

# Revealing Cumulative Risks in Online Personal Information: A Data Narrative Study

When pieces from an individual's personal information available online are connected over time and across multiple platforms, this more complete digital trace can give unintended insights into their life and opinions. In a data narrative interview study with 26 currently employed participants, we examined risks and harms to individuals and employers when others joined the dots between their online information. We discuss the themes of *visibility and self-disclosure*, *unintentional information leakage* and *digital privacy literacies* constructed from our analysis. We contribute insights not only into people's difficulties in recalling and conceptualising their digital traces but of subsequently envisioning how their online information may be combined, or (re)identified across their traces and address a current gap in research by showing that awareness is lacking around the potential for personal information to be correlated by and made coherent to/by others, posing risks to individuals, employers, and even the state. We touch on inequalities of privacy, freedom and legitimacy that exist for different groups with regard to what they make (or feel compelled to make) available online and we contribute to current methodological work on the use of sketching to support visual sense making in data narrative interviews. We conclude by discussing the need for interventions that support personal reflection on the potential visibility of combined digital traces to spotlight hidden vulnerabilities, and promote more proactive action about what is shared and not shared online.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**; **Empirical studies in HCI**; • **Security and privacy** → **Social aspects of security and privacy**;

Additional Key Words and Phrases: Human Computer Interaction, Research design, Cybersecurity, Personal data, Digital traces

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Our connections to diverse online services through multiple personal devices make it increasingly difficult to keep track of what we are disclosing about ourselves online via our digital traces. These traces include those that arise from people sharing their own personal information online, others sharing information about them, and via e.g., automated functions that make additional metadata public, such as disclosing one's location when posting on Instagram. Sharing may be intentional, unintentional or inadvertent. People are connecting digitally with others for professional and social reasons, via an increasing diversity of channels. Such diversity means that networks supporting interaction and collaboration with others are evolving in ways that are complex and difficult to mentally model. The challenge of understanding how one's data is being shared in and across these networks grows with this complexity.

A substantial body of research has examined how an individual's digital traces may be used to discover or infer information about them — their interests, livelihood, place of work, whether they are depressed or likely to self-harm, relationships, sexual orientation, political opinions, religion and other preferences — even when not explicitly disclosed [37, 43, 83]. Smartphone use alone can reveal much, based on information including accelerometer and GPS

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53 data, app usage patterns, call logs and Bluetooth proximity [27]. Revelations include the phone user's identity, mood,  
54 stress levels, personality, whether they are a parent, likely destination when travelling, whether they are sitting/walking  
55 or running, and the quality of their sleep [27]. When combined over time and across multiple digital channels — e.g.,  
56 Facebook, LinkedIn and Tinder — this array of digital traces can afford unintended insights into people's lives as private  
57 individuals, employees, and citizens. Combined digital traces may also reveal unintended insights about employers, and  
58 even about national security.

60 These insights are significant — from them, we can learn just how much we are revealing about ourselves online, not  
61 just about our past and present, but also about our future: "...fragments of past (online) interactions or activities . . . ,  
62 when correlated together, allow a preemption and prediction of future behaviors" [66, p250]. Insights are also relevant  
63 to hostile actors — e.g., fraudsters — who can make use of coherent, combined digital traces to gain advantage over  
64 their victims.

66 In this research we investigate:

- 68 • The everyday online information sharing practices of employed people, and their associated awareness of how  
69 pieces of personal information — digital traces — can be connected over different online channels over time;
- 70 • To what extent people recognise how their connected traces are available to others, potentially to be explored  
71 as a more coherent whole;
- 72 • What this more coherent whole could convey about an individual, including insights into their apparently  
73 private self (e.g., behavior, values, habits etc.);
- 74 • How aware people are of the potential harms and hazards of how such insights could be used against them, and  
75 by whom.

79 We took a holistic approach, acknowledging the interconnectedness of online practices [51, 82]; the networked  
80 nature of online identity [52]; and use of multiple digital channels (e.g., social networking sites, IoT, apps), devices (e.g.,  
81 personal smartphones, Wi-Fi-enabled devices at home, work computers), and behavioral patterns that are determined by  
82 the affordances of particular digital technologies (e.g., GPS data of fitness apps) [28]. We conducted 26 semi-structured  
83 interviews to (i) solicit insights into interviewees' digital ecosystems across multiple communication channels, sharing  
84 networks and devices plus associated behavioral patterns and practices; (ii) explore co-constructed aspects of participants'  
85 online identities across apparently discrete channels of information and; (iii) identify experiences and consequences  
86 where combined digital traces revealed more than intended.

89 All participants in this study were residents of the United Kingdom (UK), and subject to the protection of the EU  
90 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in tandem with the UK Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) [50]. However,  
91 following the 2016 referendum at which the UK decided to leave the European Union, the GDPR stopped being directly  
92 applicable. We were mindful of this uncertain context while conducting the study and we therefore acknowledge the  
93 implications for our participants and findings in our discussion.

95 We first situate our study in the context of prior work on digital traces, cybersecurity, and the workplace, before  
96 going on to outline our data narrative interview method, accounting for the necessary changes to its design during  
97 Covid-19 related Lockdown conditions. We then present the results of our thematic analysis across three themes:  
98 *visibility and self-disclosure*, *unintentional information leakage* and *digital privacy literacies*. We discuss issues around  
99 soliciting people's recollections and understandings of their digital traces across networked space and time. Our  
100 contribution comprises insights not only into people's difficulties in recalling and conceptualising their digital traces  
101 but of subsequently envisioning how their information may be combined, or (re)identified across their traces. We also  
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105 contribute insights on the inequalities of privacy, freedom, and legitimacy that exist for different groups with regard  
106 to what they make or feel compelled to make public online and the privileges that are enjoyed by some but not by  
107 others. Finally, we make a methodological contribution on the use of sketching to support visual sense making in  
108 the interviews, inviting new perspectives on researching personal online information interactions, and building on  
109 previous studies in CSCW that used this method in other contexts. This set of interviews represents a step towards  
110 our overarching research goal to identify the need for tools or other designed interventions that support not only  
111 personal reflection on the potential visibility of combined digital traces, but that additionally support the curation of  
112 one’s existing traces, retrospectively.  
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## 115 2 RELATED WORK 116

117 Our study takes a socio-technical approach to the cybersecurity risks emanating from people’s digital traces. We  
118 interpret cybersecurity from a post-digital perspective, where “the protection of technology and information has  
119 become so intermingled with the protection of people and society that distinguishing between the two is impossible.  
120 ... in a post-digital society, technological security rests upon the protection of people, and vice versa” [21, p10]. Prior  
121 work by Dunphy et al. [26] at the intersection of design and cybersecurity has focused on people and their experiences,  
122 while government agencies such as the UK’s National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) have now introduced cybersecurity  
123 guidance “for anyone looking to develop security which works for organisations and for people” incorporating a design  
124 orientation [58]. Our specific focus is on combined, intersecting digital traces, and we frame our work against this  
125 backdrop, first defining digital traces for the purposes of this paper and explaining how they can be (mis)used, and the  
126 digital literacies that affect people’s understanding of how they ‘look’ online.  
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### 131 2.1 Defining Digital Traces

132 Our digital traces are multi-dimensional. We leave traces of personal information across multiple digital platforms  
133 and across time. Such traces are generated [66] before we are born, across the lifespan [63], and even post-mortem  
134 [57]. Even in childhood, there is a multiplicity of apparently innocuous channels via which personal information is  
135 often shared – for example through connected toys; children and parents posting on social media; biometrics used for  
136 schools’ fingerprint charge accounts [80]. Brandtzaeg and Lüders [17, p2] highlight that it is “increasingly important to  
137 understand how *time* is perceived in the context of a non-anonymous social media environment” (authors’ emphasis),  
138 as digital traces over time can reveal much, not only about our current selves, but also about our past opinions, actions  
139 and feelings.  
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142 Digital traces emanate from the central actor, using their real name and pseudonyms. They also emanate from a range  
143 of other actors – e.g., health providers; employers (including through productivity tracking [9]); government agencies  
144 (including public registers of companies) – serving to produce a co-constructed digital identity for individuals [79].  
145 In addition, people’s personal information can surface through other channels, posted by friends and acquaintances,  
146 and also by government sources (e.g., voter registers) and other organisations (e.g., that collate and create dossiers on  
147 individuals).  
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150 While these traces are spread across multiple locations, with subsets of information shared with specific audiences,  
151 boundaries between the platforms and audiences are known to be porous. Context collapse, “in which individuals  
152 must meet the expectations of multiple and diverse audiences simultaneously” [17, p2] is a recognised phenomenon.  
153 Embarrassing and harmful situations can arise through context collapse, when users try to navigate multiple, diverse  
154 audiences on the same platform: they may accidentally blur borders between the public and the private, the professional  
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and the personal leading to information leakage [2]. However, Costa [2, p3652] found that context collapse was not a given, and was a result of situated practices of social media usage within Western Anglophone contexts. Her Turkish participants ably navigated complex security settings to ensure that boundaries between online groups were maintained.

## 2.2 Use of combined digital traces

There are tools available that enable individuals to make sense of their digital traces in certain contexts. For example, quantified self, personal informatics, and life logging tools can give people a better understanding of their own behaviors, through recording, measurement, visualization and publication of their own data [4, 5, 6, 6, 7]. Coherently combined traces e.g. geolocation, step count, heart rate can become material for conversation and expression of personal identity, and/or to improve behavior or performance in a particular area, and form highly personal accounts of (users) pasts [29, p518]. The utility of combined digital traces extends beyond the individual: exploitation by others can afford unintended insights and privacy violations, potentially adversely affecting individuals, employers and organisational security.

Approaches to exploiting digital traces may be manual or involve the use of specially-developed tools. 'Lurkers' especially adolescents may trawl the social media feeds of friends and followers for updates and juicy tidbits, joining the dots between posts to work out more than was intended to be revealed. More seriously, perpetrators of intimate partner violence may go to great lengths online to track down their victims (survivors) through their digital traces across multiple platforms, in order to continue their abusive behavior [6]. Examples of tools developed to harvest digital traces include a Blockchain-based application that enabled people to establish others' trustworthiness, and a tool that combined online dating site posts with fitness tracker information to reveal where people lived, whether they lived alone, and when they were at home or out exercising information that was subsequently exploited by stalkers [20]. Using Facebook profiles, Bachrach et al. [8] were able to infer people's Big Five Personality traits. Other initiatives have sought to predict from Twitter and Reddit posts whether people are depressed, suffering from anorexia, or likely to self-harm [46]. On a larger scale, and beyond our current focus on an individual's interpretation of combined digital traces, automated Big Data approaches can use these same traces to assemble insights into people's behavior and to predict e.g., the likelihood of someone repaying a loan or developing diabetes, someone's political leanings [5], their propensity for criminal behavior [55], and their mental health [47].

Efforts to exploit digital traces can be facilitated via lax security and privacy settings and behaviors. A large scale example of this lies in the lax security applied to social networking sites in Runet (the Russian Segment of the Internet), leading to 30 million profiles becoming publicly available to download [1, p50]. The profiles included users' personal and intimate details such as sexual orientation, sex frequency and preferences in sex, along with personal information like weight, height, smoking habits, alcohol, drugs, body characteristics... dwelling type, marital status, and religion. While this information may have been disclosed to circulate within the particular context of e.g., a dating site, it became more widely available, exposing people's intimate details to a wider audience than was ever intended. On a smaller scale, when parents share posts and pictures of their children (sharenting) without consent, they add a dimension to their childrens' online identities that may be at odds with how their children wish to appear online, skewing their digital traces [64]. Meanwhile sharing posts and photos about friends may unwittingly reveal private information about them (e.g., details of companions or associates, locations, activities etc).

<sup>1</sup><https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2017-07146-004.pdf>

209 Even when people actively separate their digital identities across different online channels to organize their social  
210 groups or to obfuscate aspects of their identity, their efforts can be undermined by re-identification, involving the  
211 linking together of profiles and other information [6]. For example, the Personal Genome Project linked profiles to  
212 online voter lists via e.g., birthdate, zip code – destroying the assumed anonymity of the profiles; [Facebook profile  
213 images tagged with real names were used to re-identify people on other sites (e.g., Friendster, Match.com) that host  
214 otherwise anonymous profiles [36].  
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### 217 2.3 Employees, Employers and Organisations 218

219 Social media content is used by up to 80 percent of employers and recruitment agencies as part of their assessment  
220 of candidate suitability for a post [74]. Young and Quan-Haas [65] found that applicants' chances of acceptance for  
221 advertised job positions could be adversely impacted by their openness online about e.g., health conditions or pregnancy.  
222 Employees can face dismissal for their conduct on social networking sites, even when posting outside of working hours  
223 [78]. Thornthwaite [78, p119] observes that social media is blurring the legal distinction between employees' public  
224 and private lives, increasing employer control over personal lives in ways reminiscent of traditional master-servant  
225 relationships, the effects of which are then tested in industrial tribunals, which increasingly challenge employers'  
226 intrusive stance.  
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229 Employees' social media activities also have the potential to negatively impact on their employers by unintentionally  
230 leaking sensitive information online – such as trade secrets, intellectual property and personal details of other employees.  
231 This can represent a significant security risk to organisations – result(ing) in a loss of competitive advantage, loss of  
232 reputation, and erosion of client trust [4, p351]. Irresponsible posting can result in damage to employers that goes way  
233 beyond their reputation. There have been instances of military personnel and their families discussing operations and  
234 deployment details on social media, even posting pictures of ongoing operations. In a recent case, staff living on a  
235 UK nuclear submarine base exposed compromising information via their use of the Only Fans pornography-sharing  
236 website [56]. Adversaries motivated to exploit such information can seek out service personnel or their family members  
237 to blackmail them, or use the intelligence gathered to attack or infiltrate deployment locations.  
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### 241 2.4 Digital Self and Contextual Privacy 242

243 The work of boyd e.g., [13] [14] [15] and boyd and Ellison [16] drew from Goffman's notions of impression management  
244 [32] to articulate the necessary maintenance and updating of front-stage digital selves and online identities, and  
245 discrepancies between what one gives – in explicit displays of friends, interests and online representations – and  
246 gives off – as interpreted by others, and as amplified in networked publics [14]. boyd's early work with young  
247 people also found that they cared deeply about online privacy, and recognised the value of both privacy and publicity,  
248 understanding them as contextual and adjustable, the latter especially with regard to being socially present and acquiring  
249 social status. Indeed, self-disclosure is a key factor in developing relationships and building trust in online environments,  
250 much as it is in face-to-face contexts. This self-disclosure includes actions such as deliberately sharing selected personal  
251 photographs [24], and represents a negotiation of privacy, with information often shared with selected (groups of)  
252 online network members, rather than with all network members [53].  
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255 This crafted, contextually-situated privacy is subject to the pressures of normativity. When flows of information  
256 adhere to entrenched norms, there are few concerns, whereas when violations of norms occur, protest and complaint  
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259 <sup>2</sup><https://www.personalgenomes.org/>  
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often result [60]. For example, a patient may be comfortable with healthcare providers sharing medical information with specialists, but very uncomfortable when the same data is shared with marketing companies (see also Bussone et al. [19]). When considering contextual privacy in workplace or organisational settings, we can look to the work of e.g., Ashende[7]. This work found that employees who believed their employer was driven by the need to protect information thought risks to be overstated and colleagues overly cautious, whereas those who believed the organisation was driven by a need to optimise information use, thought security risks justified and colleagues' behavior risky. McDonald and Fort[54] have drawn attention to the limits of concepts such as contextual integrity and boundary regulation when thinking about privacy in Human Computer Interaction (HCI). They revealed conceptual gaps in current frameworks and have argued for considering vulnerability i.e. of particular groups of people as a core concept when thinking about privacy. Researchers in CSCW have highlighted serious issues with digitally-mediated identity management, with the effects often being pronounced for those considered vulnerable e.g., Simpson and Semaan's work on algorithmic identity investigated and confirmed concerns that the short video sharing application TikTok was suppressing the individual identities of LGBTQ+ users via algorithmic and human moderation [6]. Seberger et al. [70] showed how users navigate trade-offs involved in app use. Despite technical and regulatory mechanisms aimed at empowering users to manage their privacy, people have a sense of resignation around privacy due to the convenience offered by apps: there is a fine line between feeling empowered by technology and the discomfort of invasive app behavior. Users are often resigned to disclosing data even as they accept personal responsibility for their own privacy.

## 2.5 Data Leakage

People can often be surprised when they discover the personal data collection and distribution activities of apps that they use. Shklovski et al. [72] showed that people felt personal space had been violated in creepy ways by apps with the creepiness lying in the realization that apps were conduits for personal information and space to leak to unknown entities who had not explicitly been invited in. These authors link creepiness to notions of personal space and territoriality [5], and to contextual integrity [59]. People will formally agree to the information sharing undertaken by apps, and can rationalize their use of them when asked, putting any creepiness out of their minds. Nonetheless, the creepiness remains [73] further suggest that there are harmful health consequences of this enduring creepiness while acknowledging that such creepy experiences may not always be negative and unwanted; and pose an interesting question as to whether such creepiness fades over time suggesting that as cultural norms change, so too will the conditions under which such creepy experiences are encountered, which has implications across the digital lifespan.

## 2.6 Digital Privacy Literacies

A person's ability to generate digital traces online does not imply the accompanying presence of digital privacy literacy, that is, an understanding of how information travels when shared online, and the associated risks. Digital privacy literacy is an area of education and practice often used in social justice and/or public education programmes, including those run by public libraries to help develop competencies in groups of people at particular risk, including those who rely on public library computers for personal digital communications and information practices, particularly those who are subject to social inequalities (see e.g., [4]). Digital privacy literacy can be considered distinct from the well-established, if rather broad area of digital literacy (e.g., [4]), which refers to an individual's multiple competencies, from having regular access to and basic functional operational skills (e.g., using a keyboard and mouse) along with being able to read and write clear information across a number of digital modes using these apparatus, including in textual, visual and wider forms of communication media [4]. Digital privacy literacy can be regarded as a subset of data literacy and



313 is used to refer to a range of competencies around understanding and communicating with informational data, which  
314 often relates to privacy and (personal) data, and goes towards enabling one's personal data self-care.

315 In the social sciences, the growing literature on critical data studies e.g., [includes 49] Lupton's notion of  
316 the lively aspects of personal data, as they are added to, and (re)configured by human interpretation and corporate  
317 segmentation/analyses. Lupton notes that personal data, as (partly) human, is typically represented visually and in  
318 language as organic and material (e.g., flows, breadcrumbs) or humanised as e.g., footprints (p47). People's encounters  
319 with the personal data that they generate via use of digital technologies presents them with challenges as to how to  
320 interpret, control and make sense of these data. Lupton elsewhere has argued that such data and their circulations  
321 could be made more perceptible and interpretable using what she describes as three dimensional materialisations,  
322 recognising that people's interactions with such re-presentations of personal data elicit visceral responses. There  
323 are also new research areas around human data interaction that include designing frictions into user experiences of  
324 technologies to promote critical reflection, e.g., prior to sharing information; and on interaction design's dark patterns,  
325 which comprise e.g., targeted manipulation and confusing terms of service, widely adopted by industry to nudge  
326 people into a particular course of action, including coercing people into disclosing personal data, often beyond that  
327 necessary for the task in hand.  
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### 332 3 METHODOLOGY 333

334 We conducted an interview study using a data narrative approach [in order to understand the risks and consequences  
335 of the digital traces that people leave online. This approach served to capture participants' descriptions of their data,  
336 device use, channels and networks of communication, and data and information practices. Using this approach also  
337 allowed us to capture the co-constructed aspects of a person's online identity, as well as enabling the investigation of  
338 direct and observed experiences of, in this case, the cumulative implications of digital traces.  
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#### 341 3.1 Interview Study 342

343 We conducted the study in May-July 2020. Due to the physical distancing requirements of the Covid-19 Lockdown in  
344 place in the UK at the time of the study, we had to conduct interviews remotely via videoconferencing, which we took  
345 care to pilot before the interviews. We engaged with participants in advance by sending information sheets by email.  
346 Cognisant of the likely effects on data sharing that might arise due to the circumstances of the Lockdown, we added  
347 questions to the interview schedule regarding changes to data-sharing habits and experiences, with the intention of  
348 capturing the effects of self-isolation, homeworking and other Lockdown-related phenomena (Appendix A).  
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#### 351 3.2 Participants 352

353 We recruited 26 adults (13 male, 12 female, one non-binary; age 20-59 years, median 37 years) to take part in the  
354 study. All were based in the UK, active online and in full-time employment. We recruited participants by creating an  
355 advertisement that was circulated via emails to contacts with access to mailing lists to be shared more widely, and  
356 via social media, with the offer of a £20 shopping voucher for participation. We aimed to recruit participants from a  
357 variety of employment roles and sectors and made sure there was roughly equal representation from employees in the  
358 public (n=16) and private sectors (n=10) and that staff recruited represented all levels of seniority. Participants were  
359 employed in sectors including healthcare, education, engineering, management, IT and hospitality and were drawn  
360 from city, suburban, town and rural locations. 21 participants reported speaking English as their first language, four  
361 spoke it as a second language and one was bilingual in English and another language. 13 had postgraduate qualifications,  
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10 were qualified to undergraduate level, two had qualifications from further educational studies and one had high school qualifications. When we asked about their level of technology skill (the interviewer read out the full definition of each category to each participant) they responded as follows: four said Low/Low-Medium indicating basic use of software, hardware and social media; 15 said Medium indicating confidence with using and integrating a variety of standard software packages over a number of platforms; seven said Medium-High/High including the use of specialised software and an ability to program. At the time of interview, 18 participants were working at home full time, we split their time between working at home and at their workplace, while three reported no home working.

### 3.3 Method

The first author conducted all interviews, with each lasting 60-90 minutes. In a short briefing, we invited participants to ask questions about the study based on their reading of the information sheet. They then provided consent verbally. We then asked participants to complete a technology questionnaire via a SurveyMonkey link, delivered via the Chat function of the videoconferencing software, or sent by email. We designed the questionnaire to capture participants' self-reported use of technology including devices, communication channels, data storage and social media networks (Appendix B). In addition, the interviewer asked participants a short series of questions regarding their current employment, level of education, and their understanding of and confidence in using digital technology.

Interview questions were centred on the following areas and are detailed in Appendix A: (i) information about communications channels, apps, data storage/management systems, and devices used, including whether/how any of these were shared; (ii) everyday practices and behavior patterns around e.g., conducting searches, posting and other digital information sharing; (iii) participants' awareness of the unanticipated potential for self-disclosure through digital traces and their associated level of concern; iv) information management, security setting behaviors and Lockdown-related changes especially regarding working from home; v) we asked participants to envision a scenario where someone else had to write a book about them based only on their digital traces, and to think about what the resulting book would comprise. We finished by asking them to summarise their advice to others on optimising their information security. We tailored the questions, where appropriate, through answers provided in the technology questionnaire.

We supplemented the interview questions by asking the participants to hand-draw sketches of their digital eco-system on paper. Having participants sketch as part of interviews, has its roots in Cultural Probes and has been used successfully within the Human Computer Interaction (HCI) and Computer Supported Cooperative Work communities in a number of study contexts. For example, [6] asked participants to draw a map of their finances to understand how people track money. Building on work by e.g., Ryan et al [58] on mapping interactive digital artefacts, Vertesi et al [82] used the data narrative approach to promote people's descriptions of how they manage their personal data. Drawing was used to facilitate more thorough conversations, to elicit grounded comments about data practices and examine conceptions of personal data space. Vertesi et al [81] argue that drawing during interview allows the remembering of new stories, the discovery of forgotten elements, and the visual expression of relationships between devices and data. The drawings produced are not a test of a participant's precision or recall with regard to their digital ecosystem, rather, they give structure to the interview process as tools with which to think [82]. Memory aspects aside, asking participants to engage with their personal information sharing in this way rather than, for example, simply talking about it or using their devices as the main support, exploits the power of defamiliarization described in work by e.g., [11] to invite participants to have a new perspective on familiar aspects of their lives.

In the current work, participants were asked to come to the session prepared with pen/pencil and paper. They were asked to sketch out their communications channels, devices, types of information shared/intended recipient(s), along



417 with whether usage was in a personal or professional capacity, and (separately) whether they were using a personal  
418 or professional account. The process of drawing the sketches proceeded throughout the interviews with participants  
419 adding to them as elements were remembered. Participants were also asked to identify and draw any links between  
420 media, devices and the public or private aspects of shared information. Participants were later asked to photograph and  
421 email the hand-drawn sketches to the interviewer (21 sketches were returned from 26 participants). We have included two  
422 example sketches in Appendix C to illustrate the variation in approach and reflecting the uniqueness of each individual  
423 in the study and the personal nature of their digital ecosystem.  
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425 We made audio recordings with participant consent, and coded anonymised transcripts by performing thematic  
426 analysis [18], using NVivo. Our analysis took a hybrid approach (see also [19]); existing concepts were used for deductive  
427 coding while new concepts grounded on the empirical data from the interviews, contributed to the inductive coding.  
428 The deductive coding included, for example, concepts from technology law literature on personal information such  
429 as Right to Erasure and pseudonymous posting [6] and on the participants' desires or requirements for a tool to  
430 manage their digital traces. The resulting coding list was iteratively refined in the light of the interview data, as new  
431 codes emerged. One author did the early coding, undertaking frequent code review sessions with another author  
432 to help remove potential biases. The list of preliminary codes was then distilled further into a set of refined codes  
433 (Table 1 in Results) that corresponded with a high number of instances across the transcripts, or that captured novel  
434 emerging design ideas or relevant practices. All authors were involved in three data sharing meetings and arrived at the  
435 designations of the refined codes through discussion. Further iterative analysis and clustering resulted in the three  
436 themes: visibility and self-disclosure, unintentional information leakage, and digital privacy literacies. From an original  
437 list of six themes, visibility and self-disclosure arose from the combination of themes of visibility, self-disclosure and  
438 identity curation, unintentional information leakage was one of the original themes, while themes of conceptions of  
439 overview of own data and data concerns were combined into one digital privacy literacies. Each theme is discussed in  
440 turn below illustrated with pseudonymous quotes.  
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## 446 4 RESULTS

447 We now discuss each of our themes in turn (see Table 1 for details of the codes that comprise the themes), illustrating  
448 points with verbatim quotes. While participants' ages are reported, all names have been changed and other identifying  
449 information omitted to protect interviewees' privacy.  
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### 453 4.1 Visibility and Self-disclosure

454 4.1.1 Curating an online profile: creation or maintenance of online identities was mentioned by many of our partici-  
455 pants: ten spoke about creating or maintaining professional online profiles while five spoke about their curation of a  
456 non-professional online identity. Attitudes to having a presence and being in/visible online had an age dimension. On  
457 the whole, younger participants (18-25 years) were those who were more likely to speak about the vital importance of  
458 having an online presence especially in enhancing, even enabling one's career. Xander, a recent graduate now working  
459 for a student organisation, had a good understanding of how his online information was received and judged by others;  
460 he had even been researching how sharing personal information online comprised a form of self-commodification:  
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465 To be successful, whether it's on social media, just to get likes, or whether it's in a professional sense... you  
466 are your brand and you need to sort of, I don't know, show that in every single way you do online, and so I  
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469 am just careful about what I post, whereas I know that some other people aren't, and it can look quite bad.  
470 (Xander, 22)  
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472 Meanwhile, ve participants expressed awareness that online traces only ever provided a partial picture, albeit an  
473 authentic representation of someone, and as such invited interpretation. Una, a clerical assistant commented:  
474

475 I think it's a true snippet of who I am. But I think that it is just a snippet, because I don't post about  
476 everything. ....I wouldn't be concerned. I think people make judgements no matter what you put out there,  
477 so they have a snippet of what it is (Una, 21)  
478

479 While not expressing particular concern, Una touched on the potential for inferences to be drawn from incomplete  
480 traces, and also on how some interests lend themselves more to being documented and shared, saying: "I play a musical  
481 instrument, but that is nowhere on my social media, and not many people know how musical I am... [but] they know  
482 I'm maybe quite sporty, but they don't see the musical side" (Una, 21). As part of his youth worker role, Calvin recruits  
483 others to work with the young people for whom he has safeguarding responsibilities on on whom he carries out  
484 informal background checks online while also mindful of the limitations of these:  
485  
486

487 One of the rst things I do is a basic Facebook search of them...and sometimes that has... created a false  
488 narrative ... We had a student on placement, and her photos showed ...this quite ragey, party person. When  
489 I met her, they were completely lovely, and those photos didn't represent them (Calvin, 29)  
490

491 One participant spoke from bitter personal experience about times when the visibility of information posted online by  
492 them had directly led to their prospects being seriously curtailed: Tom, a bakery supervisor, had been aggressively  
493  
494

495 Table 1. Code Book: themes developed from the interview data with details of the codes that comprise them  
496  
497

Theme	Code	No. Interviews	Occurrences
Visibility and Self-disclosure	Creating/maintaining a professional online profile	10	18
	Curating a non-professional online identity	5	13
	Life Events motivating online sharing	20	43
	World Events motivating online sharing	19	40
	Revealing one's location	10	22
	Pseudonymous posting	6	7
Unintentional Info Leakage	Context missing/partial picture	5	5
	Revealing too much about yourself	8	10
	Things posted by others about you	11	17
	Others revealing more than they intended to	17	23
	Leakage in domestic settings/IoT	4	4
	Leakage due to work/personal boundary blurring	2	4
Digital Privacy Literacies	Postings appropriated to other media e.g., broadcast	5	7
	Google-searching self	14	14
	One's online info being boring/of no interest to others	9	20
	Lack of agency/overwhelmed/resignation to fate	4	5
	Concerns about marketing	10	14
	Inappropriateness	6	9
	Fake news	7	9
	Security measures taken	6	10
Right to erasure	15	21	

519  
520

521 confronted at interview with examples of jokes he had posted online. This left him feeling humiliated and his job  
522 interview drew to an abrupt close (Tom, 20). Meanwhile Yan, a civil servant spoke of:  
523

524 ...colleagues who had disciplinary hearings...you have to be cautious...on what you put out online, so if  
525 somebody shares a post.. with... swearing and questionable humour, that gets around the office...somebody  
526 might be having a quiet word to someone (Yan, 23)  
527

528 One interviewee reflected on living with an ongoing tension between feeling they had to promote their visibility online,  
529 and protecting their own safety and that of their community. Zara, a third sector worker whose family had sought  
530 asylum in the UK, commented that her family's desire to be invisible online raised questions, including around their  
531 legal status, which she perceived as damaging her current prospects:  
532  
533

534 I have also met loads of people who were genuinely risking... running for their lives. And any information  
535 that they put online digitally would be instantly sought out, so they stayed off any kind of digital, social  
536 media, anything. But then they're also met with the contrast of needing to put something out in order to  
537 progress I'm going to say in a Western country but, well, that's not exclusive to Westerners, but just to  
538 put yourself on show, or otherwise people don't think you're legitimate (Zara, 20)  
539  
540

541 Helen, a helpline operator, described how wanting to stay online had affected a loan application: "I had to put myself  
542 back on the public [voting] register, because if you use credit at all, you can't get it if you're not on the public register...  
543 you get... forced into actually having your name and address out there" (Helen, 56). These experiences demonstrate how  
544 a visible online presence can become skewed to tell a particular story. They also give insights into how online privacy  
545 can be a privilege, when some individuals must establish and maintain their online representation as a source of public  
546 identification for evaluation and validation by others.  
547  
548

549 4.1.2 Motives for Self-disclosure As well as talking about the ways in which they disclosed personal information  
550 online, participants also described what motivated them to do so. 20 participants described how life events motivated  
551 them to increase the amount of information they posted and 19 participants described being motivated to respond to a  
552 world event or cause by posting or responding to posts online. These actions revealed online what were otherwise  
553 private aspects of themselves.  
554  
555

556 Regarding special life events, HR manager Anna's (38) desire to lose weight prior to her wedding involved tracking  
557 steps and recording her meals to calculate calorie consumption on her FitBit. In interview she discussed being uncon-  
558 cerned about the privacy implications, progressing to the subscription version of the FitBit app to record her menstrual  
559 cycle. In contrast, Xander, expressed alarm when a friend posted their university acceptance letter on social media  
560 publicly disclosing an application number, leading Xander to imagine this provoking: "someone sort of malevolent on  
561 the other end of the computer that just wants to mess with people" (Xander, 22).  
562

563 With regard to causes, when probed, two participants who had claimed to share little about themselves online  
564 recalled making public contributions to petitions and fundraising pages, and, also, sharing their full name and location,  
565 information that often persists online indefinitely. Queenie, a lab technician commented in interview: "I've signed  
566 petitions... judging by emails that come in unsolicited, you realise that other people know you're an animal lover"  
567 (Queenie, 55). Xander had unwittingly revealed his address through location tracking after getting involved in a good  
568 cause: "The sports club that I'm involved with did... a charity fundraiser, so I downloaded it to... track my runs... you  
569 realise that the start and finish point is right outside your front door" (Xander, 22). Meanwhile Patrick, an engineer  
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573 was cognisant that causes he got involved in online and related a liations and opinions would persist with possible  
574 repercussions:

575  
576 I have some views which are commonly held and not as yet controversial but I do wonder at some point  
577 politically if they will become (so). I'm becoming more and more careful about what I post about things like  
578 that. (Patrick, 56)  
579

580 It is worth noting here that it was younger participants (18-25 years) who most vividly described their public  
581 expressions of support for certain causes in terms of obligation. Research assistant Rita had clearly tussled with  
582 expressing anything other than her more usual apolitical online self: "I thought that I was doing a very, very bad thing,  
583 because I was being very silent on the matter [of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) campaign]" (Rita, 25). Rita consequently  
584 contributed to the campaign in her own way by promoting online book lists she had curated about racial injustice.  
585

586 Participant responses often linked self-disclosure with wanting to share a particular personal event or to signal  
587 allegiance with or opposition to a more universally signi cant concern. Participants recognised the risks of oversharing,  
588 but also, as in posting in support of a social movement such as BLM, of under-sharing for fear of being seen as  
589 uncaring or unaware. Visibility and self-disclosure were perceived as tricky to navigate: even when preferring to  
590 maintain a minimal online pro le, current norms around recruitment, immigration applications and the nancial service  
591 industry, for example, often require personal information to be available online in order to assess credibility or eligibility.  
592 Participants often implicitly recognised the need to tread a ne line regarding the volume and type of information to  
593 put out there. We heard from the perspectives of both recruiters and the recruited, how the absence of certain types of  
594 information threatened employment and wider social and professional prospects. This partial picture was recognised as  
595 potentially damaging in speci c contexts such as job seeking.  
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#### 600 4.2 Unintentional Information Leakage

601 Various forms of self-disclosure can stem from information leakage. Participants mostly talked about unintentional  
602 information leakage in respect of their personal (i.e., non-work) information sharing, but leakage due to work/personal  
603 boundary blurring was also reported by two participants. Third sector workers Zara and Flora had both resorted to using  
604 their personal Facebook logins to set up Facebook accounts for work, having tried and failed to set up dedicated work  
605 pro les. This led to their mixing information sources across professional and private accounts, and their professional  
606 identities encroaching onto the personal: "It's really di cult to keep a personal Facebook, I think, if your workplace is  
607 using Facebook a lot for the way they work" (Flora, 54).  
608

609 Four interviewees re ected on their experiences of information leakage in their domestic lives. Such leakage could  
610 be intimate, if also unintentional and/or somewhat creepy, though some were more relaxed about this than others. Will  
611 (24) said he was unconcerned about any potential implications of sharing his passwords with his girlfriend. Meanwhile,  
612 teacher Linzi (31) expressed her unease at her realisation that she had been inadvertently sharing details of her plans and  
613 contacts with her partner via her calendar, due to device synching. On re ection, she said that while she had nothing  
614 to hide, in di erent circumstances such as in relationships involving domestic violence and controlling behaviours  
615 this could have been hugely problematic. Another interviewee (Queenie, 55) expressed obvious discomfort during  
616 interview when recalling her discovery that her partner could view her Internet searches, including those she had  
617 conducted to check particular spellings.  
618

619 A further instance of information leakage in a domestic setting was described by designer Ben, who recalled instances  
620 of inadvertent cross-device leakage. His Smart TV would spontaneously display his neighbour's private smart phone  
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623  
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625 information: "the TV switched itself on... someone [in the adjoining property] was playing on their phone or something...  
626 and if they've clicked a Share button... it sometimes comes through to my TV in the middle of a show" (Ben, 49).  
627 These information leakages mostly occurred due to insecure account settings. However, 11 interviewees recounted  
628 how things posted online about them by others either unthinkingly or, due to more deliberately malicious actions,  
629 were also sources of unintentional information leakage. Healthcare worker Will described how his mother's misplaced  
630 pride had potentially serious consequences: "I said (to her) I wanted to join... one of the intelligence agencies. She...  
631 posted up, 'My son wants to become a spy, how does he do it?'" (Will, 24). While Will joked, saying this was "a little  
632 bit counter-productive for undercover work, he went on to recount how his mother had also posted details of his  
633 confidential military achievements and training exercises on Facebook, including the nature and location of the training.  
634 This leakage violated military protocols and created a security risk.  
635  
636

637 Instances of postings either by participants or people known to them, that had then been appropriated to other  
638 media, were reported by several participants. Conversations believed to be private had been recorded and/or more widely  
639 (re)shared in a very different, typically much later context, e.g.,:

641 A friend of mine... was called out on Twitter for things that he'd said in a private group chat six years  
642 ago, and... reported to his place of study. It's all cleared up, but it still sort of hit home... people can take  
643 anything you say and change it to however they see it... I guess if there's any shred of doubt, it can be...  
644 disastrous (Xander, 22)  
645  
646

647 Delivery driver Vinny (24) found one of his old Tweets embedded in a newspaper article several years after the article's  
648 publication. He had concerns about assumptions people might make about his beliefs when seeing the tweet out of  
649 context: "it was talking about...outdated cultural stereotypes...and I was wondering why my name was involved in this  
650 [article he'd found]" (Vinny 24).  
651

652 In contrast to more narrow understandings of data leakage that link it to the use of insufficiently secure settings, our  
653 participants reported threats that arose in many other ways. Such threats were apparent through the actions of others,  
654 via the re-appropriation of content intended for a specific audience, into new locations and contexts. This revealed the  
655 information to a wider public—often alongside personally-identifying, or socio-politically significant information.  
656 This might be done with the intent of causing reputational damage, but even in the absence of malicious intent, such  
657 combinations of digital traces can lead to revelations, and the associated lack of control that individuals have can  
658 be problematic and/or distressing. Our participants' responses also show that the proliferation of Internet of Things  
659 (IoT) devices has created new vectors for information leakage. Personal and specifically domestic contexts are where  
660 they reported the majority of such experiences, perhaps due in part to the Lockdown context, but also because these  
661 instances were those that were the most immediate, identifiable and relatable. Two female participants in particular  
662 talked of recently discovering routes via which partners had sight of what had previously been private information,  
663 and of their raised awareness, and associated concern.  
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667

#### 668 4.3 Digital Privacy Literacies

669 The interviews were revealing with regard to participants' digital privacy literacy, their knowledge and understanding  
670 of the nature and potential of coherent digital traces, and of their control and personal agency over those traces.  
671 Overwhelmingly, participants were aware that there was a great deal of publicly available information online about  
672 them. 14 participants explicitly mentioned that they knew this from having previously conducted a Google search on  
673 themselves. Jenny, a local government officer, had been disturbed to discover some information related to a company  
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676

677 with whom she'd long ago been involved: "it had my full name and address and date of birth, and I was like, 'Whoah!'"  
 678 (Jenny, 43) Despite this, none of those who reported having searched for themselves on Google was able to describe with  
 679 con dence or accuracy the range of publicly or semi-publicly (for instance, a Facebook account) visible information  
 680 across their various online accounts. For those participants who said they had never Googled themselves, when o ered  
 681 the opportunity to check what was visible online during the interview, they were invariably surprised by the level  
 682 of detail about them that was public. Further, slightly more than half (14) of the participants said they had what they  
 683 regarded as stringent approaches to information sharing, deletion and account security. For example Olly, an electronic  
 684 engineer, recounted one of his practices and the motivation behind it: "I tend to disable search history...my bigger  
 685 fear is I am an immigrant into this country... so I think that if I search for something because it was in the news, can  
 686 it be connected to me...by mistake?" (Olly, 40). However, this was at odds with some of participants' other answers  
 687 during interview. For example, when asked how they would advise a friend with the same digital services as them what  
 688 security measures should be taken to secure their information, in the case of all but 6 participants, their answers tended  
 689 to be very general and provided few speci c recommendations, indicating that they had relatively low levels of privacy  
 690 literacy and a lack of awareness around their own information's potential for being compromised.  
 691

692 As referenced in the wider results, participants did, on the whole, have a good sense of the long-lasting persistence  
 693 of their information, once it was online. However, envisaging the potential e ects of connecting apparently discrete  
 694 aspects of their online information coherently proved more challenging even with access to their various accounts  
 695 and having their sketches to hand. Understandably then, participants struggled to comment on where potential risks  
 696 or possible consequences lay where others might connect the same dots into coherent digital traces to potentially  
 697 use against them. Where matters of concern were expressed, these related to interviewees being aware of inviting  
 698 unwelcome marketing (10 participants), and being targeted by advertised goods, particularly if these were of no personal  
 699 interest to them.  
 700

701 We found it striking that nine of the participants regarded themselves and the personal information they had shared  
 702 online as being of no likely interest to others. Ivor, a writer and teacher, was aware that a great deal of his personal  
 703 information was available but was bemused that there could be any interest in it:  
 704

705 They would know where I live. They know who I know, they know who I interact with a lot, they know  
 706 what I work as, they know what my interests are... They could easily work out any political, spiritual, other  
 707 viewpoints. They would know what I don't like, they would know what I do like, and not just in terms of  
 708 products. As I say, I'm quite a boring individual, so none of it would be particularly shocking, and it would  
 709 struggle to get a PG [UK Im classi cation Parental Guidance: for children 8+] certi cate, but at the back  
 710 of my mind, it's 'why do you want to know all this? Why do you want to harvest all this about everyone  
 711 and everything?'(Ivor, 59)  
 712

713 This self-identi cation as "boring", a term used speci cally by ve participants, was a factor in some interviewees'  
 714 lack of motivation around deleting super uous personal information circulating online. Four further participants used  
 715 language such as "dull" or "uninteresting" to describe their postings.  
 716

717 In line with the literature, four participants expressed a lack of agency, overwhelm or resignation, or  
 718 feeling unable to manage and where necessary remove information. Flora, for example, conveyed a sense of being  
 719 overwhelmed by her online clutter or, at least, with nding su cient time to deal with it; the task was clearly not a  
 720 priority: "I would take one look at it and go, 'Oh, my God!' and walk away: I've got far too much to do to untangle this  
 721 mess" (Flora, 54). Helen meanwhile, mentioned her sense of resignation to fate when asked to make a suggestion for a  
 722



729 designed tool or service that could help. She found it difficult to conceptualise and dismissed the notion as she would be  
730 unlikely to use one: "I'm not sure what I'd want from it. I think in some ways, I've kind of accepted that the horse has  
731 bolted!" (Helen, 56). Another participant shared a compelling first-hand experience to support their thinking that any  
732 remedial action could only ever be of limited use, and the benefits were unlikely to outweigh the substantial detriment  
733 of living in online obscurity:

734  
735 I did have a stalker... I sort of removed everything that I used to have [online], and I just existed in the dark  
736 for a long time. But it wasn't dark enough, because she did actually come to [my workplace]... so at that  
737 point I realised there was just no point in being dark on all of these tools, because ....if they want to find  
738 you, they will.(Matt, 44)  
739  
740

741 Participants across all age groups understood how time and a potentially changed future context of a posting affected  
742 its significance and 15 participants talked about their right to erase such digital traces. Notably, those in the 18-25 years  
743 age group were more likely than older participants to express a desire to delete the digital traces of their younger selves,  
744 as these no longer represented the person they perceived themselves to be. Xander, 22 had recently deleted everything  
745 on Facebook posted in the years pre-university, while Zara, 20 had increased her privacy settings to prevent others  
746 from seeing her childhood postings. As Vinny, a delivery driver explained of the online material most concerning him:  
747 "I'd probably delete the stuff from most of my school days... I've forgotten a lot of the stuff I posted back then, but...  
748 some of it might be potentially embarrassing" (Vinny 24).  
749

750 In summary, participants showed an awareness that they had left digital traces but could not be accurate about  
751 how visible their online information was: those who looked were surprised when confronted with the reality. Even  
752 with the support of sketching, the majority did not or could not show how their devices and information channels  
753 were interconnected. All participants had a sense of the persistence of online information but only rarely did they  
754 acknowledge the potential for connections to be made and compromises to arise. Even those who believed themselves  
755 vigilant in their approach to personal information sharing could not explain beyond the most basic guidance, how one  
756 would secure devices and channels to minimise risks from cumulative revelation. In general, participants lacked agency  
757 to undertake remedial action to their digital traces out of a sense of it being too late, not possible to do, or it not being  
758 necessary as their traces were "boring" and therefore posed little risk to them. Younger participants were more likely to  
759 have actively removed content, often to delete elements of childhood online activity as they moved into adulthood.  
760

## 761 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

762 This research focused on employed people's everyday online information sharing practices and their associated levels  
763 of awareness of how pieces of personal information – their digital traces – can interconnect over different online  
764 channels and media over time. We wanted to find out to what extent people recognised how these connected traces  
765 are available to others, to be explored as a more coherent whole; what this coherent whole could convey about them,  
766 including their apparently private self (e.g., behaviours, values, routines etc.); and where and to what extent they were  
767 aware of hazards and potential harms of how this could be used against them, and by whom. Through thematic analysis  
768 of the outcomes of 26 interviews, we uncovered themes of visibility and self-disclosure, unintentional information leakage  
769 and digital privacy literacies

770 Visibility and self-disclosure was heavily influenced by necessity and obligation, with some participants feeling  
771 compelled to have an online presence when job seeking. This is consistent with Berkelaar and Buzzanell's findings  
772 [12, p84] that employers increasingly expect potential staff to maintain digital career capital to enable employers to  
773

781 construct and evaluate professional and/or workplace identities. Participants also identified that online visibility could  
782 help to build legitimacy as citizens, and to comply with perceived social norms—for example, by publicly expressing a  
783 stance around current events such as BLM. Choosing to be visible and not to disclose information about oneself can  
784 be seen as a privilege, accorded to those who are established members of society and not seeking work. This is especially  
785 pertinent for those whose safety may be jeopardised by online visibility—such as survivors of domestic or other abuse,  
786 and asylum seekers—yet who feel compelled to be visible due to the adverse impact that invisibility could have on  
787 their chances of getting a job, or gaining legitimacy as citizens and members of social groups [21]; also see [75].

788 Unintentional information leakage occurred as a result of the actions of others, who shared participants' information to  
789 unforeseen audiences and at times causing unintentional shame or other harm. This could be particularly uncomfortable  
790 when the information shared was from long-forgotten posts, or was taken out of context. While participants had a  
791 good understanding of the persistent nature of aspects of their traces, they found it difficult to recall what they had  
792 previously posted across multiple channels and hence where potential vulnerabilities might lie. Yet it is not at all  
793 surprising that participants struggled to remember past posts when remembering involves cognitive processing of  
794 knowledge from the past, through a repetitive process of reconstruction [371]. Given the volume of information  
795 commonly shared online, remembering everything that one has posted presents an intractable cognitive processing  
796 burden that links to our third theme of digital privacy literacy. While processes of remembering can be supported by a  
797 range of internal and external cues including those that are technological such as Facebook On This Day reminders,  
798 things always get irretrievably forgotten [1]. Although options exist to have content removed from the Internet or at  
799 least not show up in search results—e.g., the Right To Erasure<sup>3</sup>—there is no easy mechanism through which to erase  
800 aspects of one's past history online, or to remove comments made over years that could be misinterpreted or show  
801 one in a bad light if later taken out of context. Multiple respondents rationalised that their online information was  
802 boring and of no interest to others. They also referred to being unable to summon the required time, effort and/or  
803 practical digital privacy competencies to erase aspects of their past history online. This is understandable, when such  
804 curation increasingly involves sophisticated multidisciplinary skills and knowledge spanning digital, technical, legal,  
805 and socio-cultural competencies. For example, an individual who is seeking public election might want to check back  
806 through their past history online for any information that could be taken out of context and wrongly interpreted as  
807 expressing socially unacceptable views. Of course, this is also open to misuse, with individuals who genuinely hold  
808 socially unacceptable views cleaning up their online profiles to obfuscate their true opinions.

809 Our study was conducted at a time when the legal context of the UK was an uncertain one. Materially, little has  
810 changed for UK citizens with regard to GDPR since the UK left the EU, as the UK enacted the UK-GDPR in 2020. However  
811 there is an ongoing high-profile political and legislative debate as to whether the UK should diverge more aggressively  
812 from the European framework, which is seen in some quarters as unnecessarily burdensome and overprotective [1].  
813 All these changes took place, and were publicly discussed, while the interviews took place. This posed some legal and  
814 ethical challenges for the research: knowing that the GDPR would cease to be applicable shortly after the interviews  
815 were completed, what legal assurance could be given to the participants? It raised also questions for the substantive  
816 part of the research: discussions surrounding post-Brexit data protection in the news will have created more awareness  
817 of data protection questions, and may also have contributed to an even stronger feeling of uncertainty and vulnerability.  
818 Disclosing data about oneself in the UK during 2019, the year prior to this study, also meant that it was at least not

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831 <sup>3</sup>UK Information Commissioner's Office (ICO, 2017: 49)

certain what legal protection would apply to it in a few months' time, which given the permanence of digital traces poses a significant difficulty.

## 5.1 Limitations and Future Work

A key limitation of our work is that while our participants were able to conceptualise aspects of the implications of personal information sharing in interview, they consistently struggled to conceptualise the entirety or whole picture of their accumulated digital traces across multiple channels and across time, and potential knock-on effects and risks. We acknowledge that the data narrative approach was not sufficient to achieve this and in this context, we identify the following pressing future work:

- Demonstrate to individuals in everyday terms – perhaps by using other narrative approaches, including scenarios – the potential use by another agent of seemingly harmless pieces of personal information posted across disconnected digital traces.

- Go beyond awareness nudges by promoting reflective foresharing, to enable people to make informed choices about the information that they add to their cumulative digital traces.

- Some participants conveyed anxiety around their old posts being re-discovered, despite them not having clear recall of their contents, amplifying their perceived impotence and lack of knowledge about how to go about removing or ending information. We see an opportunity to enable people to efficiently curate the material that they have posted in the past online, without having to trawl through every single post or delete an account wholesale.

- A further opportunity to reduce unintended information leakage lies in integrating prompted password change as part of standard installation for owners of domestic internet-enabled/ IoT devices, combined with information about inherent risks of devices and how to mitigate against these, to protect domestic privacy.

Last but not least, there is a critical need to address digital privacy literacy, including digital privacy gaps. This aligns with ongoing efforts towards ensuring social justice within the HCI e.g. [75], and CSCW [77] design and wider research communities. Talhouk et al.'s CSCW work [77] around the digitisation of food aid intended for Syrian refugees in Lebanon found that due to refugees' low technological literacies, their experiences of engaging with food aid were severely impoverished and ability to identify and report the misuse of the technologies by other stakeholders and intermediaries (p133) curtailed, amplifying the already present power asymmetries experienced by those groups.

While interviewees had a good understanding of the persistent nature of their traces, they found it difficult during interviews to recall what they had previously posted. Remembering, from the Latin *memorari* or call to mind, involves cognitive processing of knowledge from the past, through a repetitive process of reconstruction [81, p371]. Yet people face challenges in making connections between something visible, and its meaning – and, to paraphrase Rancière [1] across heterogeneous spaces and times. Rancière also refers to the power of art in its ability to represent what is absent or unrepresentable – and that when they are represented they infer power (ibid). He, along with others, discusses memories as works of fiction – reconstructions as opposed to re-presentations or later reproductions. While processes of remembering can be supported by a range of internal and external cues – things always get irretrievably forgotten [81]. There is only ever a partial picture, or re-presentation.

Our work offers understandings around personal information and what it collectively comprises [84], including the inferences that others can draw. It aims to promote personal agency around management of this information. As future work, we will use the findings reported here to inform the design of an online tool. The digital user interface of this

885 tool, as well as how it curates, contextualises, and relates information to people, will be informed by the qualitative  
 886 outcomes of design workshops. The tool will allow people to explore the risks and consequences surrounding their  
 887 own online data-sharing activities and the digital traces they leave behind. We are mindful of Elsdén et al.'s proposition  
 888 that design should seek to support people in making account of their data, and guard against the assumption that  
 889 more, or better, data will be able to do this for them [29]. Our current design work is also mindful of so-called moral  
 890 economies that are produced as a result of practices and activities around personal data, which are laden with a set  
 891 of cultural expectations, and responsibility [31]. Design, we argue, is central to promoting sense-making and digital privacy  
 892 literacies in this context. Even the provision of designed tools is a form of design activism, introducing new frictions  
 893 into online activity to provide context to, reflection on and guidance for, our information-sharing decisions [32],  
 894 and/or where necessary, helping to develop counter-narratives [30].

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1093 **6 APPENDICES**

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**A INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Table 2. Interview questions with Changes in Response to Lockdown/ Working From Home

Question	Original(Y/N)	Amended (Am)?
What communication channels do you use?	Y	Am
What Apps and Sites (e.g Twitter, match.com, Strava) do you use?	Y	Am
What data management services do you use (e.g. iCloud, Box)?	Y	Am
Devices used (e.g. mobile, Fitbit, NEST, IoT)	Y	Am - sharing?
Do you share devices with anyone?	Y	Am - emphasis
Behavioural patterns/practices (e.g. search history)	Y	Am
What do you post? Who it is visible to?	Y	Am
Types of information posted, Why/how do you hide data	Y	Am
Instances where information posted revealed more than intended	Y	Am
Concerns about types of revelation	Y	Am
What are your digital hygiene practices		
- to ensure privacy/reputation mgmt?	Y	Am
Account sharing and associated posting responsibilities	Y	Am
Given an overview of your data, what could be found out?	Y	Unchanged
Do you work in public/private sector? What level? How big is org?	N	Added
Are you working from home during Lockdown? Is this new?	N	Added
Did your employer advise on data management during Lockdown?	N	Added
Who lives at home with you? Any bandwidth issues?	N	Added
What advice would you give to someone with		
the same eco-system as you, to be secure?	N	Added

**B SURVEY OUTCOMES OVERVIEW**

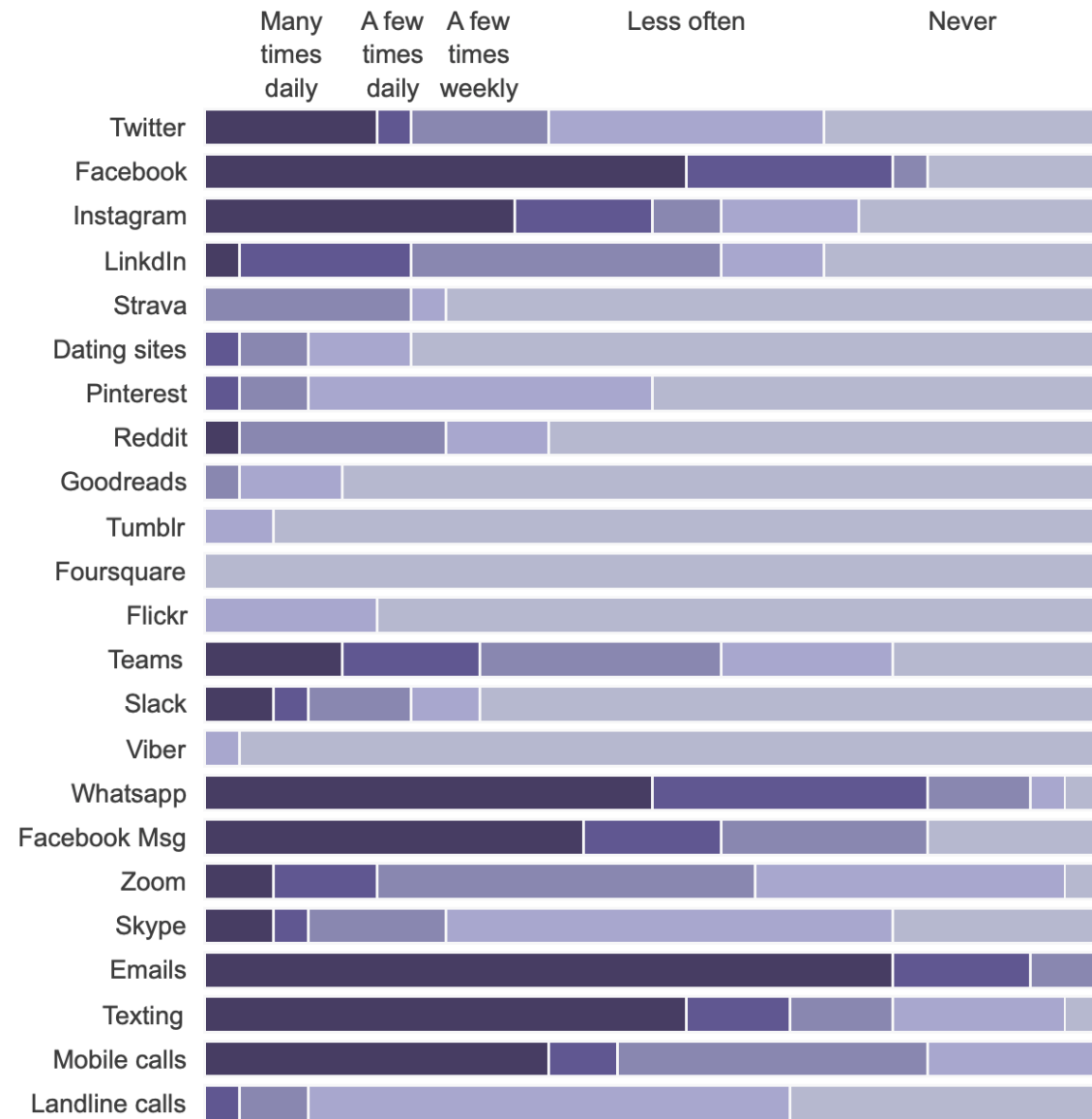


Fig. 1. Participant Responses to Technology Questionnaire.

