Goodstudent Fromfall

CS285L-03 Professor Potasznik

Weekly Write-up #1

Privacy is a fundamental component of our social structure. While most understand the privacy concerns of our fellow law-abiding citizens, society tends not to recognize the right to privacy of criminals; those who choose to operate outside of our societal norms and customs. When it comes to these criminals sharing child pornography on a computer or in the cloud, one can argue that they have no right to privacy, as they can be engaged in acts that have or will jeopardize the safety of children. Just how far should we go, however, to root out this criminal material, and is it ever okay to accidentally violate the privacy of innocent people in the process? Apple is currently having to come up with an answer to this question due to their upcoming release of new software that will scan and potentially flag users' iCloud photos for inspection should they resemble child pornography (Kovach, 2021).

With the aim of stopping their servers from being used to share child pornography, Apple's algorithm would scan users' iCloud photos, with accounts that meet certain algorithmic criteria being "flagged to a human monitor who can confirm the imagery and pass the information along to law enforcement if necessary" (Kovach, 2021). Although this could help catch and remove some very sick individuals who otherwise would have endangered children, it also has the possibility of intruding on the privacy of every one of Apple's cloud storage users. There are some **Key Aspects of Privacy** that this would violate, namely the freedom from surveillance, since an innocent user could unknowingly have their private photos shared with human monitors (Potasznik, Day 4). While the aspects of privacy are in no way law, they are reasonable expectations that we have for our everyday lives. These monitors would most likely be looking at some incredibly intimate material, the kind of material that we would not feel safe sharing with a close friend, let alone a complete stranger, and the fact that it could be happening at any time, without our knowledge, would be itself a violation of privacy.

Another issue with monitors having access to such private and intimate information is that it could be very easy for them to Re-Identify the user. **Re-identification** is the process of identifying someone from small pieces of information (Potasznik, Day 4). Photos of their home, school, place of work, not to mention selfies, would provide an immense amount of information about a user despite their personal identifying information being anonymmized, and could lead to blackmail, stalking, etc. if it were to fall in the wrong hands.

On the other hand, is this a case where the ends justify the means? While a deontological approach would quickly highlight the obvious ethical issues of invading users' privacy, there is a more utilitarian reasoning one could use to justify this surveillance. In order to protect the anonymity of the user, multiple monitors could be assigned to a single account, each only getting a snippet of photos to look through. Perhaps A.I. could be used to blur out background signs or text in emails. All the while, the user would never know that their photos are being viewed, so what harm is being done? We already live in a world where hacking is not unheard of. How much privacy is it reasonable to expect? Are we not already told over and over that anything on the internet will always be on the internet? This is all second to the real value of this feature, though: the stopping of child porn. Apple says it themselves: this software would help protect children and stop criminals from being able to "recruit and exploit them, and limit the spread of Child Sexual Abuse Material" (Kovach, 2021), at least on iCloud.

Our expectation of privacy affects how we behave in certain settings and environments. What we do and how we act in the privacy of our home is, for the most part, very different from how we are in public. We would have an entirely different relationship with our phones if we had the clear understanding that every photo and screenshot we saved was to be viewed by an Apple monitor at some point. For this reason, I do not believe that Apple, or any other cloud storage service, should implement or continue to implement monitoring of our saved photos, despite the progress such a mechanism could make toward protecting abused children.

References

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