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Mapping the Culture of Surveillance Capitalism on Twitter

Surveillance and Society Conference 2022

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V-DATA

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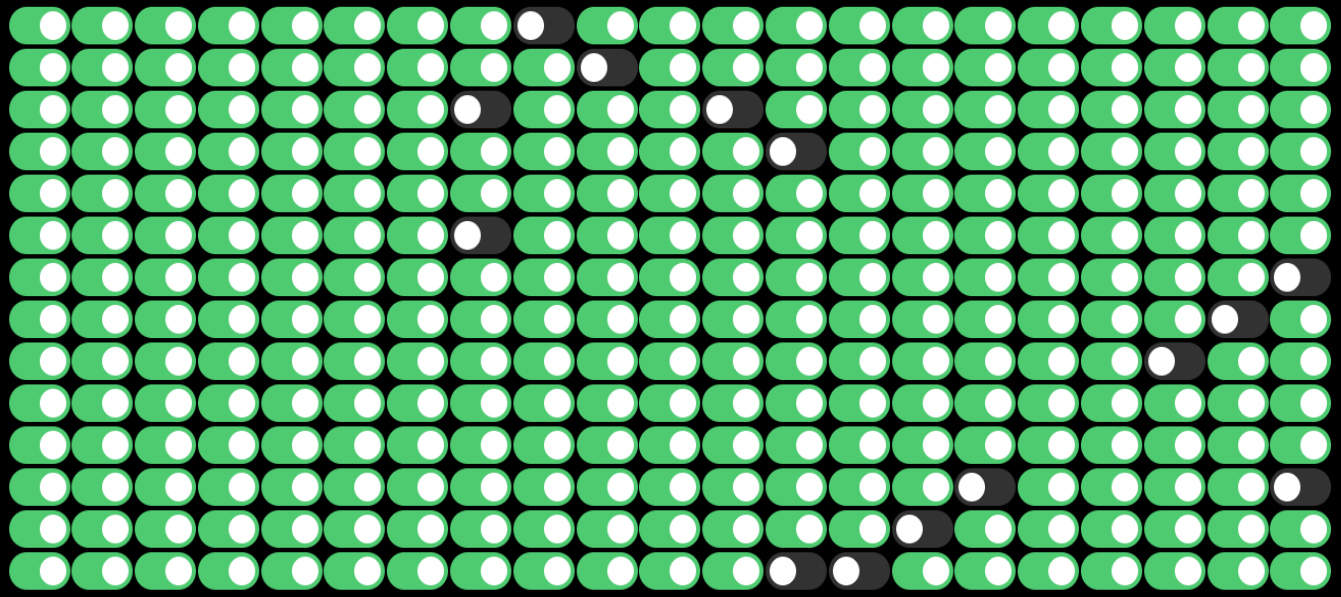
V·Data

Team Work Packages Outputs

The value of digital data: enhancing citizens' awareness and voice about surveillance capitalism



A research project by:

UNIVERSITÀ DI PAVIA

UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI BICOCCA

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Funded by:

Fondazione CARIPLO

https://vdataresearch.com/

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The scope of the Project

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- *What is the state of the art of the online public discourse on processes of digital data extraction and exploitation in Italy?*
- *What is the state of the art regarding Italian citizens' knowledge, awareness and opinions on how and to which aims digital data are exploited, and the economic value they produce?*
- *How much do Italian citizens trust actors that manage platforms extracting digital data?*
- *Does surveillance capitalism increase the risk of social exclusion of already vulnerable groups, and/or favour discrimination? How could processes of citizens' information and awareness raising prevent social exclusions and discrimination emerging from processes of digital data extraction and exploitation?*

The scope of the Project

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- *What is the state of the art of the online public discourse on processes of digital data extraction and exploitation in Italy?*
  - *What kind of culture of surveillance capitalism emerges from such debate?*

- *What is the state of the art regarding Italian citizens' knowledge, awareness and opinions on how and to which aims digital data are exploited, and the economic value they produce?*
- *How much do Italian citizens trust actors that manage platforms extracting digital data?*
- *Does surveillance capitalism increase the risk of social exclusion of already vulnerable groups, and/or favour discrimination? How could processes of citizens' information and awareness raising prevent social exclusions and discrimination emerging from processes of digital data extraction and exploitation?*

Twitter

Theoretical Framework

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- Media Ideologies (Gershon, 2010)
  - Digital media & technologies ideologies (smartphones (Vincent & Haddon 2017); social media (Hallinan et al. 2021); dating apps (Parisi & Comunello 2020); blockchain (Semenzin et al. 2022); algorithms (Bucher 2017)
- Techno ideologies: "beliefs about how a medium communicates and structures communication", which ultimately influence the way in which a person uses that medium (Fernández-Ardèvol et al., 2020: 2)
- Not so much about opinions and perceptions (Deuze et al. 2012)
- Cultural → morality, relations, identity, practices (Seaver 2017; Comunello et al. 2017; Caliandro et al. 2021).

Theoretical Framework

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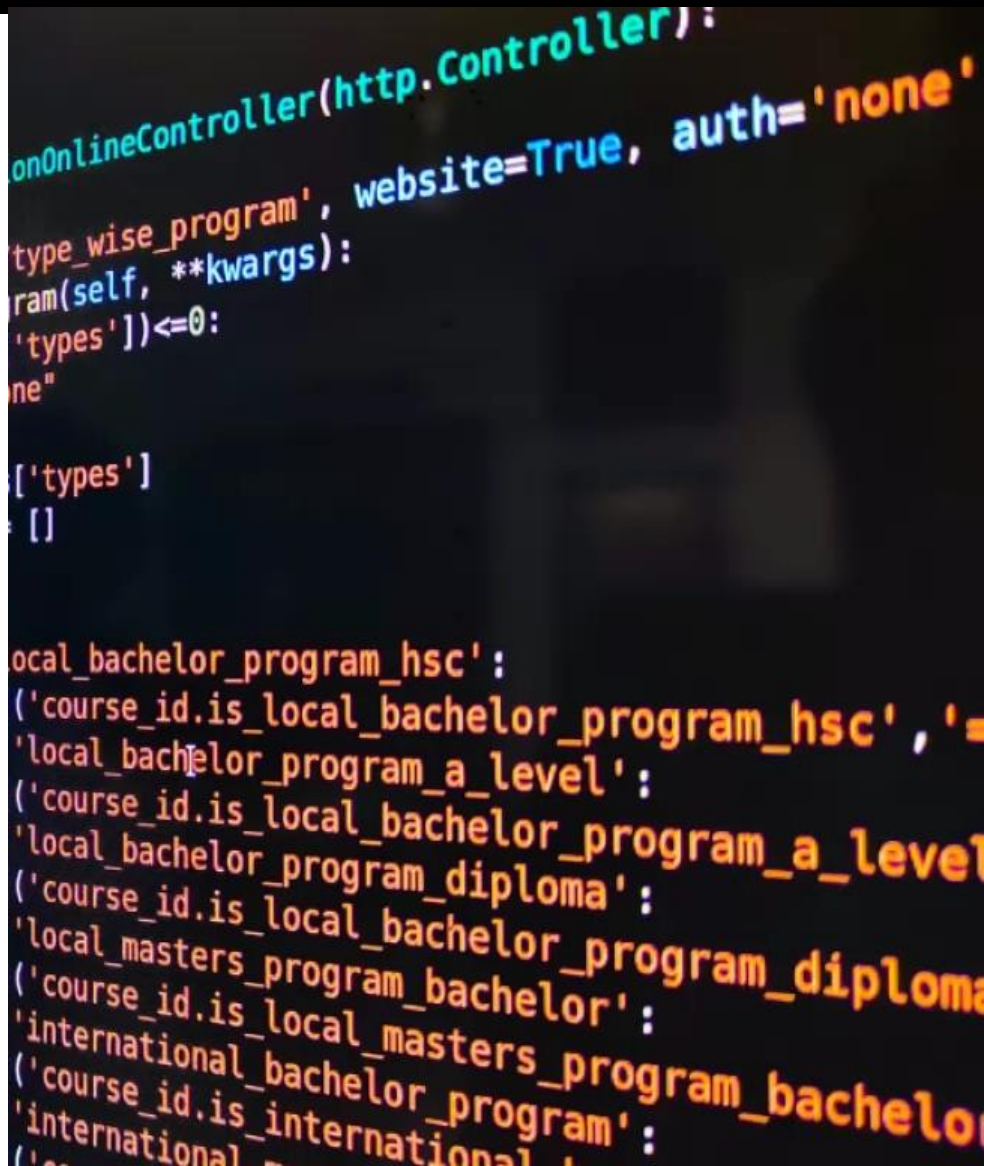
"While users might not be able to see algorithms or understand them on a technical level, they nonetheless sense and feel their consequences. It is upon this felt presence of an algorithm that an algorithmic imaginary develops. This imaginary shapes the modality of future interactions and experiences users have with a given algorithm" (Schellewald 2022: 2)

Imaginaries + practices



Culture of Surveillance

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- "A way of seeing and of being in the world" (Lyon 2018: 30)
- Imaginaries **+** practices (*responsive*, *initiatory*, *negotiation*)
- Lyon 2019: surveillance capitalism **+** culture of surveillance
- Avoiding techno-determinism (Wood & Monahan 2019)
- Utopia/activism: imagining the future as a set of possibilities instead of a pre-determined outcome (Milan & Treré 2019; Fors et al. 2020; Hinchliffe 2021)
- Methodological endeavour: to scale a cultural analysis at a big data level

Methodology

Data

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- Data capture: v2 API of Twitter
- Language: Italian
- Dataset 1 (Pilot): 130,000 tweets - 2018-2021; keyword: '#sorveglianza' (#surveillance)
- Dataset 2: 1,260,467 tweets; 'Google', 'Amazon', 'Facebook', 'Apple', 'Microsoft' (GAFAM) – (01/01/2019 – 31/12/2021)
- Techniques: automated text analysis, network analysis, qualitative content analysis
- Levels of analysis:
  - *Macro*: macro discourses (hashtags)
  - *Meso*: circulation of discourses among communities (RT)
  - *Micro*: users' narrative (imaginaries + practices)

Analysis

Overview: Pilot

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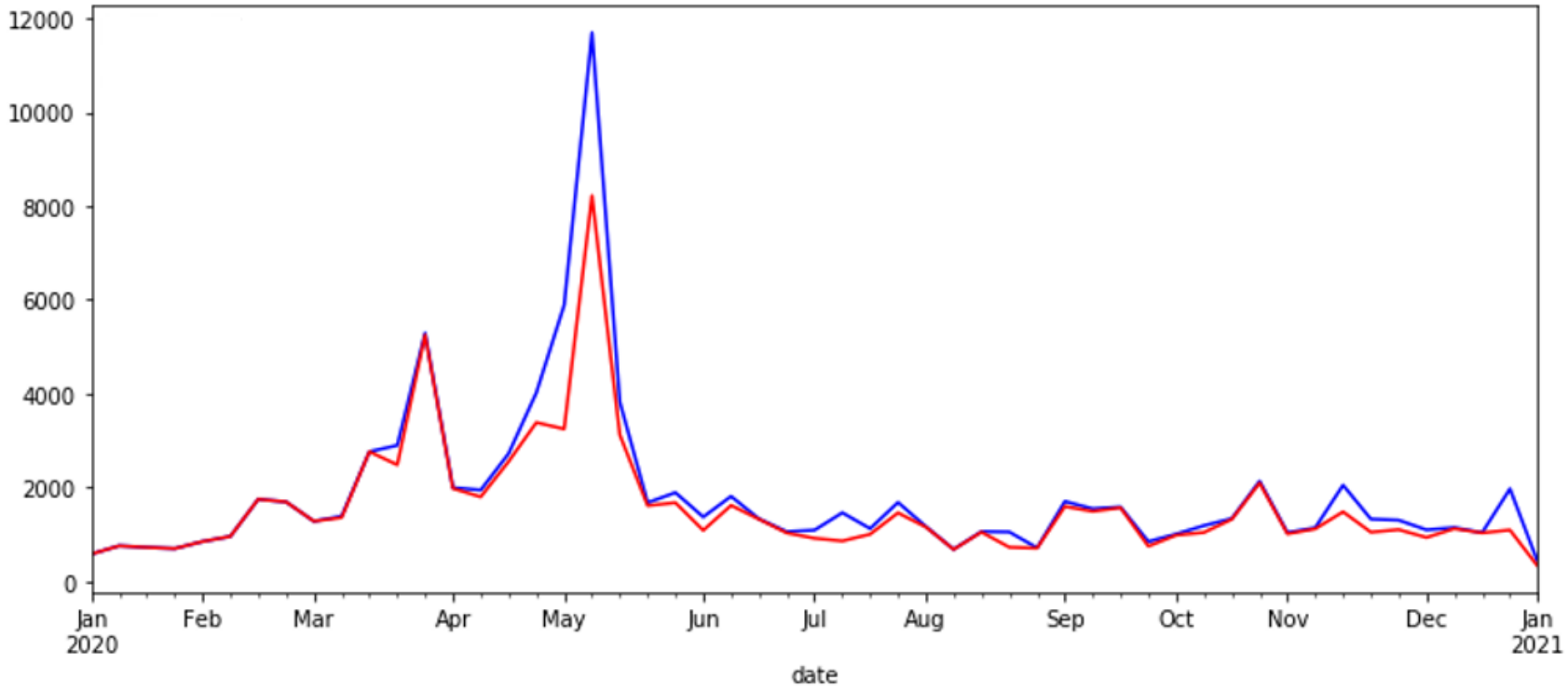
'#sorveglianza' (#surveillance)



Overview: Pilot

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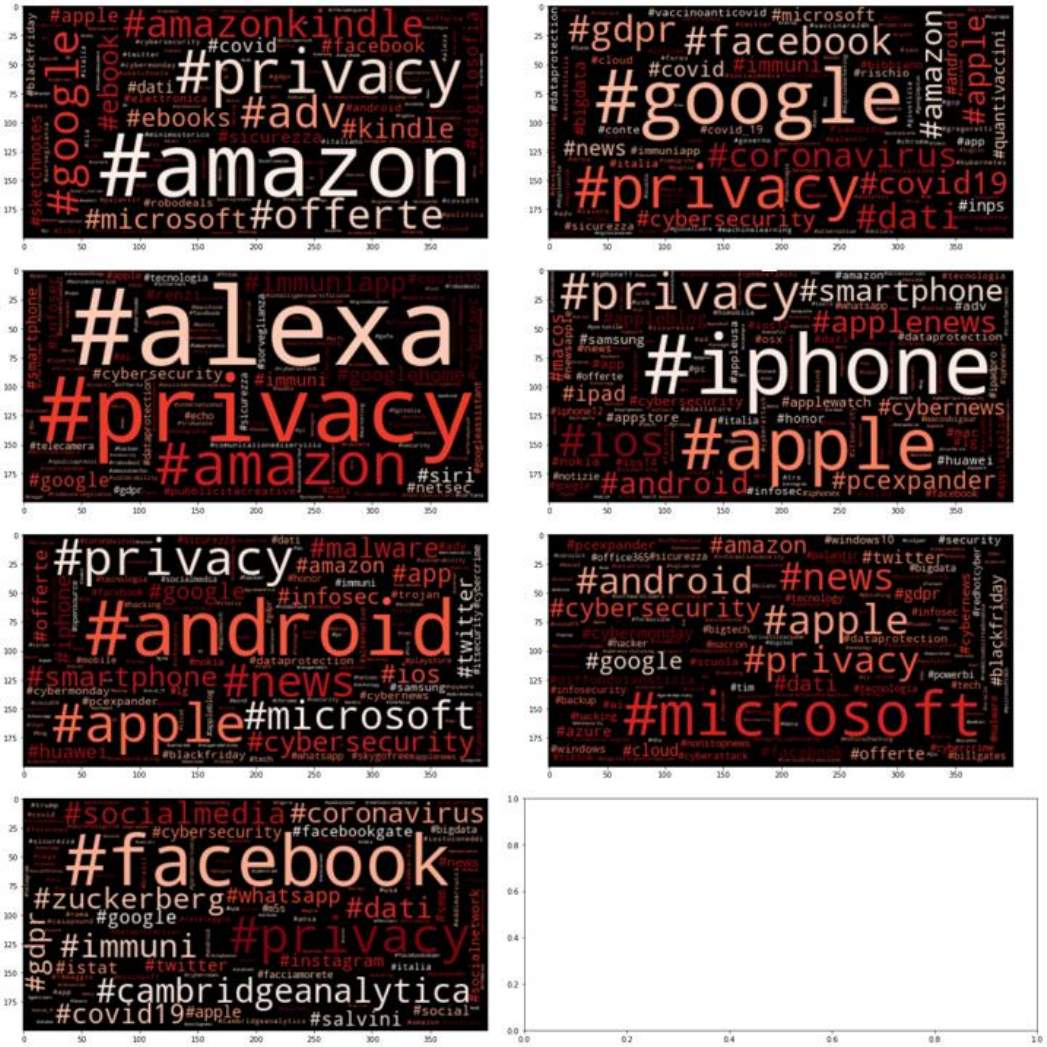

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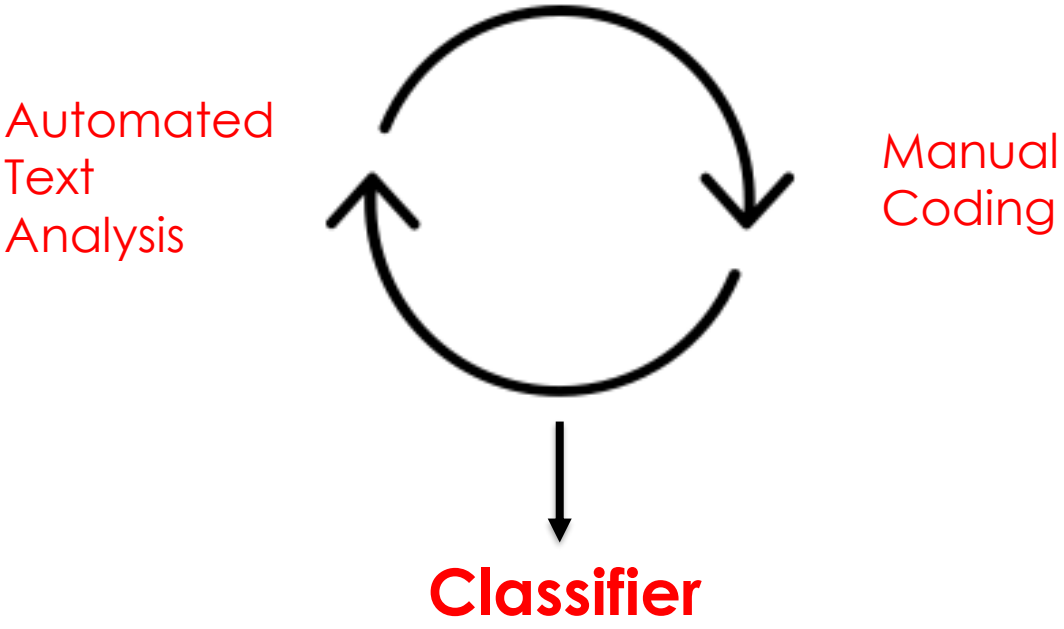
Dataset 2

1,260,467 tweets; 'Google', 'Amazon', 'Facebook', 'Apple', 'Microsoft' (GAFAM)



Dataset 2

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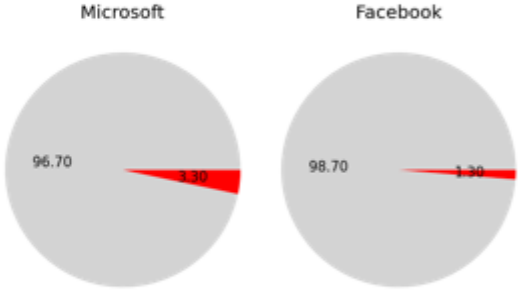
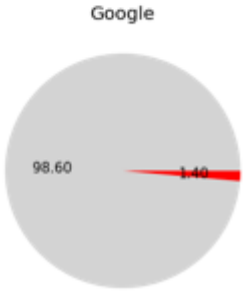
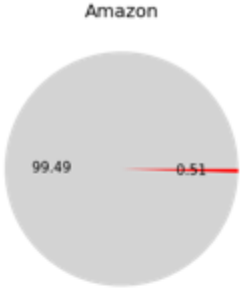
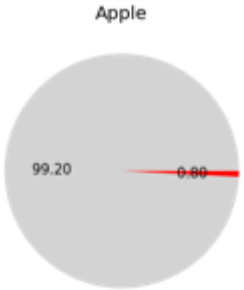
Data Value

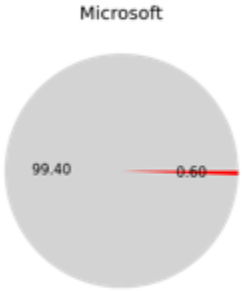


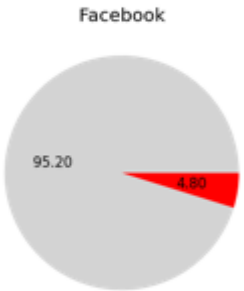


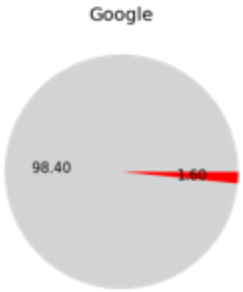
Censorship



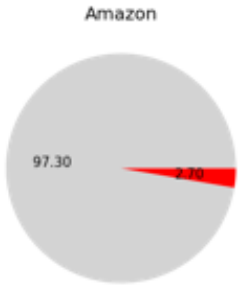


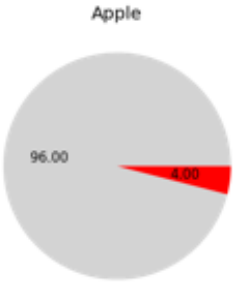


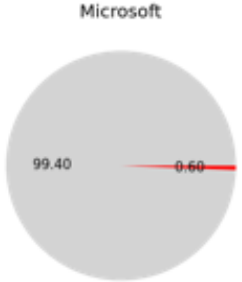


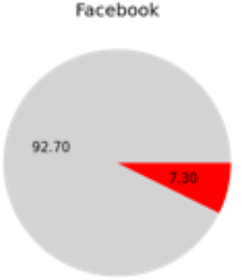


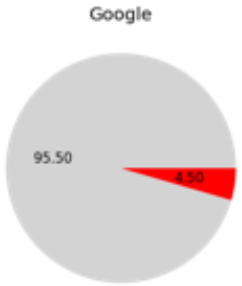
Privacy/Cybersecurity











Co-Hashtag Analysis

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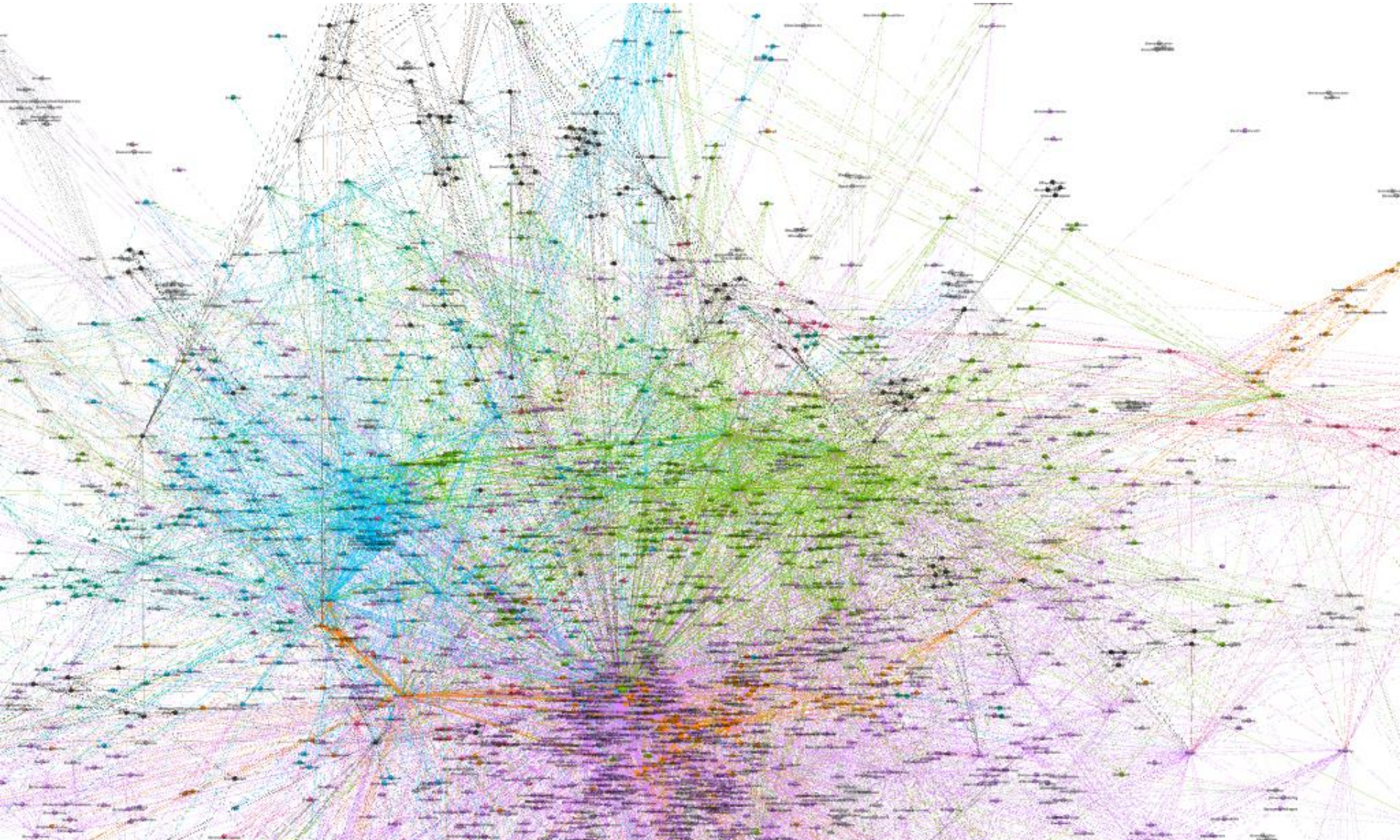

Co-Hashtag Analysis – Cross-brand

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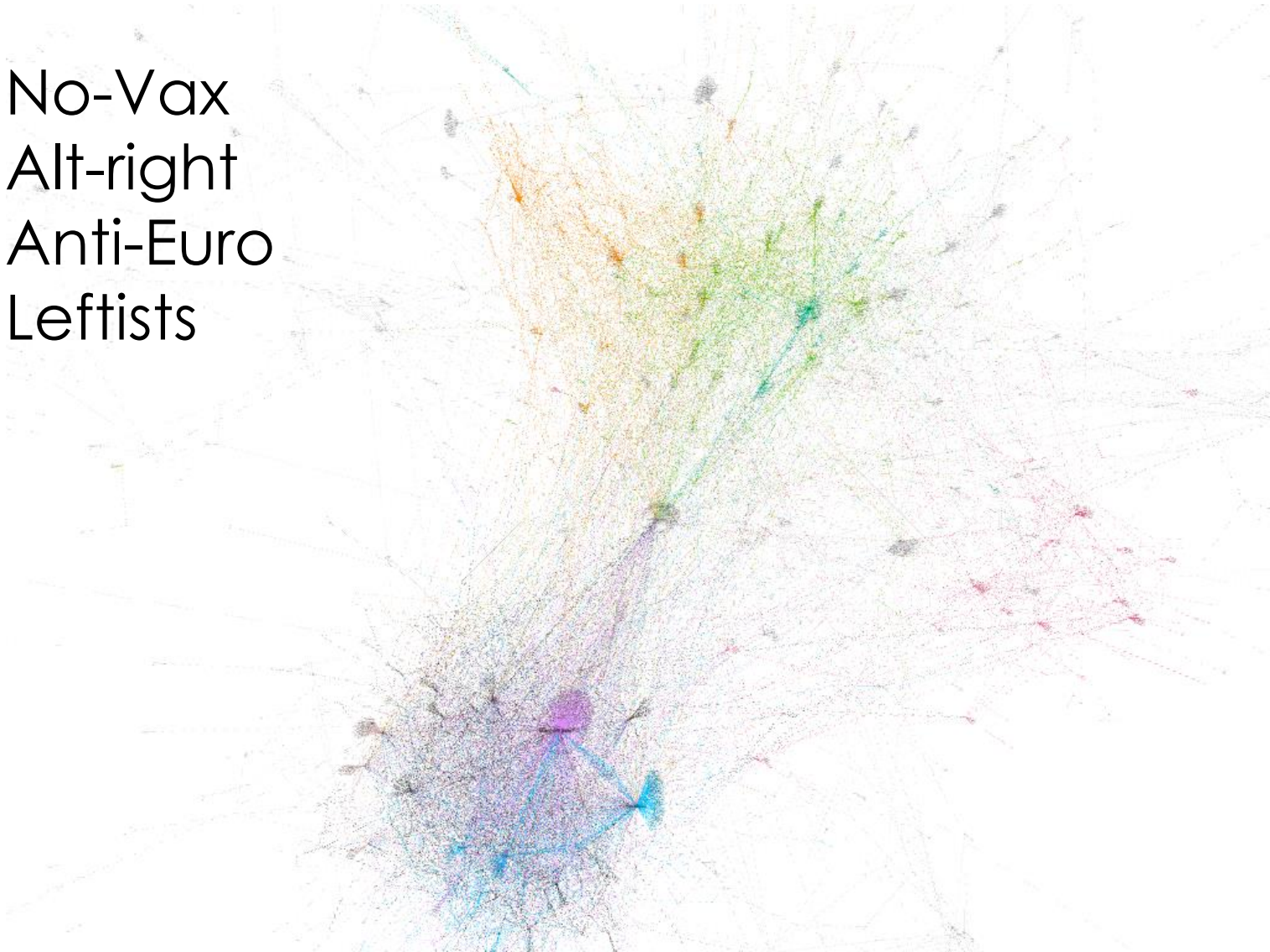
Data Value	Censorship	Privacy/Cybersecurity
#bigtech	#censura	#privacy
#tasse	#trumpbanned	#cybersecurity
#soldi	#markzuckerberg	#dataprotection
#fisco	#parler	#gdpr
#tax	#gab	#hacker
#ue	#usa	#dataprivacy
#marketing	#twitter	#databreach
#workers	#twich	#cyberattack
#money	#facebook	#malware
#lavoro	#dittatura	#dataleak
#antitrust	#china	#phishing
#rights	#socialcredit	#revengeporn
#sciopero	#ios	#smartglasses
#economia	#alphabet	#tracking
#politica	#gafam	#augmentedreality
#business	#googleplay	#robot
#monopoly	#fakenews	#algorithm
#investimenti	#cloud	#cookie
#trading	#moderation	#alexa
#multinazionali	#socialmedia	#videosurveillance

Networks of users

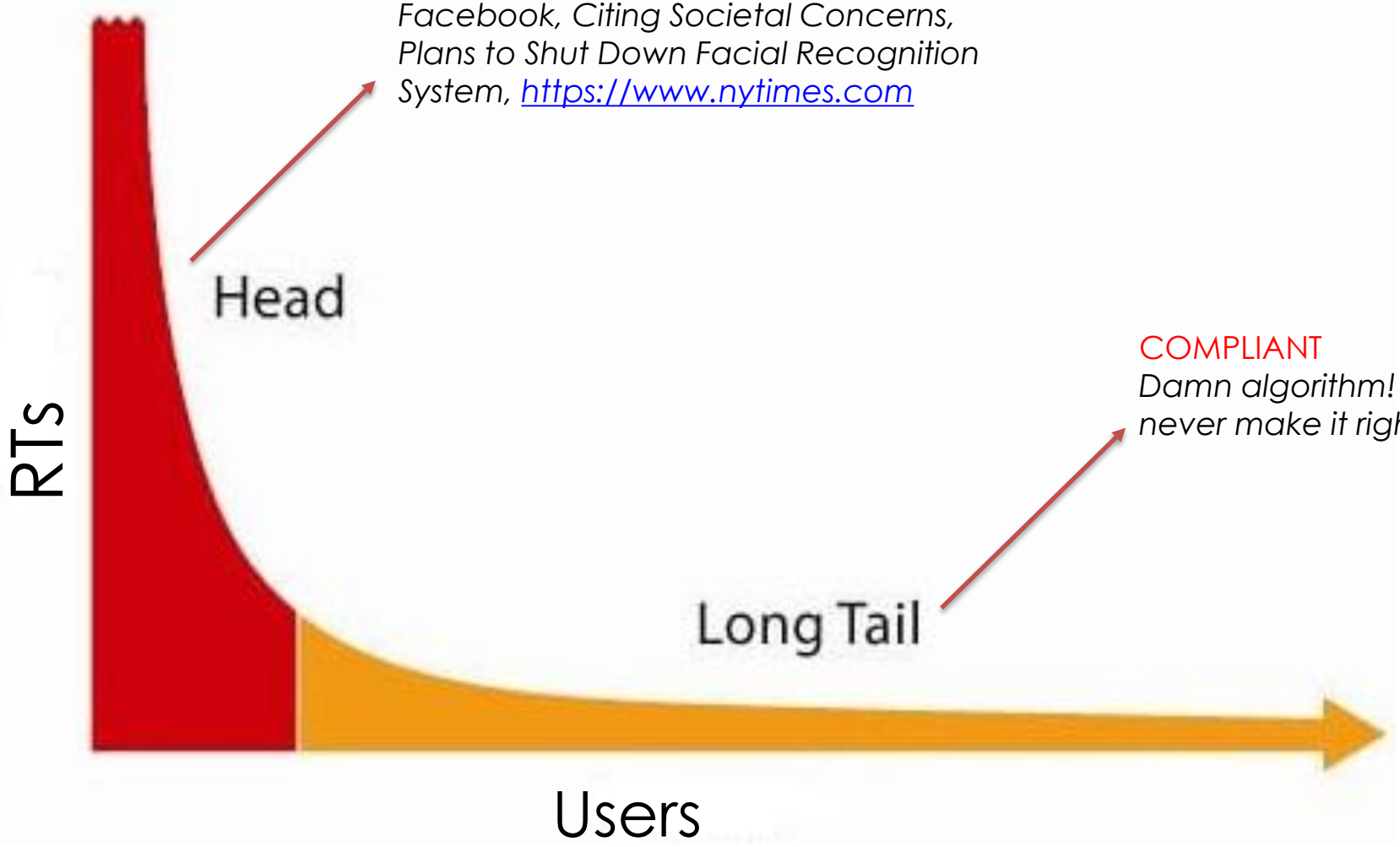
- No-Vax
- Alt-right
- Anti-Euro
- Leftists



Narratives – by RTs

ANTAGONIST

Facebook, Citing Societal Concerns, Plans to Shut Down Facial Recognition System, https://www.nytimes.com



COMPLIANT

Damn algorithm! you never make it right!

Conclusions

- Definitely more work to do!
- Considering using less data (only post-covid?)
- Qualitative analysis
  - Classifier of practices: *responsive*, *initiatory*, *negotiation*
  - Narratives: deeper understanding of users' imaginaries and imagination of alternatives to surveillance capitalism,

Thank you for your attention!

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