Invited lecture

Who Owns You Online:
what happens when you log out for good

Prof. Dr. Hanlie Smuts
University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa
Department of Informatics, University of Pretoria, Lynnwood Road, Hatfield, 0083, South Africa

Abstract

In the modern world of work and society, rapid technological advancement and digital transformation are generating vast amounts of data. While data has become a valuable personal and organizational asset, its accumulation also carries an environmental cost. Cloud storage, social media archives and unused “dark data” contribute to the growing carbon footprint associated with storing, processing and transmitting digital information.

At the same time, our digital lives are becoming increasingly persistent. Our identities, memories, relationships, creative work, personal information and digital assets can continue to exist long after we are no longer actively managing them. This raises an important question: What can we do now to shape, protect and manage our digital legacy?

This interactive presentation invites students to explore this question through four interconnected contexts:

- Social and spiritual context - How can we consciously shape our digital presence, memories and online identity in ways that reflect who we are and what matters to us?
- Technology management context - What can we do now to organize, protect, transfer, preserve or delete our digital assets and data?
- Ethical and commercial context - How can we establish our preferences regarding consent, privacy, ownership and the potential commercial use of our digital traces?
- Societal and philosophical context - What should we consider now about identity, memory, relationships, mortality, responsibility and the environmental impact of our digital lives?

Rather than presenting predetermined answers, the session will use interactive activities and student input to validate, challenge and expand these four domains. Students will be invited to identify the concerns that matter most to them and, importantly, to consider what actions, choices and practices we can adopt during our lives to address these concerns.

The session aims to co-create a richer understanding of responsible digital legacy management and identify opportunities for future research at the intersection of technology, people, ethics, society and sustainability.

Speaker Introduction

Prof. Hanlie Smuts is Head of the Department of Informatics and Chair of the School of Information Technology at the University of Pretoria. She has more than 30 years of experience spanning the ICT industry and academia and holds two PhDs. She is an NRF-rated researcher and has extensive leadership experience in the telecommunications and technology sectors, alongside her academic leadership and research roles.

Her research interests include digital transformation, artificial intelligence, big data, knowledge management, and sustainable digitalisation. Her work focuses particularly on the intersection of technology, people and organisations, with an emphasis on human-centred, responsible and sustainable approaches to digital

transformation. Her research explores how emerging technologies can create value while addressing organisational, societal and environmental challenges.

Prof. Smuts is actively involved in industry collaboration, postgraduate supervision and transdisciplinary research. She has published in the fields of information systems, knowledge management and digital transformation and contributes to the advancement of knowledge management as a discipline in South Africa. She is also involved in leadership roles within the knowledge management community and is committed to strengthening the connection between academic research, industry practice and societal impact.