FACTSHEET #6
DATA COMMERCIALISATION

WHY DO YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT DATA COMMERCIALIsATION?
Data is 'the new oil'. It is increasingly valuable, and companies, organisations and authorities are willing to pay huge sums to access it. Our data is used in different ways. For example, it is used to build a profile so companies can sell us products, target us with adverts, or encourage us to vote for a certain political party. Some companies - known as data brokers - are set up solely to buy, analyse and resell data. This factsheet explains what data commercialisation means - and how you can limit which data are available.

KEY MESSAGES
- Data commercialisation refers to **processing data** about individuals or groups, and **using it to make money or to sell** to others.
- There can be **benefits to data commercialisation**; for example, it might mean that online adverts recommend products we are more interested in.
- However, there are also **huge risks** when companies and organisations buy and sell our data - especially in terms of the amount of information they can now gather about us, and what they use it for.

VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND DATA COMMERCIALIsATION
Data commercialisation can affect vulnerable people in several ways. For example, non-native speakers in a country, or those with limited reading skills, can often find terms and conditions on a website **difficult to understand**. As the amount of personal data for sale increases, there is a growing risk that it could be **bought for more sinister motives**; as a theoretical example, a religious dictatorship could buy a database about citizens' religion, in order to target certain groups in that country.

THE RISKS OF DATA COMMERCIALISATION
Real-time bidding (RTB) is a process through which companies use data (e.g. web browsing histories) to bid for online advertising space. But a huge number of companies can bid - and they all are given access to this data. This is sometimes used for purposes other than advertising, such as identifying those suffering from addictions, or LGBTQ+ citizens. By selling this data, **tech companies risk revealing these groups' private lives** to those looking to control them. This article reports on

RTB breaches to EU data regulations in Ireland (bit.ly/3xN0cHo), and other cases have been reported across Europe (tcrn.ch/3j4Acmw).

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Inform yourself: there are lots of websites and services explaining the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which guarantees data protection in Europe.
- Don't just click 'I agree'; read the terms and conditions first. Do you actually agree with them?
- You can refuse technology: for example, if you don't want an app to have access to your contacts, then click 'No'.
- Technology companies collect data in a number of ways: your IP (Internet Protocol) address, your browser history, through cookies. By deactivating or getting around these - for example using a virtual private network (VPN) - you limit the amount of information they can collect.
- Engage in public discussion. There are a number of associations that fight against unfair practices, such as Privacy International, ICCL and EDRi.

FIND OUT MORE

READ: Carissa Véliz, author of the book *Privacy Is Power*, explains why we should offer some resistance to the data-driven economy (bit.ly/3qwmsTv), while these two articles from the European Data Journalism Network look at online advertising (bit.ly/3xYyLuj; bit.ly/3zPG3Sy).

WATCH / LISTEN: This PANELFIT monthly chat with Carissa Véliz covers a range of subjects, including data commercialisation: bit.ly/3d61tBa