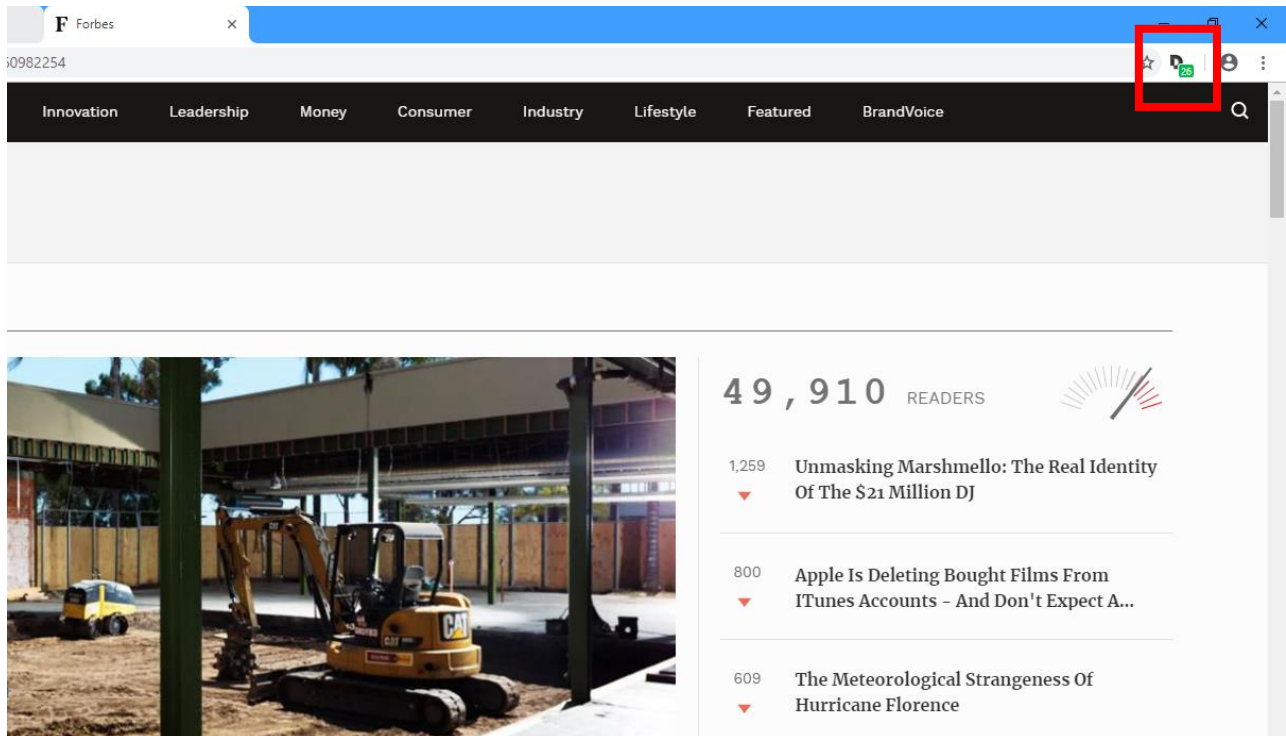


Theodore Kim

CS-GY 6813 – Information Security and Privacy

Homework Assignment #1, Part 1

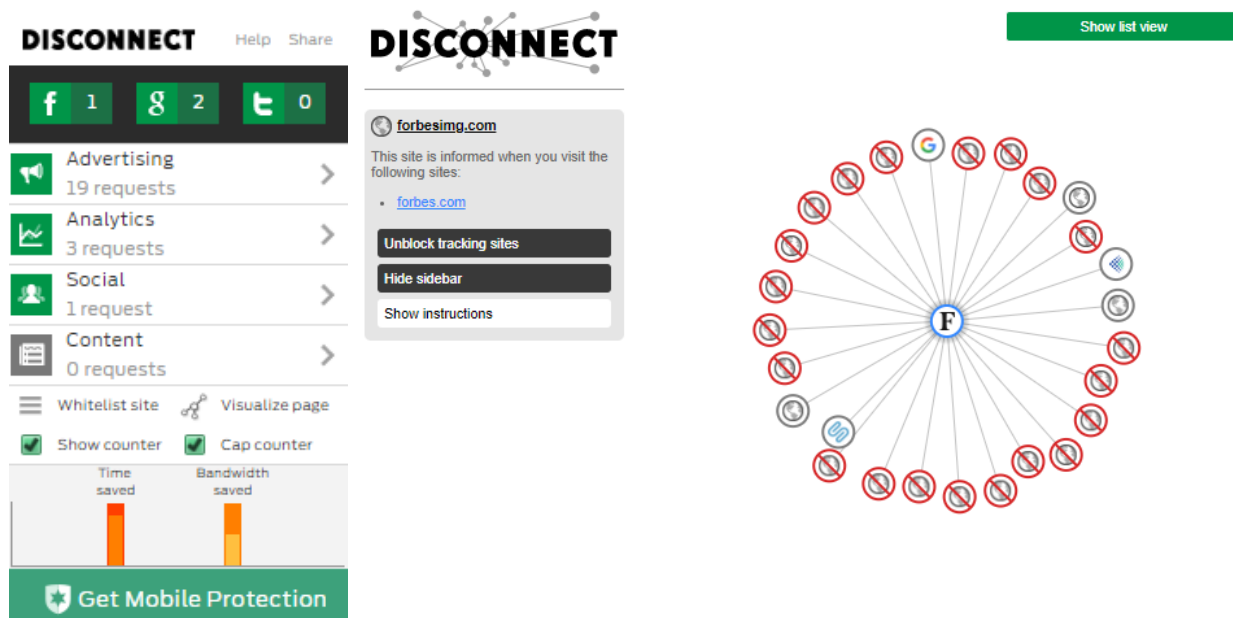


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Disconnect is a Chrome web browser extension that tracks and (optionally) blocks websites attempting to track your browsing behavior (whether those website be traffic analytics like Google Analytics, or websites tracking your browsing behavior for advertisement purposes like Google AdSense). It does so by monitoring calls to other webserver made from the user's browser (besides the original call to load the site), whether these calls are AJAX calls made from the JavaScript programming or calls to another site made using an iframe (i.e. an ad). Disconnect then prevents the browser from calling 3rd party websites (especially calls that send cookies to those websites as cookies are generally used as persistent trackers between websites).

The disconnect extension can be managed from the icon in the browser's address bar (as indicated above). The green number indicates how many "tracking" websites have been blocked by the extension (see above screenshot). Clicking the icon initially shows the "list view" which indicates how many requests were made to a known advertising site (like amazon.com), analytics site (like Google Analytics) or a social networking site (like facebook.com). Clicking the

“visualize page” option allows one to see what websites are being called by each of the other sites as visualized in a graph (both of these functions are shown in the screenshots below).



Using the Forbes website as an example, clicking the Disconnect icon, shows the screenshots above. There were a total of 23 blocked sites on the forbes.com homepage, with 19 advertisement requests, include obvious websites like amazon.com, but including some other less obvious sites like gumgum.com. Forbes also uses websites like comScore.com to handle its traffic analytics.

After looking at the request graph for the website (above right screenshot), I was very surprised by how many sites that forbes.com sends requests to. For a single news website, it makes over 20 requests to 3rd party website. I never realized how many websites are tracking you at once.