



What's mine in my images?
A tour of the use and misuse of photographic images online
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An increasing number of personal images is published online accompanied by automatically- and human-generated meta-data. This data is further enlarged by the multiplication of associated unstructured information within social networks (e.g. friends' and own comments). In parallel, image recognition technology - and facial recognition in particular - are evolving at an unprecedented speed (example applications include the much debated Facebook's automatic tag suggestion feature, augmented ids, tools for real-time ads and tv programs recognition, tools leveraging crowds' use of augmented reality for the production of new images or the diffusion of ads, and many more). These two factors have had an enormous impact on individual privacy. As the adage states, and the file size confirms, "a picture is worth a thousand words"; when we share a picture we share a very large amount of information and, under the current circumstances, we renounce all rights on it, including the right of knowing how that information will be used. By aggregating textual and image data, public and private organizations collect much more information about us than what we normally realize and desire. In most cases, the only choice that digital tools users have in order to safeguard their privacy is to opt-out; because this is often not a viable solution users tend to adopt either the "I have nothing to hide" or the "everyone I know is ok with it" strategies and prefer to forget about privacy all together. Several experiments demonstrate that this attitude may produce regrettable results due to several factors including the facts that: (1) we are unable to take into account negative consequences of information diffusion even when these consequences are in the very short term; (2) regardless of how "innocent" information is, it can be used in a discriminatory manner; (3) it is difficult to forecast how information is interpreted when placed out of context.

In order to protect citizens many governments and international organizations have produced legislation with various degrees of effectiveness. The EU's new Data Protection regulation aims at addressing these problems in a more effective and forward-looking manner. Privacy by Design, which embeds legislative requirements into technological solutions is currently being explored with the objective of covering several privacy paradigms (including privacy as control, privacy as confidentiality, and privacy as practice) so to ensure that the sharing of images can continue to thrive in online environments that are respectful of users' right to privacy.