**David Doman**

**IST618 – Information Policy**

**Privacy & Security**

**Introduction**

In today’s world, privacy and security are no longer a certainty. There are a lot of gray areas of data collection that may be acceptable by some parties but unacceptable to others. For example, governments may collect certain types of data from a citizen, that if this citizen were aware it was being collected would not be so happy. As data collection has ramped up in the 21st century, many citizens have heard or read news articles about data collection but may not fully understand the extent to which it is occurring. With the emergence of smartphones and people typically having them on their person at all times of the day, the types of data and the amount of data collected is wide ranging and substantial. From location data to the types of items purchased from Amazon and the websites viewed by citizens, this data is being utilized by governments and companies. Many people do not mind this being collected, making statements such as “If you have nothing to hide, then you have nothing to worry about” but not all individuals feel as comfortable. Stated by Ben Wizner, Director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU's) Speech, Privacy and Technology Project, and legal advisor for Edward Snowden, "For every single one of us, there is some pile of aggregated data that exists, the publication of which would cause us enormous harm and, in some cases, even professional and personal ruin. Every single one of us has a database of ruin." (Wizner, 2016). This is a much more negative idea of how citizens’ data could be used but it provides insight into how some individuals feel. Throughout this paper, the advantages, and disadvantages of data collection by government and private companies will be discussed, along with suggestions and recommendations to provide more transparency to how data is being utilized by collectors.

**Support & Research**

The NSA has been collecting data from American citizens for the past several decades under secrecy. Not being held to law or constitutional rights, it has been a mystery as to how and what type of information the NSA has been able to collect. In recent times, more and more questions have been asked by citizens for clarity and understanding of how they are being monitored. It has been made public, due to lawsuits and further pressure put on the NSA to disclose and become more transparent. It has been found that the type of information collected includes location data, internet search data, shopping data, phone call data, etc. According to a StartPage article the NSA website states,

*“NSA is the world leader in cryptology – the art and science of making and breaking codes.” By levering their people and technology, the NSA is able to achieve its goals of “discovering adversaries’ secrets, protecting U.S. secrets, and outmaneuvering adversaries in cyberspace while at the same time protecting the privacy rights of the American people.”.* *(nsa.gov).*

This statement may make many citizens uneasy but there are many advantages to the NSA doing so. To start, monitoring potential dangerous and nefarious individuals discussing or planning terrorist attacks. Being able to be spot these types of individuals out before bad actions occur instead of being reactive after something occurs can save many lives.

Along with government entities, like the NSA, there are many private companies that also collect bundles of data from unaware customers. The way private companies get around legal concerns to their practices is by having their users click a check box that states “I agree to the terms of conditions” to the service they are about to use. Literally no single person ever reads or understands what they are agreeing to due to the length of the term’s agreement. Stated in a BusinessInsider.com article by James Pasley,

*“According to Time, to read every user agreement a person encounters annually would take 76 hours." (Pasley. 2020).*

This is an astounding amount of time needed to read over the agreements that an everyday citizen could possibly review and is mainly the reason private companies make it so long. If it were a more concise reading for the user of what was being collected from them, this would prevent many more users from disagreeing to the collection practices and not utilize the companies service, which is not what a private company wants.

The way private companies utilize customers data is much different than the way that government entities do. Government entities’ goals are to prevent nefarious actions, gain information for policy reasons, etc., while private companies are primarily concerned with improving advertising efforts to target consumers. I believe government entities using such information to improve policy decisions is a big advantage, as it does not require sending out surveys and hoping citizens fill them out, such as census data. A disadvantage to these practices includes potential discrimination against gender, race, etc. in the data collection procedures. This is a serious concern for many individuals and should not be taken lightly. When it comes to private companies, we’ve all experienced viewing or searching a particular product and then seeing ads for those same products pop up when on Facebook or another social media platform. Although usually meant for improving product sales, private companies do collect certain types of information citizens might not want to be collected. According to a Huffpost.com article by Lydia O’Connor,

*“Much of that user data can include extremely sensitive information, such as insights into users’ fertility, heart rate and other health concerns, or intel on what potential purchasers of real estate are looking up.” (O’Connor. 2020)*

Any health information being collected without users knowing is of great concern. Sure, the items someone purchases and the places they have been is information many individuals would not like being collected, information on a person’s health is extremely personal and should be clearly made clear by the data collectors that is being obtained. Many people are ok with this type of information being collected, as people wear Apple Watches and other devices, but it should be clearly stated by these companies how it is being stored and utilized.

**Conclusion**

In my opinion, the privacy of citizens is extremely important and should not be exploited by governments or companies. I do believe there are many advantages in obtaining certain information from citizens. As stated previously, positive things such as assisting to optimize lawmaking and really be able to understand the needs of people without having them fill out surveys or something similar, can be immensely powerful and effective.

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