



# **How Social Media Platforms Exploit User Data and Labor Without Sharing Profits**

**Course Code: CSE 487**

**Submitted To**

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## **Introduction**

Social media platforms are widely used by billions of people around the world for various purposes, such as communication, entertainment, education, activism, and commerce. However, behind the seemingly free and convenient services, there is a hidden cost that users pay in terms of their data and labor. Social media platforms collect massive amounts of user data, such as personal information, preferences, behaviors, locations, contacts, and interactions, and use them for various purposes, such as advertising, marketing, research, and product development. Moreover, social media platforms rely on user-generated content, such as posts, comments, likes, shares, reviews, ratings, and feedback, to create value and attract more users and advertisers. However, users do not receive any compensation or recognition for their data and labor, while social media platforms reap huge profits from them. This scenario raises an ethical dilemma: Is it fair and right for social media platforms to exploit user data and labor without sharing profits with users?

## **Ethical Dilemma and Possible Decisions**

The ethical dilemma in this scenario can be framed as follows: Should social media platforms share profits with users who provide data and labor that create value for the platforms? There are two possible decisions that can be made in response to this dilemma:

- Decision A: Yes, social media platforms should share profits with users who provide data and labor that create value for the platforms. This decision is based on the principle of fairness and justice, which requires that people should be treated equally and receive what they deserve according to their contributions. Users who provide data and labor that create value for social media platforms are entitled to a fair share of the profits generated by the platforms. This decision also respects the rights and dignity of users as autonomous agents who have control over their own data and labor.
- Decision B: No, social media platforms should not share profits with users who provide data and labor that create value for the platforms. This decision is based on the principle of utility and efficiency, which requires that actions should produce the greatest good for the greatest number of people. Users who provide data and labor that create value for social media platforms benefit from the free and convenient services offered by the platforms. Sharing profits with users would reduce the incentives and resources for social media platforms to innovate and improve their services, which would harm the overall welfare of society.

## **Ethical Decision-Making Process**

To make an ethical decision in this scenario, one can follow a systematic process that involves the following steps:

- Step 1: Define the problem (consult PLUS filters). The problem in this scenario is that social media platforms exploit user data and labor without sharing profits with users. This problem can be evaluated using the PLUS filters, which are four ethical dimensions:

Policies (Is it consistent with organizational policies?), Legal (Is it acceptable under applicable laws?), Universal (Does it conform to universal principles?), Self (Does it match personal values?).

- Step 2: Seek out relevant assistance, guidance and support. To make an informed decision in this scenario, one can seek out relevant assistance, guidance and support from various sources, such as experts, peers, mentors, stakeholders, codes of ethics, ethical theories, ethical decision-making models, and ethical frameworks.
- Step 3: Identify alternatives. The alternatives in this scenario are Decision A (share profits with users) and Decision B (do not share profits with users).
- Step 4: Evaluate the alternatives (consult PLUS filters). The alternatives in this scenario can be evaluated using the PLUS filters as follows:
  1. Decision A (share profits with users):
    - Policies: This decision may not be consistent with the existing organizational policies of most social media platforms, which often claim ownership or license over user data and content.
    - Legal: This decision may not be acceptable under some applicable laws or regulations that govern data protection or intellectual property rights.
    - Universal: This decision conforms to universal principles of fairness and justice, which require that people should be treated equally and receive what they deserve according to their contributions.
    - Self: This decision matches personal values of respect and dignity for users as autonomous agents who have control over their own data and labor.
  2. Decision B (do not share profits with users):
    - Policies: This decision is consistent with the existing organizational policies of most social media platforms, which often claim ownership or license over user data and content.
    - Legal: This decision is acceptable under some applicable laws or regulations that govern data protection or intellectual property rights.
    - Universal: This decision does not conform to universal principles of fairness and justice, which require that people should be treated equally and receive what they deserve according to their contributions.
    - Self: This decision does not match personal values of respect and dignity for users as autonomous agents who have control over their own data and labor.
- Step 5: Make the decision. Based on the evaluation of the alternatives using the PLUS filters, one can make the decision that best fits one's ethical standards and preferences. In this case, one may choose Decision A (share profits with users) as the more ethical decision, as it respects the rights and dignity of users and promotes fairness and justice.

- Step 6: Implement the decision. To implement the decision, one can take action and communicate the decision to the relevant parties, such as social media platforms, users, advertisers, regulators, and society. One can also explain the rationale and justification for the decision, using ethical theories or frameworks to support the argument. For example, one can use the rights approach to argue that users have inherent rights to their own data and labor, and that social media platforms should respect and protect those rights by sharing profits with users. Alternatively, one can use the social contract theory to argue that users and social media platforms should agree on a fair and mutually beneficial arrangement that reflects their respective interests and contributions.
- Step 7: Evaluate the outcome. To evaluate the outcome of the decision, one can monitor the results and feedback of the decision, and assess its impact on the stakeholders and society. One can also reflect on the lessons learned from the decision-making process, and identify areas for improvement or revision.

## Reference

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