

Who's afraid of Google? Comparing users' positions on internet privacy with their actual web surfing behavior

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Objective: To examine whether Israelis fear for their online privacy and to what extent is this concern reflected by their browsing behavior. This study is based on Nissenbaum's (2004), "privacy as contextual integrity" theory and on Etzioni's (1999), assumption that privacy should be measured against other values. The study was based on a convenience sampling of several groups. Each group was randomly divided into two groups who answered an online questionnaire that examined privacy concerns, trust and browsing behavior. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of privacy compared with other values. Based on Westin's (1967), distribution scale, respondents were divided according to their answers into three groups comprised of privacy concerned, pragmatists and indifferent. The questionnaires were identical, but the order of questions was modified to test the effect of the questionnaire on the answers. Altogether 300 people answered the questionnaire. Short interviews were also conducted.

Findings: Correlation was found between trust and privacy concerns. Differences were found between the various groups in levels of trust, concern and behavior. No significant difference in these factors was found between the two questionnaires. Interestingly, it can be concluded that Israelis fear for their safety more than their privacy and willing to compromise on it. The current research expands the study of web related privacy issues into search engines. Its' contribution lies in examination and validation of previously published claims on the gaps between attitudes and behavior, and in the examination of privacy norms among Israelis. Its' conclusions are an interesting addition to the lively discussions on technology and privacy.