# Datafication

**The digitalization of our society**

I want to give a short description of how our society has evolved through the invention of the personal computer, the internet and other factors. This evolution is what have shaped our society into how we know it today and I think this will give a good historical perspective as to why I believe that the topics that I want to discuss in this paper is more relevant than ever. I want to briefly describe when the personal computer and mobile phone became a part of our lives as well as other things that made the process of datafication of our lives possible. This will lead me to a section where I will be describing what datafictaion actually means and how it works.

Jens-Erik Mai explains how datafictaion of our everyday lives affects our society: “*The datafication of personal information constitutes a new kind of information society. Digitization was the process of taking the analog world to the digital environment; it allowed society to store more information and process it more rapidly.“[[1]](#endnote-1)*

**What does datafication mean?**

Datafication is a process that turns information about almost anything into data that can used for analytical or other such purposes. This process of datafication is what makes Big Data possible. Cukier and Mayer-Schoenberger describes how datafictaion is the ability to turn aspects of lives and the world around us into data:

*”Big data is also characterized by the ability to render into data many aspects of the world that have never been quantified before; call it “datafication.” For example, location has been datafied, first with the invention of longitude and latitude, and more recently with gps satellite systems. Words are treated as data when computers mine centuries’ worth of books. Even friendships and “likes” are datafied, via Facebook. ”[[2]](#endnote-2)*

With the invention and increasing usage of digital devices such as the mobile phone, the personal computer, GPS systems and so on, more and more aspects of our lives can be measured and thereby can be turned into data and categorized as information. Mai gives an example of some of the many things that can go through the datafictaion process and stores as data:

*“People reveal personal information consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, as they perform every day activities: shopping for groceries, communicating with family members, paying taxes, reading the news, listening to music, reading e-books, purchasing gasoline, exchanging e-mails, sharing photos, and so on. In addition, many people choose to reveal information about their private lives on social networking sites. “ [[3]](#endnote-3)*

**Data as having value?**

In this section of the paper I want to try to answer what all of the data that are collected about people and how they live their lives is actually used for. What is data worth, and why is it so valuable to companies such as Facebook, marketing firms, online sellers and so on? Can we talk about data as having an economic value and is it maybe even more valuable than money?

Van Djick talks about how companies etc. are seeing the data that people provide about themselves: “*Metadata – not too long ago considered worthless byproducts of platform-mediated services – have gradually been turned into treasured resources that can ostensibly be mined, enriched, and repurposed into precious products.*” [[4]](#endnote-4)

”User activities are of economic value because they produce valuable user data that can enter multiple relations of exchange and are set up to multiply themselves. “[[5]](#endnote-5)

**How Facebook is keeping their users engaged**

In this paragraph of the paper I want to try and analyze how Facebook works in order to engage their users. Facebook and their content are based on their users. When Facebook is so dependent on their users and their activities they naturally must be good at engaging their users and how they do this is what I intend to examine in this section.

*“The primary thing that Facebook metrics want is increased user engagement with the site. In the case of Facebook the corporation, this desire is not surprising. The value of Facebook is dependent on the breadth of its data, and more—more users, more “likes,” more photos, more friends, etc.—is the key to increasing this value. Facebook metrics act to increase user engagement. ”[[6]](#endnote-6)*

This quote by Benjamin Grosser describes one of the ways that Facebook tries to keep their users engaged by their use of metrics. I will use is text as well as the text called Want to be on top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook by Taina Bucher. In this text Bucher describes how the Facebook algorithm called EdgeRank sets the norm for how you are supposed to interact and participate on Facebook:

*“Thus, EdgeRank, by functioning as a disciplinary technique, creates subjects that endlessly modify their behaviour to approximate the normal. Because interaction functions as a measure for interestingness, practices of Liking, Commenting and participation become processes through which the subject may approximate this desired normality. “[[7]](#endnote-7)*

**Discussion:**

In this paragraph I want to try and discuss what the advantages and disadvantages of everything becoming data might be. When more and more aspects of our lives go through the process of datafication and thereby becomes available for analysis and storage what might be the problems of this. I want to briefly describe the case of Cambridge Analytica, to give an example of one of the most resent and most talked about cases in relation to misuse of data and data security in general. I also want to try and argue why datafictaion can be a positive contribution to our society. Here I found some quotes to back up the positive side to try and give a nuanced picture of big data and datafication:

”With big data, instead of trying to understand precisely why […] looking for patterns that might help predict future occurrences. Big data helps answer what, not why, and often that’s good enough.” [[8]](#endnote-8)

Once it becomes possible to turn activities of this kind into data that can be stored and analyzed, we can learn more about the world—things we could never know before because we could not measure them easily and cheaply. [[9]](#endnote-9)

**Texts I intend to use:**

# Bibliography

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1. Mai p.193 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cukier and Mayer-Schoenberger p.29 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Mai pp. 192-193 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Van Djick p. 199 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Gerlitz and Helmond p. 1360 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Grosser [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Bucher p. 1176 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Cukier and Mayer-Schoenberger p.29 [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Cukier and Mayer-Schoenberger p.35 [↑](#endnote-ref-9)