



University
of Victoria

Writing Assignment Location-Based Services

GEOG 391
Geocaching
Rheannon Brooks

Evan Fryer

Due Date: August 18, 2013

Introduction

In today's society, location-based services are becoming more actively deployed in an effort to construct a wide variety of unique engagement experiences for public use. In fact, with the rapid augmentation of technology continuing to escalate, the retrieval and utilization of location information is substantially interwoven into the fabric of everyday life. However, these accessible and convenient services are arguably associated with privacy rights invasion. In this essay, I will briefly delineate the good, the bad, and the opportunity that comes with location-based services.

The Good

At the heart of Western culture, there resides an intrinsic desire to generate an easier and more efficient way of living day-to-day life. Thankfully, location-based services can help concretize this aspiration. Not only can a Global Positioning System (GPS) provide location information as to a person's whereabouts (which is undoubtedly useful for the typical foreigner), but it can also provide users with a unique opportunity to interact with their surrounding environment in time and space. If a user decides to opt-in to location-based services, then there are many advantages that this freedom of location information brings.

Firstly, we have to recognize that a large percentage of the North American demographic own some type of smart phone rigged with built-in GPS units. In fact, it was recently published in Forbes Magazine that around 56% of people in the United States have a smart phone, up from just 35% two years ago (Rogowsky, 2013). The main advantage here is that mobile users do not have to do any type of manual input into their smart phones; that is, GPS will track their movement and enable them to pick up on many different services (restaurants, stores, bank machines, etc.) based on their location while providing them with turn-by-turn directions to each place. Furthermore, location-based services can provide information regarding particular locations that have been created by other users, or even the store itself through location-based networking (Lahdhani, 2010). This lets customers share various

business experiences with their friends and family. From a business perspective, this can help boost reputation and potentially increase the number of customers you attract (Wu, Kao, & Yang, 2012). This correlates to another advantage: real-time marketing. This service personalizes deals and savings based on the past history of a user by compiling all of the places they have *checked-in* at (2012). Also, businesses can then offer customer rewards by giving coupons and special offers when people visit or talk about their business. Moreover, there are privacy protections through *k-anonymity* (a security algorithm) on all of these systems that do not compromise individual privacy (Zuberi, Lall, & Ahmad, 2012).

Ultimately, if you are searching for an improved experience while engaging in your daily activities, then location-based services are there for your convenience. All it takes is for you to opt-in to these services in the settings of your smartphone.

The Bad

Although the enhancement of everyday activities is superficially alluring, there lay many complications rooted at a much deeper level. These concerns stem from the way in which large networking businesses and corporations collect, use, and disclose location information. As part of the Constitution Act in 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees that “everyone has the right to be secure against unreasonable search or seizure” (Justice Laws, 2013). When you read this legal right (outlined in Section 8 of the Charter) it is easy to bypass the correlation to privacy rights. Upon closer inspection, it is apparent that the key is in the word *search*. It is, however, very easy to overlook this minute detail and could give reason to the cloudiness of privacy laws in Canada today. Furthermore, the problem is magnified by the word *unreasonable*, which is left to much interpretation.

Thus, the very next year in 1983, the Federal Government of Canada put into place a new privacy law. The Privacy Act was implemented to impose obligations on some federal departments and agencies to respect privacy rights by limiting the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information (Privacy Commissioner of Canada, 2008). However, with the growing economy and the thrust of technology

hitting the marketplace at the turn of the millennium, the Federal Government had to enact another law in the year 2000. Consequently, individuals today are also protected under the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act which sets out rules for how private sector organizations may collect, use, or disclose personal information in the course of commercial activities (2008). In today's day and age, the latter of these two laws is more often scrutinized due to the growing threat to personal privacy.

I feel as though the root of the problem lies in the sheer speed of technology "improvements". That is, during the creation of novel technologies, it seems as though capability comes before wisdom. Many private sector companies are overlooking the proper and legal way of doing things in order to make a quick buck. For example, in his article outlining the loss of location privacy in the cellular age, Stephen Wicker explains how consumer targeting is at the heart of legal litigations regarding privacy (Wicker, 2012). He goes further, describing a story of how one company tracked women on their way to various yoga centers in order to cater and personalize their marketing scheme to those women (2012).

How much is too much? To me, this seems like a form of geo-stalking, a clear violation of human rights, and the beginning of a path towards a world where Geoslavery (one person monitoring and exerting control over the physical location of another individual) could be an imminent and frightening possibility (Dobson & Fisher, 2003).

The Opportunity

Outrage regarding personal privacy has permeated the media as of late, especially due to the recent leak of government intelligence regarding mass surveillance programs in the United States. However, it is important to note that the media's tendency is to hone in on the negative and controversial. In these times, it is clearly difficult to overlook these obvious concerns with location-based services; however, I truly believe that the positive outweighs the negative. Location-based services provide an opportunity for citizens to interact with the World around them in a dynamic and efficient way. Technology is the way of the future, so let's embrace

change, enact stricter and clearer privacy laws, and join together so that we can all enjoy the benefits of location information. If we can harness this potential, then maybe location-based services can figuratively and literally help us pinpoint where to go from here.

References

- Dobson, J. E., & Fisher, P. F. (2003). Geoslavery. *IEEE Technology & Society Magazine*, 22(1), 47-52. doi:10.1109/MTAS/2003.1188276
- Justice Laws. (2013). *Constitution Act, 1982*. Retrieved August 16, 2013, from <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-15.html>
- Lahdhani, N. (2010). Why location-based social networking matters. *Social Policy*, 40(3), 49-49. Retrieved from <http://www.socialpolicy.org/>
- Privacy Commissioner of Canada. (2008). *Fact sheets: Privacy legislation in Canada*. Retrieved August 15, 2013, from http://www.priv.gc.ca/resource/fs-fi/02_05_d_15_e.asp
- Rogowsky, M. (2013, June 6). More than half of us have smartphones, giving Apple and Google much to smile about. *Forbes Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/markrogowsky/>
- Wicker, S. B. (2012). The loss of location privacy in the cellular age. *Communications of the ACM*, 55(8), 60-68. doi:10.1145/2240236.2240255
- Wu, C., Kao, S., & Yang, K. (2012). Acceptance of real-time location based advertising service: A conceptual examination. *Journal of Location Based Services*, 6(4), 250-269. doi:10.1080/17489725.2012.744474
- Zuberi, R. S., Lall, B., & Ahmad, S. N. (2012). Privacy protection through k-anonymity in location-based services. *IETE Technical Review*, 29(3), 196-201. doi:10.4103/0256-4602.98861