

Activity 2: How Do Platforms See You?¹

Tech companies (including but not limited to social media companies) collect, analyze and act on the data they collect about their users. Whenever you accept terms of agreement, you ‘give permission’ for this data to be collected and used. In today’s tutorial, we’re going to examine this phenomenon by choosing one of the following platforms (below) and explore the data they collect:

[Google](#) | [Facebook](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Snapchat](#) | [TikTok](#)

If you don’t use any of these platforms, you can either:

- Investigate a different platform of your choice, or
- Skim the following article on various platforms’ data collection, and note your reactions: <https://www.security.org/resources/data-tech-companies-have/>

Part 1: [On Your Own] Explore the Links Provided

Navigate to the platform of your choice (by clicking the name of the platform above) and examine the links provided. (I picked snapchat)

Part 2: [In Groups] Discuss (15 Minutes)

Discuss the following questions with your group. Be prepared to share what you discussed.

- What did the platform get right and what did they get wrong about you? They got my name, birthday, general location, how often I send messages and who I send them to, general image meta data
- How do you think they gathered / inferred this information about you? I gave most of the information to them to use the app effectively
- How do you think this platform monetizes this information? Be as specific as you can. They sell the information to service providers, although they dont explicitly say it

¹ Credit: This activity was designed in collaboration with Natalie Melo (Ph.D. student) & Bijal Mehta (while she was an undergraduate).

they admit to giving it to many different companies but most notably service providers which I can imagine is pretty lucrative.

- Has anyone in your group already turned off data collection for the particular platform? If so, why did they decide to do this? Nope

Part 3: Answer at least 3 of the following questions on Moodle under Tutorial 1:

1. How does the platform you analyzed “see” you? In what ways does this represent you, and in what ways does it mis-represent you?

It “sees” me via collecting data from key inputs, messages, consistent activity doing certain things, location my ip is from, etc etc. It mis-represents me by just knowing the info I use on its given app or website which can be vastly different from the info I project and use on a different platform.

2. What’s a piece of data you would expect the platform to know? What’s a piece of data you’re surprised they know? Why?

I expected them to know my name and location since its data I've provided to them but what I didn't expect was for them to gain data from my contacts even when i'm not on the app, it's just a bit creepy since I did not provide that info to them.

3. Why are these the things these platforms choose to know about you? What do they do with this information?

For the most part they use it for in app features but I have no doubts that its also used heavily to sell to advertisers to maintain their free service.

4. How much do you want these platforms to know? Are you comfortable with what’s being collected on you currently?

I fully think that privacy is dead, I think that everything I do is recorded in this current world and although I would like if they only saved what is needed I also understand the lack of realism in that dream.

5. Note that you can turn off these settings. Would you want to do that? Why or why not? What are the consequences for you and for the platform?

No I wont, I dont think it will matter if i'm honest, when everyone already has my data stopping random companies wont change much. If I turn off my settings the company loses money and I lose in app features.

6. Why should we care about this?

Its our data and its a lot, theres a black mirror episode where a company is able to make a perfect clone based off of a dead relative or partener by web scraping all their data. This is not that crazy far from realism, in the modern day we provide these unknown servers with almost everything that makes us, us. Most things that make us who we are from the way we interact with loved ones and where we live to our ambitions and sense of humor, privacy is dead and although its important to care and acknowledge the problem theres not much we can do until lawmakers decide our privacy is worth their time.

THE PLATFORMS

Google²

What does Google know about you?

Check out the following links with your account:

1. <http://www.google.com/settings/ads/>
2. <https://maps.google.com/locationhistory>
3. <https://myactivity.google.com/activitycontrols/webandapp>

If time allows,

- ➔ Read some of Google's Privacy Policy: <https://policies.google.com/privacy>
- ➔ Browse through other categories within Google's MyActivity page:
<https://myactivity.google.com/more-activity>
- ➔ Read this article on Google:
<https://gizmodo.com/everything-google-knows-about-you-and-how-to-delete-it-1834633034>

² If you have previously turned off the following features, you may not see any information or data. If you would still like to get a general sense of the information Google tracks or need additional help with the following steps you can read this article:
<https://gizmodo.com/everything-google-knows-about-you-and-how-to-delete-it-1834633034>

Facebook³

What does Facebook know about you?

Check out the following links with your account:

1. https://www.facebook.com/adpreferences/ad_settings
2. Look at the “Categories used to reach you” section
3. Look at the “Audience-based advertising” section

If time allows,

- ➔ Read some of Facebook’s Privacy Policy: <https://www.facebook.com/policy>
- ➔ Read this article on Facebook:
<https://www.wired.com/story/ways-facebook-tracks-you-limit-it/>

³ If you have previously turned off the following features, you may not see any information or data. If you would still like to get a general sense of the information Facebook tracks or need additional help with the following steps you can read this article: <https://www.wired.com/story/ways-facebook-tracks-you-limit-it/>

Instagram⁴

What does Instagram know about you?

Check out the following links with your account:

1. If you're on your phone: Settings > Security > Access Data > Ads
2. Or you can use the following link:
https://www.instagram.com/accounts/login/?next=/accounts/access_tool/ads_interests

If time allows,

- ➔ Read some of Instagram's Privacy Policy:
<https://help.instagram.com/519522125107875>
- ➔ Read this article on Instagram:
<https://vpnoverview.com/privacy/social-media/what-does-instagram-know-about-me/>

⁴ If you have previously turned off the following features, you may not see any information or data. If you would still like to get a general sense of the information Instagram tracks or need additional help with the following steps you can read this article:
<https://vpnoverview.com/privacy/social-media/what-does-instagram-know-about-me/>

Twitter⁵

What does Twitter know about you?

Check out the following links with your account:

1. https://twitter.com/settings/your_twitter_data/ads
2. Look at “Interests from Twitter”, “Inferred interests from partners”, and “Tailored audiences”

If time allows,

- Read some of Twitter’s Privacy Policy: <https://twitter.com/en/privacy>
- Read this article on Twitter:
<https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/04/everything-twitter-knows-about-you-how-to-download-a-copy.html>

⁵ If you have previously turned off the following features, you will not see any information or data. If you would still like to get a general sense of the information Twitter tracks or need additional help with the following steps you can read this article:
<https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/04/everything-twitter-knows-about-you-how-to-download-a-copy.html>

Snapchat⁶

What does Snapchat know about you?

Check out the following links with your account:

1. Use the “Download My Data” feature under Settings:
<https://support.snapchat.com/en-US/a/download-my-data>

If time allows,

- ➔ Read some of Snap Inc’s Privacy Policy:
<https://snap.com/en-US/privacy/privacy-policy>
- ➔ Read this article on Snapchat:
<https://vpnoverview.com/privacy/social-media/what-does-snapchat-know-about-me/>

⁶ If you have previously turned off the following features, you will not see any information or data. If you would still like to get a general sense of the information SnapChat tracks or need additional help with the following steps you can read this article:
<https://vpnoverview.com/privacy/social-media/what-does-snapchat-know-about-me/>

TikTok

Log into TikTok and see if you can find whether you're able to opt-in / opt-out of particular kinds of targeted marketing, or whether it shares the categories and data it has inferred about you. If you don't have access to this information, see what you can learn from the links below, or from your own Google searches.

Relevant articles:

- <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/tiktok-data-privacy>
- <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/02/08/tiktok-shares-your-data-more-than-any-other-social-media-app-study.html>