TILBURG UNIVERSITY

Digital Personae and Profiles as Representations of Individuals

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Outline

- Who am I?
- Digital representations
- Digital Personae
- Profiles
- Shifting from the one to the other
- Comparison and Appearance
- Conclusion

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WARNING!
Explicit materials to come

CENSORED

- The picture is already a digital form
- But there are a lot of digital representations of me
- And all of them are interpreted in a certain way by others

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Digital representations

- Pictures

- Accounts

- Personal webpages (including SNS)

- Electronic dossiers (government, health care)

- Databases

- ....

Digital representations

- Meant to represent people or individuals
- In a digital form
- Often include (also) personal data
- Convenient for processing of data
  - Statistics
  - Data mining

  Because of the personal data and affected individuals, it is important to know in which situations data protection legislation applies

Digital representations

- Digital Personae
- Profiles

Digital Personae

- Definition Roger Clarke (1994):

- "a model of an individual's public personality based on data and maintained by transactions, and intended for use as a proxy for the individual"

- Distinguish between projected and imposed digital personae:
  - Projected: "an image of one's self that an individual conveys to others by means of data"
  - Imposed: "an identity projected onto a person by means of data, by outside agencies such as corporations and government agencies"

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Digital Personae

- Representation of an individual
- Individual is identifiable by the one who creates and/or uses the data set
- Purpose is known beforehand
  - Needed attributes are known
  - Compare filling out a template

- A profile is the result of a profiling process

- Profiling: "[t]he process of 'discovering' correlations between data in databases that can be used to identify and represent a human or nonhuman subject (individual or group) and/or the application of profiles (sets of correlated data) to individuate and represent a subject or to identify a subject as a member of a group or category" (Hildebrandt 2008) or the creation of a representation based on automated monitoring of individual behaviour.

- Concern groups or individuals
- Group
  - Distributive profile
  - Non-distributive profile

Profiles

- Individual profile
- Automatic monitoring process
- Identification is not necessary, recognition is enough

Overview Digital Personae and Profiles

Characteristics	Digital Persona		Profile	
Creation	Desired attributes in 'template'	Projected persona	Result of profiling technologies: automated process	Distributive profile
		Imposed persona		Non-distributive profile
				Individual profile
Awareness	Individual is aware		Individual is not (necessarily) aware	
Connection to individual	Ingrained beforehand		Can be connected/applied to a specific individual later on	

Why important?

- The difference is whether there is a connection to an offline individual or not (Clarke 2004: (Id)entity)

- Offline individuals are affected by decisions taken based on their representations

- This has implications for privacy and autonomy

- Only if there is a link to an individual, data protection legislation applies

- This linkability or identifiability is not always evident

Shifting from profile to DP

- Identification
- Types of identifiability (Leenes 2008)
    - L-identifiability
    - R-identifiability

Shifting from profile to DP

- Usual process: after the group profile is instantiated to the individual an R-identifier (e.g. cookie) is issued to the individual to maintain the link. The group profile is now an individual profile. It is important to note that at this point (R-ID in profile) there is no link to an entity.

- An individual profile can become a digital persona when an L-identifier is added.
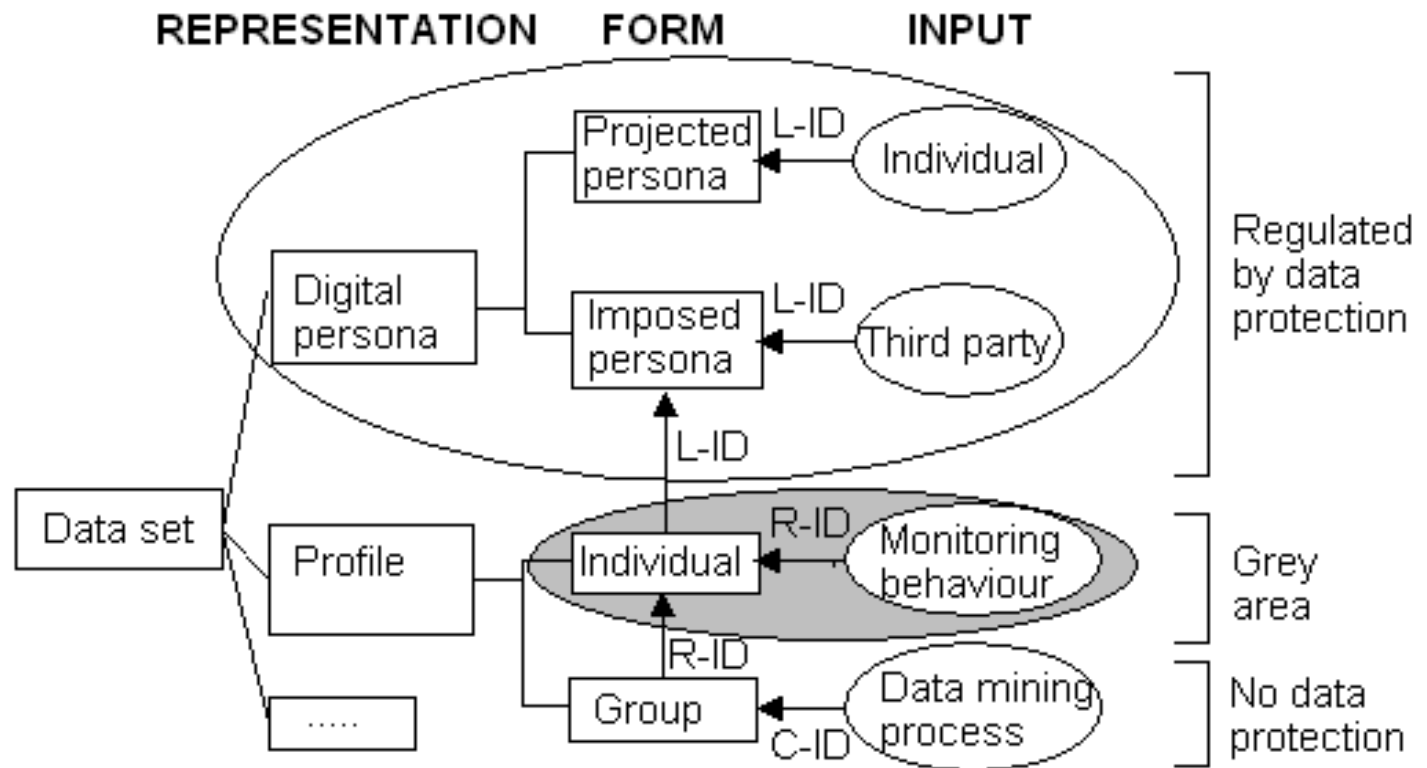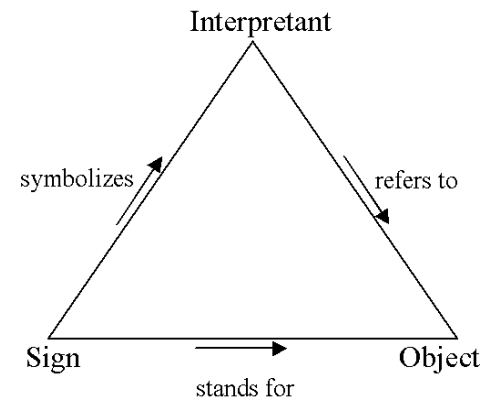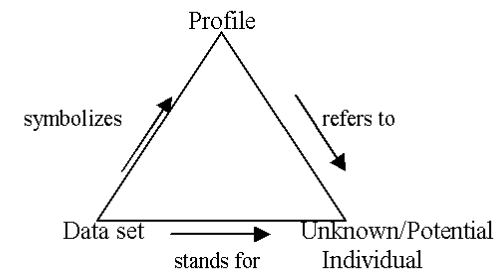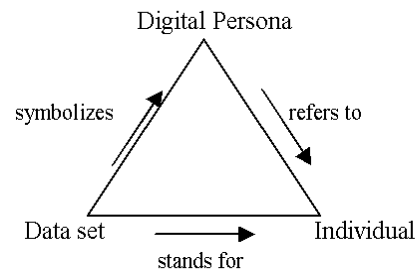
Comparison: Semiotics

- How things get meaning
- Interpretation of text, images, objects
- Indirect
- C.S. Peirce

- What do semiotics add?

- It is a visualization to show that appearance/manifestation of representations can be similar (data sets)…

- But the represented individual is known or not known or doesn't even exist

- However, there is an interpretation of a data set in any case

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Interpretant

symbolizes   refers to

Sign   Object

stands for

Digital Persona

symbolizes   refers to

Data set ⟶ Individual
stands for

Profile

symbolizes   refers to

Data set ⟶ Unknown/Potential Individual
stands for

Appearance/Manifestation

- Similar manifestation as data sets
- But different origination
- Important when decisions are based on one of the representations

Conclusion

- Much overlap, but some important differences
- Issue of what qualifies as personal data is becoming less relevant
- Different treatment is needed
- In the end, individuals are affected by decisions taken based on digital representations
- Possible implications for privacy and autonomy
- Probably, current data protection legislation is not sufficient

Thank you

Questions or points for discussion?