

COSC 244: Data Ethics Assignment - Option 2

Dylan Curran states, "the harvesting of our personal details goes far beyond what many of us could imagine". Upon downloading his stored data from Facebook, David was shocked by the sheer magnitude of seemingly mundane information store by the social networking site, with another user stating; "Facebook retains more data than we think". The referred to data includes; every message ever sent and received, including audio and visual messages, every "sticker" sent and image posted. Facebook also stores every time you log in, the location you logged in from, and the device used. Facebook has access to every contact within your address book, stores information about every application connected to your Facebook account and also stores information about what you might be interested in based off the things you've liked and your message content. This storage is all dependent on whether or not you give consent to Facebook using this information, with consent being as little as ticking the box on the term and conditions requirement when creating an account.

Generally what surprised users the most was that even deleted data; unfriended accounts, unliked pages, cancelled events or similar were recorded, with one member stating that "this was unsettling". Facebook's explanation as to why records about deleted friends were stored was so that those people did not appear on your feed or within features that resurface memories from previous years, though little explanation was given about why so much other deleted data was stored.

Privacy and freedom of information in New Zealand is enforced through the Privacy Act, established in 1993, which regulates the general use of personal data by both public and private companies. Requirements of data collection include that there must be a “lawful reason” for the recording of data, connected to the company’s function. The agency is also required to inform the user that the specific data in question is being recorded, consent for this data collection is also necessary though consent is implied if the user is aware of the referred to data storage and shows no objection. With Facebook constantly tracking your location, along with readily having access to your webcam and microphone at any time, I question their fulfillment of specific requirements stated in the privacy act and the ethicality of it all. How is having constant access to your microphone and webcam lawful, and what is the reason for this access?

Sahil Chinoy, a New York Times graphics editor, received many of Facebook’s recent patent applications including; a patent for using your device’s front camera to determine your emotions from your facial expressions and also a patent for using your microphone to interpret whether you mute the ads when watching television. Electrical signals emitted from your television would also be used to identify the programs you watch. With a representative from Facebook stating “most of the technology outlined in these patents has not been included in any of our products”, we are given little information in regards to why this initial access is given, the reason behind the requesting of such patents or if they are even ethical.

Customer data is often seen as a valuable commercial asset to internet companies, including Facebook. As it is deemed so valuable the selling of this data is thought to decrease

Facebook's value. Though it is believed that Facebook doesn't specifically sell your data, it does sell access to you, or more pointedly what you view on your "news feed", to advertising companies. Is this ethical? Do users even know this is occurring?

Without proper analysis of the terms and conditions, or general knowledge of what Facebook has access to, it is likely that users are unsure of the immense amount of personal data stored by the social media company. From Mark Zuckerberg's vague answers to questions regarding data privacy and why such a magnitude of highly personal data is stored by Facebook, this questioning of Facebook's ethicality is valid. It is vital to know what access you as a user is giving away, and what impact that has on your personal data. Though changes are being made to Facebook and what user data is stored, the knowledge of this data storage is scary and makes me as a social media user question the privacy my data and I both have. What do other social media sites know about us all?

Reference list:

- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/mar/28/all-the-data-facebook-google-has-on-you-privacy>
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/11/technology/personaltech/i-downloaded-the-information-that-facebook-has-on-me-yikes.html>
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