Morality of infringement of data privacy

Companies are increasing their access to user’s data

Why is data privacy important?

Why are corporations interested in user’s data?

What can happen with a breach in data privacy?

Analyze by applying ethical models, egoism, Kantianism, utilitarianism

Types of data companies collect:

* Personal data: gender, SSN, web browser cookies, device IDs
* Engagement data: how a user interacts with a website, advertisements, or even social media
* Behavioral data: transactions, repeated actions, or mouse movements
* Attitudinal data: consumer satisfaction, what the user wants in a product

How data is collected:

* Interaction with websites, social media
* Capturing user statistics from custom records from purchases or support requests
* Location based advertisements from tracking the user’s ip address
* Many other ways

Why they want data:

* Improve the customer experience
* Use statistics to adjust business strategy
* Sell data to 3rd party data collection services

Why it is bad:

* Just as reputable companies can have access this data, malicious users can also gain access. Like people that make spyware, adware, or malware. Can create fake ads.
* Personalized marketing can be overwhelming. Think spam in your email box
* More difficult to remain anonymous. In countries with less freedom, the government can use data to track people, and what they do online.
* Malicious users can track location on social media based on your posts, for example they can see when you are not home.

The issue with collecting vast amounts of user data is interesting because it is almost never done with malicious intent. Companies are seeking to improve their marketing campaigns, or product lineup based on what is popular, which can be very useful to users. Companies having your data is actually very beneficial to the user because it greatly improves the user’s experience. The issue lies in what can happen to this data. Often the data that is collected does not stay at the company that collected it. A user’s data changes hands many times because of the profitable business of data collection. Your data being spread like this increases the chances of a data leak, which could have very negative effects.

This essay will analyze the act of companies collecting user data by applying two ethical models. Utilitarianism which takes an acts consequence into account, and Kantianism which has no regard for an acts consequences.

Utilitarianism: not egalitarian (does not care about equal distribution of happiness), overall happiness deems data collection to be moral. Analyze using rule utilitarianism: “if a company is to collect data that is relevant to improving the customer experience and satisfaction, it is moral”. Rule utilitarianism “to be moral is for most of society to act according to defined rules”

Kantianism: companies will is to provide the greatest user experience and improve customer satisfaction. Maxim “as the company we ought to collect user data such that we are able to meet our goals in terms of improvement of the user experience and customer satisfaction”. Categorical imperative “collect data to provide the best product”. Universalization test passes, because if everyone were to follow the maxim it would be good. So it is moral. Obviously, if the user has malicious intent, as in the will was bad, the act would be immoral because it would fail the universalization test.