

# Netflix's House of Cards case Study



TV series House of Cards

# Backstory: Netflix Challenge

- Netflix runs “Netflix Challenge” in 2006
- Given a user's previous movie ratings, can you predict what movie they will like in the future?
- Release data of 100,480,507 star ratings by 480,189 users
- \$1,000,000 prize for 10% improvement
- Immediately get 7% improvement, full 10% by 2009

# What happened?

- By the time the competition closed, Netflix has moved on to a different recommendation system
- Privacy concerns meant the next competition was cancelled
- A lot of positive publicity for Netflix forward thinking and faith in big data

What if you've seen every film you like?

Netflix can't recommend a film you've already seen

# House of Cards: Design by (big?) Data

- Kevin Spacey is a very popular actor in the Netflix system
- Political Dramas very popular
- David Finch a very popular director

How Netflix is Turning Viewers Into Puppets

Salon.com

“House of Cards” and Our Future of Algorithmic Programming”

MIT Technology Review

The Secret Sauce Behind Netflix's Hit, "House Of Cards"

Fast Co Design

# Problems with the data approach

- 1) Struggles when failure is expensive
- 2) Cultural output may become boringly repetitive if statistical methods are applied
- 3) Cultural output is reflexive, and relies on a shifting context that might be hard to capture by analysing existing behaviour

# Struggles when failure is expensive

- How are you going to persuade your boss, an actor, or script writer to work on a project unless it makes intuitive sense?
- Solid Gold Bomb T-Shirt disaster (blindly trusting algorithms)





# Converging output

The restaurant dilemma (Richard Feynman):  
Should you try something you know you like,  
or take a risk and try something new you might  
love?

Data can only make recommendations based  
on what you liked last time.

(John Lasseter Effect?)

# Reflexivity

The more any quantitative social indicator (or even some qualitative indicator) is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.

Donald T. Campbell (Social scientist)

# How can big data be useful to TV producers

- As a “grammar checker” for ideas
- For advertising (Is this Netflix's real intention?)