

Synopsis for initial exam paper for Software Studies

Overall idea

The overall idea of my exam paper is based on an interest in the social medias and the growing influence they have on our society, culture and personal lives. My thought is to first of all look at the historical evolvement of how everyday communication has changed ever since the social medias started growing in popularity. Then I will look closer at some of the key points of the social media such as data capturing which, I find, play a big role on some of the biggest social medias we see today (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram etc.). In extension to this, I will dive into how the data that is stored about users on social media platforms is being used not only by the platforms that collects the data, but also the companies the data is sold to. Here I will mostly focus on Facebook, as lately they have gotten a lot of critique on the subject. To get an even better understanding of the massive amount of data that is being stored, I will use examples of some of the data Facebook has stored about me, as the data can be downloaded directly from Facebook.

Definition of problem(s)

The overall problem I want to address is still a bit unclear to me and of course depends on where my further study of texts takes me, but so far, my main question/subject is as follows:

How does data capturing on social media platforms affect us as people, users, and our society in general?

I am still not sure whether this is too big a subject to take on but will strive to answer the question in depth.

In my study I will look at some different sub questions, and here I have tried to list these and give an explanation of why I find these relevant, and how I plan to address the issues.

- *How has the social media platforms and the use of them changed in the last decade or so?*

The reason I want to include the historic aspect of the social medias is to create a good foundation for understanding the major impact it has had, and to in some way underline this. I also find that there are some very rapid changes taking place right now – for example the shift from everyone

being on Facebook, to everyone now being on Instagram and in part, Twitter. To understand these changes and where the society and use of social media is headed I find it necessary to have an understanding of where the society is coming from. By “use of” the social media platforms I mean how and what the users use the platforms for. Here I will focus on the use of Facebook, as the use of this particular platform has changed rapidly in the last few years for many of my peers – myself included. I find that users my own age doesn’t post nearly as often on Facebook as they used to. People used to post pictures and statuses from their lives – now it is in a much higher degree used as a communication tool for planning events or to reach out to your network if you need help with something (finding a place to live for example). I believe the pictures people used to post are now being posted on Instagram instead, and the statuses are being posted on Twitter instead.

- *What is the background for the current debate about Facebook’s data collection (#DeleteFacebook), and does it have an impact?*

As of now, I find it very interesting to look at how the most popular social media is (partly) shifting from Facebook to other platforms such as Instagram and Twitter. I also find the current debate about the enormous amount of data that Facebook logs about its users to be very interesting. If possible (since this is still very new, and not something that has been researched yet) I will try to see if the debate has an influence on which social medias are used and of course if the use of Facebook is dropping as a result. I will here draw in some of the data that Facebook has stored about me, as I found it very surprising how much data was stored about my actions on the social media platform. As I looked through some of the data (it would take way too long to look at all of it) I was both intrigued by the data that was captured many years ago and frightened by how enormous an amount was saved without me being aware of it.

- *How has data capturing changed social medias and our society in general?*

Through the debate about Facebook I will of course take a more general look at the data capturing that we see (and don’t see) on the social media platforms. I will try to look at both how the data is being used by the social media platforms that collect the data and also the other parties involved that the social media platforms are selling the data to. I find that we see a big change in both commercials on the internet and the general content that we are presented with, and this is obviously

a result of the data being collected about us when we are online, and then used to target the commercials and posts we are faced with on social media platforms (and other sites for that matter) directly to us. We do now not only see commercials on banners at the side of a page, but now we are confronted with one product after the other by people we follow on Instagram or campaigns and companies that our friends like on Facebook and so on.

Sources

The list of sources I plan to use is far from complete. This is in part because my focus of the exam is not completely clear yet, but also because, as I mentioned earlier, some of the issues I plan to address are being debated just this moment, and new articles will very likely appear in the near future, so I will of course try to include this.

The sources I know I am going to use are:

- Gerlitz, Carolin, and Helmond, Anne. *"The like Economy: Social Buttons and the Data-Intensive Web."* *New Media & Society* 15, no. 8 (December 1, 2013): 1348–65.

This is a text concerning both data capturing and also the concept called "The Like Economy", where the focus is of course on the data captured in what users 'like' on the social media platforms – it focusses on Facebook in particular. In addition to this it can help shed light on the development of the social medias and how they are used.

- Pold, Søren. *"Button."* *Software Studies\ a lexicon*. Eds. Matthew Fuller. MIT Press, 2008. 31-36.

This is a text concerning specifically the data that is captured when we press buttons, which is a big part of the data that is collected about users on Facebook and other social media platforms. In relation to the text I will for example look at the use of the 'like' button on Facebook, which is some of the data that is listed when you download the data Facebook has on you as a user.

The next steps

My next steps are simply to make my idea more tightly targeted. I am not sure I will be able to study all of subjects/questions above in depth in the exam paper, so I will have to cut something

out. I believe I will have to look deeper into the subject and find out what is most relevant and what is not. Through the study of the subject I believe I will also in a natural way find a clearer idea for my exam paper.

I will also have to keep an eye on the current debate about Facebook and try to get the information I need from this case.