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Your data is too valuable and sensitive to dish out for free

What you buy, watch and read online is scooped up ostensibly to tailor services to you, but it is often sold on. New EU rules will help people take back control



Your data may really be yours
Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images for Somerset House

IF SOMEBODY from a shop you occasionally visited phoned and asked what you had been doing for the past month, would you tell them? Almost certainly not. Yet often without thinking we allow technology companies to track and collect such data. Everything from your movements to what you have been buying, watching, reading and listening to gets scooped up and filed, ostensibly to help tailor services to your needs and sell you things you want. But this data is so

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The cumulative result of this lackadaisical approach can be quite shocking. One of our journalists signed up for a “data detox”, and was surprised at how much the tech giants knew about him (see “I went on a data diet and all I got was ads and paranoia”).

So should everyone detox? Probably. But in the real world, who can be bothered?

For citizens of the EU, the onus will soon change. From May, companies will have to be more transparent about their collection and use of data. Pre-ticked boxes will be banned; companies must seek specific consent to process and sell data. Those that break these rules will face hefty fines.

The change is long overdue. Even if EU citizens decide that they are happy to give their data away in return for useful services, at least that is a decision they have made themselves. The UK government has said it will keep the law after Brexit. That is a form of taking back control that we can all get behind.

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