Who is doctoring my diary?

To what extent does the recommended system influence our decision.

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Introduction

'Guess you may like is certain about what I like.' My friend Liu shared his feeling on a social media. Guess you may like is a function that Taobao, the biggest e-commerce platform in China, provided to users. By using this function, users can get access to the goods they want more easily. However, the feeling of being peeped is not that good for all of the users and some of them are worried about their privacy safety. According to the result of our online questionnaire, 67.65% of 68 participants contain negative attitude towards recommended system. In their points of view, this system is sometimes useless, and they also feel uncomfortable about the feeling of being monitored.
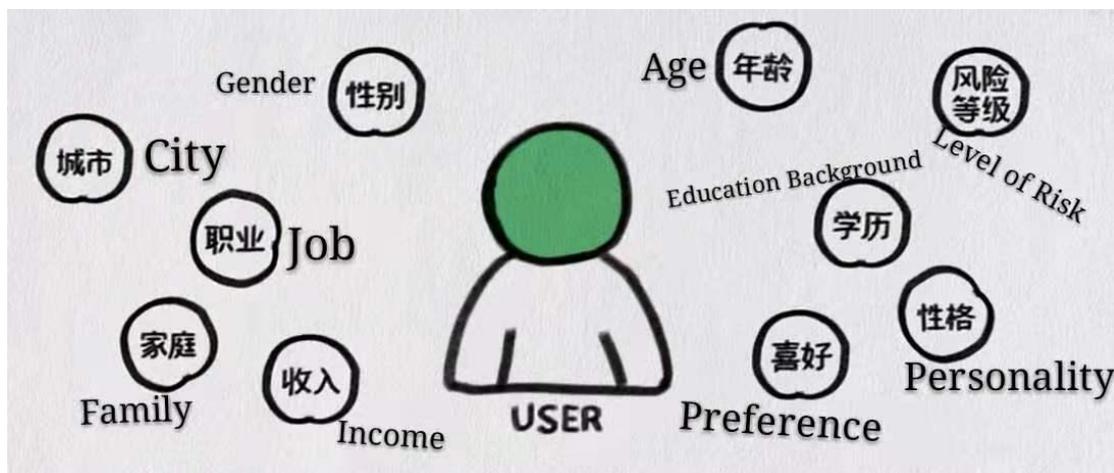
(From SENSORS Data official introduction video.)

When my diary is opened...

When we released a questionnaire on the recommendation system, the most frequently asked question from the participants was: what is the recommended system? For many users, this is the legendary big data.

Recommended system is a function act as salesmen to help users to buy their wanted

goods. This function use the information and advice of goods provided by e-commerce websites to help consumers to decide what to buy. This definition is recognized by most of software developers, since it sounds so beneficial to the users.

What users don't know is that their interests and purchasing behavior will be traced, not only from the corresponding app, but also form multiple apps in their cellphones. These information will be analysed to find out what kind of money does this user is most likely to spend. What's more, the company will unify every user's purchasing behavior on different electronic devices in order to gain a more complete picture of the user. If you still don't understand, to be simple, you can regard these 'salesmen' know themselves and know yourself (their consumers), and then they will win every war as long as you use any app.

But wait, how does this possible? Yet the fact is so surprising.The 'additional function' I mention above is exactly what SENSORS Data，a data company, provided to their clients. This company received a third round of financing of 44million dollars in April last year, and it reached the top 100 list of Chinese science and technology enterprises in 2019 by Chinese Entrepreneurs.

(List of well-know customers of SENSORS Data--From SENSORS Data official introduction video)

Now, people mostly will choose to be silent when there is no economic loss for them. This is because the right to privacy in China is not perfect in law, and most people also have a weak sense of privacy rights. The result is many websites and apps have the chance to get access to users privacy. Every time then users log on to the website or use software, they need to sign a privacy policy. In the policy, website or software will express the requests that:

1. In order to provide you with the basic function of our products and/ or services, you must authorize us to collect and use the necessary information. If you refuse to provide the appropriate information, you will not be able to use our product and/or services properly.

'Necessary information' mentioned here is classified by the company:

refers to all kinds of information recorded electronically or otherwise that can identify a particular natural person alone or in combination with other information or reflect the activities of a particular natural person.

For examples, including ID card information, facial features, transaction and consumption records, coupons and other virtual property information, website browsing records, software usage records, click records, SIM card IMSIMI information, precise positioning information.

Form this policy we can know that, users purchasing behavior or even more information can be used by the apps and websites company. These company will collect and analyse these information in order to provide more services that attract us. Most of these apps are free, but in fact, we are paying by our privacy...

The diary is induced to be doctored...

During the investigation, I pretended as an owner of an online female cloths shop to have an online consultation with a company. This company's business is to help shop owners promote their stores in Taobao. The company can make sure the shops can be sent to Taobao users in the *Guess You May Like* mechanism. The owners of shops are able to choose their consumer by the service from this company as well. In other words, an online shop owner can choose to only sell his products to some consumers that have very high 'Taoqizhi', a kind of symbol to show purchasing power, so the price of their products may suit to users' taste very much. What's more, the shop owners can adjust the prices of their products base on users' Taoqizhi to be more attractive.

How much is this service? If you have one online shop, you only need to charge 3000 yuan for this service for one year. Is this a huge expense for owners? Obviously not. Normally, an online shop can get net profit of 10,000 yuan per month. Which is also worth mentioning that, after bargaining, I got a discount that the company could provide the service for free for an extra half of a year.

From a psychological point of view, several factors will influence our decisions. Firstly, one will instinctively choose the option that meet the most pressing needs of him, and this is also the reason why recommended system occurred. When users see products that they are seeking for appear automatically, they do have the urge to buy. Secondly, one is more likely to choose the option that can match his experiences, and this is also the reason why software collect users purchasing behavior. They can analysis where did the users spend money and then to predict where users may spend money in the future. The last but not the least, one will be influenced by his values

when he is making a decision. This is usually used by some web sites and software for reading and news recommendations. These apps profit by advertisement views, so they need to find users interests in order to improve click rate.

In 2016, Baidu Company suffered heavy damage from 'Wei Zexi incident', and government started to control so-called 'Bidding Auction Ranking' system. However, there was BAR system in the past, and we get recommended system now. Both of the systems have the same purpose--- making profit. Baidu in 2016 gave the opportunity to make headlines to unscrupulous merchants, driven by the profit. Industry now continue to win a win-win with some of the merchants but with a more sophisticated appearance. Users think it is very convenient to use recommended system, so do the sellers. They can know their potential clients more clearly form this recommended system. Under this situation, which everyone shows that it is at their free will, where is the bottom line?

How to lock our diaries?

In this year, Chinese APP Special Governance Working Group started investigating 20 apps that collect too much personal information. This working group will also investigating more Apps that have bulk of users and have close connection with people's daily life. We call on the relevant department to manage our privacy security, to ensure that only information that really beneficial to consumers will be sent to users instead of commercial ads with an inducement.

For consumers, their diaries could be protected very well by themselves only if they have the awareness of protecting. When consumers have this kind of awareness, market will change their marketing strategy correspondingly. Users should also learn to do some shop around instead of relying on profit-driven sales and recommendation

too much.