



Tracking Transparency Privacy Policy

The goal of this project is to measure and study how users interact with personalized information regarding online tracking. If any data collected pursuant to this project is sensitive, it will be anonymized. This means that any data collected will not be Personally Identifiable Information (PII). We are committed to protecting the privacy of all users of our extension. We have established this privacy policy to help explain what information we collect through the extension and how this information will be used. In this policy, "the researchers," "our," "we," or similar terms refer to any and all researchers or assistants otherwise involved in this project. This project involves personnel from the University of Maryland and the University of Chicago.

1. Information Gathered

As you browse the web, the extension will gather information. This information will be presented to you in order to provide a "tracker's perspective" of you and your browsing habits. Information gathered by the extension may include:

1.1 Overview

- Data about the web pages you visit, including:
 - The page's title and URL
 - Date and time information about pages visited
 - The trackers present on the page
 - A guess about what the page is about (inferred topic)
 - Google adsSettings information over time [AdsSettings](#)
 - Modified (i.e., readable, or stop-words removed) webpage content if that page falls into a particular inferred topic
 - Information about advertisements served, included what the ad is about (i.e., the inferred topic) and where the ad links to (i.e., the final destination click-through)
- Analytics regarding interaction with the extension
- Whether you have other ad or tracker blocker extensions installed

1.2 Sharing Data with Researchers

The extension may also share anonymous data with researchers—not PII—which includes the following: configuration of computers, operating systems, browsers, browsers' plugins, browsing patterns, adblockers and other privacy software. Although it is theoretically possible for this data to form a 'fingerprint' that could be used to track individuals, the researchers will not use the data provided for that purpose.

For clarity, here is an example of what anonymous data may look like. Please note, this example shows a particular case which only occurs when: (1) you are logged in to Google adsSettings; (2) Google adsSettings information is updated; and (3) you were visiting webpages within a three-minute window from when adsSettings was updated. If all of these conditions are met, then the extension would send the following information:

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- date: 1656702538754
 - account:
'8d9f19fe73ba04108d44ef3e6d58da2730b258aee2fc86064ee71551ded172c8'
 - inferences:
 - {type: 'demographic', value: '35-44 years old'}
 - {type: 'demographic', value: 'Male'}
 - {type: 'interest - company', value: 'USAA'}
 - ...
 - difference from previous adsSettings data:
 - {type: 'interest', value: '/Beauty & Fitness/Fitness'}
 - {type: 'interest', value: '/Home & Garden/Home Appliances'}
 - {type: 'interest', value: '/Home & Garden/Kitchen & Dining'}
 - ...
 - pages visited
 - "21 Best Yoga Pants For Women, According To Reviews In 2022 [Fitness, womenshealthmag.com]"
 - "Colorblock Studio Legging | Light Oregano – Vuori Clothing [Fashion & Style, googleadservices.com]"
 - ...
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Notably, this entry occurred on Friday, July 1, 2022 at around 3PM. Account information (i.e., 'account') is anonymized, but the inferences are not. The inferences, however, are guesses, made by Google, taken from the Google adsSettings page (<https://adssettings.google.com/authenticated>). Again, this

level of detail only occurs if Google adsSettings is updated while you are browsing the web.

PII will exist *only* on your local copy of the extension (i.e., on the local device). If any of the data listed above is considered PII, then it will be anonymized prior to collection by us.

2. Purposes in Data Collection

Web history data: In order to help you visualize your web browsing, the extension keeps a local database with the pages that you visit while the extension is installed and enabled. While page titles and URLs are stored on the local copy of the extension (i.e., your computer), this information is never sent to the researchers. Instead, anonymized metrics will be sent in order to identify aggregate trends in web browsing and tracker activity or inferred topics.

Tracker data: This extension gathers information about the trackers that you may have interacted with online. This information is stored locally, and is also used to help you visualize what happens when you browse online. Anonymized information about the trackers will be sent to the researchers to gain insights about online tracking, without connection to you specifically.

Inferred topics: When you browse web pages, our extension will make inferences about the topics of visited web pages and store this information locally, in order to improve the visualizations shown in the extension. Anonymized metrics about the inferred topics will be sent to the researchers to determine trends in web browsing and potential inferences, without connection to you specifically.

Google adsSettings Data: As you browse the web, our extension will periodically check the Google AdsSettings webpage for new information. We collect this information to improve the visualizations you see in the extension, information which is stored locally. Anonymized information about this data (e.g., number of interests or number of demographics) may be shared with the researchers, but will not include PII.

Advertising Data: The extension captures information about advertisements you've been served while browsing the web. This includes the inferred interest of the advertisement, which is gathered by fetching the URL of the advertisement (i.e., the final destination of the click-through link) and guessing the topic of the resulting webpage. This information is collected in order to improve visualizations found in the extension. Anonymized information about this data (e.g., number of ads or inferred ad topics or

provided ad explanations) may be shared with the researchers, but will not include PII.

Usage data: We collect usage data for the dashboard visualization page in our extension. This includes data about which components were clicked, but not any identifying data about your web browsing habits. We collect this information in order to determine which parts of the dashboard are more frequently used. Usage data will not be connected to you specifically.

Other installed extensions: We access a list of your installed extensions in order to determine if you have another ad or tracker blocker installed. We do not record the specific names of any extensions you have installed, only whether there is such an extension currently enabled. This is so that we can determine whether such extensions change the behavior of the extension.

3. Updating or Removing Your Information

To protect your privacy, we use various techniques to anonymize the data, and have agreed in this policy to refrain from any attempts at re-identification of the data. Because of our use of anonymization, we will be unable to know which entry in our data set is yours. Additionally, we have no way to allow you to access, update, or remove any specific data. If you have any questions about this, please contact us at the links below.

4. Sharing of Your Data

As part of this project, we may share datasets derived from this project with research partners. Before sharing, we will evaluate whether further sanitization or aggregation of data is necessary to reduce the likelihood that inferences about identifiable individuals' activities might be made from the published dataset. Because anonymization is a complex problem, we cannot promise that our techniques will be perfect. If we find that a dataset may contain information that is sensitive or vulnerable to re-identification, we will not publish it, and if we share such data with research partners, we will place them under a contractual obligation to keep the dataset confidential and to refrain from attempts to re-identify.

Furthermore, we may publicly release and publish anonymized information from datasets to further general scientific knowledge. The datasets we may share or publish will not intentionally contain PII. As part of the surveys for this project, you will be asked whether you are willing to allow anonymized data from your responses to be publicly released for scientific purposes.

This decision will not affect your participation or compensation in any way.

5. Data Storage and Retention

We will retain the dataset for as long as the data remains useful for research topics related to online tracking, privacy, and personalized web visualizations.

6. Security

We employ industry standard security measures to protect the loss, misuse, and alteration of the information under our control, including appropriate technical and organizational measures to ensure a level of security appropriate to the risk, such as the pseudonymization, the encryption of personal data, data backup systems, and engaging security professionals to evaluate our systems effectiveness. Although we make good faith efforts to store information collected by us in a secure operating environment, we cannot guarantee complete security.

7. Contact

If you have any questions about our privacy and data protection practices, you can reach our Principal Investigators at:

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8. Changes Made

This privacy policy may change periodically. However, any revised privacy policy will be consistent with the purposes of this research project. If we make any substantive changes to our policies, we will post notice of changes on this page.

Updated October 28, 2018 to clarify affiliations of researchers.

Updated November 5, 2018 to update institutions involved.

Updated January 19, 2022 regarding data collection processes.

Updated July 6, 2022 to add examples of data collection.