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What Happens to Our Data Online?

Posting information online has become a routine for most people, either consciously, via social media, or passively, in cases where this is required, such as online shopping. On top of these, there are a series of hidden web activities which use people's data in order to serve a distinct purpose, one that is probably not in the best interests of individuals.

A common concern is whether data can be thoroughly deleted once it has made its way into the Internet abyss. In theory, it is not impossible to entirely delete data from the Internet, however, this presupposes an accurate knowledge of the data's whereabouts, as well as the input of a respectable amount of time and effort for removing the data from each and every single location. It should also be noted that most databases, applications and even hard drives, only mark data as deleted, instead of deleting it. In many cases, the online data will stay in the website's database until someone deletes it manually.

Moreover, privacy policies appearing in websites and which more-often-than-not are agreed to by the website's visitors, will most certainly state that the information inserted will be handled in a number of manners, which can include doing things like selling it to third parties that will do what they like with it. This should alarm people to filter the content of their shared information and limit it to any information/post/image that will at least won't be damaging in any way should it end up out of the individual's control.

That said, even typical activities that appear to be risk – free such as Internet browsing, hold hidden dangers of data vulnerability and ultimately exposure. Every single click on the internet launches a huge international auction, where numerous companies seek to match up peoples' personal data and make guesses about them all in an effort to serve the most well – targeted adverts.

Companies achieve this via the use of *cookies*: these are small text files that a website asks one's browser to store on his computer or mobile device. Although cookies are widely used to make websites work more efficiently by

saving peoples preferences, they are also used to follow peoples' internet use as they browse, make user profiles and then display targeted online advertising based on their personalised preferences.

Fortunately, there are now updated laws that govern the actions around an individual's data, both before and after the data is received. These apply to both companies and organisations (public and private) in the EU and those based outside the EU who offer goods or services in the EU**,** such as Facebook or Amazon, whenever these companies request or re-use the personal data of individuals in the EU.

Any website wishing to use cookies **is required to obtain consent to do so prior installing the cookie** on the computer or mobile device. A website is not allowed to simply inform about the use cookies, or explain how these can be deactivated. Websites should also explain how the cookie information will be used. Moreover, anyone should be able to withdraw his consent in relation to the cookies and in this case, the said website will still have to provide some sort on minimum service to him, such as providing access to a part of the website.

It should be noted however that not all cookies require prior consent. Cookies used for the sole purpose of carrying out the transmission of a communication do not require consent. This includes, for example, cookies used for "load balancing" (enabling web server requests to be distributed over a pool of machines instead of just one). Cookies that are strictly necessary to provide an online service that you explicitly requested, also do not need consent. This includes, for example, cookies used when you fill in an online form or when you use a shopping basket when shopping online.