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Internet Privacy Concerns in the Context of Web Personalisation

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The convergence of multiple technologies such as cloud computing, mobile, the Internet of Things (IoT), social media and big data analytics are driving the creation of huge data sets and organisations are increasingly using these individuals data trails to personalise products and services (Newell and Marabelli, 2015). For example, web personalisation enables companies to tailor content for each user, based on the data collected from their on-line behaviour being product recommendations the most widely used application of web personalisation (Ho and Bodoff, 2014). Although personalisation supports business goals such as increased advertising and/or sales revenue, for customers this personalisation may represent a violation of their online privacy (Hong and Thong, 2013; Ho and Bodoff, 2014).

Data privacy is broadly defined as the control that an individual retains over the collection and use of his or her personal information (Toufaily et al, 2013). More specifically, there are six factors (collection, secondary usage, errors, improper access, control and awareness) of internet privacy concerns (IPC) that have been identified with emphasis on control and awareness as key dimensions (Hong and Thong, 2013). Concerns about data privacy arise when this sense of control which individuals feel is removed, or his or her understanding of the technologies involved is low (Regan et al. 2013; Schwaig et al. 2013). It has been found that individuals who feel they have control over how their personal information is both collected and used, perceive less of an invasion of privacy, for example through website mechanisms for consent (Vegheș et al. 2012; Schwaig et al. 2013).

Perceived understanding of the technologies or awareness has also an impact on data privacy concerns, a study found that data privacy concerns peaked during the rise of email and online transactions, but subsided as consumers became familiar with the technology (Regan et al. 2013). A similar impact can be expected with the rise of web personalisation and it is important to better understand the impact of internet privacy concern in today's context of personalisation as the privacy concerns may evolve as personalisation becomes more pervasive (Hong and Thong, 2013). Research suggests that individuals are more likely to click on a personalised ad if they feel they can easily understand the advertising agent used (Ho and Bodoff, 2014). Furthermore, users' daily online practices do not mirror their privacy concerns with the majority of them willing to disclose information in order to get discounts and offers when purchasing online or forgetting their anonymity when browsing the Internet (Awad and Krishnan, 2006; Hsu, 2012).

There is no doubt about the potential benefits of personalisation of services/products based on data analytics, however, further research is required to better understand the business and ethical implications.

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