Anyone who has been on the internet for any amount of time has seen the pop-up that contains the words, “This website uses cookies.” It seems like they are on every website! Despite this widespread use of cookies, there is not a lot of knowledge about what they do. The pop-ups usually say that cookies are used “to personalize content and ads,” but how do they actually function? And why are websites required to alert you when they are using them? And why do you have to accept them?

***What are cookies, and what do they do?***

HTTP Cookies, better known as just “Cookies,” were originally designed as a method for websites to remember important info, such as shopping cart contents in an online store. Now, there are many different types of cookies. These include session management cookies, personalization cookies, and tracking cookies.

Session management cookies are the things that originally handled shopping carts. In their modern usage, they still have a hand in managing shopping carts, but now they do it by keeping track of which user is assigned to which shopping cart. This is because shopping carts are usually handled by a database on the server that is running the website. Session management cookies are also used in logging into websites. Basically, the website will send the client a cookie that has a completely unique session identifier. When the login is complete, the server remembers the identifier and grants access to the website.

Personalization Cookies remember information about the user. They do this to show content to the user that the user will be interested in it. It personalizes the content. These also remember password information so that the browser can autofill the login info.

Tracking Cookies track how the user browses the internet. Corporations use these to analyze people’s purchasing habits and play to them. Tracking cookies work by basically sending the cookie to the server from the browser every time that a new page on the website is opened. This is the sketchy cookie because this data is not only analyzed by the corporation gathering the data, but it is also auctioned off for other corporations to benefit from manipulating.

While cookies are vital to the modern internet experience we have today, they still can be used for ill. It is because of this that we browsers of the internet are required to know when they are being used, and for us to accept them. They can be used to manipulate us, but they can also make our quality of life much better.