

Media Literacy

or rather

**understanding how media, technology, and the internet work
and becoming a free thinker**



Dr. Gözel Shakeri

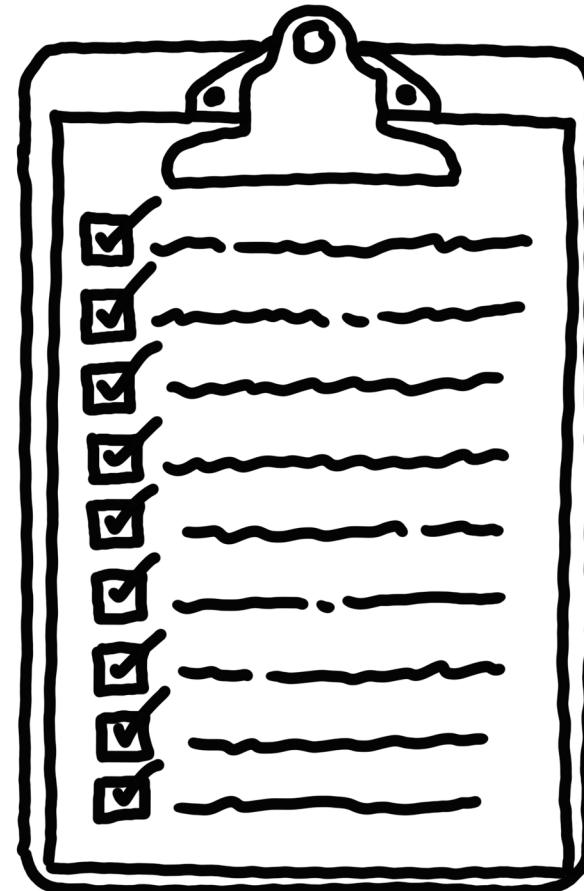


Gözel Shakeri

- 2015-2020: Ph.D. in Human-Computer Interaction
- 2020-2022: Post-doc in Sustainable Digitalisation
- 2023: Junior Professor in Sustainable Digitalisation
- Since 2024: Consultant in Sustainable Digitalisation

Today's goals

- 1) **Social media algorithms:** how they work, how they make money, and how they impact individuals
- 2) **Behavioural manipulation** and the importance of **media literacy**
- 3) Strategies to become a **free thinker** and curate a healthier media diet



Question 1

Have you found
yourself a little bit
angrier, more
confused, or more lost
than usual as of late?



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Have you found yourself a little bit angrier, more confused, or more lost than usual as of late?

Question 2

Have you “lost” friends and family members to polarisation, radicalisation, and fake news?



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Question 3

Do you need influencers to tell you what to think?



(1)

Social media algorithms:

how they work, how they make money, and how they impact individuals

on the example of YouTube

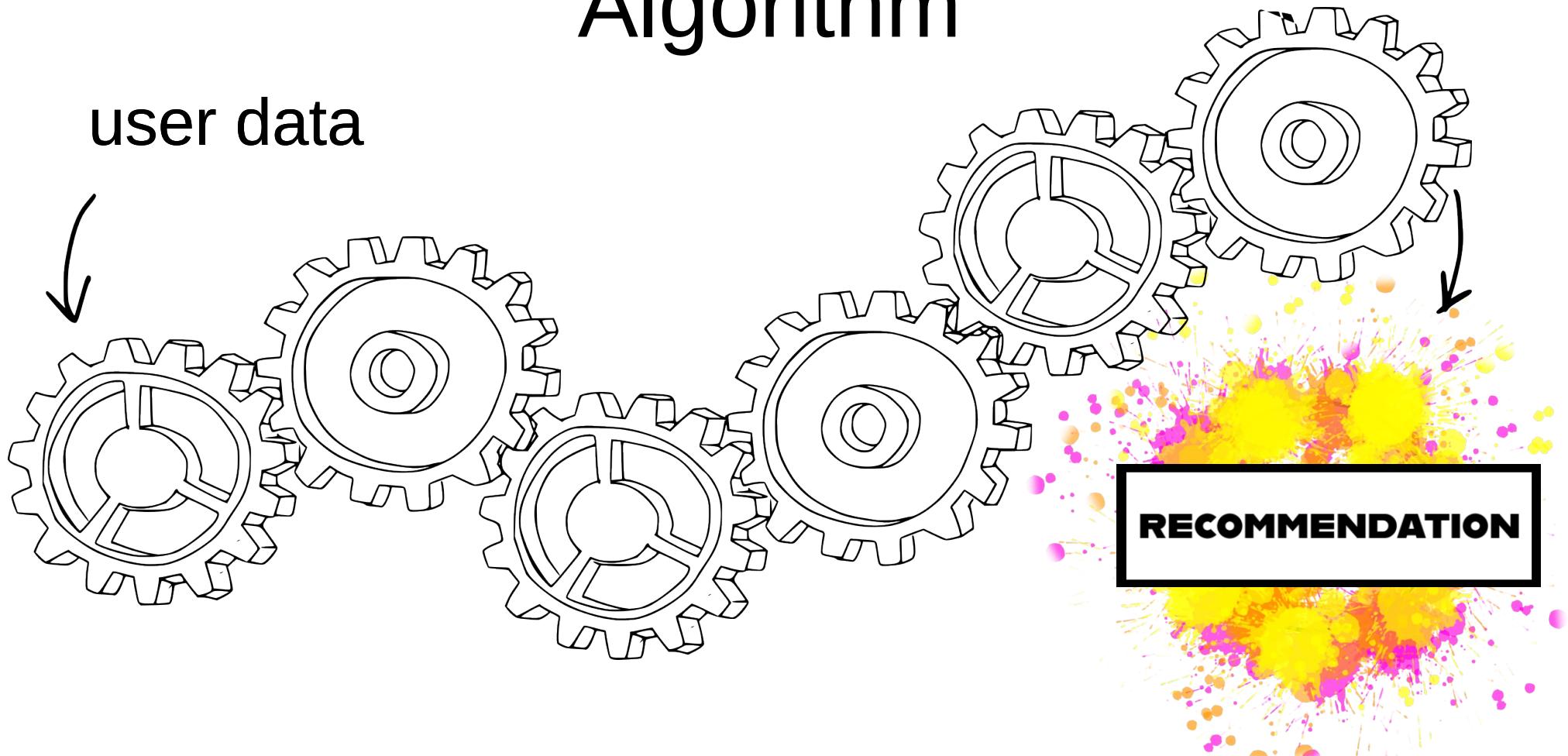


Meet: Bernadette

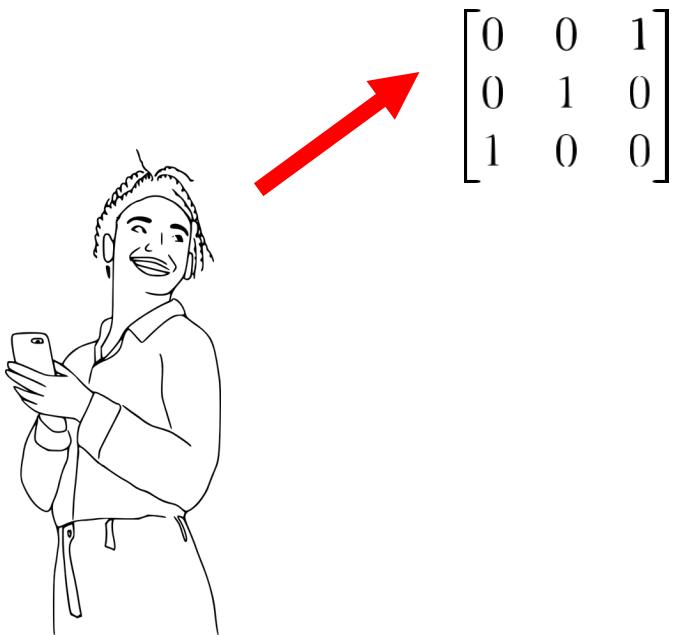


- Problem-solver
- Lives in Strasbourg
- In her 30s
- Hates Wednesdays
- Loves
 - cooking,
 - trekking,
 - interior décor,
 - gaming

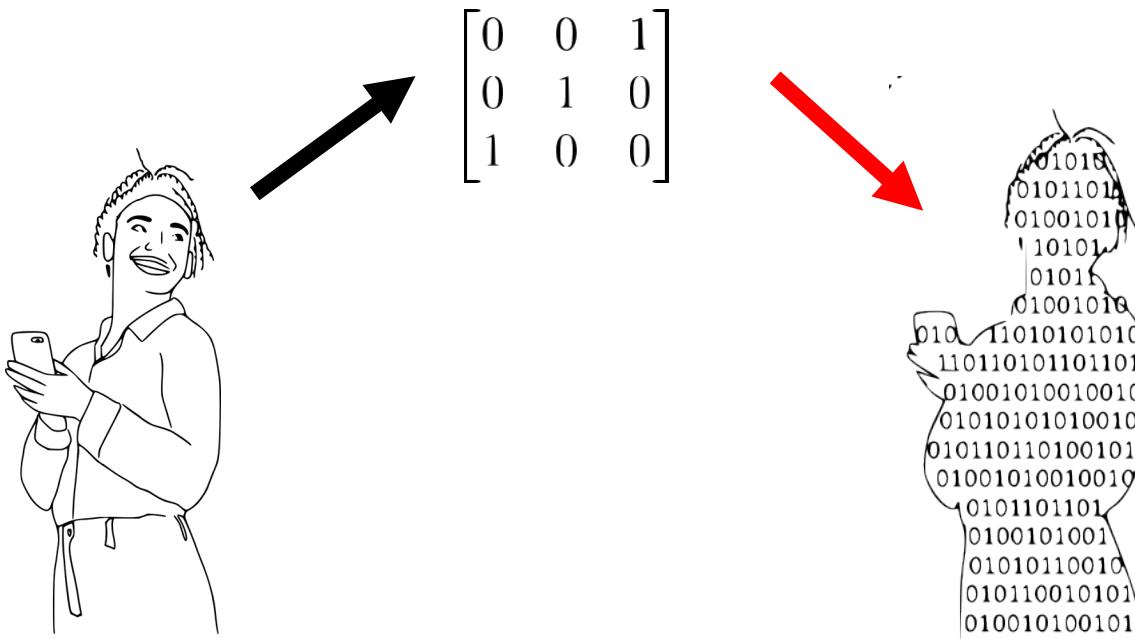
YouTube's Recommendation Algorithm



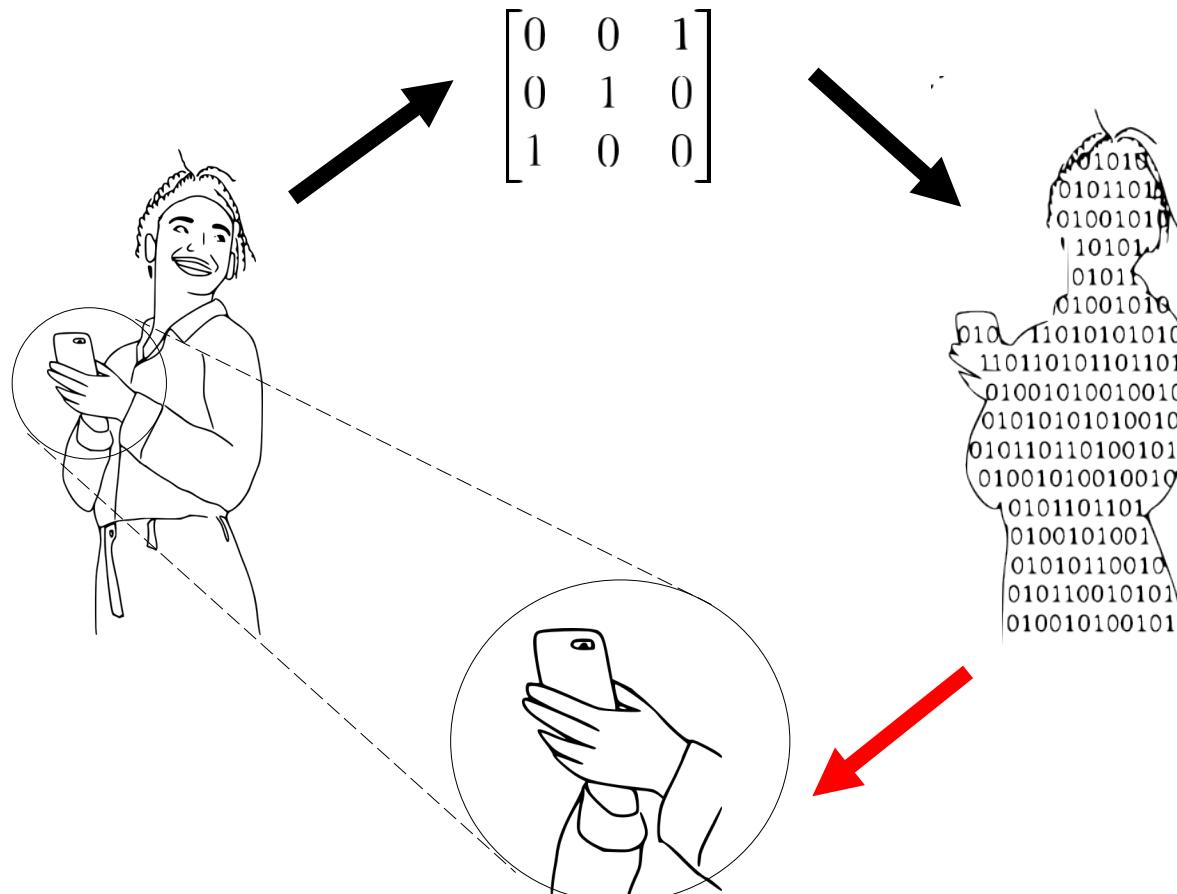
1) Data Extraction: Turning Our Behaviour into Data



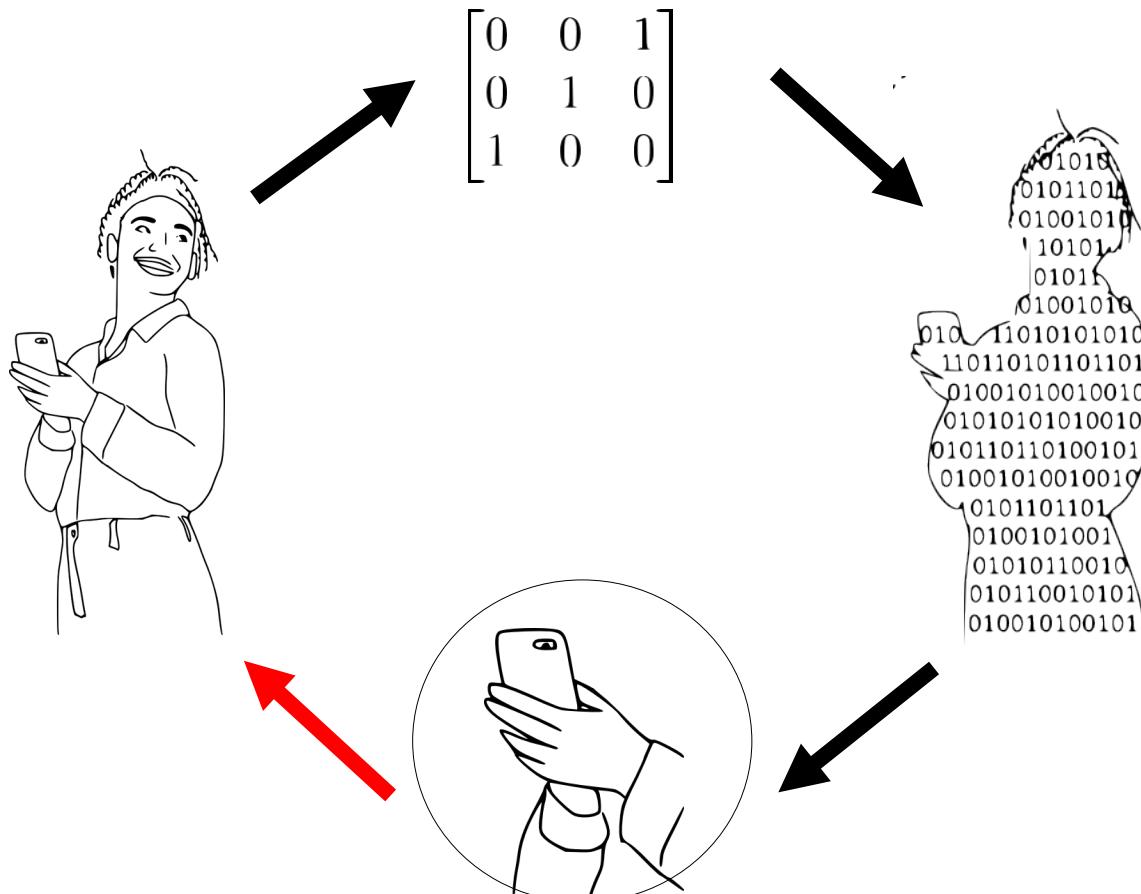
2) Data Analysis: Identifying Our Patterns



3) Recommendation: Predicting Our Future Behaviour

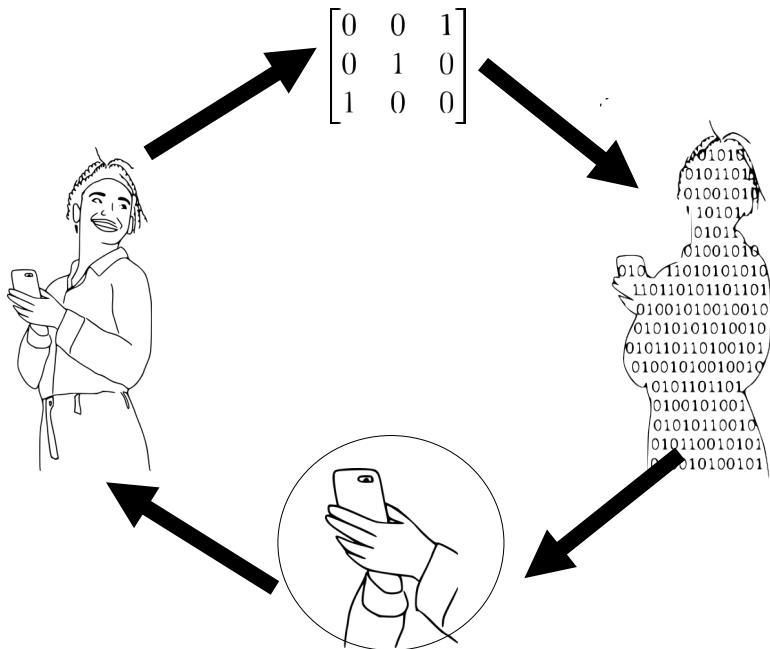


4) Maximising Engagement: Shaping Us



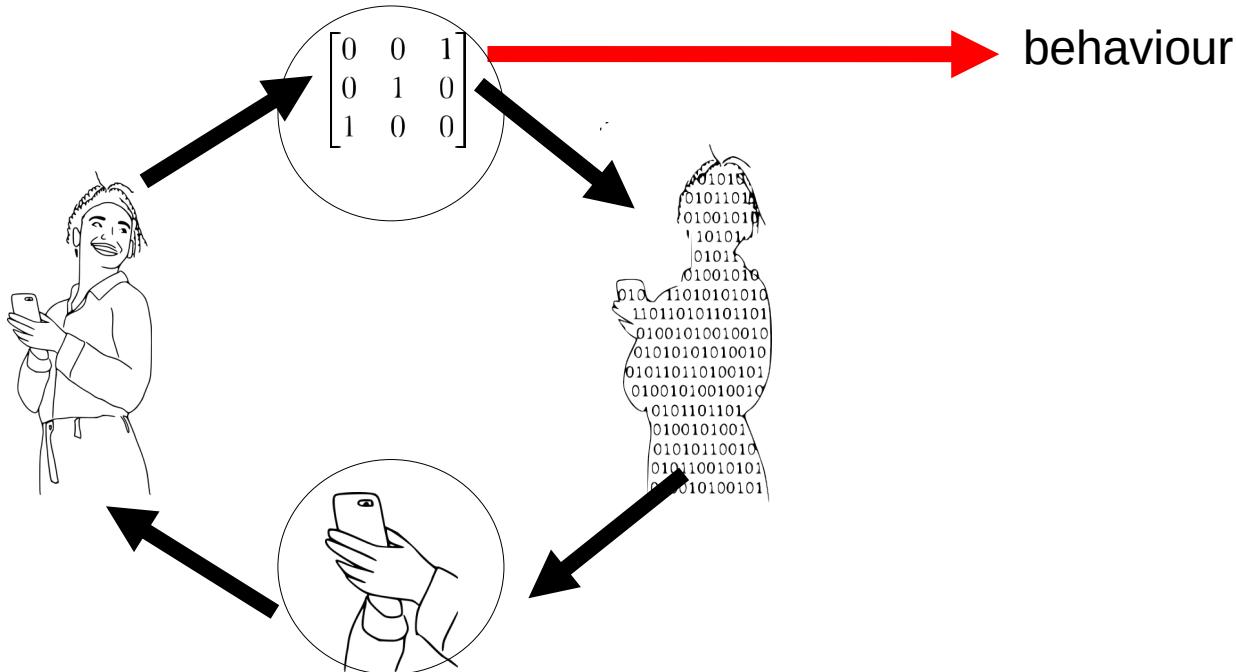
YouTube's Digital Economy

- Reminder: the goal of the YouTube algorithm is to **keep you watching**.
- YouTube's business model: selling our data.



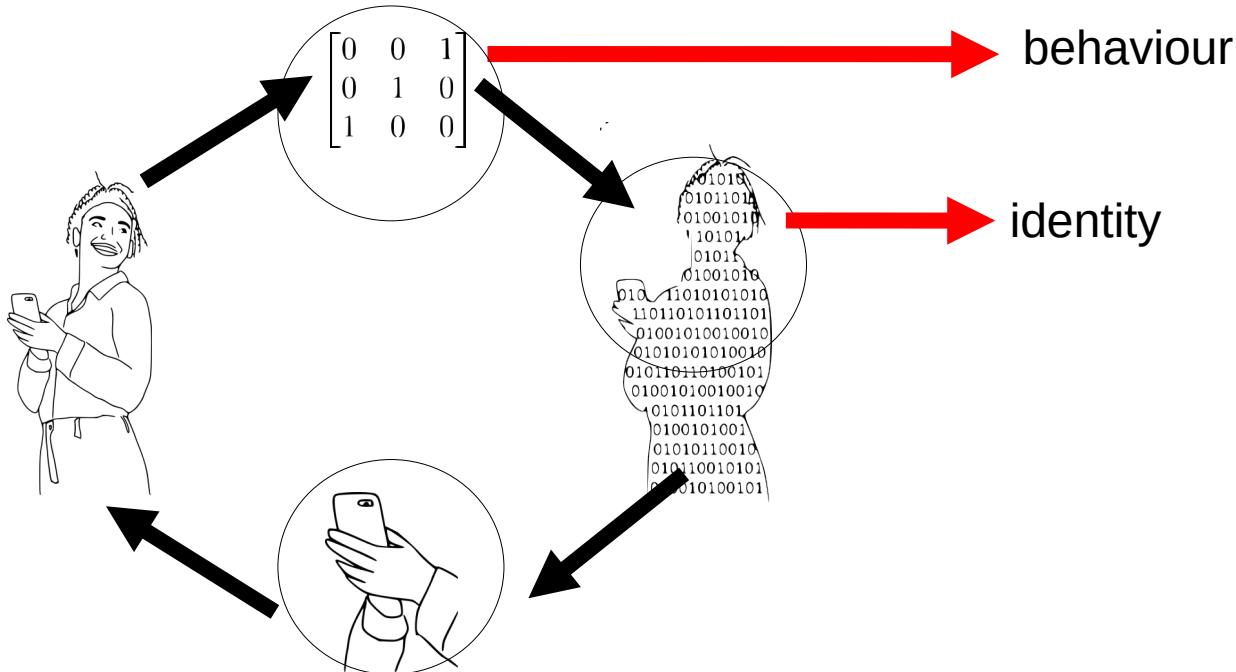
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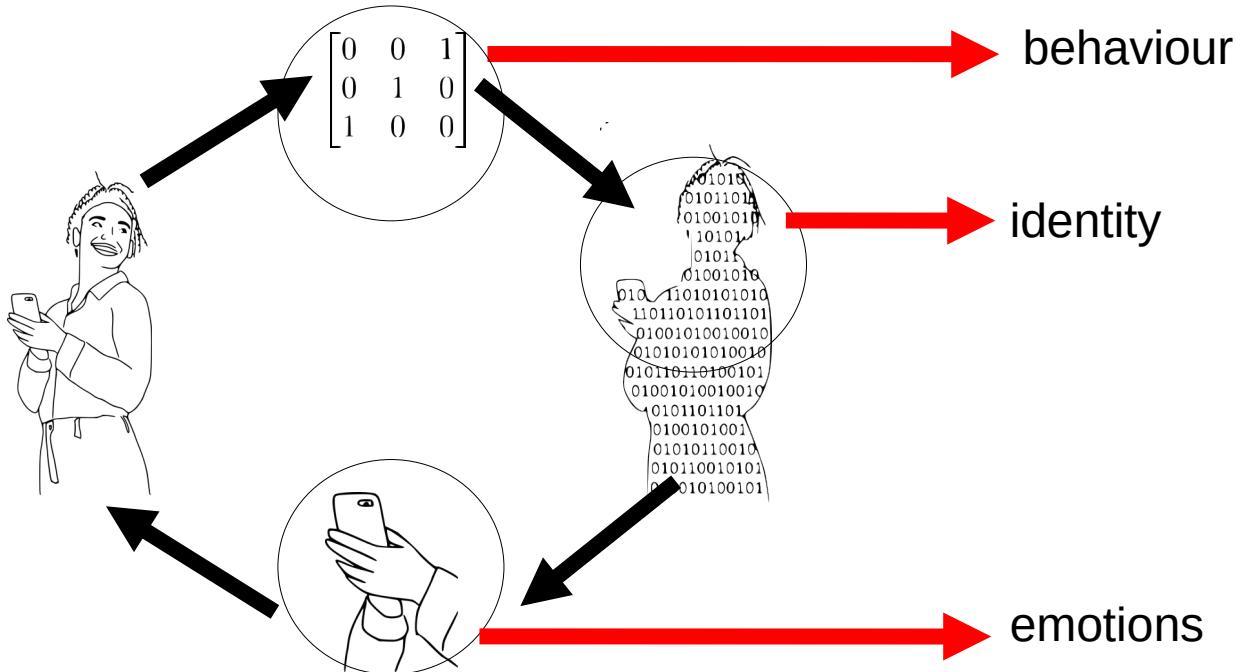
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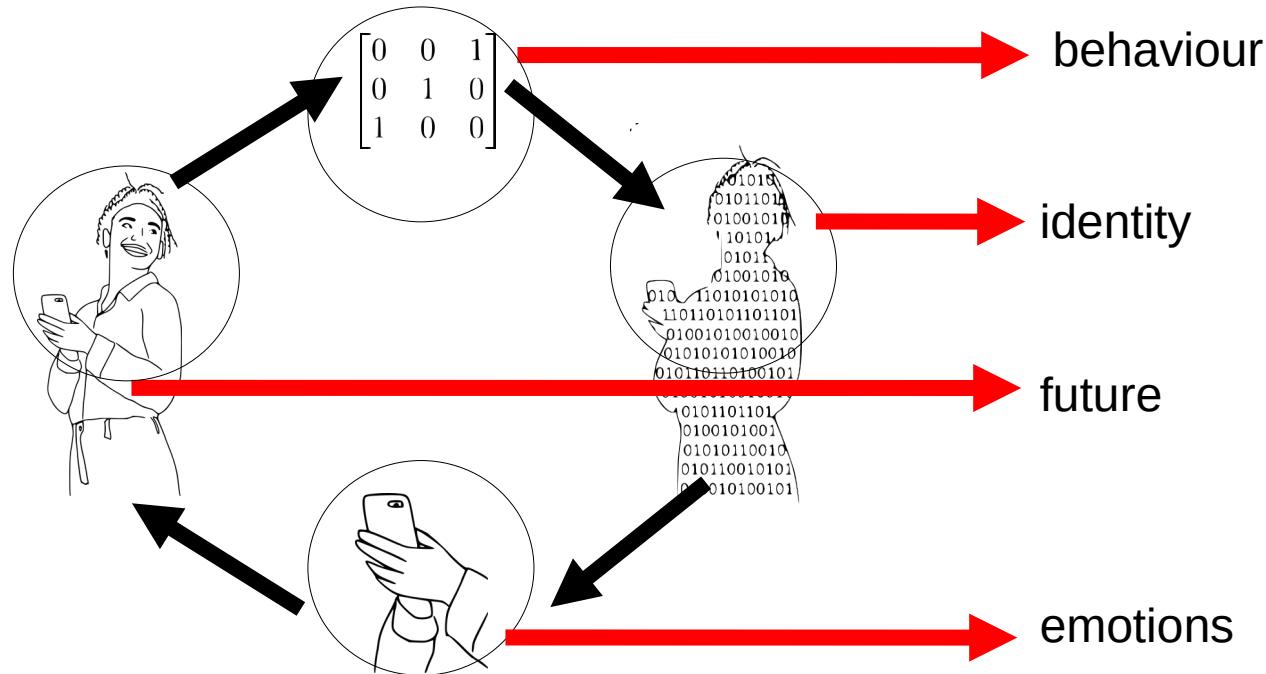
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YouTube's Digital Economy

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(2)

Behavioural manipulation and the importance of media literacy

on the example of YouTube



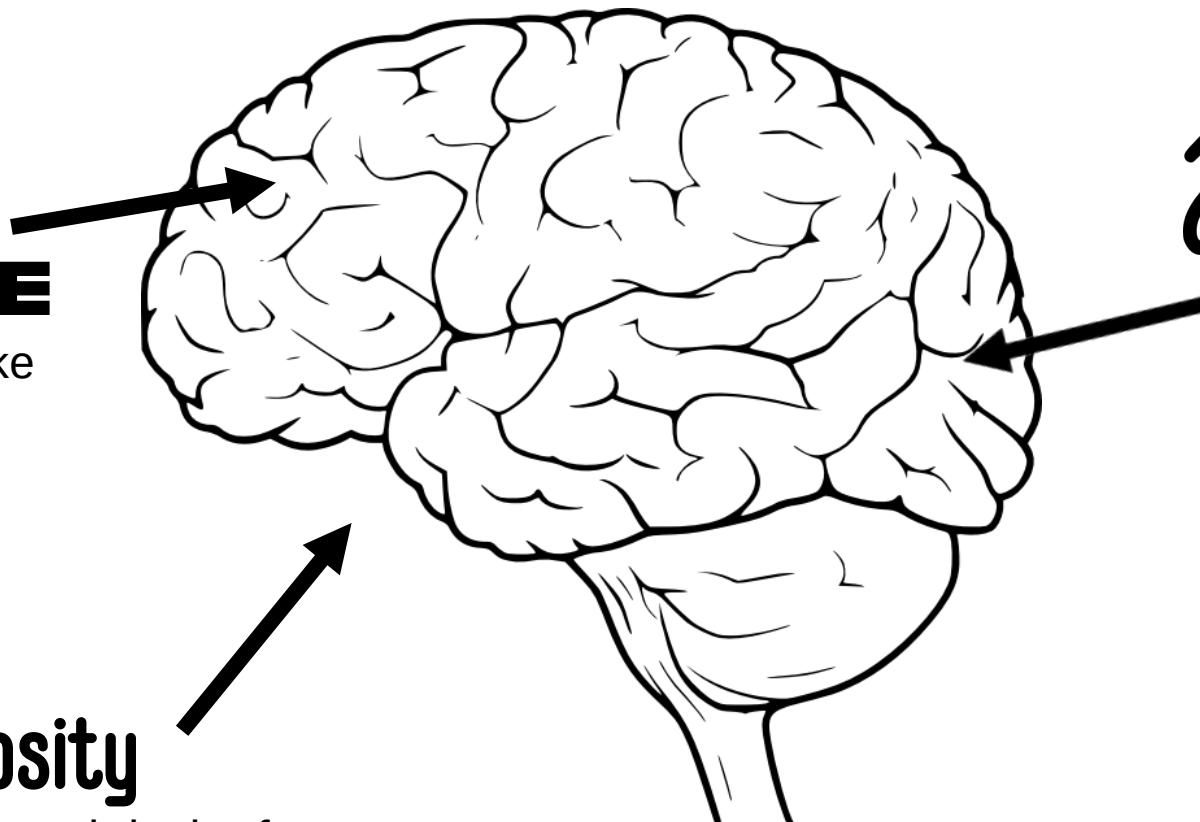
Triggering Emotions

OUTRAGE

designed to provoke
and pull us in

Curiosity

plays on our natural desire for
closure and surprise



joy
keeps us
coming back

Triggering Emotions

OUTRAGE

designed to provoke
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Emotionally charged content performs better. A feedback loop is created where **emotional manipulation** isn't just common – it's the norm.

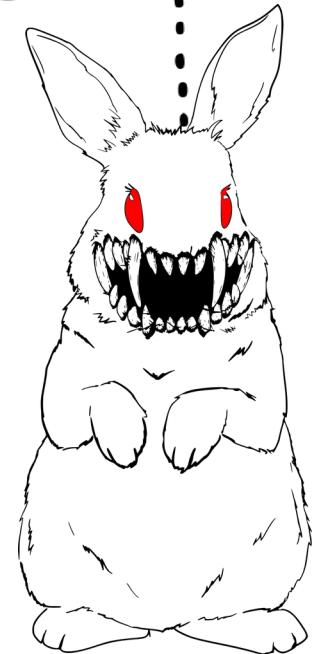
Rabbit Hole Effect



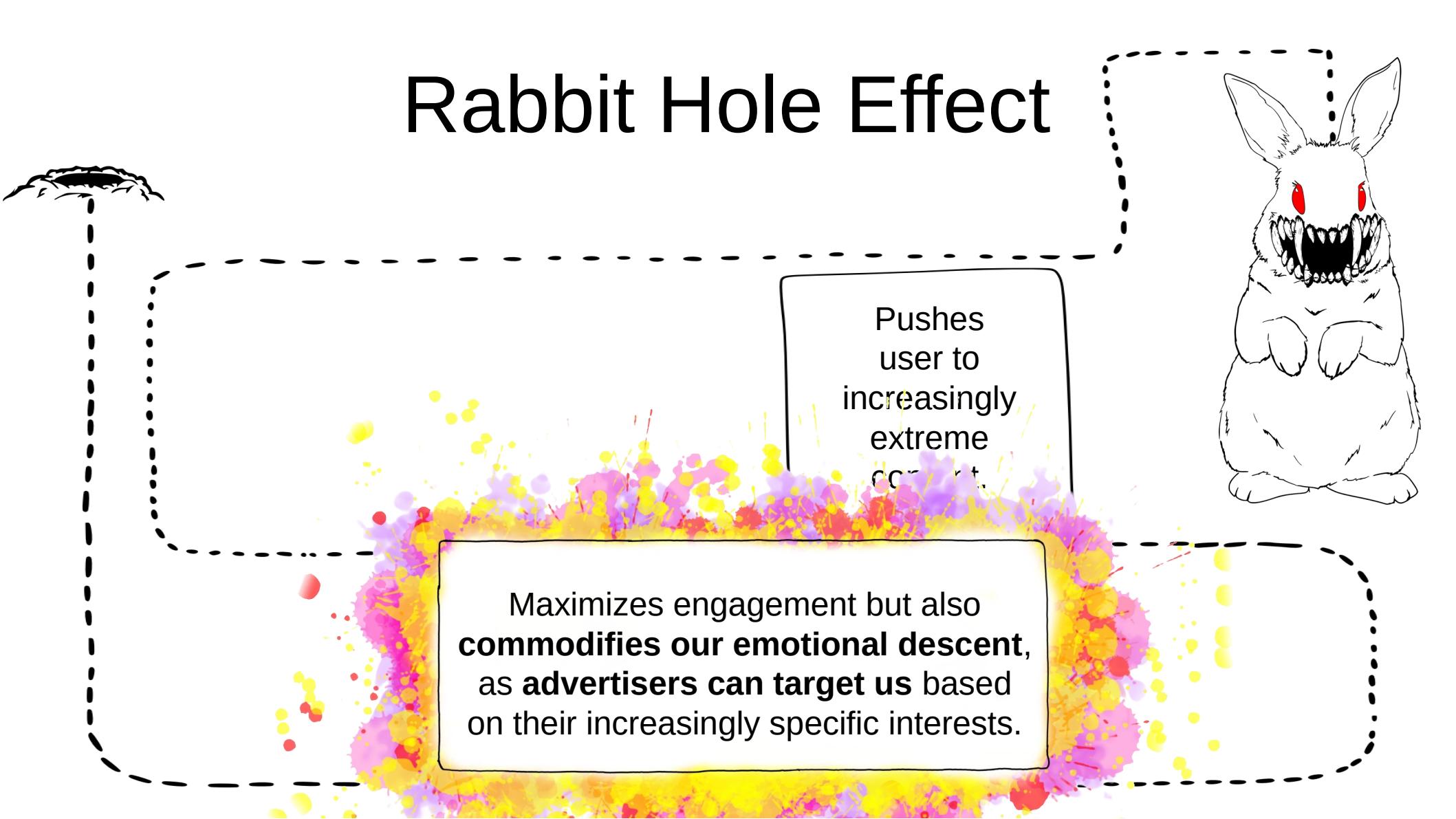
Pushes user to increasingly extreme content.

wellness-to-fascism pipeline

loneliness-to-fascism pipeline



Rabbit Hole Effect

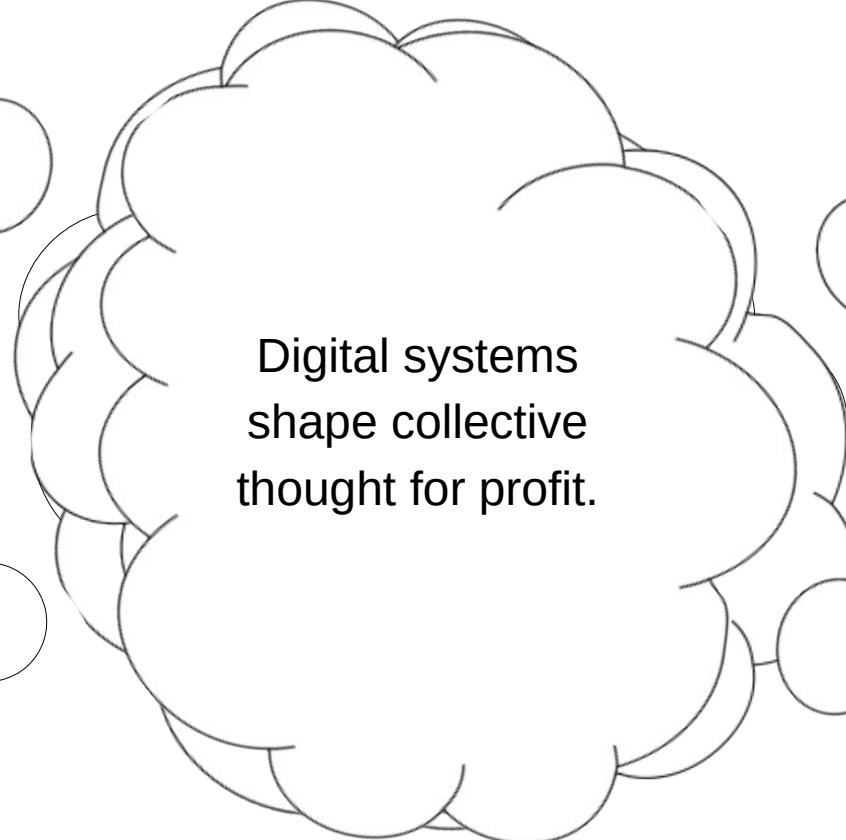


A colorful illustration of a rabbit hole. At the top left is a small hole in the ground. A dashed line forms a U-shape, leading down into the hole. Inside the hole, there is a colorful, abstract base resembling a garden or field with yellow, pink, and red dots. A white rectangular box is centered on this base. To the right of the box is a black and white line drawing of a rabbit sitting upright, looking towards the viewer with a slightly open mouth. The entire scene is enclosed within a dashed rectangular border.

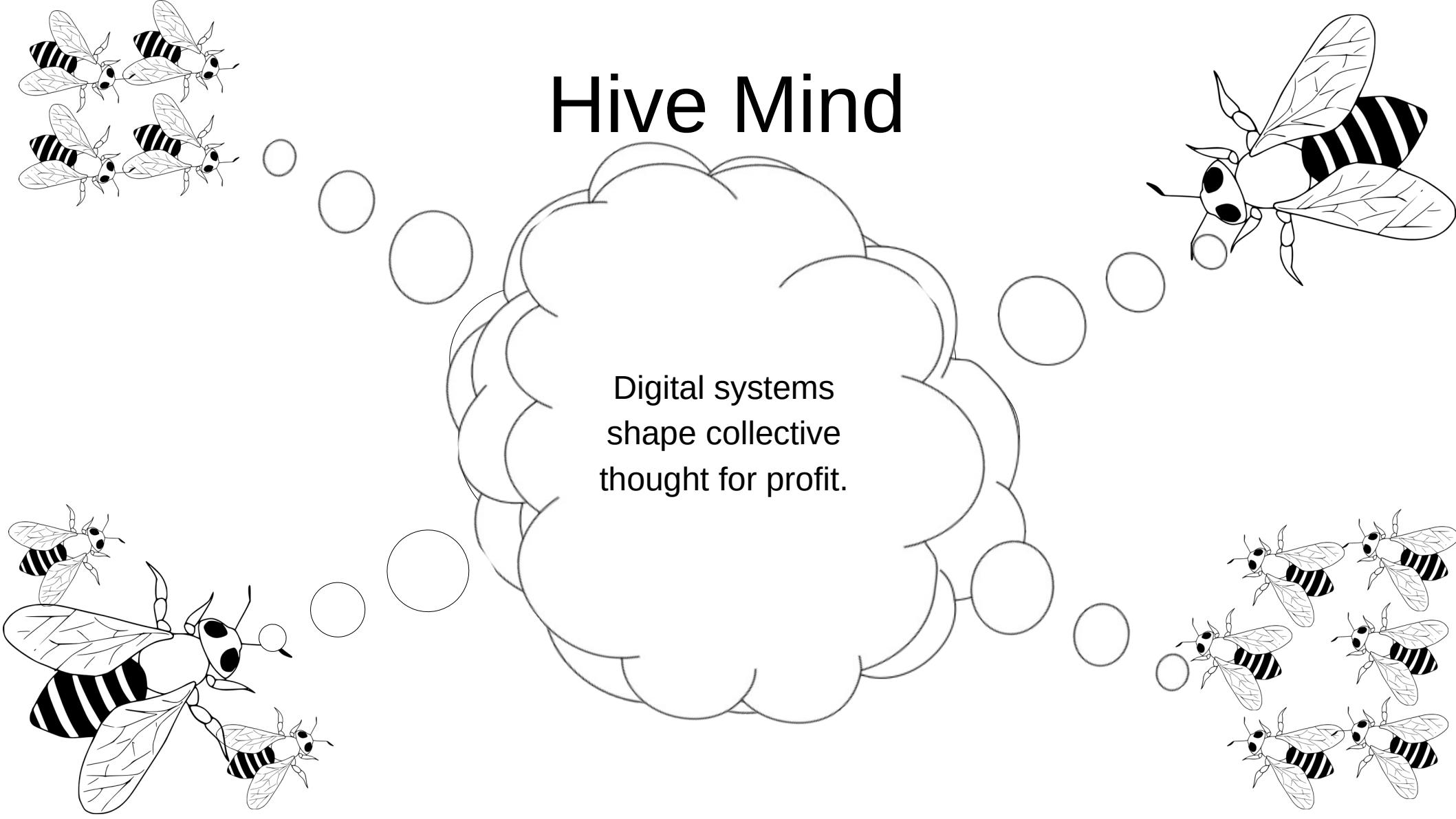
Pushes user to increasingly extreme content

Maximizes engagement but also **commodifies our emotional descent**, as **advertisers can target us based** on their increasingly specific interests.

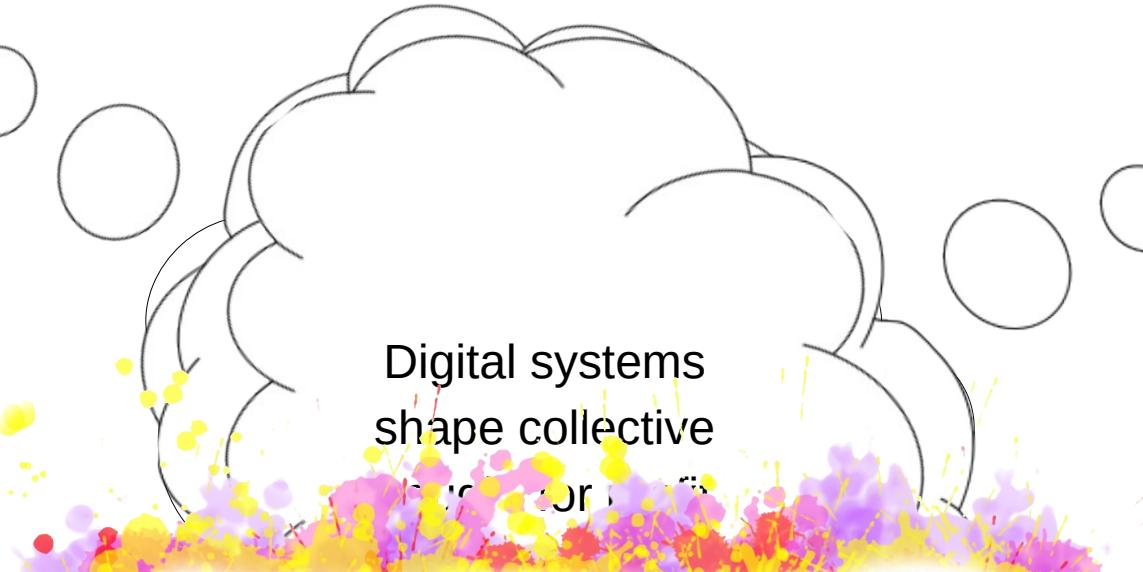
Hive Mind



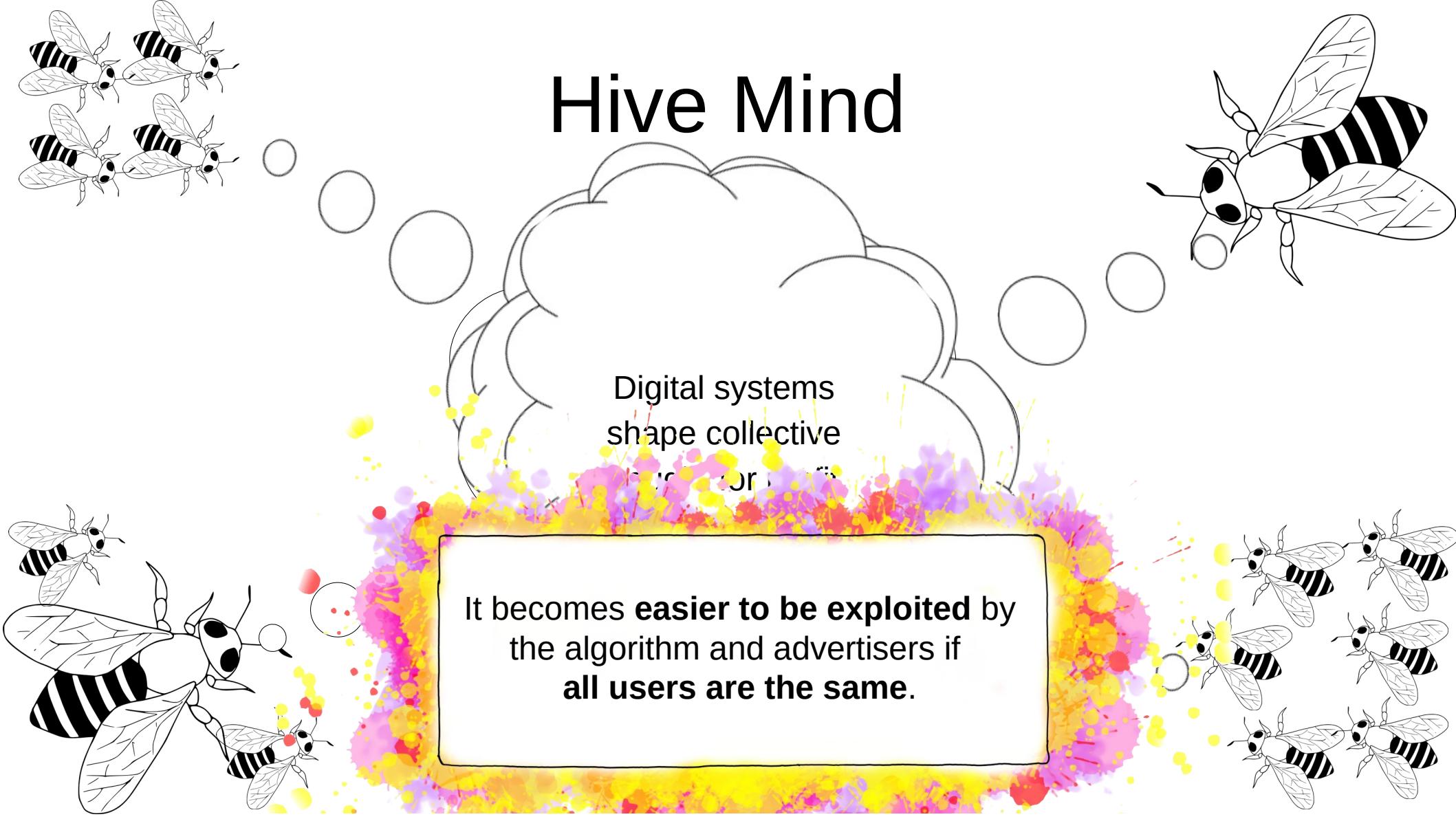
Digital systems
shape collective
thought for profit.



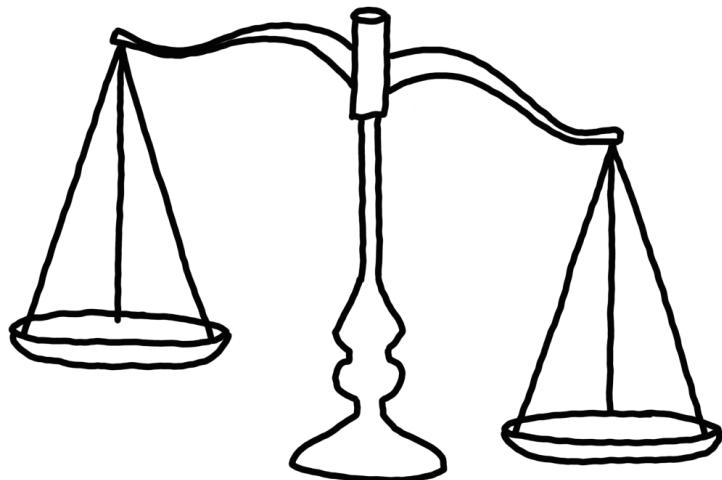
Hive Mind



It becomes **easier to be exploited** by
the algorithm and advertisers if
all users are the same.



Potential Risks & Consequences



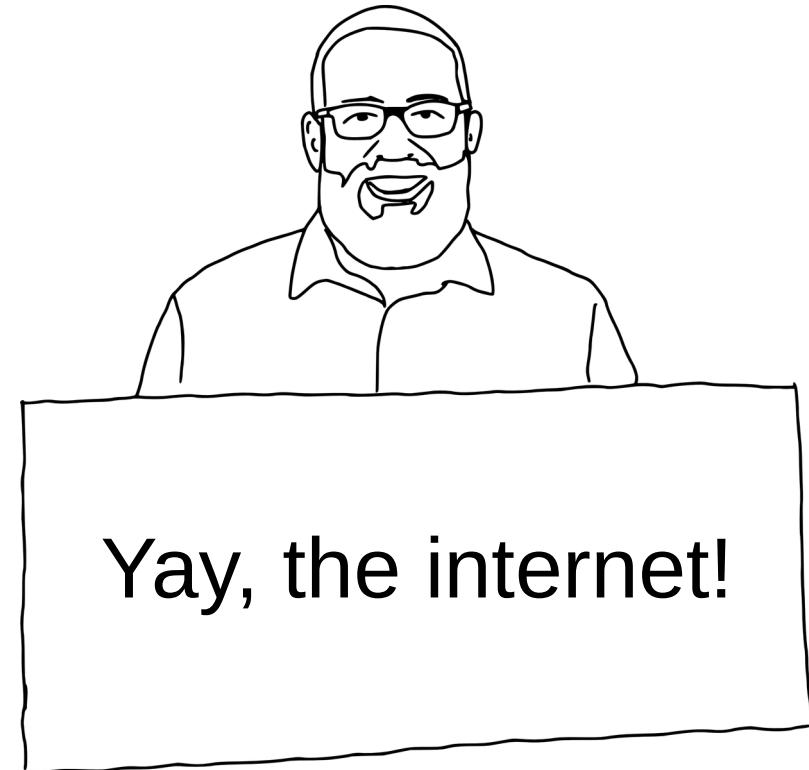
- Radicalisation, polarisation, and division
- Mental health impacts (e.g. peer pressure, risky behaviour)
- Normalisation of extremism and violence (e.g. toxic mob mentality)
- Manipulation of behaviour (e.g. addiction and overuse)
- Commercial exploitation of vulnerable users
- Erosion of trust (e.g. spread of misinformation)

It's complicated!



I love the internet

- Access to Knowledge(s)
- Global Connection
- Empowerment and Autonomy
- Entertainment and Joy



I love the internet, but

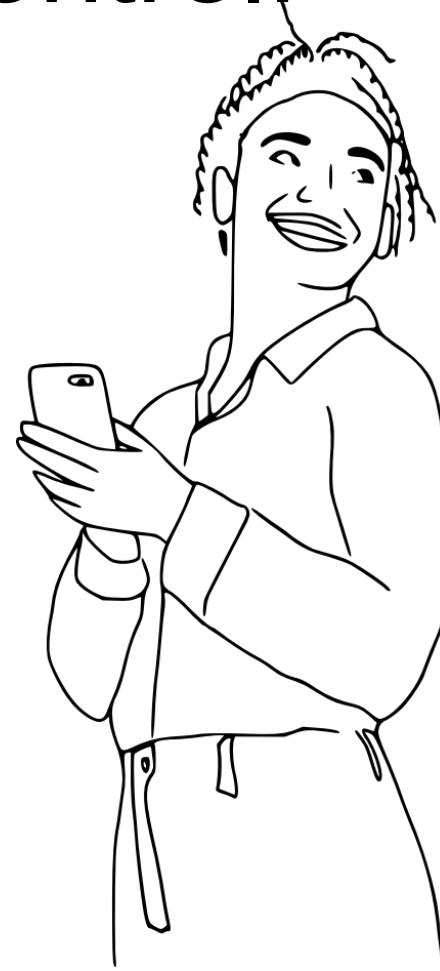
- Access to Knowledge(s)
- Global Connection
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More **media literacy**
to make
big tech accountable!

Take Back Control!

- Algorithmic Transparency
- Media Literacy
- Regulation
- Ethical Design



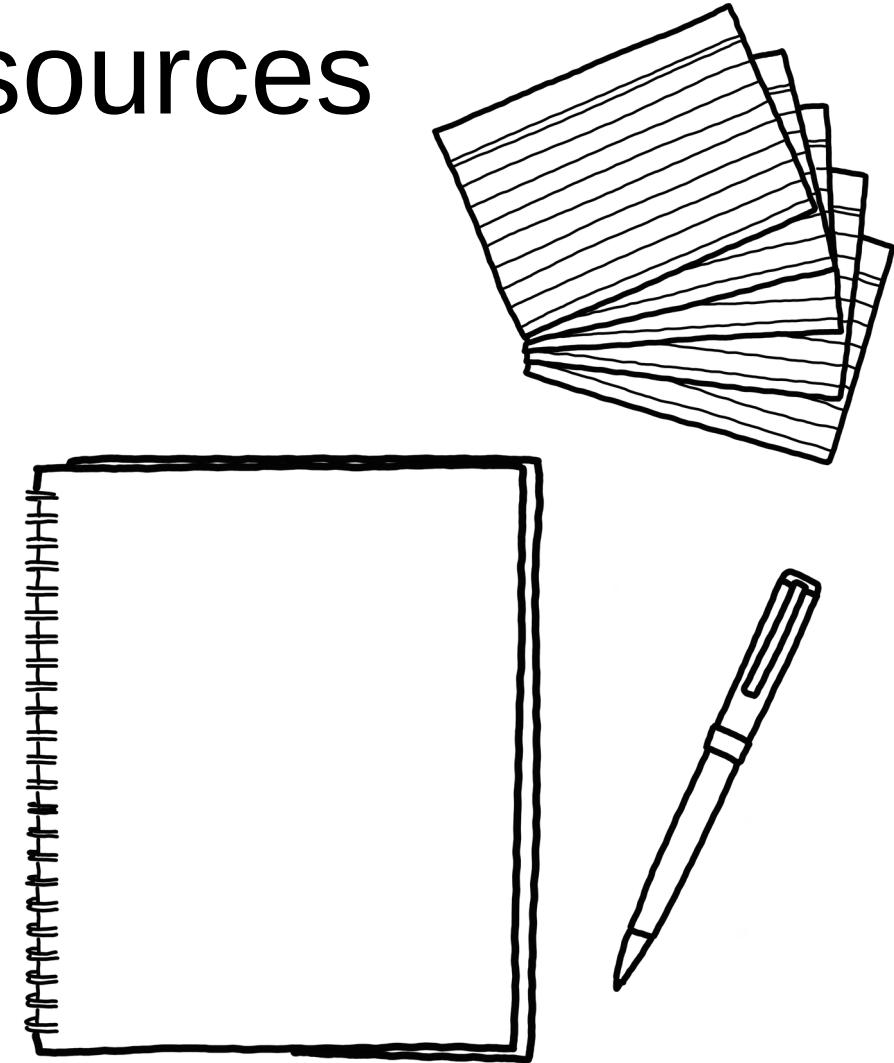
(3)

Strategies to become a
free thinker
and curate a healthier media diet

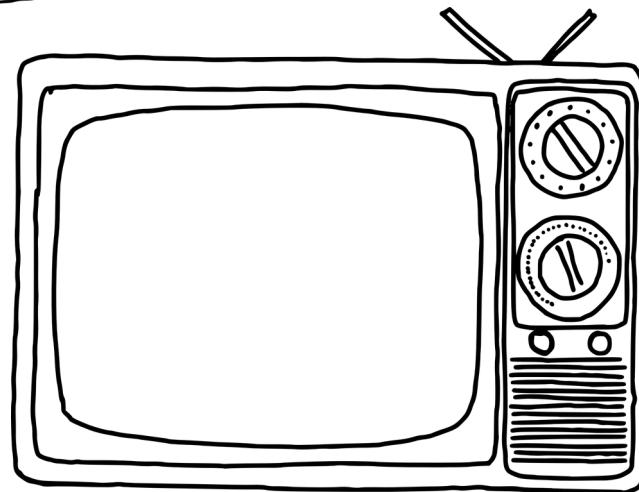
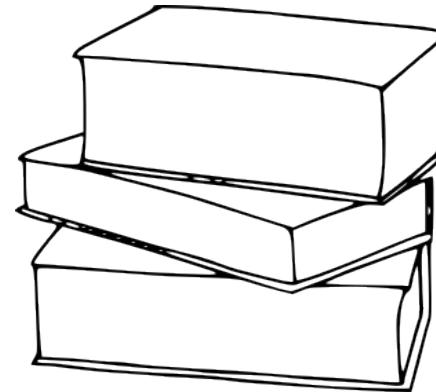
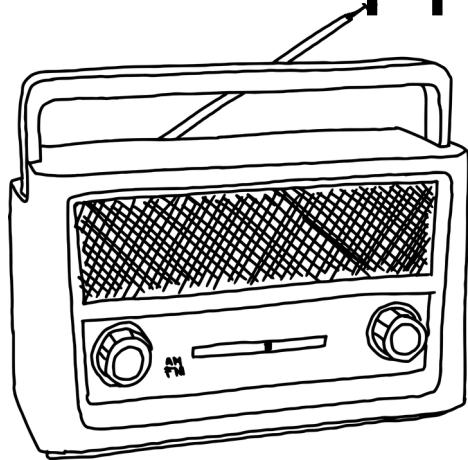


Free Resources

- Media Literacy Starter Kit incl.
- 5-step Guide towards more Media Literacy
- Quick Guide to recognising AI generated content
- Bonus: 5-day media detox / literacy challenge
- Reading recommendations
- Watching recommendations



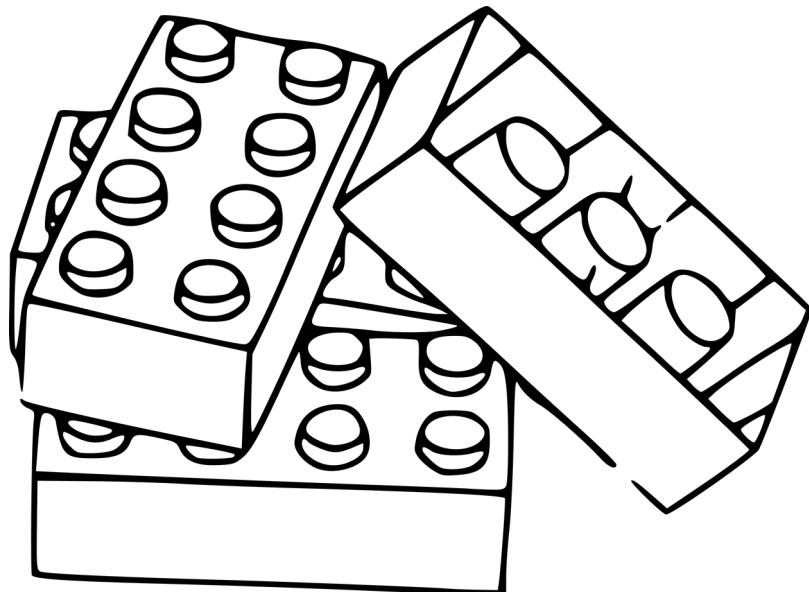
Applicable to all media



Media Literacy Starter Kit

- **Resources to explore:**
 - Data Detox Kit: <https://datadetoxkit.org>
 - Algorithmic Justice League: <https://www.ajl.org/library/home>
 - Crash Course Media Literacy: [YouTube Series](#)
 - National Association for Media Literacy Education: <https://namle.org/>
- **Personal favourites:**
 - **ad-blockers:** e.g. [uBlock origin](#), [AdBlock Plus](#), [adguard](#), [Ghostery](#), etc
 - **change your settings** to make yourself less available to ad targeting (e.g. [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)) through tutorials on [Data Detox Kit](#)

5-step Guide towards more Media Literacy



- 1) Understand the source
- 2) Verify Information
- 3) Analyse the Message
- 4) Recognise Bias and Perspective
- 5) Engage Critically and Ethically

1. Understand the Source

- **Why it matters:** Not all sources are created equal. Knowing who produced the content, their motivations, and their credibility is crucial.
- **How to do it:**
 - Check the author's credentials and expertise.
 - Investigate the publisher or platform (e.g., is it a reputable news outlet, a blog, or a social media account?).
 - Look for biases or potential conflicts of interest.
- **Tip:** Use tools like [Media Bias/Fact Check](#) to evaluate the reliability of news sources. Be vigilant about people who provide “simple” explanations to complex issues.

2. Verify Information

- **Why it matters:** Misinformation and disinformation are widespread. Verifying facts helps you avoid spreading false information.
- **How to do it:**
 - Ask: Is it **fact or opinion?** Cross-check information with multiple reputable sources.
 - Use fact-checking websites like [Snopes](#), [FactCheck.org](#), [PolitiFact](#) or [Wikipedia's List of fact-checking websites](#).
 - Use fact-checking browser extensions like [NewsGuard](#) or [Media Bias/Fact Check](#).
 - Look for primary sources (e.g., official reports, studies i.e. [Google Scholar](#), or direct quotes) whenever possible.
- **Tip:** Be wary of sensational headlines or content that evokes strong emotions—these are often red flags for misinformation.

3. Analyse the Message

- **Why it matters:** Media messages are often designed to persuade, entertain, or manipulate. Understanding the intent behind the content helps you interpret it critically.
- **How to do it:**
 - Ask: Who is the target audience? What is the purpose of this message?
 - Identify persuasive techniques, such as emotional appeals, loaded language, or cherry-picked data.
 - Consider what is not being said—are there gaps or omissions in the information?
- **Tip:** Learn about common logical fallacies (e.g., straw man, false dilemma) to spot flawed arguments.

4. Recognise Bias and Perspective

- **Why it matters:** All media content reflects some level of bias or perspective. Recognising this helps you interpret information more objectively.
- **How to do it:**
 - Compare how different outlets cover the same story.
 - Be aware of your own biases and how they might influence your interpretation.
 - Look for diverse perspectives, especially on controversial topics.
- **Tip:** Use tools such as [AllSides](#) to shows bias ratings for news outlets or stories or help you understand persuasive techniques used in specific ads to influence buyers. Follow a range of news sources with different political leanings to get a balanced view.

5. Engage Critically and Ethically

- **Why it matters:** Media literacy isn't just about consuming information—it's also about how you engage with and share it.
- **How to do it:**
 - Pause before sharing content online. Ask: Is this accurate? Is it helpful? Could it harm others?
 - Engage in respectful discussions, even when you disagree.
 - Educate others about media literacy and the importance of critical thinking.
- **Tip:** Use tools like [AI Content Detector](#) or [Reverse Image Search](#) to verify the authenticity of photos and texts before sharing.

Quick Guide to Recognising AI generated content

- **Images:** unnatural details, inconsistent textures and lighting, repetitive patterns, metadata inspection, [Reverse Image Search](#)
 - AI detection tools and plugins: e.g. [InVID](#), [FakeImageDetector](#), ...
- **Videos:** visual inconsistencies (e.g. flickering, weird transitions), audio mismatch, metadata inspection
 - deepfake detection tools and plugins: e.g. [DeepWare](#), [SensityAI](#), ...
- **Text:** repetitive or unnatural phrasing, overly generic or vague information, lack of personal experiences or emotions
 - AI detection tools and plugins: e.g. [Hugging Face Detector](#), [Originality.ai](#), [GPTZero](#), [CopyLeaks](#), ...
- **Social media posts:** too perfect or generic posts, hashtags or keywords

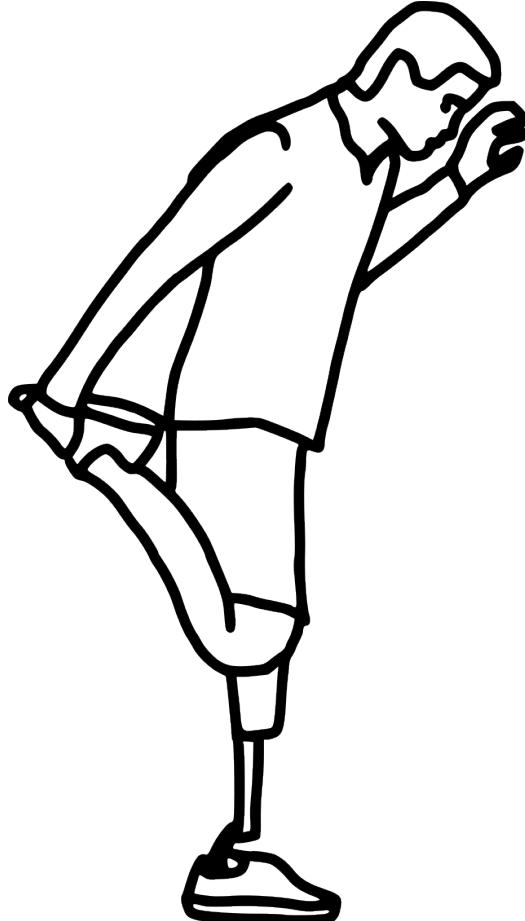
5-day Media Literacy Challenge

- Day 1: Reclaim Your Focus
- Day 2: Explore New Perspectives
- Day 3: Go Beyond the Headlines
- Day 4: Cut the Noise
- Day 5: Build a Wholesome Feed



*based on the 5-day challenges from [University of Maine](#) and [Dasia Sade](#).

Day 1: Reclaim Your Focus



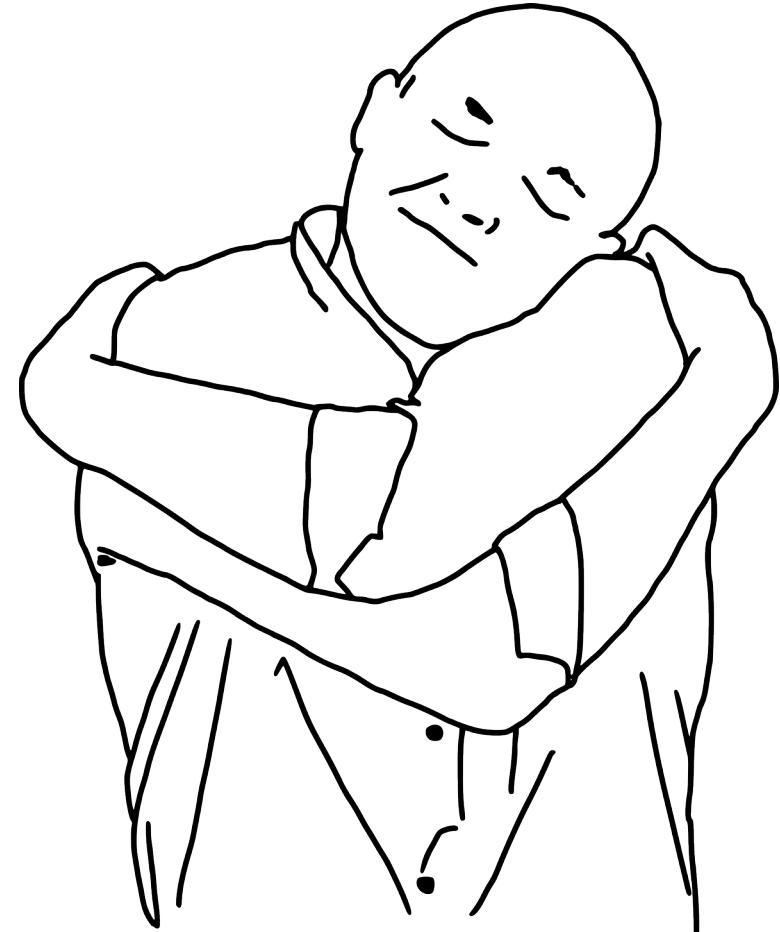
Goal: Break free from mindless scrolling and reconnect with yourself and your surroundings.

- 1) Set 3 specific times to check news (e.g., 9am, 12pm, 6pm).
- 2) *Reflect: How did you feel, think, and act today?*
- 3) Replace one screen habit with a non-screen activity.

Day 2: Explore New Perspectives

Goal: Get comfortable with diverse viewpoints and approach media with curiosity.

- 1) Read a news source from a different cultural or political background.
- 2) *Reflect: What surprised, challenged, or intrigued you?*
- 3) Fact-check one story from this source.
- 4) Share your insights with someone.



Day 3: Go Beyond the Headlines



Goal: Dive deeper into stories and recognize different angles of truth.

- 1) Compare one story across 3 outlets with differing viewpoints.
- 2) Reflect: *What stood out, was missing, or felt biased?*
- 3) Question assumptions, tones, and nuances.
- 4) Discuss your media journey with someone.

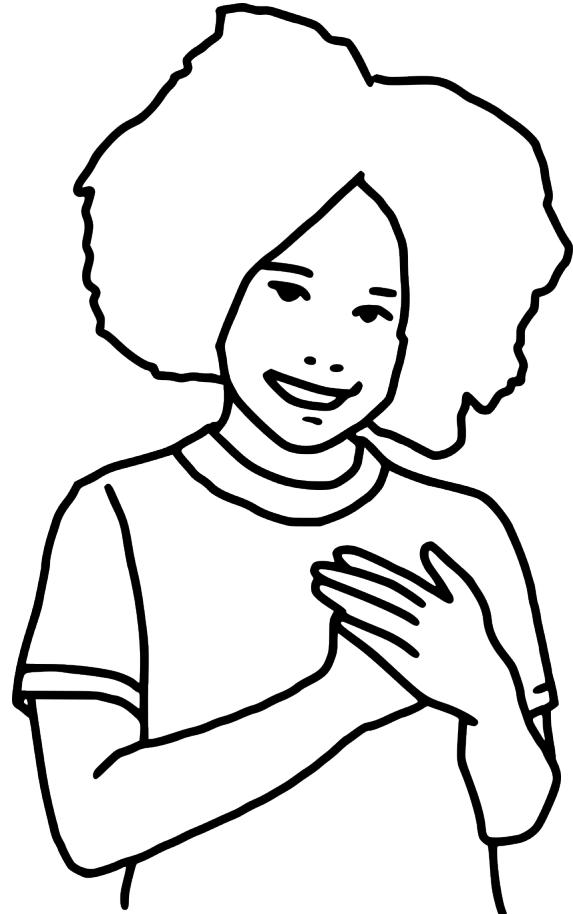
Day 4: Cut the Noise

Goal: Curate a media feed that informs rather than drains or manipulates.

- 1) Identify a story that prioritizes drama over value.
- 2) *Reflect: Did it trigger emotions? Was that intentional? What was its purpose?*
- 3) Unfollow three sources that provoke more than they inform.



Day 5: Build a Wholesome Feed



Goal: Fill your feed with content that educates, inspires, and connects.

- 1) Discover 3 news sources known for depth and fairness.
- 2) *Reflect: How do they make you feel? Are you genuinely informed?*
- 3) Discuss your media journey with someone.

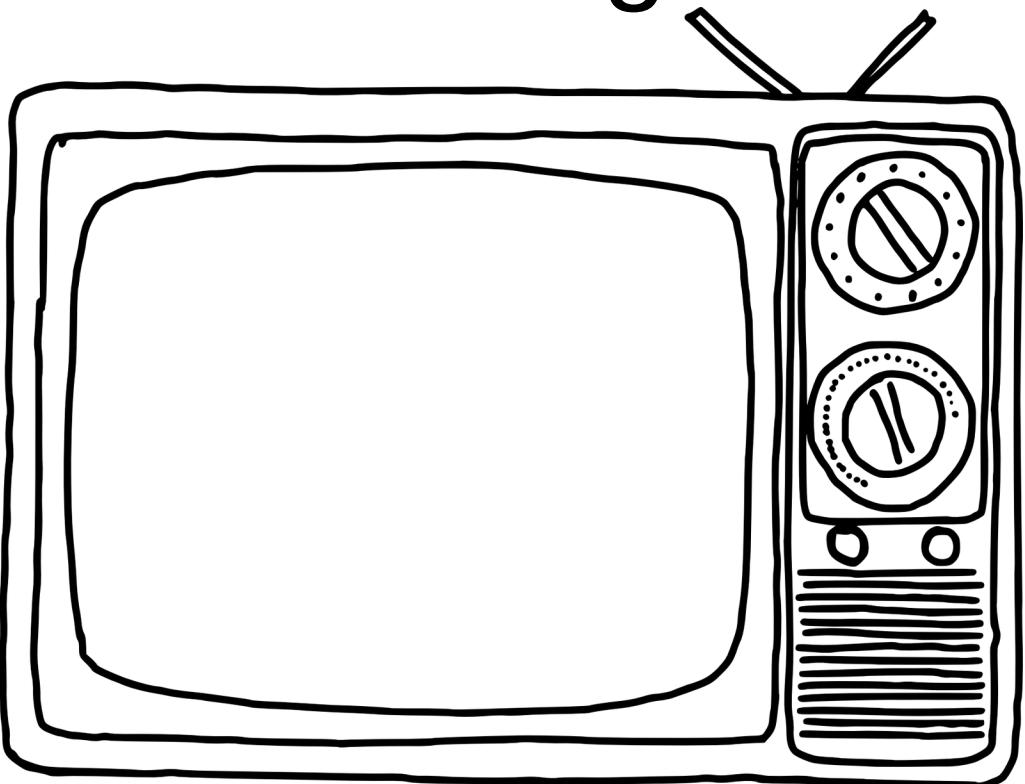
Recommended Reading



- Zuboff, Shoshana (2019):
 - The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power
- Benjamin, Ruha (2019):
 - Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code
- D'Ignazio, Catherine; Klein, Lauren (2020)
 - Data Feminism
- Monea, Alexander (2022):
 - The Digital Closet: How the Internet Became Straight

Recommended Watching

- Can't feel nothing (2024) by David Borenstein; on [Arte](#)
- Coded Bias (2020) by Shalini Kantayya; on [Algorithmic Justice League](#)
- The Great Hack (2019) by Jehane Noujaim, Karim Amer; on Netflix
- The Social Dilemma (2020) by Jeff Orlowski; on Netflix



To summarise ...



I hope you understand why ...



- you have found yourself a little bit angrier, more confused, and more lost than usual as of late?
- you “lost” friends and family members to fake news?
- you have lost your uniqueness?



We got this!

- Stay aware!
- Make informed decisions.
- Spread the word about **media literacy**.
- **Remember:** each little action is important. Only together can we change the world.
- Keep up the joy, keep up the fight!

joy

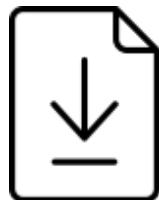
Thank you! Questions?



www.shakeri.eu



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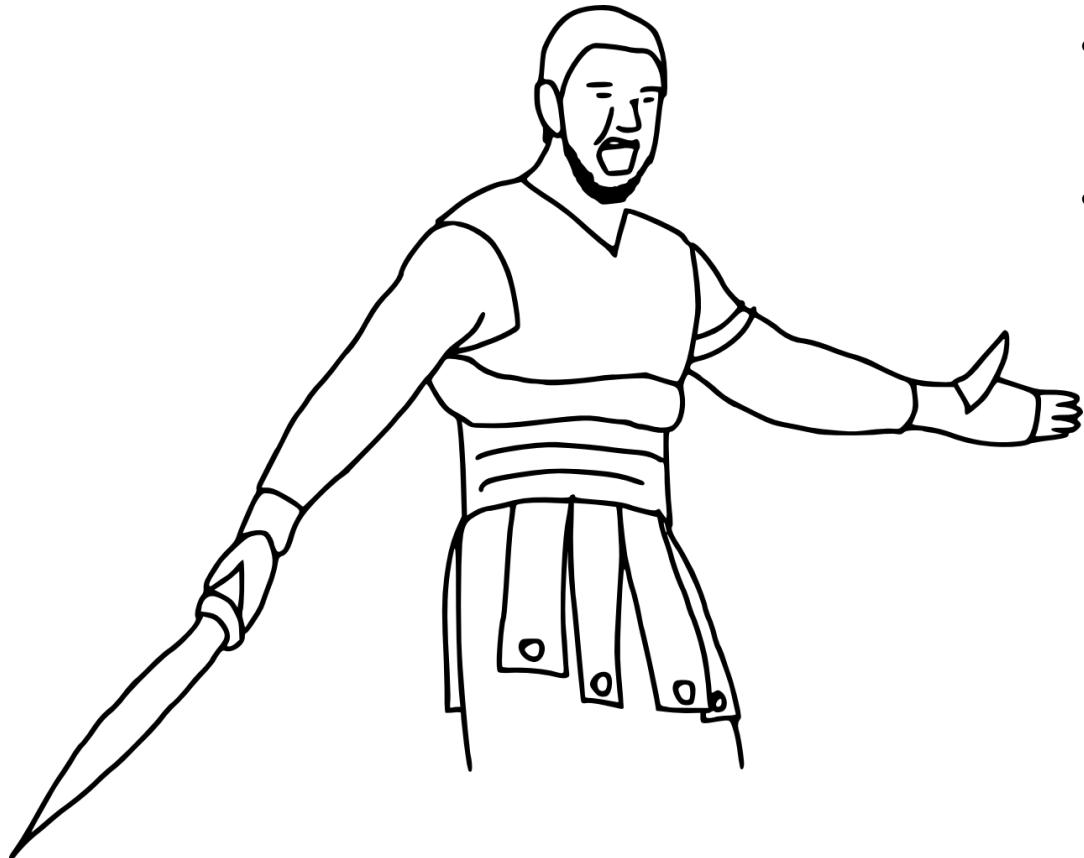
Resources



References

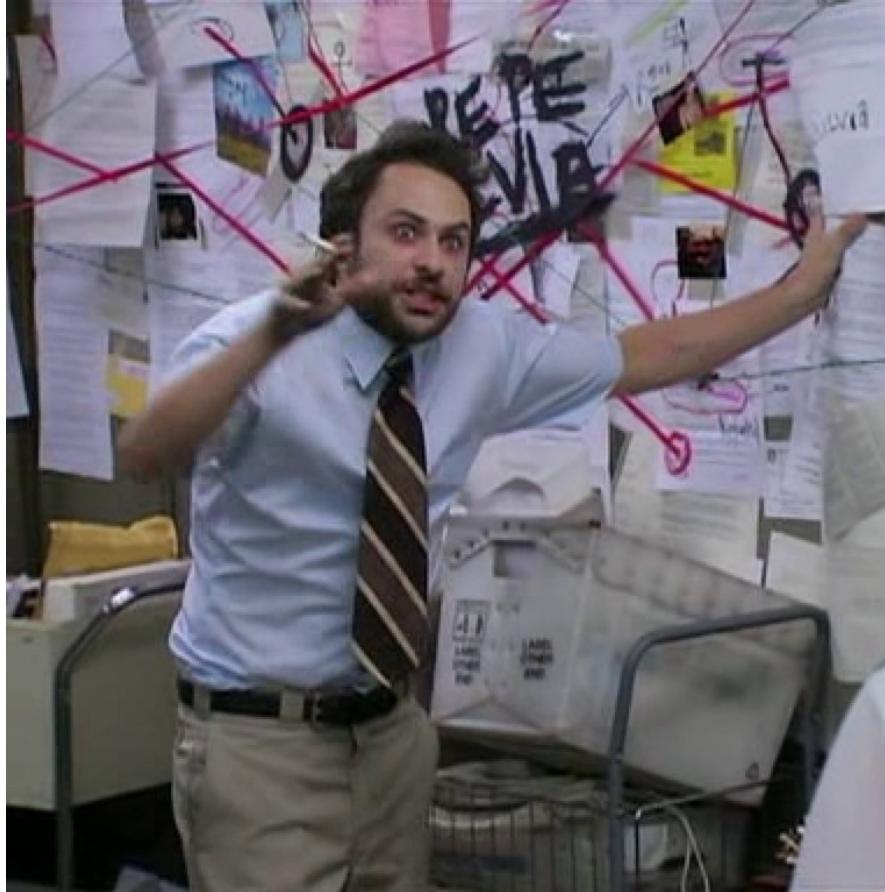
- Books:
 - Zuboff, Shoshana (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs.
 - Srncek, N. (2017). *The Challenges of Platform Capitalism: Understanding the Logic of a New Business Model*. Juncture, 23, 254-257. <https://doi.org/10.1111/newe.12023>
 - Van Dijck, José Francisca Theodora Maria, Thomas Poell, and Martijn De Waal. *The Platform Society: Public Values In a Connective World*. New York (N.Y.): Oxford university press, 2018.
- Algorithms:
 - Baker, S. A. (2022). Alt. Health Influencers: how wellness culture and web culture have been weaponised to promote conspiracy theories and far-right extremism during the COVID-19 pandemic. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 25(1), 3-24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494211062623>
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 - Pfundmair, M., Wood, N.R., Hales, A. & Wesselmann, E.D. (2024) How social exclusion makes radicalism flourish: A review of empirical evidence. *Journal of Social Issues*, 80, 341–359. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12520>
 - Norris, P. (2021). Cancel Culture: Myth or Reality? *Political Studies*, 71(1), 145-174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217211037023>
 - Hesmondhalgh, David and Campos Valverde, Raquel and Kaye, D. Bondy Valdovinos and Li, Zhongwei, The Impact of Algorithmically Driven Recommendation Systems on Music Consumption and Production: A Literature Review (February 9, 2023). UK Centre for Data Ethics and Innovation Reports, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4365916>
 - Tong, Z., Liu, H., Feng, J., Wang, W., Wu, H. and Xu, J. (2025), Trapped by AI Recommendation: How Identity Concerns Reduce Variety-Seeking Behavior. *Manage Decis Econ.* <https://doi.org/10.1002/mde.4524>
- Specifically on YouTube's Algorithm:
 - Lewis, R., & Christin, A. (2022). Platform drama: "Cancel culture," celebrity, and the struggle for accountability on YouTube. *New Media & Society*, 24(7), 1632-1656. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221099235>
 - Jack Nicas, 2018. How YouTube Drives People to the Internet's Darkest Corners, Google's video site often recommends divisive or misleading material, despite recent changes designed to fix the problem. *The Wall Street Journal*. [Here](#)
 - Munger, Kevin, and Joseph Phillips. "Right-wing YouTube: A supply and demand perspective." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 27, no. 1 (2022): 186-219. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161220964767>
 - Hana Kirov, 2022. Hated that video? YouTube's algorithm might push you another just like it. *MIT Technology Review*. [Here](#)
 - Rieder, B., Matamoros-Fernández, A., & Coromina, Ò. (2018). From ranking algorithms to 'ranking cultures': Investigating the modulation of visibility in YouTube search results. *Convergence*, 24(1), 50-68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856517736982>
 - Birchall, C., Knight, P., & Knight, S. (2024). Conspiracy Loops: From Distrust to Conspiracy to Culture Wars. *Demos*. https://demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Conspiracy-Loops_Report.pdf
 - Hazem Ibrahim, Nouar AlDahoul, Sangjin Lee, Talal Rahwan, Yasir Zaki, YouTube's recommendation algorithm is left-leaning in the United States, *PNAS Nexus*, Volume 2, Issue 8, August 2023, pgad264, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgad264>
 - Yesilada M, Lewandowsky S. Systematic review: YouTube recommendations and problematic content. *Internet Policy Rev*. 2022 Mar 31;11(1):1652. doi: 10.14763/2022.1.1652. PMID: 36466439; PMCID: PMC7613872.
 - Zuboff, S. (2015). Big other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization. *Journal of Information Technology*, 30(1), 75-89. <https://doi.org/10.1057/jit.2015.5>
 - Coudry, N., & Mejias, U. A. (2019). Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data's Relation to the Contemporary Subject. *Television & New Media*, 20(4), 336-349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476418796632>
 - West, S. M. (2019). Data Capitalism: Redefining the Logics of Surveillance and Privacy. *Business & Society*, 58(1), 20-41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0007650317718185>
- Google occasionally publishes white papers and blog posts about YouTube's algorithm and business practices. These can be found on the [Google AI Blog](#), [YouTube's Creator Academy](#), and [Google Research Blog](#).
- Icons by [Larea](#) from [Noun Project](#) (CC BY 3.0)

Are you not entertained?!?



- Content creators are our modern gladiators
- They are the most media literate people out there

It's huge and connected!



- Eco-systems (e.g. Google)
- Social Media Academies and Consultancies
- Data Analytics and Behavioral Insights Firms (i.e. Affective Computing)
- Fake News and Propaganda Organisations

Be vigilant!

- Collective anxiety creates a vacuum for figures who have “figured it out”
- Figures speaking with authority – speaking "truth" - exploit our need for certainty
 - e.g. explainer journalists like Ezra Klein



Cancel Culture



- Historical Context of Canceling
- Cancel Culture vs. True Accountability
- Psychological dangers of public shaming
- When Canceling Works (and Fails)
- Path Forward
- Broder, J.L. (2024). Complex Dynamics of Cancel Culture in the Media. In: Rich, G.J., Kumar, V.K., Farley, F.H. (eds) Handbook of Media Psychology. Springer, Cham.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-56537-3_17
- Jahanbin, N. The Significance in Diminishing Shame Culture: An Analysis on Cancel Culture. In: The NCHC Journal of Undergraduate Research & Creative Activity.
<https://nchcureca.com/the-significance-in-diminishing-shame-culture-an-analysis-on-cancel-culture/>