



Algorithm Awareness: How Technology Is Engineered to Influence You – English Transcript

We all use the internet every day for finding information, whether it's for school or for personal use. Relying solely on search engines and platforms, such as Google or YouTube, or on text and media generators, such as ChatGPT, for accurate and reliable information can be risky.

These technologies use something called an algorithm that is engineered to predict what you want to see instead of presenting accurate and balanced information. Algorithms can limit the information that you are exposed to, shaping your perception without you even realizing it.

So what is an algorithm, anyway? Algorithms are step-by-step instructions or rules embedded within technology that are applied to perform a specific task or solve a particular problem, such as retrieving or generating information. These algorithms don't just randomly pick or generate sites, images, or information. They can use data about you to guess what you might like to see. But here's the catch. Algorithms can have biases, which are tendencies to believe that some ideas are better than others. This means that the algorithm rules determine which results are most relevant or most popular, or predict what you would like to see. But that's not always the full picture.

Search engines and social media platforms often use algorithms that personalize your search results based on your past behavior. This can create a filter bubble that only shows information that aligns with your existing beliefs and interests. This can lead to a limited perspective and keep you from being aware of and exploring different viewpoints.

When algorithms mostly show you content that confirms your existing beliefs, it can reinforce your biases. This is known as confirmation bias, and it can make it difficult to evaluate new information or consider alternative viewpoints. Confirmation bias can hinder your ability to think critically and to make informed decisions.

Another influence on the information you see is advertising. Advertisers and sponsors pay money to be at the top of your search results. So, sometimes what you see first isn't the best result. It's what a sponsor paid for you to see.



Search engines, social media platforms, and other sites you visit on the internet are constantly collecting information about you. They use this information to personalize your online engagement to show you what they predict you want to see, so that you will keep scrolling and browsing. This never-ending stream of stories allows them to keep showing you advertisements. And they make money with every ad click or view.

This practice of technology companies collecting your personal information raises privacy and security concerns. Which of your preferences, searches, opinions, or curiosities are too private to share with strangers? Do you really want technology companies, your social media followers, college admissions staff, or future employers knowing those things about you?

Review and adjust the privacy and security settings on your devices, browsers, and other technology regularly to limit the data that these companies can collect about you. Keep your personal activities private.

So, what can you do to account for the influence of algorithms and their biases? Be a critical searcher. Evaluate sources carefully. Who created them? What is their motivation and their expertise?

Seek opposing viewpoints to more fully understand a topic, and read laterally to verify information. Remember that just because something is at the top of your search results or is generated for you doesn't mean it is an accurate or preferable source or the only viewpoint. Understanding how algorithms influence online engagement empowers you to use technology wisely. Stay curious. Keep learning. And don't let algorithms and ads limit your world.

For specific examples and for more information about this topic and the entire research process, explore OSLIS.

OSLIS – Learn to Research. Research to Learn.