News Item

I Want Your (Anonymized) Social Media Data | The Conversation

By Anthony Sanford

June 6, 2018

> Social media sites' responses to the [Facebook-Cambridge Analytica scandal](#) and [new European privacy regulations](#) have given users [much more control](#) over who can access their data, and [for what purposes](#). To me, as a social media user, these are positive developments: It's scary to think what these platforms could do with the troves of data available about me. But [as a researcher](#), increased restrictions on data sharing worry me.
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> I am among the many scholars who depend on data from social media to gain insights into people's actions. In a rush to protect individuals' privacy, I worry that an unintended casualty could be knowledge about human nature. My most recent work, for example, [analyzes feelings people express on Twitter](#) to explain why the stock market fluctuates so much over the course of a single day. There are applications well beyond finance. Other scholars have studied [mass transit rider satisfaction](#), [emergency alert systems' function during natural disasters](#) and how online interactions [influence people's desire to lead healthy lifestyles](#).
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> This poses a dilemma – not just for me personally, but for society as a whole. Most people don't want social media platforms to share or sell their personal information, unless specifically [authorized by the individual user](#). But as members of a collective society, it's useful to understand the social forces at work influencing everyday life and long-term trends. Before the recent crises, Facebook and other companies had already been making it hard for [legitimate researchers to use their data](#), including by [making it more difficult and more expensive](#) to download and access data for analysis. The renewed public pressure for privacy means it's likely to get even tougher.

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