

Privacy in a Globally Connected World

Every person on Earth has a different perception of their own reality. Within the world views that each person establishes for themselves, there is a sense of purpose. This does not necessarily mean everyone knows what they want to do for a career, but rather every person knows, at some degree, that they are alive for a reason. This is the world view that privacy lives in. When billions of people share a place to live but have vastly different views of what is important around them, there must be a canvas for decision. In many societies, there are very different ideologies and rule sets that dictate social norms and laws. However, one common view is that people deserve some form of privacy. Allowing one to retreat to a place of safety and comfort and peace is vitally important to the mental health of social creatures. As much as one may desire the love and affection of the people around them, it is equally important to be able to have the freedom of decision to walk away from that state of being.

In a world riddled with electronic devices and endless connectivity, privacy has become increasingly scarce. Large tech companies like Google often trade, buy, and sell personal data of their users (Solove), and the fact of the matter is that every person in America who lives within reach of a cell signal is constantly being monitored in some way. Whether that is background location services, compiling internet browsing activity for advertisement marketing, or having their voices recorded when using smart phone services. All of this data is compiled and subjected to machine learning algorithms in order to tailor future technological experiences to one's liking (Epstein). Although, at the heart of this idea, targeted advertisement or technological experiences are not innately a bad thing, the potential for dangerous power grabs by large tech companies is very high. Information is power. If large tech companies all have countless terabytes of personal data on their consumers, they can unfairly adjust their business plans to take over entire markets. Well, wait a minute. Why is that bad?

Although increasing consumer happiness by providing them experiences that they are sure to enjoy seems like a benefit of technology, it comes at a high cost; large tech companies with the resources capable of gathering, distributing, buying, and selling large data have a significantly unfair advantage over traditional stores and shops that rely on sales projections only. Thus, I believe developing a monopoly on free markets based solely on the ability to compile data on consumers at a higher rate is extremely unethical. Further, the means of acquiring such large amounts of data on real life people and trading it to others like a commodity is equally as troubling. People are being exploited by the very devices that make their lives "convenient."

From Excerpts from the Catechism:

"2410 Promises must be kept and contracts strictly observed to the extent that the commitments made in them are morally just. A significant part of economic and social life depends on the honoring of

contracts between physical or moral persons - commercial contracts of purchase or sale, rental or labor contracts. All contracts must be agreed to and executed in good faith.”

This excerpt essentially means that the interactions between business and consumer must be just, clairvoyant, and honored. When most people buy smartphones for the first time, they are bombarded with permissions requests and TOS and Privacy Policy agreements. Oftentimes, this comes as such a nuisance to the average person that it is skipped right through and all permissions are granted in order to make the device usable and friendly. However, it is unfair to assume that the average consumer of these products has the time, patience, or even capability to accurately peruse a legal document and decipher its meaning. When signing these permissions and TOS agreements, companies often include that they reserve the right to compile, sell, and trade user data. Because of the lack of transparency of this information, I believe companies that do not present their use of consumer data transparently are at fault for breaking the moral obligations necessary when conducting business.

Yves Le Roux discusses the importance of fighting back against the nothing to hide argument. Essentially, surveillance analysts – especially involved with government work – often claim that users should not be upset by the surveillance as long as they have nothing to hide. This is an important argument to fight against because it inherently breaches our societal contracts of privacy to each other. As fellow neighbors of the Earth, it is important to remember that each person holds equal value; the Golden Rule should always be applied: “Do unto others what you wish they do unto you.” I certainly know that I do not enjoy entertaining the thought of constantly being watched and listened to; it’s unnerving. In order to treat each other with respect and dignity and live in peace with all the people around us, I think collecting personal data of users must be stopped at all costs. The value of having total privacy in a world surrounded by electronic eyes and ears is far greater than the benefit of having targeted advertisements and comfortable technological experiences.

Works Cited

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