

Maymanah Farhat
Dr. Christine Angel
LIS 258: Museum Informatics
Museum-Partner Observation #3

The Brooklyn Museum's Privacy Policy

Privacy concerns have become central to museum policies as most cultural heritage institutions now collect user data in an attempt to better understand the demands of their visitors. According to the *NMC Horizon Report: 2016 Museum Edition*, this recent upsurge in data collection has increased the risk of privacy breaches among the public. What this means for museums is that as new and innovative ways to engage audiences through digital technology are adopted, the amount of personal information circulating in cyberspace multiplies, which can potentially compromise the privacy of visitors.

The Brooklyn Museum currently uses multiple forms of interactive technology that require the user to agree to its privacy policy, which includes the right of the museum to share data mined from its digital platforms. Unfortunately, the terms of the policy can only be accessed through the museum's website or a designated section in the sidebar of its widely popular Ask Brooklyn Museum mobile app, and appears as a rambling, jargon-filled post. On the museum's website, the policy can be accessed by scrolling to the bottom of the main page, where it is listed as a tab written in fine print.

Brooklyn Museum

200 Eastern Parkway
Brooklyn, New York 11238-6052



Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn
Museum

HOURS

| | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|
| MONDAY | 11 am–6 pm (1st floor only) |
| TUESDAY | 11 am–6 pm (1st floor only) |
| WEDNESDAY | 11 am–6 pm |
| THURSDAY | 11 am–10 pm |
| FRIDAY | 11 am–6 pm |
| SATURDAY | 11 am–6 pm |
| SUNDAY | 11 am–6 pm |

TELEPHONE

718.638.5000

EMAIL

information@brooklynmuseum.org



DIRECTIONS
ADMISSION INFO
CONTACT INFO
FAQ

COPYRIGHT
IMAGE SERVICES
TERMS OF USE
PRIVACY POLICY

Screenshot of the bottom of the Brooklyn Museum's website, where its privacy policy can be accessed.

Although not completely inaccessible, the difficulty with which the policy is found online suggests that the Brooklyn Museum has approached user privacy as an afterthought, or perhaps as an issue that is not a common concern among its patrons. It is most likely the latter, as most online users share personal information via websites, social media platforms, and mobile apps without ever reading the terms of agreement. Citing a Deloitte survey of 2,000 online users in 2017, *Business Insider* reports that 90% of consumers accept legal terms and conditions without ever reading privacy policies. Deloitte found that this is largely due to the fact that users find the language of these policies to be too dense to understand, as they are often laden with legal terms.

1. INTRODUCTION; GENERAL TERMS

1.1 As described in more detail below, we collect and use the information you provide to personalize the Services so that we can meet your needs, fulfill your online order, facilitate customer service, and inform you of the Museum's exhibitions, programs, and activities. This Privacy Policy explains what information we collect and use in connection with your use of the Services and how and when we disclose such information. Please take a few minutes to read this Privacy Policy so that you understand how we treat your information. If you do not agree with this Privacy Policy, please do not use any of the Services.

1.2 This Privacy Policy governs only the information collected by us on or through your use of the Services, and does not cover any other information collected in any other manner or collected by any other third party, unless specifically stated. Where you have provided any of your information to third parties, including, without limitation, marketing companies, advertisers, and product/service providers, we may obtain such personal information and combine it with your Information (as defined herein) and, if we do so, our use of the resulting combined Information will be subject to this Privacy Policy.

Screenshot of a section of the Brooklyn Museum's Privacy Policy.

Reading or even casually browsing the many sections (and subsections) of the Brooklyn Museum's privacy policy is tedious, yet worthwhile. One of the most alarming things in the terms of the policy is the fact that the museum reserves the right to share visitor data with third parties for marketing purposes. Such data includes access to the user's location or other personal information such as usage data or preferences. Although this type of information is beneficial to museum staff, who can then tailor the interactive technologies, onsite displays, and larger museum programming to better serve its diverse audience, this collection of data can be sold or stolen without the user ever knowing.

If the visitor (or online user) wishes to opt out from this term (or even its mailing list), they must contact the museum via email. Given that most online users skip over the privacy policy when agreeing to terms and conditions because it requires a concerted effort and time, it is highly unlikely that they will go to the trouble of emailing the museum in order to opt out.

When using the website or app with Third Party platforms like Facebook or Twitter, the museum is able to access additional information such as the user's legal name, date of birth, country of residence, internet protocol, and contacts. This significantly increases the risk of breaches in personal information, yet few users are aware of the extent to which their privacy is weakened by using something as innocuous as an art museum website or educational mobile app. Browsing the website and using the Ask Brooklyn app lend to enjoyable, enriching experiences, offering visitors a means of accessing educational information with ease, but is easy access to information worth such risks?

Taking into account its current user terms and agreements, it behooves the Brooklyn Museum to adopt the *NMC Horizon Report's* suggestion of drafting a privacy policy that is written in clear, approachable language in order to transparently explain how and why user data

is collected. In doing so, the museum would communicate to its patrons that it respects their privacy and right to opt out from their personal information being shared. What's more, allowing users to opt out by having the ability to instantly erase the personal data that has been collected from the museum's website or mobile app will allow visitors to have better control of their information, and in turn a greater sense of trust and personal investment in the museum. If major tech firms like Apple are vulnerable to cybercriminals as the *NMC Horizon Report* notes, museums must take extra measures to protect their consumers from serious breaches of personal information, especially as visitor engagement often involves this type of data exchange.

References

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Privacy concerns wicked challenge: Those that are complex even to define, much less address.

(2016). *NMC Horizon Report: 2016 Museum Edition*.