

COSC244 - DATA COMMUNICATIONS, NETWORK AND THE INTERNET

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When you create an account of Facebook you are required to fill in some details about you, such as your name, gender, date of birth, email address or mobile number. From that point of time Facebook gathers and stores more and more of your personal data, which it uses to target you with advertisements. Most of the advertisements are linked to the things you have added or shared on facebook and pages that you have liked or clicked to check them out.

There was a recent scandal that suggested that Facebook was a part of President Trumps campaign and they allegedly received information on several million users. Such incidents tell you that its is no longer the simple application that connects the world but a storage of personal and private information that are being used without knowledge of users. There is a lot of information stored about you and you are in serious misunderstanding if you think you are not a target because you seldom use Facebook. Users who rarely post information and media and occasionally click a few advertisements here and there, were taken aback when they went through the copy of their Facebook data that is available to be downloaded by users. Facebook kept a record of every single advertisement they had clicked along with several ones that the user could not associate with. It had all the IP address of every device that the user used to log into their account with. Facebook also had a list of people that the user had unfriended and deleted since the account was created. Facebook tried to justify their having such unnecessary information being to stop unfriended people showing up in your memory timeline. It also had a list of people who sent the author a friend request but the author had deleted their request. There is a feature on Facebook called activity log that is essentially a list of all your posts and activities like accepting a friend request or liking a page, from the first day you logged into facebook till present date. There is also a list of all the searches you have made using facebook.

Third party applications such as Spotify, airbnb, uber, candy crush etc provide an option for users to Log in using their facebook account. People choose this as it is an easy way out — you only need to remember one set of username and password to log into most applications. These apps vary in the data they collect about you, but it does not stop them from collecting private information in the first place. The lengthy legal agreement that nobody thoroughly reads contains your approval to collect information about you — name, gender, locations, friends, preferences, etc. These third party applications now sell your information to big research and analysis companies without your direct permission. There is a section which is called Advertisers with your contact information which overwhelmed users because it included companies and applications that the user had no idea about. All of them had the users contact details and personal information. With theses transactions coming to light and people getting more annoyed facebook has reduced the amount of information it shares with the third party, but still not stopped for good.

Users were surprised to see that facebook had their contact list stored — each and every contact. There could be no possible justification as to why facebook need to record this information. It does the storing when setting up messenger. Web cookies and pixels are tracking technologies that are loaded on to web browsers to record your browsing activities. The user tried to call companies that he did not try to reach but they had his information — but they did not get back to his calls and messages.

I do not think it is right for Facebook to store all this personal information. There are valid reasons for why we should pay attention to the information breaches. The metadata that facebook collects about you — IP addresses, time and date of calls and text messages is usually not very sensitive on its own but it can become when social network providers put together the different data they have in

order to get the bigger picture. This is a pure breach of privacy without the users knowledge. Using the metadata you can actually guess the relationship the user has with the receiver of his calls and texts. If they frequently corresponded during office hours they probably work together or if late at night then more like close friends. Trying to trespass into someones personal life like this is not correct in my opinion. Sometimes if an IP address is present you can easily get the persons accurate location. Advertisers that have access to the information know way too much that what they should be knowing. Companies use Artificial Intelligence to try and know even more about your preferences which is used in marketing no doubt but also igniting discord. The election campaign for Donald Trump can be used as a recent example of such discord. I feel that we the users should be clearly told what we are signing up for and what sort of information will no longer email private. Facebook has made several attempts to reassure the users that they are always in control of the information they share and can check it at any time, people still get surplises when they realise the full content of the information and to what extent it is being stored.

Facebook carefully scrutinises the minute details in the lives of the users online and tracks all of their moves. It collects biometric facial data without users direct consent to do so. The federal officials in the United States of America have done very little to curb the power Facebook has by having all of users private information. It might not be wrong to say that Facebook users are being treated as laboratory animals with no respect given to anyones private life.

At some point or another we surely have said that there is nothing that we have to hide but it is important to aware of what applications are capable of doing these days. It is always better to be informed than to be sorry at the end for having been clueless to important facts. We are vulnerable at all times so we need to be extra cautious when connected to the Internet. Nothing is free in this world, we pay with our privacy.