



“The Times They are a-Changin’”: Thoughts on Data Security and Privacy in the Post-Modern Age

By: Martin Mendelsohn, Senior Partner

Some of us grew up in the 1970s, listening to the “Age of Aquarius” by The Fifth Dimension, a legendary band which also chalked up some of my other favorite 45s (an old record format): “Stone Soul Picnic,” “Save the Country” and “California Soul”. Great titles, then, and increasingly relevant to some of today’s evolving technology challenges. The Age of Aquarius is a song, and now video clip which ports in characters and constellations from cyberspace, the entire scene cosseted by a lion’s silhouette. Whether stimulant-induced or otherwise, the vision created is one of a dark universe with infinite points of light, some visible to the eye, others less so, though all converge onto a spaceship hosting dancers and singers—an oasis in the deep dark web universe. An Orwellian image and statement which we can interpret in any number of directions. Once the music stops and we pause the Spotify feed, cyber sleuths, hackers, ‘red teams’ and raconteurs all let us know how vulnerable we are to actors bad and good—in article after article and expensive global confab after confab. Heck, Tony Blair and Benjamin Netanyahu are fixtures today at Web Summit and Cybertech, global internet and cyber conferences—discussing nation state defense, Fortnite, and bad actors in an increasingly borderless world. **What does it all mean and how dangerous is all of this, really? We would posit dangerous, even downright nefarious.**

The Millennial generation gets this hazard more than anyone else. When asked what their biggest fear is in today’s Internet world, Web Summit Lisbon conference attendees voted unanimously during one of the online tallies held in a Web Summit conference hall, for Big Brother’s ‘long arm’ as the winner of the fear instilling contest for 2020.



In this case, though, Big Brother is FAANG (Facebook, Amazon, Apple, Netflix & Google), while Government (the lesser Big Brother) is regarded as a reactive force as opposed to its more traditional role as restrictive, regulatory body. Government is one step behind the vaunted oligopoly that all of us hold in our stock portfolios, and in many cases, is viewed as a pawn of the data behemoths. So what are we doing about the fact that you and I are one click or data breach away from some major personal and potential financial harm?

While we call Big Government scary, we share personal data across social media and content providers, inviting others into our personal, financial and professional 'safe spaces'. You can watch me hitting the pistes *real time* in Val Thorens--ah, and my house is empty and IoT alarm setting is easily disabled....You know my purchasing patterns and what I buy, from whom, where and when I go to Starbucks, whom I befriend (or in my specific case, defriend every election cycle), and I think nothing of it. You see my kids' photos and Instagram accounts, where they go to school, what they do on holiday, and even their political leanings. Confusing for sure; on one hand, Millennials are often first in line to provide, share-- and expect to receive--content, for free, while on the other hand, we as a generation are quite opposed to FAANG owning and using our data for 'diverse' and 'helpful' purposes. My Gen-X and Boomer colleagues have enough trouble expanding the font size on their smartphones, though are also avid data 'sharers'. So, we are all vulnerable--and all complicit--as individuals who want to be seen and want to see others' lives to know how (*fill in the blank with your favorite adjective or insert emoji*) we are! All the while, the cloud data security providers collect, curate, collate and...cash in.

The Government knows more about you today than in the entire history of the world, and can monitor your movement, correspondence and connections with a swipe or click. Google and Facebook know what you say, even what you are about to think. Your weight, pulse, health program, spending, favorite drink? Who needs a scale, cash, or a camera any more--simply grab your Fitbit, GoPro or AppleWatch and all the answers are there. These data platforms are making us more complacent by gradually taking away our need to make decisions. They always have the answer--the right answer, they know what size shoes we're looking to buy, shows on Netflix we're likely to watch



and political issues that may sway us in a certain direction. We place great trust in the likes of Google for the best route to a destination, restaurant reviews, and what devices to procure without hesitation. Our reliance on the oligopoly is growing and our attention span is shrinking-concurrent with our ability to think independently.

Software providers help Governments ensure citizen complicity and complacency--in borderless, seamless and vapor-ware fashion. Data fusion, pattern tracking, web intelligence and dark web trolling help track bad guys in far-off lands, a good thing one might argue. We can wiretap citizens with a FISA request (or sometimes without) and have programmed chat apps with an 'explode' feature to delete our conversations within seconds of sending the note. Is this progress or harmful? And what are we to do? Some basic lessons on life in today's hack me - track me - whack me wacky world:

- Chat streams: consider that anything you send to another individual or group is accessible to others; anyone from that group of friends/colleagues with whom you correspond can forward, share, like, alter or cut and paste your message/picture/video.
- Emails: whenever a serious or sensitive topic requires communal assessment or negotiation, pick up that thing with the cord (the charger or the twisty cable) and engage the counterparty(ies) in direct discussion. This will save angst, discomfort and potential harm as what you write is often misinterpreted.
- Facebook: someone hit the red button already! How much damaging personal information do you really want to share with the world? You had a great weekend with your friends on the yacht and the bikini really does fit well. This is something your potential (or current) employer needs to see? Your political views are important--does your future spouse/mother-in-law/professor need to know that you support (fill in the blank here)?
- Sharing data with content providers/aggregators: NO! Provide the absolute minimum amount of data about yourself, your financial situation, goals/objectives, alcohol preference or predilection for lollipops and edibles. Really, this is not funny.

What happens in Web 3.0 / 2030, is indeed less of the same. Governments will put the heavy hand on data companies' shoulders. Restrictions on use, distribution, type and even delivery of content are certain to increase, which will result in a more regulated economy coupled with controlled content (with content providers exercising increasing levels of self-censorship). This will impact you, the consumer, directly, as the multitude of feeds, streams and information is likely to taper, while Twitter and chat apps will grow in proliferation and usage. Telegram, Viber, WhatsApp and WeChat will all be owned by larger conglomerates and will end up exercising increased self-censorship and monitoring of hate speech, criminal activity and nefarious

planning--all pushing the dark web to flex its tentacles. Governments will struggle to keep pace, and will end up responding in haphazard and uncoordinated fashion; just as Russia banned LinkedIn, and China has banned any number of apps and websites, other more self-declared 'democratized' countries will soon beat a path to the examples set by the wayward 'vanguard of the proletariat'. In short, the landscape is shifting rapidly, the consumer will not benefit over time, the convergence of interests between Governments and Content Providers and Data Aggregators is already underway....and Bob Dylan lurks ever more prominently: the times really are a-changin'.



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