

GNITN

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Algorithm Theology

Over And Over Again

Myself and many others can get lost in scrolling on social media. We watch one video about dancing bears and suddenly the next video is a variation on more dancing bears. And the next one. It's almost like the app thinks you like to see more bears prancing on your screen. The truth is, it's not a coincidence. Don't believe me? Listen to this article from *sciencenewstoday.org*: *Social media platforms have become an integral part of our daily lives. Whether it's scrolling through Instagram, watching TikTok videos, or catching up with friends on Facebook, the digital landscape has dramatically shifted our interactions, entertainment, and even how we consume news and information. At the heart of this digital revolution is one invisible force that drives almost everything we see online: social media algorithms. Algorithms dictate much of what appears in our feeds, shaping our online experiences in ways we don't always realize. They decide which posts are worth showing to us, what content we find engaging, and even how long we stay on a platform. But how exactly do social media algorithms work? How do they determine what we see and why? And, perhaps most importantly, how do these algorithms impact our lives, behaviors, and beliefs?*

So just what is a social media algorithm? Here's a breakdown:

To understand social media algorithms, we must first break down what an algorithm is. Simply put, an algorithm is a set of instructions or rules designed to solve a problem or perform a task. In the case of social media, algorithms are used to organize and prioritize the vast amount of content generated by millions (sometimes billions) of users every day. Imagine opening Instagram or Facebook. Within seconds, you're presented with a customized feed of photos, videos, and stories from people you follow, along with sponsored content. The algorithm curates this experience based on various factors, such as your past interactions, your interests, your location, and the behavior of others who interact with similar content. It's a highly complex, data-driven process aimed at keeping you engaged for as long as possible, but it's not always transparent or easy to understand.

Engagement With Caution

As noted, viewer engagement dominates the algorithm. We get it. These social media platforms depend on getting and keeping the attention of viewers:

One of the most important factors driving social media algorithms is user engagement. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok prioritize content that generates interaction—likes, comments, shares, views, and time spent on a post. The more engagement a piece of content receives, the more likely it is to appear on your feed. This creates a feedback loop where popular posts continue to rise to the top, and less popular content is buried in the depths of the platform's database.

Overall the platforms need videos that get viewed to make money. Anyway they can accomplish that they will do it. It costs nothing to post so they need to make a profit other ways. And really, how harmful is it to watch an endless stream of cute babies, adorable pets, and clumsy people? I'll answer that and tell you it is completely innocuous. But there is a downside:

However, this focus on engagement can have unintended consequences. In a world where viral content often dictates the conversation, algorithms can push extreme, sensational, or controversial content to the forefront because it tends to attract higher engagement. This leads to the spread of misinformation, outrage, and even political polarization, all of which are amplified by the very systems designed to keep us glued to our screens.

Left out of that list of dangers is a more eternal problem which I call Algorithm Theology. This is what happens when one sees a video that talks about the Bible and is completely wrong. And then the viewer watches it to the end which signals the algorithm to push another video with bad Bible information. And then another. Before long people are getting a steady diet of bad doctrine which makes a difference, especially if these viewers have no other source of Christian information. It's already troubling when most young people get their news from TikTok, it's devastating when they get their theology from the same place.

Theology Matters

I know that seems a little anticlimactic after the lead I just created. But really if you think that Jesus isn't the Son of God or that the Bible isn't the inerrant Word of God of course it will change your belief system. A faux Christianity isn't helping anyone get closer to knowing God and spending eternity in Heaven. Bad doctrine is predicted to be rampant in the days preceding the return of Jesus and now we see exactly how that will happen. It used to be if you wanted to know more about God you went to church or talked with a pastor. Now social influencers are taking that role more and more. And it doesn't appear to be slowing down anytime soon. In a time when solid information about the Bible is sorely needed to offset the onslaught of Bible deniers, Christians are nowhere to be seen. Or at least not as involved as they could be. I like how an [article](#) from [gotquestions.org](#) describes the need for sound doctrine:

Sound doctrine is important because what we believe affects what we do. Behavior is an extension of theology, and there is a direct correlation between what we think and how we act. For example, two people stand on top of a bridge; one believes he can fly, and the other believes he cannot fly. Their next actions will be quite dissimilar. In the same way, a man who believes that there is no such thing as right and wrong will naturally behave differently from a man who believes in well-defined moral standards. In one of the Bible's lists of sins, things like rebellion, murder, lying, and slave trading are mentioned. The list concludes with "whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine" ([1 Timothy 1:9-10](#)). In other words, true teaching promotes righteousness; sin flourishes where "the sound doctrine" is opposed.

Truth Matters

When bank tellers need to avoid fake currency they aren't taught what a fake bill is but how to know what a real bill looks, feels, and even smells like. The Bible tells to do the same thing in the last days:

Sound doctrine is important because we must ascertain truth in a world of falsehood. "Many false prophets have gone out into the world" ([1 John 4:1](#)). There are tares among the wheat and wolves among the flock ([Matthew 13:25](#); [Acts 20:29](#)). The best way to distinguish truth from falsehood is to know what the truth is.

And knowing your Bible saves lives but also leads to destruction for those who don't:

Sound doctrine is important because the end of sound doctrine is life. "Watch your life and

doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” ([1 Timothy 4:16](#)). Conversely, the end of unsound doctrine is destruction. “Certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord” ([Jude 1:4](#)). Changing God’s message of grace is a “godless” thing to do, and the condemnation for such a deed is severe. Preaching another gospel (“which is really no gospel at all”) carries an [anathema](#): “let him be eternally condemned!” (see [Galatians 1:6-9](#)).

Do you want peace? Know your Bible as well. Pastors also can’t panic:

Sound doctrine is important because it encourages believers. A love of God’s Word brings “great peace” ([Psalm 119:165](#)), and those “who proclaim peace . . . who proclaim salvation” are truly “beautiful” ([Isaiah 52:7](#)). A pastor “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” ([Titus 1:9](#)).

In a world of social media pray that the Body of Christ rises to the challenge and gets in the fray of podcasting and short videos. We can do more than just make a dent in the wall of lies. The article ends with this challenge:

The word of wisdom is “Do not remove the ancient landmark which your fathers have set” ([Proverbs 22:28, NKJV](#)). If we can apply this to sound doctrine, the lesson is that we must preserve it intact. May we never stray from “the simplicity that is in Christ” ([2 Corinthians 11:3](#)).

Amen!