

Debriefing

Mission:

Explore how YouTube adjusts recommendations based on user actions

Past:

During the session, I investigated how a user who is new to YouTube starts to receive content suggestions. I explored searching for topics and engaging with videos by watching, liking commenting, and saving them to watch later affected the suggested video feeds.

Results:

The results were somewhat expected. Some main findings:

- Just searching for a topic does not generate the same topic suggestions in the recommendation feeds or even populate the suggestion feed initially (00:01:38).
- Trending videos appear only after having searched for and watched a video.
- A narrow topic (specific horse breed) must be interacted with in multiple ways to generate breed-specific suggestions on the first page.
- Searching for a topic and disliking a video results in topic-related suggestions in the suggestion feed (00:21:30, 00:30:45).
- Searching for more general and popular topics resulted in more suggested videos on the topic quicker (00:24:38).
- Saving unwatched videos to a playlist (00:25:42) affects the feed less than saving a video that is being watched (00:27:24).
- Suggestion: The Save button could indicate if the video is saved, like the liking/disliking buttons in the same view (00:28:50).
- Positive: Opportunity to tell YouTube if I am not interested in a video because of the topic or that I already watched it (00:32:10). After informing them of my dislike, I did not receive space videos.
- No differences were noted in how video recommendations change based on positive/negative comments in the comment section.
- Initially, a controversial search such as “become an alpha man” led to a money-making video in the Shorts recommendations, which often can be seen in association with each other. However, this can be a coincidence, since reacting to more alpha male content led to a heavy emphasis on women’s appearance content (00:57:19)

Obstacles:

There were no obstacles in setting up this task. Initially, the user did not get any video recommendations, even trending ones.

Outlook:

This session covered some of the main recommendation features for a new signed-in user. This section explored the main page and briefly explored the Shorts feed too. A comparison of

content suggestion behavior between the traditional video feed and Shorts could still be explored further. This session did not cover YouTube Kids, Premium, or Music. This could also be compared with the experience of not logged-in users.

Feelings:

The overall feeling of this session was positive. It seems like the original video format is more predictable when it comes to recommendations, as the recommendations for most parts matched what was being searched. Shorts-suggestions were more unpredictable. At the end of the session, Shorts took a heavy makeup and celebrity appearances shift without me having searched for looks. This left me a bit uneasy, after having engaged with alpha male content, not previously receiving any skin care videos based on an earlier search and not having indicated I am a woman.

I feel that further exploration of how the algorithms affect users' recommendations is needed, especially expanding the exploration to YouTube kids.