Homework

Read the article. Choose the examples of things that contribute to your digital footprint (a–h) that the article mentions.

a emails
b photos and videos
c tags on photos
d text messages
e internet shopping
f likes or loves on social media
g your search history
h an online calendar

Read the article again. Are the statements True (T) or False (F), according to the article?

1 When you go online, you leave information about your online activity without realising.
2 People generally don't know there is a risk of sharing their personal information on social media.
3 You can't stop people copying your posts, even if you delete them.
4 Some of our digital footprint is information that we leave online without choosing to share it.
5 Companies can use your digital footprint to sell your information to other companies.
6 It's possible to completely delete your digital footprint and start again.
7 People should be careful about how much information they put online.
8 People should consider if they'd be happy for everyone that they know to read their posts.

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Digital footprints

Have you ever walked on a beach and looked behind at the footprints your feet made in the sand, showing where you've been? We leave footprints in other places, too, often without realising. If you've ever uploaded a video to YouTube or 'liked' a photo on social media, you've left a digital footprint. Nearly all the stuff we do online – sending emails, using a map or tagging photos – leaves information about ourselves that can be seen by anyone, even people we don't know. Just like real footprints we leave at the beach, this online trail of information tells people where we've been and what we've done there.

We all know about the dangers of sharing too much personal information online. Everyone's heard stories about people losing their jobs because they were tagged in a photo at a party when they were supposed to be at work, or people whose houses were broken into after they posted their holiday plans on social media. Once information is shared online, we can no longer control who sees it or what is done with it. What we post is permanent. Even if we use apps that automatically delete posts after a certain amount of time, someone can make a copy of the posts before they are deleted.

But what many of us don't know is that our digital footprint is not only made up of the information that we choose to share, but also the data we share without knowing. When you browse the internet, your IP address (a set of numbers which are different on every computer) is recorded in databases that show your visits to different websites. Also, files called cookies are sent to your computer to observe how and when you use websites. Every word you type into a search engine and every link you click provides information about yourself. Have you ever searched for a product online and then wondered why adverts for similar items keep popping up? It's because companies use this information to target their advertising and sell things to you.

It's impossible to avoid a digital footprint unless perhaps, you never go online. Even if you delete your search history and remove cookies, some data will remain. It is, however, possible to make sure your digital footprint doesn't cause you problems in the future by limiting the amount of personal information you put online and thinking carefully before you post anything at all. Maybe the question we should all be asking ourselves is, would I be happy seeing this post online in ten years' time?

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