

# People overshare their data if they think data collection is unavoidable

Submitted by: BlueSky Education

Wednesday, 10 July 2024

---

People who believe their personal data will be accessed no matter what they do tend to share more information online, according to new research by Vlerick Business School.

Researchers have been studying the privacy paradox, where users know how to protect their data, but this fails to translate into action, for a long time. One earlier study, for example, stated that laziness is an important driver of this behaviour.

However, Martin Butler, Professor of Management Practice in Digital Transformation at Vlerick Business School, and his colleagues from the University of Galway, Professors Eoin Whelan and Michael Lang, wanted to challenge the assumption of laziness and consider the effect of the 'Does it matter what I do?' mindset.

The researchers' study found the influence of an external locus of control was a stronger predictor of disclosing information, than laziness.

An external locus of control refers to a belief that outcomes are primarily influenced by external factors rather than your own actions or decisions.

Most of the interviewees (83.7%) believed that no matter how hard they tried to prevent it, their data was going to be accessed and misused on social media. The distrust of privacy and suspicions about big tech companies' motives were key aspects of people feeling powerless over their data privacy.

Normally, you would expect privacy concerns to lead people to share less online. But through surveys, the research established social media users who think they can't control what happens to their data, tend to not display the necessary caution with their disclosure and privacy settings. They feel protecting their privacy is pointless.

"Only 48% of people we surveyed believed that they exert any influence on how much of their personal data was being passed on and utilised by social media platforms and third parties," said Butler.

"It was individuals with the 'nothing I do matters' and 'they will inevitably take it' attitude that shared more of their personal information. This highlights the needs for more tools across social media to help people accurately control their data disclosure and restore a sense of transparency online."

Some support for the previous impact of laziness was confirmed in the study. Over one-third (35.7%) of respondents also admitted to not investing enough time and effort in protecting their personal data on social media.

Published in May 2024 in the journal Internet Research, the research used a mixed methods approach, first creating a model that suggests laziness and external locus of control can affect privacy concerns, and

then testing it quantitatively with a survey of 463 Facebook users.

/Ends.

To speak with Professor Martin Butler, or for a copy of the article, please contact Alexandre Lopez at BlueSky Education at [alex@bluesky-pr.com](mailto:alex@bluesky-pr.com) or call +44 (0)1582 797959.