

Privacy-Aware/Consent-Friendly Video Calling & Conferencing

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1. Problem Statement

With the transition to Virtual Meetings demanded by the advent of COVID-19, many organizations and institutes have switched to online-only modes of meetings for the foreseeable future. In a survey (N=2,285) commissioned by Microsoft [1], 71% of the employees and managers reported a desire to continue working from home at least part-time. With the inevitable adoption of virtual meetings throughout the world, concerns about the participants' individual privacies are questioned. The vast majority of states in the US, including New York and New Jersey, are one-party consent states, which means that it is lawful to record conversations so long as one party to the conversation consents [2]. However, California, like a handful of other states, is a two-party consent state, i.e., all parties to a confidential communication consent to the recording [3]. As such, the legal ramifications of recording/capturing somebody during a call without consent, appear inconsequential.

2. Proposed Solution

A standard protocol for video calling and conferencing apps to have an option in their settings to "disable recording/capturing of your video by others" during a meet or a call.

Similar implementations include Snapchat's immediate notification system for when a contact takes a screenshot of their posts.

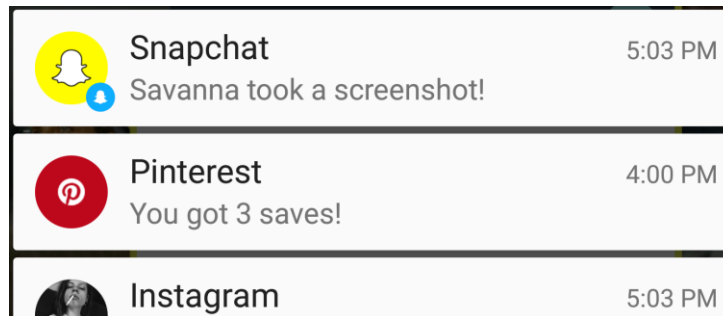


Figure 1 Snapchat screenshot notification

The popular videoconferencing software Zoom has its own consent feature that requires participants to click on a consent button before recording can begin. But it also forces you to choose either to agree or leave the meeting.

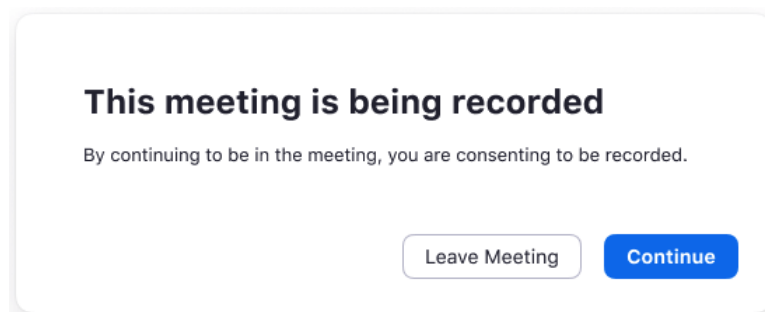


Figure 2 Providing consent to be recorded on Zoom

Apps can also be developed to impose restrictions and disallow taking of screenshots while using their apps.

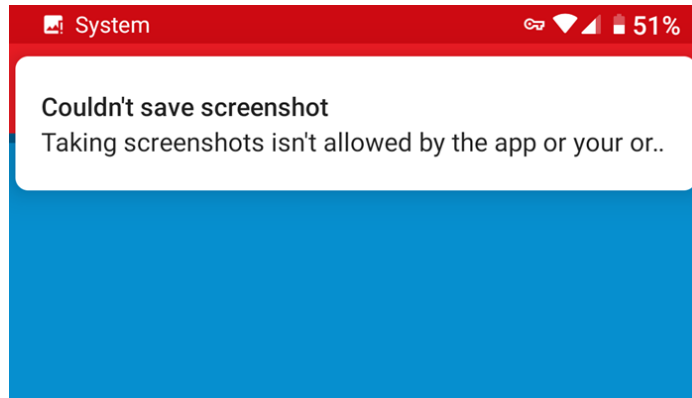


Figure 3 App-level screenshot restrictions

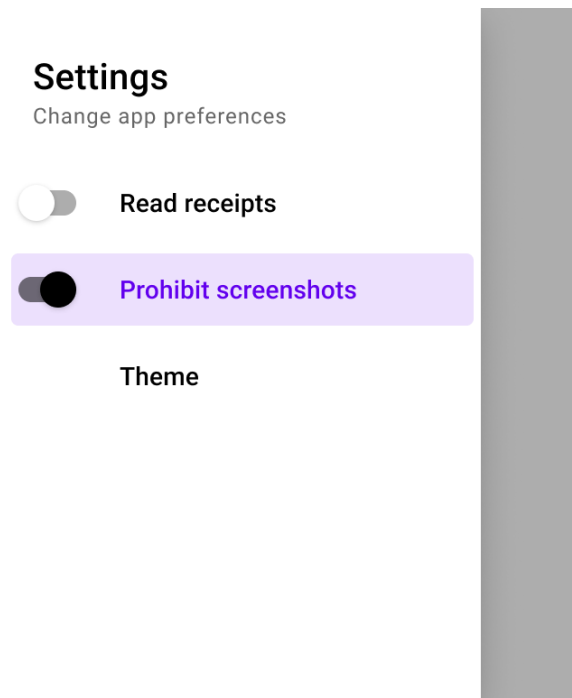


Figure 4 Control setting mockup prototype

Because of wide-range availability of features such as the app-level screenshot restrictions on most modern mobile and PC operating system platforms, the proposed solution is deemed confidently achievable.

3. References

[1] Harris Poll Survey commissioned by Microsoft on May 26-30, 2020 among 2,285 total adults ages 18+ who are currently working remotely across the US, UK, Germany, Italy, Mexico, and China. <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/blog/2020/07/08/future-work-good-challenging-unknown/>

[2] See, e.g., N.Y. Penal Law §§ 250.00, 250.05; N.J. Stat. §§ 2A:156A-3, 2A:156A-3-4.

[3] Cal. Pen. Code § 632.