Ethics Report

This report will be about the information Facebook collects about its users. It will consist of three points: how the company organises the data, how it gets this information and finally how ethical it is for Facebook to store and collect this data about its users.

To begin, this report will look at the way Facebook organises its data. All the information is split up into several different folders that detail what the folder will contain, for example the "Friends" folder has multiple html pages that show details such as received and accepted friend requests along with sent and removed friends. All the folders and the data from this folder can be accessed through a central "index.html" page in the main folder that opens up and sorts the data into separate categories. There are two main categories, that split into many subcategories. The first category is the "Your Information" category, which details things such as comments and posts you've made, pages you're a part of, things you've liked or reacted to and basically ways that you have interacted with Facebook itself. These are all things anyone would likely find themselves if they just did a little searching with a bit of time. The second main category is "Information About You" which has sub categories such as "Ads and Businesses" which has information about ads that are relevant to you and businesses that have collected information directly from you, along with other categories that detail a little bit more in depth and sensitive information that is directly useful to companies. It seems that Facebook easily separates the information into a users interactions with the site and also sensitive information about how a person may think and feel and what they would like, which would be very convenient for companies or advertisers that are looking for a specific demographic.

Next, we look at where this information comes from. According to Facebook themselves, it comes from a variety of different sources. A big one is a user's usage, how they interact with Facebook and its other products, including transactions and content they would post. They collect metadata from media you post such as the location a photo was taken or the date a file was created. Another way is through the people that a user directly communicates with, they get information from messages, call logs and also use information about the specific people that you communicate with to associate you with certain groups and interests. Information may also be acquired from business partners that are not neccesarily under Facebook themselves, such as advertisers or shops that use Facebook to promote themselves. If a user has interacted with any of these partners, it is likely that the information on how one used their site is shared with Facebook. The specific devices you use are also used to gather information, from mobile phones, computers and even your television which can give specifics about the technology used in the devices right down to software versions and storage space and also uses the data from cookies stored on your device. Overall, it seems that Facebook gets its data from everywhere you interact with something online, it is able to keep track of your web usage; even if you're not directly using Facebook, and store that information in their database.

Now the question stands, how ethically 'right' is it for Facebook to store and gather this data? Personally, I think it is alright for Facebook to store and gather the data of its users. The reason being is that Facebook does not try to hide or keep a secret that they gather their user's data. A quick search on google will find pages by Facebook explaining what data they collect, how they collect it and what they use it on. As it is a choice to use Facebook and its services, if a user uses Facebook they consent to the tracking of their data. Even if they want to use Facebook without doing this, according to Facebook, they can opt out and not share specific details with Facebook or its partners. For example, location is sensitive information that people may find scary to share with Facebook even if they are okay with the collection of the other types of data. But Facebook gives the option for you to share precise location data with them whenever you access it from a device of yours. They are clear with their intentions and notify you about it instead of keeping it from you. It appears that they are somewhat transparent with the data they collect and give the users complete control over the data they personally share. As the users are using a service Facebook provides for free and gives them control over their own data, I believe it is completely ethical for Facebook to collect and use this data. It may even come to help in disasters, such as when an earthquake happens near you and Facebook asks you to make sure that you're okay which notifies you of the danger and allows your family to know that you're okay, which would be impossible without the use of location tracking data.

Overall, the debate of whether Facebook's methods of collecting and sharing data is a heated one, to say the least. However, further investigation shows that Facebook gives the user a say in the data they give and are also transparent on how they gather and use this data. Because of this, I believe it is completely ethical for Facebook to gather and use data to give you a better user experience, if any of its users disagree with their methods they are free to opt out, or, stop using Facebook services entirely.