DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES SCULPT INDIVIDUAL TRUTHS

TATUM MCPHERSON-CROWIE looks into the ways that digital technology shapes the information that we are shown and outlines some steps that you can take to step outside these bubbles of information.

All of the librarians I have worked with during my career have a skill set that equips them to identify omissions and lapses in patterns. Whether it is a stray comma in a reference, a book out of place on a self, an item absent from an invoice, a double space in a line of text, or a citation missing from a list of results. Often my colleagues can identify the impression that something is awry generally, long before they know what in particular is amiss. For decades I have relied on this skill set when accessing news and media, however negotiating my online information experience has tested the limits of my skill set.

Most of us have a unique view of social media and the wider internet due to an opaque combination of personalised search results, news streams, and media feeds. Our lens to current events and world affairs is also shaped by our online history of searches, clicks, and page views processed by proprietary algorithms. Sometimes a personalised perspective of the online environment is brilliant; it feels efficient and intuitive. Other times it feels creepy and wrong. Moreover, the obsequious world view tailored for individuals, confirms our biases, insulating us from challenging ideas, opinions, and communities.

After I read Eli Pariser's book *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You* in 2011, I realised that I needed to expand my approach to dealing with online information by further developing my skill set, cultivating online habits and strategies, and incorporating a range of tools. I took a quick tearoom poll of my colleagues to assemble a list of the ways in which we seek to challenge the information we receive online and I'd like to share the results with you, hopefully they will help you to identify and escape the bubbles you might find yourself in.

TOOLS

- Use more than one internet browser.
- Signing in/out to compare different results.
- Using browser extensions, such as Do Not Track.
- Block or delete third-party cookies.
- Use incognito browser modes.
- Use an anonymous web browser.
- Have additional accounts specifically for managing news and social media.
- Opt out of tracking, endorsements, and personalisation options.
- Enable/disable or modify your location settings.
- Use multiple platforms.
- Use an aggregator service.
- Use RSS feeds that do not require you to give personal details to access information.

STRATEGIES

- Set different default search services on each browser.
- Subscribe to a mix of local, international, independent and multinational media sources.
- Follow specific journalists, not just publications.
- Subscribe to news alerts in languages other than English, Bilingual newsletters, or the English language version of international media.
- Seek out and follow news and social media views that are different to your own (especially when it's uncomfortable).
- Avoid sources and social media sites that deny access to content when the above strategies are used.
- Perform an annual review of your subscriptions.

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