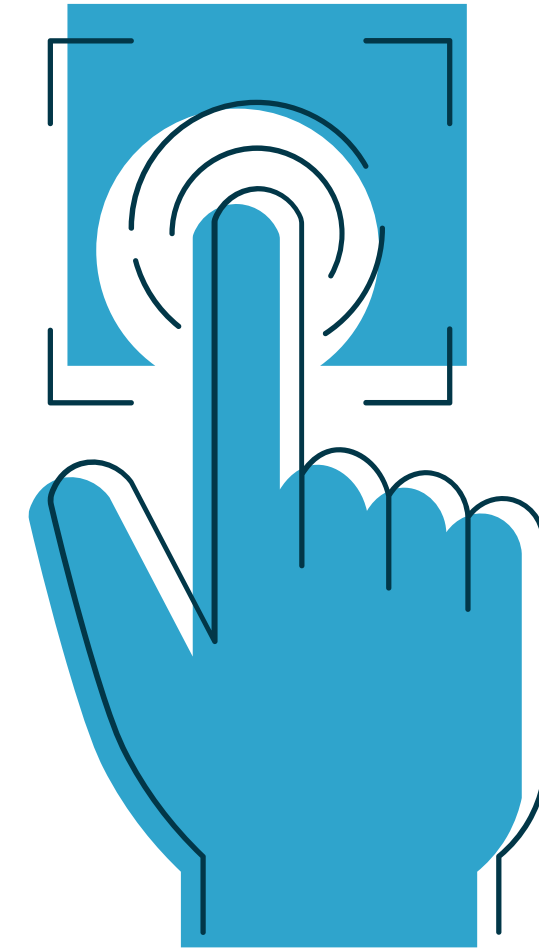


Mass Personalization, Microtargeting, and the News



A presentation by the Mucktracker Team

Objective



Analyze how microtargeting practices influence news media production & consumption

Connect

Read the following scenario and answer the questions that follow.

Miles wants to learn more about the United States Congress so he starts to look for information on the internet. The next few times he goes online, he discovers that he's seeing more information about politics and government than he had previously. The more he clicks on content about politics, the more he begins to receive political ads and ads for sites that specialize in political news content.

Have you ever experienced a situation similar to Miles? What are the pros and cons of getting information this way?



Media Platforms: Mass Personalization



Chances are that you get information directed at you based on your interest. In fact, you probably aren't getting quite the same content as those around you.

This is because publishers and advertisers discovered they can adapt their content personally for each audience member and—in the process—keep audiences on their site.

This personalization is one of the big changes to the media in recent decades, and it largely has to do with how computers work.

How do personalization algorithms work?

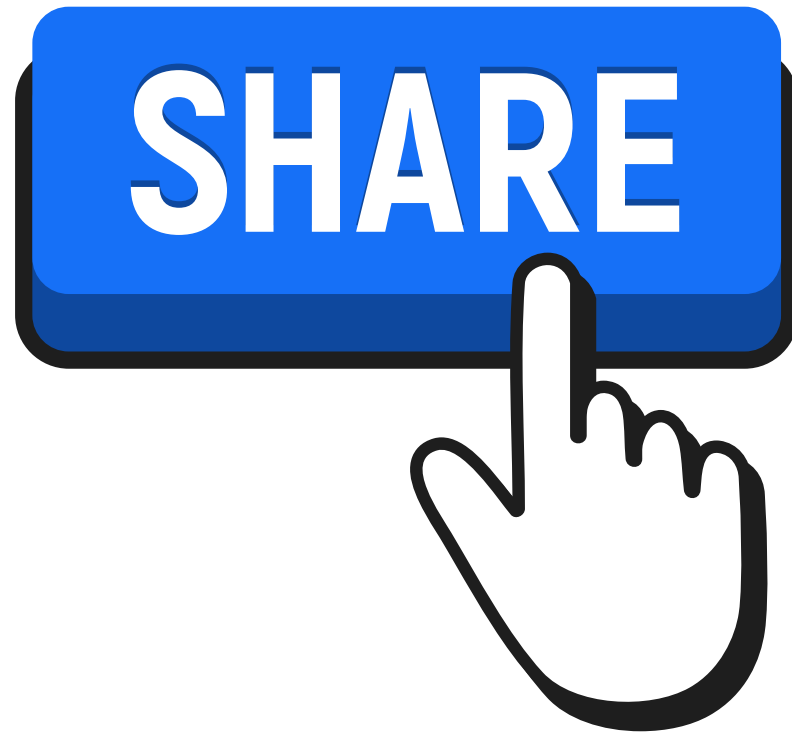


Because computers can easily access and display large amounts of information very quickly, they have to determine which information to show to users.

Complex algorithms are often used to determine what kinds of information to display to each user who accesses a site.

- Personalization Algorithms are computer programs that engineers have developed to help people find the information they're looking for, often based on their online habits.

Your Data and Algorithms



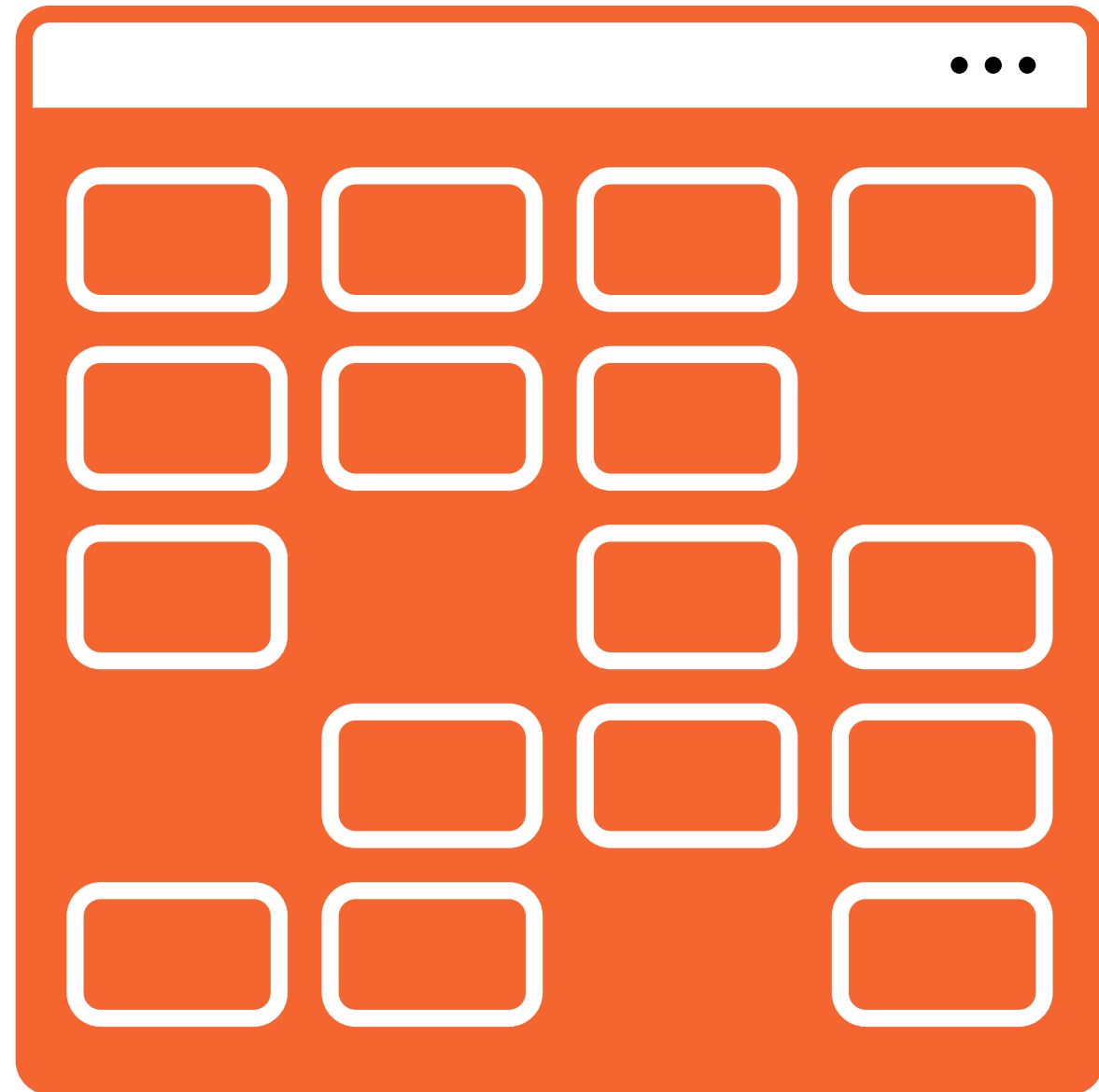
- To track user activity, commercial websites use cookies, or small text files stored in web browsers.
- This tracking of user activity across the Internet helps newspapers, advertisers, and content providers understand and predict consumer behavior.
- The user data allows platforms and publishers to serve up information that's customized to each user's interests and behaviors.
 - In the case of news, this often means readers will receive differing coverage of events, or coverage of entirely different events.

Microtargeting



Because the user information gathered by websites is so detailed, it creates a detailed picture of consumers and their behavior, which is useful for a range of marketers, advertisers, and political campaigns.

Businesses and other special interest groups use patterns in user data to discover ever-more niche audience segments to target with specific information campaigns. This strategy is called *microtargeting*.



Now, let's see if we can show the differences in stories different users might see based on their differing online footprints.

Imagine two different consumers of online news, and write a short profile of their internet personas. Then, [launch Mucktracker](#), select Explore, and use the two-column Canvas organizer to curate two lists of stories that personalization algorithms would likely highlight for them.

What stories are missing from these lists? What significance do you think these gaps might have on your users' sense of what's going on in the news?

Wrap-Up



Mass personalization describes the impact of computer-mediated customization and personalization on the mass media, such as the news media.

Microtargeting describes the way that marketers and advertisers can locate specific audiences on platforms that serve large numbers of users.

Browser cookies are an example of the way user behavior can be tracked on the Internet.

Now that you know a little bit more about why Miles found himself in the situation described at the beginning of the lesson, what do you think can be done to balance the benefits of personalization with the gaps in exposure you witnessed in the Mucktracker exercise?