

Australian Search Experience**QUT Ethics Approval Number 2021000293****Research team**

Principal Researcher:	Prof. Axel Bruns	Research leader
Associate Researchers:	Prof. Jean Burgess	Researcher
	Abdul Obeid	Developer
	Nicolas Suzor	Researcher
	Daniel Angus	Researcher
	Timothy Graham	Researcher
	Ariadna Matamoros-Fernández	Researcher
	Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology (QUT)	
	Mark Andrejevic	Researcher
	Monash University	
	Kimberlee Weatherall	Researcher
	University of Sydney	
	James Meese	Researcher
	Damiano Spina	Researcher
	Falk Scholer	Researcher
	RMIT University	
	Mathias Spielkamp	Researcher
	Lorenz Matzat	Researcher
	AlgorithmWatch gGmbH	

ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society**Why is the study being conducted?**

This project in the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society aims to evaluate the information recommended by leading search engines; to assess the extent to which search results are personalised by their algorithms, based on the profiles established by those search engines for their different users; and how the search results for a given topic evolve over time. It compiles and analyses the search recommendations encountered by a wide range of genuine users across prominent search engines, for a variety of generic and specific topics, and over an extended period of time. The project uses a 'data donation' approach that involves you and other members of the general public in Australia in the research: we invite you to participate if you are currently residing in Australia and are aged 18 or older.

What does participation involve?

As part of the installation process, we will ask you to provide some general demographic information (including age, gender, overall location, etc.). None of this information can be used to personally identify you; it will be used only to examine general demographic patterns in the data we gather.

Once you have installed the browser plugin, it will from time to time initiate new searches on Google Search, Google News, Google Video, and YouTube. These will search for generic terms (e.g. the names of political leaders or major celebrities) and topical issues (e.g. current events). The plugin reports the results of these searches back to a central server, allowing us to track and analyse what information the search engines recommend, and how this changes over time. Any impact on your own use of your computer will be minimal – you will simply see a search window pop up from time to time.

Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary. If you do agree to participate you can withdraw from the research project without comment or penalty. To withdraw, simply disable or uninstall the plugin from your browser. Once you do so, no new data will be gathered, but we will retain the data you have already provided as we cannot trace this back to you. Your decision to participate or not participate will in no way impact upon your current or future relationship with QUT.

What are the possible benefits for me if I take part?

It is expected that this research project will not benefit you directly. The outcomes of the research, however, will benefit our understanding of the diversity of results provided by major search engines, and enable independent research into the role that such search engines play in informing the public.

Outcomes from this research will be published from time to time on the project's page at <https://www.admscentre.org.au/searchexperience/>.

What are the possible risks for me if I take part?

There are minimal risks associated with your participation in this research project. These include:

1. Inconvenience of having to install the plugin.
2. Inconvenience of day-to-day plugin background operations.
3. Technical issues during installation or operation of the browser plugin.
4. Revelation of personally identifiable user information.

We have addressed the first three of these by making it as easy as possible to install the browser plugin, testing it thoroughly, and minimising its impact on your day-to-day computer use. Also, if you run into any trouble with the plugin, please simply disable or uninstall it again.

To prevent any disclosure of personal information, we ask only for some generic demographic information, and store this only against a computer-generated ID that cannot be traced back to you. We do not capture and store any identifiable information about you, your computer system, your network connection, or anything else that could conceivably be linked back to you. Further, in all publications from this research, we will reveal only general demographic patterns, and never single out the search results reported by any individual participants.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

All information reported by the browser plugin is stored only against a computer-generated ID that

cannot be traced back to you: it will not be possible to identify you at any stage of the research, because personally identifying information is not sought in any of the demographic questions or included in the searches conducted by the browser plugin.

Any data collected as part of this research project will be stored securely as per QUT's Management of research data policy. Data will be stored for a minimum of 5 years, and can be disclosed if it is to protect you or others from harm, if specifically required by law, or if a regulatory or monitoring body such as the ethics committee requests it.

In all publications from this research, we will reveal only general demographic patterns, and never single out the search results reported by any individual participants.

The research project is funded by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society, and, in addition to the QUT research team, partner researchers in the Centre from other institutions (listed above) will also have access to the data obtained during the project.

In keeping with our 'data donation' philosophy, the full dataset will also be shared via a public data repository at the end of the project that is accessible to anybody, including people not involved in this research project. To remove any residual risk of re-identification of participants, however small, we will create a new set of computer-generated participant ID codes for this public dataset.

How do I give my consent to participate?

The installation process includes an online form that enables you to give your consent to participate in this research. If you do not wish to provide your consent, the browser plugin installation process will be aborted, and the plugin will not be activated.

What if I have questions about the research project?

If you have any questions or require further information please contact one of the listed researchers:

Prof. Axel Bruns	a.bruns@qut.edu.au	07 3138 5548
Prof. Jean Burgess	je.burgess@qut.edu.au	07 3138 8253
Abdul Obeid	abdul.obei@qut.edu.au	07 3138 9089

What if I have a concern or complaint regarding the conduct of the research project?

QUT is committed to research integrity and the ethical conduct of research projects. If you wish to discuss the study with someone not directly involved, particularly in relation to matters concerning policies, information or complaints about the conduct of the study or your rights as a participant, you may contact the QUT Research Ethics Advisory Team on 07 3138 5123 or email humanethics@qut.edu.au.

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please print out this page for your information.