Understanding and Improving Human Data Relations

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Table of Contents

# 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, individualist, 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, *mapping out the landscape for future research and innovation*.

# Dedication

*For my children Rosie, Joey, and Zach; my nephew Elliott; and my nieces Amy and Lyla. My wish is that that you and your generation might soon experience a future where technology can truly help people and empower them to thrive, and where personal data drives human flourishing more than corporate profit. I hope that this research can in some small way contribute to a better future for you all.*

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# Lists of Tables and Figures

## Lists of Tables by Chapter

### Tables in Chapter 3

[3.1](#table-3.1) - Context One (Civic Data & Early Help): Participants involved in Research Activities leading into Case Study One. [3.2](#table-3.2) - Context Two (Digital Life): Participants Involved in Digital Life Research Activities Leading into Case Study Two.

### Tables in Chapter 4

[4.1](#table-4.1) - Case Study One Group Design Workshops [4.2](#table-4.2) - Theme 1 - Meaningful Data Interaction for Families: Subthemes & Participant Quotes [4.3](#table-4.3) - Theme 2 - Giving a Voice to the Family: Subthemes & Participant Quotes [4.4](#table-4.4) - Theme 3 - Earning Families’ Trust Through Transparency: Subthemes & Participant Quotes

### Tables in Chapter 5

[5.1](#table-5.1) - Types of Data Holding Organisation Targeted for GDPR Requests by Study Participants [5.2](#table-5.2) - Types of Personal Data Potentially Accessible from Data Holders via GDPR Rights [5.3](#table-5.3) - Presence and Quality Assessments of GDPR Responses by Data Type (as Percentages) [5.4](#table-5.4) - Participants’ Hopes, Imagined Data Uses and Goals for GDPR, as well as Resultant Outcomes [5.5](#table-5.5) - Theme 1 - Insufficient Transparency: Subthemes & Participant Quotes [5.6](#table-5.6) - Theme 2 - Confusing & Unuseable Data: Subthemes & Participant Quotes [5.7](#table-5.7) - Theme 3 - Fragile Relationships: Subthemes & Participant Quotes

### Tables in ‘Additional Reference Information’

[ARI4.1](#table-ari4.1) - Example Categories of Family Civic Data [ARI5.1](#table-ari5.1) - Best and Worst Data Holders for GDPR, according to Participants’ Judgements [ARI7.1](#table-ari7.1) - Eight Lenses on Personal Data

## Lists of Figures by Chapter

### Figures in Chapter 1

[1.1](#figure-1.1) - Poster Presentation of Case Study One [1.2](#figure-1.2) - The Structure of This Thesis

### Figures in Chapter 2

[2.1](#figure-2.1) - The Wisdom Curve: Making Data into Meaningful Information [2.2](#figure-2.2) - Li *et al.*’s Stage-based Model of Personal Informatics Systems

### Figures in Chapter 3

[3.1](#figure-3.1) - My Action Research Approach [3.2](#figure-3.2) - Family Facts — What is Data? [3.3](#figure-3.3) - Walls of Data — Sensitising Participants to the World of Commercially-held Data and GDPR [3.4](#figure-3.4) - Sentence Ranking — Bringing Support Workers and Families to a Shared Problem Space [3.5](#figure-3.5) - Family Civic Data Cards — Things to Think With [3.6](#figure-3.6) - Personal Data Examples — Making Data Relatable [3.7](#figure-3.7) - Home Interviewing: Card Sorting with a Family in Their Living Room [3.8](#figure-3.8) - Ideation Decks — Combining Random Design Ingredients to Generate New Ideas [3.9](#figure-3.9) - Group Poster Design — A Participant-designed Poster to Advertise Features of Imagined Data Interface Products [3.10](#figure-3.10) - Storyboarding Cards — A Collaboratively-constructed Narrative Created through Discussion from a Palette of Possible Parent and Staff Actions [3.11](#figure-3.11) - Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data using Quirkos for Case Study One [3.12](#figure-3.12) - Spreadsheet-based Quantitative Analysis of Interview Data for Case Study Two [3.13](#figure-3.13) - Pilot Study Recruitment Poster [3.14](#figure-3.14) - How the Case Studies and Peripheral Activities Contribute to This Thesis

### Figures in Chapter 4

[4.1](#figure-4.1) - Participants’ Shared Values Deduced from Sentence Rankings Data [4.2](#figure-4.2) - Current Model of Data Interaction, and Proposed Model of Shared Data Interaction

### Figures in Chapter 5

[5.1](#figure-5.1) - A Journey Map of Each Participant’s Study Progression [5.2](#figure-5.2) - An Example Life Sketch from Interview 1, with Data Handling Companies in Red, Data Types in Blue, and Feelings in Green [5.3](#figure-5.3) - Sankey Overview of Participants’ GDPR Requests [5.4](#figure-5.4) - Longitudinal Distribution of Net Changes in Participants’ Perceived Power and Trust Scores [5.6](#figure-5.6) - Participants’ Perceived Trust in Provider at Different Stages of the GDPR/Study Process

### Figures in Chapter 7

[7.1](#figure-7.1) - The Two Motivations for HDR: Controlling Your Personal Data Ecosystem and Utilising Your Information About Your Life [7.2](#figure-7.2) - Mapping the Six Wants into Objectives for the HDR Opportunity Landscape [7.3](#figure-7.3) - Obstacles and Resulting Insights in the HDR Opportunity Landscape [7.4](#figure-7.4) - Life Concept Modelling [7.5](#figure-7.5) - Mock-up of a Unified TV Viewing History Interface [7.6](#figure-7.6) - SubsCrab: An Example Application for Ecosystem Detection and Visualisation [7.7](#figure-7.7) - Some of the Many Aspects of Metadata that Might Exist About a Datapoint or Dataset [7.8](#figure-7.8) - The Panopticon Structure of the Illinois State Penitentiary [7.9](#figure-7.9) - Human Values, as Identified in BBC R&D Research Funded by Nesta [7.10](#figure-7.10) - A Contact-and-Calendar-centric PDS Approach [7.11](#figure-7.11) - The Scattered Data Relating to a Vacation [7.12](#figure-7.12) - Mock-up of a Unified Interface for a Vacation [7.13](#figure-7.13) - Annotating Data with Semantic Context [7.14](#figure-7.14) - Theory of Change [ToC]: The Four Dimensions of Change [7.15](#figure-7.15) - HDR Approach 1: Discovery-Driven Activism [7.16](#figure-7.16) - HDR Approach 2: Building the Human-centric Future [7.17](#figure-7.17) - Conceptual Model for a Personal Data Store System [7.18](#figure-7.18) - High Level Data Types [7.19](#figure-7.19) - Life Information Modelled as Happenings [7.20](#figure-7.20) - A Simple PDS Life Information Presentation Model [7.21](#figure-7.21) - Mock-up of Life Information Presented in a PDS Interface [7.22](#figure-7.22) - Life Partitioning Analogy using a Cluedo™ board [7.23](#figure-7.23) - Mock-up: Browsing by Areas of Life [7.24](#figure-7.24) - Identifying Entity Associations in Data [7.25](#figure-7.25) - Facebook’s World2vec Model, Semantically Modelling Human Information from Social Media Posts on Facebook [7.26](#figure-7.26) - Identifying the Attributes of Data [7.27](#figure-7.27) - Determining the Nature of a Piece of Data [7.28](#figure-7.28) - Attributes of Data [7.29](#figure-7.29) - Actions One Might Perform on Life Information [7.30](#figure-7.30) - Questions One Might Ask of Life Information [7.31](#figure-7.31) - Example Taxonomies for Life Information Navigation [7.32](#figure-7.32) - HDR Approach 3: Defending User Autonomy and Hacking the Information Landscape [7.33](#figure-7.33) - The Modern ‘Black Box’ View of Technology [7.34](#figure-7.34) - HDR Approach 4: Winning Hearts and Minds: Teaching, Championing and Selling the Vision [7.35](#figure-7.35) - SILVER Health Data Viewing Interface [7.36](#figure-7.36) - Summary of Generalised Change Strategies for Pursuing Better HDR, Using the ToC Model

### Figures in ‘Additional Reference Information’

[ARI3.1](#figure-ari3.1) - Private Data Viewing Monitor with Viewing Glasses[ARI4.1](#figure-ari4.1) - Extract of Sample Scenario Storyboarding Exercise walkthrough [ARI4.2](#figure-ari4.2) - Example Backing Mat for Storyboard Decks [ARI5.1](#figure-ari5.1) - Screenshot from Quirkos During Coding Process [ARI5.2](#figure-ari5.2) - Screenshot from Quirkos at End of Coding Process [ARI5.3](#figure-ari5.3) - Screenshot from Workflowy During Theme Construction

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