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English 1

Exploratory Writing #3

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I believe that the algorithms that control how I use technology (Google, Amazon, Netflix, YouTube, Spotify, etc.) have both positive and negative implications. Though I am fine with taking the recommendations these algorithms give me (for the most part), it is worrisome that these algorithms have so much dictation on what I do. Though algorithms do what they are designed to do (make things easier/more convenient), they also raise concerns about how much power they have. For example, Google’s search algorithm makes finding information easier, but it also raises the concern that you see only what Google wants you to see. Out of millions of search results, Google chooses certain items to go on the first page. Though these results can be chosen because they are the most beneficial/useful ones (based on your cookies), they can also be chosen due to sponsorships or brand deals. Google also pushes its own items ahead of others so that you are guaranteed to see them. Though these personalized search results can be beneficial in most scenarios, it does leave a sense of a loss of power/control on your own results (along with a lack of privacy). The same can be said about algorithms used in other media platforms such as YouTube, Spotify, and Netflix.

As Kartik Hosanagar says, algorithms make a lot of choices for us, meaning that we do not have as much independence as we think we do. If we become passive in how we use algorithms, there could be consequences. Another issue is that though algorithms make the sites more convenient (you get content that aligns with your interests), they require personal data that may not be well protected. A data breach or cyberattack could release confidential information that could potentially put an individual in harm’s way. Algorithms could also have inherent biases/flaws that may hinder its operations or target certain groups of people. People are also more inclined to believe a “wise algorithm” than they are a person (who they can mistrust and argue against). This sort of overarching power allows algorithms to really have control over our lives and influence our decisions in ways that we may not even realize.

That being said, algorithms do have their benefits. The rise of artificial intelligence has made countless new opportunities available. It is easier than ever to gain new information and analyze it. Algorithms in popular websites (Google, YouTube, Amazon, etc.) make finding something that you would like easier, possibly making the overall experience more pleasurable/convenient. Algorithms can also be used to forecast future events with an accuracy that would be impossible to replicate manually.

Overall, I believe that algorithms, including those found in popular sites like Google and Amazon, have both positive and negative implications. Though they can make tasks more convenient, remove human error, help make decisions, and automate certain tasks, they are also vulnerable to biases/flaws, have privacy issues, and take control/freedom away from the individual (among other issues).