

Nathan Toepke  
4320 Software Engineering

I chose the retailer selling personal data for profit as my ethical analysis. I find no doubt that this sale would be completely unethical in multiple regards. As we talked about in class, the idea that a person owns all related data to them has grown increasingly popular in recent years, so much so that places like the European Union have seen it as a legal right for their citizens. Expanding on that, it would seem logical that it would require some form of consent or opt out from the customer in order for the retailer to sell such data purely for profit, as well as a disclosure that the data is being sold in the first place, perhaps even indicating to whom it is being sold to.

There are also major ethical concerns when collecting and saving any sort of data. Given the open-endedness of this scenario, the data collected could be purchase history, emails, or even credit card data. The most blatantly awful would be selling data on credit cards or purchasing data, which would erode all trust in anyone trying to buy anything from a retailer. Selling customer lists, like mailing addresses or emails, while not as horrible, I still think is immoral along the lines of what I have previously mentioned. However, selling some data along the lines of customer sales seems morally ok. Surely if a retailer has data on how many t-shirts they sold, they can sell that data to anyone they want. Now what if they sell data on average shirts sold to a customer? Seems fine, and maybe they even ship with an anonymous customer id that, while being unique to each customer, does not necessarily imply selling out any data on the specific customers. As long as there is no way for these customers to be traced or followed when the data is sold, then I think selling data for profit would be fine, but that really isn't what this scenario addresses.