Netflix Faces Backlash for Spying On Customers' Private Viewing Habits And Emotions

Twitter users compare company to "big brother" following comment on viewer data

[Mikael Thalen](#) | [74 Comments](#)
[Netflix Faces Backlash for Tweeting Customers' Private Viewing Habits](#)

Image Credits: [Chesnot/Getty Images](#).

0

Netflix is facing backlash for a tweet this week detailing the private viewing habits of some of its customers.

The official Netflix US Twitter account on Sunday jokingly noted that 53 people had watched the film "A Christmas Prince" for 18 days straight.

"To the 53 people who've watched A Christmas Prince every day for the past 18 days: Who hurt you?" the tweet said.

> To the 53 people who've watched A Christmas Prince every day for the past 18 days: Who hurt you?
>
> — Netflix US (@netflix) [December 11, 2017](#)

While some Twitter users viewed the attempt at humor lightheartedly, others began questioning what exactly is being done with customers' data.

"This is amazing," one Twitter user said. "Except for the 'watching us like big brother' part."

> This is amazing. Except for the "watching us like big brother " part 😉
>
> — blake (@blaketopia) [December 11, 2017](#)

Another Twitter user compared Netlix's actions to those detailed in the dystopian novel "1984."

"To the @netflix employee who recently watched 1984: It's not an instruction manual," the user said.

> To the [@netflix](#) employee who recently watched 1984: It's not an instruction manual [https://t.co/lpKbUIWPm0](#)
>
> — Grant Hamilton (@Gramiq) [December 11, 2017](#)

Although Netflix is known to collect user data in order to provide content recommendations, some felt the public disclosure, even if not linked to actual identities, suggests that such information may be widely accessible to employees.

Trevor Timm, executive director at the Freedom of the Press Foundation and columnist at The Guardian, responded by tweeting a series of questions for journalists to ask Netflix.

"How many employees have access to people's viewing habits?" Timm said. "Are there any controls on how they can access this

data/what it can be used for?"

> Some questions for reporters to ask Netflix:
> —How many employees have access to people's viewing habits?
> —Are there any controls on how they can access this data/what it can be used for?
> —What's the punishment for creeping on people?
> —Why are they publicly shaming customers?
> https://t.co/bnouaaGnZC
>
> — Trevor Timm (@trevortimm) December 11, 2017

Netflix, after being contacted by numerous reporters, released the following statement:

"The privacy of our members' viewing is important to us," the company said. "This information represents overall viewing trends, not the personal viewing information of specific, identified individuals."

> We asked Netflix how many employees have access to customers' viewing habits and if there are any controls on who can access and what can be done with the data.
>
> Instead, a spokesperson gave us a canned, ambiguous statement. Thanks... https://t.co/1Sx31TFF8s
>
> — Zack Whittaker (@zackwhittaker) December 12, 2017

Supporters of the company pushed back against criticism of the tweet by accusing those concerned of blowing Netflix's comment out of proportion.

"Netflix can do whatever they want," one Twitter user said. "People can also stop using them."

> Netflix can do whatever they want. People can also stop using them
>
> — Jeremy (@The4ngryG4mer) [December 11, 2017](#)

Matt Tait, a former information security specialist for Britain's signals intelligence agency GCHQ, asked how Twitter users would feel had the NSA made the same tweet as Netlfix.

"Imagine if the NSA tweeted out stuff like this," Tait tweeted.

> Imagine if the NSA tweeted out stuff like this https://t.co/UMUxnzQvYN
>
> — Pwn ▌▌ ▌▌ ▌▌▌ 1.4(C) – Pro Se Tweets (@pwnallthethings) [December 11, 2017](#)

According to Shane Dingman, a reporter with The Globe and Mail, Netflix has previously revealed the viewing habits of users.

"Again, this isn't the only example: Netflix sent Canadian journos an example of a user who watch[ed] Lord of the Rings Return of the King 361 times in a year," Dingman tweeted.

> Again, this isn't the only example: Netflix sent Canadian journos an example of a user who watch Lord of the Rings Return of the King 361 times in a year. https://t.co/ho0hXElyvR
>
> — Shane Dingman (@shanedingman) [December 11, 2017](#)

Netflix's comment has received more than 400,000 likes and has been retweeted more than 100,000 times at the time of publication.

Netflix silent about ridicule as it discusses punters' viewing habits (theregister.co.uk)

submitted 3 hours ago by WitnesstheSalt to **news** (**+3**|**-0**)

1 comment