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## Data brokers, can I have my virtual self back, please? Using the right to data deletion to prompt protective privacy behaviors

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## Data brokers, can I have my virtual self back, please?

Using the right to data deletion to prompt protective privacy behaviors

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Pew Research Center (2019) indicates that approximately 80% of U.S. adults feel they have little or no control over the data collected about them, yet often consumers consent to sharing their data when they actively click “agree” to terms and conditions. Consequently, consumers trade their personal data (privacy) for convenience (Awad & Krishnan, 2006) and thus make their data publicly accessible in data markets (Spiekermann et al., 2015). Moreover, consumers’ private, behavioral use data become available for buying and selling, where companies (data brokers) aggregate information from online and offline sources to create unique user profiles of consumers (virtual selves). However, these virtual selves are not owned by consumers but instead by companies. Policymakers have passed data privacy regulations to grant consumers rights over their personal data, namely a consumer’s right to data deletion (“right to be forgotten”). The right to data deletion is a way to exert control over companies’ ownership of consumers’ virtual selves. However, little is known about whether consumers will exercise their right to data deletion and whether the activity of data deletion can induce (or reduce) further protective privacy behaviors.

In this study, we use the lens of identity economics to investigate how the right to data deletion can be effectively framed as a privacy protective mechanism. By requesting to delete their digital footprints, consumers can reduce the use of their personal data in the algorithmic profiling of other consumers who share similar demographics or psychographics. We hypothesize that participants will be more willing to delete their online profiles to prevent companies from recommending preferences based on their virtual identities, to allow others to freely express their choices according to their own self-identities. We propose a scenario-based experiment to determine the effects of a privacy nudge to encourage participants to delete their customer profiles in three online consumer contexts: finance, ecommerce, and job search. Our study will contribute to the literature on information privacy by presenting a new lens from which to encourage consumer privacy protection practices in the context of publicly accessible consumer data.

### References

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