

Trust in Adherence to a Predefined Role

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Thoughts on the Venetian Anonymity Concept and its
Relevance for the Internet Community #2

Starting Point

- “Anonymity on the Internet” always raises the question “what would work”?
- The discussion is influenced by societal concerns (e.g. crime rate, deindividuation effects).
- I'll try a different approach:

What did already work in the past?

Venice

- In old Venice, wearing masks during daily life and work was common among the citizens. The use of masks was based on an anonymity concept which was regulated by government and widely accepted for several hundred years.

Venice

- The mask and disguise that made “incognito living” possible was called “Bauta and Volto”
- Etymology: Same root as German “behüten”, “to protect”
- Hood, made of silk, covered the head down to the shoulders
- Face covered by “volto” or “larve”, tricorn hat

Venice



Venice



Venice



How it was used

- A mask for daily life...
- Leaves mouth part free. Speaking, eating and drinking was possible.
- Hides clothing, no problem to walk swiftly.
- Eyes unhindered. Person behind the mask sees everything.

How it was used

- Commonly used for...
- A visit to the Casino (mask mandatory)
- Different kinds of adventures (Think about Casanova!)
- Certain types of governmental events (conferences, elections – mask mandatory to guarantee equality throughout peer group. Interesting: In this context, a deindividuating device guaranteed individual free speech and power of the very personal to trigger political change)
- Used by noble citizens of Venice only (those who were accountable, credit-worthy and had at least some money).

Facts

- It worked for several hundred years until a fundamental cultural change caused by occupation by Austria.
- Of course there are records of misuse and crime – but no excessive increase in crime rates.
- All bearers of a Bauta were addressed as “Signora Maschera”.

Why did it work?

- EIC 2010 / University of Siegen 2010: “Main reason is that social control was functioning. Venice was a closed community. Concept won't work on the internet, but perhaps in virtual closed communities like social media platforms”.
- EIC 2013: There is an additional aspect to discuss: Role play!

Why did it work?

- Bauta and Tabarro have historical roots in Carnival and Commedia dell'Arte role play. Venetians were used to that.
- To use the mask as an anonymizing device was related to a time-consuming and elaborate act of dressing up: Wearing the mask was a mixture of hiding and exposing yourself.
- Taking the role of the “ideal Venetian citizen” implied taking the role and adopting the behavior of a “gentleman” - similar to the British Gentleman Role.

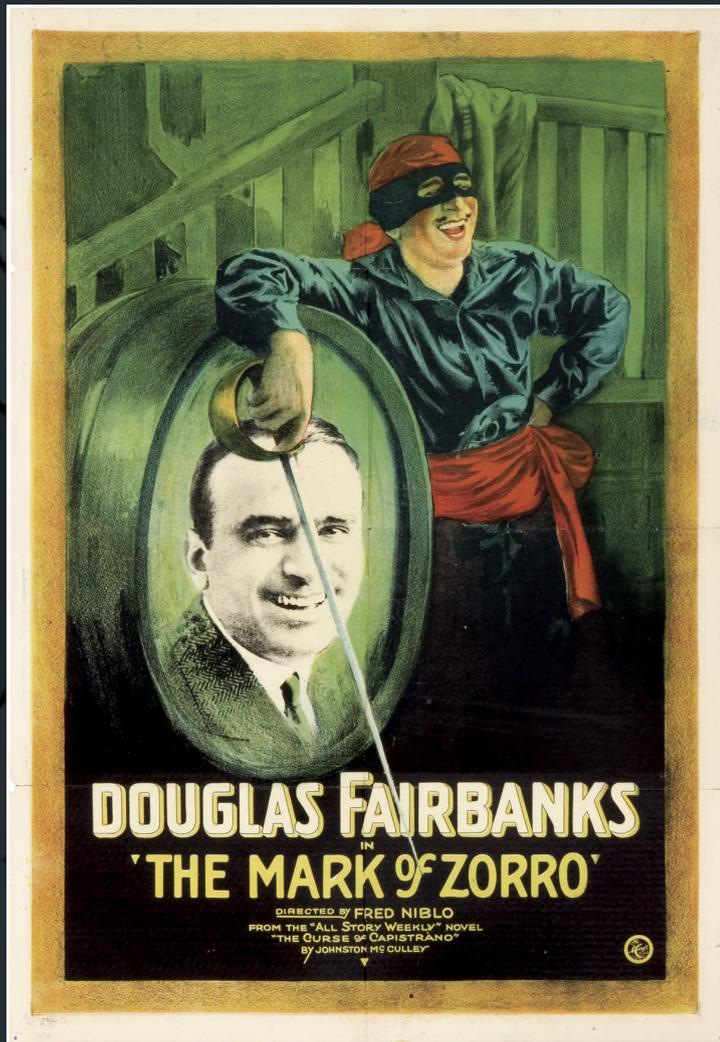
Why did it work?

- So putting on the Bauta was a deliberate act of accepting social control and societal expectations.
- It also meant to accept public unmasking and exclusion from the Venetian community as a penalty when misusing the Bauta privileges.
- There was a direct and inevitable impact on behavior.

The trust base

- When communicating to bearers of the Bauta, other Venetians could trust that those citizens would adhere to their accepted political and societal role
- Sanctioning was possible when misuse occurred

Trust in a masked person / a role?



Jörg Resch 2012

A Trust Framework is a combination of

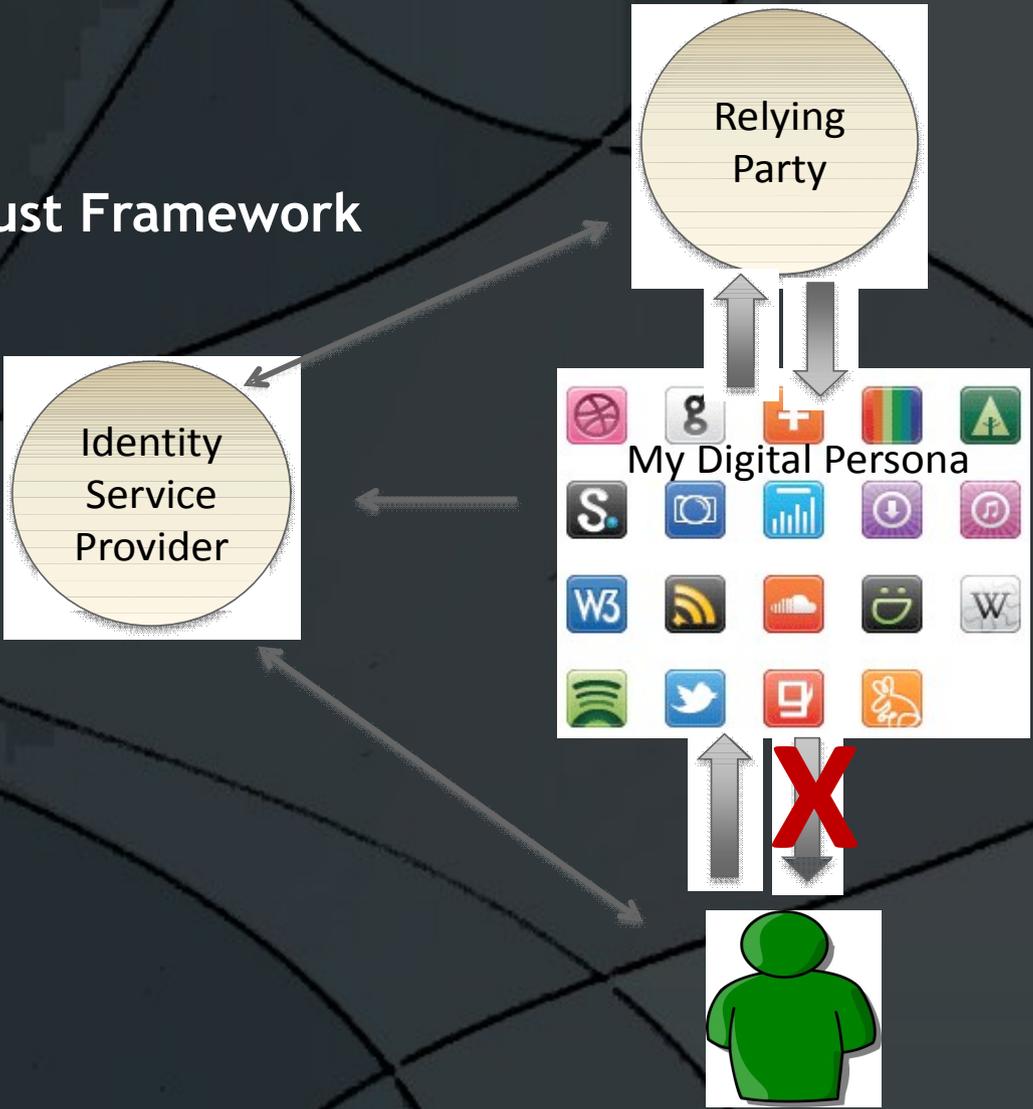
- software mechanisms,
- legal contracts and
- social rules.

Together these integrated elements set forth an algorithmic “constitutional system” of governance and enforcement for a given body of information and the people who use it. The trust framework constitutes a voluntary “social contract” governing how that body of information may be shared and used in specific contexts.

John Clippinger, ID3

Jörg Resch 2012

Open Identity Exchange Trust Framework Model



What does the role play aspect add?

- For anonymity on the internet, social acceptance and an accepted behavior model are a prerequisite.
- Expectations should include certain types of behavior inevitably related to anonymous interaction:
Switching to anonymous mode should include switching to politeness and friendliness.
- Sanctioning should be possible.

Problems and thoughts

- The role of the “anonymous citizen” does currently not exist (“any more”, “yet”?)
- Who could play the role of an accepted identity provider for making unmasking possible, if misuse occurs? Who would be allowed to trigger sanctions?
- What role can behavior-based security play?
- In closed communities – would exclusion be a sufficient sanction? The inconvenience and annoyance of having to reconnect could be an effective educational factor (see safety belt warning sounds).

How do current models fit in?



How do current models fit in?

- Lack of acceptance outside the netizens' world.
- Is there enough motivation to adhere to “netiquette” standards?

Last question...

- Can we add behavior based security?

An annotation

- In Venice mask shops, the integration already took place...



An annotation



Thank you!

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I'd like to thank Ignatio Toscani for his research and his doctor's thesis "Die venezianische Gesellschaftsmaske", published 1970. Without his work the Venetian anonymity concept would probably have been forgotten.