

Your Phone Number is Not Only Yours

How your phone number can travel from the services you use to third parties you might not know about.

3 Personas

These **three personas** are not real people, but their characteristics are real. They are based on interviews with real people representing various ages, genders, classes and economic backgrounds. The personas are used to illustrate the similarities and differences in the apps we use. They also show how common it is for certain kinds of users to be asked for their phone numbers.

Kirti, 25

Kirti is a 25-year-old woman who belongs to a high-income group

Akhil, 40

Akhil is a 40-year old man from a low-income group

Priya, 65

Priya is a 65-year-old woman from a middle-income group

The Services

The services listed here represent some of the most popular apps among different demographic groups in India. Around 25-30 services have been selected for each persona, including physical and digital stores and services, all of which ask for a customer or user's phone number. The privacy policies of each of these listed services were studied to primarily ask whether the company collects the phone number, and if so, who they share it with. The accompanying research lists the service categories for the three personas, followed by the specific services in each of those categories.

Dating: Bharatapp, Bumble

Digital tools: Google, Google Home, Google Maps, SHAREit

Entertainment: MX Player, Netflix, Like, BookMyShow

Finance: ICICI, HDFC, Bajaj Allianz, MagicBricks

Health: Apollo, Myra, Practo SRL Diagnostics

Hospitality and eating: OYO, Coffee Day, Swiggy

Information and news: Justdial, Aaj Tak, Traffic Bangalore, Truecaller

Payments: Paytm, Google Pay

Public: IRCTC, ITR, Aadhaar, LIC, Hindustan Petroleum

Security: Hik-Connect, MyGate, bSafe

Shopping: Amazon, Pantaloons, Myntra, Flipkart, More, RentoMojo

Social media: WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, ShareChat, Youtube

Telecom: Airtel, MyJio

Transport: Uber, Dunzo

Travel: MakeMyTrip, Ola

So what do they do with all these phone numbers?

Today a phone is as much a communication device as it is a tracking device. While your phone enables you to communicate with endless analogue and digital services, it also makes you traceable and exposed to many if not all of these services. Your device's phone number, besides being a number that one can call, is also a unique identifier that can travel between your devices and activities. A single phone number is a valuable asset used to verify a person's identity, as well as their behaviour, not only in digital spaces but also in physical spaces. When it is attached to your device's unique identifier and your personal log in details, a phone number can become the most precise identifier of a person – one that stays with us even if we change our phone and our SIM card. Once it's collected, your phone number is shared and traded with other entities: direct subsidiaries, business affiliates and service providers as well as external parties such as advertisers and government agencies, making it one of the most important fingerprints of the digital era. How long have you had your current phone number?

Type of third-party companies your phone number could be shared with: **banking & finance, company employees, data processors, distributors, event organisers, Facebook, government agencies, hospitality, local databases, partners, service providers, third parties, travel and transportation**

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Conceptualisation and research by **Shweta Mohandas** and **Saumyaa Naidu**.