

CAPP Young International Network

Contribution to the 2018 International Conference of CAPP
From 24-26 May 2018 in Rome (Italy)/Vatican City

Background of the Young International Network

In 2018 the board of CAPP established the Young International Network (YIN). It comprises CAPP members up to and including 35 years. The primary aim of YIN is to bring together and grow this group of younger members, to raise interest for and knowledge of the Catholic Social Doctrine and to contribute to the work of CAPP.

On this discussion paper

This is the first discussion paper of YIN and has been prepared for the 2018 International Conference of the Fondazione Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice. It provides thoughts, remarks and suggestions raised in relation to the themes of this year's International Conference. This contribution focuses on biases and free will in a digitized world, one of the predominant topics raised in discussions of YIN.

Detecting today's New Things and socio-economic priorities: on the role of free will in AI enhanced societies

Introduction

The pace and scope of technological developments has opened extensive new opportunities to mankind over the last decades. It enhanced, among many other things, our ability to reach out to others, it increased our connectivity and ability to communicate quicker, more distant and more personalised. In many cases, the enhanced connectivity is mediated by technological equipment or tools, such as computers, mobile phones, navigation systems or online platforms etc. Not only for younger generations, this becomes self-evident and a natural part of life and interaction with others.

Several events in the past few years have raised serious concerns on these modern communication tools and techniques. Large datasets with personal data are prepared and, with analytics, used to improve effectiveness of communication. From some events it seems that, more than before, intentional biases are incorporated in communication to influence our perceptions, opinions and ultimately our decisions. However, all these technological developments are still fast moving and rather novel for mankind. It feels like a logical step to further explore these developments, and establish social, moral and ethical principles to safeguard against unintended consequences, in particular, those that limit our free will.

Technological advances in communications

Our society is increasing its velocity due to new digital developments, such as smart phones, faster internet, supercomputers, and social networks. We are living in the dawn of the digital age, a development that cannot be ignored. As Pope Francis stated in *Laudato Si'*: *'We are the beneficiaries*

of two centuries of enormous waves of change (...). It is right to rejoice in these advances and to be excited by the immense possibilities which they continue to open up before us (...).¹

Many times we do not realize how fast the changes are taking place. We are facing an evolution of human interactions in a new way, this 'unknown' may be uneasy from time to time and bring emotions of uncertainty and fear. However, the main part of social interactions existed already before, social networks empowered us to interact faster and more distant than ever before. There can be instant interaction, regardless of the physical location(s) of the other person(s).

Observing how interactions work in social networks, we can expect that they are still in a relative primitive state of development. There is a considerable number of people who feel lost and confused using Twitter or Facebook in the beginning. The natural skills to find orientation and resources on these platforms, through text, buttons and images, to find friends or people will determine our experience, the so-called 'social network life experience'. It is like when you start practicing a new sport, such as tennis. After some practice, you will probably improve your performance and become better able to coordinate your arm and your hand to use the tennis racket to hit the ball. You don't have opponents in social networks, but if you are well enough it may benefit you in the interaction with other users. For example, to convince them to visit a website, buy your products or to get them to vote for you. Online interactions increasingly resemble the interactions of the offline world. They may even go beyond in their own way if they don't get regulated, but this may change - as it seems - after the recent events regarding Facebook and the infringement of the (data) privacy of its users.

A Rapid Development

In the Apostolic Letter of Pope St. John Paul II on 'the Rapid Development', he discussed the emerging world of media. He emphasized, among other things: *'Man's genius has with God's help produced marvelous technical inventions from creation, especially in our times. The Church, our mother, is particularly interested in those which directly touch man's spirit and which have opened up new avenues of easy communication of all kinds of news, of ideas and orientations.'*² And also: *'(...) I wanted to underline in the Encyclical Redemptoris Missio that the first Areopagus of modern times is the world of communications, which is capable of unifying humanity and transforming it into – as it is commonly referred to – "a global village".'*³ Thanks to social networks this 'global village' will take place also on the internet. However, a lack of regulations and legal differences between countries brings uncertainty and inequality. Where we understand inequality in line with the view of Paul Twomey – as shared during the last meeting of the Dublin process in March 2018 in New York – who stated that *'(...) the poor in the 21st century are the ignorant, the naive and the exploited in a data world as much as the cash poor.'*⁴

Pope St. John Paul II also elaborates on the role of mass media, and stated they must: *'(...) promote justice and solidarity according to an organic and correct vision of human development, by reporting*

¹ Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis on care for our common home, 24 May 2015, at 102.

² Apostolic Letter on the Rapid Development of the Holy Father John Paul II to those responsible for communications, 24 January 2005, at 1.

³ *Idem*, at 3.

⁴ Paul Twomey, 'Ethical challenges for data gathering industries', 2018, p. 2 (available at: http://www.centessimusannus.org/en/conferences/2018-2_trashed/international-consultation-new-yor-cuty-march-15-17-2018/).

events accurately and truthfully, analysing situations and problems completely, and providing a forum for different opinions.⁵ This requires a 'mature exercise of freedom and responsibility'.⁶ These aspects are also true for social media, but are challenging since social media are developing fast.

Pope Francis touched upon the role of media and modern technology in his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. We are at a crossroads with the progress: 'How can we not feel gratitude and appreciation for this progress, especially in the fields of medicine, engineering and communications?'⁷ But also: '(...) when media and the digital world become omnipresent, their influence can stop people from learning how to live wisely, to think deeply and to love generously.'⁸ The Pope calls for efforts to ensure that also the digital world becomes '(...) sources of new cultural progress for humanity and not a threat to our deepest riches.'⁹

With the increasing technological developments, mankind obtains more control and power over what happens in our lives.¹⁰ '(...) [W]e should be concerned that, alongside the exciting possibilities offered by these media, a deep and melancholic dissatisfaction with interpersonal relations, or a harmful sense of isolation, can also arise', as is stated in *Laudato Si'*.¹¹ Moreover, with current developments regarding social media, we should be concerned that these new technologies are able to make individuals the victims of manipulation who, as a consequence, become less free.

The way forward with social media

Concerns on how social media and digital data are used have been expressed in particular following various events in the past years. In 2013 the Associated Press' Twitter account was hacked, on this account it was subsequently announced that two explosions had taken place in the White House in the U.S. It created a shock wave, also on the stock exchanges. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell down 143 points.¹² It reveals how powerful modern communication techniques can be, also in response to untrue news.

Recently, a major data leak was reported where – according to Facebook – a maximum of 87 million profiles of its platform were used. It is presumed that this data is used for political purposes (for instance elections) by data analytics companies. Naturally, it can also be used for other purposes, such as economic reasons and also to keep people active on the platform itself. The data is used not solely to inform people, but also to tailor messages in order to affect perceptions, thoughts, ideas and ultimately their decision. We would like to emphasise that here there are two main issues:

⁵ Idem, at 3.

⁶ Idem, at 3.

⁷ Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis on care for our common home, 24 May 2015, at 102.

⁸ Idem, at 47.

⁹ Idem, at 47.

¹⁰ Idem, at 104 and 105.

¹¹ Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si'* of the Holy Father Francis on care for our common home, 24 May 2015, at 47.

¹² The Guardian, AP Twitter hack causes panic on Wall Street and Dow plunging, 23 April 2013 (available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2013/apr/23/ap-tweet-hack-wall-street-freefall>).

Firstly, regarding the data leak. Issues regarding challenges with data were extensively explained by Mr. Twomey during the last meeting of CAPP's Dublin Process. He describes how this 'data gathering' industry is something pretty unknown for everyone, as well as its associated dangers.¹³

Secondly, there is the use of psychometrics with huge amounts of data. Psychometrics is a field of study concerned with the theory and technique of psychological measurement. This technique has been used for instance in U.S. Presidential Campaigns since 2012 or during the Brexit Campaign. While the public opinion is focused on Facebook and privacy issues, the main problem is being ignored. As Mr. Twomey explained, data-collection is happening all the time, right now many different companies are collecting data from our smartphones.¹⁴ We should be concerned about that. But what really should concern us is what is being done with that data. Research conducted by the Psychometrics Centre of Cambridge University demonstrated that data collected from different sources, can be used to automatically and accurately predict a range of highly sensitive personal attributes including: sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious and political views, personality traits, intelligence, happiness, use of addictive substances, parental separation, age, and gender.¹⁵

The main point is that by using algorithms and Artificial Intelligence ('AI'), soon we will be able to predict human behaviour with an unthinkable accuracy. That will have consequences not just in political campaigns, but also in our day-to-day life.

Is there a role for privacy in all this? In a Dutch referendum earlier this year, it appeared that – maybe surprising – privacy concerns seemed more present with younger than older voters.¹⁶ However, in general, our behaviour intends many times to neglect the relevance of our privacy when we enter into activities where privacy is not the highest priority, for instance when registering for social media or by posting a message.

Algorithms of websites, in particular at social media, decide what information we see, in what sequence and how often. With AI these suggestions are not only based on our location or previous search strings, they are – and will become more – personalised per individual. The greatest danger of this, as St. John Paul II stated in *Centesimus Annus*, is that *'Man is thus reduced to a series of social relationships, and the concept of the person as the autonomous subject of moral decision disappears, the very subject whose decisions build the social order. (...) A person who is deprived of something he can call "his own", and of the possibility of earning a living through his own initiative, comes to depend on the social machine and on those who control it.'*¹⁷ Pope St. John Paul II was talking about socialism and not the digital revolution. However, with all these digital developments, we could be faced with the question whether a dawn of a digital socialism will arise when algorithms instead of people will start to control the lives of individuals.

¹³ Paul Twomey, 'Ethical challenges for data gathering industries', 2018 (available at: http://www.centessimusannus.org/en/conferences/2018-2_trashed/international-consultation-new-yor-cuty-march-15-17-2018/).

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ Michal Kosinski, David Stillwell, and Thore Graepel, 'Private traits and attributes are predictable from digital records of human behaviour', 2013 *PNAS* 110(15) (available at: <http://www.pnas.org/content/110/15/5802>).

¹⁶ The Referendum regarded a data-mining law which extends the power of the intelligence agencies to collect, store and analyze large amounts of internet traffic. Research of Ipsos indicated, among other things, how different age groups voted.

¹⁷ Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* of the Holy Father John Paul II, 1 May 1991, at 13.