[formal writing] Privacy analysis

Objectives

- Reflect on your own personal connections to data privacy

- Observe how you personally are affected by organizations' privacy decisions

- Apply concepts from the course readings through formal writing

Due date

Tuesday, October 3, 10pm CT, on Moodle (see below for how to turn this in).

Your task

For this assignment, you will examine how much "The Internet" knows about you, through a combination of observation and analysis.

Pre-writing: Observation and data gathering

Before you begin writing, you will need to gather some data about your online interactions. For simplicity, we'll concentrate mostly on websites and a few data feed-based apps that are likely to have sponsored content (like TikTok, Instagram, etc.).

1. Pick a 24-hour period over which you will gather data. I suggest that you do this in the first half of Week 3.

2. Over this period, keep a list of all of the websites you visit and feed-based apps that you use. You don't have to obsessively write these down throughout the day -- I suggest taking a few minutes once every 1-2 hours (that you're awake!!) to write down all of the sites / apps you remember using over the previous 1-2 hours. (If you forget a few, that's fine.)

3. Once or twice during this period, when you are on a site or app that has ads or sponsored content, jot down what ads and/or sponsored content appear in your feed.

4. Select 2 of the sites you visited often during this period. Enter the URLs into [The Markup's Blacklight tool](#) and record what the tool returns. (You can take notes, screenshots, print it to a PDF, etc. I'm happy to help you think through what makes the most sense for you.)

Writing up your experiences

Once you've gathered and looked at your data, write a 3-5 page single-spaced essay analyzing your findings. Your analysis should address the following points.

- **Summarize your Internet usage.** How many sites and apps did you visit / use throughout the day? What were your usage patterns -- was your usage spread out over the day, or concentrated into a few sessions? What sites / apps did you visit / use most often? Was this a typical day in terms of Internet usage?

- **Describe what "The Internet" knows about you.** Present your findings from what Blacklight returned, as well as the ads and sponsored content that appeared in your feeds. Feel free to include screen shots if you think this will help illustrate your points. What themes emerge? Are there any

connections that you found between the content and ads you saw on various sites and feeds? (Feel free to speculate here if you are not 100% sure if there's a connection.)

- **Discuss the privacy implications of your findings.** How did what you learned fit, or fail to fit, your understanding of personal privacy coming into this course? What concepts and points from the readings and discussions in class related to privacy inform the way you view your findings, or provide context to your findings? What are the ethical implications of your findings?

Helpful hints

- Your essay should have a clear introduction and a strong conclusion.

- The questions posed by each of the prompts should serve as guidelines rather than strict formulas. In other words, I don't expect your essay to answer each of the questions in turn. Instead, you should make sure that your essay holistically answers the questions in an easy to read and follow manner.

- Include the list of sites you visited (that you are comfortable disclosing) as an appendix at the end of the essay. The appendix does not count as part of the page limits.

- If you want to include screen shots but are not sure how to do so, come and see me and I'll be happy to walk you through it.

- I've found that Blacklight does not always work as well on sites / apps like Instagram or TikTok that rely heavily on you being logged in. In other words, because it doesn't evaluate a site through your account, it misses a lot of the tracking that goes on. Keep this in mind when figuring out which sites to run through Blacklight.

- Please use APA style citations. You do not have to cite individual sites you discuss in your essay. You should include a citation if you use an idea from one of the class readings or if you're directly quoting something from a website (for instance, a site's privacy policies).

- Please do not include identifying information in your essay, your essay title, or your file name so that I can grade blindly.

Evaluation

This essay counts towards your Formal Writing grade in this course, and will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- **Structure and flow**: This includes the overall organization of the essay and how easy it is to read and follow along.

- **Presentation of data**: This includes how clearly you describe and summarize the data you collected.

- **Strength of analysis**: How well are you able to connect the dots for the reader and describe what you discovered?

- **Integration of course concepts**: How well are you able to connect your observations and analysis to the material from class?

Please see the rubric (coming soon) for more detailed information.

Your essay will receive an overall grade of Exemplary / Proficient / Developing / Not Assessable.

You may revise this essay.

Turning your assignment in

Upload your file (PDF or Word) to Moodle on this page -- if you scroll to the bottom of this page, you should see a space to upload your essay.