AI lecture Report #1

Topic: Empowering Algorithms and Algorithm Disillusionment

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Prof. Karrie gave us a great lecture, providing us with an in-depth analysis on social algorithmic systems, their influences, and the awareness of people regarding to the controlling of these systems.

Nowadays social media plays an important roles in our daily lives. We leave comments on Yelp, read posts on Facebook, and retweet on Twitter. However it has raised concerns among people that our personal data can be used to track us, and algorithms have been applied to display contents and take control of what we see. Our comments are hidden from other users, the review scores are inconsistent with what we desired, and some posts from friends are hidden from us without our awareness. There are several theories derived based on these cases, for instance, the global popularity theory showed that the more people click, the more popular it is. These theories are used in machine learning models that make decisions and control our digital lives. Only 37.5% of people are aware of algorithms behind scenes, and both positive and negative views were collected from those people after they realized their existence.

Most control options, like “hide posts”, can be ambiguous, and we have no idea if they truly work. Prof. Karrie conducted a test that her team built their own twitter control interface with control sliders, and asked people to use it and give feedbacks. These sliders can be useless or randomized, and they also conducted distraction tests that they let users view up to 800 tweets with the same filter algorithm. Their result shows that people love playing with their control settings and they are satisfied with them. We can conclude that people really care about algorithms and they have attributed power to them. Also, Prof. Karrie suggested that people are in a high demand in less vague control options to help them gain higher interpretability.

The tracing ads is another issue. Facebook has the most personal dataset lined to identities, and their ads intertwined among feeds are based on your internet footprints, so people may find that their accident clicks before can change the ads preference targeted to them.

From my point of view, we cannot avoid ads in our daily lives, and people should not be afraid of algorithms. AI related technologies, like NLP, are more influential than we could ever imagine. It is our responsibility to apply what we learned from classes and design for algorithm awareness. It is the companies’ responsibilities, like Facebook, to design more straightforward algorithm interfaces to guide people through settings that they truly need. Subjective controls should be explained better, and companies need to take intermittent reveals that allow for comparison into consideration.