Can we ever expect our online activities to remain private?

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How private is your life online? When you visit large social media websites or smaller blogs, do you expect your user details to be kept forever? There are over 4 billion regular users on the internet which is almost half the world's population. We care about our personal information and do not want it to be systemically collected by websites and apps just so we can use their services.

Over the years websites have been asking for more and more information about each of its users just so they can continue to use their website. This means that if you want to email, chat with friends on social media, or share pictures, you will need to hand over your real name, email address, mobile phone number, and in some cases, home address. This information is used to create even more precise advertising banners just for you, by building up a picture of your life and habits. Consumers are very often taken advantage of by placing the details of their activity in the small print of their terms and conditions. Nearly 91% of people do not read the terms and conditions and simply click 'accept'. For apps like TikTok, Zoom, and Uber, their service terms can take up to an hour to read. This becomes more worrying once user profiles are exposed in data leaks. In August 2020, Instagram had 235 million user details leaked with many other companies suffering similar cyber-attacks. Where do you draw the line?

Data sharing with social media websites and corporations is a choice.

Agree

Companies are very open and transparent on the data they keep and how it is used. Laws like GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) protects users because it stops companies, like social media websites, from misusing people's personal data. There are options to opt-out from some data collection and there are even processes where you can reduce what is collected. Google, for example, has a feature in its account settings where users can request less specific ads to be shown and so have few data points collected on them. If website users are unhappy they are able to download their data and then move to a new service provider.

Disagree

It is true there is a choice, but it is a false choice. Large websites like Google, Twitter, Facebook, and Microsoft are embedded in almost every part of our life. If someone is working from home or is studying they will have to use their products to create documents and to collaborate online. Video sharing, emails, calendars, and other tools are all gathering data on individuals and these products are a necessity for everyday life. It is impossible to avoid them unless you choose to use software and online tools that are incompatible and are unsuitable to reach your colleagues and classmates. Because of this, these companies know they can collect more and more information on people as they have a data monopoly and so want to make as much money as they can.

Online advertising thrives on data collection.

Agree

Online advertising works very cheaply and effectively because social media companies and websites collect user data. Without doing this, the cost of creating your own business and growing sales each and every month becomes harder. When everyone online gives only a small amount of their data to websites the benefits are greater because it means there is more competition amongst companies. It also creates famous success stories of small businesses becoming famous and creating a loyal customer base – all because of digital advertising. So, having too much privacy is bad for the economy.

Disagree

Users are not objects to be advertised to. Another example might be as follows, just because I have a mobile phone or I have a home address it does not mean by default that companies can send me marketing flyers or to call me to sell products. I have a right to private life and to have my activities online to be kept private. I am first a citizen and then a consumer. When I am a consumer, I should have a choice to not have any advertising targeting me online.

We all deserve human dignity and the right to live our life in private

Agree

We know that these technology companies are very careless with our data. They regularly collect more than they need and then this becomes leaked during a cyber attack on their site. Yahoo, Facebook, and Instagram, to name a few companies, have had data breaches where usernames, passwords, addresses, and profile images were compromised. This information is collected where hackers cross-reference the data with other leaks to build a profile on people's data. This is then sold to other criminals where they commit fraud and other crimes. Data collection is ultimately not safe and infringes our right to private life and to live undisturbed.

Disagree

Technology is making life more convenient and accessible for everyone. The small sacrifice of giving websites very basic information like your location, your email address, and to record what you click on is a small price to pay for a better life. Think of services like Google Maps, when it was begin introduced people were worried about their privacy and problems it might cause, but in fact, it has made all our lives better. We can get to unfamiliar places easily and even know what the building looks like. The worry about privacy is overstated.

Useful language to use in formal debates

In general, you would need to come up with 4-5 main arguments to support your team's debating position. It's also important to remember to also anticipate the opposition's arguments to help you defend your team's point of view.

<ins>Building your Argument</ins>
Introducing your point: To begin with… First of all…
Connecting your points: Also… Furthermore… What's more…
Showing importance: More importantly… What's worse… Above all else…
Giving examples: For instance… For example…

<ins>Opinions, Preferences:</ins>
In my opinion..., The way I see it..., As far as I'm concerned..., If it were up to me..., I
suppose..., I suspect that..., I'm pretty sure that..., I honestly feel that,
Without a doubt…,

<ins>Disagreeing</ins>:
Don't you think it would be better..., Shouldn't we consider..., But what about..., I'm afraid I
don't agree..., Frankly, I doubt if..., The truth of the matter is..., The problem with your point
of view is that..., It's a fact that…, According to …, The reality of the situation is…, The
numbers show that…, The fact is this:…, Here's the deal…

<ins>Partially agreeing:</ins>
I agree with you to a point however…, I see where you are coming from but…, I see what you
are saying but …,

<ins>Delaying Strategies</ins>
I can't answer that directly..., I'll need time to think about that..., That's a very interesting
question, because…, That's a difficult question to answer,

<ins>Asking someone to repeat</ins>
Pardon me? Pardon? Excuse me? Sorry? I'm sorry? I beg your pardon.

<ins>Holding the floor</ins>
Hold on..., Hold on a second..., Yes, I was about to mention that...., Well, I was about to come
to that..., Sorry, I haven't finished yet…, I haven't made my point yet …
a
<ins>Expressing solutions and alternatives</ins>
The solution is to…, Then you will…, The best way to … is …,
To …, you really must …., There are many choices....,