

Virtual identity, our destiny

Zbigniew KOTULSKI

Warsaw

Years ago people communicated directly. They could speak each other standing face to face. Authorities wanting present their will was to use tools that were inaccessible for common people and easy to control (temples, monumental state houses, steles with written rights, etc.). Even written correspondence has been quite personalized since the handwriting was easy to identify and the writing style and some specific marks in letters (almost) uniquely characterized communicating parties. Also telephony was very personalized, what need not be explained.

However, new communication technologies, especially the Internet, made that people started to communicate (even in very important matters) by box-checking and clicking Enter, so these things can be done completely anonymously. On the other hand, authorities can collect information about every bit (character, word, sentence, etc.) generated by any user of a computer that is linked to the global network. Such a situation makes our (virtual) life completely uncertain, unpredictable, dehumanised, and even dangerous.

In the paper we present technological concepts that can be (and often are) applied to identify users of the Internet. Comparing to the mentioned traditional ways of communication, they make possible to introduce some scale of identification of people, which we call virtual identity. We present advantages of such solutions, but also try to identify dangers for peoples' personal freedom and, on the other hand, personal integrity. We present some case studies that could be discussed to clarify the problem and, perhaps, lead to some conclusions for legal regulations of the virtual identity solutions.