Essay Reflection: Ethics In Surveillance Capitalism

***Abstract*—The purpose of this essay is to present the case that, in accordance with the ACM Code of Ethics, it is morally acceptable to work for a MAMAA company that engages in surveillance capitalism while actively supporting privacy protections, providing users more control over their data, and advocating for corporate transparency as well as accountability.** While the extensive gathering and monetization of personal data under surveillance capitalism presents serious ethical issues, this essay explains how computer scientists can navigate these environments in an ethical manner by using their power to promote responsible data practices. Moreover, this essay considers how these moral obligations and challenges relate to my own professional aspirations in computer science, highlighting the significance of maintaining a balance between ethical decision-making and technological advancement.

Keywords—The Moral Way, Privacy Protection, User Autonomy, Corporate Integrity.

I. Introduction

In the modern digital age, there is a growing ethical discussion concerning the influence of technology corporations, particularly the MAMAA giants (Meta, Apple, Microsoft, Amazon, and Alphabet), on society due to their expanding dominance. One of the most urgent issues is surveillance capitalism, a business model where a great deal of personal information is gathered and sold, frequently without the consumers' knowledge or consent. This approach has created a great deal of concern about privacy, autonomy, and the ability for companies to influence consumer behavior. **The purpose of this essay is to present the case that, in accordance with the ACM Code of Ethics, it is morally acceptable to work for a MAMAA company that engages in surveillance capitalism while actively supporting privacy protections, providing users more control over their data, and advocating for corporate transparency as well as accountability.**

II. Supporting Arguments

A. Enforcing Privacy Protection

Promoting strong privacy protections is one of the main ways computer scientists can act morally within MAMAA businesses. It is clear that surveillance capitalism excels in large-scale user data collection, which is performed without people's full awareness or consent. The ACM Code of Ethics, which highlights the commitment to preserve privacy and the confidentiality of data, can be followed by ethical experts working from within to create systems and policies that prioritize user privacy [2]. For example, engineers can guarantee that data collection and usage are visible and consent-driven by putting privacy principles into practice. We know that privacy is a fundamental component of the system's architecture. The significance of data security has been emphasized by my personal experience working on data analytics initiatives. Even when conducting complex analyses, I was able to safeguard user identities by utilizing anonymization methods. For instance, I employed the use of data masking, which is essentially replacing confidential data with randomized values. Based on this experience, it is my moral duty as computer scientists to prioritize protecting user privacy. A fantastic example of ethical corporate practices is Apple's privacy policy in Safari. The browser has sophisticated technologies to protect user privacy, such as Intelligent Tracking Prevention, which uses machine learning to hide users' IP addresses from trackers, protecting their privacy online [1]. Security is further improved by Safari's Private Browsing mode, which locks windows while not in use and stops searches, browsing history, and data from being saved. However, privacy by itself is insufficient, as it's crucial to provide users with the ability to manage their data. This can be guaranteed by providing them with more direct access and control over it. This idea leads us to the next crucial ethical approach, providing users with greater control over their data.

B. Empowering User Autonomy

Empowering users with greater control over their personal data is essential to operating ethically within a MAMAA organization, in addition to privacy safeguards. In order to give users the ability to decide if and how they want to engage in digital environments, professionals are required by the ACM Code of Ethics to make sure that users are informed about how their data is gathered, processed, and used [2]. Computer scientists can maximize user autonomy and reduce unethical data exploitation by creating systems that provide detailed control alternatives, such as the ability to opt out of data sharing, revoke consent, or even customize privacy settings. I worked on a platform during one of my side projects that let users choose precisely what personal data they felt safe sharing with third-party services. A few examples would be browsing history, location data, and personal contact information. This experience demonstrated the value of giving users options that are obvious and encouraging transparency and trust between users and the platform. A real world example would be Apple's "Privacy Nutrition Labels" feature, which provides users with full insight into how apps handle their data [3]. The labels provide concise as well as easy to read descriptions of the data that apps collect, including location, contact, financial, and health information. In this way, users have the flexibility to decide whether to download or use an app, knowing in advance what information will be gathered and how it will be used. Increasing user control is a good thing, but companies that are secretive about their data practices can cause ethical issues. This takes us to the following crucial point; the significance of corporate responsibility and transparency.

C. Encouraging Corporate Integrity

One of the most important aspects of ethical behavior in a MAMAA company is fostering corporate transparency and holding organizations accountable for their data operations. Computer scientists have an ethical obligation to be truthful and open about their work, especially when it affects the public's well being as stated by the ACM Code of Ethics [2]. A necessary part of transparency must involve clear communication with users regarding the types of data collected, their intended uses, and the associated risks, such as potential breaches. Businesses need to be more proactive in providing users with information, as it builds trust and empowers people to choose platforms and services wisely. I came to understand how crucial it is for companies to communicate with users effectively when I was working on privacy settings for a data-driven application. Our development team worked hard to make sure privacy policies were written in a comprehensible manner. As a result, there was an increase in user satisfaction and trust. A great example of promoting transparency is Apple. Users can easily control how apps monitor their data across other apps and websites with its App Tracking Transparency feature, and they can opt-out if they so desire [3]. Apple guarantees accountability by adhering to privacy standards and demonstrates its dedication to customer privacy by

providing these privacy alternatives in a manner that is clear. This demonstrates how important accountability and transparency are to fulfilling businesses' moral obligations to users.

III. Conclusion

In all, addressing the ethical concerns of privacy is a challenging task in pursuit of moral accountability and engagement in the technology industry. However, as technology professionals, we can respect the values outlined by the ACM Code of Ethics by emphasizing privacy measures, giving consumers more choice over their data, and pushing for corporate accountability and transparency. As my career progresses, these ethical issues will continue to play a vital role in my work, directing my interactions with corporations and their data practices to guarantee a more transparent digital society. *These lessons are especially important today because they promote integrity, trust, and ethical use of technology.*

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References

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