

How Consumers Simplify Data Recipients on Digital Platforms

In today's data-driven landscape, consumers frequently interact with digital platforms, that shares their personal information with numerous third parties. For example, platforms like PayPal and Facebook share data with hundreds of third parties. In turn, marketers highlight the need for transparency in data-sharing practices to build stronger relationships with consumers (Bleier, Goldfarb, and Tucker, 2020). Likewise, policymakers emphasize transparency and trust to help consumers better understand how their data is shared with third parties (Walker, 2016). Despite efforts to enhance transparency, marketers and policymakers often assume consumers are both willing and able to review privacy policies when sharing their data. However, consumers frequently experience cognitive overload from the vast amount of information, making it unrealistic to expect them to fully understand the numerous third parties involved in data sharing (Gerlach et al., 2019). Moreover, the convenience of these platforms leaves consumers with little choice but to participate, offering limited time to consider the implications of sharing their data.

This raises two key issues: (1) it questions the effectiveness of self-regulatory approaches that depend on consumers making informed decisions, and (2) it underscores the urgent need to explore how consumers construct mental models and the types of models they use to navigate the complex privacy policies and data-sharing practices of digital platforms. This is where this Master thesis comes in. The aim of this thesis is to conduct a qualitative investigation to; first, classify the strategies consumers employ to simplify data recipients; and second, to investigate the factors influencing consumers to simplify, and (potentially) identify key conditions that shape or alter consumer's simplification strategies.

N.B. this thesis topic is only offered in English