Vinh Tuan Dat Nguyen (Percy)

THIS FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL IS STILL IN THE WORK

PLEASE CHECK IN LATER AND DEDUCT GRADE FOR NOW :(

The Human Algorithm

What is your theme/topic/goal/issue to be tackled - why is it important to you?

As social media are integrated more closely with our daily lives, the fine line between convenience and privacy becomes thinner and thinner. The problem tackled is the ambiguous methods behind personal data collection by big corporations. While some social media specify which types of data they collect though fail to explain the algorithms and methods of collection. An example of data transparency is Instagram's option for users to download their data on a json file which includes a post of your interactions with content and other users as well as an archive of every image/video you have posted or shared to other users. Although this transparency does help me understand which datas they collect, it does not explain the way by which they process this gathered information and how they utilize it to create an engaging feed with oddly relevant ads.

The algorithms that they employ to keep users engaged have never been publicly disclosed by the technology conglomerates themselves. For now, the only valuable insights into these algorithms are given by former employers from top tech companies such as demonstrated in the netflix documentary The Social Dilemma. Otherwise, content creators are pushing through waves of trials and errors until fortune (or the algorithm) smiles on them.

The project, in the form of a website, will showcase a record of my interaction with instagram on a given day. These interactions may be recorded in the various methods: hand notes, screenshots and screen records. These different types of records will be posted on my website as a gallery photo/video/text for users to navigate through. The time that I spend on each content is annotated and displayed right under each interaction.

The showcase will display the major features that Instagram offers that I utilize the most: Posts, Story Highlights(a posted story that is highlighted and put on the user's account), Stories (a post that lasts 24 hours and is highlighted on your profile image), Reels (a video post).

Upon the showcase is finished, the user will be asked to write one sentence that best describes what they think of my personality (solely from this showcase) as well as three subjects that I will most likely be interested in.

What form will your project evolve into - who is your audience?

I strongly believe that given enough time and trials, the average human will be able to suggest relevant, if not strong content that would fit my taste.

Ideally, in order to stimulate an algorithm that judges its unbeknownst user, strangers will fit the role perfectly as their feedback will be uninfluenced.

However, as this project is indeed personal by involving , only close friends and family will be invited to participate for the first waves of experiment. If all goes well, I will conduct the same experiment with a set of trustworthy strangers. They could be other students recommended by my friend from different majors.

As the point of this project

designed to appeal to the paranoid and the curious who question what Instagram is getting out of you.

For users who are in it for entertainment values, collection of private data poses no concern to them as this in fact provides them a more pleasant experience.

individuals like myself, I do want to understand how they structure their AI to see if there is a breach of privacy. For now, I vaguely understand that Instagram AI loves sharing similar content that I have high engagement with.

What is your data? How will you collected it?

In this experimental project, my behavior, my preference and my digital engagement form a collection of data to be interpreted. It involves not only what I consume, but also the manner and speed at which I consume them. This collective data, carefully detailed and annotated will give insights into my personal life.

To ensure that all interactions will be recorded, I will change my phone password temporarily for that day to break my normal habit and remind me to actively record whenever I engage with the app.

Here are my specific approaches to each type of content on instagram:

For users stories, I will describe my interaction with each user if I do engage

For my feed, I will record the way thatI navigate through it (the way that I scroll through and if there are any interactions with the content).

Any content by a private user will be censored, while public users will still be recorded.

The project will be in the form of a website made with HTML, CSS, Javascript and

Regarding privacy of the parties involved, I will only show the content of public accounts (including friends and family). In Instagram, any content shared by public accounts is visible to anyone on the net (including users without an account) and thus as per Instagram's policy I should be able to share them freely.

Any content derived from a private user will not be displayed. This interaction will still be recorded anonymously. For example, "Percy spends 2 seconds on a story of friend A".

With all of this data combined, the challenge is for the audience to write one sentence that best demonstrates Percy and write down 3 possible subjects that will interest me. Every audience's guess is recorded into a json file.

for viewers and a reveal what type

Over the course of 3 days, I will take notes/ screenshot/ record every single interaction that I created with Instagram. As I do not use instagram frequently,   I will write down whenever I use instagram. This project is targeted towards Instagram users specifically but will also grasp the interest of everyone involved in social networks.

Inspiration

https://www.wired.com/story/how-to-stop-instagram-from-tracking-everything-you-do/
https://artnowla.com/2019/04/21/alexandra-bell-counternarratives/