



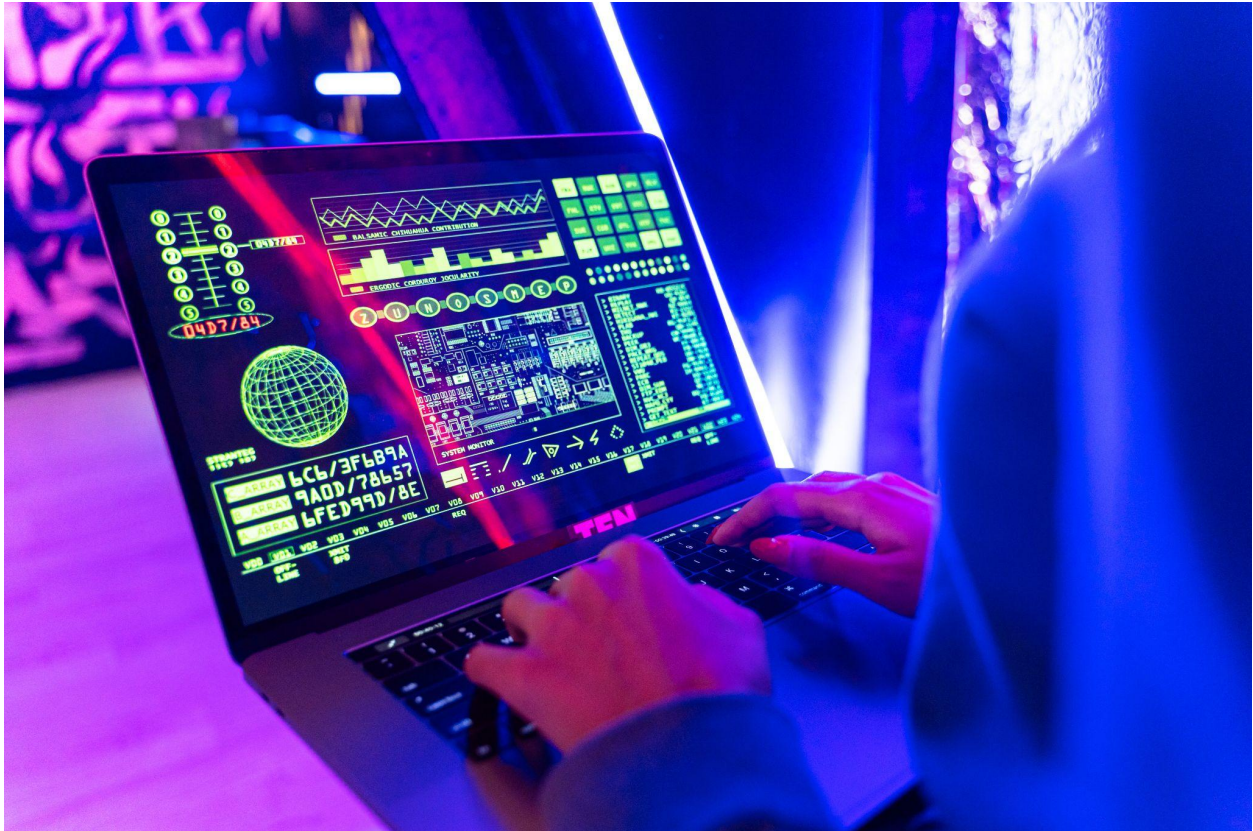
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We Are Millions

# Meaningful Privacy in Web 3

## The Digital Right to Education

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## Introduction

The following paper was inspired by the panel on [Reclaiming Privacy](#) held during the [We Are Millions Hackathon](#) of March 2022. The primary purpose of this discussion is to look at what privacy means in the age of Web 3 where decentralized networks actually enable a level of democratized surveillance capability that goes far beyond the concepts of Web 2 corporate surveillance capitalism that are reviled today. At this point the question is “so what?” to which the answer is so you no longer need to worry about Facebook spying on you and selling your online activity analytics you now have to worry about your neighbor

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performing their own form of surveillance capitalism on you. To which the further response could be “but I like my neighbor?”

## Privacy

Hence this leads us to the discussion of what exactly is privacy and what is Privacy in the digital age. Privacy in the traditional sense as a term is defined as:

- ☐ a state in which one is not observed or disturbed by other people.
- ☐ the state of being free from public attention.

Source: Google

Digital Privacy expands this definition somewhat by reaching into the realm of the surveiller and demanding explicit declarations on information gathering activities undertaken. However the efficacy of this is brought into question when in order to use the surveilling service you have to effectively hand over either the information or the permission to gather data that the service was going to acquire from you anyway.

To bring this into relief we take the example of the herd boy who is using Whatsapp to talk to his school friends. To install the app he will usually ignore much of the legalities involved and assent to whatever permissions are required to give him that connection to his circle. From his perspective, “so what if someone in California is collecting his data from Africa, they don’t pose a direct threat to his livelihood nor can he buy any of the services they might think to sell to him for a variety of reasons.” In short as far as he is concerned he is in a state of privacy, because the chances of him bumping into someone who has actually looked at his data are remote to none.

Which brings us to an often overlooked fact about privacy which is the concept of the perception of Privacy. Returning to our herd boy example, as far as he is concerned he is in a private mode of existence and in his belief he is exercising his right to privacy, despite being blatantly surveilled. When we look at the outcomes despite being surveilled, the benefit of connecting with your friends and family can not easily be compared with the “loss of privacy.” In short, without the understanding and hence ability to perceive the threats posed by consents provided WhatsApp our herdboys are grossly incapable of

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practically exercising and enforcing his right to privacy. Hence we arrive at the Right to Education.

## **Right to Education**

The Right to Education that we consider here is focused on the Right to Education about privacy. This covers education around aspects such as how loss of privacy or granting of consent can lead to real impacts on the service user. The point to understand is that privacy has changed in nature phenomenally with the advent of the Digital age and in that change the concepts around Digital privacy have also changed phenomenally. However the ways of educating users, both new and old have not changed to keep up with this evolution. This creates a quandary for would-be innovators, as without users understanding the implications of certain privacy consents it becomes difficult to design services which don't fall foul of any subsequent regulation.

The challenge we have is that our cultural systems only avail the assertion of privacy once an individual has reached some age of majority. In that light it is a challenge to teach the concepts of privacy as these get in the way of parenting and safeguarding. Hence a new way to teach privacy and its implications is required to give actionable meaning to users such that enforcing the right to privacy actually has a significant and noticeable impact on would be surveillance. This creates the scene for meaningful privacy in Web 3

## **Meaningful Privacy in Web 3**

So what is Meaningful Privacy? Meaningful Privacy goes beyond the Digital Privacy definition of Web2. It expands into understanding the perceptions of the user and moves away from the pure play transaction model of the previous era. With meaningful privacy the idea is that there is no trade of consents, a service offered is a service given, regardless of whether privacy consents are present or not. This has begun to take root in a small way in Web 2 where some sites will provide the ability to reject "all cookies" whilst still providing the service offered.

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In Web 3 with services being permissionless and decentralized, meaning full privacy interactions become more important. The challenge here is that by the nature of blockchains and decentralized storage services such as SWARM the privacy of users and their associated perceptions change phenomenally. Hence when we look at our herd boy example his feelings around whether to use a decentralized Whatsapp may change when he understands that not only will his photos and messages be shared for anyone to see but also the definition of “anyone” could be his latest crush or his neighbor up the street. The difference here is not so much that his data is in the open, the difference lies in the education and understanding that he now holds as to the proximity of his privacy being violated manifesting itself in ways that could disrupt his livelihood.

Hence the call to action for developers, creators, innovators and entrepreneurs in Web 3 is to begin the work of understanding how to educate and communicate the implications of the technology on their target users.