Under Review

Characterizing platform behaviors.

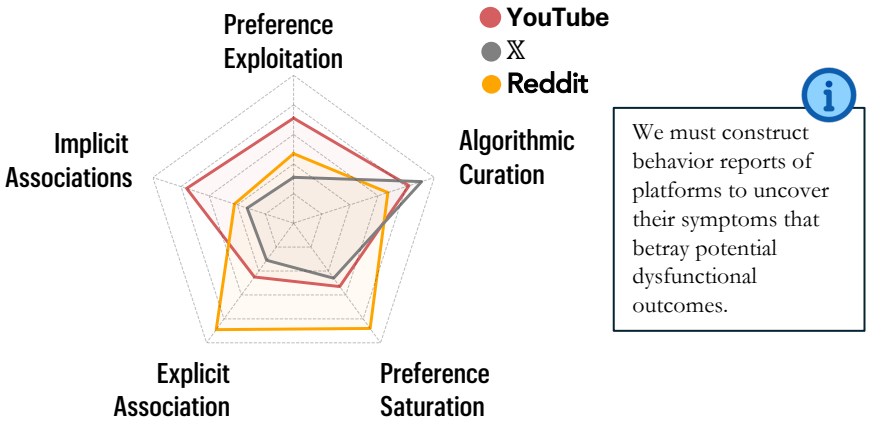
Quantifying the Effect of User Interactions on Social Media Homepage Recommendations

Hussam Habib, Ryan Stoldt, Raven Maragh-Lloyd, Brian Ekdale, Rishab Nithyanand

We don't know how curation algorithms within social media platforms interpret our preference signal to curate our home feeds. These behaviors reveal a lot about the platform's priorities and also the pathologies that might emerge from their curation. In this work, we characterize the behaviors of Twitter (X), Reddit, and YouTube and uncover how they prioritize and interpret different interaction signals.

Using a Sock-puppet audit with 380 accounts for each platform, we investigate changes in homepage curation following revelation of preferences from one of these actions: Search, Like, Open, Follow, and Join.

Each platform interprets these affordances differently, this helps us create a behavioral profile of the platform and understand their priorities. For example, Reddit prioritizes explicit signals and networked curation over inference of implicit signals and algorithmic curation, something that YouTube prioritizes. This further allows us to hypothesize pathologies (such as echo chambers) that might emerge within these platforms.



We must construct behavior reports of platforms to uncover their symptoms that betray potential dysfunctional outcomes.