

## Assignment 6

### **Part I:**

For one week in January 2012, data scientists manipulated almost 700,000 Facebook user's news feeds to view content that was either positive or negative to analyze how it would affect their mood. The study found out that skewing a Facebook user's content resulted in the user mirroring the emotion of their feed in their status message, for example a negative feed would cause a user to make a negative status message. While emotional feeds would cause people to write and reflect on it themselves, a bland feed will cause the user to write less due to less engagement. The experiment was conducted before an IRB was consulted, and since this was the case the IRB could not do much because the human research was already done. It was assumed that the researchers did not see users' confidential data, therefore no further review was required and it could be analyzed without harming anyone's privacy. Facebook manipulating news feeds happens all the time and they do it within ethical regulations clearing them from anything that can harm their business. However it is an open ethical question because Facebook's extensive terms of service did not include the word "research" while the experiment was conducted.

### **B.**

The mood experiment is unethical in nature because the user's did not really know that their content was being manipulated so that they can be analyzed for data. Although the paper could help social networks in the future to design their platforms to signify a certain emotion throughout their feed, the form of data collection is not justified. Letting people know about the experiment could have led to a placebo effect, but that could be fixed by separating users into

groups and determining the statistical significance between them. Future experiments should learn from this ethically and make sure their users are clearly informed before data collection. People respond very negatively when they find out they were used as a subject in an experiment they had no idea about; the outlash from users after Facebook went public with the experiment shows that this sentiment is shared between users on the platform. Studies that seek to understand how the human mind reacts to certain stimuli can be very helpful in today's society. Mental health is a big issue currently and social networks can be engineered to alleviate some problems. Social networks can be used to influence mood as the study indicates, so using a platform to aid mental health can be very beneficial to society. Experiments, such as the mood experiment, happen all the time in order to increase website clicks or something similar. Developers may show different users a certain message to see if it persuades them to buy their product more, they then would analyze the data to see which design gives them the most revenue. This could be either ethical and well-structured or it could be designed with malicious intent. Dark patterns have been used by developers many times to make a user pay for something they do not realize to increase revenue. As long as companies are ethical in the methods of testing and there is no malicious intent, experiments can help develop social networks.

## **PART II:**

1.
  - a. What data does TikTok gather?
  - b. Tiktok gathers an abnormal amount of data and can gather everything from what you say to your friends, data on your location, and other multitudes of data that can be used to tweak their user specific feed.

- c. Knowing that TikTok gathers all of this data it feels like user privacy is being invaded upon. The app collects data from other social network connections and even what you say, which seems very unethical to me. The owners have a way to collect all of this data without getting in trouble, therefore it is up to the user to determine if it is worth the risk of having private data exposed.
- 2.
- a. Does the TikTok app do anything shady?
  - b. TikTok was found accessing people's iPhone clipboards every few seconds, and bugs were found that could let attackers have access to personal data. Also the company had to pay a fine for violations of America's children's privacy law.
  - c. TikTok having this absurd amount of information and access to people's phones seems shady to me. The company can try their best to prevent the data from getting leaked, but a bug by developers can lead to people's private information being stolen. Privacy is a big issue with the app and although the company itself may not have ill intent, the data stored might be accessible to a third party.
- 3.
- a. What are the U.S. government's concerns about TikTok?
  - b. TikTok is under national security review after lawmakers accused it of censoring some videos to satisfy the Chinese Government. The bigger concern is that China could collect personal data about millions of Americans, due to China being the ultimate boss.
  - c. Having concern about China collecting data on millions of Americans is definitely justified, from what they collect it can filter people based on specific

requirements. A foreign country can push its objective on people who have no idea, going as far to even censor some agendas that do not meet the criteria of the business's ideologies.

4.

- a. Does TikTok data get stored in China?
- b. Most of the data flowed into cloud services such as Amazon Web Services, but the data could then be transferred to China. A lawsuit claimed that TikTok sent data to several Internet addresses in China without citation.
- c. Finding out whether or not TikTok sends data to China in order to be stored should be an open investigation rather than seeing traffic being flowed. There could be many subsidiaries that the data goes through have not been public, and could fall into a legal loophole. Location of data being stored should be openly known to the public so that they know for sure where it is.

5.

- a. Can the Chinese government force TikTok to hand over your data?
- b. TikTok has said that the Chinese government has never asked for user data and that they would refuse such a request. TikTok however says "We may disclose your information to respond to subpoenas, court orders, legal process, law enforcement requests, legal claims, or government inquiries." without specifying the government.
- c. China probably has multiple ways of collecting information on people in America that are much more secretive. TikTok is under a lot of stress with its data

management and it seems like if the Chinese government tried anything it would be known.

6.

- a. Is it better or worse than Facebook?
- b. TikTok seems to collect less data overall than Facebook. Facebook tracks users across divides, and inside other apps and websites.
- c. This article does not mention any experimenting by TikTok but it is highly plausible. I'd say Facebook needs to be regulated more on what it collects and needs to show exactly what they do with the data.

7.

- a. Is there anything you can do to reduce your privacy risk and keep using TikTok?
- b. There is no way to truly deny TikTok from collecting data about you. Throwaway names and email addresses can be used, but data from the device will still be taken.
- c. Data collection is a big issue of today's social networks and there should be made an effort to protect it and make sure where it goes. If you truly want to stop TikTok from collecting data the best thing to do is to delete the app as a whole.