Reading Summaries Week 2
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What's the Deal With Algorithms? By Jacob Brogan

The first reading was "What's the Deal With Algorithms?" by Jacob Brogan. The article starts by saying it's "Your 101 guide to the computer codes that are shaping the ways we live'. While the author admits that he isn't an expert in algorithms and the low-level workings of a search engine, he shows that he is speaking of a high-level overview of the topic. He explains that an algorithm isn't a complex term, it's just refers to a set of instructions to follow to accomplish a task. Following this he starts to highlight the uses of algorithms and how they are used to accomplish numerous things in our day to day lives. Continuing on this path, he mentions how algorithms "have to create complex pictures of us" and how machine learning algorithms are among the more strange algorithms. This is because humans don't really write machine learning algorithms, we supply them with vast amounts of data and the algorithms are generated by the computer to fit the data. This fact causes us to question if we are to blame the company that produced the algorithm or the computer that generated the output. Since these algorithms are built off the data pulled from society we have to question if society is to blame for the output of these algorithms.

How Does Spotify Know You So Well? By Sophia Ciocca

Something that many people appreciate but don't take the time to question is how Spotify curates' music for each of its users. The article gives us a brief history of online music curation, walking us all the way from Songza's manual curation to manually tagging songs with attributes and building profiles based off listening profiles. All the way to analyzing audio and textual content from music and matching that to users profiles based on all the data the company has on them. Following this they go into Spotify's three types of recommendation models: Collaborative Filtering, Natural Language Processing and Audio. Collaborative filtering is the processing of collecting data on how many times a user streams a particular song, adds it a playlist or liked songs. That data is used to suggest songs that other users who listened and liked the same songs as you also enjoyed. Next up is Natural Language Processing, the ability of a computer to understand human speech. Spotify uses NLP to search the internet for review of songs and albums to find terms commonly used to describe those songs which are then used to tag the songs. Finally, Raw Audio Models are used to analyze songs based on their time signature, key, mode, tempo and loudness. These statistics are used to find songs with similar characteristics so that they can be suggested to the user.

How Pinterest Built One of Silicon Valley's Most Successful Algorithms By Will Oremus

The author points out how well Pintrest is able to classify its users. By asking the user their age and gender and recording a few responses such as the users language and region they are able to suggest interests with fairly high accuracy. The next step is taking the interests chosen by the user and creating a machine learning algorithm to show you things related to those topics. The author also brings up Pinterest's greatest flaw, "drawing the wrong conclusions from the users' past behaviour". Following that he mentions that Pintrest is actually allowing users to shape their own algorithm as a solution to this problem, letting users turn off recommendations allowing them to remove bias's that don't reflect their own. Pintrest's creators found that users do not

want to provide more information about themselves to personalize a product more to themselves; however, they will supply information they don't think to be confidential, like their interests. This is how interests became the backbone of Pintrest's algorithm, asking people for their interests, something they love to talk about. As other social media platforms shy away from allowing users to shape their own feeds, Pintrest uses a more open approach that allows users more control over the things they that show up on their feed.

Noble, S. (2018) Algorithms of Oppression:How Search Engines Reinforce Racism. C 4: Searching for Protection from Search Engines

The next reading was titled "Searching for Protection from Search Engines", the article focuses on how search engines allow people to find information that would be lost in a traditional filing system. The author gives many examples of search engines being used to find information on people that they would probably rather be forgotten such as a woman who was decided to be unfit for the classroom because of a nine-month stint in the pornography industry. A lot of people believe that it should be a right to have things forgotten from the internet. Mario Costeja Gonzalez fought in court against Google Spain on the grounds that people have a right to request delisting of links to information about them from search engines, especially if may cause personal harm. These laws that support "the right to be forgotten" were approved in the European Union. The rest of the article focuses on how you should avoid digitizing things that don't need to be digitized. As information is rarely ever fully deleted and/or destroyed we should be weary of what we create and upload.

Noble, S. (2018) Algorithms of Oppression:How Search Engines Reinforce Racism. C 6: The Future of Information Culture

The final reading was titled "The Future of Information Culture", the article focuses on the increase in availability of information to the general public in urban and rural areas. The author brings up the fact that "almost two-thirds of the time users spend online is focused on communication, information searching, entertainment or social networking". This shows how prevalent information culture really is and how much of an effect, how we are shown this information has on us. The article focuses a lot on Google's monopoly on information, they highlight how much power google has in what it shows you and when it shows it to you. This power can have an immense impact on everything from politics to economics. As well as being able to negatively affect our culture, the web also has the ability to share information of people who are oppressed and would normally not have a chance to stage their opinions. The article finishes by bringing up their opinion that "Social Inequality Will Not Be Solved by an App", and how we can not combat the effects of information culture from our beds staring at smartphones.