

Personal Privacy Concerns Emerge from Automobile Data Collection and Resale

September 12, 2023 - A recent report by the Mozilla Foundation has found that automobile manufacturers are using all of the sensors in their cars to spy on the owners. And the information that they are gathering is then being offered up for sale with virtually no notification to owners and passengers of their vehicles.

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Researchers looked at 25 different car brands and 15 car companies and their revelations were somewhat astonishing. Japanese carmaker Nissan openly admitted that it could sell information regarding drivers and passengers' sexual activity, intelligence, and health diagnoses to various entities, including data brokers and law enforcement agencies. Meanwhile, German automaker Volkswagen stated that it had the capability to record drivers' voices for the purpose of creating targeted advertisements.

To investigate car companies' privacy practices, the research team examined privacy policies and downloaded apps from car manufacturers in Germany, France, the United States, Japan, and South Korea. They determined that the sensors included in newer vehicles and often sold as safety enhancements were actually being used to spy on drivers and passengers. The data being collected includes things like the weight of passengers in the car, filming of both the interior and exterior, eavesdropping on conversations and even tracking owners via smart phone applications.

They found that 84% of the brands they looked at had the ability to resell any collected data; either to data brokers or government agencies including law enforcement.

All of this is being done with virtually no regulation and no consent being granted by owners or passengers. According to the report Subaru actually implied that being a passenger in one of their vehicles inherently implies consent to their privacy policy. We can virtually guarantee that almost none of Subaru's customer have ever read their privacy policy. In fact we're fairly certain that none of their customers ever thought they would need to read the privacy policy for a car that they are purchasing.

The extensive collection and resale of data by car manufacturers raise significant concerns about personal privacy. As technology in vehicles continues to advance, more data will be gathered, potentially including even more intimate details about individuals. But none of this data should belong to anyone other than the people who own the cars or their passengers. And it certainly shouldn't be data that is stored by automotive manufacturers without the explicit consent of

the owners. This is one area of privacy that Congress needs to get involved with quickly. The idea that an automobile manufacturer can record conversations you have in the "privacy" of your personal vehicle and then sell those conversations to the highest bidder is simply unacceptable.

by Jim Malmberg

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