Changes in data ownership and usage

Preliminary thoughts

Katrina Ligett and Kobbi Nissim



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You can decide (3) to share data with friends or physicians or to participate in research by providing access to subsets of your data (4).

In that way you contribute to the development of new treatments for OUR HEALTH (5).



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What does Solid offer?

Solid (derived from "social linked data") is a proposed set of conventions and tools for building decentralized social applications based on Linked Data principles. Solid is modular and extensible and it relies as much as possible on existing W3C standards and protocols.

At a glance, here is what Solid offers...

True data ownership

Users should have the freedom to choose where their data resides and who is allowed to access it. By decoupling content from the application itself, users are now able to do so.

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Modular design

Because applications are decoupled from the data they produce, users will be able to avoid vendor lock-in, seamlessly switching between apps and personal data storage servers, without losing any data or social connections.



Reusing existing data

Developers will be able to easily innovate by creating new apps or improving current apps, all while reusing existing data that was created by other apps.



What problems do these projects respond to?

Today's internet

"That feeling of individual control, that empowerment, is something we've lost" – Brewster Kahale, on today's internet

A few dominant platforms = a few potential points of massive failure

- Security vulnerabilities
- Failure of incentives





Missed opportunities for innovation

How can a small startup

- get access to data relating X and Y? purchasing habits and mental health information
- get interactive querying of highly tailored subpopulations? people with predisposition to sickle cell anemia who live within 10 miles of a coal mine
- deliver a highly personalized experience without needing highly personal data? *provide medical advice without having a person's medical record*

Why would high-quality data be produced/collected [c.f. Frauke's talk] when currently

- there's no market for it (chicken and egg problem)?
- quality is not compensated?
- the risks of breaches/subpoenas/GDPR violations are so costly?

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Lack of individual autonomy

I don't choose who gets what data of mine, for what purpose

I don't know who gets what data of mine, for what purpose

I'm trading my data for something (services, etc.), but the transaction isn't transparent

The potential future consequences aren't transparent, either

Everybody is making money off my data, except for me



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TECHNOLOGY

Reading the Privacy Policies You Encounter in a Year Would Take 76 Work Days

Latest

ALEXIS C. MADRIGAL MAR 1, 2012

Share One simple answer to our privacy problems would be if everyone became maximally informed about how much data was being kept and sold about them. Logically, to do so, you'd have to read all the privacy policies on the websites you visit. A few years ago, two researchers, both then at Carnegie Mellon, decided to calculate how much time it would take to actually read every privacy policy you should.

First, Lorrie Faith Cranor and Aleecia McDonald needed a solid estimate for the average length of a privacy policy. The median length of a privacy policy from the top 75 websites turned out to be 2,514 words. A standard reading rate in the academic literature is about 250 words a minute, so each and every privacy policy costs each person 10 minutes to read.

Next, they had to figure out how many websites, each of which has a different privacy policy, the average American visits. Surprisingly, there was no really good estimate, but working from several sources including their own monthly tallies and other survey research, they came up with a range of between 1,354 and 1,518 with their best estimate sitting at 1,462.

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Many ideas out there...

Monetize personal data

Meeco - personal life management platform; users can exchange data for special offers from brands
CitizenMe - information management service; users can sell/donate data (to academic researchers)
Datacoup - data exchange platform; users decide who buys the data, in exchange for small fees
Make data available for research

Midata.coop - nonprofit around health-related data; users donate their medical data for research, in exchange for data analysis and interpretation tools offered by the platform

The common data project - nonprofit data trust managed by a community of volunteers, nonprofit; users donate their data

Restore individual control

Hub of All Things - initiative of 6 UK universities; personal data micro-server and database, wrapped with microservices that protect user data

Enigma - decentralized and secure data infrastructure

TheDataUnion - aim to form a union that can negotiate with the big tech companies

Data as Labor movement - advocate for protection and compensation for personal data as labor

Opportunity to formalize and organize the problem

Three pillars of a solution

- Creation of value
 - Transform personal data into new products traded in a data market, maintaining info validity
- Meaningful individual control
 - Transparent, varied choices with options for delegated decision-making
- Security and privacy
 - State-of-the-art data protection solutions, with emphasis on provable guarantees



What are we trying to do?

Catalyze a discussion about alternative paths, force a reckoning with the path society is currently on

Build a research community around data co-op idea, understand the research challenges

 Product: tools that should serve many different sorts of initiatives that share commonalities with co-ops

Understand the principles and ground rules

We are not committing to a single model



This talk

- How might a co-op provide value, control, and security?
- What might this future look like?
- The multidisciplinary research agenda

One vision of a data co-op



Co-ops could create value by...

- creating new data products
 - new combinations of data sources/individuals' data
 - access to currently unavailable aggregate statistics and sanitized datasets
 - interaction with targeted audience
- incentivizing the capture of more and better data
- taking the pain out of working with personal data
 - providing data science tools to facilitate discovery and ensure statistical validity
 - ensuring compliance with data protection regulations
- eliminating market frictions and inefficiencies

Co-ops could enable control by...

- supporting delegated decision-making
- providing individuals with a variety of meaningful, understandable choices to control how data are used and by whom
- allowing choices to be changed or revoked
- providing an overview of data uses and risks

Co-ops could support security and privacy by...

- giving individuals access to meaningful trade-offs between data use and risks
- modeling data usage in a concrete and rigorous manner
- implementing state-of-the-art data protection technologies
- vigilantly protecting their members against data theft, auditing for unauthorized use, advocating for their members' rights, and pursuing legal action when necessary

Co-op non-negotiables

Value

- Market-based individual compensation for both risks and value in data
- Align incentives of the co-op with the incentives of the members
- Ability to ensure high-quality data products (bots, fraud, statistical validity)

Control

- Delegation
- Expressive controls
- Usability by non-experts
- Right to withdraw or change permissions

Security & Privacy

- State-of-the-art protection against data theft
- Mathematically rigorous data rights guarantees in all use cases where possible

data co-op								
data	market	data rights						
value		control		security & privacy				

Some concrete questions

What types of data would be held by a co-op? Medical? Financial? Geo-location? Genetic? Browsing history? Purchase history?

What would happen to my data that's currently held by companies? Hospitals? Other organizations?

What would happen to "free" services that I currently receive in exchange for my data?

Would companies be buying my data (e.g., my entire browsing history) from the co-op outright?

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What might this future look like?



- Modernization gradual. Maybe more legal protections first, technical tools as they mature (e.g., secure multi-party computation)
- What of value is currently being exchanged? (Unshackle from pay-with-data.)



- Is transmission of personal data needed?



- e.g., Email. Encryption for contents, mixing network for hiding source-destination pairs. Stronger guarantees for data that stays within co-op. Pay for usage or flat-fee models.

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- Does the service need to learn from aggregate user data?
 - e.g., Recommendation systems, navigation software. Learning the recommendation/route could happen "inside" the co-op. Co-op could act as proxy for delivery of goods and payments. Recommendations would be much better! Strict controls on privacy risk from tailoring of recommendations.



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- Does the service involve extraordinary computational requirements?
 - e.g., Web search. Strip queries of unnecessary identifiers, bundle them, act as proxy for payment. Contractual limits on how information in queries is used.

Enabling innovation

- Nano-targeting ads without invading privacy
- All your data needs, under one roof
- Secondary uses
- Data linkage, made easy
- The niche application



Potential roles of the co-op

- Consumer protection
- Protecting political discourse in democratic society
- Letting consumers vote with their feet (choice, interoperability, no data lockin)
- Providing protections currently unavailable (e.g., informed consent)
- Setting a higher standard for algorithms that use data
- Promoting priorities of the members (e.g., encourage small businesses)
- Promoting public interest (e.g., academic research)



Pitfalls and risks

- Fat target for data theft, disruption of society, harming individuals
- Subpoena risk
- Great harm could come from not acting/negotiating/advocating for best interests of members, obeying constraints/preferences on data use, reporting clearly and truthfully about uses
- Must respect confidentiality for data purchasers, provide high-quality data
- Could be "taken over" legally or technically
- Could evolve in a bad direction, or programmed directives could have unintended consequences
- Need for control of incentives, oversight, legal constraints, technical constraints



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Ground rules

Focused on understanding. Mathematical rigor where possible. Scrutiny by the community.

Timely sharing of results within the community. Code made public. Collectively developing a good for the public.

Openness about funding, competing interests.

The community should have a careful eye on the research agenda, and on the overall incentives that drive the project.

Open design: Research should support a large variety of implementations of concepts related to data co-ops and not settle on a particular architecture.

Creating a toolkit, not a single solution

- Value in diversity among co-op models, friendly competition among models
 - more and better co-op design ideas
 - wider set of participants in the research and development
 - more data and more types will be made available, supporting innovation
- Value in co-existence of multiple co-ops
 - avoid creating data monopoly
 - ensure reasonable pricing and access
 - pressure co-ops to serve their constituents, meet their obligations
 - different communities may have different priorities, values

Relevant research areas



Law and policy: research agenda

How do current legal and policy frameworks around the world fit with the co-op idea? What needs to be changed? Mechanisms for change?

Current practices may infringe individual rights w.r.t. privacy, data, labor (data as labor). Who owns data?

Where are the relevant rights enshrined? Some data rights have not yet been enshrined.



Regulation and governance: research agenda

What type(s) of legal entity could a co-op be? Can legal aspects of the co-op structure enforce and reinforce its goals? ("Information fiduciaries")

Not self-regulation, not government-regulation. (But also an opportunity for regulation.)

Success of the coop will rely on trust of and protections for the information-buyers. Technical or legal safeguards to protect data users and analysts from the coop.



Socio-technical: research agenda

Launch: How to ramp up to large enough user base?

Who will oppose this kind of solution? Who would be in favor?

Could a co-op emerge from existing organizations?

Safeguards against drift and hard fork of behavior/intentions of project. Mission creep. Subpoena risk.

Creating a language/framework for discussing the different (computational, privacy, economic, legal, ethical, social) aspects of the system in a way that is consistent across disciplines.



Technical, system design: research agenda

HCI: give a comprehensive understanding of how data is used, tools for reasoning about choices, language for individuals to express their values and preferences [people don't understand Randomized Response! c.f. Frauke's talk]

Provide a global view of the information landscape: what information is out there? what uses?

Data protection: we are creating a new attack surface! Merging state-of-the-art privacy, crypto, security

System design: centralized vs. decentralized data storage, computation

Formal verification: how to ensure the system operates and evolves as intended

Incentives, mechanism design: research agenda

How to set/control incentives of the co-op organization?

Managing privacy budgets

Mission creep

How to detect and protect against data being used to manipulate (e.g., children, Cambridge Analytica)



Much more tomorrow!

Cambridge Analytica

Our goals

- Catalyze a research community that will provide answers, guidance, toolkit to existing/future efforts in this vein
- Explore paths forward, both in technical design decisions and practical launch decisions
- Raise awareness of potential pitfalls, failure modes, mission creep
- Maximize chances of successes

Wanted: your engagement

- Thoughts about our documents
- Pointers to people and literature
- Participation in fora
- Your research efforts



Value in data: research agenda

Co-ops should increase welfare

Economic growth: universalized data access, greater competition, interoperability

Data products have value greater than the sum of their parts; more and better data should be captured

Insurance for risk vs. compensation for value; how to allocate the surplus

Statistical validity: preserving data quality by mitigating selection bias, overfitting

Data resale, re-purposing: how to price it? how to control it?

Mechanism design for information: research agenda

What are the goods exchanged?

How to price them, how to split revenues fairly?

How to incentivize participation on both sides of the market?

Multiple co-ops? Competing?