Our privacy is valuable. It allows us to make our own choices about the parts of ourselves that we wish to share, and lets us control what others know about us. However, it is something that has become increasingly threatened in the digital age. Massive amounts of personal data are being collected from us without our knowledge or consent while we use the internet and our digital devices. Cellphones have become so ubiquitous today that we don’t think about the more insidious aspects of them; namely the data they are collecting from us. Privacy is a fundamental human right, and in our digital society it is something that needs to be protected. The goal of my thesis project is to create an informational and interactive website that aims to educate internet users and smartphone owners about digital privacy. It will help explain what digital privacy is, why it matters, and what we can do to help uphold our own privacy and the privacy of those around us. I want my website to realistically acknowledge the current problems that we are facing in relation to these issues, but ultimately provide an optimistic outlook for the future of digital privacy. Data collection practices work more effectively when users aren’t aware of them, so education is the first step in preventing it from happening in the first place.
Every internet user, smartphone owner, and consumer is having their personal data collected and shared with companies all over the world. Our personal data is a commodity. When we don't pay for services like Google Maps or Facebook, it's because we are the product. We're paying for them by allowing these companies to access information about us. This information includes our location data, search history, browsing history, user ID and device IDs, contacts, communications, birthdate, purchases, and more. Our data is being collected right under our noses and without our consent; every time we open an app or webpage, information is being taken from us. Even if we think our data is insignificant, or if we do not care if it is collected because we have nothing to hide, it still negatively affects us and those around us. Companies benefit from our lack of privacy. Their knowledge about our whereabouts, shopping habits, and internet histories give them power over us and other companies. Our personal data can be used to analyze trends in the general population and can be exploited to try to convince us to buy things we do not need.

Having and maintaining our privacy is extremely important. Our privacy gives us autonomy, and autonomy is what allows our democracy to function the way that it is meant to. The digital economy relies on our cooperation and acceptance of the actions of invasive technology. There are steps we can take to prevent our data from being stolen and used against us. One of the places we can start is with our cellphones, devices that we carry around with us every day.
Existing Projects

Center for Democracy and Technology
https://cdt.org

The Center for Democracy and Technology is a Washington DC-based nonprofit organization. They focus on how democracy is shaped by technology, and advocate for our freedoms and rights in the digital age. Some of their goals include holding online services accountable for what they do with our data and how they collect it from us, fighting back against government surveillance and censorship, and supporting pieces of legislation that protect us from technological exploitation, discrimination, and invasive practices.

This is a more legislation-focused website, which is unlike what I am planning on making. Its audience also has a wider scope than mine does – since they are focused on democracy, they cater to everyone, so the information they provide is quite broad. They have sections of their site dedicated to cybersecurity & standards, elections & democracy, equity in civic tech, free expression, government surveillance, open internet, and privacy & data. The concept of staying safe online and protecting people against invasive technological services is something that this site and my project have in common.
The New York Times Privacy Project

The NYT has a series of articles dedicated to the topic of digital privacy. The subjects of the articles range from anecdotal events about privacy violations, how-to guides on staying safe online, reports on different types of insidious technology that our devices try to keep hidden from us, and pieces of legislation that are being debated and passed in relation to online privacy. This resource is a lot broader than my project is going to be. This site is more of a compilation of articles hosted on a NYT microsite rather than its own website, and the articles are all written by different people.

My project will be one cohesive website, with most of the content written by me. My scope is much narrower, focusing specifically on digital privacy in relation to our smartphones. However, some of these articles have really relevant information for me, so it is possible that I will use some of them as a resource.
USA.gov privacy information

https://www.usa.gov/privacy

This is a page about privacy on the United States of America's official website. It consists of a bulleted list of 7 different tips on ways to protect your privacy, ranging from “Create and update strong passwords for your online accounts” to “Find out from your state or local consumer agency if your state has laws to protect your privacy.” It is quite short and doesn't have much information on it. The site I plan on making is going to have a lot more information, and it's going to provide some background on the topic of privacy before it jumps into tips to help protect yourself online. This site is also tailored more towards those looking for ways to file claims, complaints, and find legislation regarding privacy in their state.

My site has a different audience and a more specific approach. It will also have more information. This is just one singular web page, whereas my project is going to be a whole site dedicated to the topic.
Privacy International

https://www.privacyinternational.org

Privacy International is a nonprofit organization based in London that focuses on human rights in the digital sphere. They look at where online privacy and user safety interact, and advocate for the right to privacy for everyone in the world. Their website is full of information about different aspects of digital privacy, including encryption, social media surveillance, AdTech, and micro-targeting; all of it is clear and easy to understand. They also do a lot of investigation and research into harmful tech practices. Since this is a London-based organization, the information is more tailored towards people living in the UK and Europe.

Similar to some of the other existing projects I’ve looked at, this has a broader scope than what I intend to look at. The fact that it is based in the UK and Europe makes some parts not very relatable to Americans. It also doesn’t have a section tailored specifically to tracking from cellphone apps, which is a big part of what my project will be about.
Student Privacy Compass

https://studentprivacycompass.org

The Student Privacy Compass, as stated on their website, aims “to provide a one-stop shop for education privacy-related resources to all stakeholders in the student privacy conversation: students, parents, educators and education agencies, the edtech industry, and policymakers struggling to grapple with the ever-changing student privacy legal landscape.” This is a site that is very specifically tailored to digital privacy in relation to EdTech. They were formerly known as FERPA, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Their site acts as a news hub and educational source for all things related to student data privacy. They also have resources for students, teachers, and parents to learn about data collection and privacy in the increasingly digitized educational sphere.

Similar to my site, it is an educational resource, but their digital privacy scope is a different one than mine will be. Since EdTech is more prevalent on laptops and tablets, there is not much mention of privacy in relation to cellphones.
Center for Humane Technology
https://www.humanetech.com

This organization was founded by Google's former design ethicist, Tristan Harris, who resigned from that position because he was becoming increasingly concerned with the negative impact that new digital technologies were having on the population, and big companies like Google and Apple's resistance to doing anything to help stop it. The Center for Humane Technology doesn't exclusively focus on digital privacy, it looks at the negative impacts of different types of dangerously designed technology. Privacy is definitely a factor in some of that, but that is not the main topic of this website.

My project will have a more specific approach, but will have a similar sentiment to this site. Both are analyzing the negative effects of poor technology design, and want the outcome to be a better approach to protecting users. However, as stated previously when talking about other existing projects, my site has a distinct purpose.
Annotated Bibliography

*Privacy is Power by Carissa Véliz*
This book gives a detailed description of how your data is collected via the things you use every day: your smartphone, car, smart TV, credit card, email, etc. Véliz then breaks down why companies want to take data from you and how they use it. She gives background information on different events and developments that led to the creation of the data economy, such as 9/11 and the Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018. At the end of the book, Véliz gives realistic advice and practical solutions on how to end the practices of the data economy and predatory privacy violations.

*Why Privacy Matters by Neil Richards*
This book, written by a Washington University law professor, describes how our privacy is increasingly at risk in the digital age. He talks about privacy in a more philosophical sense related to the law, since that is his background. In it, he touches on things like data collection and specifically digital privacy. This gives me a good basis for understanding “why privacy matters” - the exact name of the book, and I could apply the ideas he brings up to how I relay the information on my site.
Understanding the Digital World: What You Need to Know about Computers, the Internet, Privacy, and Security by Brian W. Kernighan

This is a general information book about different aspects of computers, including hardware, software, systems, and networks. It has a good section called “Data and Information”, and it gives thorough technical explanations about how your data is collected and analyzed. This is going to be a useful asset for me if I were to have a section on my site explaining some of the more technical aspects of data collection. It would also give me a good foundational understanding of how it happens, which is useful to know when talking about its effects.

Privacy in the Digital Age

This is a comprehensive journal article from 2015 talking about problems surrounding the definition of privacy in the digital age, and what it really means when considering users as their “digital selves”. It was co-written by the CEO of the Center for Democracy and Technology and a policy analyst on the CDT’s Consumer Privacy Project. Even though it is from 2015, it still has a lot of relevant information that relates to my topic. Much of the technology discussed has changed or progressed since then, but the underlying framework of and tenets of digital privacy remain the same. I can use the information in this article to help plan how I want to outline the sections of my website.
This article was written by the same author who wrote *Privacy is Power*. In this piece, she goes into more detail about the ethical framework of user data collection, and how that relates to privacy. She examines the current practices that are in use for user data collection, such as personalized targeting and different data acquisition models, evaluates the ethics of each, and proposes alternative methods that would keep the consumer in control and informed of what is being collected. This article is relevant to my topic because it explores different methods of data collection and the ethical challenges that stem from them. When considering privacy in this context, it is important to note that ethical data acquisition would leave users in control of what is being taken from them and would prioritize their privacy.

### Privacy's Blueprint: The Battle to Control the Design of New Technologies by Woodrow Hartzog


This book looks at digital privacy through the lens of design. The author explains what good privacy design should look like, proposes boundaries in order to discourage bad privacy design, and calls on lawmakers, courts, and regulators to target these bad privacy designs. He goes on to apply these design ideas to real-life scenarios including social media and the internet of things. I can use some of the principles that Hartzog brings up in the final portion of my website where I talk about the future of digital privacy. Everything about digital privacy is related to design, as these dangerous
systems were all designed to be the way they are on purpose. This book gives valuable insight on the intersection of design and privacy.

**Goodbye Tracking? Impact of iOS App Tracking Transparency and Privacy Labels**


Apple’s newest iOS updates have been rolling out some new user privacy functionalities, including privacy labels in the App Store and a new App Tracking Transparency feature. This study evaluates these new features and looks at their intended effectiveness vs how they function realistically. The study finds that while Apple’s new features do make it harder for mobile apps to track you, but by no means do they stop it from happening entirely. This is very relevant to my topic because it focuses specifically on tracking and digital privacy in relation to mobile applications.

**Apps, Trackers, Privacy, and Regulators: A Global Study of the Mobile Tracking Ecosystem**


This is another study that looks at tracking in relation to mobile apps. However, this study is not specifically focused on iOS software, and was done on an Android phone. The researchers take a closer look at individual trackers
and analyze the relationship between mobile apps and third-party tracking services. As stated in their abstract, they “present insights into the mobile advertising and tracking ecosystem and its stakeholders.” This study is also very relevant to my project, since it also looks at data collection and tracking on mobile devices. Much of the information in this study is quite technical, so I would use it to inform myself of the exact way third parties collect data. I could then use the information that I have learned to help explain it to others in my project.
Outcomes, Methods, and Audiences

Outcomes
I plan on making a website that will act as an introductory resource for people looking to learn more about digital data collection and privacy. It will be divided into several sections: background information on the topic, relevant examples of how it affects you in your daily life, and what you can do to retain some of your privacy online. It is going to be more specifically tailored to digital privacy relating to cellphones. My goal is to make the topic of digital privacy more accessible for people and easy to understand. I also want to bring more attention to it, since it is something that is happening to all internet users but goes relatively unnoticed. My website will also contain some interactive elements to make the experience more engaging.

Methods
The first step in making this site is doing the necessary research. I need to become familiar with the topic so that I can explain it in a way that is both accurate and easy for others to understand. I am doing this by collecting information from different books, videos, and journal articles related to digital privacy. Then I need to start writing the content that will go on my website. The other half of my project is building the site that will host all the information. I am planning on doing some experimenting in HTML and JavaScript as well as no-code resources such as Readymag in order to build my website.

Audiences
The intended audience for my project is young adults aged 18-24. Since my project will focus more on cellphones, I am writing for people who use their phones very frequently. Also, since certain aspects of this topic can be quite
technical, I am gearing the site towards those who are very familiar with using the internet and might have grown up using it. It is my understanding that people around my age have some sort of awareness that data is being collected about them through their internet searches and apps on their phone, but don't know much else about it. I want to help them understand what is happening and why, and give them the knowledge that will empower them to try to keep their data more secure and private.
# Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January</th>
<th>February</th>
<th>March</th>
<th>April</th>
<th>May</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content gathering finished</td>
<td>Website HTML outline built</td>
<td>Javascript interactive elements partially built</td>
<td>Nearly all JavaScript elements built into the site</td>
<td>Final touches and polishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begin building website</td>
<td>Half of website content written</td>
<td>3/4 of website content written</td>
<td>All website content written and populated into website</td>
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