Filter Bubbles

Issues and challenges of news personalization
Genesis

Described in 2011 by Eli Pariser (USA)

“The state in which a user is when the information displayed on a web page results from a personalization based on a collection of data produced by this user. The bubble is created when each web page participating in this system will be presented differently to each user”

Bubble filters = result of personalization strategies

Concept first developed in the field of social networks, search engines, e-marketing
Social Networks

Based on data collected from the individuals

Hidden process characterized by its opacity

Show information based on the user's behaviour

Aim to predict what he/she will like

Facebook prevents users to see contradictory opinions

= ideological bias
Critics

Limitation of media diversity

Enclose the user in his/her own cultural sphere

No contradictory debate

No control on the process

Isolate individuals in their own community

Small political groups sharing same ideas = “cyberbalkanization”
Swiss students in journalism have created fake FB accounts

Each followed a particular candidate to the presidency as a militant

Results

Friends publishing were more highlighted in the news feed

Ideological bias

Decrease of the visibility of traditional media

What you may not see

Filters define what you see and what you are not allowed to see

exclusion filters = censorship
Filters applied from data collected via Google Search Engine, Gmail, YouTube…

- Previous search activity that’s related to your current search
- Other activity on Google services, like Google ads
- Websites and apps you’ve visited that belong to businesses that advertise with Google
- Information in your Google Account, like your age range and gender
- Information we obtain about you from partners

“When you’re using Gmail, you might see ads at the top of your inbox. The ads you see are based on your activity while you were signed in to Google. Google does not share your personal information with advertisers, unless you have asked us to.”

Source: https://support.google.com/ads/answer/7029660?hl=en
A call to consumption

Adds based on data collected = prescriptions

Anticipate the desires, proposes recommendations... and it works
Opacity vs Transparency

Google, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft… communicate about personalization

For the good of the individuals?

“Cookies can help you be more efficient.”

“Cookies let you store preferences and user names, register products and services, and personalize pages” (Microsoft)
How to get out?

Matter of privacy

• Private navigation or use of a proxy server
  • Cleaning the cookies
  • Use services that ensure privacy
• EscapeYourBubble (for Chrome, permits contradictory advice on FB)
The EU Commission wants to strength the rules
Project approved in October 2017

Concerns electronic communications and the right of confidentiality, data/privacy protection

Fears of European publishers: “catastrophic effects on the future of the EU digital content economy”

Cookies = small files that allow site publishers to better understand the habits and therefore the profile of their readers

User will have to chose: block everything or nothing
News personalization

Cookies are used to provide an editorial offer “more suited to the readers expectations”

Implicit (cookies / user preferences) or explicit (requires action from the user)

4 types of personalization

Through exploration: when a user is exploring a news application

Through interaction: newsgame application f.e

Through curation: newsfeeds and personalized streams

Through automation: customized content depending on the user

Source: http://projects.nyujournalism.org/newsliteracy2016/topics/personalization/
Automated generated news

Can provide different versions from same data
Generate reports on specific data (financial f.e) for individual customers
Ability to satisfy individual needs
Information as a service
Danger: marketing inside editorial decisions
The user doesn’t always know what he wants
+ privacy issues

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Chatbots

Dialog agents & social agents

Information as a service

Based on interactions with the user

Facilitate researches into news contents

Personalization: one-to-one logic
Pros

Management the overabundance of information
Attract and retain audiences
Create value-added content
Greater engagement of audiences
Monetization of a service
Promote the autonomy of the user
Create new & more enjoyable user experiences
Cons

- Creation of a monoculture
- Dangerous for the exercise of the critical sense
- Opacity of the process for journalists + audiences
  - Contrary to the principles of journalism and democracy goals
- Who is the gatekeeper?
- Information as public good? Censorship? Propaganda? Marketing tool?

Algorithm = direct intermediary between sources and audiences
Algorithmic filters

Algorithm = process to solve a problem
(cooking recipe, washing machine program)

Prioritization
To attract attention

Association
Relation between entities

Inclusion/exclusion
Create filter bubbles

(Diakopoulos)

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Algorithmic process in journalism = editorial process

Behind any algorithmic process, there are always humans

- Bias could be introduced in the design or could be automated
- Journalists must be associated to the design
- Developer involved must be trained to journalism ethics
- Audiences must be informed and have the choice to be tracked or not, to get personalized contents or not
Thank you!

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