

A STUDY ON FACTORS INFLUENCING THE HABITS AND OPERATIONS OF INTERNET USERS REGARDING DATA PRIVACY

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Abstract:

Technically, internet is a global system of interconnected networks which uses a standardized set of protocols to communicate and share information and emotionally internet is the current blood being circulated in all human beings. Life has become heavily dependent on it and thus in return it is attacking the privacy concerns of these internet users due to several reasons. Thus, this research paper focuses on the internet surfing habits of the internet users which could affect their privacy concerns. A sample of 397 internet users was taken from Udaipur city and their habits for using internet were categorized through exploratory factor analysis. As per the study, safeguarding privacy is partially in the hands of the internet users and they must be alert and responsible enough to read terms and conditions before agreeing to it on any website.

Keywords: *Internet, Information Privacy, Internet Surfing Habits, Terms and Conditions, Website.*

1. Introduction:

Internet refers to a global inter connected networks all over the world which has removed all the barriers related to geographical boundaries. Through internet the whole world has been reduced in a palm as people are connected through social media, video conferencing, chat messengers etc. where distance is not a limit. It has even upgraded the human lives with the gift of limitless knowledge. But nothing costs free. This indulgence has led to invasion to the privacy concerns of internet users in terms of their personal information (name, address, contact no., email address, health records etc.) leakage for economic gains. Entering the personal details while surfing the internet is the most source of personal data collection. However, the tracking of internet surfing history from the website companies either by taking or without taking consent has drawn attention for bringing stringent regulations for the sake of safeguarding the privacy of internet users.

Even “**28 January**” every year is being celebrated as Data Privacy Day/ Data Protection Day (Buhariwalla, 2023) to give importance to this concern. Already, General Data Protection regulation (GDPR) has been enforced for the member countries of European Union to regulate the internet related activities of its citizens and website companies working there. Even, the government of India has proposed Personal Data Protection Bill, 2019 for regulating the internet related activities for the citizens of India which was improvised and in re launched in August 2023 as The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. This bill aims to protect the privacy of individuals regarding their personal data, create a proper chain for authorized use of this personal data and establish a proper regulatory framework for creating authority and responsibility for the usage of this personal data.

Thus, this study aims to seek the factors which influence the internet operating habits of the individuals with regard to their behavior and concern related to their privacy.

2. Review of Literature:

Personal information is defined as that piece of information which reveals identity of a person such as a person's name, email address, medical records, contact number etc. (Cloudflare, 2023; Government, 2016). Information privacy is defined as providing individuals to have control/ influence over the data regarding themselves. With the digitalization era, the concern of increasing this privacy have been raised as now the data leakage to the third party for economic profits is causing a concern (Bélanger & Crossler, 2011).

Personal data has been transformed into valuable currency as this information possess economic value if it is transferred for some use (Zeller et al., 2019; Spiekermann & Korunovska, 2016) as on these the expectations about economic profits is based which leads to prediction about consumer behavior regarding development of products and

services by various companies. (Gare, 2016) which was also verified by Amazon, Google, Apple, Microsoft and Facebook (Kerber, 2016). This personal information is often traced, accessed, explored and collected by website either with or without consent of the internet user which can harm the privacy of a person with respect to his choice, opinion, judgment etc. on a public platform and this collection of information brings the need of data privacy law in every country (Cloudflare, 2023; Lupton, 2018). Mobile applications also play an important role in gathering this personal data by just running in background where the mobile phone user is unaware about its collection method. Sometimes, during the configuration it takes several permission together and most of the time the mobile user agrees with all of them even without reading (Zyskind, Nathan, & Pentland, 2015; Acquisti, 2010).

In getting some attractive services and offers, the internet users forget about their privacy concerns and share their personal information without much thinking over it. This could not have happened if they have paid attention towards the stated privacy statements which they usually ignore and just “**AGREE**” to it. Thus, for the internet users the study suggests that they should be attentive enough while reading the privacy terms and conditions and then agree/disagree to them by understanding them instead of just ignoring them to browse the websites (Borgesius, 2015 ; Berendt et al., 2005). Data privacy reveals the protection of data (name, personal information, address, email etc.) from the person who doesn't have authorized access to it (Cloudflare, 2023).

Though online services are an essential part of today's life but its usage is on the verge of loss of control of personal data (Abiteboul et al., 2015). The line of difference between public and private life in this online world is getting blurred because the mode of operation of internet through an electronic gadget is of an owner but the control of data is in hands of online marketers (Chen, 2018). Thus, the need for Information researchers to explore these issues is required where they could suggest the solutions towards data protection (Bélanger & Crossler et al., 2011). Even government of every country is trying hard to come up with rules and regulations but still struggling on part of its strict execution. Thus, it is suggested that evolving rules and regulations should be enrooted from the fundamental rights of that country and this data should be given protection in every possible way (Ben-Hassine, 2021). However, privacy laws can be made stringent and applicable but it is always required from the consumer/ internet user to read privacy condition before accepting them because the ultimate empowerment can only be created if the internet users are active and does not keep this concern at the backend. (Borgesius, 2015; Shore & Steinman, 2015). Thus, before an individual learns to use internet, he/she must be aware about the concept of data privacy, data protection and data security so that he acts accordingly (Europe, 2023; Chaudhury & Choe, 2022; Zeller et al. , 2019). For the internet users, there are ways to stop their information leakage such as creation of strong passwords for different accounts, use of authentic website, cookie control, usage of open Wi-Fi cautiously, avoid using credentials from social media, encryption of data, close the old account which are not in use etc. (Cloudflare, 2023; Miller, 2021; IBM, 2020).

Thus, due to the absence of strict implementation of data privacy law, its awareness is still found low in Indian internet users and their habits are shaped accordingly which can cause sometime problems to their privacy. Thus, this study reveals those habits which are beneficial or threatening for their privacy protection and very few studies have been conducted in Indian context till now.

3. Research Methodology:

This study was carried out with the aim of extracting the factors that govern the internet surfing activities of the respondents. A sample size of 397 internet users were taken from Udaipur city in order to identify their basic knowledge and usage habits related to internet and then ultimately grouping them as per their governing factors. Convenience Sampling was applied for choosing the samples. A well-structured questionnaire was used for the purpose of primary data collection which was mailed through Google Forms and secondary data was collected through research journals, websites, reports, conference proceedings etc.

4. Data Analysis & Interpretation:

As per the findings, there were 48.87 % males and 51.13% female respondents out of which maximum respondents 38.03% belong to the age category of 30 years- 40 years followed by 40 years-50 years (21.67%), 18 years- 30 years (20.15%), 50years- 60 years (17.13%) and 60 years & above (3.02%) category. Regarding their educational background, 42.82% were post-graduates. 22.92% were graduates, 10.83% were school pass outs and diploma courses and 23.43% hold professional degrees like software engineers, doctorates etc. Regarding the frequency of internet usage 48.36% use internet during some intervals of the days, 30.48% use all throughout the day while remaining

21.16% use either once a day or once a week from either mobile phones, laptops, tablets and desktops. 64.74% of the respondents were not aware about the data privacy law while some (24.68%) have partial knowledge. Only a small proportion of respondents (10.58%) are aware about this law and its vitalities. Thus, regarding the habits and operations while surfing internet the respondents were asked to give their agreement so that their habits could be grouped and some meaningful interpretation could be traced out. So, for the same Exploratory factor analysis was applied. Initially, Chronbach alpha was applied on all the statements to check their reliability which was 0.830 i.e. above the cut off limit signifying the reliability of the scale for further operations. Further, KMO and Bartlett's test also resulted 0.756 above the threshold limit signifying the applicability of factor analysis. Communalities were also extracted and they resulted above 0.5. Table 1.1 depicts the total variance explained for the habits.

Table 1.1
Total Variance Explained for Habits

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.727	46.584	46.584	3.727	46.584	46.584	2.834	35.431	35.431
2	1.866	23.328	69.912	1.866	23.328	69.912	2.759	34.482	69.912
3	.725	9.069	78.981						
4	.522	6.528	85.509						
5	.481	6.016	91.525						
6	.291	3.639	95.165						
7	.219	2.736	97.901						
8	.168	2.099	100.000						

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

From Table 1.1, it can be interpreted that two factors are extracted from this process as their eigen value lies above one. Factor one (Protective habits) shows the 35.431% of variability and factor two (Influenced Habits) shows 34.482% of variability. Together they represent 69.912% of variability. Further, labelling of the two factors extracted is mentioned in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2
Labelling of Factors extracted for Habits

Factor Label	Variable No.	Variable Detail	Factor Loading	Variability
Protective Habits	H_1	Read Privacy Policy before Installing an Application	.896	35.431
	H_2	Feed Correct Details while Registering on Website /Application	.874	
	H_4	Filling of Details whenever asked	.776	
	H_8	Read Terms and Conditions while making Payment	.638	

Influenced Habits	H_3	Attracted by Personalized Advertisement	.890	34.482
	H_7	Prefer Applications/ Websites which show similar things of Interest	.846	
	H_5	Install Applications based on suggestions	.772	
	H_6	Allowing cookies while surfing Internet	.650	

Interpretation:

Factor 1 (Protective Habits): This factor comprised of all those variables which reflects the positive and safeguarded habits which a person usually practices while surfing on the internet such as reading terms and conditions, filling required details, understanding privacy policy etc.

Factor 2 (Influenced Habits): This factor comprised of all those variables which clubs all those variables which depicts the effect of influencers on person's internet surfing habits such as attracting towards suggestions based on history, always allowing cookies to access websites, prefer websites showing things of interest etc.

5. Conclusion:

Though internet has gifted limitless knowledge and collapsed the world with the connectors like social media, chat messengers, video and audio conferencing where geographical distance is not the limit but started costing in terms of privacy invasion. Personal information (name, date of birth, email id, address, contact no. , health records, internet surfing history etc.) is being collected by the websites through various means where internet user either deliberately enters the details knowingly or they are being fetched in the background which is mostly transferred for economic gains that can be used for marketing purpose. Thus, this study extracted the factors which were related to the habits of internet users regarding their internet operation (Protective Habits and Influenced Habits). Protective Habits comprises of all those habits like reading terms and conditions, filling required details, understanding privacy policy etc. Influenced habits clubs all those habits like attracting towards suggestions based on history, always allowing cookies to access websites, prefer websites showing things of interest etc. Thus, it is suggested from the study that besides of enforcing strict laws for privacy by the government it is also expected from the internet users to be alert enough on their part. They should always read the privacy policies of the websites and applications before "Agreeing" to it and must enter the personal details only if required. Gaining knowledge about privacy laws and its basics must be made a habit to all internet users specially who have recently started or going to start internet. Attracting towards personalized advertisements based on surfing history should be limited to an extent which is further scope of this study where marketing perspective is uncovered. However, this study was limited to Udaipur region only and in future this type of study could be carried with different age groups or different geographical regions.

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