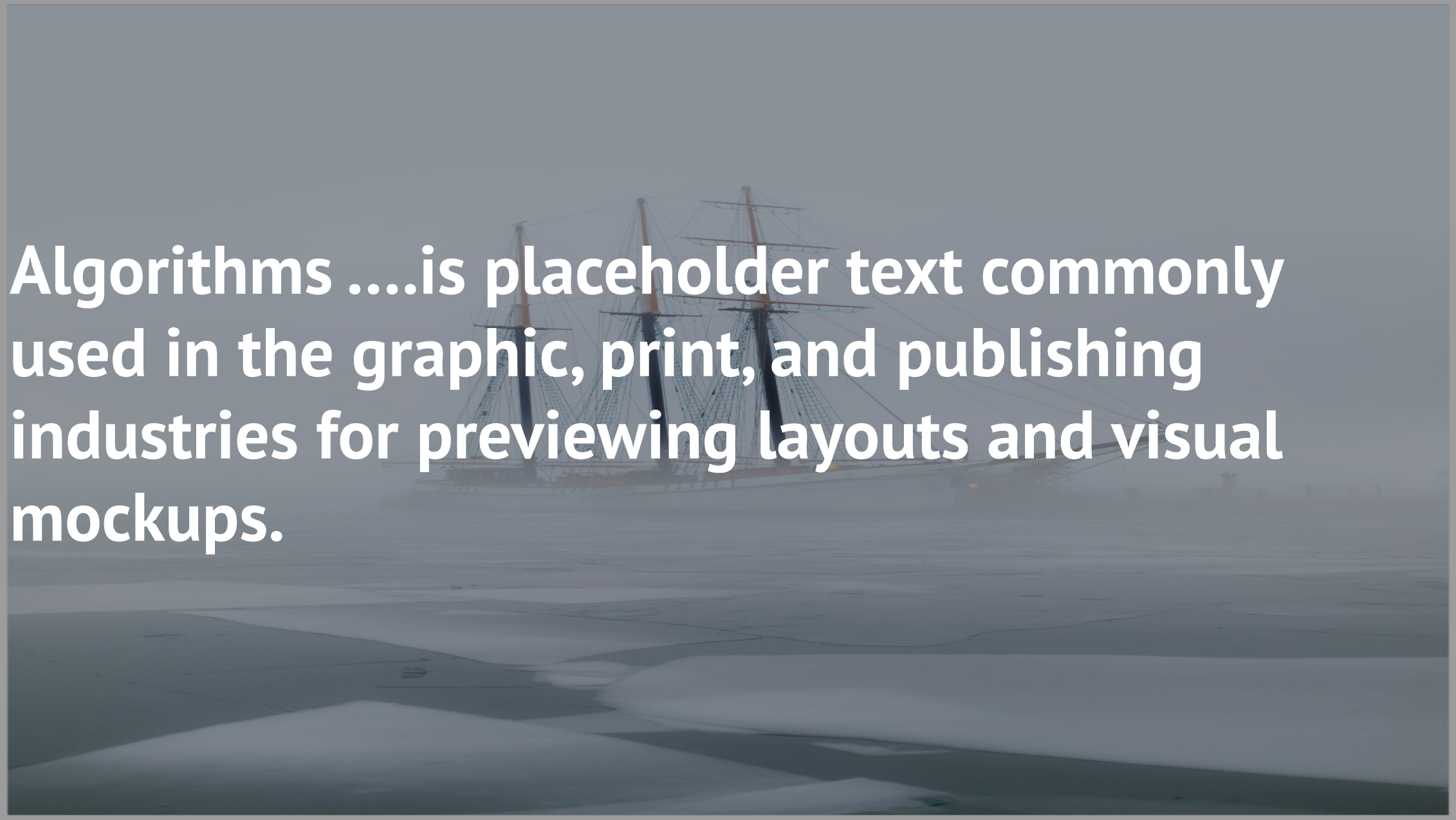
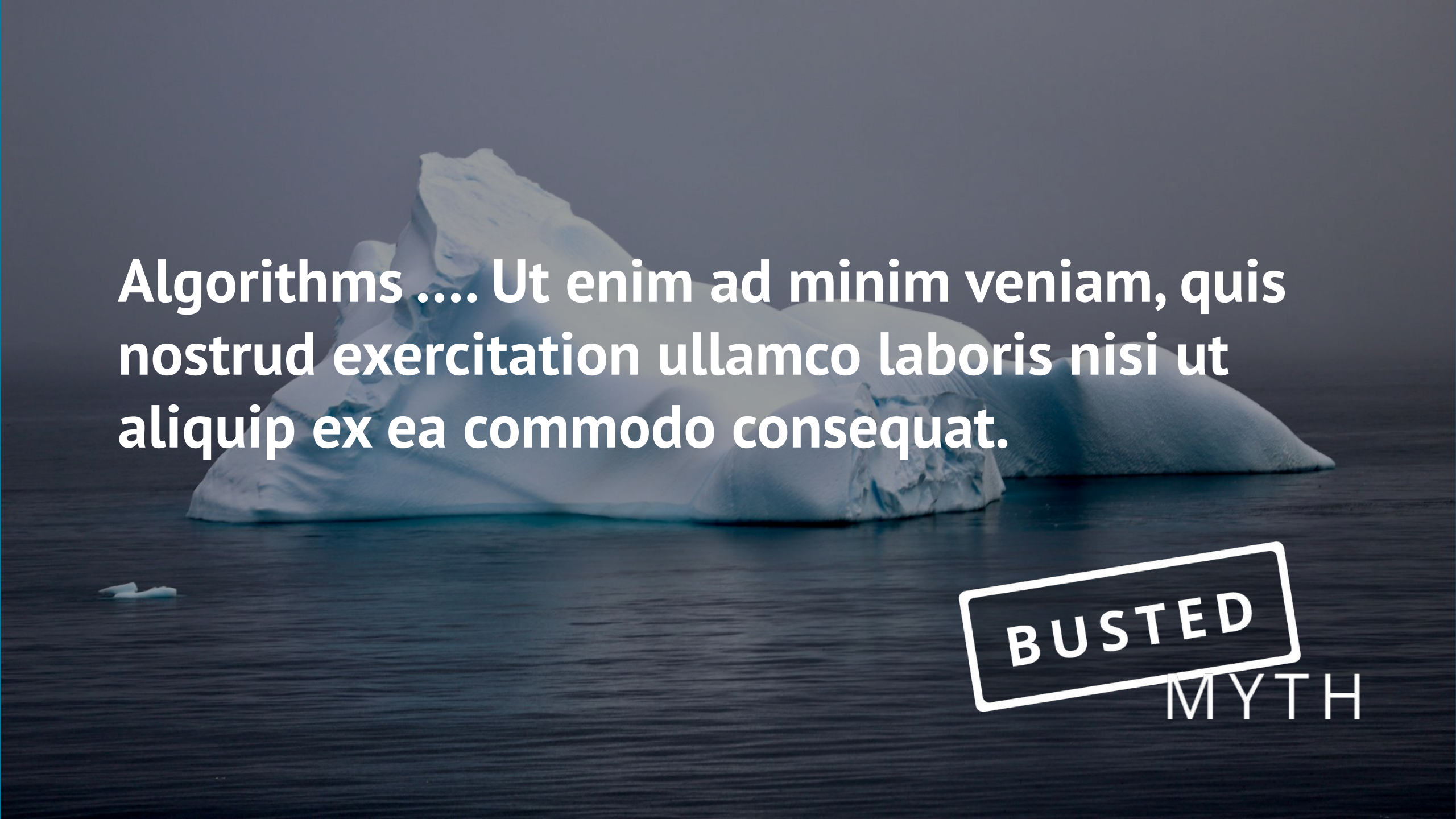
Why, AI.

BUSTED MYTH



Algorithms ....is placeholder text commonly used in the graphic, print, and publishing industries for previewing layouts and visual mockups.


Algorithms .... Ut enim ad minim veniam, quis nostrud exercitation ullamco laboris nisi ut aliquip ex ea commodo consequat.
BUSTED
MYTH

Cybercolonialism and the Politics of Prediction in the Digital Age

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University of Kassel


amazon
UBER
Microsoft
Google
TESLA
The world's most valuable resource is no longer oil, but data.
The Economist - May 2017

Cybercolonialism

refers to algorithmic power monopolized, not only but especially, by the Western data companies, which use this power to manipulate inhabitants of certain geographies by forecasting their social and economic vulnerabilities, variabilities and exploitable strengths. What differs this type of colonial infrastructure from the historical one, is that it doesn't demand a physical or logistic movement. After all, with the help of predictive analytics and software applications they do not have to sail and settle in a particular geography physically but write a code and install it (as we will see in the case of Cambridge Analytica). I call this, also, *installer colonialism*—a virtual version of settler colonialism.

- draws on and expands other concepts such as digital and data colonialism
- but also aims to trace the shift in online and offline material conditions, (like from oil to data), and look at how they come together and create new power relations at one point.
- and foregrounds the spatial process as much as the material and aims to look how this spatial and material matters generates new modes of agencies.

“What sort of coding has produced *this* subject?“

Gayatri Spivak

What kind of algorithmic coding would represent the subjectivities in the digital age, who do not and cannot provide data to the system because simply they don't possess the hardware, or have the knowledge and thus cannot get connected?

what happens to the questions of subalternity when we look at it in the context of cybercolonialism?

Skipped code:

Nothing in the algorithmic code system designates the data whose computerized value is **unknown** to the programmer. In computing, 'nothing' symbolizes an immeasurable value, or the data that is missing. So, when the programmer encounters a missing parameter, in order to skip a code in the algorithmic command chain, they write a “dummy line” with a command:
//do nothing.
A computer scientist Howard Wainer states that *nothing* in computing is not equal to zero. Putting a zero in an algorithmic code chain instead of missing data will eventually bring false prediction. ‘When data is missing,’ he writes, ‘there will be great uncertainty in the estimation of any summary statistic that has a missing piece’
Howard Wainer (2016),*Truth or Truthiness: Distinguishing Fact from Fiction, p.45.*

Digitally subaltern?

The term “subalternity,”’ as John Beverly describes it in his book *Subaltern and Representation*, “refers to a condition of subordination brought about by colonization or other forms of economic, social, racial, linguistic, and/or cultural dominance” which defines the codes of representation. He describes the subaltern subjectivity in the sense of a *skipped code* as the subaltern “resists symbolization” and becomes “a gap-in-knowledge that subverts or defeats the presumption to ‘know” it.” Because as data the subaltern remains unmeasurable.

John Beverly (1992), Subaltern and Representation, p. 24

Digital Divide

Digital divide refers to the gap between those who have access to the internet, to the hardware, and to the knowledge of how to use all these. Kent's depiction of the digital subaltern provides, in this sense, a productive entry point to the discussion, as he describes the digital subaltern as a "group without a voice" who are "currently excluded from access to the digital environment

"…the digital subaltern like their analogue counter partner has no place to speak and no consciousness of their position. [...] with no shared spaces with those online, the digital subaltern has no ability to perceive what they are excluded from."

M. Kent in Digital Divide 2.0 and the Digital Subaltern

Because the subaltern might be deprived of accessing the digital world, they still appear in the algorithmic command chain as a skipped code not as a zero (there is an agency). As “uncodable” subjectivities, they are still included in the algorithmic calculations and digital predictions, as if they are there, *as if* **we *know*** the value, but they nevertheless (and thus) remain misrepresented.

Radhika Gajjala (2016), *Cyberculture and the Subaltern: Weavings of the Virtual and Real*

From weather to political forecast: How algorithms change the climates

The gathered data about climate through the meteorological stations over the seas did not only helped the European colonizers, to “speculate”’ about “the living conditions and challenges” of the colonial spaces but also to guessingly suggest “the bodily characteristics, such as the form of noses” of the inhabitants living in these geographies.
‘The dual role of climatology in German colonialism’ (2017), Hans von Storch and Carsten Gräbel

> “The combined correlation between nasal index on the one hand and temperature-and- humidity on the other, will probably also point the way to an actual fact. We do not use the word ‘probably’ in the loose sense of a qualifying adverb expressing a vagueness of mind and a desire to shirk real issues, but in the sense that we speak of the ‘law of probabilities,’ meaning that in betting parlance ‘the odds are in favor of.’”
>
> Arthur Thomson and L. H. Dudley Buxton's 1923 paper ‘Man's Nasal Index in Relation to Certain Climatic Conditions’

- Example: Cambridge Analytica, a British consulting company.
- The company allegedly installed a software application which was designed in the form of a simple personality test "This is Your Digital life" on Facebook interface. Once, a user accepted the terms and conditions in order to answer the questions, unknowingly, they permitted the software to access other users' Facebook profile in their friend list. Through this software, it is believed that Cambridge Analytica accessed 50 million users' accounts in the US only.
- Changing the political climate: Malaysia, Trinidad & Tobago, Lithuania, Romania, Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and so on.

Who We Are

Cambridge Analytica‘s promotion video

A. Nix: “There are two main political parties, one for the blacks and one for the Indians. And you know, they screw each other. So, we were working for the Indians. We went to the client and we said, 'We want to target the youth'. And we try to increase apathy. The campaign had to be non-political, because the kids don't care about politics. It had to be reactive, because they're lazy. So, we came up with this campaign, which was all about: Be part of the gang. Do something cool. Be part of a movement. And it was called the 'Do So!' campaign. It means 'I'm not going to vote', 'Do so! Don't vote' The salute of resistance that is known to all across Trinidad and Tobago. It's a sign of resistance against, not the government, against politics and voting. They're making their own YouTube video.”

According to Alexandra Nix, the strategic intention was creating a movement that seemingly aimed to attract and include every young person in the country. However, as Alexandra Nix reveals, the company's strategy was to target the black youth, in Nix words, in order to "increase the apathy" among them, who could potentially vote for the Party which primarily attracts Afro-Trinidadians. In this commercial video of Cambridge Analytica, Nix triumphantly tells his future clients the hidden strategy eventually that led the party, and also the company, to the victory, as he says:

“We *knew* that when it came to vote, all the Afro-Caribbean kids wouldn't vote, because they ‘Do So!’ But all the Indian kids would do what their parents told them to do, which is ‘go out and vote’. They [the Indo-Trinidadian youth] had a lot of fun doing this, but they're not gonna go against their parents' will.”

Skip it, Don‘t vote

how on earth did Cambridge Analytica *know* that the black youth wouldn’t vote but the Indo-Trinidadian youth would not, despite their active involvement in the “Do so, do not vote” campaign?
What sort of data analysis (e.g. algorithmic abstraction) would make such a *prediction* possible? [We don’t know]

> What the phrase 'we knew that' in Nix's speech wants to performatively advertise is then a way of knowing, which is and can only be produced through predictive analytics and algorithmic coding.

Conclusion

The case of Cambridge Analytica displays a salient example of how a youth group in Trinidad and Tobago was excluded from formal political participation (i.e. voting), although they were actively there, online and offline, in this political movement. Their voices were muted, rendered unheard and their political motivations were hijacked, paradoxically, despite and because of the digital tools available to them.

The politics of prediction in the digital age, as Ruha Benjamin writes, 'builds upon already existing forms of racial domination and reinforces them precisely because the apparatus ignores how race (and perhaps also the colonial power) shapes the "weather" but, as Benjamin goes on, 'the system is accurately rigged, because unlike in natural weather forecast, the weathermen are also the ones who make it rain'

R. Bejamin (2019), Race after Technology, p. 82.

Can the Subaltern Code?

If data becomes the new oil of the digital age, understanding cybercolonialism and its dynamics requires different perspectives to analyse the new forms of silencing and oppression emerges with it. But how to understand and perhaps also to name these new modalities of subjectivities emerges in this new material condition? Perhaps, for the sake of provoking such debate, one can rephrase Gayatri Spivak's famous rhetorical question 'Can the Subaltern Speak' as 'Can the Subaltern code?'