ELECTIONS & SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media & social media algorithms have the ability to influence the decisions we make. Understanding algorithms and their impacts can help us better evaluate content we see and share. Throughout campaign and election seasons, algorithms are especially influential in circulating information for or against certain candidates or parties. Algorithms can explain why you keep seeing content you either do or do not agree with. This is why we need to question the information we see and learn how to critically evaluate it before we share!

WHAT'S AN ALGORITHM?

An algorithm is a set of rules that help computers make decisions, almost like a recipe. The searches you make, accounts you interact with, and websites you visit all contribute to your own algorithm. This informs websites and apps about content you may want to interact with (even if you actually don't!), so make sure to be conscious of what you're interacting with, as it impacts what you see.

WHAT SHOULD I ASK WHEN I SEE POLITICAL CONTENT?

Always think about the purpose of a political post on social media. Is the purpose to inform, entertain, or persuade the viewer?

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- Who is being promoted in this?
- Who does this information benefit?
- Who does this information not benefit?
- Can I verify any of this information?

ECHO CHAMBERS

An echo chamber utilizes personalized algorithms to reinforce, or "echo," your beliefs and opinions back to you. Being "stuck" in an echo chamber reinforces and confirms beliefs regardless of how accurate they are. Thorough content evaluation and source checking helps avoid this.

PROPAGANDA

Propaganda is carefully selected information aimed to influence public opinion. Election-specific propaganda may use false information to create an emotional response and persuade you. This information spreads quickly on social media and is often easy to believe.

1 Agudo U, Matute H (2021) The influence of algorithms on political and dating decisions. PLoS ONE 16(4): e0249454. "Democracy in the United States." (n.d.). U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Retrieved from https://www.uscis.gov/sites/default/files/document/lesson-p

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