

You have NOT read the terms of use, and nor did I

When installing different applications and games on our phones and computers we just press next, next, next, until we see that progress bar and finally the finish button. Don't we? Yes, we do, all of us. We press it and it's done. We can now use the app, play the game whenever we want for as long as we please (before mama says go to bed). But, wait. Let's go back a bit. In between those next buttons, there was one checkbox that you rushed through. This checkbox mentioned something about some terms of use. Everything that we have bought or borrowed in our lives comes with some conditions under which we are allowed to use it. Literally everything. When we borrow a bike from our friend, the condition is "Please take care of it", when our parents buy candy for us the terms of use are "Don't eat it before lunch" and "Give half to your sister/brother".

Usually the terms of use for the games and apps we use are made in similar fashion, we should be considerate towards the companies that built them for us and use them fairly. And we all agree with these, no objections. This habit of ours, accepting the terms of use with no objections because we believe them to be fair and reasonable, can be very dangerous for us. We all use applications that require our personal information in which we can provide our personal input (Facebook, WhatsApp, Viber, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter etc.). This is where a bubble of danger starts to form. By using all these applications, we share information about us, information which are very abundant and very revealing. However, it's not a problem since we share this information between the people we know and trust, right? Wrong. In order to send this data, the company that made the app, needs to store it somewhere. So, now, that silly face photo of you which was intended for yours and your friend's eyes only is saved on some server. As well as that joke you made about your friend's weird new haircut. Don't forget about everything that you have uploaded on your cloud. The host owns that data. All of a sudden, it looks like we have too much data about us in many different formats (messages, images, links shared, pages followed, etc.) stored by multiple companies. The bubble of danger got bigger, right? Of course it did, because the companies that are storing this data are not our friends, and are not in our circle of trust.

However, it is all under control as long as the companies do not take advantage of our personal data. As a matter of fact, it can be a good thing, because they have developed tools based on our data that can provide a better experience for us as users. For example, Facebook knows that if you like the pages of Manchester United, Chelsea, and Arsenal, you are a fan of the Premier League, and it will show you the news regarding these clubs at the top of your news feed. Furthermore, it will show you advertisements from places that sell merchandise from these clubs. So, it is a win-win, the company that made the application uses your data to show you updates about your interests on one hand. On the other, it makes better placement of the advertisements for the companies that paid for them.

It really is a win-win situation, isn't it? Not really. These companies that I mentioned, the ones paying for the advertisements, what happens when they offer instead of buying advertising space, to buy your data from the company that made that great application you are so happy to use? Now you have a different scenario. The data that you posted for your friends to see, and owned by the company that you trust because it makes all these cool features for you is owned also by someone else. Someone you don't know and don't trust. Just like your best friend telling his/her cousin that you like Sarah from biology class. Now you don't know if he/she is going to tell someone, and that someone to some other person. You are now at a point where you don't have control of the information that is very sensitive for you. So, that bubble of danger is getting really big and harder to handle. Once this data about you is a property of a third party, they can use it to our benefit or to the contrary. This is especially important when using certain applications to read the news about recent events since those applications are presenting content that is a key factor in forming our opinions. Giving a third party company the opportunity and power to shape your opinion in a way that best

suits their interest leads to major consequences. Creating separation and intolerance between people is just one of them. These two create fertile ground for problems that echo through many aspects in one society, the effects of which we are witnessing in the past couple of years.

The way that data policies are set right now, we can do little to change this predicament. However, we can learn how to master them, how to exploit and extract the best of them for our own good. First step towards that is to be aware. Be aware of our behavior on the Internet, think twice before sharing things that can hurt or embarrass us in the future. Imagine sharing something in social media as publishing the same thing on a front page in a daily newspaper that has your name in the headline. If it is not meant to be there, it is also not meant to be online. Next, we don't want to get in a loop. We want to read news from different sources, read the same things written in different ways, from different perspectives, and form our own opinion. Use the networks for what they meant to be in the first place. Connect with people, communicate, exchange opinions, educate yourself and others through debates and shared experiences. Only in this way, we can handle and embrace that dangerous bubble of data without bursting into ignorance and division.