It is no exaggeration to say that popular platforms with loyal users, like Google and Facebook, know those users better than their families and friends do. Many firms collect an enormous amount of data as an input for their artificial intelligence algorithms. Facebook Likes, for example, can be used to predict with a high degree of accuracy various characteristics of Facebook users: “sexual orientation, ethnicity, religious and political views, personality traits, intelligence, happiness, use of addictive substances, parental separation, age, and gender”. It all can be used as a tool to manipulate people.

Manipulation can take many forms: the exploitation of human biases detected by AI algorithms, personalised addictive strategies for consumption of (online) goods, or taking advantage of the emotionally vulnerable state of individuals to promote products and services that match well with their temporary emotions. Manipulation often comes together with [clever design tactics](https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-tech-giants-get-you-to-click-this-and-not-that-11559315900), [marketing strategies](https://emerj.com/ai-podcast-interviews/ai-social-influence-behavior-manipulation-dr-charles-isbell/), [predatory advertising](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Predatory_advertising) and pervasive [behavioural price discrimination](https://wilte.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/the-rise-of-behavioural-discrimination.pdf), in order to guide users to inferior choices that can easily be monetised by the firms that employ AI algorithms.

The US chain store Target has used AI and data analytics techniques to [forecast whether women are pregnant](https://www.driveresearch.com/market-research-company-blog/how-target-used-data-analytics-to-predict-pregnancies/) in order to send them hidden ads for baby products. [Uber users have complained](https://www.forbes.com/sites/amitchowdhry/2016/05/25/uber-low-battery/) that they pay more for rides if their smartphone battery is low, even if officially, the level of a user’s smartphone’s battery does not belong to the parameters that impact [Uber’s pricing model](https://www.uber.com/us/en/ride/how-it-works/upfront-pricing/). Big tech firms have often been [accused of manipulation related to the ranking of search results](https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/amazon-india-rigging/) to their own benefit, with the [European Commission’s Google shopping de](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_17_1784)cision being one of the most popular examples. Meanwhile, Facebook received a [record fine](https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2019/07/ftc-imposes-5-billion-penalty-sweeping-new-privacy-restrictions) from the US Federal Trade Commission for manipulating privacy rights of its users (resulting in a lower quality of service).