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Attitudes towards privacy

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Abstract

Data, the modern power, plays an important role in everyone's day to day life. From dawn till dusk, most of the happenings around us are dependent on data. It is been years since we entered into the era of data, but, rules and laws are still being regulated for data privacy and protection. These are strongly required for the prompt usage of data. Although there are strict rules and regulations, there are quite a few concerns that pose as constraints for the usage of data. One of which is the user privacy. User privacy is highly dependent on every individual and receives different opinion from different users. Saying so, it is also seen that users' attitudes towards privacy is not stable which can vary to a greater extent based on different factors, well known as the "privacy paradox". In this paper, we will come across the varying attitudes towards privacy based on different factors including, age, sex, geography, online behavior to name but a few. We will also discuss and analyse the results of various experiments and surveys conducted regarding the same.

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1 Introduction

Over the years, there has been drastic advancement and development in technology due to the continuous usage and exposure of internet. Internet has become a part of our day-to-day life and there has been 42% increase in the number of people using the internet (Kemp, 2017). From early morning news to late night transactions and messages, people rely on internet as it's the fastest and easiest way that makes anything possible in seconds. As a result, corporate giants collect a lot of personal data and preferences in various forms like cookies to provide satisfaction of the user needs to a greater extent. Saying so, although it has a lot of advantages that is of great convenience to the users, there are also concerns that it carries along. Surveys were carried out on these reported concerns over the years revealed that the top privacy concerns, data privacy, data protection, data storage and online information haven't changed (Anton, Earp & Young, 2009; Fatima, Yasin, Liu, Wang, et al., 2019).

Online information disclosure, the major concern of privacy (Fatima et al., 2019), has its roots from the users who disclose their information online. The disclosure of information by users themselves is because either they are not aware of the privacy concerns or also because they are forced to do. The latter reason leads to the prevalence of "privacy paradox" where users are actually concerned over privacy but their behaviors are not. This is one of the current problems that exists as constraints for finding solution to the privacy concerns. The privacy paradox users tend to be in a state of dilemma between their thoughts and the actual action (Park, 2013). Also, users lack their control on the information disclosure because of various including less privacy concerned friends and family, varying privacy policies and smart environments to name but a few (Hargittai & Marwick, 2016).

The structure of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 discusses the concept

of privacy paradox. Section 3 discusses the varying users' attitudes towards privacy based on different factors, surveys conducted and analysis of the same. Section 4 concludes the results and discussions.

2 Privacy Paradox

Privacy Paradox, as the name states, has many definitions but with a common idea. A quicker and clear idea of privacy paradox is explained with the following questions.

2.1 What is privacy paradox?

The paradox of privacy is the discrepancy between the intentions of an individual to safeguard their privacy and how they actually act on the online marketplace. It can be seen that the connection between the intentions of people to disclose private data and their real behaviors of disclosure of private data, which are often very distinct.

2.2 Who drives the privacy paradox?

According to various researches and studies related to privacy, the online users can be categorized into Privacy fundamentalists, Privacy pragmatists and Privacy unconcerned users. The Privacy fundamentalists are highly inclined towards privacy and protecting their private information. Privacy unconcerned users are not at all concerned towards privacy and readily share their information to enjoy benefits and get satisfaction (Kumaraguru & Cranor, 2005). Privacy pragmatists are the dynamic users who fall into the other two categories. Defining the user categories, it can be said that privacy paradox is driven by both the fundamentalists and pragmatists. Although fundamentalists are concerned towards privacy, they are likely to share information that are not highly important (Spiekermann, Grosslags, & Berendt, 2001).

2.3 Why is privacy paradox actually happening?

After the emergence of social networking sites like Friendster and MySpace, in the early 2000s, a significant difference in the users' attitudes and behaviors were noted as it was new and people started creating public profiles, sharing information and photos online (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Hargittai & Marwick, 2016). In a nut shell, privacy paradox happens because either the users are not completely aware of the concerns and consequences or they are in a situation where they are forced to do so. There are various other reasons including varying privacy policies, users' lack of awareness of the amount of personal data being utilized by the companies and oversharing of information.

2.4 How can privacy paradox be resolved?

There are lots of measures that can be taken by both the users and corporate in order to solve this concern. Users must have self clear idea and at least try to understand the privacy policies before disclosing the information. It is better if the users promote the same to their friends and families. Also, companies must visualize their privacy policies in such a way that it is easily and readily understandable by the users.

3 Attitudes towards privacy

Privacy paradox, the clash between the attitudes and behaviors online, has varying user attitudes. Many researches and studies focus concern on young people's usage of internet and social networking sites (Kornbulm, 2007) as they are the majority users of social media in recent days (PRC, 2018). While some of young people lack the understanding and awareness of the privacy and protection behaviors, many others have good knowledge on what privacy is and the utilization of online protective behaviors (Hargittai & Marwick, 2016).

3.1 Level of concern about online privacy

Regarding the user concern on privacy online, various studies and researches show that most of the people tend to really concerned on their privacy online. The survey conducted in 2017 on about 1000 UK adults show that about 78% were concerned on privacy (both fundamentalists and pragmatists) and about 22% of them are not all concerned on what the companies do with their data (Big Brother Watch, 2017). Apart from this, another survey reported 75% are concerned about privacy online and 25% aren't concerned at all (DMA, 2018).

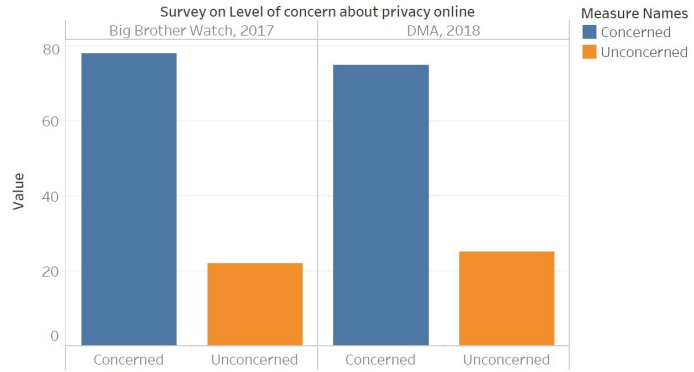


Figure 1: Level of concern about online privacy

Source: *Big Brother Watch, 2017 and DMA, 2018*

3.2 Does attitude vary?

Although attitudes of the users online seem more concerned about privacy, it is not the same considering various factors. The attitudes of different user groups vary based on time, age, region, etc.,

3.2.1 Time

Surveys and studies reported that attitudes towards privacy change over time. The study conducted by DMA in 2018, a shown in Fig. 2), report that over a period of 6 years, the attitudes of users towards privacy varied a lot. It showed that the number of individuals who were completely concerned about their privacy dropped from 31% in 2012 to 24% in 2015 and raised to 25% in 2018. Pragmatists, who were either

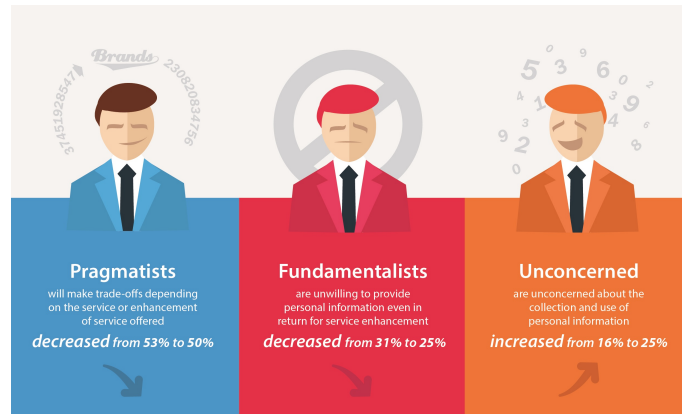


Figure 2: Changing consumer attitudes from 2012 to 2018
Source: DMA, 2018

concerned or unconcerned raised to 54% in 2015 from 53% in 2012 but, dropped to 50% in 2018. And finally, the unconcerned group of users, steadily increased from 16% in 2012 to 25% in 2018. This study means that the users are getting less concerned about their data over the development of technology.

3.2.2 Age

Similar to attitude change over time, studies show that age is one of the reasons for change in attitude about privacy online. The study by DMA in 2012 reported that the level of concern among the individuals increase with respect to the age from about 76% among 18-24 age groups to about 90% among 55-64 age groups. On the other hand, in 2015, it can be seen that the percentage of concerned dropped in all the age groups between 5% and 10%.

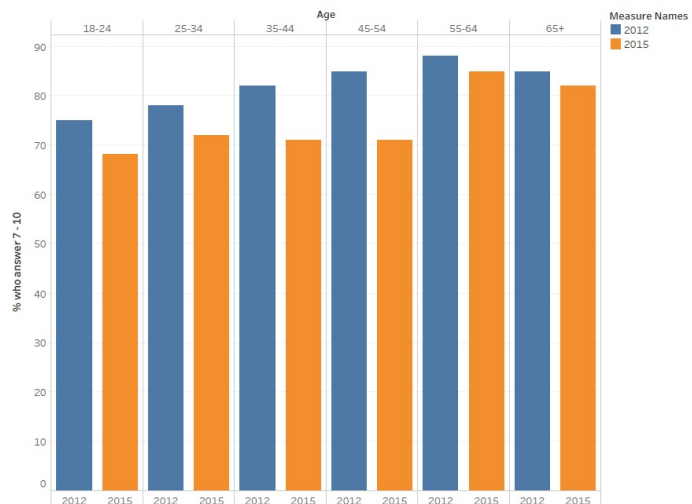


Figure 3: Changing consumer attitudes by age
Source: DMA, 2015

3.2.3 Region

The attitude change depending on the region seems to be an interesting factor. In 2019, Statistica conducted a worldwide survey with the question: "How concerned are you about your online privacy compared to one year ago? -Much more concerned / somewhat concerned". A

whopping 23,854 responds were made on this question and it was seen that compared to one year, Latin Americans tend to show highly concerned where 65% of their attitude has changed, followed by Africans, BRICS and APAC users. The survey reported a least of 39% change by the Europeans. With the significant change in a year, it can be always seen that there will be paradox

in the behaviors of the users for at least quite a couple of years. Overall, a total of 53% respondents responded that their attitude has changed which is a drastic concern towards privacy.

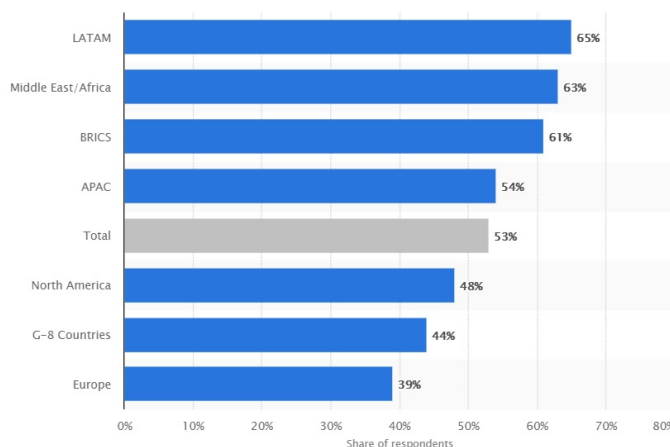


Figure 4: Change of online users concern towards privacy compared to a year ago, by region

Source: Statistica, 2019

4 What Can I Really Do?

In 2014, Hargittai and Marwick conducted group interviews with a total of 40 adults in a college and enquired them about their knowledge on privacy and the risks involved, their level of control over the privacy and their responsibility and actions towards protecting the private information. Let us discuss their findings and questions answered by the group of young people.

4.1 Knowledge about Privacy and Risks

From the responds from the groups, it is evident that their knowledge on privacy is good than expected. They were also aware of the consequences of sharing information online. Also many discussions regarding online sharing was focused on family and surroundings than risks from companies. Also, some students responded that they are highly concerned when it comes to sharing their medical and employment information which is clear that users are aware of sharing the required information.

4.2 Lack of control

Although, the users are concerned about their privacy, some of them reported that they lack control on their privacy. This is because, even though they're sure of their privacy settings and behaviors, they claim that their information like photographs in facebook can be shared public because of their friends and families. Also, some students reported that the frequent change in privacy policies makes them unaware of the current policies and as a result of which they lack their privacy control.

4.3 Responsibility and actions

The group of people were interviewed on how responsible they are in protecting the information and the actions that they do to protect the same. For the former question, some respondents said that once the information is available online, it was the responsibility of the companies in securing the information. Also, a small group of respondents believed that government is also responsible in securing the information. So, there was no clear information and conclusion on who actually held responsible for securing the information. Regarding the actions, students mentioned that they use several security apps to secure their information online. Also, some people prefer to send their photos via email to friends and family members with whom they like to share with instead of posting online in social networking websites

and some people reported that they use incognito window so that they can stay away from cookies recommendations. These actions by the respondents prove that their attitudes towards privacy is concerned.

5 Conclusion

From the above discussions on studies and researches conducted related to the users' attitudes towards privacy, it is evident that the hypothesis by Hargittai and Marwick, the change in attitude behavior is not a result of unawareness of privacy, protecting behaviors or risk involved, is true. Users do know the risks and the usage of privacy protecting behaviors. But at times the change in attitude is because of various other reasons that force them to do so. Also, apart from users, companies can formulate privacy policies in such a way that users can easily understand and get to know about it and the collected information should be stored securely instead of providing it to third party companies for profit. As discussed, also, the age, time and region play an important role in the change of attitude behavior. Hence, not only the people activities be complained regarding the attitudes towards privacy but also other factors are equally responsible.

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