



DEMOCRACY AS ACTION
IN THE ERA OF POLITICAL BEHAVIOURAL TARGETING

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John Dewey (1939): we must not believe that

**Democracy as a
set of habits
and inclinations**

that democratic conditions automatically maintain themselves, or that they can be identified with fulfillment of prescriptions laid down in a constitution. Beliefs of this sort merely divert attention from what is going on, just as the patter of the prestidigitator enables him to do things that are not noticed by those whom he is engaged in fooling. For what is actually going on may be the formation of conditions that are hostile to any kind of democratic liberties.



The new PRESTIDIGITATORS?

Political micro targeting as MAGIC:

- Digitalization & computation to fool advertisers & consumers
- It doesn't work as professed, but
- It works where decisions are based on it *by those who believe

Transparency, participation, contestation

Hildebrandt (2019):

“agonistic machine learning refers to the design stage of machine learning, requiring that we build adversariality and democratic participation into the makings of our new world.”

Why apply ML?

**Agonistic
Machine learning**

Data Protection law

Competition law

What's Next?

1. Democratic theory
2. Political micro targeting
3. Re-enacting democracy & the role of law

What's Next?

- 1. Democratic theory**
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Democratic theory

Hannah Arendt on:

- 1. Labour:** life-sustaining, circular, repetitive
- 2. Work:** artefacts, things, institutions, society
- 3. Action:** speech, natality, public sphere, plurality

Democratic theory

Hannah Arendt on behaviourism:

**“The trouble with modern theories of behaviourism
is not that they are wrong
but that they could become true.”**

Democratic theory

The assumption of behavioural micro targeting:

**Human behaviour can be described and predicted
by way of a mathematical target function**

Democratic theory

1. Representation

- **One person One vote**
 - Aggregation of given political preferences (behaviour)
 - Equal respect and concern (action)

Democratic theory

2. Deliberation

■ Public space

- Private (newspapers, magazines, television, search engines, social media)
- Public (parliament)

■ Public reason, public interest

Democratic theory

3. Participation

- If government fails, **publics** will form around matters of concern
 - Dewey: mutual constitution of publics and issues
- **Democracy as action** rather than delegation or public reason
 - Mouffe: agonistic debate (those who will suffer the consequences)
 - Rip: agonism in constructive technology assessment
 - Arendt: public space enables plurality

Democratic theory

Governments owe their constituents equal concern and respect

- **Democracy:** one person one vote
- **Rule of Law:** protecting individual person against majority

'Majority rules'

- taking into account that **minorities must be able to become majorities**

Democratic theory

- **Democracy requires hard work:**
 - Institutions, habits and inclinations
- **To enable action:**
 - Plurality, agonism, natality

**How to reinvent and sustain a public sphere
in the era of behavioural micro targeting?**

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Online Political Microtargeting: Promises and Threats for Democracy

Frederik J. Zuiderveen Borgesius, Judith Möller, Sanne Kruikemeier, Ronan Ó Fathaigh, Kristina Irion, Tom Dobber, Balazs Bodo, Claes de Vreese*

Table 1 Promises and threats of microtargeting for citizens, parties and public opinion

	Promises	Threats
Citizens	More relevant political advertising Reaching social groups that are difficult to contact	Invading privacy Manipulating voters Excluding voter groups
Political parties	Cheap (some types of microtargeting) Efficient Effective	Expensive (some types of microtargeting) More power for commercial intermediaries
Public opinion	Campaign diversification More knowledge among voters about individually relevant issues	Lack of transparency regarding politicians' priorities Fragmentation of the market place of ideas

POLITICAL MICRO TARGETING



Guillaume Chaslot @gchaslot Following

The YouTube algorithm I worked on heavily promoted Brexit, because divisiveness is efficient for watch time, and watch time leads to ads.

Brits deserve to know what **@YouTube's** AI promoted by the millions during the referendum.

Without transparency there is no democracy

Christopher Wylie 🇺🇸 @chrisinsilico
The real "betrayal of democracy" is moving forward with a Brexit that was won by cheating, data crimes, Russian collusion, money laundering and the largest breach of campaign finance laws in British history. [telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/...](https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/...)

8:43 PM - 2 Sep 2018

848 Retweets 1,194 Likes

Profile picture icons of users who interacted with the tweet.

Micro targeting

- **The advertising model of free services: how does it work?**
 - Capturing behavioural data (e.g. RTB)
 - Figuring out 'ground truth' (e.g. AB testing, Ad Rank's CTR)
 - Matching features with consumer preferences
 - Selling targeted ad space in auctions based on inferred relevance

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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<https://www.wsj.com/articles/p-g-cuts-more-than-100-million-in-largely-ineffective-digital-ads-1501191104>

BUSINESS | MEDIA & MARKETING | CMO

P&G Cuts More Than \$100 Million in 'Largely Ineffective' Digital Ads

Consumer product giant steers clear of 'bot' traffic and objectionable content

By Alexandra Bruell and Sharon Terlep

July 27, 2017 5:31 p.m. ET

Procter & Gamble Co. PG 0.71% ▲ said that its move to cut more than \$100 million in digital marketing spend in the June quarter had little impact on its business, proving that those digital ads were largely ineffective.

Micro targeting

■ Incentive:

- maximizing user engagement
- maximizing amount of time spent on platform

■ Result:

- prioritise content (e.g. news) that promotes user engagement
- increasing influence of 'superposters'

■ Indirect effect: selection of addictive content (e.g. news)

- dynamics, turbulence
- extreme, sensational (available from 'superposters')
- fake or not fake is not part of that equation

➤ **need for moderation**

Political micro targeting

- The model of political opinion mining: how does it work?
 - Capturing behavioural data
 - Figuring out 'ground truth'
 - Matching features with political preferences

Political micro targeting

■ **Deliberate** objectives of political micro targeting:

– **Elections:**

- **To obtain votes**, but also
- To inform and/or to disinform
- To persuade or dissuade people from voting
- To persuade or dissuade people from donating

– **Government:**

- **Fraud detection (tax, social security, crime prevention)**, but also
- Inform and/or disinform about eligibility (for education, welfare, housing)
- To persuade or dissuade people from applying for benefits
- To persuade or dissuade people from appealing administrative decisions

Political micro targeting

- Tufekci: 'Paralyze and Polarize'

- Howard, Woolley & Calo:

Not about changing voter opinion, but attacking journalists, discrediting political leaders, amplifying negative messaging

- Bodó, Helberger, & De Vreese:

a change of institutions: online media platforms, data brokers, technology providers, analytics companies

Political micro targeting

Howard, Woolley & Calo:

- “Intelligent agents are specifically designed to *observe and act upon* a given computational environment in order to *achieve certain goals*. These coded agents are able to navigate and influence changing and, thus, unpredictable environments.”
- Use of bots and bot-networks to optimize distraction, confusion, fragmentation and radicalization

Political micro targeting

■ **Deliberate and indirect effects of political micro targeting:**

- More informed publics, less informed publics
 - Redistribution effects
- Erosion of shared public sphere (Sunstein, Pariser, Tufekci etc)
 - Proliferation of extreme content
 - Distracted, confused, fragmented public sphere
 - 'Trump is a liar, but at least he is honest about it'
- Creation of a 'scalable subject' (citizen)
that can be nudged into flourishing behaviours (Stark)
- Governing 'data subjects' instead of actual people

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NOISE TO SIGNAL RobCottingham.com
@robcottingham



➤ **POTs (GUERSES ET AL) :**

PROTECTIVE OPTIMIZATION TECHNIQUES

Mozilla Co-Founder's Brave Files Adtech Complaint Against Google

By Reuters

Sept. 12, 2018



"There is a massive and systematic data breach at the heart of the behavioral advertising industry. Despite the two-year lead-in period before the GDPR, adtech companies have failed to comply," Brave's chief policy officer Johnny Ryan told Reuters.

Ravi Naik, a partner at ITN Solicitors in London who is representing the plaintiffs, said this case addressed a long-standing data-protection concern that "is likely to have far reaching and dramatic consequences, which may change our fundamental relationship with the Internet".

- **Agonistic Machine Learning:**
 1. Involve those affected in the research design
 2. Research design choices have trade-offs for reliability, fairness and risk distribution
- **Question the need for and wisdom of behavioural micro targeting:**
 1. What problem is solved (which are the alternatives)?
 2. What problem is not solved (how about the alternatives)?
 3. Which problems are created (and which in case of the alternatives)?
- **Enforce the primitives of legal protection re personal data:**
 1. Purpose limitation & data minimization
 2. Meaningful consent & other grounds
 3. Automated decisions: explanation & justification
- **Rethink competition law:**
 1. Low consumer price is not holy grail, paying with data is excessive pricing
 2. Think monopsonies as well as monopolies
 3. There is no such thing as a free lunch



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www.cohubicol.com

**For the curious
I have added some slides with references**

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