Tutorial 1: Understanding Internet Tracking

Tech companies (including but not limited to social media companies) collect, analyze and act on the data they collect about their users. Whenever you accept terms of agreement, you ‘give permission’ for this data to be collected and used. In today’s tutorial, we’re going to examine this phenomenon by choosing one of the following platforms (below) and explore the data they collect:

**Part 1: [On Your Own] Explore the Links Provided**

Spend about 15 minutes looking at the following links:

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|  | **Link** | **Notes** |
| Google | [6 links that will show you what Google knows about you](https://medium.com/productivity-in-the-cloud/6-links-that-will-show-you-what-google-knows-about-you-f39b8af9decc) | * Analyze both your school and personal Google accounts * Check out all 6 links and associated data (from the link). * Consider how this data benefits Google. Consider whether and how it benefits you * If you turned on any privacy settings in the past, when did you do it? Why did you do it? |
| Meta | Article: [Facebook Showed Me My Data Is Everywhere And I Have Absolutely No Control Over It](https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/katienotopoulos/facebook-advertisers-data-brokers-car-dealerships) | The article discusses the settings for [Facebook](https://accountscenter.facebook.com/ads/), but if you’re more of an Instagram user, check out the [Instagram privacy settings](https://accountscenter.instagram.com/ads/) |
| Where are you logged in? | [Your Social Media Fingerprint](https://robinlinus.github.io/socialmedia-leak/) | Why is it a problem if any website can figure out if you’re logged in to selected accounts (we’ll discuss this more towards the end of the semester)? |
| EFF: Are you anonymous? | [Panopticlick](https://panopticlick.eff.org/) | Click the button to analyze your browser and wait a minute. Then analyze your results. Big idea: by combining a series of benign browser settings, your browser can uniquely identify you. Madness! |
| Psychometrics & Categorization | [Apply Magic Sauce](https://applymagicsauce.com/demo) | This demo shows how your data can be fed into models in order to put you into various marketing categories. Remember “[The Great Hack?](https://www.netflix.com/title/80117542)” |

**Part 2: [In Groups] Discuss (15 Minutes)**

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|  | **Category** | **Discussion Questions** |
| 1. | Google | 1. Did anything surprise you about the scope / scale / type of data that Google collects? Yes, I was surprised at the scale at which Google can track data. Google can even track data through third-party websites and apps. Google can create a profile about me and target ads that would attract my online and offline interests/behaviors. 2. How does Google benefit from the data collected about your behavior on their platform? See if you can come up with at least 3 **specific** ways that Google monetizes this information. Google can use the data collected to generate revenue. 1) It can target ads to me, 2) Collect data (location, purchases, browsing history, etc.) and then sell that to other companies, and 3) Study and analyze my online behavior for their own business strategy or business strategy of partner companies. 3. How does this collection of your behavioral data benefit you? I think it helps with convenience and a more personalized experience online. It can use auto-complete features that save time. 4. Note that you can turn off these settings. Would you want to do that? Why or why not? What are the consequences for you and for the platform? I could turn it off, but I’ve sadly become accustomed to the personalization and optimized features. It’s convenient for Google to have my information to save time and make online activity easier. If I turned these settings off, the benefit would be that Google would have less information on my behavior and I would have more privacy. By turning off the settings, it would reduce Google’s data collection and would limit their ability to generate revenue for their gain. 5. Why should we care about this? Data collection raises significant privacy issues. I do think it’s important to be informed and cognizant of data collection and its effect on privacy. There are significant social and ethical implications with this type of data collection and how that data is used (phishing schemes, political advertising, government surveillance, etc.). I do wish that companies like Google were more transparent with how it collects data and how that data is used. |
| 2. | Meta | 1. Did anything surprise you about the scope / scale / type of data that Meta collects? 2. Were the advertising categories / companies listed relevant to your interests? Why or why not? How do you think those advertisers got there? 3. How does Meta benefit from the data collected about your behavior on their platform? See if you can come up with at least 3 **specific** ways that Meta monetizes this information. 4. How does this collection of your behavioral data benefit you? 5. Note that you can turn off these settings. Would you want to do that? Why or why not? What are the consequences for you and for the platform? 6. Why should we care about this? |
| 3. | Your Social media Footprint & Panopticlick | 1. Your Social media Footprint: As Lou Montulli noted in the Planet Money podcast you listened to, websites shouldn’t be able to access other websites’ info within your browser. Each website should be sandboxed. However, there are a number of ways that websites can “cross-talk” through the browser. Why might this be a problem? 2. Panopticlick: Why does it matter that you can be uniquely identified from benign metadata sent from your browser? |
| 4. | Psychometrics & Categorization | As shown from the “Apply Magic Sauce Demo,” the data you generate can be fed into a model in order to put you into various marketing categories. How might these categories…   1. Benefit you? 2. Be used to manipulate you? 3. Influence the news and information you access? 4. Shape your access to resources and opportunities? |

**Part 3: What to Turn In**

1. Make a copy of this document
2. Pick one of the 4 categories above – (1) Google, (2) Meta, (3) Social Media Footprint + Panopticlick, and (4) Psychometrics & Categorization.
3. Answer all of the questions associated with that category from your own perspective.

Submit your answers to the Moodle by uploading this Google Doc as a PDF or Word Document.