ecosystem.Ai

WHAT IF

You could delpoy a digital anthropologist?

Human beings don’t want to be free.

This was the somewhat controversial notion presented in Erich Fromm’s The Fear of Freedom. The psychologist argued that once human beings achieve freedom from an authoritarian entity, such as the church or monarchy, they experience increased levels of anxiety, isolation and powerlessness. Sigmund Freud also famously said: "Most people do not really want freedom, because freedom involves responsibility, and most people are frightened of responsibility".

To gain a feeling of grounding, we follow other rules instead, codified within cultures and societies. Our founder, Jay van Zyl, likes to put it like this: human beings create for themselves a ‘tunnel of existence’ with defined edges. What determines the tunnel’s shape are certain cultural boundaries that dictate our behavior, and there are certain non-negotiables when it comes to what we will or will not do.

Let’s explore a real-world example to see how this plays out in markets.

In 2002, Gillette launched a new razor product called the Gillette Vector. The Boston-based toiletry brand wanted to acquire a new customer base in lower-income India, and designed what they thought was a product fit for Indian beards. Indian men, they reasoned, had thicker facial hair and shaved less frequently, so Gillette created a razor with a higher blade threshold. To test the product, they handed free razors to Indian students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), in the US. The feedback was glowing. So, the company bounded ahead and introduced the razor in India

Expecting rejoice from the Indian market, Gillette was instead greeted with bristling silence, with only a spattering of buyers in the middle and upper classes.

In an effort to crack the Indian code, Gillette sent researchers to visit consumers at their homes and shops, and ran focus groups. What they discovered could never have been predicted, especially from the input of students who live on another continent.

What came to light was that a large portion of their target market did not have access to running water. In the early hours of the morning, Indian men would typically shave by squatting on the floor over a bowl of water. Without a mirror, they went by feel, often cutting themselves. As a result, the Indian market was less concerned about a tight shave, which had been the central story for Gillette's marketing campaigns, and more so about avoiding injury. In response, Gillette released the single-bladed Guard Razor, with easy-rinse cartridges to conserve water, and a 'safety comb' to accommodate for longer hair. The handle was hollow, to lower manufacturing price and for easier portability. This newly refined razor was soon absorbed into regular Indian households, both accommodating to, and improving, existing rituals.

Gillette turned a dismal failure into a resounding success by going beyond speculation and immersing human researchers into the market.

Learning through immersion

The codified way that human beings function within culture gives us the first clue in understanding and predicting human behavior. There are certain algorithmic approaches businesses can now take to understand humans, not as elusive, unpredictable and irrational beings, but dynamic nodes within a network.

Ken Anderson, principal researcher at the tech giant, Intel, argues that cultural analysis is increasingly essential in the age of AI. Intel is considered to have spawned the substrate for the AI revolution, bringing the first commercially viable microprocessor to the market in 1971. The microprocessor essentially 'shrunk' computing systems and later enabled the embedding of intelligence in

countless devices. According to Anderson, along with the company's ground-breaking contributions to tech, Intel also employs one of the highest numbers of anthropologists. The practice of anthropology sets out to intrinsic motivations behind human behavior through cultural observation. Anthropologists at Intel perform a large variety of research internally, but one of their core functions is to gather insight about how human beings in the 'real world' interact with new technologies. This, according to Anderson, is one of the key reasons why Intel has succeeded in introducing breakthroughs.

Your digital anthropologist

How, you may ask, does one learn the so-called limits of a human's existence if you do not have the budget or time to conduct market-wide anthropological research?

Businesses have attempted to circumvent this intensive human involvement in research with digital algorithms. Replacing human-to-human market research with digital algorithms, however, has pitfalls. Anthropology is inherently qualitative. It considers the unique context in which individual human beings exist. Conversely, digital algorithms analyze patterns in the actions humans take, rarely taking into account the contexts that spawn these behaviors. Rather, algorithms predict an individual's behavior based on trends across vast populations. This often misses the nuance modern consumers are looking for.

But how does one merge algorithmic intelligence with anthropological sense-making?

ecosystem.Ai has developed a range of technological tools that enable businesses to unveil human meaning behind the data:

- **The Computational Social Science Approach:**

ecosystem.Ai solutions all incorporate Computational Social Science concepts. CSS is the interdisciplinary field that combines the social sciences, large-scale data analysis, and computational methods to gain a more holistic understanding of human behavior.

By combining the power of computation with human nuance, CSS enables testing and hypothesising about human behavior on a scale that is not possible in real-world experiments.

- **The Client Pulse Responder:**

The CPR establishes the optimal rhythm of engagement based on customers' habitual, ritualistic behavior. This is backed by the behavioral niotion that some humans require greater effort for a relationship to remain strong, while others prefer to engage on their own terms.

- **Behavioral Algorithms:**

The ecosystem.Ai platform provides a range of algorithms designed to extract human behavior from data, and learn

from it. From testing a humans propensity to take certain actions, creating models of their spending personalities, and determining their preferred style on interaction, these algorithms have been proven to enhance customer satisfaction, create loyalty and boost sales.

- **Vertical 'humanised' solutions:**

ecosystem.Ai Has identified blind-spots in customer engagement across industries like telecommunications and banking: a lack of behavioral understanding. We've developed vertical solutions that humanise the customer, while maintaining scalability. For example, our Spend Personality Module enables banks to move beyond static demographic segmentation, to dynamically-adjusting segment-of-one views based on spending personalities.

- **Real-time capabilities:**

In order to understand how your customer feels just before (or just after) performing an action, you need tools that can collect evidence of human behavior in real time.

Conclusion

The age of algorithms presents an interesting dilemma for stakeholders in the business of human decision-making. Artificial intelligence holds great promise, but applying its strengths to a human context is proving more complex than businesses previously thought. Fusing algorithmic intelligence with the nuance of being human requires an ecosystem approach - using the right tech, with the right approach.