

Reading privacy policy lowers trust

May 20 2014

Website privacy policies are almost obligatory for many online services, but for anyone who reads these often unwieldy documents, trust in the provider is more commonly reduced than gained, according to US researchers.

Almost every commercial website, social network, [search engine](#) and banking site has a privacy policy. Indeed, these and countless other sites that scrape [personal information](#) via forms, logins and tracking cookies are obliged by law in some parts of the world to post a document online giving details of how they protect any personal data you give the site and to what use it might be put.

Of course, the existence of a privacy document does not ensure that users read and understand the policy. Indeed, the long-winded and opaque policies provided by many well-known web sites not only deter casual users from reading them but seem to be prepared in such a way as to obfuscate the very policies they aim to describe. One might suggest that such obfuscation is there to deliberately confuse naïve users and to allow the companies running such websites to harvest personal and private information and to do with it what they will without any recourse to the morality of such actions.

Now, Xiaojing Sheng and Penny Simpson of the College of Business Administration, at The University of Texas-Pan American, in Edinburg, Texas, USA, have investigated why users are often not inclined to read online privacy policies. They have demonstrated that for many users hoping to access a given online service reading the operator's detailed

privacy policy commonly leads them to be less trusting and to perceive the operator as less trustworthy in general.

The team's survey of internet [users](#) revealed that almost one third of those who read the [privacy policy](#) on the sites they use are concerned that their [private information](#) might be shared or sold. Conversely, more than a quarter of respondents reported that they do not read privacy policies because of the documentation's overt complexity, length, and small print. Almost 13% of respondents did not read the documents because they trusted the site implicitly.

More information: Sheng, X. and Simpson, P.M. (2014) 'Effects of perceived privacy protection: does reading privacy notices matter?' *Int. J. Services and Standards*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp.19–36.

Provided by Inderscience Publishers

Citation: Reading privacy policy lowers trust (2014, May 20) retrieved 17 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2014-05-privacy-policy-lowers.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--