

17:46

VoLTE 4G+ 67%



Austin Tan You wei

online



Info



Never gonna give you up

Bio

Posts

Archived Posts

No posts yet...

Publish photos and videos to display on  
your profile page



## Reflection on Social Media Data Collection: An Empty Profile's Hidden Footprint

For this assignment, I examined my Instagram profile, which appears largely inactive—no published posts, a meme-inspired bio (“Never gonna give you up”), and only archived content. Despite the lack of visible activity, downloading my data revealed how much the platform still infers about me.

### Data Collected and Assumptions Made

Instagram's data file included:

- **Basic Demographics:** Accurate age, gender, and location (pulled from my sign-up details).
- **Activity Logs:** Time spent online, searches (e.g., meme pages, travel hashtags), and interactions (likes on friends' posts).
- **Inferred Interests:** Assigned categories like “humor,” “pop culture,” and “travel” based on my bio and sporadic engagement.
- **Ad Preferences:** Targeted ads for meme merchandise and travel gear, despite never posting about these topics.

### Reflection on Accuracy and Surprises

- **Accuracy:** The assumptions were partially correct (e.g., humor aligned with my bio), but ads for “vegan food” were irrelevant, likely triggered by a single accidental click.
- **Surprises:** Even with no posts, Instagram tracked my “off-platform” activity (websites I visited via Instagram links). The “archived posts” section also showed deleted content I assumed was gone permanently.

### Feelings About Corporate Data Collection

The experience was unsettling. While personalized ads can be convenient, the depth of tracking—especially for inactive users—feels disproportionate. Companies profit from subtle behaviors (e.g., lingering on a post) without explicit consent. My “empty” profile wasn't truly empty; it was a data point in a larger surveillance economy.

### Digital Identity and Privacy

This exercise revealed how **digital identity** is constructed from fragments—even a meme in a bio or a second spent hovering over an ad. Privacy feels illusory: “archiving” or deleting content doesn't erase it from algorithms. It's a reminder to be intentional online, but also to demand transparency about how platforms use (and monetize) passive participation.