

COSC 244 Ethics Assignment

Name: Shaun Liew

Student ID Number: 2553068

Facebook has been headlining the news in the past few years due to the controversy between online data and ethics. They have been suspected to be misusing data collected from users in order for commercial gain. This raises a critical question: what and how much does Facebook know about us?

From the moment you create an account with Facebook, you have essentially instantiated your 'digital footprint' with them. Starting from your email address, your country, your full name, your mobile number and more. These details are stored within their database and shared amongst third-party partners to help target you with their advertisements. This continues as long as you keep posting, liking or even clicking on Facebook links/pages/posts, developing a wider and more in-depth personal data record allowing firms to target-advertise you specifically. Facebook uses business tools, such as the like button, seemingly harmless, but key for targeting its customers. This is all available to view for every Facebook user through downloading your own data on their site. The file downloaded was nearly 4 GB, which is a lot of personal data obtained for just information from one website. For me, I have owned a Facebook account for around 9 years now, and data is still stored from since I created my account back in 2008. Data includes everything from every IP address that you have logged in to Facebook on, every like and comment I have made, anything I or others post that is associated with me, anything I have ever search on Facebook and any advertisement I have ever clicked on. All this metadata is crucial to the success of data aggregate companies and advertisements as any form of activity can infer more information about the user, such as a photo can identify a specific location of a user etc. However, there is data stored that I found to be rather irrelevant, such as friends that were removed/friend requests that were rejected. This could raise concerns about information that may be considered 'unnecessary' that is stored in Facebook's data base about us, and why such information is not ignored/deleted.

The main source of information gathering by Facebook is obviously what you do on Facebook. All your activity log is recorded, including anything you have clicked on. Information is also gathered through metadata, where any data that you have provided may contain information about other pertaining data, such as the location of the photo you took as it could be explicitly gathered through GPS signals (if you allow Facebook to access your location), or implicitly through the surroundings of your photo (e.g. the area, your friends, family etc). Another system that allows Facebook to collect more data on users is through the quick and easy 'Facebook log-in' function that many apps and websites contain. No doubt, this allows an easier and less time-consuming way of using different apps and websites as you do not need to create a new account each time. This is present in my available Facebook data under apps and websites which displays third-party apps which I have logged into using my Facebook. Apps such as Uber, Spotify, Wish, RAD1 and many gaming apps are just some that offer this ideal. This easy way of logging in through Facebook builds a greater 'digital footprint' beyond Facebook itself. These apps gain more personal data from you and allows Facebook, a data aggregate company, to build a bigger information archive on each user. This helps further build the specific advertisement targeting, as Facebook sells such data to allow companies to reach its target market online.

I personally believe that Facebook being able to gather and store all this information is right. Given such a negative history, especially of recent times, Facebook has caused a dispute between business and ethics. Take for example the Cambridge Analytica scandal, where millions of users had their data mined from Facebook and shared with Cambridge Analytica. Cambridge Analytica then went on to build a software to help influence choices in election voting. Donald Trump had hired Cambridge Analytica, where they help him through

developing profiles of people through this data gathered, and delivered pro-Trump material to them online, without any consent from any users. Manipulating private data from users to sway voting in such an important election creates negative views about the potentially corrupt and irresponsible company that holds much of their personal data. Looking at all the information that has been gathered of me, it can make it simple to pinpoint many different aspects of my life that should be private. Aspects such as where I live, my relationship with friends, family, what I look at, personal interests and much more. Not only is the information gathering alone seemingly a breach of privacy, but the fact that there is possibility of potential leaking/breaching my personal information due to the poor history of Facebook and how it deals with users' data, creates an atmosphere of insecurity and worry in terms of how safe and private we actually are. Facebook takes advantage of the long and boring 'Terms and Services' that many do not read. I believe that it should be clearly stated what and how our information is being gathered and easily determine what information you want do not want to be recorded.

Facebook has been under scrutiny about the unethical gathering of personal information, with a counter argument being that you are at fault for whatever you do on the internet. The internet is such a significant and profound interface, millions use it for hours a day, with most steps taken on the internet always recorded. Users are always vulnerable and are susceptible to giving out information that they might not want to, yet do not know about it – which I believe, is a strong breach of privacy.