**Question: What responsibilities do software engineers have to the people who use the systems that they create?**

I think that one of the major responsibilities software engineers have to their clients is the protection of their privacy. Clients entrust their private data to systems designed by software engineers, and they believe that it will not be shared with/sold to other people (including businesses) without their consent, firmly trusting that the data will be available only to the other clients of the systems they are using, if at all. A great example of client choice in the level of privacy of their data are social networks, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, which allow their users to adjust the publicity of their posts with the option of private accounts or sharing the posts to friends only. This freedom of choice in the level of clients’ privacy helps keep data just as secure as the clients want it to be, which signifies the importance of this responsibility: software engineers should create systems with the needs of their clients put first.

However, privacy protection from the client’s side is impossible if there is no informed consent. Software engineers should ensure that the users of their systems are informed about their own level of privacy and are able to maintain the level desired. There should be no hidden options to opt out of forced participation in any data collection initiatives, such as better keyboard prediction, a better ‘News Feed’, etc. In my opinion, all data collection points in any user experience should be clearly and explicitly stated to the users, who can then choose whether they want their data collected at those points or not. The warning statements about data collection should be legible by all users regardless of their usability problems, like blindness, deafness, inattentiveness, etc, which is why software engineers should create systems with a high level of usability and a variety of methods of usage in order to accommodate users with different needs. This ensures that all users are able to give informed consent to any parties wanting access to their data.

Finally, the users’ freedom of choice should also be exercised in the content they view, that is, software engineers should give their users control over what type of content they may wish to be able to see and what they may wish to hide. Great examples of this in search engines and social networks are child-friendly content filters, which hide explicit content from their user with their (or their parents’) consent. Wilful content-blocking by the users themselves ensures that they have a safe and healthy user experience with the customisable systems that software engineers create. Therefore, they have a responsibility not to traumatise or otherwise cause distress to users who do not wish to see explicit content, which is why a large part of the software developing process should be spent on seeing what kind of content can be shared on the developed systems, categorising this content and giving the users the choice of seeing only part of it. In the end, users’ freedom of choice is governed by the software developers who make the systems that are used.