User Manipulation

1 min

In the modern social media landscape, users consume much information. While much of this feels as if it is from decisions made by the user, AI plays a huge role in directing the new content users receive. As we may expect, social media and content-sharing platforms need users to remain engaged for their platforms to grow and flourish. One way to do this is by employing various algorithms and AI technologies to help feed new content to users.

As with all things AI, this is a double-edged sword. The platform can learn what users like and help provide them with additional content.

For example, a user creates a new account on "ShareIt," a new, hot social media app. After signing up, they begin to follow and subscribe to various accounts related to art and drawing. After interacting with these accounts, viewing similar accounts, and engaging with these accounts' contents, the "ShareIt" application slowly begins to recognize this user's affinity to art.

Given a little more data, the next time the user opens "ShareIt," it recommends several new art accounts the user hadn't seen. Because of these new accounts, the user continues to interact with the app. Soon, this user's account is wholly engaged with art accounts and enters a bubble. Because of the large amount of art, that's all the user sees.

While this may not seem serious, this algorithmic behavior can have severe impacts, sometimes detrimental to the user. When these algorithms push users to dangerous or extreme ends, we refer to this as "Algorithmic Radicalization." Users are pushed into "echo chambers" or bubbles where their ideas are only present.

These echo chambers function to cut off people from other views and ideas. While this may not be concerning with things such as art or cat photos, it can be dangerous in other aspects of life.