Measure Your Filter Bubble

Assignment 5

SOC 204

Spring 2017

1) What is an issue you would like to discuss in precept? [30 points]

[write in blank here]

**Who you are on Facebook**

2) Explore what Facebook “knows” about you

A) Go to Settings 🡪 Ads (on the left hand bar). Some of you might see a page called “Your Ad Preferences”, in which you can just start browsing through your targeted ad topics. The rest of you will instead see a panel of more options. Click “edit” on “Ads based on my preferences” at the bottom and then click “Visit Ad Preferences”. (We don’t know why there are two different interfaces – we think that maybe Facebook is beta-testing right now!)

Who does Facebook think you are? In addition to what bands they think you like and what businesses they think you are interested in, Facebook may have also categorized your political ideology (see <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/24/us/politics/facebook-ads-politics.html?_r=0>) and even your race or ethnicity (<https://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2016/03/facebooks-ad-platform-now-guesses-at-your-race-based-on-your-behavior/>). Do any specific news and media companies (Wall Street Journal, CNN, etc.) come up? What about a specific political orientation? [10 points]

B) More generally, what do you think of your “Facebook self”? Are there any topics that surprised you? Do you think this set of preferences is a good representation of your social identity? [10 points]

C) You can also download a copy of your archived Facebook data to get more detailed information about what ad topics you are targeted for and which advertisers have your information. To do this, go to Settings again, and stay on “General Account Settings”. At the bottom of the main page, click on the link that says “download a copy”. Then, download your archive (this could take a few minutes). Once you have downloaded the zipped file, open the “html” folder and click on “index.htm”. This is all the profile information you have provided Facebook. Did you list a political affiliation? What is it? [10 points]

D) Now, use the left hand navigation bar to go to “ads” for a detailed list of ad topics and advertisers. List any news or media companies that come up, as well as topics related to politics. Does any of this surprise you? [10 points]

**Who you are in real life**

Now let’s forget about what your Facebook says. The following questions are more traditional survey questions about your actual interests, views, and behaviors regarding politics and news consumption. There are no right or wrong answers – just reflect and answer honestly. We will aggregate these responses and show you how the answers are distributed in this class, but your individual answers will always remain anonymous. That is, no one will be able to see what answer option *you,* or any other individual, chose.

3) Forget about what your Facebook says. Where would you actually place yourself on the political spectrum? [10 points] (multiple choice)

\_\_ Liberal

\_\_ Moderate

\_\_ Conservative

\_\_ Other [write in]

\_\_ Prefer to not say

4) Where do you think Princeton students fall on the political spectrum? Take your best guess at what percentage of the undergraduate student body identifies with the following political views. The guesses should sum to 100. [2 points for each subpart, 8 total]

1. What percentage identifies as liberal? [\_\_\_]
2. What percentage identifies as moderate? [\_\_\_]
3. What percentage identifies as conservative? [\_\_\_]
4. What percentage identifies as “other”? [\_\_\_]

5) Some people read, watch or listen to political news and commentary a lot; others get a sense of what’s going on without consuming much political media. Where would you say you are on the spectrum? [10 points] (multiple choice)

\_\_ I hardly ever consume any political media.

\_\_ I consume political media occasionally, but not often.

\_\_ I consume political media regularly.

\_\_ I consume political media every day.

\_\_ Prefer to not say.

6) How much of a role does Facebook play in influencing what political media you consume? [10 points] (multiple choice)

\_\_ I get my news from sources directly (e.g. I read the New York Times in the dining hall; I go straight to wsj.com and read there, etc.). I rarely click on links I see on Facebook.

\_\_ I get some of my news from sources directly but I also discover new stories and commentary through things my friends or public figures post on Facebook.

\_\_ I get almost all of my news from friends on Facebook.

\_\_ I hardly ever consume any political media.

\_\_ Prefer to not say.

**7)** An important part of the debate about filter bubbles and their effects is the question of whether exposure to ideologically diverse ideas would actually change people’s attitudes and opinions. We are going to try to answer this question by measuring your attitudes before and after you “break your bubble”. Please propose an issue that you think could be impacted by filter bubbles.

For extra credit, find a question on the [General Social Survey](file://localhost/(https/::gssdataexplorer.(https/::gssdataexplorer.norc.org:variables:vfilternorc.org:variables:vfilter) (GSS), the [American National Election Studies](http://www.electionstudies.org/index.html) surveys (ANES), or [Pew Research surveys](http://www.people-press.org/topics/) that operationalizes this issue.

[30 points for answer, 10 points for extra credit]

[write in]

**Measuring Your Filter Bubble**

8) We are going to try to “measure” your Newsfeed: repeat the following instructions on **at least three different days** (doing this more often is encouraged!) Record your answers in the Excel template we have provided. [50 points]

1. Record the top five posts (links AND text posts) related to U.S. politics. If the post is a link, make sure to record what source it came from.
2. Bold the entry if the post is a link to a news or opinion piece you have already read.
3. Record who author of each post
4. Keep track of the number of **total** number of posts – including ads – you had to scroll through to get to five stories.
5. In his article “Strength of Weak Ties”, Mark Granovetter discusses the concept of “friendship circle overlap”, which he defines as the number of friends two people share divided by the total number of *distinct* people they are connected to. Calculate your friendship circle overlap for the people who posted the political content with this definition. First, add the total number of friends you have and the total number of friends they have, and then subtract the number of mutual friends you two share. This number is the total number of *distinct* friends. Then, divide the number of mutual friends you have by this number to get your “overlap” measure. (Example: if you have 100 friends and the poster has 120 friends, and you share 20 friends in common, your overlap is: 20/(100 + 120 – 20) = 20/200 = 0.1).
6. Code each post as “liberal”, “neutral”, or “conservative”

Record this data in the Excel template attached and upload your filled log.

9) How many posts did you scroll through to find five news stories about politics? [2 points for each answer, 10 points total]

a) Number of posts on the first day [write in]

b) Number of posts on the second day [write in]

c) Number of posts on the third day [write in]

d) Average of the three [write in]

e) Is there much variation between days? If so, why do you think that is? [write in]

10) What percent of the links in your feed were to stories you have already read? (numerator = number of bolded entries; denominator = number of links reported in the 15 entries) [5 points]

11) Now look at the friendship overlap of the posters [2 points each, 10 points total]

1. What is the smallest degree of friendship overlap?
2. What is the largest degree of friendship overlap?
3. What is the median degree of friendship overlap?
4. What is the mean degree of friendship overlap?
5. According to this metric, are the top political content in your feed coming from strong or weak ties? Do you feel subjectively close or distant from these people?

12) Finally, analyze the political “slant” of the content [5 points each, 15 total]

1. What percentage of the posts are liberal?
2. What percentage of the posts are conservative?
3. What percentage of the posts are neutral?