PERSPECTIVE

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A Band of Little Big Brothers: The Privacy Merchants

By Amalit Elzioni

The American public has long understood that, first and foremost, our financial and personal data are the property of the American government. For the first time in history, it is the state, the most powerful entity on this planet, that is supposed to protect our privacy. This is a revolution in the realm of information in the United States: individuals are supposed to be the owners of their own data, and the government is supposed to respect their privacy. However, this revolution is not complete, and there are still many gaps in the protection of personal data.

Privacy merchants are the companies that collect, store, and sell our personal data. They are the ones that determine what information about us is valuable, and how much we should pay for it. They are the ones that decide what we can do with our data, and what we cannot do. In most cases, we are not even aware of the extent of these data collection activities.

For example, many may be aware of tracking tools called "cookies," and some have learned to protect themselves by deleting cookies from their computer. However, cookies are often used by privacy merchants to collect data about you, such as your browsing habits, your interests, and your preferences.

Another approach would be to compare the works, Columbia University Press 1997. The American Public Library system ("the library") and a few other libraries have already amassed. In 2010, more than 400,000 public libraries had subscribed to MyLibrary. It may be some time before the government is able at http://mcir.usc.edu/.

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