Datafication

My entry

We live in a world that is getting more and more digitalized over time. This has provided us with a lot of options for activities and actions we can do online, instead of doing it in person. We can get a doctor's appointment online, we can shop online, we get the post online, and we can communicate with friends and family on the other side of the world if that is what we want to. At the same time, we as users are leaving behind a lot of data, that was not as easy countable before *"We can now collect information that we couldn't before, be it relationships revealed by phone calls or sentiments unveiled through tweets" (Mayer-Schoenberger and Cukier 2013)*

The world as it is now, is basically made out of databases, as most of our everyday actions occur on some sort of digital device. All these actions, is transformed into data, and this phenomenon is called Datafication:

> *"The transformation of social action into online quantified data, thus allowing for real-time tracking and predictive analysis. Businesses and government agencies dig into the exponentially growing piles of metadata collected through social media and communication platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Tumblr, iTunes, Skype, WhatsApp, YouTube, and free e-mail services such as gmail and hotmail, in order to track information on human behavior" (Mayer-Schoenberger and Cukier 2013)*

In 2013 Edward Snowden became famous for leaking information about NSA's secret worldwide mass surveillance. This was a wake-up call for many citizens, as they may not have realized that everything they share or do on the internet, especially on social media, is shared with a third party, who uses this information to their advantage. This realization did not come easily, because social media isn't as transparent as it looks, as the websites neglect to inform the user about their way of handling their data.

My overall question for this paper is:

How does social media get the data they want from their users, and how do they use it?

I will begin my paper by explaining the term datafication, and I will share some examples about how everyday activities can be turned into data. Furthermore, the paper will describe the process from when the user produces some data, to this data ending up in a database, ending with how the companies might use this data to persuade the user to act a certain way. I will also describe why the term datafication is extremely relevant now, compared to what is was 15-20 years ago.

Analysis

In his article "Datafication, dataism and dataveillance: Big Data between scientific paradigm and ideology" José van Dijck states:

> *"In other words, metadata appear to have become a regular currency for citizens to pay for their communication services and security – a trade-off that has nestled into the comfort zone of most people*."

I find this extremely interesting, not only that trading personal data has become a way of gaining access to social media, but especially the fact that the users just go with it. They have somehow grown accustomed to it, and accepted that it is how it is. To look further into this, I think Facebook is a good place to start. Almost everyone uses it, or know someone who does. This paper will use Facebook as a concrete example, to see how Facebook uses buttons, and tracking, to gain the wanted data from the user, and then how they later on, displays commercials and suggested sites, based on the data they got from the user. For this part of the paper I will use the articles "The like economy: Social buttons and the data-intensive" by Carolin Gerlitz and Anna Helmond "What do metrics want? How quantification prescribes social interaction on Facebook" by Benjamin Grosser and "Want to be on top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook" by Taina Bucher.

Discussion and questions

I want to discuss if it is ethically correct for websites, and social media to save the users data, and then later on use the saved data to their advantages. Also, Koen Leurs & Tamara Shepherd has written a segment in the book "The datafied society" where they talk about datafication in correlation with discrimination. I will use their text to discuss if dataficiton in some way is discriminating by judging a user's needs and wishes entirely on the way they act online.

I think this topic and the ethical questions behind it is important to discuss, as it has become such a big part of our everyday lives.

Some of the questions I want to raise throughout this paper is:

- Who can access these data?

- Is datafication a thread to the users' privacy?

- Is it ethically correct to collect and save the users data?

- Why is it important for social media to have these data?

Texts I want to use in my paper

- van Dijck, José. (2014). Datafication and dataveillance: Big Data between scientific paradigm and ideology. Surveillance & Society, 197-208.

- Dourish, Paul. (2014). The shifting materialities of database technology

- Grosser, Benjamin. (2014). What do metrics want? How Quantification prescribes social interaction on facebook. Computational Culture.

- Bucher, Taina. (2012). Want to be on top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook. *New Media & Society*, 1164-1180.

- Gerlitz, Carolin., & Helmond, Anne. (2013). The like economy: Social buttons and the data-intensive web. *New media and society,* 1348-1365.

- Leurs, Koen., & Shepherd, Tamara. (2017) Datafication and discrimination. *The datafied society,* 211-231.