What's in Your Filter Bubble? Or, How Has the Internet Censored You Today?

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WHAT’S IN YOUR FILTER BUBBLE?
OR, HOW HAS THE INTERNET CENSORED YOU TODAY?
This book was written and published.

Pariser shows how we are being algorithmically filtered. This filtering is to achieve a few things:
Personalization
Marketing

We’ve all personalized things. We personalize our houses with paint colors, our bodies with tattoos, our identities with our clothing, etc. and this all translated to the web. Our cell phones and our e-mail inboxes have so many personalization options. They are intended to optimize the functionality of these tools so that we can be effective and have fun doing it.

But the thing is--the personalization is going farther than that. Our web search results are based on who we are, not on what is “true.” Based on the web sites you visit most frequently, the time you spend on a site, how many links you click on from a particular site, you are being tracked and algorithms have been developed that will further personalize your web experience. Sounds good, right?

The problem is that technology is being put in a place to be an editor. It is deciding what is important for you to see and read and discover. Sounds a lot like what we do as librarians, right? At least in academic libraries, it’s a lot like what we
do.

But here’s the problem— these editorial decisions are not based on a worldview or education. They are based on $$$$.

Quote the NY times bit in Pariser’s book here.

Talk about AXCIOM
If my world was indeed captured in a little bubble, I wanted to investigate it and understand it. So I decided I’d try to (unscientifically) see if I could find evidence of my filter bubble.

I tried to repeat the gist of what Pariser did when he talked about having two separate people google the same thing at the same time and see what happened. In his case, “
Brooke Gladstone: ...Even a small search yields different results for different people, says Pariser, as when two people he knows searched “BP” during the oil spill.
ELI PARISER:
And one person saw information about the oil spill - what you can do about it, the environmental consequences - and another person saw stock tips - here’s how the BP stock is doing, here’s investment information. You know, this could lead to some pretty bad decisions.” – from the On the Media transcript
So I tried to replicate the experiment that Parisier talks about in his book. For background, he asked two women to google the same thing at the same time. The search was “bp.”
No difference
Not really any difference
Except this one. This particular result came from S. – 30s, male, PhD but works for a health insurance company, Libertarian
So I tried to have my participants re-do the search that Pariser had the ladies do. My subjects searched for BP. I noticed some slight differences, as in those who live in areas with BP gas stations had those mapped and listed up top. Other than that, there was not much difference at all.
So then I thought maybe it’s a browser thing? And I tried an experiment on myself. At work I have two browsers open, one with work stuff, one with personal. And I don
And I tried using IE, too, which I try to never use.
My conclusion was: meh. It failed. Yeah, maybe my searches were a little different, but nothing of significance.
I was innocently curled up on my big arm chair sipping on wine with the dog sleeping by my feet, about to watch one of my shows on Hulu (I don’t have cable).
“Emily, did you know that viewers of this show also like (Planned) Parenthood?”

This popped onto my screen. (Parentheses is what I heard—I’m still not sure if that’s what it said.)
THE CONCLUSION?

- My test searches were bad.
- My test subjects weren’t representative enough.
- I have created my own bubble and Google has aided and abetted me in doing so.
- #*@@#*#@&!!!
So I looked at my Google Dashboard. And I downloaded my Facebook data. And this is just a sample list of what Google and Facebook, combined, know about me. Potentially what has been sold to companies like Axciom. This more information than my partner, my parents, and best friends know about me.
And it can get even more precise...
OMG What does Google Think I should Know?
OMG What does Google Want me to know?

Education/Awareness—librarians are really good at this.
Opting out – Delete cookies regularly. Have your browser ask about cookies. Use plugins like Disconnect.
Talk to your local and national decision-makers—technology decisions can have impacts that reach far into the future.
Local decision makers may include your library director, your supervisor, etc. Without having these conversations I don’t think we’ll get anywhere, which is why I moved them up on the list.

Duckduckgo
THANKS TO THE FOLKS WHO HAVE LICENSED THEIR FLICKR IMAGES WITH CREATIVE COMMONS LICENSES.

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OTHER RESOURCES

On the Media Interview Transcript with Eli Pariser
onthemedia.org/2011/may/20/the-filter-bubble/transcript/
The Filter Bubble Web site
thefilterbubble.com
CRATED TALK
ted.com/talks/eli_pariser_beware_online_filter_bubbles.html
QUESTIONS/
COMMENTS/
ETC

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