

Is Social Media Really Stealing Your Data? Here's What You Need to Know

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In brief

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The ways in which social media platforms use and manage data from their users has become a hotter and hotter topic over recent years, and people have started asking questions about targeted advertising, data breaches, and other concerns. Let's take a quick look at a few of the most important things you need to know about what social media is really doing with your data.

User Empowerment and Control

Let's start with the good news. You are (for the most part) still in control if you're careful about your choices.

Users are still in charge of deciding which advertisements they see, who can access their information, and how much data they provide. These factors can all be controlled in your account and profile settings and preferences on various sites and platforms, which are becoming more transparent about control and data use. You also have the option to use software like DeleteMe, which can actually remove any of your personal information from the web.

Data Collection vs. Theft

Next, we need to distinguish between data theft and data collection, because the difference is important for you to understand as a user.

Social media companies all gather a tonne of data on its users, including their contact details, demographics, online activity, and their interests and preferences. They then use this data to personalise advertising, platform capabilities, and your user experience as a whole. Even though this might lead to privacy problems and concerns, as long as users provide their consent, it's not considered theft. This is why you need to pay attention to the permissions you provide to any platform.

Consent and Privacy Policies

Here's what we mean: when you sign up for a social media platform, you typically have to agree to their terms of service and privacy policies. This is exactly where you'll be agreeing to their procedures for gathering, using, and sharing your data.

Most users won't bother to read through these rules. However, having even a basic understanding of what you're agreeing to when you click "I Accept," is a pretty good idea - especially if you're concerned about your data and privacy. In the end, it's your responsibility as a user to make well-informed choices.

Data Breaches and Security

Okay, but what if your main concern is a massive cyberattack that leaves your precious data vulnerable and out in the open?

The thing about this is that it can always happen. Even major companies with stringent cybersecurity have been hacked and had data leaked. When this happens, sensitive user data might be disclosed to uninvited parties, and users might be at risk. The best we can do to avoid this is secure our accounts with strong passwords, use 2FA, or if you're truly concerned, avoid signing up to these platforms in the first place.

References

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