Understanding and Improving Human Data Relations

Alex Bowyer

Frontmatter

Abstract

Technologies including PCs, smartphones, and cloud computing have transformed the world: In our daily lives we interact with many businesses and public services who (to reduce costs) increasingly seek to rely on data collection and processing rather than face-to-face user interactions to inform their decisions. This creates an *imbalance of power* between those who hold data and the individuals about whom data is stored, who cannot easily see their personal data or how it is

used. This *Digital Civics* PhD research explores, from a pragmatic, constructivist perspective, the topic of *Human Data Relations*. Through two qualitative case studies across public and private sectors, it answers the question, *"What relationship do people need with their personal data?"*. Case Study One focuses on *Early Help* social care: Through four workshops with supported families, social workers and staff, a deep understanding of the individual perspective on civic personal data use is established. *Shared data interaction* is explored as a means to shift the balance of power towards the individual while maintaining an effective care relationship. Case Study Two is a three-month study exploring 10 participants' experience of using *GDPR data access rights* to view their own data, resulting in insights into individual needs and the challenges of data-centric service relationships, and recommendations for improvement of policies and practices. With reference to literature from the fields of *Personal Information Management*, *Human Data Interaction* and *MyData* personal data ecosystems, these case studies contribute to a unified understanding of *six core needs* that people have in Human Data Relations. In the final chapter, the thesis discusses the *practical pursuit* of these goals, drawing on first-hand knowledge acquired from expert participation in industrial research projects at BBC R&D and Hestia.ai/SITRA, providing a workable *roadmap for future research and innovation*.

Bibliography