SOCIAL MEDIA AND FILTER BUBBLES

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Summary
The aim of this paper is to analyze the media bubbles and media footprint in social medias. The authors reflect the ways numerous online hubs are personalizing the Internet for their users, so people have media bubbles as an effect when the algorithms of social networks and search engines personally select what posts and links to show. The information bubble is related to the peculiarities of the cognitive activity. People choose information that supports their point of view and isolate what will confirm their opinion from the whole array of facts and information, a "Confirmation Bias". Turning students' attention to their own filter bubbles on social media, a space where they may have already developed an array of literacies, the authors warn the students that media bubbles can be dangerous. There are tasks to analyze the media fields of students and also there are ways to filter out information flows, preserve and develop critical thinking. The authors give examples of tasks for bachelor level students in the discipline "Info-Media Literacy and Critical Thinking".

Key words: social media, concept, critical thinking, media bubble, media consumer, media footprint.

1. Introduction

As one of the researchers has stated, "academic research lags behind marketplace developments" (*Montgomery, 2015*). This fact must be highlighted on a global level as these market changes have affected the way we interact with various online platforms.

As Facebook transforms its marketing model to meet their economic needs, privacy issues continue to arise and change. As a new social network tool is place in the forefront and students of all ages chose to join the question of data protection become important. This issue appears more important to the parents, educators, or caregivers who have a vested interest in keeping their children or students safe (*Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, Ólafsson, 2011*). Then, the other side of this issue comes into context that even those whose job it is to protect children/ students may have also allowed for breaches in data such as educational institutions. These issues are just beginning to take shape so the research in this area is just growing *(Abreu, Lee, McDougall, Melki, Mihailidis, 2017:10-12)*.

When you visit a website, you think you are getting the same content as everyone else. But almost anywhere you go online, **algorithms** keep track of what you like to click on. These algorithms give you content based on what they think you like, and they will continue to do so

until they are mainly showing you content you will likely consume. This process can lead to the creation of a **filter bubble**.

The decisions around the types of posts that we see when scrolling through social media are in the hands of algorithms rather than people, computer programs ran by companies that own the app or website.

The news information that appear on search engines and social media are tailored to your personal information, which is collected through your search history, online shopping habits, platforms you use, details passed on when signing up to things online and your privacy settings.

2. How is the information bubble formed?

The information bubble (filter bubble/algorithms) is an effect when the algorithms of social networks and search engines personally select what posts and links to show people. Usually people see the information that they like and that coincides with their worldview and supports their interests.

Information bubbles were first coined by Eli Pariser, the author of the book "The Filter Bubble: What the internet is hiding from you", who detailed the ways numerous online hubs were personalizing the Internet for their users. The concept of an information bubble can have two explications.

The first is the technological algorithms of social networks and search engines, configured to give out information that is as close as possible to our interests, positions and approaches. All our actions, all our clicks, being on sites, views, likes in social networks are aggregated, helping algorithms to interpret our behavior, predict what else we could be offered. Social media feeds are set up to show us not new publications in chronology, but those that, in the opinion of the algorithm, will be most adequate to our interests, opinion, even emotional state. In fact, an information bubble is forming around you.

The second explication of the term information bubble is related to the peculiarities of our cognitive activity. We choose information that supports our point of view and isolate what will confirm our opinion from the whole array of facts and information, this is called "Confirmation Bias". Confirmation bias is one of the most common cognitive distortions and the most problematic aspect of human thinking. This phenomenon manifests itself in a variety of areas – from the perception of political information to medical diagnostics and scientific research.

3. Information bubble can be dangerous

Information bubbles, making our personal life more comfortable, create tension in social life, interfere with the development of the ability to negotiate between members of the community. On the one hand, the search engine and the social network helps to find more adequate information. They won't offer you horror movies if you show with all your behavior that you prefer romantic comedies. But on the other hand, you will be less and less likely to encounter opposite opinions, with people who disagree with you in values, in opinions. You will live surrounded by a very comfortable and pleasant bubble, but when you come out into reality, when you need to do something, solve the issue, you will be very much surprised how distorted your idea of the world, how it works and what views are held by people living next

to you. Therefore, you need to at least sometimes try to get out of your information bubble or expand it, faced with an opinion opposite to yours.

Periodically clean the cache and browser history, look for information in incognito mode (for example, the Google Chrome browser gives this opportunity). For the sake of interest, compare the results of search queries in incognito mode and without it. Do not immediately refuse to read or view publications with the opposite point of view, especially if an opinion is presented reasonably. In social networks, turn off automatic sorting of your feed, set settings that allow you to show publications by chronology. When faced with the "wrong" opinion, take the position of an active listener. Listen to him carefully, not to argue, but to hear his point of view.

We therefore maintain that turning students' attention to their own filter bubbles on social media, a space where they may have already developed an array of literacies, means they can attempt to reconcile the distinction between their digital literacies and *critical* digital literacies as part of reassembling their data with their body. Indeed, the difference between digital literacies and *critical* digital literacies are particularly problematic in social media spaces. After all, social media are themselves sites of converging roles and agencies, where users are both producer and consumer *(Beck, 2017)* and, as *(Jenkins, 2006)* suggested, sites "where the power of the media producer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways".

4. Analyze your media field

Each person's media field is individual, like a fingerprint, it is a set of sources of information, channels and methods of communication.

Communication is of three types: passive – subscribe to a specific blog; active – read posts and take notes or notes; bilateral – put likes, write comments and ask questions.

Many people, when forming their media field, begin to unconsciously apply toxic patterns. Thus, incorrectly configured communication channels can form a lost profits syndrome (FOMO) in the user. It begins to seem to them that the people around them have brighter and more interesting life, that all important events do not happen to them, that as soon as they disconnect from the Internet, they will definitely miss something. In this case, their media field ceases to perform useful functions, it eats up time and attention, is fueled by a sense of anxiety.

Without verification and fact-checking, making thoughtless reposts, we form a media field from information that is not credible. Such a media field ceases to be an assistant and becomes an enemy: it creates a false picture of the world, reduces the criticality of thinking. This pattern is quite contagious and can damage the immediate environment as well.

Toxic patterns include the media field, which is formed under the effect of framing. This is a well-known example of cognitive distortion, in which the field of view is markedly narrowed. Some information is given more attention to the detriment of another (entertainment content prevails over developmental content), some communication channels always receive a negative emotional coloring ("time in social networks goes only to harm").

While learning Media Literacy, our students have such task as Media Analysis assignment. In these assignments, students have to identify fact from opinion and recognise various forms of media bias. To do this, students may be given specific resources to analyse, or might be asked to look at a wide range of media, including television, radio transcripts, newspapers, films, blogs, and social media. Some questions help the students with the task:
- Is the group/issue accurately portrayed?
- Is the group/isssue portrayed in a positive way, a negative way, or a mixture?

• How do people feel about the way the group/issue is portrayed?
• Are there different perspectives or opinions presented about this group/issue in the media, or just one?
• Are there positive outcomes from the way this group/issue is represented in the media?
• Who benefits from these positive outcomes?
• Are there negative outcomes from the way this group/issue is represented in the media?
• Who suffers from these negative outcomes?

5. Preserve and develop critical thinking

The insatiability of information is very difficult to stop, because the entire information world that makes money from users contributes to the formation of this habit. And only the person himself consciously can somehow resist these manipulations. From constant scrolling, we only lose time that we could spend on real progress in our own lives. So, these are forces to filter out information flows, to preserve and develop critical thinking:

1. Recognize the bubble.

Social networks from the very beginning of their existence began to collect user data in order to improve the user experience and bring together people with similar interests and preferences. After some time, it became clear that people create volumes of data that can be used for marketing purposes, to simplify the sales of certain goods and services and also in order to observe people and influence society.

Media researcher Eli Pariser foresaw a threat back in 2010 that no one had thought about before. It is called an information bubble (from the English filter bubble – a state of intellectual isolation that occurs when the search engine supplies the user only with information that corresponds to his own views, and removes everything that contradicts them). Special algorithms based on the search history of a person and his other actions create a homogeneous information space around a person, offering him more and more of what a person has already been interested in. This is clearly seen in the example of Google search, where different people will get different results for the same keywords – this will depend on individual search history.

2. Don't listen only to your own echoes.

If you shout something in a room with a high level of sound reflection, you can hear an echo – your voice will be reflected as if there are dozens of other people in the room. The same phenomenon is possible in social media. People form groups, make pages where those whose views and interests are similar gather. And then there is the echo effect, or the "echo chamber" effect, which Pariser wrote about in his 2011 book "The Filter Bubble: What the internet is hiding from you". On social media, this happens as follows. A person publishes something. Those who agree with him put "likes", share the publication, write approving comments. And those who disagree, either do not see the publication at all, or are afraid to leave a comment in order not to fall under verbal attack. The author of the post has the feeling that his thoughts and opinions are large-scale and very important, and that many people think the same way. It's a very powerful feeling – many people agree with you and recognize you. But it's really just a reflection of your thoughts from those who think in a similar way.

In an echo chamber, especially an echo chamber of somebody's own thoughts, it can be very comfortable, but a media literate person has a broader outlook. This means that people should be more open to other people's opinions and the picture of the world. On social networks, people should consciously join groups and subscribe to pages that at first glance are

not interesting or even contradict your beliefs. And if everyone with whom you communicate begins to agree with you, then you should think about whether you have fallen into an echo chamber where only your own voice sounds.

3. Manage your attention.

A person has six senses with which a certain amount of information can be perceived – sounds, tastes, smells, texts, pictures, etc. are information. Our feelings, along with information, form what we call attention and it is limited. We have two ears and two eyes, and even if there are a lot of texts, videos, pictures and sounds, our eyes and ears can no longer pass through themselves. For this reason, the ability to manage your attention becomes an extremely important skill. Then important information is transmitted to the brain, and insignificant does not interfere with it.

Unnecessary data and information noise do not begin to control your attention, so you should get your inbox in order; set up filters in your accounts; filter spam in your inbox. Newsletters and promotional emails distract attention and also try to influence you or sell you something.

4. Choose "healthy" info channels.

Unlike YouTube, Facebook, TikTok and other social media, in journalism it is considered mandatory to check information before publishing. At the same time, it is important to read various press, so as not to be in the info bubble. Thus, in your "info menu" there will be high-quality and reliable information that expands the horizons.

5. Check and doubt

Fascinating, incredible, unusual, dangerous – these words often characterize false and misleading information. It is also often characterized by the following: "unknown or anonymous source", "lack of experts", "scientifically proven", "according to experts", "confirmed and true" and "in fact". The press should refer to the source from which the information comes. In some cases, a journalist may use the anonymity of the source to protect the source of information, but in this case, it is always indicated that "the source is known to the editorial board".

If it is claimed that something is "scientifically proven", then it should be possible to verify it. Proof can serve as a scientific article published in an international scientific publication, or a link to the scientific work of the author with the opportunity to get acquainted with his other works. So you can make sure that such a scientist exists at all.

If the text indicates that things really are in one way or another, or there is an abundance of phrases "in fact" or "truthfully", then there is a reason to doubt. Reliable information does not need to be emphasized on its credibility, nor does it need to be constantly emphasized that the situation or phenomenon is indeed as claimed. If there is a doubt on at least one point, then you should not take this information seriously, and, especially, share it.

For our bachelor level students, we have some tasks connected with this theme in our developed lessons in the discipline "Info-Media Literacy and Critical Thinking".

Ex. 1. Answer the questions:

1. How often do you surf the internet?

2. What social media do you visit more often?

3. How often do you share photos or write reviews on any products?

All that you do in the internet make up your "social media footprint".

A social media footprint is the trail that you leave behind for others to find every time you upload a photo on Instagram, check in on Foursquare, share anything on Facebook, tweet on Twitter, pin on Pinterest boards, publish videos of yourself on YouTube, get tagged in a Flickr photo, add jobs and education info on LinkedIn, and so on.

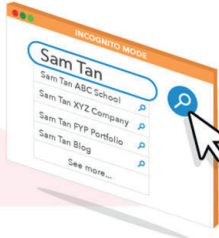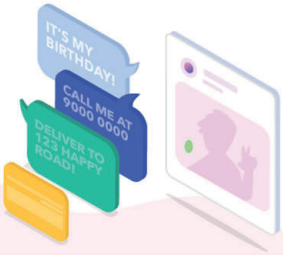Read the information below and add more safe habits you should have online.

Ex. 2. Read the text "National Selfie Day"

Comment on the quotation from the article:
"The term "selfitis" arose in 2014 to describe someone who takes a lot of selfies and posts them to social media and since then, it has been adopted by psychologists and is considered a real mental condition."

Ex. 3. Watch the video "How filter bubbles isolate you" (2:37) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pT-k1kDIRnw

While watching, make notes and finish the statements:
1. Almost anywhere you go _____ will keep track of what you like to click on.
2. Each of us has specific interests so why not focus on _____ we'll probably like.
3. A social media site may _____ from friends with different viewpoints.
4. If you want to go online _____ algorithms is almost impossible.
5. It becomes difficult to have a _____ discussion about the facts.
6. Keep _____ in mind when you browse the internet and try to seek out new _____.
Answer the questions:
1. Describe your personal filter bubbles.
2. Do you try to avoid filter bubbles?
3. Have you ever noticed that you miss information?
4. How can you change your filter bubbles?

6. Conclusions

To conclude, media literacy is one of the principal new tools that provide citizens with the skills they need to make sense of the sometimes overwhelming flow of daily media and in particular, new media and information disseminated through new communication technologies. The news information that appear on search engines and social media are tailored to your personal information, which is collected through your search history, online shopping habits, platforms you use, details passed on when signing up to things online and your privacy settings. So, be trapped into a personal media bubble can be dangerous, because you will live surrounded by a very comfortable and pleasant bubble, but when you come out into reality, when you need to do something, solve the issue, you will be very much surprised how distorted your idea of the world, how it works and what views are held by people living next to you. Once everyone gets stuck in their own bubble, the problem only gets worse. For example, if everyone is confident they're getting the full story on a current event when they're really only getting part of it, no one can make an educated judgement, and it becomes difficult to have a meaningful discussion about the facts. This is how filter bubbles contribute to a lack of understanding and an unwillingness to consider opposing viewpoints and unfavorable information. Keep filter bubbles in mind as you browse the Internet, and continually seek out new sources and perspectives. Hopefully by doing this, you'll be able to take back some control of your online experience.

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