

Case Study: Social Media Algorithms

Emily, a 17-year-old high school student, has been an active user of (fictitious social media app) UConect for over two years. Initially, she used the platform to keep in touch with friends and follow her interests in photography and travel. However, over time, she noticed a shift in her feed. The platform began to show her an increasing amount of content related to extreme dieting and fitness regimes. Intrigued and influenced by what she saw, Emily started engaging with this content more frequently.

Emily's increasing interaction with such content led the algorithm to show her even more related posts, creating a feedback loop. Over time, this exposure contributed to a noticeable change in Emily's behavior. She became overly concerned with her body image and started following unhealthy dieting practices, impacting her physical and mental health.

Her parents, upon realizing the change, traced the issue back to the kind of content Emily was exposed to on UConect. They raised concerns with the platform, questioning the ethics of personalizing content in a manner that could harm young, impressionable users.

Company executives for UConect deflected blame for this and other claims. They say that AI-driven personalization is crucial for the platform's success. It increases user engagement and satisfaction, which are key to the app's growth. They also stated that users have an individual responsibility in how they interact with the platform, pointing to features and settings that allow users to control their experience, such as adjusting privacy settings and reporting harmful content.

When this story was covered by news sources, the public expressed concerns about the ethical implications of social media platforms personalizing content, especially when it affects minors. The public called for greater transparency in how algorithms work, and more control over content. They also would like to see more regulation of content on social media platforms.

Questions

- After hearing the case study, how do you think personalized content on social media platforms can impact users, particularly those of your age group?
- In your opinion, where should the line be drawn between the responsibility of social media platforms and the responsibility of users in managing the impact of AI-driven content?