

Filter Bubbles

Issues and challenges of news personalization



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Laurence Dierickx – Université Libre de Bruxelles - 2017

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

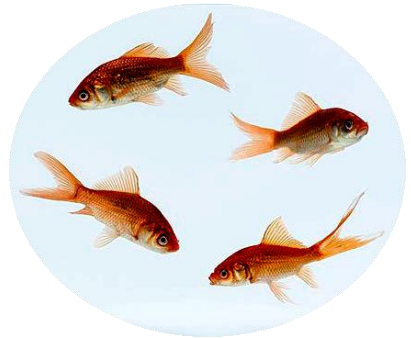
Isolate individuals in their own community

**Small political groups sharing same ideas =
“cyberbalkanization”**

The Facebook Experiment

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

Source : <http://jam.unine.ch/index.php/2017/09/27/au-dela-du-mur-lalgorithme-de-facebook-mis-a-lepreuve/>

What you may not see

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

exclusion filters = censorship



Google Products & Services

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.”

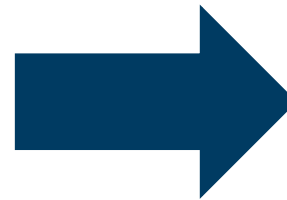
Source: <https://support.google.com/ads/answer/7029660?hl=en>

A call to consumption

Adds based on data collected = prescriptions

Anticipate the desires, proposes recommendations... and it works

A screenshot of the Samsung website's TV section. At the top, there is a search bar and navigation links for 'Mon compte' and 'Mon panier'. Below this, there are links for 'Business', 'Mediaplane', and 'Flyer', along with 'Club', 'Services', and 'Mon magasin'. The main content features a 'SAMSUNG TV (277)' banner with the text 'Une expérience TV à couper le souffle.' and 'QLED TV'. A blue circular badge says 'Recevez une Soundbar Dolby Atmos'. Below the banner, a section titled 'Quel type de TV recherchez-vous ?' displays five TV categories with images: 'TV Smart', 'TV 4K / Ultra HD', 'TV OLED', 'TV QLED', and 'TV Curved'. A pagination bar at the bottom shows '1 2 3 ... 12 Suivant >'.



A screenshot of a news website. At the top, there are social media icons for Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and RSS, and the text 'LE CLUB DES AA'. A navigation bar includes 'Actualités', 'Régions', 'Editorial', 'Opinions', 'Publications', 'Archives', 'Blogs', 'WebTV', 'Web Radio', and 'Open Data'. The main headline is 'Images de la semaine du 16 au 22 octobre 2017' with a sub-headline '13 octobre | par La Rédaction'. Below this is a 'PUBLICITÉ' section with several ad cards, each showing a percentage and a small image. The ads include 'HOMECINÉ SOLUTIONS', 'GetLogic', 'Un 4ème ou 6ème', 'GetSmu6646', 'L.500 6', 'Ts. 400x70...', 'Fiches Ban...', and 'De 40mu7646'. On the right side, there is a vertical banner with a red and black graphic and the text 'Un témoin un récit'. At the bottom right, it says '827 visiteurs en'.

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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)



ePrivacy regulation

The EU Commission wants to strengthen 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”

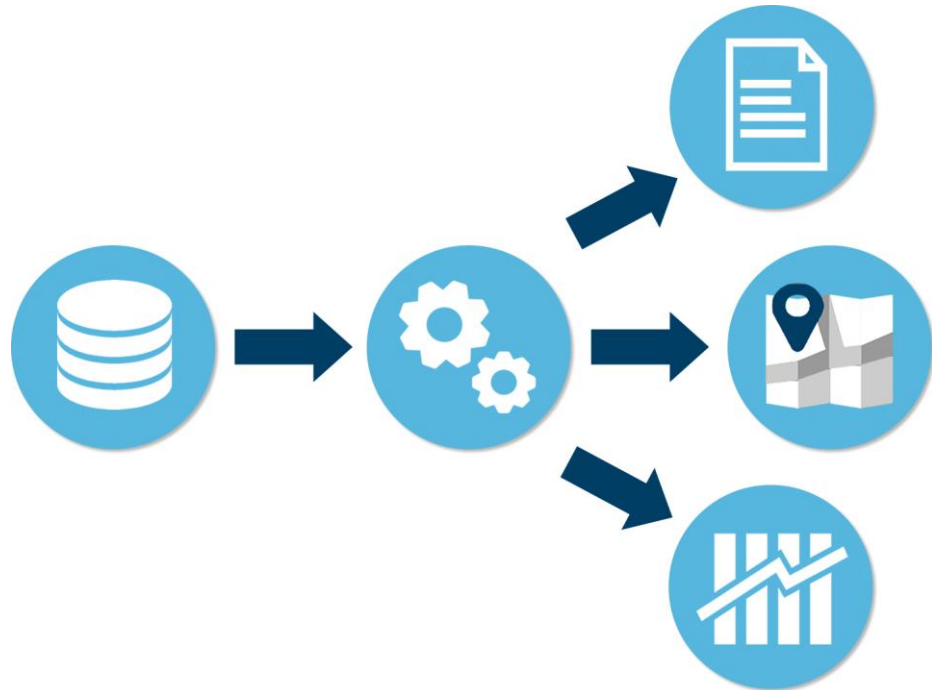
Cookies = small files that allow site publishers to better understand the habits and therefore the profile of their readers

User will have to chose: block everything or nothing

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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

Chatbots

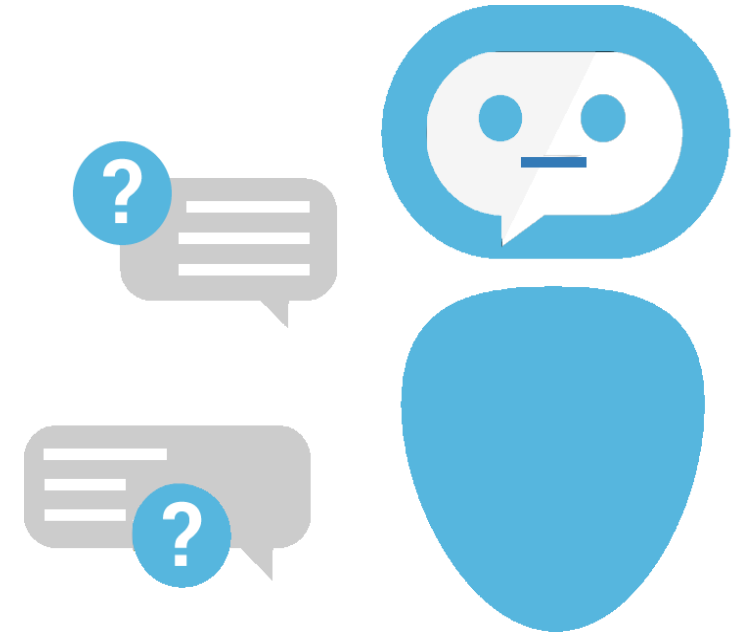
Dialog agents & social agents

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

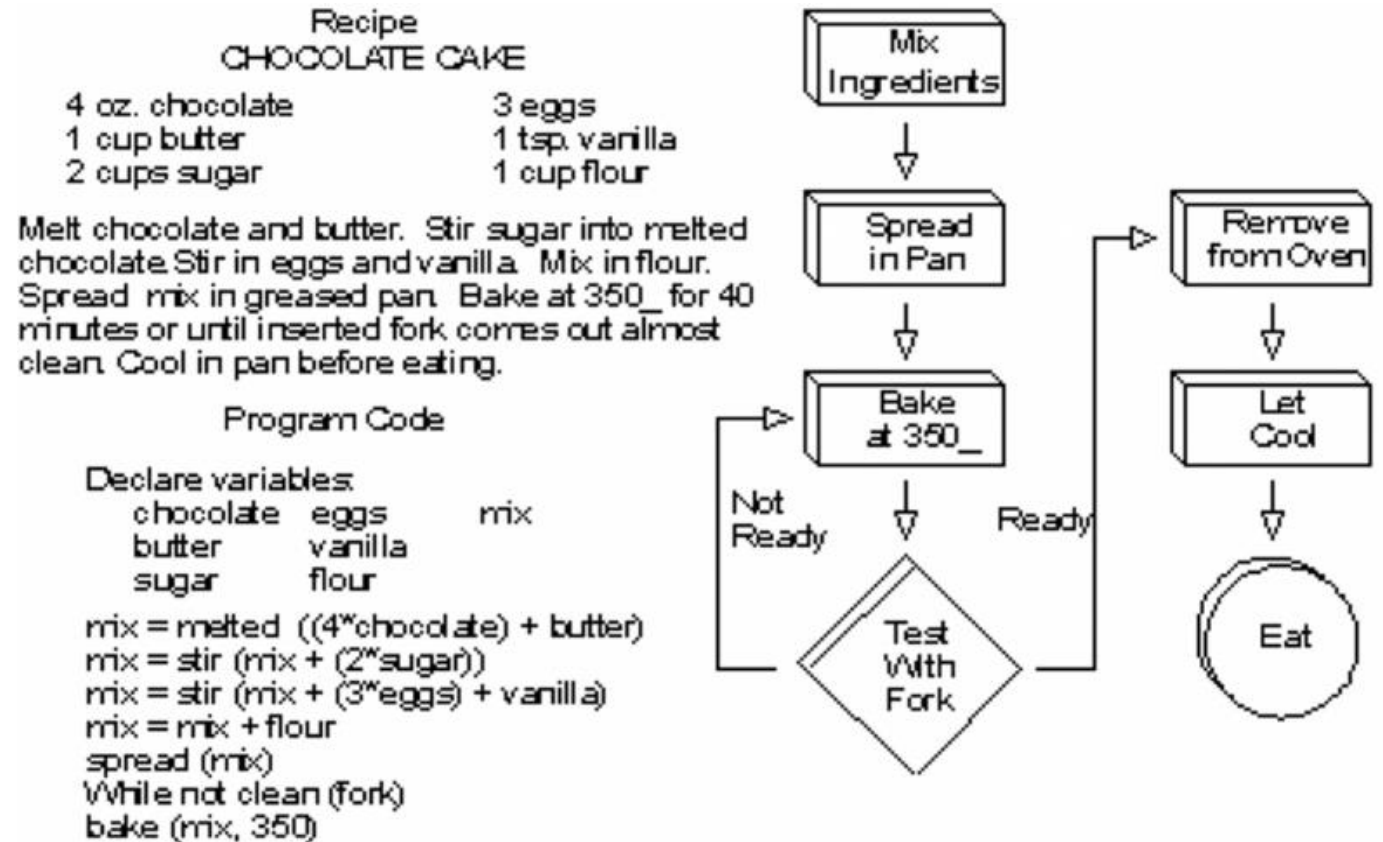
Association

Relation between entities

Inclusion/exclusion

Create filter bubbles

(Diakopoulos)



The Human Factor

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!



www.ohmybox.info

@ohmyshambles