

# Assignment #4

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PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES | 4314 Section 002

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This Assignment is submitted towards  
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# Personal Data and Business Practices of GAFAM

## Introduction

As the growth of the Internet exploded in the 1990s with the ‘.com’ bubble the world, specifically the 1<sup>st</sup> world nations, began to see a shift from traditional means of communication and transactions to the Internet. Though the Internet was far slower at this time than now many businesses began to see the usefulness of the internet as a tool to connect people, particularly Apple with their ‘smart phone’. Over time the integration of the Internet into every single aspect of daily life has brought with it greater conveniences as well as concerning business practices of the ones with the greatest command over the Internet. GAFAM (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, and Microsoft) have, over the 2000s and 2010s, created for themselves a tech oligarchy and arguably have more command over the Internet than most governments. As part of their business practice each of these companies acquire information about their consumers (as part of the agreement to use the service). They then take this information and use it for their own purposes, sell it to third parties (particularly advertisers), but most importantly make use of this information without the input of the ones whom the information belongs. Overtime these practices have led to greater public concern over their personal data and ePrivacy. Despite these concerns GAFAM continues to use their influence to put down any political regulations over the usage and collection. As a result of GAFAM’s actions many ethical issues have begun to crop up. This paper will discuss the reasons why these business practices exist, why they are so concerning to many individuals, and perhaps suggest ways that individuals or regulatory bodies can use to help address this ethical quandary.

## Pros

Due to this scenario involving two parties of people, both who are affected very differently by personal data collection, this section will highlight the positive viewpoints of both parties. For both parties data collection is useful to foster new conveniences that are helpful in everyday life. GAFAM often exchanges the collection of personal data for the usage of services for free. For example, Google uses their cloud services to provide its users with the capabilities to make spreadsheets, word documents, and presentations along with many other services completely for free. Furthermore, their google accounts are provided with 15Gb of data with no cost to the user. Another example of mutual benefit is contact tracing. By using their data collection over a user's location and the voluntary disclosure of covid contractions by the user Google and Apple can provide their users with up-to-date information about Covid-19 outbreaks (Mast 2020). This allows users to protect themselves and their families from the virus and helps stop the spread of the virus. All in all there are, undoubtedly, uses for personal data collection that benefit society as a whole.

## Cons

Much like the previous section both parties have differing viewpoints; therefore, this section will highlight the negative viewpoint of both parties towards personal data collection. Due to the value that is inherent in the personal information of millions of people GAFAM are constantly under scrutiny of how they secure this data. However, these company are not perfect, and it is only a matter of time before another data breach occurs. Because of these concerns, and GAFAM's adavance towards data collection, these companies must often update their systems with new means of protecting their data from malicious third parties. The problem the public

have with these companies, however, is that the adjustments they make that helps protect data are often preceded by data breaches of the vulnerable system. Therefore, the damage to the individuals has already occurred long before these protections get added. As a result, many people have begun to desire regulation over how their personal data is collected. Google recently has had to update their Google chat with a slew of new features that are designed to prevent data leakage (Puri 2021). Furthermore, these companies often make use of data that the public did not consent to them using for their own purposes. Facebook, for example, created a facial recognition system on their app that became a vulnerability, users could scan photos of another user to get access, but Facebook went even further by trying to use the images that they had collected of users to store biometric data for “Face tagging” (Chapman 2021). Considering these things, it is understandable that the public would want to see these companies to be more well regulated for their own personal protection.

### Conclusion

Considering all these things I think that the tech industry either needs to come up with a better solution to protect the public or they will inevitably be hit with major regulation. It appears, to me, that the crux of the issue isn't so much that these companies collect data of their users, but more so a service issue. These five companies hold some of the greatest control over the internet currently; enough that any action of their part can be just as influential as government regulation. Compound their influence with how they aren't beholden to the public that often must use their services (because there aren't any other competitors other than these five, if that). The problem is that there isn't much choice left other than these giant corporations. The public is essentially stuck with Google, Microsoft, or Amazon for cloud computing services, Facebook (and Twitter) for social media and Microsoft or Apple for operating systems along with many other things. If I

want an operating system that doesn't try to collect my data I have to use Linux, which doesn't have the same capabilities or worldwide acceptance as Apple OS or Windows. To break it down to simple sentence these companies don't have enough competition which allows them to get away with business practices that actively harm the public. To remedy this the public should ask their respective representatives to look for ways to regulate how these companies collect personal information and give the public more control over how their data is collected and used. Furthermore, the judicial system should investigate whether they should use anti-trust lawsuits to break these companies apart to help foster more competition. Lastly, companies who collect personal data need to be more transparent with the public as to where the data is going and how it is being used. To conclude, these current business practices are not sustainable for the general public if these companies are always playing catch-up to the ones exploiting their vulnerabilities and therefore the protection of personal data needs to be given over to those who care most about protecting it.

## Appendix A: References

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## Appendix B: Integrity Form


### **CSE - 4314 Professional Practices Academic Integrity**

**In order for your Assignment/Homework/Project to be accepted you must read the following, sign this form and attach it to your papers (as the last page of your assignment).**

**Academic Integrity:** Students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

*I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.*

*I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.*

Student Signature: 

Student Id Number: 1001401200

*Note: Must be read, signed and attached (stapled) as last page of homework or assignment. If it is a team assignment then all team members must read, sign and attach a single copy of the Academic Integrity form to the team's paper as the last page. If not properly attached as last page a 2 point penalty will be assessed after grade assigned*