PLAYING THE ALGORITHM: MOBILE GAMERS' EVERYDAY (IN)VISIBILITY STRATEGIES

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Internet users are increasingly aware that they generate data traces and that they are acting in spaces in which algorithms operate. In Germany, scandals related to intelligence services' data collection practices have been instrumental in shaping people's image of social media and personal digital devices. In Australia, the revelation about the release of Australian user data to the NSA in the United States similarly highlighted the capacity for data to be reappropriated and employed for other unrelated and unapproved purposes. Globally, concerns about a loss of the private sphere also led to negative reactions towards unsolicited information gathering, for example, by the Google Streetview car. Public concerns have resulted in legislative and policy changes, and prompted reactions and behavioural changes among users.

In this contribution, we examine the everyday practices of casual gamers in their interaction with mobile games as algorithmic spaces. Games on mobile phones or tablets, similar to many other mobile apps, enable the collection and analysis of user data. These analyses are performed by simple or complex algorithms. We are interested in how casual gamer awareness of these practices alongside broader privacy concerns are navigated.

Tufekci (2014) showed how social media users adapt their practices on the basis of experiences with algorithmic agency in the context of the Gezi protests. The trending topics on the Twitter start page are an example of such algorithmic agency. Tufekci describes how the announcement of the publication date of a specific hashtag in advance led to the hashtag being re-tweeted by thousands of Twitter users (Tufekci 2014). Publishing a hashtag at a predefined moment leads to the generation of a maximum spike, to which Twitter's trending algorithm reacts. As trending generates

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great attention for a specific topic, numerous practices of deliberate manipulation of trends have been established which are more or less professionally used by individual users, organizations or enterprises. Lobbying right up to the deployment of bot-networks, which push content for often opaque reasons (Hegelich 2016) are being employed.

Such practices lead to data containing an element of recursiveness and 'cultures of circulation' emerge as the algorithms adapt to user behaviour and users in turn adapt to the results of algorithmic analyses (Beer and Burrows 2013).

Couldry and Powell (2014) found too little attention is given to the consideration of the power of algorithms: the consequences of analysis results for user behaviour and algorithmic reflexivity are often neglected. They call for making space for agency or reflexivity on the part of the 'smaller' actors and for the various ways in which they construct and implement power and participation in diverse contexts. A 'social analytics' approach can reveal how specific actors are involved in social processes of reflection, surveillance and observation as well as in iterative adjustment - even though often only minimal adjustments are possible for the users (Couldry and Powell 2014).

In his discussion of everyday life practices, Michel de Certeau (1984) notes how tactics are commonly employed by people (in their capacity as consumers, readers, audiences, pedestrians, and so forth) in order to shape or influence constrained environments (e.g. by technical, economic, political systems) and practices. Tactics are described as practices of resistance and appropriation enacted against the constructs of (seemingly) larger and more powerful systems and actors. In our discussion here, these may refer to individual corporate actors such as game developers (who may again be entangled in constraints); companies such as Facebook; or even the broader capitalist system that generates value from data gleaned from users' everyday activities.

Beer (2009) mentions three areas for such empirical studies: the organizations of social media providers; software infrastructure and their applications on the web; and how these two play out in the everyday lives of those using (or not using) participatory web-applications. This third area considers "...how and why individuals divulge information about themselves, how they play with and within the boundaries of the software, how they react to and resist the impulsions written into the codes" (Beer 2009) and it is this area that we are interested in here.

The complex practices of utilizing or resisting algorithmic power in everyday life become particularly visible in the game interaction of players of so called casual and/or social games. These games can be accessed and played within social network sites such as Facebook or downloaded as apps. They often operate using a freemium model (free to play but offer microtransactions –small monetary transactions within the game) and are referred to as casual games to indicate that gameplay can be intermittent and played for short periods of time (Juul 2010).

For this study, casual mobile games act as a focal point for observing everyday algorithmic practices 1) because they act as a first point of contact for devices such as the ipad for many users and 2) because it is here that the ludic sphere, shaped by

playing and fun, and the strive towards achieving maximum user attention to generate ad revenue meet. Mobile applications have the added complexity of potential geo-location data generation.

Through the use of qualitative interviews and a questionnaire, we investigate the practices of casual mobile gamers around management of visibility and invisibility, mainly focusing on the following:

- deciding at which point and in which way to link games to social network platforms such as Facebook
- balancing sometimes incommensurable game interests such as social interaction, building and stress relief by making use of game features for player interaction (e.g. managing membership in player groups such as 'neighbourhoods' or 'clans' to fit in with different levels of intimacy and anonymity depending on the situation)
- navigating geolocation, personal and social information data choices through game practices

We consider these practices as ways of managing privacy requirements within algorithmic public spheres.

We are looking at Australian and German mobile game play to identify similarities and differences in practices of situated algorithmic management in the everyday. Germany has been the locus of considerable concern about online privacy, and part of the impetus behind the right to be forgotten data protection legislation. It therefore should pose an interesting site of comparison with Australia, where similar concerns have been evinced but are less evident within the broader public discourse and in legislative approaches.

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