**About this project**

We are a group of artists and data privacy activists. The ‘this is you’ project looks at how the location data shared with apps like Instagram can compromise users’ privacy in ways that they perhaps don’t expect, by revealing exactly where they were and often, the precise moment that they were there. Crucially, these posts don’t only affect the individual Instagram user’s privacy – they also affect that of all the other people shown in their photos and videos.

The aim is to raise awareness of location data on Instagram as a significant privacy issue and to share tips on how people can better control what they are sharing about themselves online while using this app.

**Puerta del Sol, Madrid**

The square ‘Puerta del Sol’ is Spain’s ‘kilometre zero’, the place from which all distances in Spain are measured. As such, it is an important public space, not only for Madrid, but for the entire country. It is constantly full of people – tourists, commuters, people out shopping, street performers – and the entire space is constantly being photographed and filmed. There is CCTV in the surrounding shops, government buildings and metro station, as well as in the buses themselves. Two webcams positioned at either end of the Puerta del Sol stream the activity on the square continuously and stream the footage online.

**How we made ‘this is you’**

We made ‘this is you’ using the public webcams that are continuously filming the Puerta del Sol and video stories shared on Instagram. The Instagram stories often contained location data about where they were taken, either because users added a ‘#puertadelsol’ hashtag, or because they had allowed Instagram access to their location, meaning that this information was automatically shared with all of their posts. By searching in Instagram for ‘puertadelsol’ under both places and hashtags, we were able to identify a large number of videos taken there. Instagram also shows the time that posts are shared and many users shared their stories immediately after creating the videos.

The videos themselves also contain a huge amount of information. With satellite images from Google maps and the webcams we could quickly learn exactly where all the different features in the square – fountains, shops, metro entrances, bike stands – were. Then we could start to identify these same features in users’ videos to learn exactly where they were in the square at the time they took the video. Using the time data from the Instagram post, we could then look for the webcam footage in which they would appear and identify them quite quickly. From here, we were able to synchronise the webcam video and Instagram stories to present them side by side – this is you, taking a video on Puerta del Sol and uploading it to Instagram.

**Some ways to think about privacy on Instagram**

By default, your Instagram account is public and your location is shared with each post or story that you make. For some accounts, it may be desirable to have photos and location visible to everyone – a famous museum, for example, where images to share are chosen carefully and where the museum’s location is well-known. Most Instagram users aren’t in that situation however. Having seen in this project just how much information can be learned from the images and videos you post, here are some things that you may want to consider doing to make your account more private.

Changing your location settings

People setting their location as public within the Instagram app was one of the key things that allowed us to find their stories (the other was them adding hashtags with their location). It meant that every image and story they posted on Instagram was automatically shared together with their location at the time that they shared that post – in most cases that was also the place where they created the post, since they shared it immediately. We recommend not giving Instagram automatic access to your location and this is how you change that setting. You can still share the location of a post if you wish, using a hashtag, or simply writing it in the text of your post.

Your location settings are not changed within the Instagram app, they are changed in the main settings of your device.

On Android, go to the phone’s ‘settings’ menu, then select ‘apps’. Find Instagram in the list and select it it to open the ‘app info’ page. Select ‘permissions’ which will take you to a further page with a series of things on your phone that Instagram would potentially like access to, including the camera and storage, which are essential for the basic functioning of the app, as well as others, like access to your location and contacts, which are less essential. Use the sliders next to each setting to change whether Instagram has access to that.

On iOS,

Other things that show/conceal your location

#hashtags

Hashtags with the place where the video was taken were the other way in which we found the Instagram stories. If you do want to share the location of your image or story, hashtags are better because they have to be added post by post, meaning that you can’t add your location accidentally. They will still give away your location at a particular time if you’re not careful. For another way to think about that issue, read on.

#latergram

The fact that people typically shared their photos immediately after taking them was what allowed us to know where they were on Puerta del Sol and approximately when and then to find them on the webcam. It would have been much, much more difficult for us to do this (although not impossible) if people had posted their images and videos a significant time after the event. The longer that they waited to post to Instagram, the harder it is likely it would be to find the webcam footage of them taking the video. Latergramming can improve your privacy significantly. There is an important caveat to that however. Read on...

Your images themselves

Your images themselves can contain large amounts of information indicating when and where they were taken: day or night,;shadow length and direction can indicate the time of day (and even time of year); an event, such as a concert, on the square can show that your video is from a specific day and time; a construction project in the background of your image can place it within a timeframe of a few months. These are just a few examples.

Other settings on your account

Other than location, most settings are controlled from within the Instagram app, but the account settings can be hard to find. This is how to find them on Android and iOS.

Android

To get to your account settings, go to your profile by clicking the ‘person’ icon in the bottom right corner of the screen. On your profile page, click the hamburger menu in the top right corner. A menu will appear with a small number of options at the top (saved, discover people, open Facebook) and then, right at the bottom of the screen where you might not otherwise notice it, the settings option. Select this to go to the settings page.

iOS

To get to your account settings, go to your profile by clicking the ‘person’ icon in the bottom right corner of the screen. On your profile page, the settings button is next to the ‘edit profile’ button (under the number of posts and followers you have). Select this to go to the settings page.

An open account or a private one?

With an open account, everyone can see your images. This may be important to you if you’re a photographer or artist and want people to discover your work, for example. With a private account, only your followers can see your images. People can request to follow you and you have to approve their request before they can see your images.

How to make your account private

You can make your account private in your account settings. The ‘private account’ option is halfway down the page. Slide the button to set your account to private.

(The private account option slider can also be found further down this menu under ‘account privacy’.)