Datafication

## Introduction and why I find the topic interesting

When Edward Snowden leaked sensitive information on how the American Intelligence agencies carried out mass surveillance on phones and other devices, it suddenly opened up a lot of people eyes to questions of privacy and data-security. Most of us do not spend a lot of time thinking about what we leave behind on the internet or technological devices that we use, because it is not something that have a direct effect on our everyday lives. Although, with our society becoming more and more digital and technological and almost everything can be handled via a computer such as shopping, interacting with friends, paying bills, going to school, just to name a few, maybe it is more relevant than ever to start thinking about the result and possible consequences that our digital lives can give.

To begin inquiring about this topic I have decided to start with looking at data, and more specifically the process of datafication - how many aspects of our lives is turned into data and thereby given a new value. Data is what we leave behind when we engage with the digital world. It is information about ourselves and our lives, and it is almost impossible for normal people to avoid leaving traces of their whereabouts on the internet or on various technological devices. My starting point of this topic is to examine exactly what is datafication and what does it mean what you leave behind data?

Data is described as: “a set of values of qualitative or quantitative variables.” on the Wikipedia website[[1]](#endnote-1) but I want to specify what I mean when I use the word data and also in which context I intend to use it. The title of my exam paper I decided to be datafictaion and not just data because I find the notion of how everything suddenly becomes data very interesting. In the first part of my paper I want to give a brief historical overview of how the internet and social media came around to try and explain why the issue of data and datafictaion is more relevant than it was only 20 years ago.

## Analysis and an example

As a way to get a little more concrete and introduce something that the reader probably is familiar with I want to use Facebook as an example. I will try to explain how Facebook uses data, how they collect data and encourage their users to give them even more data, and also try to explain why they want their users data. To help to answer these questions I will use the two articles "What do metrics want? How quantification prescribes social interaction on Facebook” by Benjamin Grosser and “The Like economy” by Carolin Gerlitz and Anna Helmond.

## Discussion and reflection

I think a good starting point for a discussion at the end of my exam paper could be the case of Cambridge Analytica. I would give a short introduction to the case and then afterwards try and discuss some of the ethical elements of data and the use of data. It could also be relevant to include the case of the whistleblower Edward Snowden to help reflect upon the issue of data-surveillance and the trust that we put into digital systems such as the one we use in Denmark called NemID.

## Texts I intend to use:

* The like economy: Social buttons and the data-intensive web - By carolin Gerlitz and Anne Helmond
  + This text is about what the author describes as the like economy. The like economy depends very much on the social aspects of the internet. Users interactions are transformed into data which is then presented back to other users, who can then again interact with what they are presented with and thereby creating more data. The article claims that “user activity is of economic value because they produce valuable user data” (p. 1360, Gerlitz and Helmond) and data is of high value because it can provide insights into the millions of people lives, preferences and interest that are using Facebook.
* ”What Do Metrics Want? How Quantification Prescribes Social Interaction on Facebook,” - By Benjamin Grosser.
  + This text also uses Facebook as an example to describe how a company like Facebook is trying to engage its users to generate more data. Key concepts like quantification, metrics and capitalist culture are concepts that would be relevant for me to talk about in relation to my own paper. This article can help shed light on exactly what Facebook does to engage its users and also why they succeed so well in doing what they are doing, in a society like ours today.
* Datafication, dataism and dataveillance: big data between scientific paradigm and ideology - By José van Dijck
  + This text looks at the relationship between people and the institutions in which we choose to put our trust in relation to our data. I think this will be helpful in relation to the discussion I want to carry out. I think the text can give some interesting insights and arguments to start a more ethical debate about the handling of our personal data.
* Want to be on top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook - By Taina Bucher
  + This article again uses Facebook as its main example. I believe this article will be relevant because of its description of the EdgeRank algorithm works in structuring the newsfeed on Facebook. This is something that I may be able to use when trying to determine how Facebook manages to engage its users.

* "[The Graph API: Key Points in the Facebook and Cambridge Analytica Debacle](https://medium.com/tow-center/the-graph-api-key-points-in-the-facebook-and-cambridge-analytica-debacle-b69fe692d747)" - By Jonathan Albright
  + This article does a really good job at explaining the case of Cambridge Analytica and therefor it will be really useful in my discussion.

I think I will need to find more articles to use in the discussion and also in the introduction. I need to find some that describe how the web 2.0 came about and also what happened when companies like Facebook and other social media sites began to gain a massive user base. For the discussion I will need some more articles that describe the two cases of Edward Snowden and also Cambridge Analytica, to have a qualified starting point for my discussion.

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Data [↑](#endnote-ref-1)