The impact of YouTube’s algorithms

Ever had the problem of running out of videos to watch on YouTube? Me neither, until recently.

# Intro

In my opinion the AI used for youtube's algorithms is scary good, as it knows what you want to watch even before you know what you want to watch.

# My experience

Recently I've tried de-google-ifying my phone, which includes using alternative apps for services like YouTube or Twitter. Only then I realised how good youtube's recommendation algorithm actually is, as it picks up on my viewing behaviour and recommends new videos (which I actually enjoy).

However, the de-googled YouTube app alternative I'm using now only takes the default YouTube algorithm, so it doesn't know what I like or not. With this app I've spent noticeably less time watching YouTube videos, which is not a bad thing.

I feel as if youtube's algorithm is designed to be as addictive as possible to maximize view time on the platform, which makes sense from a business perspective. Many people don’t even notice that the algorithm is doing that because it’s so subtle. Before I made the switch to the de-googled app, I could easily spend several hours every day watching YouTube videos because interesting topics kept appearing in my recommendations. Now I still regularly watch YouTube videos, but the time has been reduced to below 30 minutes every day because at some point there are no more interesting topics in the recommendations. Because of this, I only watch a recommended video every so often, but I mostly open the app because there's something I am actively searching for.

# Ways to "solve" this "problem"

I think YouTube is best experienced without the algorithm stuffing your face with videos you might be interested in (but don't really need). You can do this in a roundabout way, for example by only watching YouTube in incognito mode. *Logging out does not work because you still get a customised list of recommendations because of cookies*.

The downside of this method is that it's hard to keep track of certain channels you want to follow/support, which is where the alternative YouTube apps like [NewPipe](https://newpipe.net/) come in. With these apps you can still follow your favourite channels and get a subscription feed, so you're notified when your favourite channel uploads a new video.

These YouTube alternatives often add more features as well which are normally behind a paywall such as downloading videos, playing videos while the screen is locked and adblocking. Of course, we can blame everything on the "evil big corporations", but we also play a part in this. The ads on YouTube have been getting out of hand lately, with more and longer ads getting more common. YouTube is kind of shooting itself in the foot with that, as more people will start using adblockers which means they need to increase the amount of ads again to compensate for that which turns into a self-fuelling fire burning a hole in youtube's pockets.

Sadly, using these apps also comes with a risk, namely youtube's lawyers. For example, [YouTube Vanced](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/YouTube_Vanced), an alternative app with similar features got sent a cease-and-desist letter by google. Because of this, they had to stop developing and distributing the app. This forced the users of the app to look for alternative solutions.

# The moral issue

Using alternative apps for YouTube can be a moral grey area, as you're technically stealing or freeloading off of YouTube. I personally am fine with it however, as I would use an adblocker anyways and I experience the background playback as more of a nuisance than a positive feature. I also don't think the few people who actually use these alternatives have a very big impact on YouTube’s total revenue, which was about 28.8 BILLION dollars in 2021 according to [this website](https://www.businessofapps.com/data/youtube-statistics/).

# The solution

In my opinion YouTube should have an option to disable customised recommendations, as this could help so many people be more productive.

Stopping the algorithm altogether can also stop people from getting addicted or dragged down conspiracy rabbit holes as described in [this](https://youtu.be/FLoR2Spftwg) Zondag met Lubach video. This would save us a lot of trouble from self-proclaimed "researchers" who the algorithm put in a so-called "echo chamber" filled with misinformation.

The cost of the loss in views could be offset by making paid subscription plans. However, I don’t think that many people will pay to turn **off** a feature which will technically make their experience on the platform worse.

Sadly, putting a stop to the algorithm is not likely to happen as it is a lose-lose situation for YouTube, as they will lose both money from ads and statistics for investors (which means even more money). Because of this I'm not expecting this to be a "vanilla" YouTube feature anytime soon if no regulations are put in place. Until then, I'll happily keep using the alternatives.