

Questions Are Obsolete - The Information Is Out There

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While in the first round of the French Presidential election, opinion polls got the results to within 1% correct, the industry as a whole has taken quite the beating of late. Calling the 2015 UK election, the Brexit referendum and the US Presidential election all wrong. While much has been written about the flaws in polling companies' models, or wrong assumptions that they have made which led to mistakes, there is a missing element from this debate. Why do we even *need* to do polls?

Traditionally polling and research companies will semi-randomly select people to create a representative sample based on certain assumptions about future behaviour and historical data. This has clear problems, not least as found in the UK 2015 general election the fact polls were conducted during the day meant that unemployed people were more likely to be in the sample, or the issue of 'shy' voters who will not admit in public to backing a party but will at the ballot box. However, this flawed approach is not necessary any more to find out people's voting or spending preferences. With the advent of social media now more than ever information about our beliefs, our values, our ideas and us is publicly available. Combine this with the ability for artificial intelligence platforms to analyse large amounts of data in record time, it is entirely possible to predict behaviour from the information we, and the people we know happily share with the world.

The simple fact is questions are no longer necessary, to find out your preference for political party, coffee brand, film genre, anything. All that is online, freely given. This is not hacking into data to find secret preferences, just looking at what you share. Even if you are very tight with what you put on social media your friends aren't and you will share their preferences on most things. There is *no* escape.

Already some organisations are employing this kind of technology, often to great benefit. During the 2016 Brexit referendum and US Presidential election Cambridge Analytica combined data mining, analysis and strategic communications to target voters on behalf of the Leave campaign, Ted Cruz's campaign and finally Donald Trump's campaign.

Alexander Nix, CEO of Cambridge Analytica said in November last year "Today in the United States we have somewhere close to four or five thousand data points on every individual ... So

we model the personality of every adult across the United States, some 230 million people.” This data is collected from publicly available information, in many cases without people’ knowledge. While there is a question mark over how impactful Cambridge Analytica are, the fact of the matter is, this technology will only grow and grow. Expect more political campaigns and B2C companies to employ these kinds of techniques.

While this may sound and look invasive or even down right creepy, it is happening because of our behaviour and that of our friends. While this kind of technology is in its early stages it is about to make a break through and could in very short order become part of our day-to-day.

Scared? Don’t be. For the first time ever political leaders will actually know your concerns, ever worried that the man or woman in Whitehall or on the Hill doesn’t get your life? Well now they will. For the first time ever, consumer brands will be able to tailor products that directly service your needs. For the first time ever, what you feel, your preferences and what you want will be known and harnessed to deliver better products, better services and even better politics.

Technology in of itself is neither good nor bad, it is but a tool. This tool can be utilised to make our lives significantly better, our leaders more reactive and companies more useful. Embrace it and demand that this happens.

Original article and video can be found here:

http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dmitry-bagrov/questions-are-obsolete-th_b_16380790.html