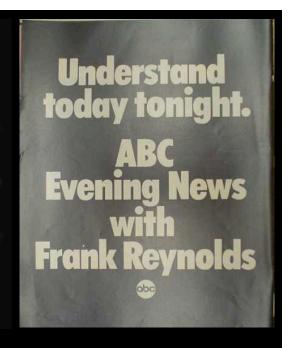
## Building and Breaking Bubbles

Designing Systems
that Select & Present News







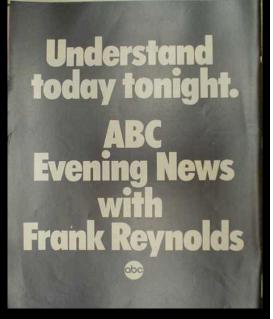


500 of adults watched one of three broadcasts in 1970.

by 2007, this had dropped to just



JOHN CHANCELLOR











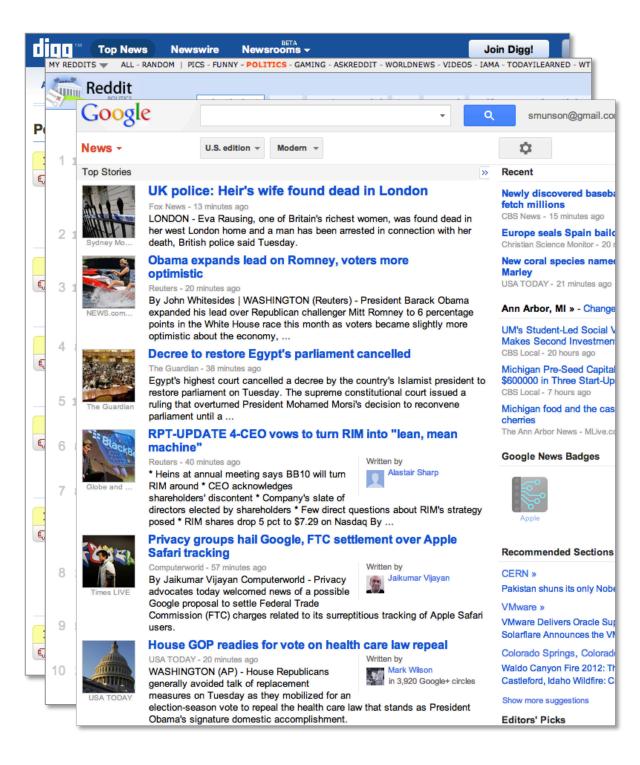












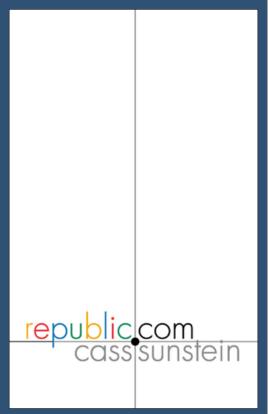
56% of adult
Americans who access news online in a typical day read news aggregators.

68% of the 18-29 demographic.

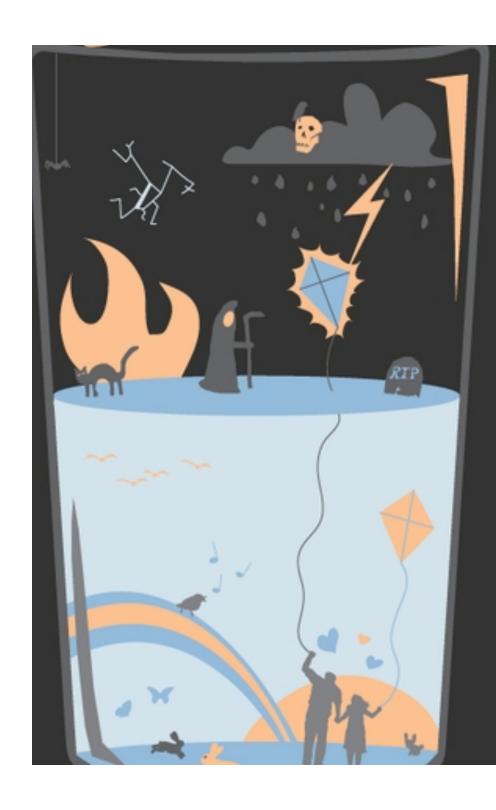


30% of US adults get news through Facebook, largely incidentally.









The choices
designers make
either build bubbles
or break them.

Image: Josh Perkins, Threadless (buy his shirt!)

## Catering to your in-the-moment instincts.

e.g., Algorithm designers assume you want agreeable news (& give it to you)

#### Ann, a liberal, gets MSNBC and Huffington Post:



#### Lisa, a conservative, gets Fox News:



### Stuck with your old preferences.

e.g., You expressed an interest once, now you will see an ongoing stream of content about that.

# Reinforcing homophily.

Your friends tend to be like you, so what they share can further reinforce your views.

# Reinforcing homophily.

Your friends tend to be like you, so what they share can further reinforce your views.

Some people hide updates from or even unfriend friends who are politically different.



"Managing political differences in social media" C Grevet, LG Terveen, E Gilbert. *CSCW* 2014.

# Reinforcing homophily.

Your friends tend to be like you, so what they share can further reinforce your views.

Some people hide updates from or even unfriend friends who are politically different.

On sites with a common front page (e.g., Digg), the tyranny of the majority can drive others away.

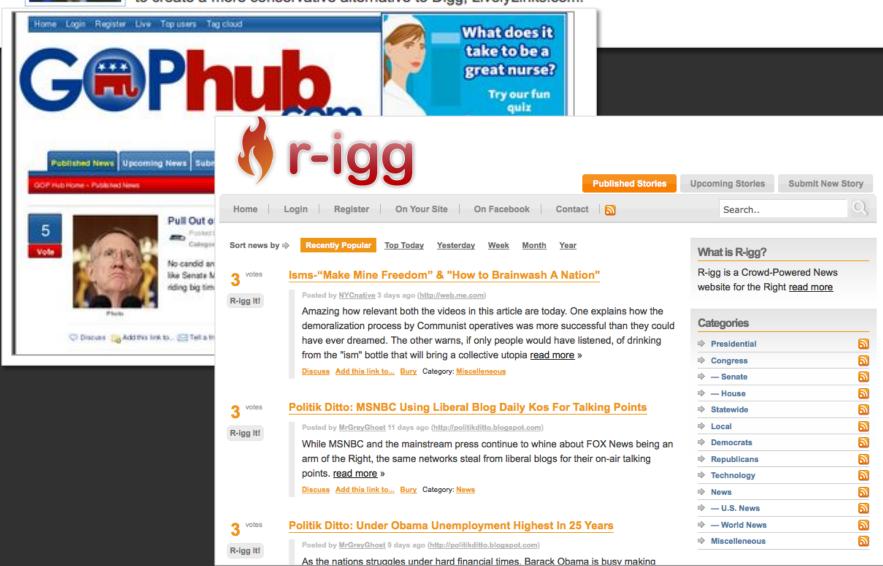
50 diggs

🛅 digg



#### **Lively Links - a conservative Digg**

livelylinks.com — Annoyed with the liberal bias of Digg.com? Frustrated with the popularity of those stories that display conservatives / Republicans in a negative light. Thanks to capitalism and free enterprise, I've decided to create a more conservative alternative to Digg, LivelyLinks.com.



### this has costs

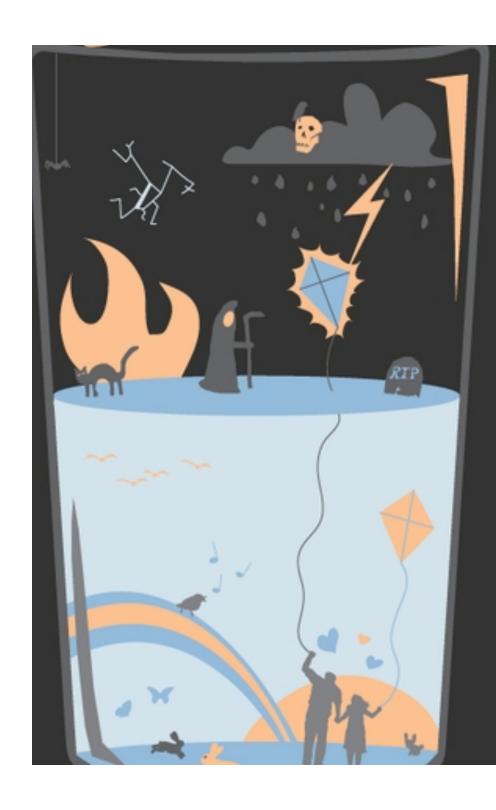
Fewer opportunities to learn.

Less common ground for decision making.

Reduced empathy and understanding.

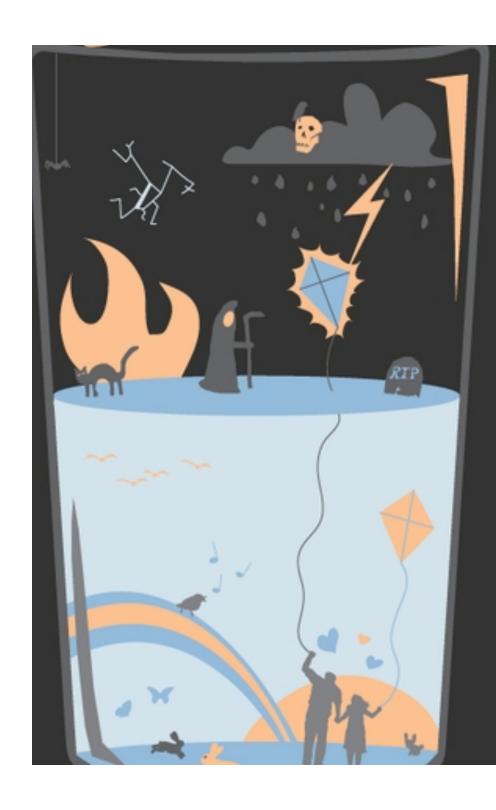
Fragmentation.

Lower engagement if taken to the extreme.



The choices
designers make
either build bubbles
or break them.

Image: Josh Perkins, Threadless (buy his shirt!)



The choices
designers make
either build bubbles
or break them.

Image: Josh Perkins, Threadless (buy his shirt!)

# Strategies for breaking barriers



Selection



Presentation

Naïve to assume that people only want ideologically agreeable, topically consistent news.

Naïve to assume that people only want ideologically agreeable, topically consistent news.

Also value: being able to participate, being correct, learning new things, serendipity, and variety.

• Explore your reactions to diverse items.

• Explore your reactions to diverse items.

• Present you with novel information.



• Explore your reactions to diverse items.

• Present you with novel information.

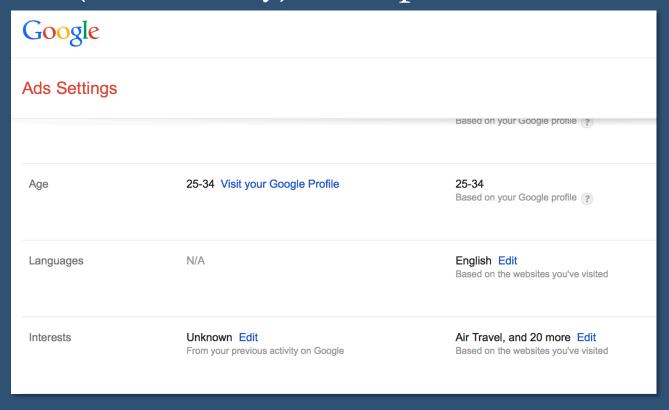
• Give others a turn, and help a user be aware of the breadth of discourse and ideas.



Be (reasonably) transparent.



## Be (reasonably) transparent.





Be (reasonably) transparent.

Show value in the information.



John Doe and 10 of your co-workers shared a link.



White House Considers Timir

People rally for immigration reform



Be (reasonably) transparent.

Show value in the information.

10 of your co-workers shared a link.



#### White House Considers Timing of

President Barack Obama could announce executive actions overhauling the immigration system as early as next week, though White

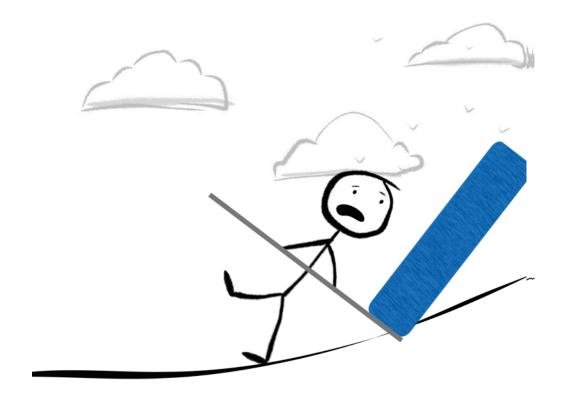


Be (reasonably) transparent.

Show value in the information.

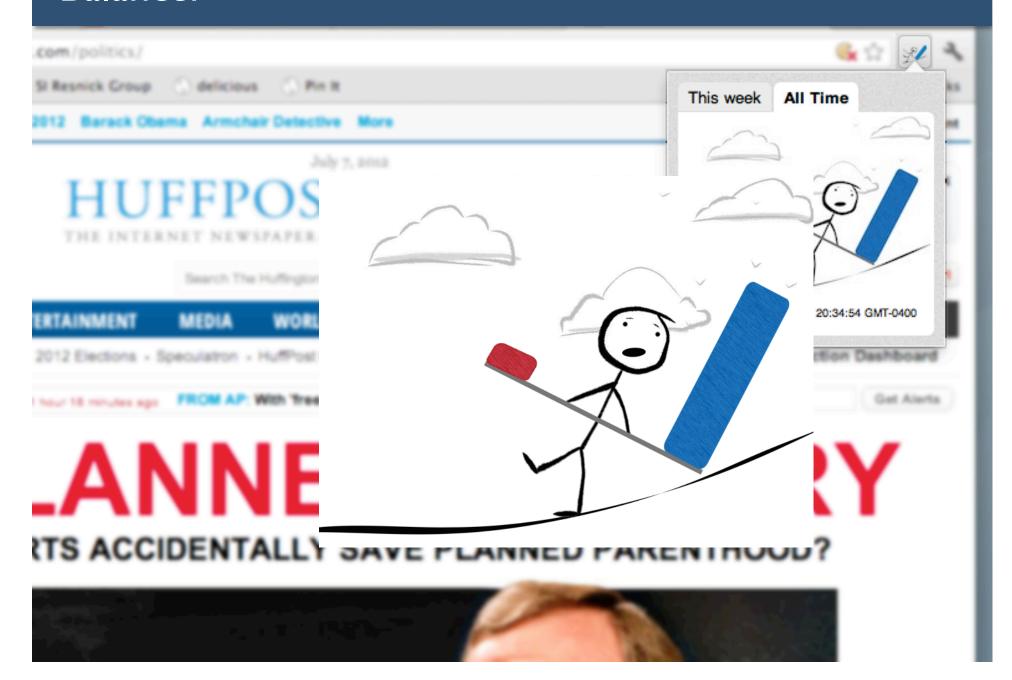
Nudge people toward their better selves.

#### Balancer



"Encouraging Reading of Diverse Political Viewpoints with a Browser Widget." SA Munson, SY Lee, P Resnick. ICWSM 2013.

#### Balancer

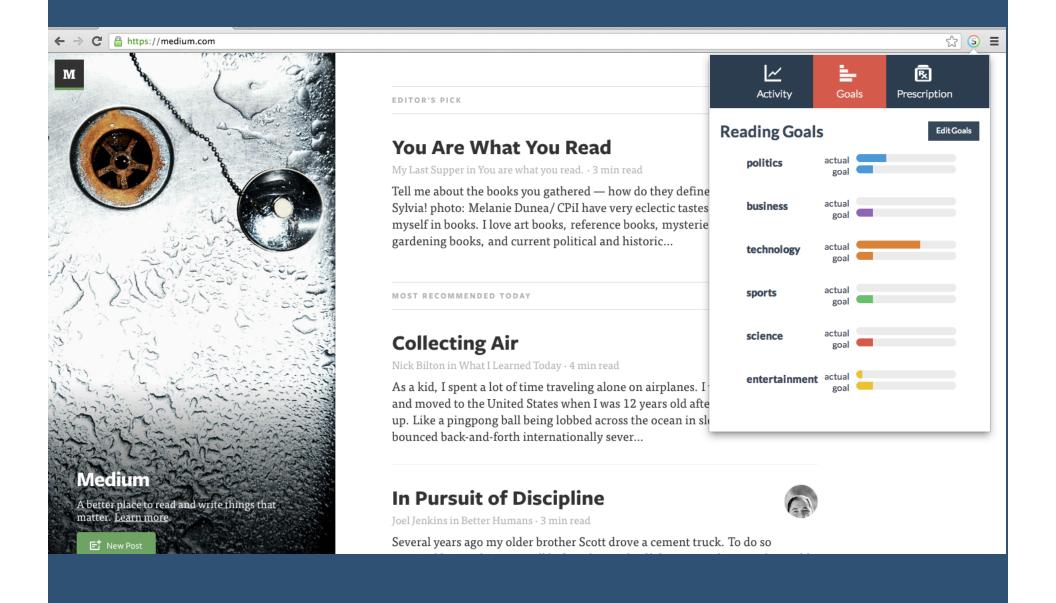


#### **Balancer** | Field experiment

For median liberal-reading user (187 visits per 28 days), the difference in change between control (no feedback) and treatment (feedback) was equivalent to:

- 4 new monthly visits to a right-leaning site or
- 20 new monthly visits to a neutral site

### Slimformation (Knight Lab, Northwestern)



### **Slimformation** (Knight Lab, Northwestern)

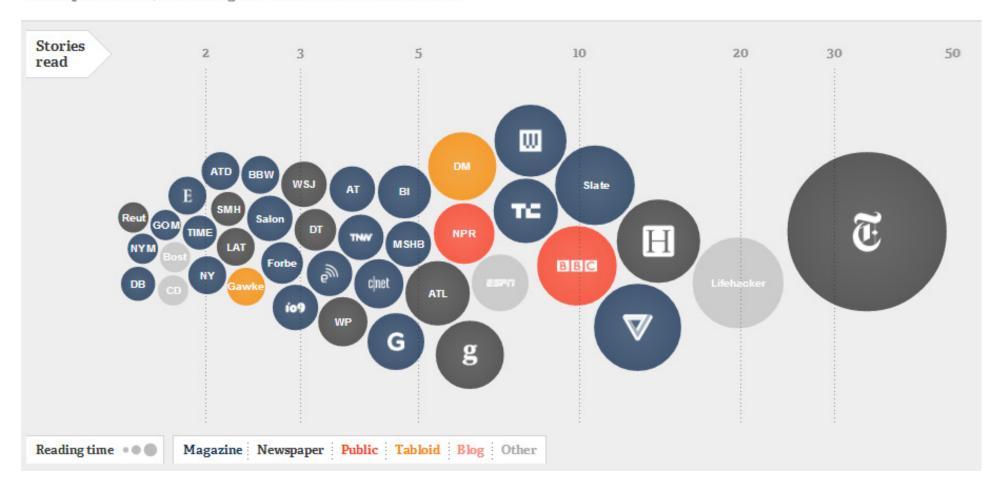


#### **Nick Bilton**

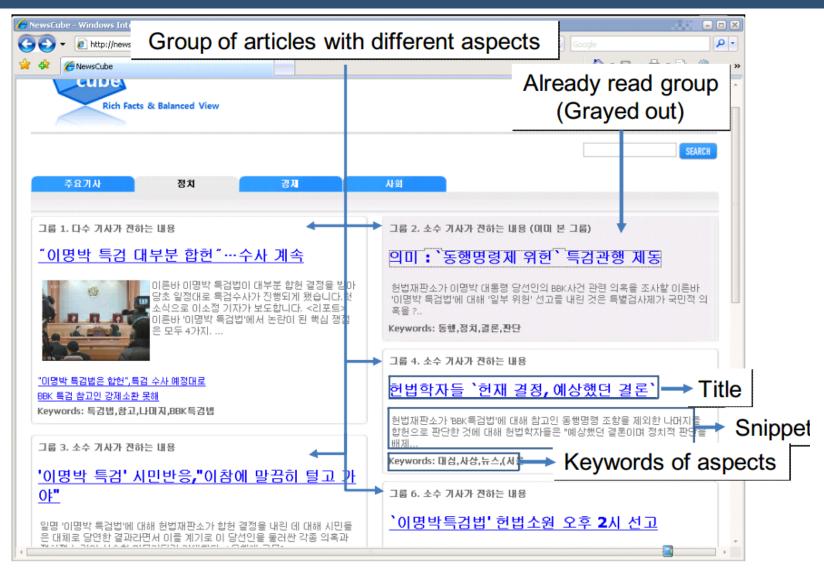
Writes for The New York Times

Follow @nickbilton 160K followers

In the past month, the average reader of Nick Bilton also read:



### **Selection + Presentation** | NewsCube



NewsCube: delivering multiple aspects of news to mitigate media bias. S Park, S Kang, S Chung, J Song. *CHI* 2009.

## System designers can build or break bubbles

Bad personalization is fraught with potential downfalls.

### System designers can build or break bubbles

Bad personalization is fraught with potential downfalls.

Good personalization – in selection and presentation – can support individual engagement & learning as well as better societal outcomes.

## thanks!

#### Sean A. Munson

smunson@uw.edu @smunson

#### Collaborators

Paul Resnick

Xiaodan Daniel Zhou

Cat Hong Le

Emily Rosengren

Erica Willar

Jeremy Canfield

Brian Ford

Peter Andrews

Stephanie Lee

#### **Funding**

NSF Awards IIS-0916099 & IIS-0812042

Intel PhD Fellowship

Yahoo! Key Technical Challenge Grant



## System designers can build or break bubbles

Bad personalization is fraught with potential downfalls.

Good personalization – in selection and presentation – can support individual engagement & learning as well as better societal outcomes.



