

First reflection session

I used this meeting to discuss my research question with my supervisor and narrow it down. I got interested in the subject of internet privacy by following the story of Wikileaks and the arguments about whether this was the right thing to do, I thought this was too big an area to get in to so I tried to narrow it down to something that was relevant to me, because like most other people I use Google and Facebook quite a lot. I discussed how I was going to focus on what was ethical about the issue I chose for example if people get a service for free, what is it ok for the company to get back in return from the users. I also discussed what kind of research I should do and where to find resources. I realised that I needed to get views from both sides including data and figures about things like how many people use Facebook and Google.

Interim reflection

So far the project is going pretty well. I have overall a better understanding of the task and what I have to do and I think I'm better at seeing both sides of the argument. When I started reading information about how my data was being tracked even when I wasn't actually using Google or Facebook, it made me pretty angry and then I started to realise that most of my research was from one side and this meant that my project would not be balanced. This made me look for some other evidence from Facebook and Google's point of view and I saw that there were some good sides to it like being able to catch people grooming on the internet to keep young people safe. I wanted to get information from different sources, but because it's a very up to date issue there isn't much information about it in books so I'm getting most of my information from the internet. I found a really useful article on an online blog called Beyond The Beltway which makes some really good points that fit with my ideas, though it's harder to find information that puts the points for tracking information. I think the next thing I needs to do is thinking about what my conclusions should be and how I can give my point of view on the subject. I've also got a lot better at using internet search engines by using things like advanced search and quotation marks to get more relevant results.

Final reflection – viva voce

The project was a really challenging task to complete, but I think I have learned a lot from it. I now know much more about the subject of internet privacy than I did at the start and I also understand about how to research and issue and look for sources of information. At the start I was really against companies using data from people because it seemed really unfair that someone who you don't know knows personal information about you and you don't really know what for. I changed my point of view a little bit because if a company is giving you a service for free then it's only fair that they make their money somehow and everybody has to sign up saying that they agree. I still think that it's wrong when they track you when you're not using their product though, because that just seems like spying and you haven't given your permission for that. Overall I think I did pretty well gathering information from both sides and putting both sides of the argument, but it could have been improved by putting more facts and figures about things like how many people have been affected and giving more information about how the police use the information they get from things like Facebook to help stop crime.

Supervisor's comments:

Overall, the candidate showed good evidence of an increased understanding of both the complexities of the ethical dilemma chosen and what makes an effective research methodology. In the early meetings they were able to show understanding of what the ethical dimension was and how this could be shaped into an appropriate research question. Though the question could have been better phrased so it didn't suggest there was a straightforward 'yes or no' answer, this did not seem to have an adverse effect on the content of the project. They were able to explain their approach to research, though found it hard to get beyond using keyword searches to find internet resources when looking for information and insights on the dilemma.

The candidate was able to reflect on their research process across the supervisor meetings, mainly through improving the range of views in the materials they collected. However, they often found it hard to use the information to develop their own views and tended to refer to how far they agreed or disagreed with the ideas presented rather than using it as a starting point for their own thoughts. Overall understanding of bias and validity was shown mainly implicitly through their selection of material. The candidate found it more difficult to assess the provenance of the material they had used, tending to think of bias more in terms of whether what was said seemed 'fair' or not. For example, they quoted from the founder of a company offering privacy monitoring and protection without considering that they would have a commercial interest in making the threat seem as significant as possible.

The candidate clearly seemed engaged in the ethical dilemma they selected and showed some evidence of having changed their ideas on the subject over the course of the project to take a more balanced view. During the final reflection meeting they were able to clearly articulate both sides of the ethical dilemma at a straightforward level. However, at times when questioned they still seemed to be more comfortable reporting other people's views rather than challenging them or using them to explore particular aspects of the dilemma, such as, for example, how far using internet data to target the minority who may be using it illegally, justifies privacy breaches of the majority or whether one necessarily means the other is inevitable.