Data wellbeing

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When confronted with a data security issue, people don’t think—they feel. “The impact of privacy issues isn’t clearly defined but is, instead, learned through pain and fear,” Joe Toscano, founder and chief vision officer at The Better Ethics and Consumer Outcomes Network (Beacon), tells Wunderman Thompson Intelligence.

Consumers’ experience underscores this: after being notified of a security issue with their personal information or data, 55% of Americans report feeling disoriented, 48% violated and 37% frightened, according to research from Wunderman Thompson Data. Pew Research Center findings indicate that Americans feel concerned, confused and vulnerable about data privacy.

These visceral reactions are driving a rise in data anxiety. “Privacy is one of those issues that’s constantly humming in the back of people’s minds—which, over time, can be just as, if not more, damaging to their psyche as major spikes in anxiety,” explains Toscano, who has a PhD in behavioral economics.

As anxiety around digital privacy mounts, consumers are looking for new ways to foster a healthy, symbiotic relationship with data.

In India, Facebook partnered with the Central Board of Secondary Education in July 2020 to launch a certified curriculum on digital safety and online wellbeing. And Refinery29, in its guide to tech self-care, positioned data management as akin to health maintenance: “Think of it as your annual doctor’s visit: you may not be sick, but you’re taking a preventative step by going.”
Persuasion Machines at Sundance
At the January 2020 Sundance Film Festival, “Persuasion Machines”, an installation presented by the creators of *The Great Hack*, explored the data surveillance that’s seemingly inescapable in a digital-first world. The VR experience created a virtual living room that visualized the data footprint left behind when using connected devices, to draw attention to the looming threat of a data privacy dystopia. As visitors moved through the space, digital portals opened to reveal the trail of data these devices create and how that data can be exploited.
As an extension of the installation, the artists directed visitors to a Data Detox Kit, created by Mozilla and Tactical Tech, which offers data privacy tips to “help people harness all aspects of their online lives,” make “more informed choices” and change their digital habits “in ways that suit them.” These include techniques to enhance digital wellbeing such as how to find clarity among confusing designs, carry out app cleanses, “lock your digital door,” and protect virtual valuables. With soothing illustrations of natural landscapes, the Data Detox Kit’s vernacular aligns data privacy with modern lifestyle platforms, and positions digital security as a pillar of holistic wellbeing.
With data security weighing on people’s emotional wellbeing, the latest brand initiatives are redesigning products and platforms to facilitate digital self-care and pave a healthier path forward through the data landscape. As the data privacy debate matures, expect to see more digital sanctuaries that enable data detoxes and an increase in products offering peace of mind.

This article is adapted from The Privacy Era. Download the full report for more.

Main image courtesy of Tactical Tech.

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