**Filter Bubble: Why should you care?**

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*“Google is great at helping us find what we know we want, but not at finding what we don't know we want.” ― Eli Pariser, The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You*

I was casually scrolling through my Facebook news feed looking through the photos people have carefully selected and edited, among whom very few actually impact my daily life other than by wasting my time through their posts and stories, and by making my self-confidence go down the drain seeing their perfect on-screen presence when I realized something. Everyone on the internet has the same belief system that I have: it is a cozy little place where my thoughts are echoed again and again. Every article that I get suggested is about something I agree on, and every video I get on my home page on YouTube is from a person who has more or less the same viewpoint regarding the world as I have. I love Eminem, so YouTube recommends ten channels who think that Eminem is dope. Does this mean people who hate Eminem don't exist? Or is something else going on behind the scenes?

The first thing we need to understand is that Google and Facebook, no matter how much they scream about connecting the world and making the world to a better place, are**profit-oriented companies** who have to earn money to sustain the services they provide. They have to earn a hefty sum, because for you to upload an embarrassing photo of your friend in her birthday, thousands of very smart people have to work day in and day out, which obviously requires a lot of resources. And since you are not the customer of these companies who pay for their services, you are the thing being sold. The more time you spend chatting with a cute girl who ends up being your \*friend next door or watching the last video on YouTube after which you are definitely going to be studying and not clicking on another video, the more these companies earn. Because essentially what's on sale is you and your engagement. These sites have to create algorithms that serve you the things that you want to see and engage with. The focus of the algorithm is not to give you a healthy dose of content or the best content on the site, but rather the content that is statistically guaranteed to engage you for longer.

**The Problem**

So now is the time you question the need for this article. You might be asking: when you have taken a break and want to refresh your mind, why shouldn't you get recommended the things that you like to watch? Isn't it a good thing that you get things that you like rather than things you don’t?

What we must all understand is that social networks or the internet is not a place to chill anymore. They are an integral part of our lives, not just a medium for entertainment. Today people use it to consume news, gain information The internet serves as a key viewpoint for looking at the world. The internet is where we form our opinions and shape our understanding of the world. The human as I like to call it is a *know-it-all* species. No matter how stupid something we believe in is, we have to be right. We don't generally want to be proven wrong. We mix our feelings with facts. Surely whatever you think is the absolute truth. And whoever disagrees with you is a moron. If someone has a different opinion than us, we tend to stay away from them. If anything challenges our view of reality than we tend to reduce them to the lowest standard and convince ourselves that we are better than them. This has existed for the longest of time from the dawn of civilization but the internet has elevated this problem to a new extreme. Because we tend to avoid content with conflicting viewpoints, the algorithm filters it out for us. What this essentially means is that if I believe in something which is wrong and has dangerous impacts, I will still be served with the content that reaffirms my beliefs. The algorithm connects me with people who have the same viewpoint that I have. And if later I am presented with contradicting facts, I simply refuse to believe them, using my newly found cult as a shield. If this many people believe it, it must be right, right?

Metaphorically we are trapped in a bubble and everything that doesn't line up with what we think is filtered from our content diet. This essentially is what internet activists are referring to as the Filter Bubble. The Wikipedia page defines filter bubble as, “A state of intellectual isolation that allegedly can result from personalized searches when a website algorithm selectively guesses what information a user would like to see based on information about the user, such as location, past click-behavior and search history.”

**Impact**

So why should you care? I mean when you are getting your daily dose of pictures from that one girl you had a crush on five years ago, why should you care about getting content you don't want to view? Well the short answer is this filter bubble has real world consequences. Anti-VAX movement due to which children are actually getting measles in America and Europe started on Facebook when some misinformed moms created several Facebook pages and groups which popularized the existing notion that vaccines are bad for you and they harm the children. This has no scientific backing and years of testing have proved vaccines are safe. But when every person you meet through the group share articles in legit looking sites telling you are leading your child to autism and your child will be harmed, you tend to listen. This made the once extinct disease a public health crisis and children who cannot vaccinated because of their disease are actually suffering and risking the chance of getting affected. People are dying because of a computer algorithm.

The same ideological isolation has also led to the creation of the Flat Earth movement, which arguably is in another level of stupid in itself. It has helped to increase the divide between people with different ideologies be it political, religious or social. In short the filter bubble is responsible for dividing in this already divided world even further and promoting misinformation.

What should we do, then? Now the main and most difficult question arises. How can we solve this problem? And honestly, I have nothing. I can’t help you find a definitive solution to this crisis. The internet giants have tried their best to come up with a solution to tackle this problem without affecting their profit margins. Governments are now realizing the potential of this problem and now are working towards regulating the internet giants and making them stop misinformation in their sites. YouTube has even started putting credible sites in content which may further the misinformation. But the echo-chamber the internet creates will not go away for a long time, if it goes away at all.

The only way this problem can be solved in the near future is by spreading awareness, and engaging in dialogue rather than constantly looking down on our phones. While the latter is far from happening very soon, we might as well start educating the billions of internet users that what they see on their screens is far from the real world and that there are people who you can communicate with in real world. And please stop using Facebook, YouTube and Instagram as much as you can. And if you do decide to not follow my advice, come follow me at instagram.com/panthasuresh.