Part 2: Algorithmic Bias

Instagram

Mine vs My friend Mollys

1. **Content Ranking:** What appears first vs. later in results?

My Instagram:

- Dog video
- Clothing ad
- Meal making

Molly's Instagram:

- Makeup tutorial
- Clothing ad
- Concert video clip

2. **Content Types:** What formats/genres are prioritized? (videos vs. articles, news vs. opinion, etc.)

My Instagram:

- Mostly dog reels, and food videos

Molly's Instagram:

- Mostly clothing and makeup ads

3. **Perspectives:** Whose voices are centered? What viewpoints dominate?

My instagram:

- More meme dominated content, humorous

Molly's instagram:

- More ad dominated clothing shopping reels

4. **Missing Content:** What do you notice is absent from each set of results?

My instagram:

- Not much beauty or relationship content

Molly's instagram:

- No sports, tech, or video game content

Both

- Not much world news, politics, or educational fact based news

5. **Tone/Framing:** How is the same topic presented differently?

My instagram:

- Loud, funny, sarcastic

Molly's instagram:

- Calming, gentle, self improvement focused

Analysis Questions:

- Who might benefit from these different algorithmic choices?

Instagram benefits by having targeted content shown on people's pages because it makes people spend more time on the app. Influencers and brands also benefit from exposure.

- What assumptions about users seem built into each version?

My interests align with memes and jokes while Molly's align with shopping and skin care products. Both of us prefer entertainment over information.

- How might these differences impact various communities or demographics?

They may limit exposure to diverse or opposing views like how neither of us get much serious or global content. They also can shape perception.

- What data might the algorithm be using to make these decisions?

Liked/saved posts, watch time on reels, accounts followed, gender, age, etc.

Part 3: Post-Class Reflection Assignment

For my micro-interaction, I made a "Complete Task" button that, when clicked, shows a "Success!" message and shoots off colorful confetti. I used easing to make the animation feel smooth and satisfying. The idea was to make the user feel good and accomplished. It was meant to be a reward for finishing something.

But thinking about how something like this could be used in a system like Instagram, it's easy to see how it might be part of a pattern that pushes people to keep interacting. Imagine getting confetti or some animated effect every time you like a post or follow someone — it would definitely encourage you to keep going, without really thinking about it. That kind of feedback loop could feed into the biased algorithms we saw, like how my Explore page looked totally different from Molly's, based on what we'd interacted with before. Even small animations can end up reinforcing those patterns.

Doing this project made me realize that even little design choices, like hover effects, animations, or colors, can really influence how people behave on a site. As developers or designers, we actually have a lot of control over what people click on, how long they stay, and what paths they take. That's kind of cool, but also a little scary.

Not everyone knows their clicks, likes, or even just pauses on a video are being tracked and used to shape what they see next. When I compared my Instagram Explore page with Molly's, it was obvious that we were being shown really different things, hers full of beauty and wellness, mine more memes and food stuff. That's not random, it's based on past behavior. And if animations or interactions make it fun or rewarding to click certain things, we might just go along with it without realizing how it's shaping our feed.

So yeah, I think we have a responsibility to be more mindful. It's important to make things engaging, but also give users more control or at least some idea of how their actions affect what they see. It's about respecting people, not just keeping them hooked.

Instead of using animations just to make something feel good or addictive, we could design them to help users be more aware of what's happening. For example, after clicking my "Complete Task" button, I could add a little message like, "Want to see more interactions like this?" or even give them an option to turn the confetti off. It's small, but it adds a bit of intention.

On Instagram, I think a great addition would be a "Why am I seeing this?" tag under each post on the Explore page. It would let users understand what data is being used to show them stuff and maybe even let them adjust it. That way, they're not just stuck in a loop of content the algorithm thinks they want.

Overall, I think ethical design means giving users more agency. Fun interactions are great, but they should support people, not just boost engagement for the platform.