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Ethics and the Internet

The world becomes increasingly more digital with every passing day. Computers are powerful machines that grant us the power to receive media content and connects with others from all around the globe. However, with great power comes great responsibility. The 21st Century has shown us the first major step into internet-driven society. As an increasingly large portion of our lives are fostered on the web, how will we adapt our social standards of morality to meet our expectations for the services that we interact with through screens? We already know that companies are compiling mass amounts of data to compile personality portfolios that allow them to flow a stream of user-curated advertisements down our throats; should this be morally acceptable? How much surveillance is too much surveillance? Where must we draw the line for internet privacy?

When it comes down to it, the primary reason companies collect data is to curate content and advertisements in the flavour of their customers favourite tastes. Is this really such a bad thing? Well the complications arise when we consider the long-term effects of this approach to media distribution. One criticism of the Big Data approach to the internet is that using algorithms informed by maps of the past may direct the future in the wrong direction (“Big Data”, Wikipedia). If the future of content is based on the experiences of the past, how can we learn new things and improve our services? Think about YouTube for example: the website once hosted a plethora of unique gems, individual creators conceptualizing creative ideas and a community driven by word of mouth. Videos were passed around using social media and popped into the recommended section without any apparent rhyme or reason. The algorithm adaptations of the decade have only drifted YouTube further astray from its roots. It seems as if now, individual creators are being buried underneath a mountain of more “advertiser friendly” corporate channels that prioritize financial gain and high watch times over creativity (Alexander, Julia). YouTube’s algorithm has lost its touch with providing quirky and original content, and has become increasingly more mainstream. Data collection has shaped the platform around pushing the most popular content to all people, which is hardly an improvement. New and original content is increasingly more difficult to discover in a data driven world.

While curating content and collecting data is not objectively wrong, it can certainly be made frustrating when paired with a lack of transparency and control. Most consumers are not aware of true weight of the massive amounts of information companies have stored about them: emails, phone numbers, location history, text messages, emails, even pictures that were never knowingly uploaded anywhere on the internet, all of which have been collected and stored by Google with little explanation as to why it was necessary (Lamont, Jonathan). When it comes to people’s privacy, it remain most important that the user is in complete control of what information they would like to share, or the very least, they must be made aware of what personal information is being shared with the services they willingly choose to use. T Without transparency, internet privacy is non-existent.

**Citations**

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