Global Regulations in Content Industries: 
The Google Privacy Policy as a 
News Gatekeeping Factor

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the role of privacy policies on internet sites as a newly emerging news gatekeeping factor as well as part of the new web world wars between regulators and internet giants’ privacy policies, like the one of Google. All these developments are related to both innovation excellence and customer experience, in every aspect of life, business and entertainment, and therefore of the news industry. One of the most important fights of these recent wars is raging between Google and the EU on the field of customers’ experience and their privacy protection. The author argues that even the updated news gatekeeping model by ICTs influences should be mapped more precisely in every one of its traditional pillars, focusing on the consumer’s data protection. Their potential exploitation by search engines and advertisement industries from one side and the privacy protection claims from international institutions from the other, indicate the need of new variables in the equation of the updated media gatekeeping model, as derived from global regulations on the issue. The reactions of the EU to the actions of Google indicate the momentum of wars in citizen–customer’s experience, which is the most reliable key performance indicator in the e/m commerce sector. A convenience sample’s data show that the policy adopted by the EU and the one applied by the global content industries would remap the audiences’ preferences and therefore the news industries strategies.

KEYWORDS

Advertisement Industry, Article 29, Customer’s Experience, Data Protection, EDPS, E/M Commerce, EU, Google Privacy Policy, Mobile, News Media Gatekeeping Model

INTRODUCTION

All ICT related companies announce from time to time their updates on their privacy policies. The last decade, from all of them, the internet search engines began testing a mapping approach for their users’ declared interests, via their activities or purely by the personal data required by their subscription procedure of a service provided. Furthermore, they offer the mentioned users’ data to interest-based advertising and opt-out content (Das, Datar et al., 2007), in order to customize better the customer’s experience (Google Commerce, 2012), like Google news, etc.

The audience measurement and product placement technologies and services are not anymore issues of business development models of a specific off/on-line media industry. Through published privacy policies of the access points to them, namely of the internet search engines, the users’/audience/consumer activities concern all their interaction with content, with or without personally identifiable information, directly or through a third-party are subject to global regulations. The advertisement industry is interested to identify advertising placement opportunities that meet their applicable target

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audiences and competitors are seeking for misuse of personal data management to fight against these policies. The internet search engines are by default the cyberplaces for matching audience concentrations with particular advertisements. Google has the biggest market share worldwide, with 82.74% in desktops and 93.76% in mobiles and tablets, in December 2016 (netmarketshare.com, 2016). On the other hand, the EU regulations are considered world widely one of the strictest system on the protection of personal data. Hence, the EU-Google fight is the last half decade the mother of all fights to a continuous world web war with direct impact in the commodity of news and the model of their gatekeeping, influencing the user’s online behaviour.

THE GOOGLE PRIVACY POLICY

Google announced the first edition on privacy policy in 2000. Since then Google changed it more than ten times. The argument of Google by introducing each time a new privacy policy is “to provide, maintain, protect and improve them [the information we collect from all of our services], to develop new ones, and to protect Google and our users... to offer you tailored content – like giving you more relevant search results and ads.” Also, the updates of Google Privacy Policy applies to all Google Inc. services and its affiliates, such as Google advertising services but excludes services that have separate privacy policy, such as companies offering relevant advertisements (Google Privacy Policy, 2017). The information collected include ranges of basic elements, i.e. from user’s name, face, language to publicly viewable Google profile, even user’s popular advertisements’, as precondition to take full advantage of the sharing features provided by a Google Service.

The information is collected by: 1. Device information: i.e. Operating System (OS) version, model, unique identifiers, mobile network information, which allows Google to associate the IDs with user’s Google account. 2. Server logs and other technologies, i.e. emails tracking activity, search queries, audio/video down/upload and thumbnail-sized screenshots of most pages that a user is visiting, telephone calls records (types, date/time/duration/SMS routing of calls etc.), Internet Protocol (IP) information, device data i.e. settings, browser information, cookie that may uniquely identify user’s browser or user’s account Google. 3. Location information: GPS signals from a mobile device, sensor data from user’s device i.e. nearby points of any Wi-Fi hotspot and cell tower. 4. Unique application numbers during un/installing and updating them. 5. Local storage on user’s device using mechanisms, such as web browser storage (including HTML 5) and application data temporary storage. 6. Cookies and anonymous IDs, anonymizers collected by owned or offered to Google partners service interacting i.e. advertising services or Google features that may appear on other websites.

The abovementioned information is used, as announced in the Google Privacy Policy: 1. For user’s consistent representation across all Google services. i.e replace past names with the Google Profile name across all of the services offered that requiring a Google Account or turn to publicly visible Google Profile information, such as user’s name and photo to the users already have one of identifying information. Google new privacy policy, in the beginning, required Google members to use their real names instead of pen names, causing anger among members who use pen names (McCracken, 2011) and now allows members to have nicknames in addition to their real names, but real names are still required. At the Techonomy conference in 2010, Google CEO Eric Schmidt predicted that “true transparency and no anonymity” is the way forward for the internet, due to asynchronous threats and that artificial intelligence is now a sufficient prediction tool for user’s online behavior (Smith, 2010). Additionally, according to Google, 1. The real name policy makes Google more like the real world and is protecting children and young adults from cyberbullying, while is making Google+ a better place for businesses, as would allow people to link people to their activity, although in the real world real names and personal information are not known by everyone and the super surveillance could cause identity hiding trends. 2. For facing issues or inform of user once communicated with Google in the future 3. For services’ appearance in the user’s most preferred language or for avoiding cookies or anonymous identifier association with sensitive categories (such as those based on race, political
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