PUBLIC INTEREST TECHNOLOGY

My digital superpower #PublicInterestTech

Sid Rao, a security analyst specializing in communication protocols, explains how metadata from our day-to-day Internet activities can be exploited.

Technology is transforming every area of our lives. But as it opens new avenues and shows us fresh possibilities, tech can also deepen existing inequalities. We believe in harnessing technology to serve justice and the public interest—and we see a wealth of opportunities to do so. That's why the Ford Foundation is working with a community of partners to develop a path for people to use their technology skills to change the world for the better: the professional field of public interest technology.

Transcript begins.

Sid Rao: One of the most pressing tech issues which civil society is facing is the invisible data problem.

> [Sid Rao, Ford-Mozilla Open Web Fellow, European Digital Rights. A bearded Indian man with a handlebar mustache, wearing a black t-shirt.]

Hi, I'm Sid Rao, and my superpower is to help you protect your digital privacy.

> [A light blue animated cape and eye mask appears on Sid as he flexes his muscles. The cape says "digital privacy".]

As part of my fellowship, I was based in European Digital Rights, 35 human rights organizations which are working in the digital space. Part of my main work was to work on projects related to privacy, how metadata can be exploited. As Internet end users, we don't know what we are signing up for. We don't know how our personal data is used, how we are being tracked, and most importantly how all these things are impacting your personal life.

So what we did through Hakuna Metadata Project was, I built a tool which anyone can use to see how their Internet service providers can see what they're doing, and how they can build a digital persona.

> [An animated x-ray machine scans Sid's body to reveal the words "attack", and "privacy".]

Example of which, if my Internet service providers start tracking what I do on the Internet and try to build a person of it, I am branded as a terrorist—mainly because one set of my metadata says I'm a brown guy, I'm from Global South, I'm from Southeast Asia. There's one set of

metadata, which is about how I look, and with a beard, and things like that. On the other hand, I'm a security and privacy researcher, and most of my academic papers start with attacking this protocol for something.

So, I built this tool, and I was surprised to see the very significant word in my profile, my digital persona, was the word "attack." What if this data is sold to someone, for example, to the government agencies? And now I can relate that every time I go to the airport I'm called for random checks, probably this is the reason. So, using this tool everyone can see what is happening, how day-to-day Internet activities can be used for monetizing, can be used for tracking, can be used for profiling.

> [Sid Rao transforms into a silhouette of blue and white data and numbers, with words such as "Attack", "Security", "Southeast Asia", and "Privacy" forming inside his body outline.]

My freedom matters the most than anything else in my life, and I'm sure that it's the same for everyone. And before it's too late, I have to take a stand. I'm doing it for myself, but for everyone.

> [Ford Foundation logo: a globe made up of a series of small, varied circles. Mozilla logo.]

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