Chapter 13

Embodiment and Gameplay: Situating the User in Crowdsourced Information Production

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ABSTRACT

Distributed decision making with several stakeholders has various facets. On one hand, it enables significant opportunities for fast and efficient information provision, in particular when various structuring frameworks are provided. On the other hand, there are several problems regarding the reliability and consistency of the data produced in social media contexts as well as with the frameworks themselves. Online collaborative data production systems where crowd feedbacks are aggregated and mediated are easily affected by group biases. There are also several credibility and verification issues as the representativeness of the participants normally is difficult or impossible to determine. This chapter discusses the handling of user data in tools for crowd sourced data production and suggests a framework for describing the socio-technical setting for the production of data, and thereby the detectability of bias patterns in collaborative information production.

INTRODUCTION

There seems to be an ever-growing demand for fair participatory processes and participation has become an important part of research and design processes, where the basic idea is to decentralize the control to various and inclusive groups of stakeholders. The idea is that, thereby, the democratic decision making in the development of more participatory and innovative governments will more or less automatically be strengthened (cf., eg., Hansson, Belkacem & Ekenberg, 2014, Ekenberg et al, 2017). To facilitate this, there are various IT-based platforms, such as voting systems, communication platforms, and various crowd-sourcing techniques aiming at facilitating various features of participation and transparency.

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However, the success of all these methods has, in general, been quite limited to communication platforms, whereas tools for more analytical and deliberate support to a substantial participatory democracy have not seldom failed quite miserably.

The core idea of deliberative and participatory processes is that a broad public engagement and influence is important for understanding the issues at hand and that the transparency of the processes behind public decision making will provide a better and more trustworthy result. This general idea is supposed to be of high significant within both semi-public and public spheres and that the support from, e.g., social media platforms, further augmented with various structuring features and reputation mechanisms for analysing and verifying information, would provide a fundamental change to more hierarchical decision processes. The dream of an open government thus envisions transparent and deliberative processes, where the civil society can participate in the collection and analytical phases as well as in the actual decisions. These ideas have been explored more thoroughly by a multitude of researchers and practitioners, such as, (Heeks & Bailur, 2007; Roy, 2003; Yildiz, 2007). More recently, more elaborate ideas of fundamental institutional transformations have also appeared, where the fundamental idea is to investigate whether different social media platforms, rather that dedicated tools, more effectively can support participatory democracy and, equally importantly, create a more instrumental meaning to concepts such as e-government, e-participation and open data, cf., e.g., (Bright, J. and Margetts, H. 2016; Sinclair et al, 2017; Alarabiat et al, 2016)). An interesting and related question here is to what extent participation at all can be stimulated by some specific tools, or whether there are other mechanisms that are more dominant. Most informed or semi-informed people have ideas of democracy, transparency, fairness, equity, and so on, but in many cases in very vague terms. Concepts like these are of course constructs, and there are no unifying ideas regarding what participation and deliberation actually mean in relation to them, which of course is a further complicating factor when trying to understand to what extent various tools adequately represent what is going on and what they are actually support for.

We will not try to define these concepts herein. Sufficient for us is to assume that they include some inclusive and participatory aspects together with some degree of transparency when it comes to decision-making in different forms and that there are also decision-making bodies, such as governments, that can be more informed and effective at all. Transparency here seems to be crucial due to its obvious relation to trust, but also important when it comes to understanding the whole information process, why, e.g., Bannister and Connolly (2011) suggest that transparency in the online contexts not only should be about data, but also include the information and decision processes involved, i.e., who is behind the information as well as when, when, how and why it was produced. Regarding the participatory and decentralized components, some authors claim that these, except for strengthen the democratic processes per se, also can be a more sustainable and dynamical way of general governance, maintained through broad participation without a central authority, where larger groups can stipulate the agenda and the content as well as measure its quality. (See, e.g. Fung 2013; Parasie & Dagiral 2012.)

Some also claims some positive effects of that networked publics’ are performed, shared and reproduced online by crowds of participants, where trust and mutual recognition is central, contrary to more traditional public spheres controlled by centralized gatekeepers (Hansson, 2015a). These networked publics can be used for establishing public archives and providing alternative decentralized sources of data, enabling different, and sometimes more reliable, data validation in the forms of different discussion forms, motivating mechanisms and voting systems, or mixes thereof, for extending communication.
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