

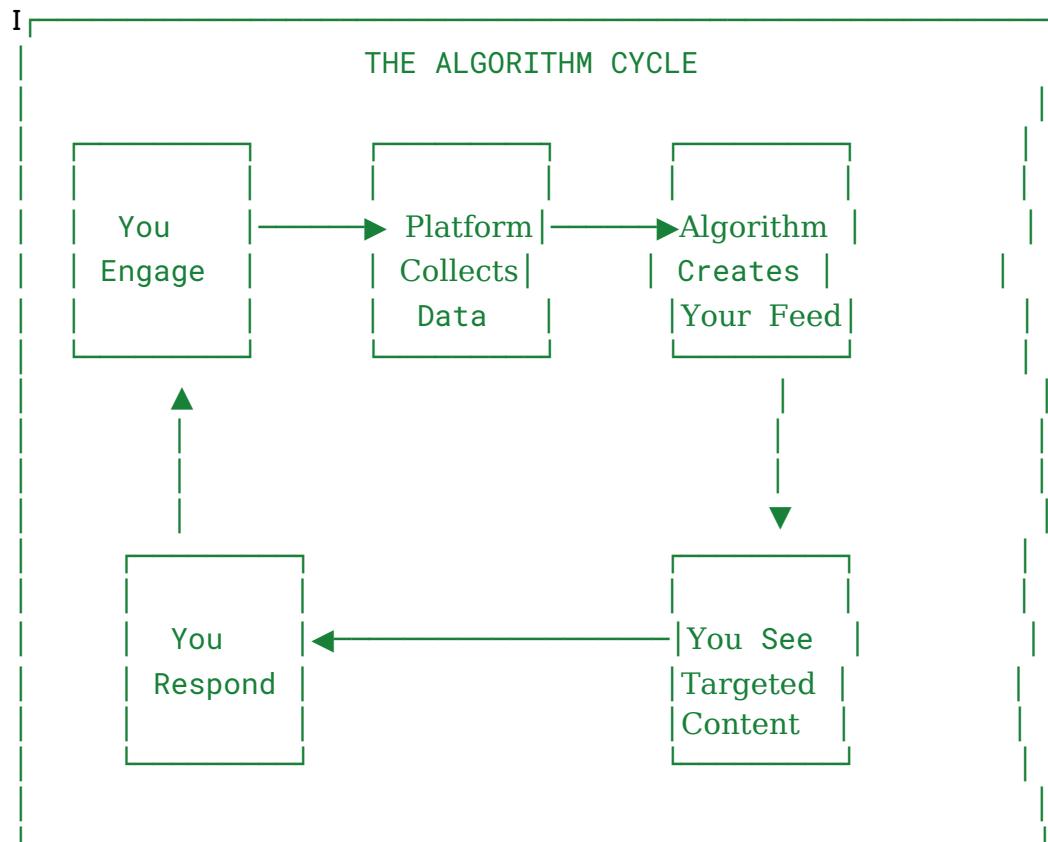
Algorithm Awareness: Understanding How Your Social Media Feed Works

WHAT IS AN ALGORITHM?

An algorithm is a set of rules or instructions that social media platforms use to decide **what content to show you** and **in what order**. Think of it like an invisible DJ that chooses what songs play next based on which ones made you dance before.

How algorithms work:

- They track EVERYTHING you do online (likes, comments, shares, time spent, pauses, searches)
- They use this data to predict what will keep you engaged longest
- They show you more content similar to what you've engaged with before
- They're designed to maximize your time on the platform



HOW ALGORITHMS SHAPE YOUR EXPERIENCE

Check the algorithm effects you've noticed:

- Getting more of the same content after engaging with something once
- Feeling like your feed "knows" what you're thinking about
- Seeing increasingly extreme versions of content you've shown interest in
- Noticing your mood change based on what appears in your feed
- Finding it hard to see different viewpoints on your feed
- Spending more time on the app than you intended
- Finding it difficult to stop scrolling
- Seeing ads related to things you've only talked about
- Other: _____

My main platforms and what they seem to show me most:

Platform Content That Dominates My Feed

Instagram

TikTok

YouTube

Snapchat

Other:

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF ALGORITHMS

Algorithms aren't just showing you random content—they're specifically designed to trigger emotional responses.

Content that triggers strong emotions gets prioritized because:

- Emotional reactions = more engagement
- More engagement = more time on the platform
- More time = more ads = more money for the platform

The emotions algorithms often target:

Emotion	How Algorithms Use It	Potential Impact
Outrage	Controversial content that makes you angry gets more engagement	Can increase stress and negative worldview

Fear	Threatening content keeps you checking for updates	Can increase anxiety and worry
Insecurity	Content that makes you compare yourself to others	Can lower self-esteem and body image
Belonging	Content that makes you feel part of a group	Can reinforce in-group/out-group thinking
Validation	Content that confirms what you already believe	Can create "filter bubbles" and polarization

Reflection: Which emotions do you notice your feed trying to trigger in you?

ALGORITHM EXPERIMENT: FEED INVESTIGATION

Instructions: For 5-10 minutes, scroll through one of your social media feeds and analyze what you see.

Platform I'm analyzing: _____

Content categories I noticed: (check all that apply)

- Entertainment/humor
- News/current events
- Lifestyle/fashion
- Fitness/health
- Gaming
- Relationship content
- Educational content
- Celebrity/influencer content
- Political content
- Other: _____

Emotions I felt while scrolling:

Topics that appeared most frequently:

Surprising patterns I noticed:

HOW ALGORITHMS CAN AFFECT YOUR MENTAL HEALTH

The Spiral Effect: Algorithms can create feedback loops that intensify over time:

1. You engage with content that triggers a certain emotion (interest, insecurity, anger)
2. The algorithm shows you more of that content
3. Your feelings intensify as you see more extreme versions
4. You become more sensitized to that type of content
5. The real world begins to seem less stimulating by comparison

Check any effects you've experienced:

- Feeling worse about yourself after scrolling
- Increased anxiety or worry about world events
- FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out) when seeing others' activities
- Trouble concentrating on real-life activities
- Comparing yourself to unrealistic standards
- Feeling like you need to check your phone constantly
- Getting drawn into online conflicts or drama
- Other: _____

The strongest negative effect social media has on me is:

TAKING CONTROL OF YOUR ALGORITHM

You can influence what your algorithm shows you! Try these strategies:

Reset Your Algorithm:

- Unfollow accounts that make you feel bad
- Click "not interested" on content you don't want
- Pause and skip content instead of engaging with clickbait
- Search for and engage with positive, helpful content
- Take breaks from platforms that affect your mood negatively

Train Your Algorithm:

- Actively engage ONLY with content that benefits you
- Set time limits for apps that tend to pull you in
- Follow diverse perspectives to avoid echo chambers
- Be intentional about what you search for and click on
- Remember: every like, comment, and pause is a vote for more similar content

My algorithm reset plan:

ALGORITHM AWARENESS CHALLENGE

For the next week, try these awareness exercises:

1. **Notice Before You Scroll:** Before opening a social media app, ask:
 - What am I hoping to get from this app right now?
 - How am I feeling before I start scrolling?
 - How much time do I want to spend here?
2. **Notice While You Scroll:** As you use the app, ask:
 - What emotions is this content triggering in me?
 - Do I feel better or worse than when I started?
 - Am I seeing diverse perspectives or more of the same?
3. **Notice After You Scroll:** When you finish, ask:
 - How do I feel now compared to before?
 - Did I find what I was looking for?
 - Was this time well spent?

My observations from this challenge:

CREATING A HEALTHIER DIGITAL DIET

Just like food, the media you consume affects how you feel. Design a healthier content diet:

Content that makes me feel good/inspired:

Content that makes me feel bad/drained:

Three changes I can make to improve my digital diet:

1.

2.

3.

Instead of mindless scrolling, I could:

ALGORITHM REALITY CHECK

Remember these truths about social media algorithms:

- They're designed to maximize engagement, not your wellbeing
- What you see is filtered, not a complete or accurate picture of reality
- The "perfect" content you see is often heavily edited or completely fake
- Strong emotional reactions are specifically targeted and amplified
- You have the power to influence your algorithm through your choices
- The real world is richer and more nuanced than any algorithm can show

The most important thing I've learned about algorithms is:

MY DIGITAL EMPOWERMENT PLAN

Based on what I've learned, I will:

1. Be more aware of how I feel when using: _____
 2. Set healthier limits by: _____
 3. Train my algorithm to show me more: _____
 4. Reduce my exposure to: _____
 5. Remember that algorithms are designed to: _____
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REAL VS. DIGITAL WORLD COMPARISON

Instructions: Compare how the real world differs from algorithmic social media.

In Algorithm-Driven Social Media

Content is selected to maximize

In the Real World

Experiences happen naturally and randomly

engagement

Everything is designed to keep you scrolling

Life has natural stopping points

You see an edited, filtered version of reality

You see the unfiltered, complete picture

Extreme content gets amplified

Extreme views are usually less common

You mostly see content from people like you

You encounter diverse perspectives naturally

Success is measured in likes and followers

Success has many different definitions

One way I can bring more "real world" into my digital experience:

Remember: You are more than what you like, share, and scroll through. The algorithm knows certain things about you—but it doesn't know your full humanity, your potential, or your future.

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