

Data and Algorithmic Bias in the Web

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All Data has Bias

- Gender
- Racial
- Sexual
- Religious
- Social
- Linguistic
- Geographic
- Political
- Educational
- Economic
- Technological
- from Noise or Spam
- Validity (e.g. temporal)
- Completeness
- Gathering process
-

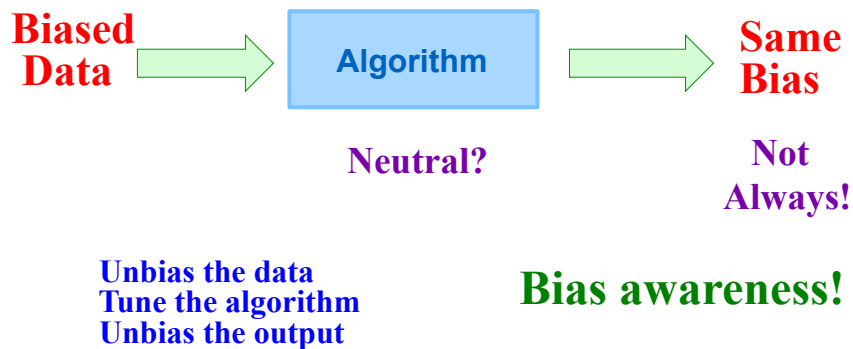
However many people extrapolate results to the whole population (e.g., social media analysis)

In addition there is bias when measuring bias as well as bias towards measuring it!

Yes, We Live in a (Very) Biased World!

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying a Spiegel Online article. The URL is www.spiegel.de/netzwelt/netzpolitik/facebook-kann-eine-wahl-drehen-sagt-internet-forscherin-a-1092348.htm. The article title is "Internetkonzerne im Wahlkampf: 'Es gibt riesige ethische Fragen'" and it is an interview by Fabian Reinbold. The main image shows a woman, Kate Crawford, speaking at a podium with a screen behind her that says "WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?". The article text discusses the power of Facebook and search engines in elections and user manipulation. The page includes a sidebar with social media links, a navigation menu, and an advertisement for ImmoWelt.de.

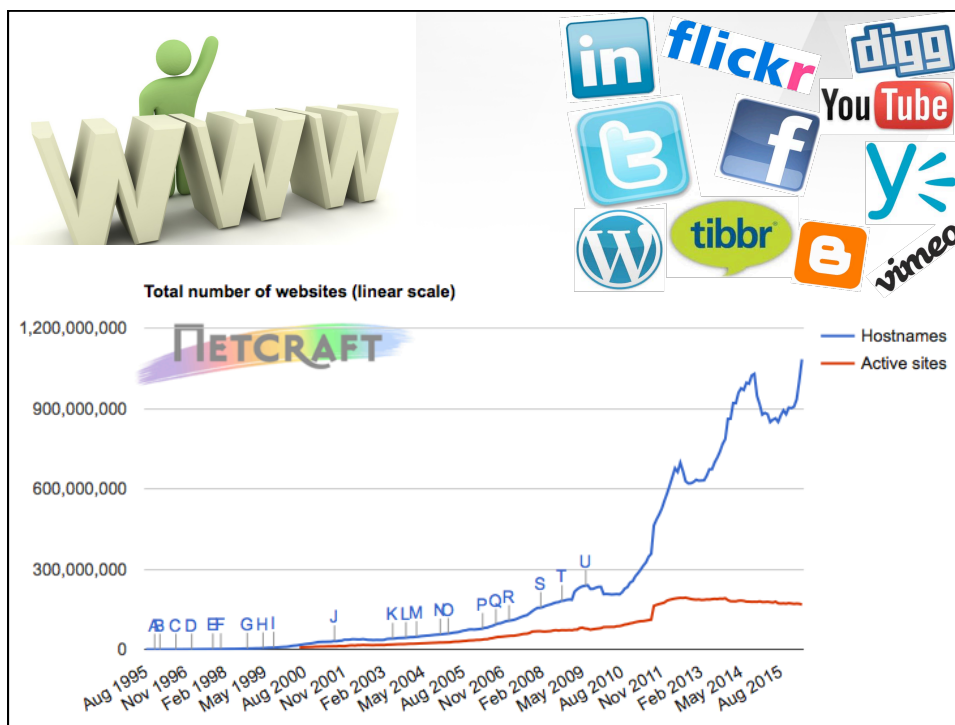
A Non-Technical Question

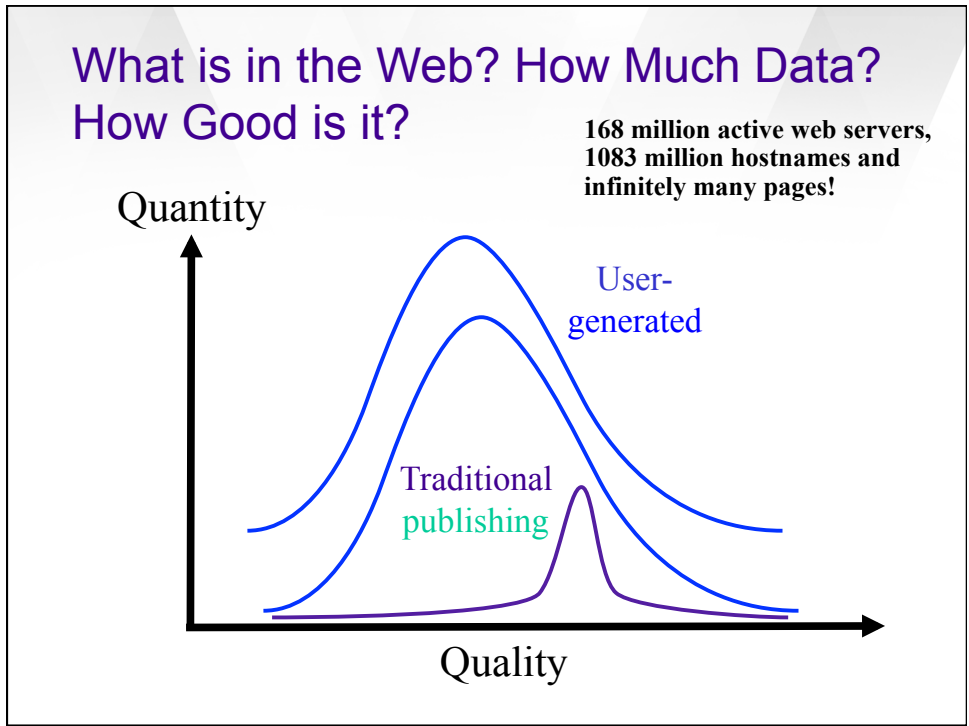
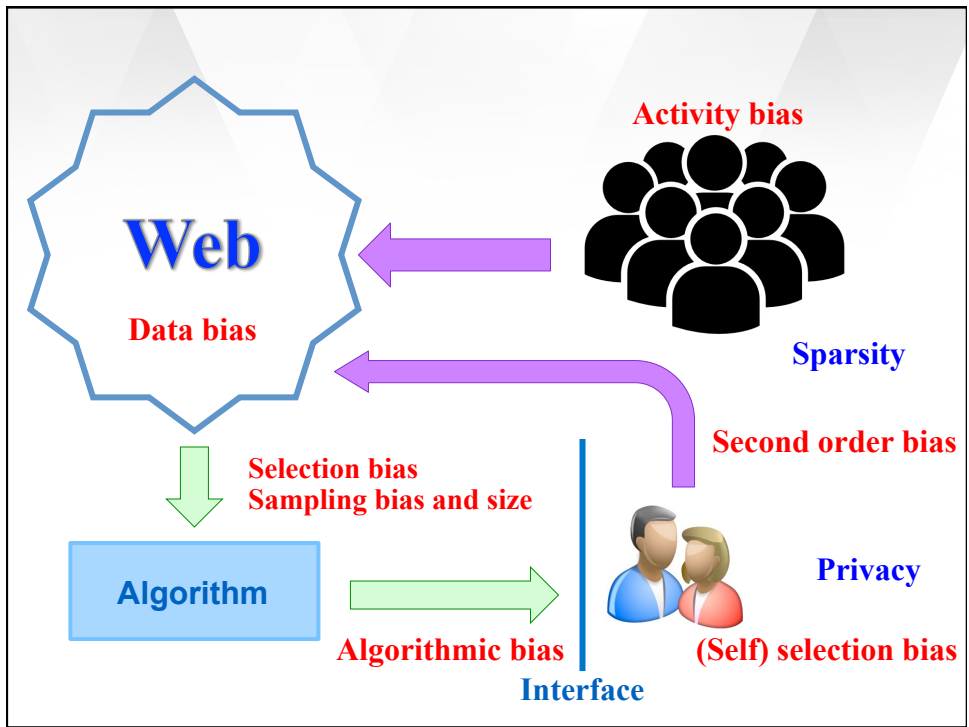


Big Data and Bias

- The quality of any algorithm is bounded by the quality of the data that uses
- Data bias awareness
- Algorithmic fairness
- Key issues for machine learning
 - Uniformity of data properties
 - In the Web, distributions resemble a power law
 - Uniformity of error
 - Data sample methodology
 - E.g., sample size to see infrequent events or sampling bias issues

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Web Spam

- Deceiving text, links, clicks...
due to an economic incentive
- Depending on the goal and the data,
spam is easier to generate
- Depending on the type & target data,
spam is easier to fight
- Disincentives for spammers?
 - Social
 - Economic

Web Spam is NOT Mail Spam

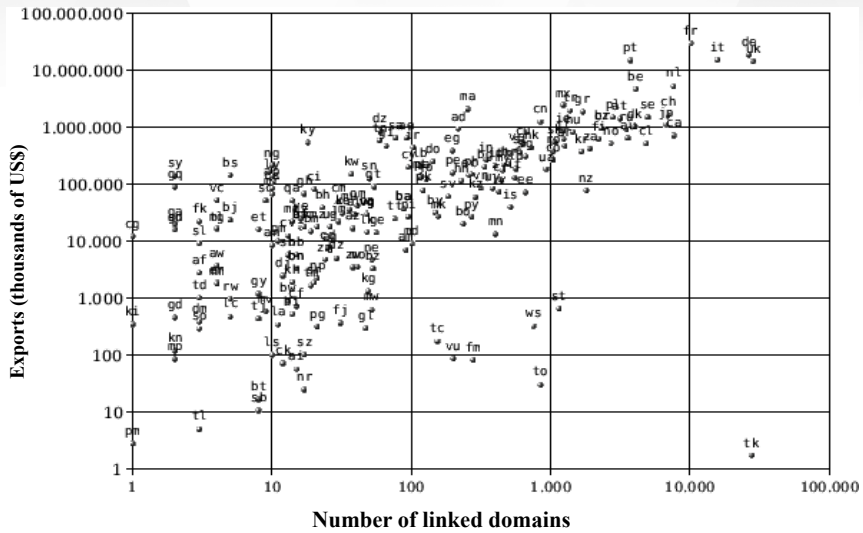
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Data Bias and Redundancy

- There is any dependency in the data?
- There is any duplication?
 - Lexical duplication in the Web is around 25%
 - Semantic duplication is larger (more later)
- Any other biases? Many!
 - Web structure (economic, cultural)
 - Web content (linguistic, geography, gender)

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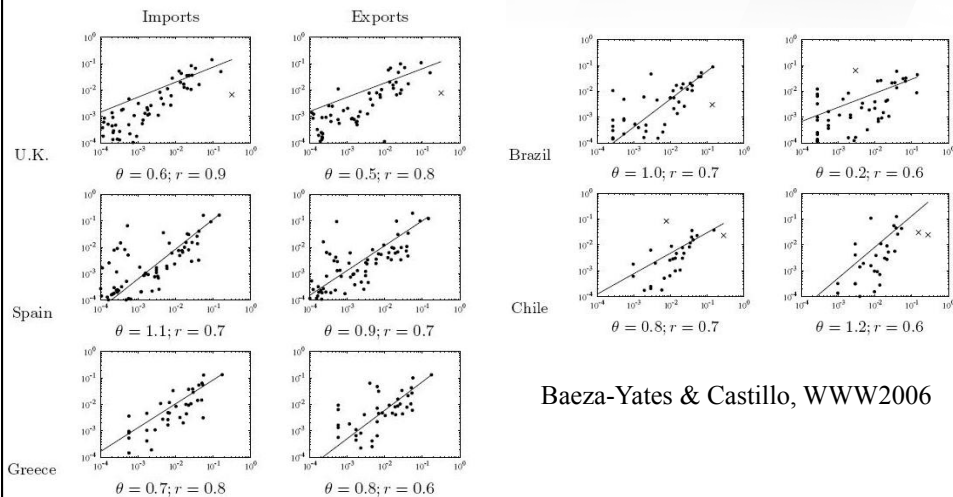
Economic Bias in Links



[Baeza-Yates, Castillo & López. Characteristics of the Web of Spain. The Information Professional (Spanish), 2006, vol. 15, n. 1, pp. 6-17]

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Exports/Imports vs. Domain Links



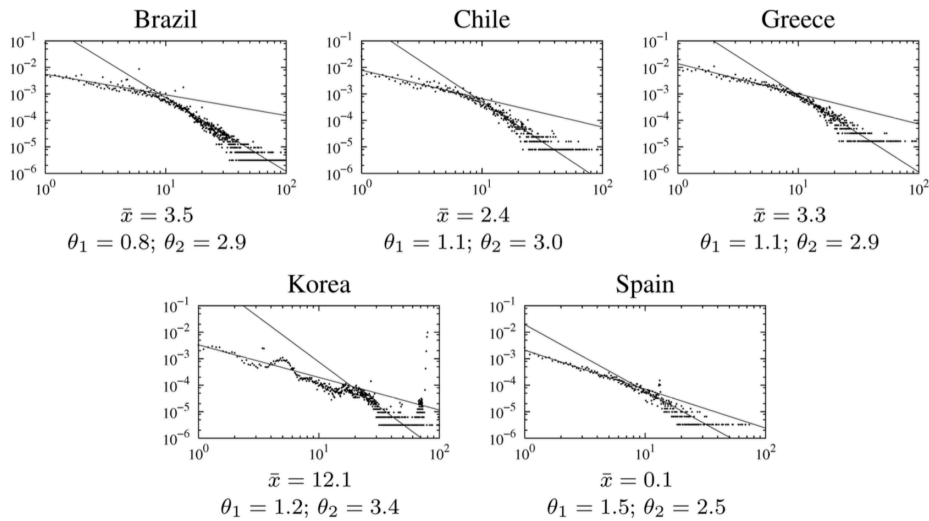
Baeza-Yates & Castillo, WWW2006

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Website Structure

Shame

Minimal effort



[Baeza-Yates, Castillo, Efthimiadis, TOIT 2007]

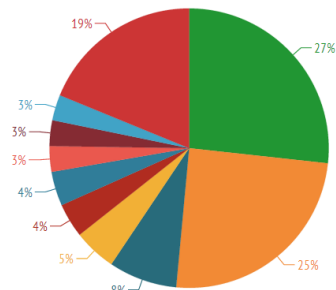
Linguistic Bias

Top 25 World Languages

- Chinese, Mandarin
- Spanish
- English
- Hindi

Top Ten Languages in the Internet
in millions of users - November 2015

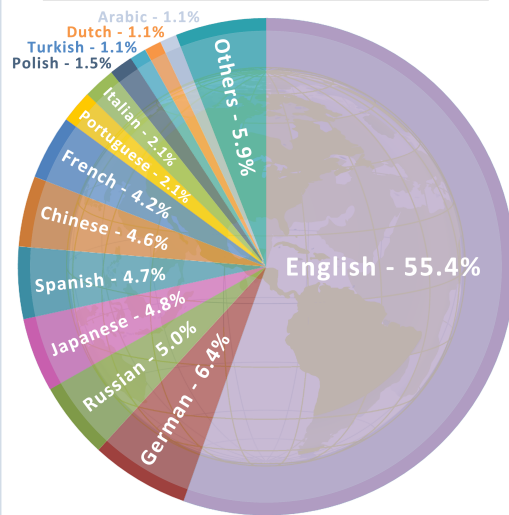
Languages on the Web



- English
- Chinese, Mandarin
- Spanish
- Japanese
- Portuguese
- German
- Arabic
- French
- Russian
- Other

The Languages of Web Content

The percentage of the top 1 million websites available in various languages

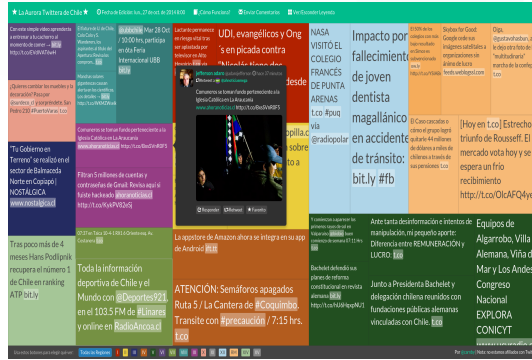
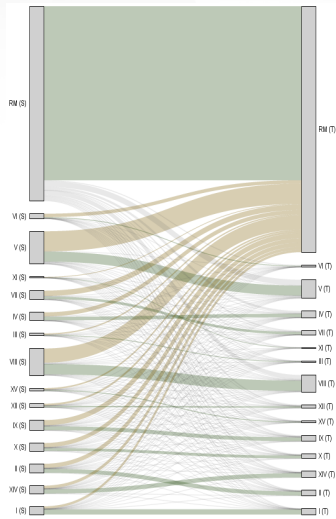


Source: Web Technology Surveys



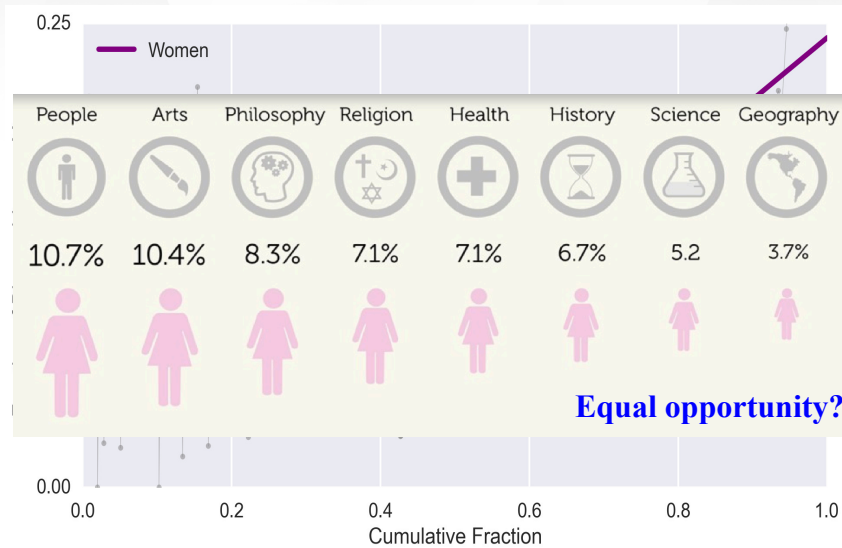
Insight Digital Audio Branding Text
Web: languageconnect.net / E-mail: info@languageconnect.net / Follow us: @lconnect

Geographical Bias



[E. Graells-Garrido and M. Lalmas, “Balancing diversity to counter-measure geographical centralization in microblogging platforms”, ACM Hypertext’14]

Gender Bias



[E. Graells-Garrido et al., “First Women, Second Sex: Gender Bias in Wikipedia”, ACM Hypertext’15]

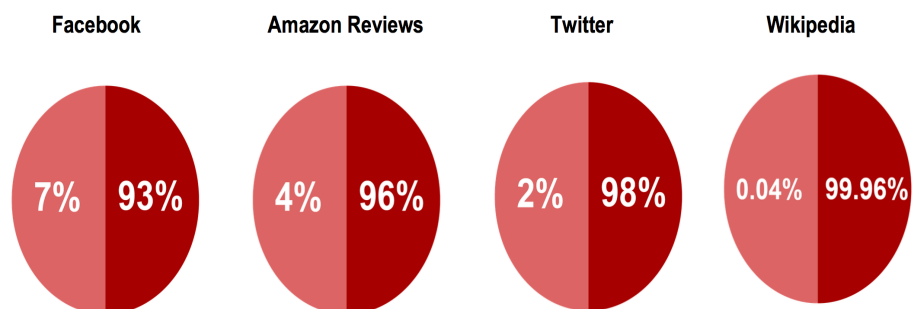
Activity Bias: Wisdom of a Few?

- The Web already is influenced by small groups
 - "0.05% of the user population, attract almost 50% of all attention within Twitter" (50K users)
[Wu, Hofman, Mason & Watts, WWW 2011]
- We explored this issue further with four different datasets:
 1. a large one from Twitter (2011),
 2. a small one from Facebook (2009),
 3. Amazon reviews (2013), and
 4. Wikipedia editors (2015).
- Digital desert: the content that is never seen

[Baeza-Yates & Saez-Trumper, ACM Hypertext 2015]

Examples

How many users produce most of the content?



[Baeza-Yates & Saez-Trumper, ACM Hypertext 2015]

Amazon sues 1,000 'fake reviewers'

October 2015

Online retailer files lawsuit in US against people whose names it says it does not know, claiming they offer reviews for sale

Amazon Continues Their Crusade Against Fake Reviews

By Tyler Lee on 04/26/2016 05:07 PDT

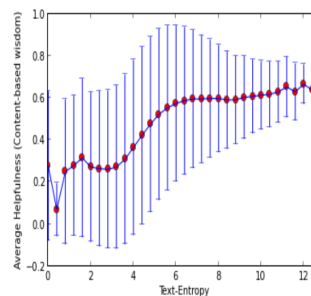
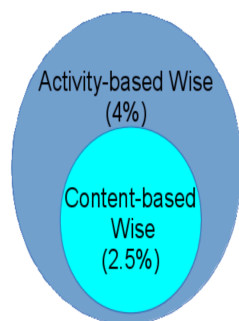


sag

Jetzt Sage 50
kostenloses D
Fan-Paket s

Quality of Content?

- Adding content implies adding wisdom?
- We use Amazon's reviews helpfulness
- We computed the text entropy
- Content-based-wise users
- How many of those users are being paid?



Digital Desert

- 1.1% of the Twitter content is never seen.*
- 31% of articles added/edited in May 2014 in wikipedia, were not visited in June.



Bias in the Interface

Related Searches: tennis racket, tennis shoes.

Shop by Category



Tennis Equipment



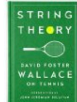
Tennis Games



Kids' Sports



Clothing, Shoes & Jewelry



Tennis - Books

Position bias Ranking bias

Irrelevant alternatives bias



Wilson Sporting Goods Championship Extra Duty Tennis Balls (1-Can)

Jun 14, 2012
by Wilson

\$2.79 ~~\$6.99~~ **Add-on Item**

Add to a qualifying order to get it by **Tomorrow, May 6.**

More Buying Choices
\$0.99 new (16 offers)
\$7.99 used (2 offers)

See newer version

★★★★☆ 186

Sports & Outdoors: See all 60,449 items

Social bias



Best Seller

Wilson 75 Tennis Ball Pick Up Hopper

by Wilson

\$19.96 **Prime**

Get it by **Tomorrow, May 6**

More Buying Choices
\$18.88 new (11 offers)
\$35.00 used (1 offer)

★★★★☆ 319

Product Features
Holds 75 tennis balls with a special no spill lid. (Tennis Balls NOT included)

Sports & Outdoors: See all 60,449 items

Presentation bias

Sponsored



Tennis Elbow Brace with Gel Comp...

\$24.50 **Prime**

★★★★☆ 7



DIMANKA Professional Table Tenn...

\$34.99

★★★★☆ 9



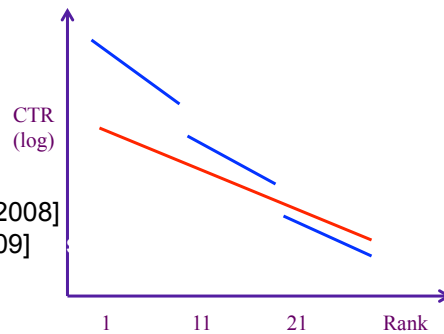
Gamma Quick Kids 78 Ball (12 Pac...

\$19.99 **Prime**

★★★★☆ 44

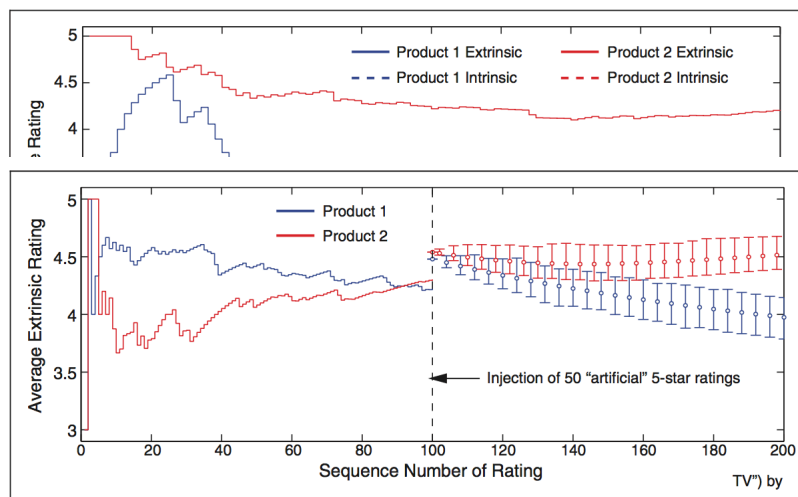
Presentation Bias

- Interaction data will be biased to what is shown
- In recommender systems, items recommended will get more clicks than items not recommended
- In search systems top ranked results will get more clicks than other results
 - › Ranking bias
 - › Interaction bias



[Dupret & Piwowarski, SIGIR 2008]
[Chapelle & Zhang, WWW 2009]

Social Bias



[WHY AMAZON'S RATINGS MIGHT MISLEAD YOU; The Story of Herding Effects
Ting Wang and Dashun Wang, Big Data, 2014]

Independence of Irrelevant Alternatives



Irrelevant Alternatives (IIA)

- IIA does not always hold
- If that is the case, nested logit should be used instead of multinomial logit
- Optimal quadratic algorithm to recover trees for a nested decision process [Benson et al, WWW 2016]
- Statistical tests to check if a nested model works (95%)

| Dataset | Test | | | |
|-----------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | SB | MSB | AMSB | CSB |
| RESTAURANTS | 0.087 | 0.066 | 0.076 | 0.041 |
| JAPANESECUISINE | 0.325 | 0.238 | 0.316 | 0.093 |
| LASTFMARTISTS | 0.106 | 0.102 | 0.129 | 0.049 |
| LASTFMGENRE | 0.300 | 0.143 | 0.284 | 0.094 |

- How much can be explained by bias?

Extreme Algorithmic Bias

London Eye



London Eye and Golden Jubilee Bridge seen from Westminster Bridge.

Tag list

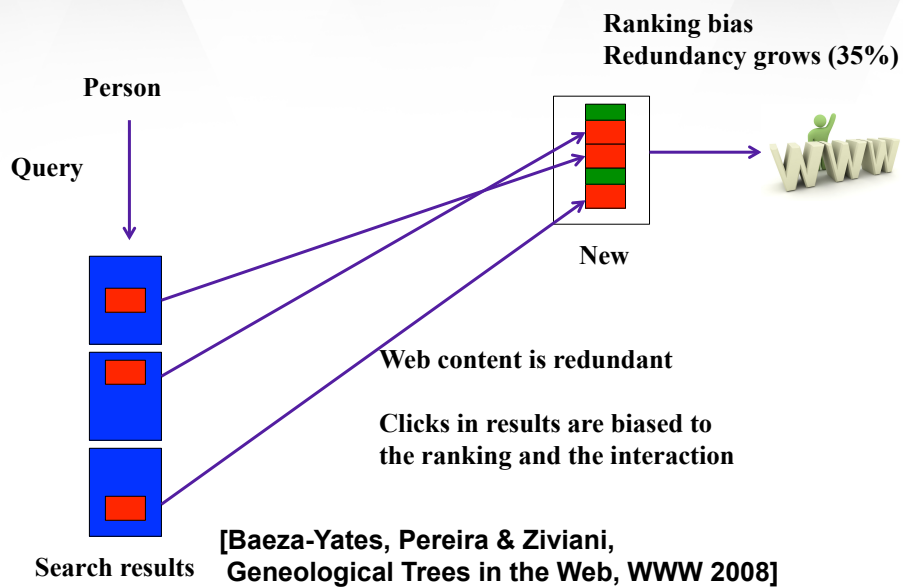
london eye, thames,

Suggested tags

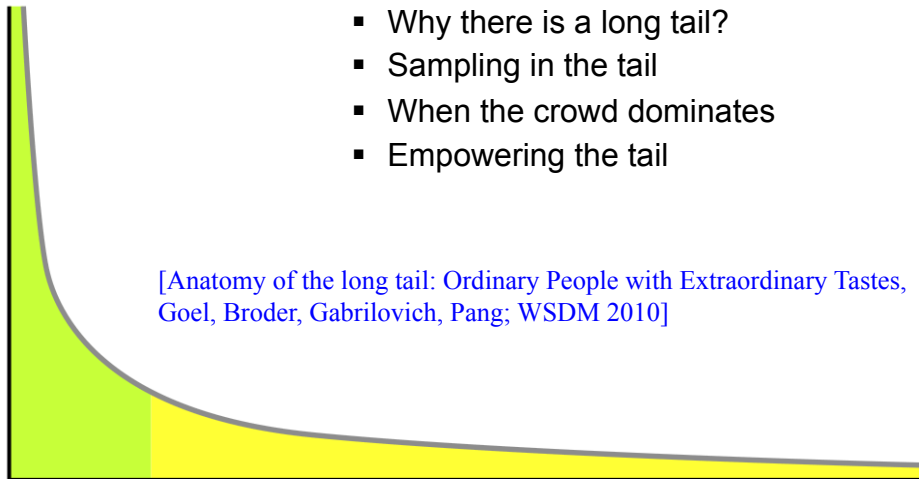
- london
- england
- uk
- river
- eye
- south bank
- big ben
- night
- bridge
- 2006

Update annotation

Second Order Bias in Web Content



The Long Tail: Sparsity



Most measures in the Web follow a power law

Sample Size?

- If we want to estimate the frequency of queries that appear with probability at least p with a certain relative error ϵ we can use the standard binomial error formula $\sqrt{(1-p)/np}$ which works well for p near $\frac{1}{2}$
- Better is the Agresti-Coull technique (also called *take 2*) which gives:

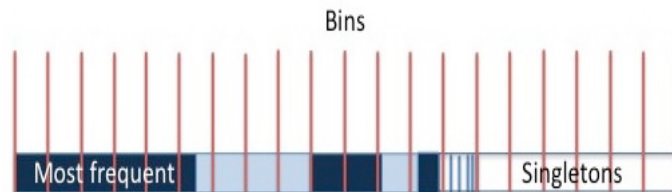
$$n \geq Z_{1-\alpha/2}^2 \left(\frac{p'(1-p')}{\epsilon^2} - 1 \right)$$

- where Z is the inverse of the standard normal distribution, $1 - \alpha$ is the confidence interval and $p' = p + Z^2/2$
- If $p = 0.1$, $1 - \alpha$ is 90% and ϵ is 10%, we get $n = 2342$. The standard formula gives $n = 900$.

[Baeza-Yates, SIGIR 2015, Industry track]

Incremental Sampling

- Main goal: make good samples consistent across time
- Simple idea based in stratified sampling: bins + random start point



- Bin size can be found by binary search starting with a good approximation if a query frequency model is used ($b < V/n$)
- This perfectly mimics the head of the distribution, but not the tail
- Change the bins in the tail to get the right distribution

[Baeza-Yates, SIGIR 2015, Industry track] 70

Fixing the Tail

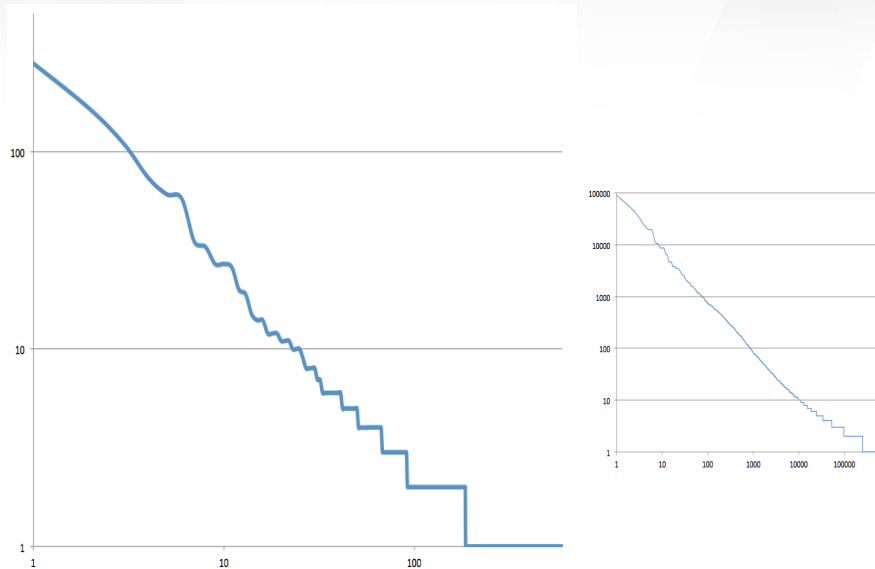
- To mimic the tail we change the binning size when we reach a query frequency of $b/2$
- If we want a singleton ratio of $\beta = S/V$ we recalculate the binning size as

$$b' = (1 - \beta)(Q - Q')/(\beta V')$$

- where Q' and V' are the partial vocabulary size and volume before changing the bin size.

[Baeza-Yates, SIGIR 2015, Industry track]

Stratified Sampling Example



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When the Crowd Dominates

Kills the long tail

Personalization “facets”:

- Language (not always)
- Location
- Semantic facets per user
 - Query intent prediction in search

shwarzneger

Web Maps Images Shopping News More ▾ Sea

About 799 results (0.18 seconds)

Did you mean: **schwarzenegger**

afia schwarzneger | Facebook
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/afia-schwarzneger/127004037372428>
afia schwarzneger. Privacy · Terms. About. afia schwarzneger. TV. 17 people topic. Want to like this Page? Sign up for Facebook to get started. Sign Up.

Лютый Азарт (@shwarzneger) • Instagram photos and
<https://instagram.com/shwarzneger>
122 posts; 73 followers; 118 following. Follow. Лютый Азарт Piu grande del n user is private You need to be following schwarzneger to like or comment.

Arnold Shwarzneger | LinkedIn
<https://www.linkedin.com/pub/arnold-schwarzneger/88/918/786>
Belarus --
View Arnold Shwarzneger's professional profile on LinkedIn. LinkedIn is the world's largest business network, helping professionals like Arnold Shwarzneger ...

SALMAN SHWARZNEGER | LinkedIn
<https://www.linkedin.com/pub/salman-schwarzneger/12/b80/82b>
Bahrain - Student at I-H-I-S
View SALMAN SHWARZNEGER's professional profile on LinkedIn. LinkedIn world's largest business network, helping professionals like SALMAN ...

Empowering the Tail

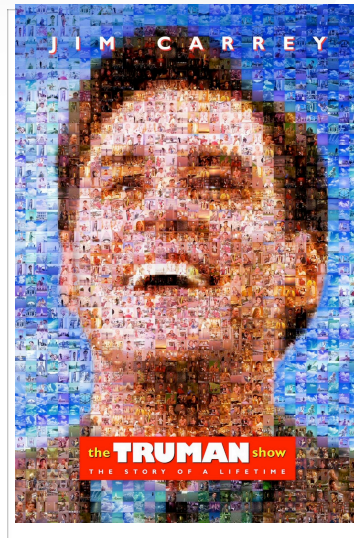
The Filter “Bubble”, Eli Pariser

- Avoid the Poor get Poorer Syndrome
- Avoid the Echo Chamber
- How to expose opposite views?

Solutions:

- Diversity
- Novelty
- Serendipity

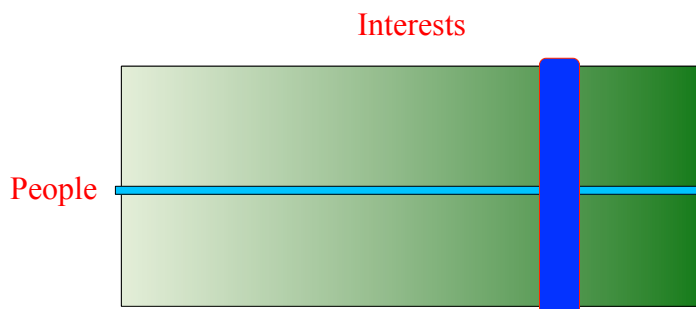
**Cold start problem solution:
Explore & Exploit**



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Aggregating in the Tail

- Exploit the context (and deep learning!)
91% accuracy to predict the next app you will use
[Baeza-Yates et al, WSDM 2015]
- Personalization vs. **Contextualization**
Recall that user interaction is another long tail

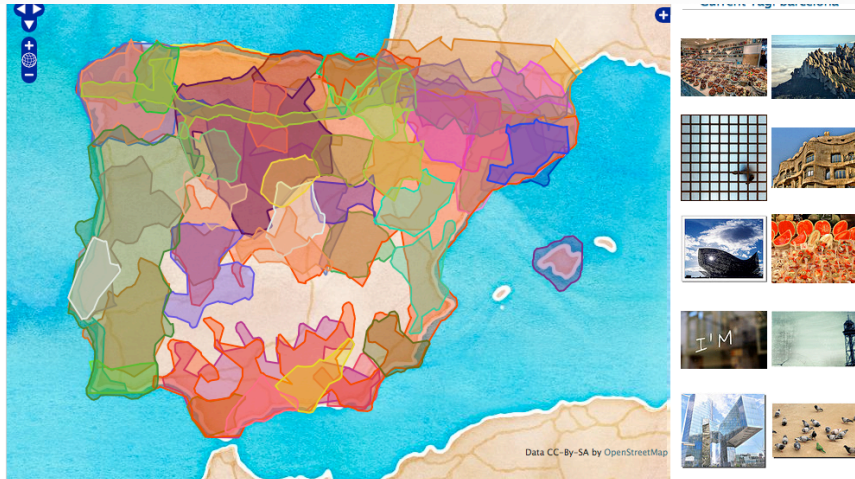




Crowdsourcing Data: Good Paths



Regions from Pictures



[Thomee et al, Demo at CHI 2014]

Privacy 101: AOL Query Logs Release Incident

A Face Is Exposed for AOL Searcher No. 4417749,
By MICHAEL BARBARO and TOM ZELLER Jr,
The New York Times, Aug 9 2006



- No. 4417749 conducted hundreds of searches over a three-month period on topics ranging from “numb fingers” to “60 single men”.
- Other queries: “landscapers in Lilburn, Ga,” several people with the last name Arnold and “homes sold in shadow lake subdivision gwinnett county georgia.”
- Data trail led to Thelma Arnold, a 62-year-old widow who lives in Lilburn, Ga., frequently researches her friends’ medical ailments and loves her three dogs.

Netflix settles privacy lawsuit, ditches \$1 million contest

Netflix's next recommendation engine may not come from its community after all ...

by Jacqui Cheng - Mar 12, 2010 10:04pm CET

Share Tweet 51

Netflix has canceled its \$1 million contest aimed at finding a better recommendation engine in the wake of a privacy lawsuit settlement. The company informed its users today via the [company blog](#), noting that it had "reached an understanding" with the Federal Trade Commission, leading it to ditch the Netflix Prize contest.

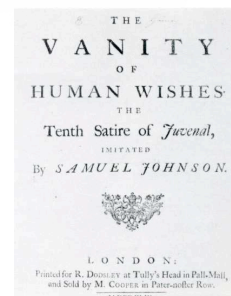
Netflix first announced the contest—actually the sequel to its original contest—in August of 2009. The goal was to crowdsource its active user base to write a more intelligent recommendation engine based on users' past rentals. This is something Netflix already does, of course, but there's always room for improvement; the company wanted to find the Next Big Thing™ by offering \$1 million to the person with the best algorithm.

Part of the contest involved Netflix disclosing what it considered to be anonymized user data to those trying to come up with solutions. This, however, [led to a lawsuit](#) by a closeted lesbian mother who argued that Netflix had not sufficiently anonymized the information and that she (among others) could be easily outed due to her own rental history. Indeed, within weeks of the data being released, researchers had found a way to use an external data source to decode an individual's viewing history with surprising accuracy, but Netflix did not immediately withdraw the contest.

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Risks of Privacy in Query Logs

- Profile [Jones, Kumar, Pang, Tompkins, CIKM 2007]
 - Gender: 84%
 - Age (± 10): 79%
 - Location (ZIP3): 35%
- Vanity Queries [Jones et al, CIKM 2008]
 - Partial name: 8.9%
 - Complete: 1.2%
- More information:
 - A Survey of query log privacy-enhancing techniques from a policy perspective [Cooper, ACM TWEB 2008]
- A good anonymization technique is still an open problem



Privacy Awareness

- How our privacy changes when we change our social network?
- Information gain to predict a private attribute based on public data
- Each user may have a promiscuity score

- Example: new friendship request

Promiscuity(me) > Promiscuity(new) ●

Promiscuity(me) ≥ Promiscuity(new) + max-gain-I-allow ●

Promiscuity(me) < Promiscuity(new) + max-gain-I-allow ●

Related work by [\[Estivill-Castro & Nettleton; Singh, ASONAM 2015\]](#)

Wagner Meira Jr.



Ricardo Baeza-Yates

Wagner's friends of friends

Is this a comment that they should see?

The Web Works Thanks to Bias!

- Web traffic

- › Local caching
- › Proxy/Akamai caching

Activity bias

(Self) selection bias

- Search engines

- › Answer caching
- › Essential web pages
 - 25% queries can be answered with less than 1% of the URLs
[BY,Boldi, Chierichetti, WWW 2015]

- E-Commerce

- › Most revenue comes from few items

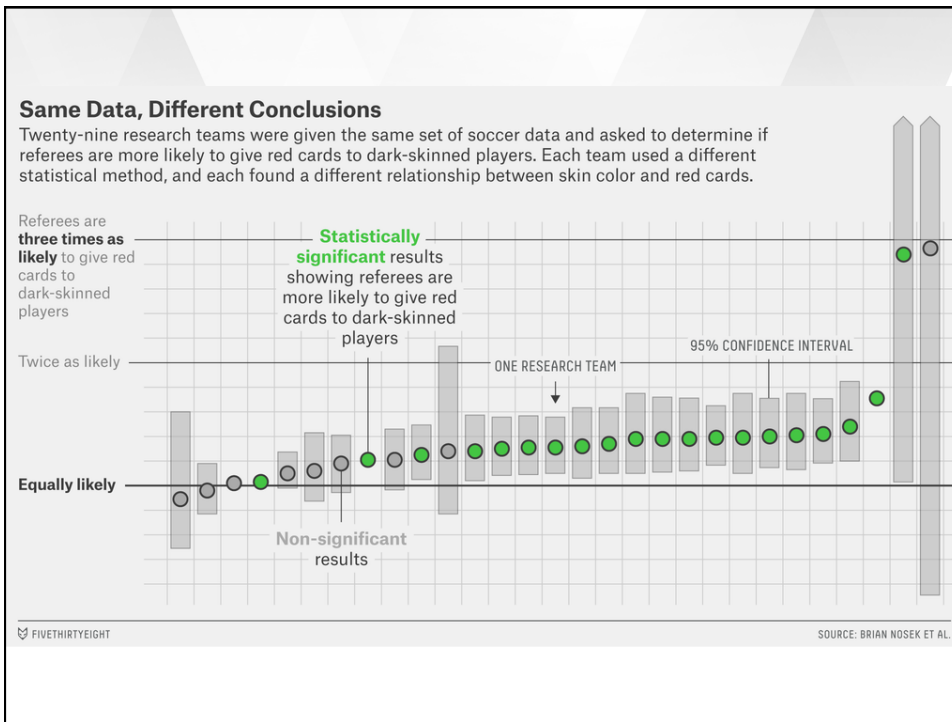
Web Data

- A mirror of ourselves, the good, the bad and the ugly
- The web amplifies everything, good or bad, but always leaves traces
- We have to be aware of the biases and contrarrest them
- We have to be aware of our privacy

Big Data of People is huge.....
..... but is tiny compared to the future
Big Data of the Internet of Things (IoT)

It's Hard to Get Data to Tell the Truth

- The blindness of the averages
 - Look at distributions
- Absolute vs. relative
 - Income per capita vs. Inequality
- Local vs. global optimization
 - Teams competing without knowing, uncorrelated criteria
- You can always see/torture data as you wish
 - › 61 analysts, 29 teams: 20 yes and 9 no (Univ. of Virginia, COS)



ASIST 2012 Book of the Year Award

Questions?

Modern Information Retrieval
the concepts and technology behind search
Second edition
Ricardo Baeza-Yates
Berthier Ribeiro-Neto

Contact: rbaeza@acm.org
www.baeza.cl
[@polarbearby](https://twitter.com/polarbearby)

Biased Questions?