

# Opinion: Government wants to regulate too much information

By Christopher Wolf

Should Congress be in the business of deciding what people can share through social media? That is the question considered at one of only three hearings so far by the Senate Judiciary Privacy Subcommittee. The three senators at the hearing each suggested that without legal restrictions, people might overshare information about what streaming videos they watch online. That is, the senators are worried about TMI – too much information.

For some, regular sharing is TMI. For others, it is part of proactively shaping their online identities and an essential way to spread their ideas. Social media provides a wonderful opportunity for free expression and connection, but users need to be sensitive of the risks of TMI. In short, we need cyber-education, parental guidance and self-editing. But do we need a federal law limiting how much users share about their online movie watching?

The Senate Judiciary Privacy Subcommittee took up the issue as part of its review of the 1988 Video Privacy Protection Act. The act was passed in reaction to a newspaper reporter obtaining the video rental records of then-Supreme Court nominee Judge Robert Bork, and it restricts sharing rental records without a person's permission. Some read that law though as to prevent the use of automatic sharing tools that many Facebook users employ to share the music they listen to on the streaming music service Spotify, or the news articles they read on the Washington Post online. That reading of the law has inhibited the launch of a Netflix "frictionless" sharing tool, and there are calls for an amendment to the act to specify that frictionless sharing is illegal.

Netflix is not the only online streaming video service whose users may be foreclosed from sharing their viewing experiences. Amazon, Blockbuster, Hulu and Vudu offer streaming video services and their users (and those of services yet to be launched) also stand to be affected by a law that prohibits consumers from choosing to share their online viewing choices.

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