

Transcript for The Filter Bubble – part one

Good morning, everyone. Have you ever noticed that when you log on to the internet, you nearly always see adverts for things that you are interested in? If you were looking for a new pair of trainers last week, suddenly you'll see adverts for trainers all over the place. Well, this isn't random. The internet browsers and websites and apps that we use know a lot about us because they monitor how we use their site or app. This way they can work out what we like and don't like. You've probably heard of cookies? When you visit some sites for the first time a cookie is downloaded onto your computer that keeps a track on how you travel around the site and exactly what you do. The next time you use the same site again your computer will check the cookies and adapt, depending on the information it stored from your last visit. So, without even thinking about it, we give out a lot of information that can then be used to personalise our online experience.

I saw a great presentation last week by the internet activist Eli Parisier and I want to tell you a little bit about it. He wrote a book a few years ago called 'The Filter Bubble' and I think it's something that we should all know about. Here's the book, we have it in the school library if you want to borrow it. In this talk I'm just going to give you a taster. He likens 'the filter bubble' to an ecosystem and he claims it is something we should all be worried about. After reading his book and watching his talk, I think it's something you should all know about too.

So, let me try to explain using a simple example. Imagine, I support a political party ... to keep this really simple let's call it the Yellow party. OK, so let's say I have lots of friends who also support the Yellows but some of my friends support the Reds. Now, on my favourite social media site I want to see the posts from all my friends but I tend to click more on the links that are posted by my friends who support the Yellows, like me. Even so, I do want to see what the Reds are posting about. Now, a few months ago, just before the big elections I noticed something weird happening on my newsfeed. I noticed that my friends who support the Red party had almost disappeared from the site and I was only being shown the posts from my Yellow friends! I wondered if all my Red friends had left this social media space and moved somewhere else, but when I clicked on their profiles to check, I could see that they had been busy posting links and talking to people, but their posts were being hidden from me. Now I understand why. I know it's because I hardly ever clicked on their posts and I didn't interact so much with them. The social media site itself had decided for me that I wasn't interested in their posts, so they decided not to show them to me. Now, this is an example of what Eli Parisier means by the 'Filter Bubble' – it's when the websites and apps choose what information we can and can't see. Does that make sense?