

## Data Selfie

I took my combined Facebook- and Twitter-data, acquired via my GDPR-granted “right to be informed”, had a good manual look-through of the categories, taxonomies and standards. I then inputted all of it into the “Apply Magic Sauce”-project, which is *"a non-profit academic research project coordinated by the University of Cambridge Psychometrics Centre"* (University of Cambridge: The Psychometrics Centre, n.d.). I was interested in finding out how the ‘mediated me’ (conferred from my usage patterns mixed with algorithmically determined arbitrary data) is perceived by machines, and thereby used against me in a sort of power-based relationship. I consider it a way of integrating a combined dataset representing me, instead of diving into specific categories, which had been my original plan for this assignment.

Having been confronted with the amount of data Facebook is storing - perhaps even curating - about me, facilitated through the GDPR-directive "Right to be Informed" - left me in a staggered state of powerlessness. I strongly believed that much of the data I was presented with had already been deleted by me, but it might have ended up in a state of ‘virtual limbo’ instead - hidden from plain sight, but still very much in effect. Simply skimming through the thousands and utter thousands of JSON-formatted lines about myself created an urge to instantly want to delete my Facebook-profile entirely - employing my "right to be forgotten" from a GDPR-standpoint. But alas, I have an inherently hard time trusting a “deletion” of my profile, when all of that data is so deeply engrained into the Facebook-ecosystem. Especially after hearing Anne Helmond (lecture held at AU, 31/10/19) lecturing on Facebooks platform as a business model, and their ways of routinely and systematically circumventing disclosure of unofficial partnerships and open “data faucets”. Not entirely deterred, I feel that I owe myself to at least attempt at restoring control of *my* digital data. Crucially, it’s a representation of myself that I don’t feel reflect me - at least not anymore.

The data Facebook has amounted about me is not just scary in regard to pure size but gets exponentially scarier when that same data is inputted into “Apply Magic Sauce”. It is an analytical tool which they describe as *"a modest attempt to reverse the trend in Big Data*

*and empower citizens to not only retain control of their data but also derive meaningful insight from it*" (University of Cambridge: The Psychometrics Centre, n.d.). Quickly described, it outputs a sort of prediction of a person from their digital footprint ("Likes", "Posts" and "Comments", etc. from Facebook), ranging parameters like age, psychological gender, top 5 personality traits to political orientation, religious orientation and relationship status. This is definitely rather juxtaposing and derived from something as arbitrary as "data" from Facebook. In this case I also inputted my acquired Twitter data, but it didn't seem to influence the results too much as it mainly takes original tweets into account - of which I have zero. It can, generally, be both scarily correct and horribly wrong, at the same time.

In any regard, I haven't approached this 'task' of trawling through my own social data as an objective and inherently external archivist (as I don't believe in a process of disentangling with data about myself in this way), and neither as a developer wanting to turn that same information into value through the means of aggregation. I've accessed this data as a platform citizen, and as a user - a user with certain GDPR-regulated rights. The way Acker & Kreisberg (2020) raises "the problem of extracted social media data collections is not just a concern for researchers and scholarly institutional repositories. As intermediaries between many kinds of users with different motivations, social platforms themselves grapple with issues of control over the records that users create, managing user data archives and the types of users who leverage them for data access (Glassman, 2020)" (Acker & Kreisberg, 2020, p. 107) seems highly influential on the very groundings upon which data is sieving through to the general public, in a way which is bound to have increasingly drastic effects on the way social sciences is able to methodically make progress in an increasingly digitized world.

My Data Selfie (Figure 1) has been produced directly from the "Apply Magic Sauce" results, being representations of the graphs and aggregated results. I've chosen sub-results which I determine to being either completely nonsensical, scarily correct, or just plain wrong. A part of the process of choosing has also been to avoid presenting data which I for some reason don't feel comfortable sharing. I also commented the assumptions where applicable. Visualizing the results made me think more deeply of them. Those which I

skipped for visualizations was not sinking in the same way the visualized ones were, birthing those reactions which are described directly on the visualization.

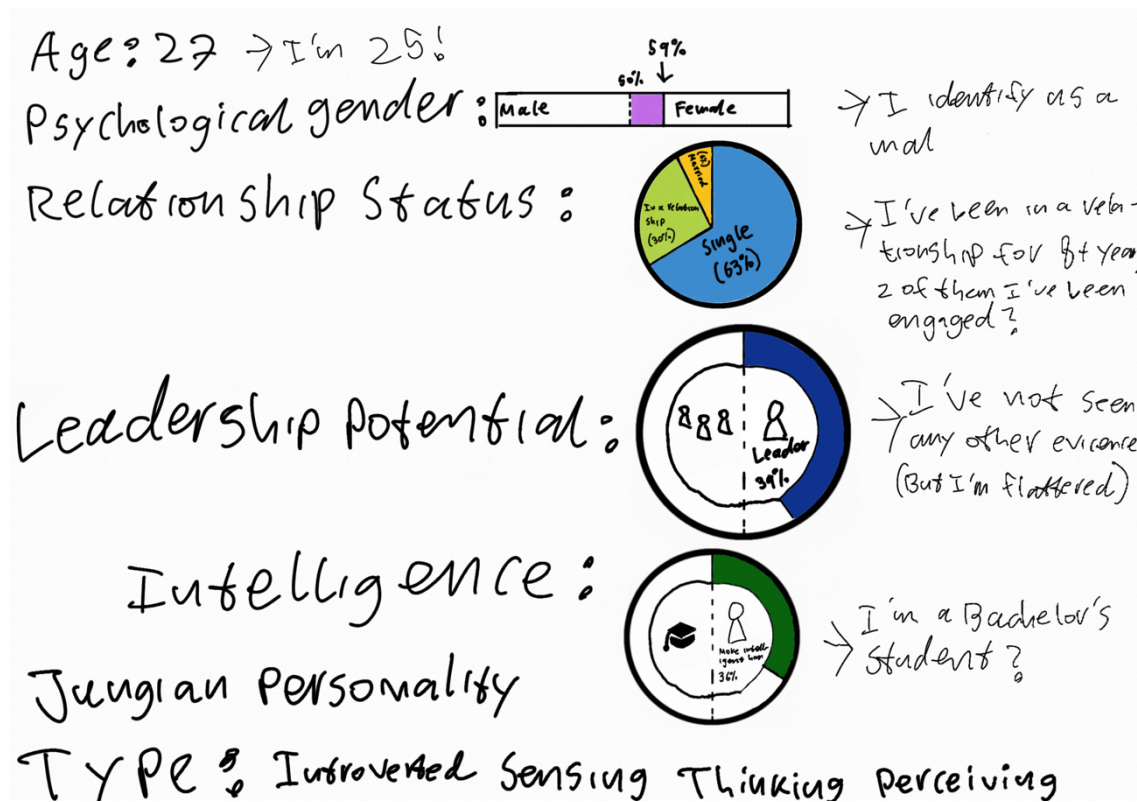


Figure 1

Personally, the profiling I received reflect different “phases” of life, which I’ve gone through since creating a Facebook-profile in 2010. It also encapsulates wildly different personas, as I at least attempt at sharply separating my “personal”-, “professional”- and “board of directors”-appearances, as I, at this stage in my life, mainly use Facebook as a “necessary-evil” for managing groups and carry out communication, being quite contextual at that. That also includes the fact that that I consciously haven’t been “liking” arbitrary or non-arbitrary things on Facebook for at least the last few years, and yet the “old” likes, of which I was certain that I’d already removed, is now defining me as a person - producing and converting me into a number in the “big data machine”, much in the same way as Cheney-Lippold (2017) describes, that “our algorithmic identities also regulate us in many different [...] ways” (Cheney-Lippold, 2017, p. 100).

After having probed some of the algorithmically derived data describing me, and subjected another algorithm, with the purpose of reverse-engineering the deterministic algorithms, to exactly that data, I now feel incited to further diving into the algorithmic

consequences of that inferred portraying of me. I've glanced, manually, through datasets 'comprising' me from Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. I know my personal relationships with those platforms but have yet to fully discover and uncover their potential power over me - described by Kitchin & Lauriault (2014) as "Data Assemblages" - a combined effort of, among others, Michel Foucault's power/knowledge relation and Ian Hacking's term of "the looping effect" (Kitchin & Lauriault, 2014, pp. 7–8). To that end my chosen research question for further inquiry would be "What power does Facebook have over me?", with a subsequent deep-dive into the 'Foucaultian' universe of (bio)power-relations and discourses (Hunger, 2019) within society at large, perhaps focusing on whether databases can be considered super-panopticons (Poster, 1996, p. 85).

## Bibliography

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