



INTERNATIONAL NETWORK ON DIGITAL SELF-DETERMINATION

Concept Note
2021

OVERALL CONCEPT

A surge of data is giving rise to new understandings and experiences of society and economy as our digital footprint grows steadily. Are data subjects able to determine themselves in this data-driven society? The emerging debates about autonomy and communal responsibility in the context of data access or protection, highlight a pressing imperative to re-imagine the 'self' in the digital space. Empowerment, autonomy, sovereignty, human centricity, are all terms often associated with the notion of digital self-determination in current policy language. This network aims to propose ways to engage in trustworthy data spaces and ensure human centric approaches when living in a data driven society that enable digital self-determination of individuals. How can we translate and operationalize common values and principles in the digital world? The Directorate of International Law (DIL) of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), in cooperation with the Office for Communications of the Swiss Federal Department of Environment Transport, Energy and Communications (OFCOM), the Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Data Governance (CAIDG) of the Singapore Management University, the Berkman Klein Centre (BKC) of Harvard University, the GovLab of (GovLab) of New York University, the Global Tech Policy Practice at TUM School of Social Sciences and Technology and potentially other partners will work together to develop further the concept of Digital Self-Determination in order to share this evolving concept and supporting practices internationally.

Digital self-determination offers a unique way of understanding where we live in the digital space, how we manage our social media environments, our interaction with Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, how we access and operate our personal data, and ways in which we can have a say about mass data sharing. As our urban life-spaces transit into smart cities the constant interaction between individuals, their communities and AI technology is inevitable and all-encompassing.

The collaborating organizations recognize an urgent need to ensure people's digital self-determination so that 'humans in the loop' is not just a catch-phrase but a lived experience both at the individual and societal level.

MISSION STATEMENT

To advance action-oriented research and policy regarding digital self-determination in a manner which appreciates the unique possibilities, potential and problems facing the management of different types of data in trustworthy digital spaces.

To advance understandings of digital self-determination which respectfully empower data subjects to flourish in their digital lives according to their individual and shared social preferences, including but not limited to the managing of their personal data, and to do so conscious of their shared duties and responsibilities as members of (digital) communities.

To communicate among scholars, researchers, policy makers and commentators a novel approach to the discourse about human agency in the digitally connected world and, *inter*

alia, the value of personal data to data subjects, along with the recognition of responsible and respectful data access and data use.

To explore and apply new understandings of the nature and value of data, their place in personal relationships and communications, the necessity to protect their integrity, the importance of data for sustainable digital communities, markets, economies and global futures.

WHAT WE DO

This collaborative network will explore the concept of Digital Self-Determination and its different dimensions in digital societies by envisaging the implications of this concept in the context of specific use cases. The collaborative project aims to elucidate the importance of digital self-determination to achieve a human-centred approach of trustworthy data spaces that strengthens confidence in a sustainable data society, while enabling the private and public sector to realise the potential of shared data sets. The different activities of this project intended to inform policy development, contribute to the regulatory debate, raise awareness and build bridges between the industry and academics in an effort to resolve tensions between ensuring the integrity of personal data, empowering data subjects to manage their data, recognising where the data of an individual intersects with its community, and enabling responsible and respectful data access freed from clandestine reuse.

Theoretical Framework

Digital self-determination is a complex notion to be viewed from different perspectives and in unique spaces, re-shaping what we understand as self-determination in the non-digital world. For this network, we propose ways to explore the notion of digital self-determination by presenting a foundational theoretical framework based on pre-existent self-determination theories and exploring the implications of the digital society in the determination of the self. Only by better appreciating and critically framing the discussion of digital self-determination, is it possible to translate the discussion into practice.

Dialogue on Digital Self-Determination

This network will function as an ongoing dialogue that allows participants to share, discuss and leverage their current research on Digital Self-Determination. The Dialogue will inform policy and regulatory discussions on how to create trustworthy data spaces and entice responsible innovation. As a result, partners will be able to release significant publications on the topic, share experience on concrete use cases, organise interesting events and public engagement where all interested parties can join in the discussion, and propose opportunities for other researchers, policy makers, the private industry, governments, international organisations and grass-roots civil society to cross-fertilise and to offer policy planners in a vast array of digital environments the benefits of digital self-determination.

Use cases

In this network, participants will translate into practice the principles and theory of Digital Self-Determination for specific use cases. The goal is to operationalize the concept of digital self-determination by illustrating its meaning and value in someone's everyday life with concrete examples. These use cases will evolve in digital spaces first from the specific communal location, out to transnational data spaces where the interoperability of data presents potentials and challenges for the wider application of the concept. Further, a use case methodology is a dynamic and contemporaneous way of addressing concerns raised regarding the applied dimensions and challenges represented in digital self-determination.

Foundational Framework for Digital Self-Determination

From the experience learn in the case studies, the network will work towards establishing common understanding and an action-oriented framework for building transnational trustworthy data spaces recognising that Digital Self-Determination emanates from the self in specific communities. As such its application will be relative to context, relationships, participants and need.

Capacity Building

With the goal to share both theoretical insights and contextual experiences from practice (including the use cases), the network will engage in international capacity-building efforts aimed at knowledge-building and skill-sharing among civil servants, members of civil society, and academic institutions from various regions, particularly majority world countries ("Global South"). These efforts, including an international summit, will also serve as an opportunity to periodically synthesize the networks' learnings and explore additional collaborations with potential new partner organizations.

PARTICIPANTS

The core participants are leading experts from academic institutions as well as public and private sector data users interested in exploring the challenges related to Digital Self-Determination. Participants come from different fields, which will allow this network to be driven by an interdisciplinary perspective. Also, they come from a diverse range of countries. The participants are invited based on their research capacity and potential to make a strong contribution, as well as to influence discussions in their own country.

This is a unique opportunity to build a vibrant network that can contribute with concrete policy and industry outputs that will enhance the domestic and regional understanding of Digital Self-Determination and trustworthy data spaces and contribute to developing possible solution for sustainable internet governance.

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