Social Media Privacy: A Contradiction in Terms?

A. Never in the course of human interaction have so many shared so much about themselves with so many others and with so little apparent concern for their privacy. Was it really just a generation ago that people kept all but their most basic information under virtual lock and key? Today, we happily share our date and place of birth, name of our first pet, mother's maiden name, favourite movie or book, favourite colour, first school teacher and myriad other snippets of information required by online services as part of their security procedures.

B. The basic premise behind this information-sharing is nothing new. Consumers have long handed over a little personal information in exchange for services such as banking and finance, utilities and healthcare. The big difference now is that the information is digitized and accessible online and we're handing it out to virtually anyone who asks, regardless of how briefly the business has been in existence. Of even greater concern to many is the amount and variety of information being gathered about us without our explicit permission. Whereas retailers and others used to tweeze out information gleaned through loyalty cards, prize draws and catalogue mailing lists, now these old standbys have been massively augmented by customers researching and purchasing online, leaving in their wake a digital trail of cookie crumbs detailing their needs, tastes and desires.

C. And then there's social media. If this isn't the Holy Grail for marketers, it's difficult to imagine what would be. In this thoroughly 21 ^ (st) century communications channel, old notions of privacy simply do not apply; sharing personal information, experiences and opinions is the whole point of the service. And, wonder of wonders, consumers don't only provide it willingly - they provide it for free! Sure, some people take the precaution of limiting access to their Facebook or Google+ pages, but even these people typically are eager to share their thoughts via comment sections on news sites, reviews on retail sites and in branded clubs and forums.

D. With all the time we spend online and all the forums we frequent, it's no wonder most of us have grown accustomed to doling out little snippets of personal information with barely a second thought. It helps that we rarely are asked to hand over a whole stack of personal information in one massive data transfer; that would be too much trouble and might provoke too much anxiety. Rather, we routinely hand it out a bit at a time.

E. Anybody over the age of 30 likely will remember that in the early days of mainstream Internet, 10 to 15 years ago, consumers were wary about handing over private information. A 2001 UCLA report, for instance, found high levels of consumer concern over online privacy in general and credit card security in particular.

F. Since then hundreds of millions of people have come online and become regular users of commerce sites and social media. Early concerns about online privacy have been sidelined by the desire for more speed, more convenience, more choice and more great deals. Familiarity has bred complacency and even foolhardiness; we've all heard about people uploading pretty much everything. including the most intimate words and images.

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G. Now, after a decade of consumers feeling increasingly free-and-easy with their personal information online, we are seeing signs of a new wariness setting in. In a Euro RSCG global survey conducted among 7,213 adults in 19 countries, we found that 55% of respondents are worried that 'technology is robbing us of our privacy'; the figure was above 60% in a number of countries, including the United States and China. Similarly, 61% overall agreed 'People share too much about their personal thoughts and experiences online; we need to go back to being more private.'

H. And it's not just snooping companies and hackers that consumers fear. Nearly half the sample (47%) and a majority of millennials - worry that friends or family will share inappropriate personal information about them online. Around one-third overall already regret posting personal information about themselves.

Questions 6-10

Do the following statements agree with the information in the text?

By question numbers 1-5 write

TRUE	*if the statement is true.*
FALSE	*if the statement contradicts the information in the text.*
NOT GIVEN	*if there is no information about this.*

1. _____ In the past, people shared their personal details freely.

2. _____ Nowadays, individuals give their personal information to online services because it makes them feel safe.

3. _____ Traditionally, financial organizations have asked their clients to provide a limited amount of information.

4. _____ The difference between the past and the present is that private information is available digitally to a much larger number of people.

5. _____ New businesses are not allowed to request personal information.

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