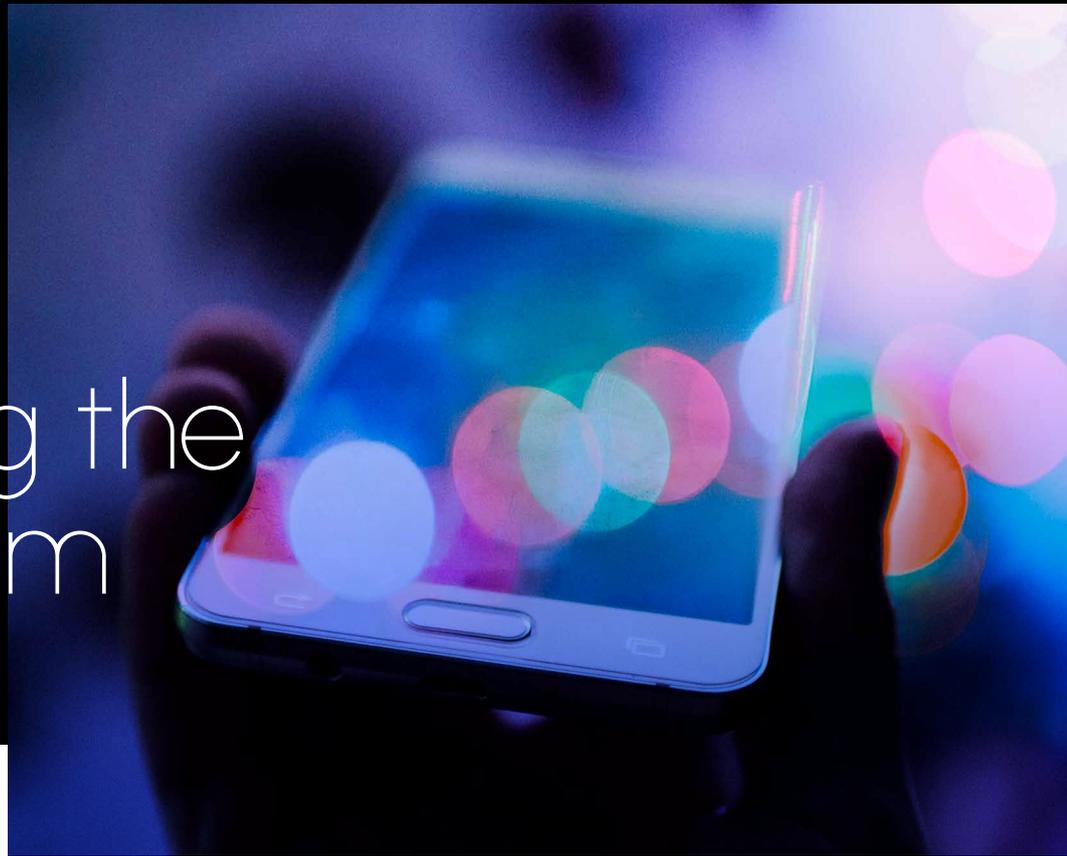


Curating the algorithm



What are social media algorithms?

Social media algorithms are software systems that are programmed by humans in order to analyse user data and in turn deliver content that users are more likely to engage or interact with. These algorithms determine what users see, guided by a balance between content that individual users are interested in and commercial platform objectives such as advertising revenue. However while they direct particular content towards particular users, they do not entirely control what users see.



How do social media platforms determine what you see?

“They’re taking data points... personalisation happens off those data points”

- **Agata Stepnik, University of Sydney**

All of your interactions on social media become data points, and these data points are used by algorithms to find similar users and show you content they engage with. The data points that social media algorithms use include content that you:

- Spend time looking at
- Partially view (for example videos that start but you don’t watch until the end)
- Scroll past or skip
- Like, favourite, or otherwise react to
- Comment on
- Share

Social media algorithms also use data points from people that you interact with when determining what content to show you. Taking in all of this information, an algorithm aligns you with particular interests, engagement patterns, social connections, and demographics in order to then determine things that you might want to see.

How can you change what you see?

"If you want a bit more diversity though...then you're going to need to start seeking different information."

- Agata Stepanik, University of Sydney

You can change the data points that social media algorithms use by changing the content that you interact with. In other words, by feeding the algorithm deliberately you can increase or decrease the amount of particular kinds of content that you see. If you want to see more of something, you need to search it out. If you want to see less of something, you need to replace it with something else. The strategies are similar either way.



How can you become a curator of your social media algorithms

Use platform search functions. If you want to see more of something, search for it. If you want to see less of something, search for something else. Use search terms that indicate what you want to see – sports, celebrities, video games, films, books, memes.

Only interact with things that you are genuinely interested in. Mindlessly scrolling is an easy thing to do, but if you aren't paying attention to what you're looking at, you could be feeding the wrong information to an algorithm. If you're sick of seeing cat videos, you'll have to scroll past a few for it to get the idea.

Unfollow accounts that show things that you aren't interested in. If you've been using a platform for a long time, your interests might change. To convince an algorithm to show you different content, you need to follow only accounts from which you want to see content.

Use "not interested" features. Sometimes you'll get caught in a loop where you are seeing content because an algorithm has determined that you are interested in it and will continue to share similar content even if you are only showing small amounts of interest. Lots of platforms have options for you to explicitly tell them that you want to see less of a particular kind of content.

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