What if Apple ran social media—would it pry?

February 6 2019, by Jefferson Graham, Usa Today

The idea seemed simple enough. An app to learn more about mobile users habits, what websites they visit, what they shop for on Amazon and the like.

Except that the way Facebook went about fishing for users data, which blew up this week when it was revealed the social network did an end run around Apple's policies, wasn't kosher. Apple kicked Facebook out. (It did the same thing with Google this week as well, but that's another story. More on both in a minute.)

Apple and Facebook have a totally different way of looking at our information. Facebook appears to covet every morsel it can gather about us, as a way of selling targeted advertising. Apple says it doesn't want to know and makes a big deal of saying it doesn't monitor your keystrokes on the iPhone, Siri searches or mapping routes. "Every Apple product is designed from the ground up to protect that information," the company says.

Facebook, of course, sucks up our data every time we like a photo, comment on a post, share a life event, buy an item through its Marketplace, reach out to friends far and wide on Messenger.

Our big question?

We wondered: What would a Facebook look like if it adhered to the strict pro-privacy stance of Apple. Could there be a social network at

all?

Yes, but it would be different, argues Bennett Cyphers, a staff technologist at the Electronic Frontier Foundation advocacy group. It would be one that still hungers for your data, but asked permission first and was less greedy.

"You could still build the features people love about Facebook without the things that make it so invasive" he says. "That means less targeted ads and more user choice about how we consume Facebook."

Remember that Apple CEO Tim Cook has made a big deal about how Apple doesn't retain your personal information. "You are not our product, you are our customer," he has said.

In a recent Op-Ed for the Wall Street Journal, Facebook co-founder Mark Zuckerberg said users want relevant ads, and to make them so, "we need to understand their interests. So based on what pages people like, what they click on, and other signals, we create categories—for example, people who like pages about gardening and live in Spain—and then charge advertisers to show ads to that category."

In the piece, he also said users have "control over what information we use to show you ads, and you can block any advertiser from reaching you."

Can Facebook users stop the tracking?

Well, yes and no. I've clicked every button on Facebook to stop advertisers from tracking me, which is good news/bad news. I killed the relevant ads, but I still have non-relevant advertisers like auto dealers from Wisconsin, Arkansas and Colorado targeting me (I live in Los Angeles), along with a chiropractor in Corona, about an hour from my

home.

But again, I clicked the buttons in the security settings to keep out the snoopers. Most people don't. And despite the headlines of the past year about hacks and other ills, Facebook has more users and made more money than a year ago, it revealed this week in its earnings report.

Still, Cyphers insists that in a retooled, less data-thirsty Facebook, users could still go to their News Feed, see posts from friends, with ads based on their travels and interests.

Facebook doesn't have to keep tracking you when you leave the social network, via the "Pixel," code that is on over 2 million websites. (That's how when you shop for something on Amazon without buying it, you see an ad for it within minutes on Facebook. Or stop by a local big box grocer, buy something and hand over your loyalty card, and get pinged with an ad from the grocer when you turn on Facebook again. "Even if you're not on Facebook, they know what you're doing," Cyphers says.

So does Google. Every time you search for something, Google notes your interest, demographic and location. When you sign in to watch YouTube and it auto plays videos based on your viewing history, it only got that information because you gave it to Google. Ditto for using Google Maps, Trips and other Google apps that track you.

Is Apple really clean?

For that matter, so does Apple. GPS on iPhones track our every move, even if Apple insists it doesn't hold onto the information.

This week Apple had its own privacy flap when it was discovered that a bug in the FaceTime video calling system could listen in on the caller before the call was even accepted. Apple apologized, pulled down the

feature and says it will return Monday, working like it's supposed to, via a software update.

Later this week, Apple was in the news for banning Facebook and Google from banning their internal apps. This is how both firms did end runs around Apple by releasing data snoop apps to the public, outside of the iOS App Store, and showing that you don't want to mess with Apple.

Apple's response to the breaches, saying it did so to "protect our users and their data," rang hollow to the Georgia Institute of Technology's Ivan Bogost. "Apple is not a company committed to data privacy. It is a company that adopts considerably better policies than its more data-hungry competitors, but that does little to curtail the general problem."

Writing for the Atlantic, Bogost says that if Apple really wanted to, it could offer a much more serious substitute to snoopy data collecting apps like Facebook, "one that could bring about a whole different world of technological experience."

Beyond its short-term bans on internal apps, it could certainly go further and ban data-collecting apps like Facebook, Instagram and Google off the iPhone altogether. It could dump Google as the built-in search engine for the Safari browser on the iPhone.

Now that would make a statement.

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Citation: What if Apple ran social media—would it pry? (2019, February 6) retrieved 18 April 2024 from https://phys.org/news/2019-02-apple-ran-social-mediawould-pry.html