I read an article titled If You’ve Got a New Car, It’s a Data Privacy Nightmare, written by Thomas Germain on 9/7/2023 (link - <https://gizmodo.com/mozilla-new-cars-data-privacy-report-1850805416>). The article highlights the concerning reality that modern cars are equipped with data-harvesting capabilities, potentially collecting sensitive personal information ranging from driving behaviors to health details. Mozilla's \*Privacy Not Included project uncovered that major car brands, including BMW, Ford, Toyota, Tesla, and Subaru, fail to meet basic privacy and security standards, raising significant data ethics issues.

From a Kantian perspective, these practices raise ethical concerns about the respect for individuals' autonomy and dignity. Kantian ethics emphasize treating individuals as ends in themselves, rather than mere means to an end. However, the data collection practices described in the article suggest a disregard for individuals' autonomy, as car manufacturers collect and potentially share personal data without adequate transparency or consent.

One key issue relevant to Kantian ethics is the lack of informed consent. Many car manufacturers, such as Subaru, suggest that passengers implicitly consent to data collection by merely being in the car. This approach fails to respect individuals' autonomy by assuming consent without explicit agreement or understanding of the implications.

Moreover, the article highlights the opacity surrounding data collection practices and privacy policies, with some manufacturers offering complex and fragmented privacy policies that may be challenging for consumers to comprehend. This lack of transparency undermines individuals' ability to make informed decisions about their personal data, further violating their autonomy.

While some manufacturers claim to comply with applicable laws and provide transparency, the article suggests a gap between these assertions and actual practices. For example, Nissan's privacy policy suggests extensive data collection, including sensitive information like sexual activity and genetic data, raising questions about the ethical implications of such practices.

Furthermore, the article mentions the concept of "privacy washing," where manufacturers present misleading information to consumers, suggesting robust privacy protections when the reality is different. This deceptive practice contradicts Kantian ethics' emphasis on honesty and transparency in interactions with individuals.

In terms of whether these issues are being handled and resolved properly, the article suggests that there are significant gaps in accountability and transparency within the automotive industry. While some manufacturers claim to take measures to protect customers' data, the lack of responsiveness to inquiries and the absence of encryption practices raise doubts about the effectiveness of current approaches.

To address these data ethics issues from a Kantian framework, manufacturers should prioritize transparency, informed consent, and respect for individuals' autonomy in their data collection practices. This involves providing clear and understandable privacy policies, obtaining explicit consent from users, and implementing robust security measures to protect personal data. Additionally, regulatory bodies should ensure that manufacturers adhere to ethical standards and hold them accountable for any violations.

**If You’ve Got a New Car, It’s a Data Privacy Nightmare**

**Bad news: your car is a spy. Every major car brand's new internet-connected models flunked privacy and security tests conducted by Mozilla.**

By[Thomas Germain](https://gizmodo.com/author/thomasgermain)

September 7, 2023

https://gizmodo.com/mozilla-new-cars-data-privacy-report-1850805416

Bad news: your car is a spy. If your vehicle was made in the last few years, you’re probably driving around in a data-harvesting machine that may collect personal information as sensitive as your race, weight, and sexual activity. Volkswagen’s cars reportedly know if you’re fastening your seatbelt and how hard you hit the brakes.

That’s according to new findings from Mozilla’s [\*Privacy Not Included](https://foundation.mozilla.org/privacynotincluded/categories/cars/) project. The nonprofit found that every major car brand fails to adhere to the most basic privacy and security standards in new internet-connected models, and all 25 of the brands Mozilla examined flunked the organization’s test. Mozilla found brands including BMW, Ford, Toyota, Tesla, and Subaru collect data about drivers including race, facial expressions, weight, health information, and where you drive. Some of the cars tested collected data you wouldn’t expect your car to know about, including details about sexual activity, race, and immigration status, according to Mozilla.

“Many people think of their car as a private space — somewhere to call your doctor, have a personal conversation with your kid on the way to school, cry your eyes out over a break-up, or drive places you might not want the world to know about,” said Jen Caltrider, program direction of the \*Privacy Not Included project, in a press release. “But that perception no longer matches reality. All new cars today are privacy nightmares on wheels that collect huge amounts of personal information.”

Modern cars use a variety of data harvesting tools including microphones, cameras, and the phones drivers connect to their cars. Manufacturers also collect data through their apps and websites, and can then sell or share that data with third parties.

The worst offender was Nissan, Mozilla said. The carmaker’s privacy policy suggests the manufacturer collects information including sexual activity, health diagnosis data, and genetic data, though there’s no details about how exactly that data is gathered. Nissan reserves the right to share and sell “preferences, characteristics, psychological trends, predispositions, behavior, attitudes, intelligence, abilities, and aptitudes” to data brokers, law enforcement, and other third parties.

“When we do collect or share personal data, we comply with all applicable laws and provide the utmost transparency,” said Lloryn Love-Carter, a Nissan spokesperson. “Nissan’s Privacy Policy incorporates a broad definition of Personal Information and Sensitive Personal Information, as expressly listed in the growing patchwork of evolving state privacy laws, and is inclusive of types of data it may receive through incidental means.”

Other brands didn’t fare much better. Volkswagen, for example, collects your driving behaviors such as your seatbelt and braking habits and pairs that with details such as age and gender for targeted advertising. Kia’s privacy policy reserves the right to monitor your “sex life,” and Mercedes-Benz ships cars with TikTok pre-installed on the infotainment system, an app that has its own [thicket of privacy problems](https://gizmodo.com/tiktok-ban-joe-biden-28000-apps-sdk-data-china-1850174019).

“BMW NA provides our customers with comprehensive data privacy notices regarding the collection of their personal information. For individual control, BMW NA allows vehicle drivers to make granular choices regarding the collection and processing of their personal information,” said Phil DiIanni, a BMW spokesperson. DiIanni said BMW hasn’t reviewed the study, but said “BMW NA does not sell our customer’s in-vehicle personal information,” and the company takes “comprehensive measures to protect our customers’ data.”

Mercedes-Benz spokesperson Andrea Berg declined to comment, as the company hasn’t reviewed the study, but Berg said the MercedesMe Connect app gives users privacy settings and the ability to opt-out of certain services. Gizmodo contacted the other manufacturers named in this story, but none immediately provided comments.

The privacy and security problems extend beyond the nature of the data car companies siphon off about you. Mozilla said it was unable to determine whether the brands encrypt any of the data they collect, and only Mercedes-Benz responded to the organization’s questions.

Mozilla also found that many car brands engage in “privacy washing,” or presenting consumers with information that suggests they don’t have to worry about privacy issues when the exact opposite is true. Many leading manufacturers are signatories to the Alliance for Automotive Innovation’s “[Consumer Privacy Protection Principles](https://www.autosinnovate.org/innovation/Automotive%20Privacy/Consumer_Privacy_Principlesfor_VehicleTechnologies_Services-03-21-19.pdf).” According to Mozilla, these are a non-binding set of vague promises organized by the car manufacturers themselves.

Brian Weiss, a spokesperson for the Alliance for Automotive Innovation, shared a link to [a letter the organization wrote](https://www.autosinnovate.org/association-update/1-Alliance%20for%20Automotive%20Innovation%20Letter%20on%20Federal%20Privacy%20Legislation.pdf) to congress about its Privacy Principles. These principles “are in effect today and enforceable by the Federal Trade Commission,” Weiss said.

Questions around consent are essentially a joke as well. Subaru, for example, says that by being a passenger in the car, you are considered a “user” who has given the company consent to harvest information about you. Mozilla said a number of car brands say it’s the drivers responsibility to let passengers know about their car’s privacy policies—as if the privacy policies are comprehensible to drivers in the first place. Toyota, for example, has a constellation of 12 different privacy policies for your reading pleasure.