Spring April 9, 2015

"Samaritans Radar": A Victim of (a misguided) Privacy Debate?

Subhajit Basu, *University of Leeds*
Richard Jones

Samaritans Radar

Richard Jones

Associate Editor IRLCT

Subhajit Basu

Associate Professor in Law

School of Law

University of Leeds

Suicide in UK

- Over 6,000 people die as a result of suicide in UK every year.
- UK Suicide numbers 2013 – 6,233, 4% increase over 2012. 11.9 deaths per 100,000
- Male 78% (increased from 63% in 1981) Men 45-59 highest rate 25.1 per 100,000
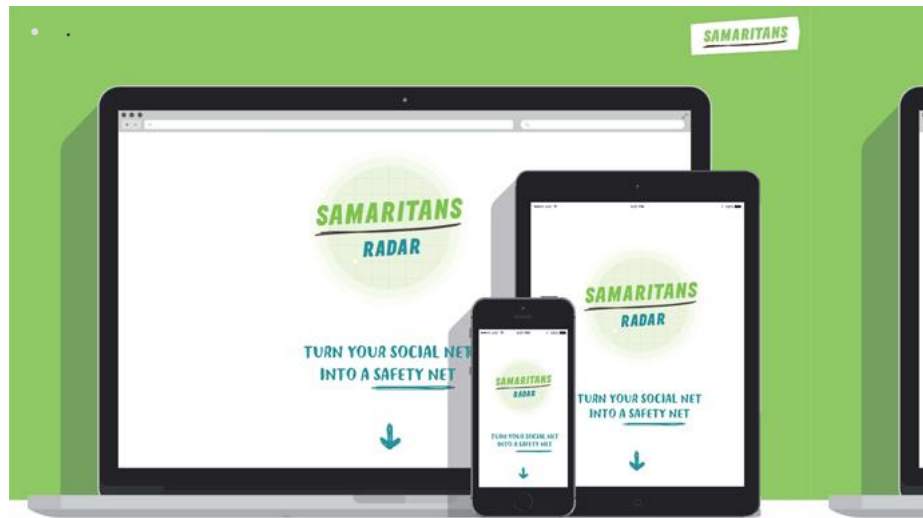
Samaritans

- Samaritans is a UK based charity whose vision is that fewer people die by suicide. It aims to achieve this by providing emotional support for those suffering distress, despair and by providing policy guidance
- Samaritans founder Chad Varah launched what he called a '999 for the suicidal' in 1953. The first call to this new service was made on 2nd November 1953.
- As at 2012 Samaritans has approximately 21,000 volunteers spread across more than 200 branches.
- Key tenants of Samaritans interaction with callers are its emphasis on **confidentiality** and on the right of the individual to **self determination**.

Samaritans and Technology

- Since its inception Samaritans has always striven to embrace technology, in part driven by the need to reach younger people.
- Original contacts were by phone. (80%)
- 2002 Samaritans launched an email service (8%)
- 2006 piloted an SMS service which rolled out fully in 2008. (10%)
- 2011 Samaritans began working with Facebook, producing a guide "*Help a Friend in Need*".
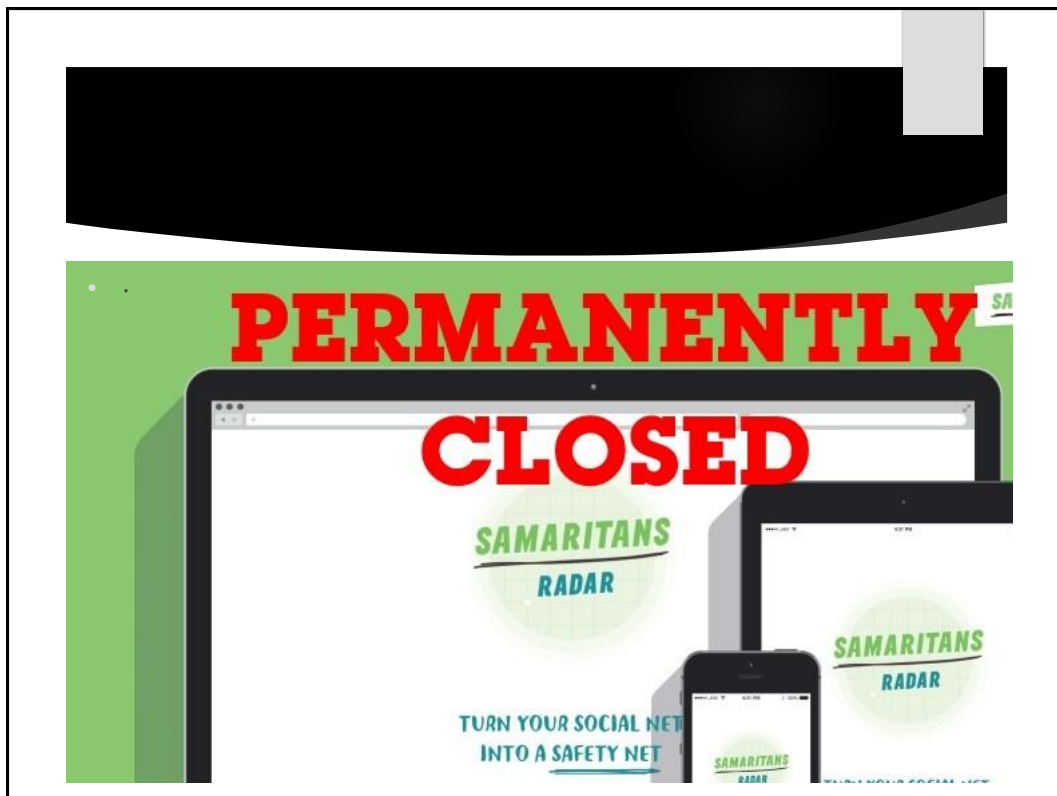
Samaritans Radar

Samaritans Radar

- Introduced 29th October 2014
- The app was designed to monitor a subscribers' Twitter feed alerting them to any concerning tweets from those they follow.
- Joe Ferns, executive director of policy, research and development at Samaritans, said at the launch that the new app will
- *"encourage people to look out for one another and help people in distress because friends could step in first."*

Reaction to Samaritans Radar

- Immediate negative reaction- petition
- 3 areas of concern on legalities
- Data protection – app monitored Twitter feeds of over 2 million people
- Privacy
- Potential to aid cyber bullying

Samaritans Response

- 30th October emphasising the white-list function of the app which allowed users to opt out of the monitoring.
- 31st October explained that the app had been tested for over a year and that 'academic' input had assisted in its development.
- 4th November claimed that it had taken further legal advice and that it believed that it was neither the data controller nor data processor of the information passing through the app.
- 7th November 2014 suspended the app,
- 14th November an apology was issued.
- *Despite receiving a positive response from many people, … it is fair to say that the critical reaction of some Twitter users demonstrated that Samaritans Radar affected them in a way we were not expecting. As you know from our previous statement, we have apologised to them and will reiterate that apology today.*
- 9th March 2015 App withdrawn permanently and data collected destroyed.

Radar and Privacy

▶ Samaritans app said nothing about the privacy or consent of the people that the app monitors. In fact the website said

> **"The people you follow won't know you've signed up to it and all alerts will be sent directly to your email address."**

▶ **"Expectation of privacy in public"**

▶ In the service's FAQ, it answered the question of intrusiveness and privacy with:

> **"Samaritans is all about choice, and so we are giving people the choice to reach out to help others in need, in the same way that we give people choice to Samaritans' helpline if they want to."**

.@samaritans need to rethink. Many of us are depressed BECAUSE we feel our consent isn't valued, autonomy is not respected. #SamaritansRadar
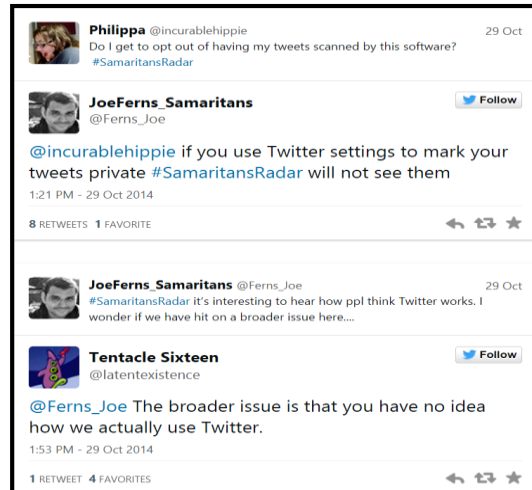
🐦 ↺ @brhaspati108 · WED, NOV 05 2014 11:34:37

Sarah Mitchell
@Smitchalot

Exploiting the privacy of those who are already marginalised and exploited in society doesn't help anyone, it harms them.#SamaritansRadar
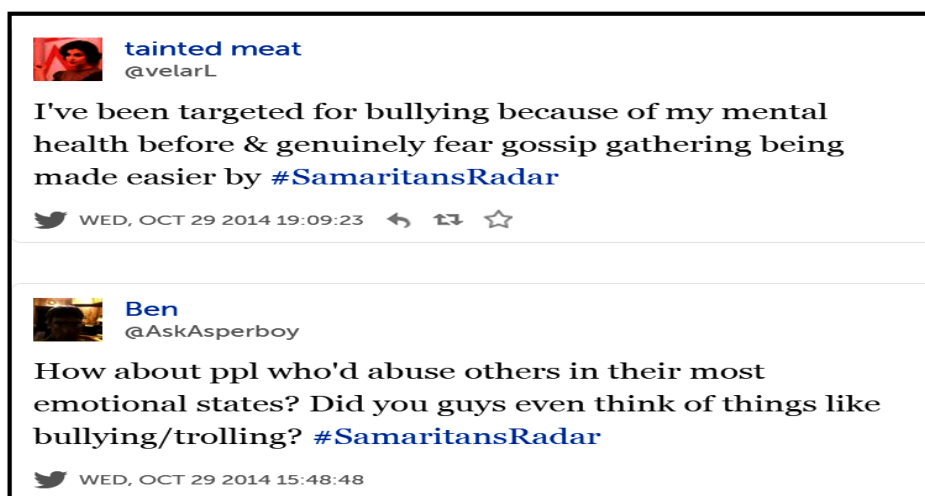
🐦 TUE, NOV 04 2014 15:36:21 ↰ ↺ ☆

Radar and Data Protection

▶ "Samaritans": Data Controller?

▶ Opt out using **Section 12(1)** of the UK Data Protection Act, which allows users to notify data controllers that they do not permit that data controller to make automated decisions that affect the individual.

Radar and Harassment, Bullying

Social Networks and suicide

- Google
- Social networking sites Facebook, MySpace, and Bebo have collaborated with the United Kingdom Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP) to provide a panic-button
- Facebook – Suicide Prevention Strategy updates February 2015
- Samaritans and Facebook

Social Networks and Suicide
Radar – a case study of how not to do it?

- Naive optimists – Cultural Disconnect
- Lack of consultation/poor research- Group Think
- Conflicts with core Samaritan values
- Inappropriate App developer
- Technology pitfalls/inadequacy – false positives etc. users/identity.
- Allowed opt out! White list.
- Poor legal advice or No Legal Advice
- No Privacy Impact Statement

I'm against #SamaritansRadar

Samaritans Radar User Stories

As a	person who's worried about my friends
I want to	be notified when they're down
So that I can	help them

✔ Radar can do this

As a	troll who wants to harrass someone
I want to	be notified when they're down
So that I can	upset them when they're vulnerable

✔ Radar can do this

As a	person who suffers from depression
I want to	notify selected, trusted friends when I'm down
So that I can	receive support

✘ Radar can't do this