Is Our Personal Data Really Personal?

Written Report

Group 10-04

Community/ Organisation Studied:

Institutions (government and corporations)

We have done research on: US government, Acxiom, Listerine, Facebook and Cambridge Analytica

Challenges Identified; What caused the situation

(i) **Making Use of Half Truths**

Companies make use of some half truths to manipulate the public. (Observation)This could lead to consumers being manipulated to buying something due to half truths that attempted to manipulate the public.(Problem)Listerine was originally a surgical antiseptic, but then was diluted and sold as a floor cleaner. AT first, Listerine was not a major success, selling barely more than $100,000 per year. In 1921 Jordan Wheat Lambert initiated a marketing campaign advertising Listerine as a cure for "chronic halitosis." (bad breath) In less than 7 years annual revenue exploded to $8 million. Just as a side note, "Chronic Halitosis" was a fake medical term! (research/real life examples)

(ii) **Psychological Profiles Abused (for political purposes)**

Psychological profiles can be used by some analytical companies to influence political decisions. This would lead to unfair elections and cause the general public to make the wrong decisions and leave the country possibly, with a bad leader. Both Ted Cruz and Donald Trump made use of psychographic profiles to aid their presidential campaigns. Ted Cruz hired Cambridge Analytica, paying them a reported $5.8 million in services according to the Federal Election Commission. This was when Cambridge Analytica started to create individual psychographic profiles. Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign utilized the harvest data to build psychographic profiles, determining users' personality traits based on their Facebook

activity. Ads were segmented into different categories, mainly based on whether individuals were Trump supporters or potential swing votes. Supporters of Trump received triumphant visuals of him, as well as information regarding polling stations. Swing voters were instead often shown images of Trump's more notable supporters and negative graphics or ideas about his opponent, Hillary Clinton.

(iii) Manipulation of Public (by Major Tech Companies)

Major tech companies can manipulate us and make us see what they want us to see, This can allow them to control what we think and lead to a loss of free will. This means that these companies could in theory manipulate our what we think and lead to a loss of free will. A Facebook scandal, where Facebook manipulated the content seen by more than 600,000 users in an attempt to see if they could affect their emotional state. They skewed the number of positive and negative items on random news feeds and then analyzed these people's future postings. The result? Facebook can manipulate your emotions. It's less great for the people having their emotions secretly manipulated." The data scientists at facebook wanted to prove a point with these results about modern technology, but the publication of the results led to a huge blow back.

(iv) Awareness of Free Will

A substantial number of people do not know what free will is, and even more people feel that companies collecting our personal data is perfectly fine. This shows that there is a lack of education amongst the general public about how to protect themselves from being manipulated and might end up living in a curated world. From our survey results, 33.5% of people either did not know, or were unsure of what free will was. 50% of people felt that companies collecting their personal data for targeted advertisements was fine.

However, it is not, as what can be seen from our challenges.

(v) Awareness of free will

Companies such as Acxiom, which is a database marketing company that collects, analyzes and sells customer and business

information used for targeted advertising campaigns. This may lead to consumers purchasing an excessive amount of goods far beyond their budget due to companies bombarding them with constant advertisements that are in line with their interests. In this fake scenario, Mr Hughes(fake person) logs on to Facebook and sees that his friend Ella has just become a fan of Bryce Computers (fake company). Ella's update prompts Mr. Hughes to check out Bryce's fan page and do some digital window-shopping for a fast inkjet printer. When Mr. Hughes follows a link to Bryce's retail site through a targeted advertisement from Acxiom, for example, the system recognizes him from his Facebook activity and flashes a printer to match his interest. The next morning, while he looks through baseball news on ESPN.com, an ad for the printer pops up again. It then offers a better deal: a $10 rebate and free shipping. In this situation, it pegs Mr. Hughes as a "savvy single" that would like free shipping and discounts. Mr. Hughes buys the printer. Later, it sends him coupons for ink and paper, to be redeemed via his cell phone. Again, Mr Hughes buys those items.

The Underlying Problem:

Given that the general public may be manipulated while making decisions regarding politics or purchasing decisions due to marketing and campaigning tactics (condition phrase), how might we reduce instances of the general public being manipulated (key verb phrase), such that they can make decisions more independently in the years ahead (purpose)?

Solution Ideas

1. Futuristic Roadshows

"Roadshows are often done in sequence and occur in a handful of cities in an effort to increase brand awareness and product knowledge" (Yarnold, n.d.).(What) Roadshows can be used to teach the public about different types of data manipulation and how to detect them. (How)It is also quoted "allow sales to move beyond the phone calls and email and actually create face-to-face relationships with potential customers". Similarly, the government will be able to interact with citizens to facilitate effective teaching and learning. With the help of "ground-breaking content, a lively environment and innovative presentation techniques"ees of the roadshow will have a lasting good impression" of the event and remember more.(Why) We will propose to the government to conduct education initiatives through futuristic roadshows. We can make use of innovative methods like virtual reality, augmented reality or holographs. These can help the public learn about what data manipulation is, how it manifests in different forms, and how it can be detected. We will also conduct the roadshow in public transports as it is used by many people and thus have a higher foot traffic, thus increasing the number of people who participate in it.(Where) The roadshow will have specific scenarios in which one might be manipulated by institutions, like the examples we provided in our challenges (corporations). This will help reduce manipulation and increase awareness and help the public make better choices regarding politics and making purchases, as they can identify and avoid manipulation.

2. Limiting Data Collection

We will propose to the government that stricter measures be implemented regarding collection of the general public's data. With

stricter measures, less data will be collected by governments and corporations for their own benefit, and they will have much fewer resources at their disposal to craft marketing or campaigning schemes that can manipulate people. For example, targeted advertisements that make use of collected data to sell products to consumers can be reduced by putting data collection laws in place, regarding the type of data that can be collected, and how it can be used. The public can thus make more independent decisions, free of influence by personalised ads. However, one will still have the choice to turn on personalized advertising should they like it. These measures will also apply to political candidates, preventing something like the Cambridge Analytica incident in the USA from happening in Singapore, thus preventing manipulation of the public. We will have a board of people moderating the data used. The people moderating the data collected by the institutions will come from a group of people who consist of both sides. For example, the people moderating the data collected by the government should consist of an equal number of government officials and unpaid public volunteers. The volunteers are not paid to reduce the feeling of obligation towards the government to agree with everything they say. The people whose data is being used must be informed about it. Lastly, the person must also consent to their data being accessed, unless in special circumstances where one is unable to answer or where the data is needed for a legitimate reason. One example of this is if one is in a medical accident and is in a coma or one commits a crime but refuses to give up his/her data like location history or browsing history. Essential services like hospitals which require these data to properly serve the public will not be affected by the stricter measures during emergencies and other times where the data is needed. However, all companies and the government must not use the data for their personal gain

3. Discussion forums

We will propose to the government that forums be created for the general public to discuss what might, or might not be falsehoods or manipulations. This would encourage healthy debate and scepticism amongst the people, and highlight instances of loss of free will. Forums can be conducted online. Both human and bot moderators ensure that no falsehoods are spread on the forum. Representatives from POFMA could also be active in the chat, to address big topics and issues going on in the forums. Many benefits of discussion forums; they can "improve communication", and users can "seek assistance and support" (Kahootz, 2017). In our case, the people have a convenient way to share with the government and the public about their opinions on instances where falsehoods or manipulation is happening. This solution to data manipulation would require moderators to ensure a serious, relevant, and healthy discussion. It also requires the public to actively contribute ideas.

4. Proposed new Ministry

We will propose to the government that a Ministry be made for the purpose of fact-checking, and making sure content is not false that might potentially mislead people. However, controversial ideas presented as opinions will still be accepted, but half truths and falsehoods spread by institutions deemed to be intentionally misleading, like the Listerine example we gave, will not be accepted. We also recommend the Ministry be formed by non-government officials and be independent from government influence to prevent unfair treatment. The idea is similar to POFMA, but on a larger scale but also makes use of technology to easily identify and neutralise any threats quickly to prevent dangerous material from spreading as much as it does now.

5. Improved Cyber Security measures

We will propose to the government that better cyber safety measures be implemented to counter terrorism incidents that might happen. This had already happened in other countries, where due to falsehoods released on

a massive scale, much of the public was misled and the incidents caused much public unrest and manipulated the election results of the french presidential elections. The US alt-right, along with bots, played a role in amplifying the #Macronleaks that took place just 48 hours before the second round of the French presidential elections. After Macron's emails were hacked, fake documents were inserted into them suggesting Macron had connections to offshore financial accounts. What is interesting to see here, is not only the coordination involved in both the leaking of fake and genuine documents and then the spreading of this information on Twitter, but also the role of foreign actors, including the US alt-right in a French election.

Criteria To Rank Solutions

1) Which solution will be the most easily accepted by the general public, such that they will most quickly be able to be implemented?

2) Which solution will have the longest lasting effects on governments and corporations so as to most effectively reduce manipulation?

3) Which solution will be the easiest and simplest to use such that it will be easiest to implement?

4) Which solution is the most futuristic to implement

5) Which solution is the most realistic to implement such that manipulation by governments and corporations can be most effectively reduced?
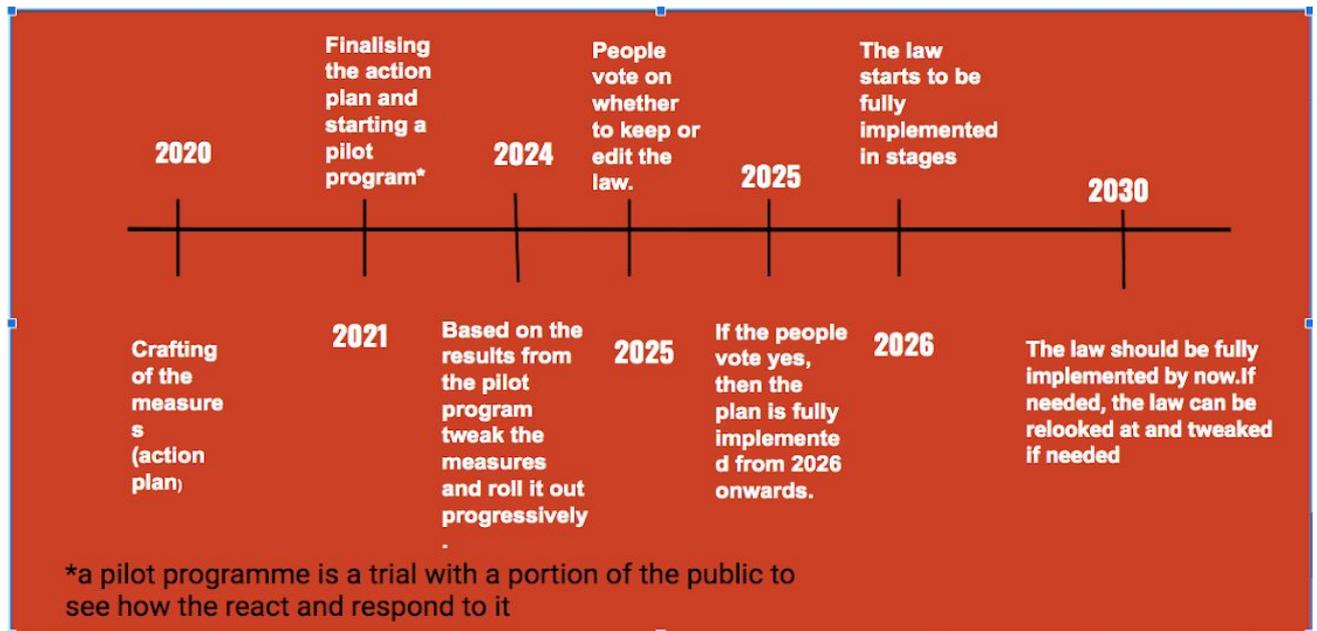
Criteria

Solution/Criteria	Most easily accepted 5	Longest lasting effects 4	Ease of Use (for both the producer and the consumer) 2	Most Futuristic 1	Most Realistic 3	Total
Futuristic Roadshows	20(4)	4(1)	10(5)	5	12(4)	51
Limiting Data collection measures	25(5)	12(3)	6(3)	3	6(2)	52
Ministry of Fact-Checking	5(1)	20(5)	2(1)	2	3(1)	32
Discussion Forums	15(3)	8(2)	8(4)	1	15(5)	47
Better Cyber Safety measures	10(2)	16(4)	4(2)	4	9(3)	43

Action Plan

As "Limiting collection of data" got the highest score, it will be the one we move forward with. We will propose to the government that stricter measures be implemented regarding collection of the

general public's data. This will affect both the government and corporations. It will also improve the security of one's personal data and greatly reduce or completely remove the chances of one being manipulated by the government or corporations

2020
Finalising the action plan and starting a pilot program*
2024
People vote on whether to keep or edit the law.
2025
The law starts to be fully implemented in stages
2030

Crafting of the measures (action plan)
2021
Based on the results from the pilot program tweak the measures and roll it out progressively.
2025
If the people vote yes, then the plan is fully implemented from 2026 onwards.
2026
The law should be fully implemented by now.If needed, the law can be relooked at and tweaked if needed

*a pilot programme is a trial with a portion of the public to see how the react and respond to it

Pilot Program

Our pilot program will basically be a group of volunteers and companiesThey have to live according to the proposed law, and will be interviewed weekly (for companies monthly) on how they feel about it. For the volunteers, they will be asked if their shopping experience been different, have they been buying less unnecessary things, And other questions that are related to the aspects of life that the law impacts. For the companies, they will be asked how their advertising campaigns have been affected, whether they have huge losses in revenue. If the companies don't face too huge a loss and the volunteers feel a good impact on their

life, then the law will move on to the next stage stated in our timeline.

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