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COSC244 - Ethics Assignment

Summarise the types of data these users found in their personal profile

Collectively the website tracks not only data logged onto the website itself, but extends its functionality to also grab users personal information outside of its own environment. From the users in the article all contact information from devices were collected, whether from the website or otherwise. This meant lists of contacts from mobile phones were scraped and sent in the same pipeline as information from the website. In one users case his contact information stored via Messenger, an instant-messaging app from Facebook that can extend to capture text messages, was collected by the website without their knowledge.

The mass-collection of data didn't just stop at contact information. For users in the article it seems as if their entire lives were not only captured, but retained long after they chose to delete the content from the website. One user (rightfully) complained about how things explicitly deleted from his account such as removed friends still lingered in his overall account history.

For users data such as search history, downloaded files and documents as well as any audio messages ever sent. What is interesting about one user is that on their personal account they mentioned having a record of every file or document ever sent *to them.* While they didn't expound in any great detail about it having an active record of others personal data is a level of collection that is worrying to hear about. It is one thing to have access to your own information but to also have access to other users which can be potentially used for malicious means with a compromised account is an egregious practice. I wished the user brought it up more in their article.

Users in the article also found quite a lot of fine-grain information was gathered from their accounts. This includes such things as login history over the lifetime of the account as well as message history such as what stickers (similar to emojis in messages) were sent in chat and at what time.

Facebook claims (and the articles corroborate this) that this amount of data in this fine-grained detail is a result of ongoing security concerns in many different fields. For example the website tracks your login history in order to prevent suspicious logins from other places, or keeps track of deleted friends lists in order to prevent them from appearing in timelines from *On This Day* events. What a lot of it is collected for is to offer a stimulus to advertising and marketing companies.

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What were these users most surprised by?

One user was shocked to find out how many companies had readily available access to his personal information without any consent. To the user it was almost shocking how wide the spectrum was for companies in terms of reputability to have interacted with their personal information of all kinds. This meant obscure or unknown companies (such as radio show Microphone Check) had as much privilege and access to user information than companies with large globalization or reach (such as womenswear company Victoria's Secret or American interest group AARP). This kind of information access is publicly endorsed by Facebook via the Custom Audiences feature - a tool for advertisers to target specific users with advertisements which may be more applicable to them that advertising to the general public.

is it right that Facebook is able togather/store all this personal information?

The company has a right to protect the interests of the company first and foremost. What it is currently doing is overstepping the line of whether things are being stored in the interest of security and not for personal (read *company*) gain. Information which remains largely anonymous I would consider *right* to store. The ultimate problem many users have with the website - and it isn't the only big tech company to have this issue - is the amount of self-identifying data being stored. I believe many users would turn a blind eye to data with some degree of separation from the user to be safely stored on the Facebook web servers. I know I would feel comfortable and willing to surrender login history over to the company because while it can be used to track people, there are many hoops to run through in regards to accuracy. Sure I could track an IP address and location to a specific point on the planet but validating the user on the computer is actually who you are trying to find may prove difficult depending on the circumstances. Conversely the capability of Facebook to store information when it is well past deleted is a little unnerving to hear about, and I would not feel comfortable with the company continuing to maintain a repository of every message, file or image sent over the account lifetime. Right now I consider it a necessary evil, but in an ideal world the company only acts in the interests of the companies wellbeing.

Another big issue I believe lies in the detail of storage some information is placed in. It is almost comical for me to find users report sticker history as being tracked down to the time of date it was posted, deleted and where. One of the cardinal problems to the whole collection system is that it wants to encapsulate *everything*. Facebook and similar websites don't just collect information you place on the website to ridiculous detail, but also everything outside the scope of the application is being collected in ridiculous detail as well.

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It's a dangerous precedent (perhaps not anymore since it has been occurring for so long now) to have data aggregation virtually available to anyone who asks for it, and in the full detail it was stored in too. I understand there is a degree of user responsibility to what you expose on the internet. In an ideal world again the amount of data collection ended with what I manually submitted. Currently entering my email on any reputable website surrenders just about any other iota of identifying information for myself.

Unfortunately I believe this perspective is far disconnected from how things are going to be in the future. The advent of the information age has left very little to be desired in terms of globalization and data circulation that even if one company chose to uphold strict data collection practices that it wouldn't really matter in the long run as others can fill in the blanks with their own egregious aggregation methods and practices. Unless you live in the middle of nowhere without access to the wide world there isn't much you can do to prevent your information being collected, making the ethical debate sort of a moot point. Still though, I would hold the point what Facebook does is indeed wrong.