A Framework for Supporting Anonymity in Text-based Online Conversations

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Abstract

This research has investigated how anonymity has been achieved in text-based online conversations. It has found that anonymity could be attained without any special provision from a conversation system. The absence of face-to-face contact and use of typed remarks are sufficient to create anonymity.

Nevertheless, the lack of special provisions can make it difficult for some to use the anonymity they have attained. Preserving such naturally attained anonymity can be equally difficult for users. System administrators will also have trouble controlling anonymity without special provisions. Will deliberate provisions for anonymity remove these problems?

The goal of this research is to determine how anonymity in online conversations could and should be supported. An existing conversation system lacking in special support for anonymity has been selected. Every possible change for the benefit of anonymity has been made to this system. The changes that have been made and why they were made are described in this thesis. The impact of those changes is also discussed.

The final outcome of this research is a set of guidelines and standards for supporting anonymity in text-based online conversations.
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