Little does the public know that everything they are tweeting, instagramming, or snapchatting right now is falling into the hands of Big Brother. Over the past couple years, tech companies and the police force are joining forces to track certain social media accounts. By making under the radar agreements with big names, social media sites like: facebook, twitter, Instagram, etc. are selling their data for a profit. Companies like Geofeedia track social media feeds in real time to monitor and track protesters so that authorities can use that information to help keep the situation under control.

The CEO of Geofeedia, Phil Harris, states that the firm is in no way helping authorities single out minority groups. The company’s main job is to associate social media posts with locations which is completely legal according to these social site developers. The developer’s belief is that if someone makes their account and information public, they are automatically giving up their right to privacy. In that case it is perfectly okay use the information in whatever way is necessary because the user has agreed to their account being viewable by anyone.

Even though Geofeedia believes they have the authority to do what they are doing, both Twitter and Facebook have come out claiming that Geofeedia is over stepping their rights as a developer. Facebooks stated that, “This developer only had access to data that people chose to
make public.” By accessing private accounts to use for data, Geofeedia was well outside of their legal boundaries. At the same time, Geofeedia employees were found boasting about how they could still pull private information off of Instagram and Twitter accounts. It is still an ongoing battle between these data gathering companies and civil liberties.

Now that this type of business is truly exposed, public outrage is growing. Some are even claiming that these data gathering techniques are hurting the black population because of racial targeting. Facebook and Instagram have officially closed off Geofeedia’s access to accounts this past September. At the same time, police forces across the nation are spending tax-dollars on data gathering equipment techniques to monitor their local social media. It was even discovered that a police force in Denver had spent $30,000 in order attain online surveillance tools. Now it isn’t about whether they can or cannot gather data but where and what data they can gather.

After reading this article I felt like a filter has been removed from my paradigm. I was always conscious of the government’s ability to collect citizens’ data but I was never aware of the extent that this data gathering would go to. When it was made known through the boasting employee that they could gather ones’ information even from a private account, I was astounded. It was always my belief that making one’s account private meant that it was inaccessible to everyone except the user and their friends. Now that it is known that private accounts can be fair game, I am not sure how I feel using my social media accounts anymore. In fact, I can already tell that I am going to decrease my activity on these applications that have been proven to be harmful.

Even though this article really pushes the idea of racial and minority injustice through data gathering I believe that this is just tiny section of a bigger problem. Now, the reasons for these groups protesting are irrelevant to the point I am trying to make which is why I will not go
elaborate too much on the situation, however, violent and harmful protests do give ground for extra action to be taken no matter the race. This is the one time I actually agree with what these companies are doing. Do not get the wrong message, the means to which this data is gathered should be legal and ethical but at the same time, when innocent businesses and police officers are being targeted due to false narratives portrayed by media and other corrupt political figures, it is the local law enforcement’s job to protect the well-being of its employees and citizens. In the cases of these racial riots, the police are simply trying to keep these mislead and rightfully angry protesters from destroying the local businesses and protect its citizen which is completely understandable.

The only reason the police were targeting certain minority groups in that situation was because those minority groups were in the process of looting and burning local businesses while also endangering the citizens in that area. They weren’t targeted simply because of the color of their skin but because of their actions. The picture is much bigger than what the author tried to insinuate with his/her racial injustice rhetoric. In fact, the title seems to me like click bait more than anything else. The true message in this article it isn’t about majority vs. minority races which it what the author really tries to emphasize at first, it is about the Government and big business surveillance over the common citizen which is what the author should have tried to focus on and what I hope the reader really focuses on.

The companies that created these social media sites have no basis whatsoever to stop doing what they are doing if they are in fact only using data from public accounts. By signing up for an account on Facebook or Twitter, one is giving the company the right to use whatever data is uploaded. In another article the author reemphasizes the point that when one is using a tool such as Google, then by using that resource the user is giving up their right to keeping that
information private. This translates into many other cases all over the web, especially when it comes to a social site. It is the person’s job to realize that, not the company’s job. At the same time, if a company claims to only use data from public accounts and is caught gathering from private accounts, then I feel that legal action should be in order to reprimand this illegal behavior.

Question: If local governments can easily track and take down individual accounts then why are there still so many fraudulent social media accounts such online?
Works Cited