PERSONAL DATA AND TRUST: WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIES OF FRENCH CITIZEN-CONSUMERS IN 2017?

SYNTHESIS
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The Chair Values and Policies of Personal Information of Institut Mines-Télécom has joined forces with Médiamétrie to carry out a survey of how French Internet users manage their personal data. The survey, completed in March 2017, covering 2,000 people representative of French Web users, was carried out at a time when the degree of trust placed in the Internet is gradually being undermined, in view of abusive data collection practices, and the surveillance put in place by certain states or private sector companies.

Trust is crucial for people to live together harmoniously in society, and for the development of the digital economy, which needs to gather data from Web users. It is thus necessary to determine the extent to which Web users are prepared to share their data, and with whom. In addition, there is another question: do individuals just passively accept the practices of the major Internet players, or do they, on the contrary, react by developing new behaviours, particularly by using protection tools such as browser extensions that block advertisements and prevent the collection of their personal data? What is the impact of these new personal data management behaviours on the way people express themselves online, search for information and buy products?

This document provides key findings and insights into the survey which consisted of more than 50 questions overall, and is an initial attempt to analyse a complex social question: what do we mean by trust in a digital context?

Survey methodology

A sample of 2,051 Web users aged 15 and over, representative of the Internet population, were asked questions by means of a self-administered online questionnaire over the period 26 February to 16 March 2017. The representativeness of the sample was ensured by the quota method (gender, age group (5 groups), socio-professional category (5 categories) and region (Paris region/other regions)), established by referring to the authoritative survey of the Web user population in France: Observatoire des Usages de l’Internet.
1. USERS ARE PAYING INCREASING ATTENTION TO THE CIRCULATION OF THEIR PERSONAL DATA

More than half of Web users say they are now more vigilant when using the Internet than they were a few years ago. The reasons they give for this are primarily the exposure of the private life of certain individuals on social media, and the reporting in the media of thefts of personal data.

Above all, Web users differentiate between the contexts in which their data circulate (cf. the concept of “privacy in context” developed by Helen Nissenbaum and referred to in Digital Identities, Handbook n°1 of the Values and Policies of Personal Information Chair (2017). Tastes and interests, and in fact browsing habits, are basically seen as data that can be shared with social media. Conversely, data included in an identity document are only shared with official state websites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Social media</th>
<th>A bank</th>
<th>State websites</th>
<th>Online purchasing websites</th>
<th>IAP or mobile phone operator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Surname, first name</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact details</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity document</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank account details</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health information</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tastes and interests</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geolocation</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web browsing habits</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet purchases</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of friends or contacts</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messages, pictures, videos posted on the Internet</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST at least one item of information</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Questions: If you could choose, to which of the following would you be prepared to give this information? BASE: Web users aged 15 and over (n=2,051)
Against this background, another more recent trend is now emerging: 38% of Web users no longer wish to share their data with social media, for example, and 10% of them would prefer to provide no data whatsoever, if they had the choice.

2. USERS WHO ARE DEVELOPING PROTECTION STRATEGIES

Our survey has confirmed a growing trend: Terms of Service (TOS) no longer inspire confidence amongst Web users. The survey shows that 89% of Web users do not read, or do not read in full, the information provided about confidentiality policies. They consider that the TOS are too long (80%), are not modular (54%) and are unclear (42%).

As users are aware of the risks associated with the circulation of their data, and as they are less confident about the ways their data is handled, they are adopting strategies to protect themselves.

Web users’ increased vigilance is reflected primarily in the parameterising of accounts; this mainly involves the deactivation of geolocation, the deletion of navigation history on Internet browsers and the parameterising of accounts on social media.
The primary objective is to reduce the number of data items collected, and not to improve the quality of personalised recommendations.

The use of an ad blocker is largely motivated by a refusal to accept intrusive advertising. In addition, more than one-third of persons questioned say they use an ad blocker as a way of protecting their personal information and their privacy.
Finally a change in purchasing behaviour in order to protect the individual’s data can be observed. Abstaining from a purchase or changing a payment instrument in order not to leave traces are two practices adopted by more than one-third of Web users when buying online.
3. PROTECTION IS NOT DETRIMENTAL TO ONLINE PURCHASEES

We have found that a significant proportion of Web users adopt personal data protection strategies, while a growing proportion seem to reject any form of sharing of their personal data. What could be the socioeconomic impact of these personal data protection strategies? **We have found that those who use protection tools purchase on average more than those who do not use protection tools:** behaviour intended to protect oneself could be seen as synonymous with involvement in the digital economy.

4. ECONOMIC AND SOCIETAL OUTLOOK

The survey shows that economic and social issues linked to the use of personal data are interrelated in a complex way.

From an economics point of view, behaviours reflecting an outright refusal to share personal data constitute a risk that cannot be ignored for the new economy fuelled by data sharing. But in fact individual protection strategies (management of digital identities, management of payment instruments, ad blockers, parameterising of accounts) do not in any way act as a brake on economic exchanges: for example, the widespread use of ad blockers, seen by some advertisers as a threat, is in fact accompanied by an increase in online purchasing by the individuals concerned. **Giving people a means of protecting themselves could strengthen their subjective feeling of individual empowerment.**
From a social point of view, other complementary paths of exploration should be mentioned. Although Web users are now more vigilant, and tend to increasingly protect themselves (or are arguably forced to take their protection into their own hands), they are also extremely suspicious about the way their relationships with digital service providers are managed, as illustrated by their perceptions of Terms of Services. Are constant solicitation or advice to “be vigilant” really the first things that consumers are looking for?

To attempt to answer this question, we asked the Web users taking part in the survey to choose 3 unrestricted words to describe what the concept of trust meant to them. The results are shown in the word cloud opposite (after a lexical grouping by categories of words). The two terms most frequently encountered are security and respect, followed closely by transparency. While security is no surprise, and while transparency seems to suggest a wish to see actors’ practices move towards more reciprocity in the “balance of power” governing the use of the data collected, respect seems to indicate Web users’ aspiration that their privacy should be respected without them having to devote constantly growing efforts to defending it.

We see here the presence of a crucial component of trust: respect seems indeed to indicate a type of social relationship that cannot be reduced merely to the execution of a contractual relationship. With this in mind, much more clearly needs to be done to ensure that the new digital economy does not lead to an impulse of rejection across society as a whole.

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