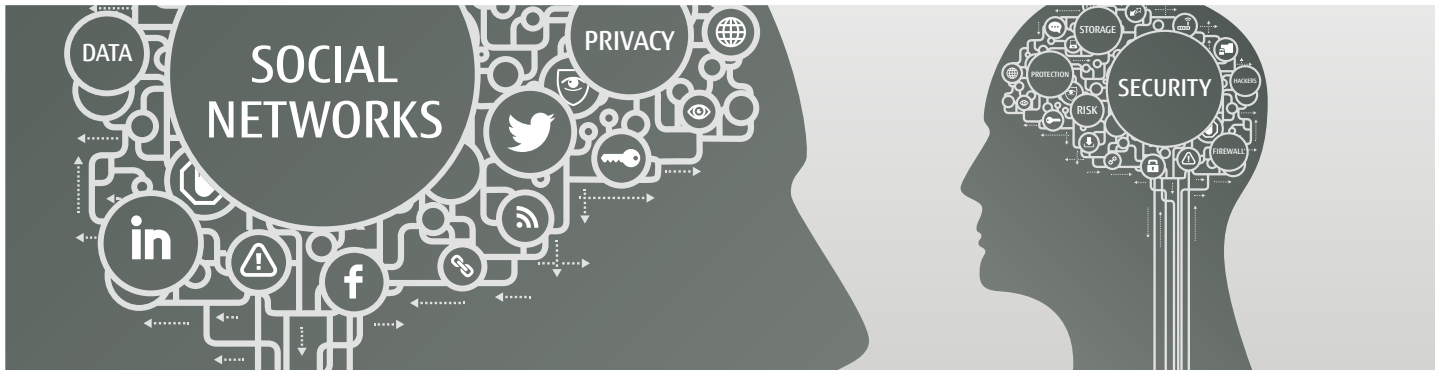FUJITSU

Better connected, better collected:
data, privacy and trust in social networks

What did 3,000 UK consumers tell us about their trust in social networks and internet businesses to keep their data safe?

There can be few issues linked quite as inextricably to social networks and internet businesses than that of data security.

From the earliest days of social networking, consumers have had an intense - and often confused - relationship with the businesses that give them the platforms to connect with their friends and family. On the one hand, we cherish the immediacy of the information we receive as a result; on the other, we ponder the implications of uploading our whole lives for all the world to see.

Our increasing dependence on these channels to do everything from bring us the latest news to connect us with our friends and family equates to an ever-increasing amount of data shared – not only with our own connections and other users, but the businesses themselves. The same is true of the multiple search engines and other internet entities with whom we share our data.

The trade may be an invisible and largely imperceptible one – but it is there nonetheless.

As part of a wider piece of research aimed at gauging consumer attitudes towards data security, we wanted to explore how the themes above might influence thinking around the ability of these companies to safeguard the masses of information that users place into their hands on a daily basis.

Surveying 3,000 consumers from around the UK, we asked respondents to score social networks and internet businesses on a scale of one to five in relation to data security. A score of five would indicate that respondents had "implicit trust", while a score of one was indicative of "no trust whatsoever".

To try and establish whether views might have changed over time, we asked consumers to provide a score for those organisations in terms of their level of trust as it stands now, and as they felt it was a decade ago.

The results were telling. Both today and in 2003, social networks and internet businesses were rated below organisations from any other sector on the subject of data security. Our consumer audience awarded them an average score of just 2.57 in 2003, declining to 2.53 today.

Most notably, even at their 2003 peak, social networks were less trusted than any other sector today. More than half of all consumers say they have "little or no trust" in social networks and internet companies to manage their data securely.

Trading privacy for service?
While social networks and internet companies are often seen as the leading lights in personalisation of services – many platforms offering intricate ways for users to configure their feeds and settings – respondents once again took a dim view of the ability for these businesses to deliver on the promise of data-driven personalisation.

45% of consumers said that they have seen "little to no evidence" of social networks and internet companies using their personal information to provide a better service.

Why do social networks and internet companies seem to struggle so hard to gain the trust of consumers when it comes to data security?

Is it really due to a fundamental inability on their part to keep that kind of information secure?

I'm not sure that it is. While businesses in this sector may not have an impeccable record for keeping their customer data secure, major data breaches have been few and far between. There are, frankly, far worse track records to be found elsewhere.

Why do consumers tar social networks and internet companies with this brush, then?

Part of the problem is inevitably related to the nature of the information we entrust into their care. There are few other businesses on earth with whom we share so much of our daily lives; from our friends to our passions, our location to our livelihoods.

It is all there and – somewhere in our minds – the deep-seated concern that it is there to be taken, too.

Because of that, data security carries an almost impossible level of significance for anyone who uses these channels.

While eyebrows might be raised should a utility let slip the details of an energy bill, and a torrent of complaints greet any retailer that loses a customer's payment details, woe betide the business that loses every aspect of a customer's life – from their private messages to their address.

In many ways, these businesses are facing an impossible burden. The value they provide is in the loyalty they engender – but therein lies the problem, too. By bottling the whole of a user's life in one place, they offer ultimate convenience alongside untold risk.

The key – now and always – is to demonstrate to users that the second of those issues is one that they need never even consider.

David Robinson
CSO UK&I Head of Security Bid and Pre-Sales

Key stats at a glance

18-24 **7%** | 55+ **2%**

percentage of consumers with "implicit trust" in social networks and internet companies to securely manage personal information today.

SIX

the percentage of consumers who said they had "implicit" trust in these companies to manage their data in 2003 – the highest it has ever been.

27%

say they see no evidence of their personal information being used by social networks and internet companies to provide a better service – the lowest result of any sector.

32%

of consumers say that they have **no responsibilty** for protecting their own information online.