CSI-COP

Citizen Scientists Investigating Cookies and App GDPR Compliance

CSI-COP's 10th Newsletter Presents:

Project Purpose

CSI-COP project at its core aims to engage citizen scientists across Europe and the world to explore their own digital journeys by recording the number, and type, of third-party tracking cookies they find across the web and in apps on their mobile devices. Frequently asked questions (FAQs) about CSI-COP have been translated into Greek, Hebrew, and Hungarian and can be found here: https://csi-cop.eu/faq/

For further information please contact CSI-COP's Co-Investigator and Director of Science:

Dr. Huma Shah on ab7778@coventry.ac.uk

Free educational resource

CSI-COP's free informal education resource (MOOC) '**Your Right to Privacy Online**', which you can complete in your own time, is available to download as a document in **English** and twelve translations (**Catalan**, **Czech**, **Finnish**, **French**, **German**, **Greek**, **Hebrew**, **Hungarian**, **Italian**, **Polish**, **Romanian** and **Spanish**) from the project website here: https://csi-cop.eu/informal-education-mooc/

In five easy-to-follow steps, the course on '**Your Right to Privacy Online**' can be completed in under half-a-day. The course covers:

Step 1 – The concept of 'privacy'.

Step 2 – *What is* 'personal data'?

Step 3 – *How a*re we tracked online?

Step 4 – What rights do we have to online data protection and privacy?

Step 5 – Free online tools to protect our data-privacy.

This MOOC is also available in English from the EU-Citizen.Science platform, from here: https://moodle.eu-citizen.science/

Project updates:

CSI-COP's work package 4 (WP4) concluded in January 2023. Citizen scientists were engaged in this project activity investigating websites and apps for compliance of the genera data protection regulation (GDPR). Partners' recruited citizen scientists explored beneath websites they visit and apps they use to uncover what lurked beneath. Cookies and other tracking technologies, and default permissions to different features in a mobile smart device were recorded in a bespoke tool. The records have been put together in two different databases by Coventry University's Jaimz Winter. The developed databases have been made open-access for anyone to look through or download from CSI-COP website project results' page. Is a website you visit, or an app you use featured in CSI-COP's citizen scientists' investigations? You can access the databases from the links below:

1. Database of citizen scientists' website investigations, available to download from here.

2. Database of citizen scientists' app investigations, available to download from here.

The final outcome of WP4 is a public report presenting anonymized information on who CSI-COP citizen scientists are. Details on age-range, and male | female make-up of the citizen scientists, as well as some non-identifiable data on their geographical location (urban | rural), and socio-economic activity (working | student | non-working), can be found in deliverable report available to download from CSI-COP website:

3. Report D4.3 | D17 Age, Gender, Socio-economic and Geographical Distribution (AGSEG), available here.

Partner Steering Committee Meeting in Bar Ilan University, Tel Aviv.

CSI-COP held a hybrid consortium steering committee on 28 February 2023. The meeting was hosted by CSI-COP team member Dr. Maayan Zhitomirsky-Geffet in Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan-Tel Aviv.
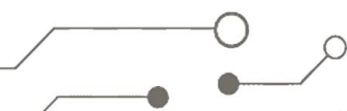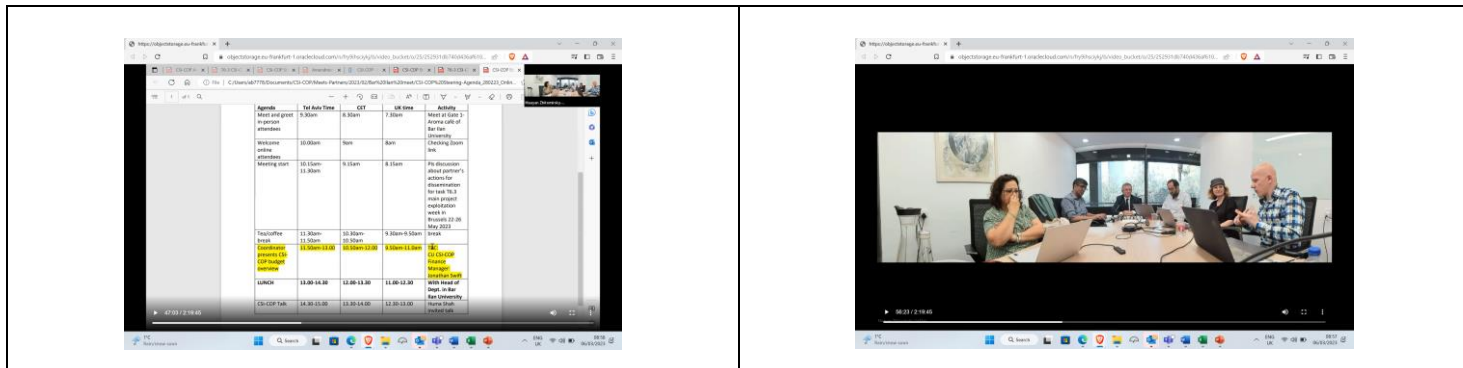
Partner Activities

Coventry University:

➢ On Monday 13 February 2023, Dr. Huma Shah and Jaimz Winter, with CU's sub-contractor, Venkat of Xcel Resources visited Coventry University's Hub in Brussels in preparation for CSI-COP project's main dissemination and exploitation event in Brussels 22-26 May 2023 (picture left).

➢ On Wednesday 15 February 2023, Dr. Huma Shah delivered an invited webinar to Coventry's branch of the British Computer Society (BCS).
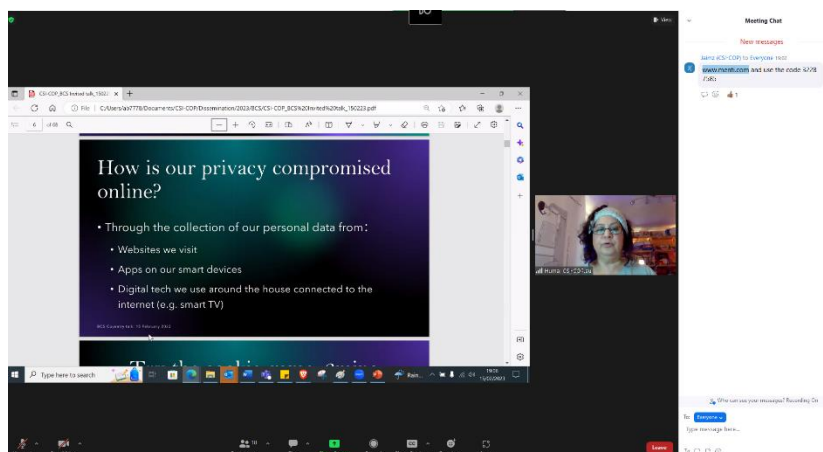
➢ On Monday 20 February 2023, Coventry University welcomed a new member into their CSI-COP team: Giacomo Masone.

➢ On Wednesday 22 February 2023, Coventry University held a stakeholder event in the research centre for computational science and mathematical modelling (CSM). The event involved participants playing a 'cookie game' learning about opaque cookie banners and notices found on websites across the Internet. The purpose of asking stakeholders (anyone who uses the Internet) to play this game is to demonstrate how difficult it is to avoid online tracking and extraction of personal data without informed consent. Attendees enjoyed pre-participation pizza and joined a darts competition to end the evening.
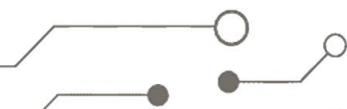
University of Patras

On 21 January 2023, Dr. Yannis Gialelis from the University of Patras was interviewed by Mr. Vassilakis, a journalist from the Greek National Radio Network, in the Patras studios. The discussion centered around the CSI COP project, beginning with a comprehensive overview of the project. They then delved into the topic of online tracking and the importance of avoiding cookies. The journalist was keen to find out about websites' compliance with the GDPR and the general public's awareness of their right to privacy online. The conversation also included a focus on the design and implementation of the project's workshops. Finally, the interview ended with Mr. Vassilakis asking for practical tips for the listeners on how to deactivate trackers and protect their personal data.
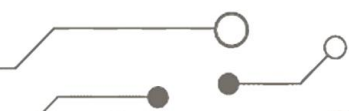
Bar Ilan University

In December 2022, CSI-COP partner in Bar Ilan University participated in an event as part of their stakeholder café activities. The café went exceptionally well lasting about 4.5 hours (10:30-15:00). A very diverse audience of about 80 people attended all of whom were very excited about the topic of online tracking. The attendees represented various faculties from academia (information science, industrial engineering, communication studies, law), from industry (Privya company), and from the government (the Privacy Protection Authority), many students, librarians, faculty and the general public.

On 4 January 2023, Bar Ilan hosted a second event, a round table with a senior eBay representative, Guy Rosenwald. The hybrid event featured 18 people attending in person and 3 online.

Bar Ian University also hosted their Open Access Week 2023 held at Bar-Ilan University. Dr. Shlomit Hadad was invited and delivered a talk via Zoom on the topic:

Are we ready for what comes next? Open-Science and the management of a cultural change: Beyond the Open-Access movement

For three decades, the open access movement for scientific publication has been working to open scientific publications freely to the public. Open science goes beyond that, and with regard to scientific research, open science seeks to make research on all its data available to all levels of scientific inquiry. The opening of the "research gates" will also enable the involvement of citizen scientists in science. Dr. Shlomit Hadad's lecture dealt with the current global debate surrounding the scope of sharing scientific information, and the benefits, conflicts and possible challenges in open science. In the lecture, research findings that included an investigation of the scientific publication trends of Israeli researchers from various disciplines were presented. Findings from interviews with directors of academic libraries from all universities in Israel were also presented. In addition, Shlomit presented the main points of the CSI-COP project and the importance of the involvement of citizens to create open and transparent science for the public. All of this led us to discuss the opening question - is science in Israel ready for the era of open science? (The answer: we are on the way, but a regulated policy on the subject is required).

Coventry University's Dr. Huma Shah also delivered a talk in Bar Ilan University's Open Science week:

Opening Science to Citizens.

On 28 February 2023, Huma presented in Bar Ilan's open science week talking about AI, early chatbots, ChatGPT, and the contribution of CSI-COP's citizen scientists recording their website and app investigations pooled into open-access databases. As mentioned in 'Project Updates' on page 2, the databases are available to look through from the website project's results page, and Zenodo.
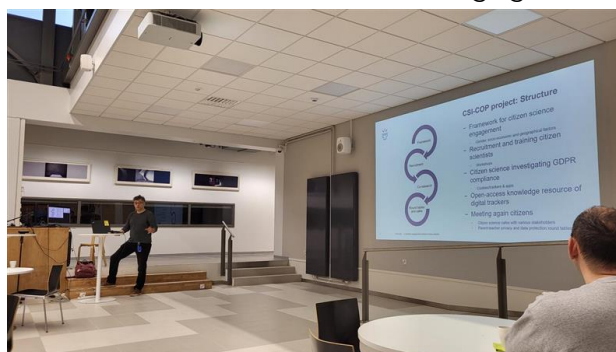
University of Oulu

After their presence at the Science Garden on 3rd November 2022, an event for families, and at the City Library Pekuri on 28th November, meetings with citizen scientists continued at the University of Oulu, where team members Henna and Ulrico discussed online tracking with citizen scientists, who performed their investigation during the event held on the 15th of December 2022.

On 17th February 2023, CSI-COP UOUOU team talked of citizen scientists' engagement at the second

meeting of the recently launched Citizen Science Network of the University of Oulu, where experience in information technology and in social sciences and humanities were brought to an open discussion with current players in citizen science as well as researchers interested in it from all faculties.

In the next section we follow up on the 9th newsletter's interview of a CSI-COP citizen scientist with another citizen scientist's interview: Lyndsey Birnsteel. Following Lyndsey's interview, we introduce junior team members in CSI-COP partner organisations.

CSI-COP Citizen Scientist

CSI-COP are pleased to present in this newsletter, another of the project's citizen scientists and why they joined the project to investigate online tracking: **Lyndsey Birnsteel**.

Tell us a little about yourself Lyndsey:

My academic background includes an MSc in Information Systems Management from London School of Economics (LSE) as well as a BA in Computational Sciences and Communication Studies from Hollins University in Virginia, US. I lived in London for eight years following my degree from LSE and worked for a media company (now called Digital Health) that provides news, research and events focused on developments in health IT. I headed the technology department which included overseeing all development projects and liaising with third party suppliers. Along with the CEO, I started a new Intelligence branch of the business that provides the most detailed database on current systems, technology and infrastructure installed at every NHS trust in the UK along with research reports and bespoke client services.

I have since moved back to the US, my home country, after having my first two children in London. I continued to work with Digital Health remotely as a freelance researcher and US correspondent covering the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. I am a member of the British Computer Society and a strong believer in increased online privacy transparency and better controls for parents raising children in the digital age.

What drove you to complete the CSI-COP 'Your Right to Privacy Online' course?

I came across the CSI-COP 'Your Right to Privacy Online' course through my BCS Women Specialist Group channel. It immediately caught my attention, not only from a technical perspective, but also as a parent of three children (ages 12, 10 and 7) struggling to navigate the exhaustive landscape of misleading apps, trackers and persuasion technologies.

When my children were younger my digital parenting approach probably leaned more towards that of a Silicon Valley nanny (article reference here: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/26/style/silicon-valley-nannies.html). However, as my children age, the goals have shifted to educating, understanding, and being a proactive consumer of technology. Unlike Europe, the US, as a whole, is not a leader in protecting personal data. The GDPR in Europe is definitely a step in the right direction, yet full compliance is questionable. I was interested in completing the course not only because of my technical background, but also as a parent eager to learn more about online tracking technologies and the implications they have across industries.
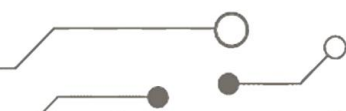
Dr. Huma Shah's CSI-COP Project is an excellent endeavor. The work her team is doing to create a taxonomy and uniform approach to privacy controls can and will lead to a greater understanding and hence more control over individual's own privacy worldwide.

What do you feel about all this online surveillance by big tech and the AdTech industry?

Without transparency and accountability, online surveillance by big tech and the AdTech industry will have significant negative implications for citizens worldwide. This will be particularly acute amongst our youth. As we all know, children are extremely impressionable. Digital influences and – more specifically – algorithmic persuasion is harmful when children are still trying to figure out who they are. Realistically, opting out is not an option. Instead, education, better tools, uniform messaging and transparency will be the answer. This is not to say that target-messaging does not have a place. However, the sheer amount of tracking and manipulation of one's online experience based on digital profiles is counter-productive as it creates a more constricted experience. I do not want to be puppeteered and I especially do not want my children to be. They should have the ability and the right to experience the digital world freely, as they do the physical world.

Citizen scientists are crucial to tackling this critical issue. Their diverse backgrounds and reasons for *why* they care about the human right to online privacy are an important part of the story. Citizen science and the power of voice can shape policy and may be the only way to create actual change and lasting impact in this area.

CSI-COP consortia's Junior Members

Giacomo Masone

On Monday 20 February 2023, Giacomo Masone joined Coventry University's CSI-COP project as a full-time Research Assistant to the end of the project. Giacomo is a junior scientist who completed two years of his Mechanical Engineering degree at Coventry University and completed a two-months Internship at Universal Fabrications (Coventry) Ltd.

Giacomo is from Rome. His Italian language knowledge is an asset to the international CSI-COP project. Giacomo's work will involve joining Dr. Huma Shah and Jaimz Winter in the final phase of CSI-COP organising citizen scientist stakeholder cafés (e.g., Darts Night on 22 February), parent-teacher roundtables, and contributing to the production of a free searchable online repository from CSI-COP team members and citizen scientists' website and app investigations.

Nantia Lantavou

Nantia Lantavou is a part-time member of the University of Patras CSI-COP team, currently working for the Applied Electronics Laboratory of the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering. She is a mechanical engineer living in Patras. Before this project, she was blissfully unaware of the extent of tracking going on in the internet. After getting involved with CSI – COP Nantia has become an avid online privacy supporter hoping to convey that message to as many people as possible.

Nantia believes that Citizen science is a very meaningful movement that aspires to bridge the gap between the general public and the scientific world. It is very important to try to involve as many people as possible in citizen science. The obvious advantage is the creation of huge pools of researchers – citizen scientists helping to solve problems while acquiring knowledge. Nevertheless, for Nantia it is also as important, if not more, the fact that science is returning to its roots because after all, lest we forget, everything began from just curious and inquisitive minds.

Deniz Özdemir

Deniz Özdemir is currently a researcher at Czech Technical University in CIIRC (Czech Institute of Informatics, Robotics and Cybernetics) and works alongside Dr Olga Stepankova in the CTU CSI-COP team. Deniz is an OSCP (Offensive Security Certified Professional) and GPEN (GIAC Penetration Tester) certified ethical hacker (white hat) specialised in network and web application penetration testing, system hacking, SAMM, SSDLC, threat analysis and exploitation.

Deniz believes that each citizen scientist's unique view dynamically brings value to the various domains of scientific initiatives. She believes that each participant not only gains invaluable knowledge regarding their specific interests from taking part but also contribute to the evolution of science.

CSI-COP Partners