

Bibliographic citation

Noble, Safiya Umoja. Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism. NYU Press, 2018.

Summary

"Algorithms of Oppression" explores how search engines, as dominant information gatekeepers, can perpetuate and reinforce harmful stereotypes and biases. Through a series of case studies, the author demonstrates the consequences of algorithmic bias, commercialization of search engines, and the feedback loop of algorithmic discrimination. Noble also discusses the concept of digital redlining, emphasizing its long-term negative effects on marginalized communities. The book highlights the importance of understanding the ethical implications and potential biases in search engine algorithms, which relate to the technical topics and ethical considerations discussed in our class.

Noteworthy quotations

- "The combination of private interests in digital technologies and the public's deeply held beliefs about technology's liberatory potential is a toxic combination for the public good." (p. 25)
- "As long as profit motives drive the development of technology, the public will always be compromised and served up as the commodity." (p. 48)
- "Discriminatory ideas about people based on race and gender are infused into the ways that technology is designed and into the choices that are made about which data to include and exclude." (p. 89)

Personal response

I found it eye-opening to learn about the extent of bias present in search engine algorithms and how these biases can significantly affect the information we access online. It is concerning that the commercial interests of search engines often prioritize revenue-generating content over accurate and unbiased information. Additionally, the concept of digital redlining resonated with me as a powerful illustration of how technology can worsen existing inequalities. While I agree with most of the author's analysis, I believe that, in addition to the recommendations provided, individual users also have a responsibility to critically evaluate the information they encounter online and challenge biased search results.