

‘Whisper networks’ don’t work as well online as off – here’s why women are better able to look out for each other in person

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A different safety concern

Online platforms offer users a limited understanding of how their data is used and stored, so the user’s safety takes second place to the platform owners’ and investors’ financial incentives. These apps have largely been created by people who carry less risk and who are concerned with monetization, even if they also care about safety. The risks disproportionately affect those whose safety is already at risk.

In addition to the issues of effectiveness and trust is the question of safety. The Tea app has been in the news because of two separate data breaches, including over 70,00 images that were leaked to online message boards. Data included government-issued IDs, personal information and private messages. A separate breach exposed direct messages on the app.

So while it’s conceivable that some online lists could be created for specific communities that share a common culture and language, no matter how good the intent is, it is unlikely that the creators of apps and websites are at the same risk of exposure as the people who use them. In addition, apps built for specific communities or communication styles would probably be significantly less profitable than those that are promoted nationally or worldwide and so are less likely to be built or sustained.

All of this isn’t to say that apps aren’t useful and necessary. But based on my research, I don’t believe they provide the same safety and protection as in-person, organizational whisper networks.

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