

Personal Data Stores and data cooperatives: a two-pronged, sociotechnical approach for data activism

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The continuing decline in trust in the processing and fair use of personal data has been well documented and captured in concepts such as privacy apathy, privacy cynicism, privacy fatigue, and digital resignation. Today, authority over personal data online is distributed unequally, and the control and exploitation of large data resources has become an important determinant of (market) power.

Internet users, however, do not know what data about them are being stored, and they lack effective tools to control how they are used or by whom. This has led to a sizable share of Internet users feeling overwhelmed and disempowered when it comes to protecting the privacy of their personal data. This study explores how Internet users can be empowered by combining Personal Data Stores (PDS) and data cooperatives. How, consequently, data activism, as a new form of civic participation in response to tech companies' pervasive role, can be supported.

Specifically, we explore a collective approach to the management of personal data by means of data cooperatives using PDS as enablers. Discussing how data cooperatives can provide a possible solution to social, technological, and economic challenges faced by PDS, we present how combining a participatory governance approach (i.e., data cooperatives) with a technological solution (i.e., Solid PDS) can function as a two-pronged, sociotechnical solution.

A specific focus is on how this solution outperforms pure PDS-based systems. Solid provides Personal Data Stores in a decentralized architecture, where data, identity, and applications can be managed by different organizations, creating affordances for personal data portability and sovereignty. In addition, data cooperatives provide a governance and trust framework for sharing and donating data. As such, our approach is 'sociotechnical', as it brings together social and technical aspects, considering them as interdependent parts of a complex system.

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