

Privacy and Security within China

Data collected by Chinese Government from its citizens:

China being a communist state, is governed by a single party. This gives the governing authorities supreme power of collecting whatever information they require without being questioned by any opposition party. With the rapidly growing internet in China, it is estimated that the content of blogs, emails, chatrooms and web pages are being monitored using 30,000 government censors. (Yanfang Wu, 2011) This surveillance system is also called as the Great Firewall of China. As a part of China's civilian surveillance network, the government monitors all the conversations of WeChat users. (BBC News, 2019) Besides the access to private chats, China has an estimated 200 surveillance cameras installed. These cameras are primarily used for national security purposes such as to scan public places for most wanted people. (The New York Times, 2018) The number of surveillance cameras installed in China amount to four times as compared to the United States. In relation to this surveillance, China has also developed a Social Credit System that measures the trust worthiness of its citizens.

Data collected by Baidu from its customers:

Baidu is a top search engine and internet service company which controls over 75% of China's market. Like Google, Baidu's main source of income is search engine marketing and advertisements. (Fu, 2019) According to its privacy policy, it collects all the information that user provides such as images, name, email address, username, passwords and any communications between the user and Baidu. (Baidu, 2016) Baidu also stores the biometric information of user such as voice, facial features and facial geometry for improvements in their propriety technology. Furthermore, it has access to users address book. Meaning, Baidu can send promotional messages to users' contacts on their behalf.

Positives and Negatives of collecting and using personal information by Chinese Government:

The collection of information by government has been instrumental in reducing the crimes occurring in China. There have been instances wherein using facial recognition technology police were able to catch heroin smugglers, murder suspects were caught in public areas. The technology was also used identify people doing minor offenses such as jaywalking and not paying debts. (The New York Times, 2018) The government has utilized the data collected from surveillance to arrest 13000 terrorists since 2014 and seize 2052 explosive devices. In all, the government has utilized the personal information of citizens well to protect its national security. (The Gaurdian, 2019)

Even though the surveillance has contributed to the safety of citizens, there has been a serious breach of citizens privacy. Such a surveillance is restraining activism and freedom of speech of the Chinese Citizens. There have been several instances in china wherein people talking about Tiananmen incident have been blocked from the WeChat application. Since the government has large amount of sensitive data of the citizens, leak of such data can have serious repercussions.

Positives and Negatives of collecting and using personal information by Baidu:

Baidu promises a personalized, useful and efficient experience to users. It uses natural language processing on users' search history to refine search results. Baidu doctor is a health care project which leverages deep learning algorithms to build chat bots that can diagnose illness of a patient based on patient's voice input. (Forbes, 2017)

Even though Baidu is providing cutting edge services, users are certainly compromising their privacy for using the technology. Robin Li, CEO of Baidu in one of his statements suggested that Chinese users are not bothered about their privacy and are willing to share personal information for ease of access for convenience. (The Times, 2018)

Information Privacy concerns:

The sensitive data of users, such as images, communication and passwords are being stored by Baidu even after the user deactivates the account. Baidu has the right to share all the data collected with the Chinese government as per the laws and regulations. (Baidu, 2016) Baidu also has the right to sell sensitive data of users such as voice and facial information to third parties. Citizens in recent years are raising their concerns on how their private and sensitive information is being used by the private companies. In response, the government is working on policies to restrict private companies from selling sensitive public information. However, the government has turned a blind eye towards public concern over surveillance.

Government surveillance threatens freedom of speech as well as right to privacy. Hence, I feel more concerned about information privacy in relation to the Government. There have been several instances wherein public revolting against the active government are caught using surveillance and punished. Chinese citizens therefore feel insecure to share their opinion on public matters.

Ethical dilemmas:

I agree that national security is of utmost importance to a country. However, as we have seen in the reading materials, the privacy of citizens is often exploited in the pretext of National Security. Is it **ethical** to breach public privacy for national security? According to the first and fourth amendment of United States, it is unlawful to violate a person's privacy without a justifiable cause. The Chinese government runs algorithms on civilian data in order to calculate a citizen score, representing a person's trust worthiness. (Wired, 2017) The ethical question raised here is that can a machine precisely judge a human's trust worthiness? There have been several instances wherein machine was biased, and the innocent have been charged for misdemeanor. Furthermore, China uses surveillance technology to publicly shame lawbreakers. For instance, in the city of Xiangyang the police displayed photos of jaywalkers alongside their names in order embarrass them in front of their colleagues. (The New York Times, 2018) There is a high possibility that an innocent is mistaken by the facial recognition software to be offending. In this case, was it ethical to use **predictive analytics for sentencing**?

Private companies in China are popular for taking advantage of customer data for monetary benefits. For instance, Wei Zexi, a student diagnosed with cancer, relied on Baidu's search engine to find the appropriate hospital for his treatment. He was recommended a top hospital for his treatment by which was in fact not verified by Baidu and was a sponsored link. The student was given wrong diagnosis which lead to his death. (BBC News, 2016) Here, was it ethical for a private company to recommend a top health service based on its monetary benefits?

Policies for protecting privacy:

China has strict rules in terms of internet usage. Meaning, most citizens do not have legal access to international online services such as Google and Yahoo. This is encouraging monopoly on collecting private information in their home market. Even though China has policy to punish using customer data for fraudulent practice (China Government, 2019), the policies and **regulations** for selling of personal information are weak in comparison to Europe and the United States. As a result, there is high volume of Chinese grey market information available at a minimal cost. (Forbes, 2017) Therefore, policies should be set in place in order to make sure right amount of authority is given to the private companies. One way to do it is passing **policies** to break data of big organization into silos based on industry. For instance, Baidu stores sensitive data for health based services and also some harmless data like cookies for user convenience. Currently, all the data is combined and used by the company in order to improve their technology as well as to sell the data to third party. The citizens of China are concerned about the abuse of their sensitive data. We have seen a similar situation in United States, wherein Cambridge Analytica exploited the delicate information of citizens to manipulate elections. (Frontline, 2014) I believe, in order to protect the privacy of citizen a certain level of **government enforcement** is required. (Swire, 1997) If we **co-regulate** the sensitive data such as the health information, citizens will feel safe and be less hesitant in providing information to private firms. **Self-regulation** in storage of harmless data such as cookies can help improve the economy and solve concerns of the private sector. (Ian Weber, 2007) The drawback of the policy is that in the near future there is a possibility that private sectors find a loop hole in it and continue to exploit customer data. To minimize this risk, it is advisable to provide universal access of internet to Chinese citizens with policies controlling the usage.

Word Count: 1348**References**

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