

The telcos know where you have been



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my paper
Tuesday, Nov 06, 2012

SINGAPORE - It's a Friday evening and you are one of many shoppers along Orchard Road. But someone else knows where you are: The telcos.

They collect personal information about their subscribers - such as age, gender, NRIC number and location - for billing, research, service improvements and marketing activities.

But they can also share anonymous versions of the data with other companies that can use them to help them market to specific groups of consumers. This is possible as mobile subscribers would have agreed to terms and conditions in mobile contracts, allowing telcos to use the data.

StarHub said at an analytics event yesterday that it will work with data-analysis firms to study its customers' data based on specific consumer trends other organisations want to learn about. This would be done at a new SmartHub research centre.

The results of the analysis are then shared with these organisations. This is to help them understand consumer preferences to improve their business. SmartHub will receive funds from the National Research Foundation and is slated to be ready next year.

One organisation StarHub will work with is the Orchard Road Business Association (Orba), to understand crowd location and the demographics of Orchard Road visitors.

This means association members - including retailers, mall owners and hotels - would be able to know what groups of people, and how many of them, visit certain areas of the shopping belt.

With this, they can organise promotional activities to market products and services that might appeal to specific groups of people - such as women in their 20s - who tend to visit these areas. Mr Steven Goh, Orba's executive director, said the data analysis can also help Orba improve annual events, shopping promotions and customer-loyalty programmes for customers' benefit.

On concerns over customer privacy with such data sharing, StarHub gave the assurance that the shared data is anonymous: Names, identification numbers, mobile numbers and home addresses are left out. The data is also grouped together and individual customer data is not shared. StarHub said it has processes in place to ensure its customer data is secured according to regulations on customer-data use.