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The Data Privacy Divide: An exploratory study of social fault lines

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Though the digitization of personal data offers much promise of health and human flourishing (Leidner and Tona, 2021), concern over consumer data privacy has grown in recent years as headlines regularly report data breaches, scandals, and consumer manipulation. The public is increasingly aware of surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019) and the potential for oppressive uses of personal digital data and machine learning tools (Kane et al., 2021). Privacy concerns have led many users to be more judicious regarding online services and have prompted government regulations such as the EU's GDPR and California's CCPA. Yet, achieving privacy is challenging and consumers may be unwilling or unable to pay for increased data privacy. To monetize digital offerings, firms offer "free" online services that do not charge fees but instead commoditize users' personal digital data in exchange for access. As with many IT threats, some communities may be more at risk of oppressive uses of personal digital data than others.

The digital divide is an established phenomena describing the gap between communities able and unable to leverage ICT. We foresee the potential for an emergent **data privacy divide**, wherein certain communities increasingly take steps to protect personal data, while others remain locked into and exploited by the surveillance capitalism models of invasive, pervasive platforms. As with the digital divide, we predict that socioeconomic factors influence the decision-making processes and socio-cultural infrastructures that shape fault lines in the privacy divide. We seek to answer this question: *Along which fault lines might an emerging data privacy divide be forming?* We have begun an exploratory study of consumers to assess demographics and privacy protection behaviors. We are interested in (a) general attitudes toward data privacy and (b) enacted privacy-protecting behaviors. This research will provide empirical support for or against the existence of a digital privacy divide and potentially illuminate fault lines that can inform public policies and interventions to protect at-risk communities.

References

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