

MISQ Archivist

Internet Privacy Concerns: An Integrated Conceptualization and Four Empirical Studies

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Abstract

Internet privacy concerns (IPC) are receiving increased attention due to the huge amount of personal information being gathered, stored, transmitted, and published on the Internet. While there is an emerging literature on IPC, there is limited agreement about its conceptualization in terms of its key dimensions and factor structure. Based on the multidimensional developmental theory and a review of the prior literature, we identify alternative conceptualizations of IPC. We examine the various conceptualizations of IPC with four online surveys involving nearly 4,000 Internet users. As a baseline, study 1 compares the integrated conceptualization of IPC to two existing conceptualizations in the literature. While the results provide support for the integrated conceptualization, the second-order factor model does not outperform the correlated first-order factor model. Study 2 replicates the study 1 on a different sample and confirms its results. We also investigate whether the prior results are affected by the different perspectives adopted in the wording of items in the original instruments. In study 3, we find that focusing on one's concern for website behavior (rather than one's expectation of website behavior) and adopting a consistent perspective in the wording of the items help to improve the validity of the factor structure. We then examine the hypothesized third-order conceptualizations of IPC through a number of alternative higher-order models. The empirical results confirm that, in general, the third-order conceptualizations of IPC outperform their lower-order alternatives. In addition, the conceptualization of IPC with the best fit to the data contains a third-order general IPC factor, two second-order factors of interaction management and information management, and six first-order factors (i.e., collection, secondary usage, errors, improper access, control, and awareness). Study 4 cross-validates the results with another dataset and examines IPC within the context of a nomological network. The results confirm that the third-order conceptualization of IPC has nomological validity, and it is a significant determinant of both trusting beliefs and risk beliefs. Our research helps to resolve inconsistencies in the key underlying dimensions of IPC, the factor structure of IPC, and the wording of the original items in prior instruments of IPC. Finally, we discuss the implications of this research.

Keywords: Internet privacy concerns, information privacy concerns, online privacy, multidimensional development theory, higher-order factors, confirmatory factor analysis, LISREL, nomological validity