

The business of babies and big data

November 1 2017, by Kim Cousins, Particle

It's bad enough we give away data about ourselves, but when did we start giving it away for babies too?

Sharing photos of our kids and the cute things they do on [social media](#) has become the norm for most parents. It is a great way to [stay connected with family and friends and feel part of a greater network](#) when cooped up at home.

But what we don't often think about is what happens to the [information](#) after it's posted and liked.

Not only are these little people's future identities being shaped, their [personal information](#) (or biometrics) is being captured and turned into big data.

Curtin University's Associate Professor Tama Leaver (a dad of four and keen social [media](#) user) studies the way social media shapes the identity of kids.

He's all for sharing special moments with digital friends but says there are a few things to be aware of, especially when it comes to big data.

Big brother is watching

Big data refers to the massive sets of information gathered online, such as what we share on social media. This data, or information, is analysed for patterns in behaviour and then stored by corporate companies.

"Internet companies, like Facebook, know there's something useful in there so they hold onto it," Tama says.

"Facebook then sells ads to advertising companies based on this data."

Babies and wearable tech

When it comes to [big data](#), babies are big business.

"Pregnancy apps are popular today, and sharing of [ultrasound images](#) has become a rite of passage on social media," Tama says.

There are a bunch of products available for nervous parents such as [Owlet](#), a sock that measures a baby's breathing, heart rate and oxygen levels. It's a like a Fitbit for babies.

Owlet's website says it's all about the "largest data set about infant health, sleep, wellness and safety that's ever been collected".

"This is not a medical company, it's a start-up," Tama says.

"The devices don't prevent SIDS and are not supported by medical experts. In fact, there could be harm from false reassurance and false warnings."

Tama's tips

There are a few things you can do to keep your baby's private details under wraps.

"When sharing ultrasound images on social media, make sure that identifying information, like the mother's name, date of birth and

medical facility, are not visible," Tama says.

They're long, but check terms of use before you click yes (or get [this guy](#) to read them for you).

Tama says, ultimately, it's the power of the parent that holds the most importance.

"Think of Superman—if his parents tagged him on Facebook today, he might get outed as Clark Kent," he says.

This article first appeared on [Particle](#), a science news website based at Scitech, Perth, Australia. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by Particle

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