

How Big Data and Social Media Algorithm Systems Shape Consumer Intentions: A Critical Study on Personalization, Platform Power, and Digital Influence

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Abstract

With the rapid development of artificial intelligence, big data and algorithmic recommendation systems, social media platforms have gradually become some of the leading digital environments in recent years. TikTok, Instagram and Xiaohongshu systematically track user engagement metrics - including watch, likes, comments, and click-through rates-to feed their algorithmic recommendation engines. Algorithmic recommendation systems can be used by these platforms to deliver content and personalised advertisements more precisely. Although it is good for the use of platforms by the public, at the same time, serious issues have been pointed out, such as manipulation and loss of freedom for users. Big Data and Algorithmic Systems' Influence on Consumer Behavioural Intentions in Social Media Platforms. In terms of the theory of surveillance capitalism and platform capitalism and algorithmic governance, how personalized recommendation systems have affected consumer behaviour is analyzed in this paper. TikTok and Instagram have been used as the main subjects of study to investigate the effects of emotional content, data collection, influencer culture and behavioural prediction on people's consumption behaviour. Algorithms have been developed to predict what people will want; now they actively shape people's wishes by presenting personalised information and products over and over again. Social media platforms attract more users by using emotional triggers, an endless-scroll design, and precise-target ads. As people use the Internet more and more often, the types of products they need gradually start to change. At the same time, algorithmic recommendation systems are also associated with problems such as "filter bubbles", information homogeneity, privacy concerns and reduced user autonomy. Although users have the choice, the information they receive will be filtered by algorithms in the major platforms first. Therefore, the platform is not an impartial technological system, but rather a kind of digital power that collects data and changes behaviour. Today, the economy of social media is closely linked to forms of digital control and surveillance, as shown in the paper. Although the platforms gain profits from users' behaviour data, they are also constructing new social values and consumer cultures. Finally, this paper proposes increasing the transparency of algorithms, promoting digital literacy among the public, and strengthening regulatory measures for data collection.

Keywords

Big Data; Social Media; Algorithmic Recommendation; Consumer Intent; Platform Capitalism.

1. Introduction

In recent years, many people have been spending more and more time on the Internet. TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and Xiaohongshu are now popular platforms that offer more than just

communication; they have also introduced entertainment, shopping, advertising and consumer behaviour. With the development of artificial intelligence and big data technology, these platforms have been using algorithmic recommendation systems more and more frequently to organise information and predict users' behaviour.

Now, many people have a lot of time to enjoy customised content feeds based on their life online. All the clicks, likes, comments, pauses and searches are good data for the platform. The above data is processed by algorithms to determine what interests the user and recommends suitable content[1].

Therefore, both advertising and consumption have changed significantly in the digital age. Social media is a relatively young media that does not offer generic services for all users. Therefore, they can more effectively attract users and boost the demand for online consumption. With the development of these algorithms, so too have accompanying social and ethical issues. Algorithmic systems are convenient and personalised, but they have also been affecting people's thinking, emotions and consumption patterns. Users believe they are freely choosing what to watch and buy, but their online environments have long been systematically arranged by platform algorithms. Many times, a person's interest in a particular product does not arise from an actual need for it but is due to being repeatedly exposed to similar content promoted by the platform. The Purpose of a recommendation system is to interest more users and increase advertising revenue, not to present unbiased information. Therefore, the platforms will be able to guide consumers' wishes to some extent. Social media platforms have also become the basic support systems for life in the digital age. Based on a large number of data and behaviour analysis, these platforms are beginning to affect people's living habits and societal values. With the development of influencer culture, online shopping trends and algorithm-driven advertising models have all been introduced into the era of modern consumerism by social media[2].

Critically examine how big data and algorithmic systems are shaping consumer behaviour intentions on social media platforms in this paper. TikTok and Instagram are the focus of the current study, and both are based on personalised recommendation algorithms and advertising models. According to the theory of surveillance capitalism, platform capitalism and algorithmic governance are studied in this paper as aspects of technology, power and consumption in the digital age[3].

2. Development of Big Data and Algorithmic Recommendation Systems

2.1. Big Data and Social Media Platforms

A large amount of diverse and complicated digital data that can be analysed to obtain information is referred to as big data. At any time, numerous people are using social media and producing vast amounts of data through their interactions on these platforms. All the activities one performs online on social media are data sources that can be collected and analysed, such as watching videos, liking posts, searching for products, commenting on content, or even the time spent watching a particular video.

Now that more and more people are using smartphones and mobile apps, the social media companies have gained a large amount of people's private data. These platforms can also collect hidden behaviour by observing how long users view content, how fast they scroll, how often they interact, where they are in the world, and their browsing habits.

TikTok's recommendation system knows how long a person has watched a certain video. If a user repeatedly watches videos about beauty and cooking, then the algorithm will recognise this interest and start recommending other such videos. Over time, the recommended content stream has become more personalised. Many platforms are now more personalised, and users feel closer to the service. In the past, users had to actively search for information; now,

platforms can anticipate what users will need to view before the users themselves are aware of it. Another Feature of a Big Data System is Prediction Power.

Personalised Advertising is now significantly more effective than traditional media advertising. In TV and newspaper advertisements, many people are shown the ads without knowing who among them will be truly interested; however, on social media platforms, advertisements are targeted specifically to certain users according to their online behavior.

Therefore, the platform will be more effective for advertising and sales. If the platform can provide more relevant information that interests users better, it will be more appealing to them, and these users are likely to buy the products advertised on the platform.

This system has raised some serious problems of privacy and digital surveillance as well. Most users are not aware of the types of data collected by the platform and what will be done with that information. Many times, the platforms have continued to track users beyond the applications via cookies, app permissions and third-party data partnerships.

2.2. How Algorithmic Recommendation Systems Work

Now, most of the social media sites have begun to use algorithmic recommendation systems. These systems are intended to determine what content users should view, how frequently to show that content, and which advertisements are most likely to attract the user's attention.

TikTok's "For You Page" is a typical case of an algorithm-driven recommendation system. Collect data on what users watch, like, comment on, share and how long they watch, and then recommend new videos that might interest those users more.

Instagram is a Recommendation System as well. The platform will organise the content that users interact with and are friends with at the top, and display sponsored advertisements and shopping recommendations among this content.

Although recommendation systems are generally considered to be neutral technologies, they also have commercial applications. The aim is to have some representative data; it does not need to be all the data for all users and advertisers.

Therefore, the algorithm is more likely to be emotionally stimulating. Videos that can make people feel excitement, anxiety, desire or controversy are more likely to attract and retain the attention of users for an extended period, especially beauty, fashion, fitness and lifestyle content.

For example, "product recommendation" videos, unboxing content, and the popular trend of "TikTok made me buy it" repeatedly show people these products and make them want to buy. Many users buy things not because they have a real need for them, but because the algorithms repeatedly show them so frequently that they feel familiar and normal in their digital lives.

Thus, recommendation systems are not merely instruments for the user, but actively influence attention, emotion and behaviour.

3. Platform Capitalism and Digital Power

3.1. Platform Capitalism in the Digital Economy

With the rise of social media platforms, platform capitalism has also been developing. Nick Srnicek believes that platforms have become the main form of the business model in the digital economy and are built on large amounts of data and network effects[4].

Not many traditional enterprises produce physical goods; most of these enterprises are based on the idea of data. Collect user information and behaviour patterns from the platform, then create economic value.

The model of the platform is connected to the attention economy. Platforms are competing for users' time, interest and attention; thus, advertising revenue for these platforms has been declining.

Users of this system are also producers. Consumers of the content are also users of the platform. All of these will be used by the algorithm.

For instance, when a user wants to see new fashion photos on Instagram, they know what kind of posts the user likes, and then that related advertisement is shown to them. With the addition of more data over time, the model will become more complex. The above process has made the platforms relatively wealthy and well-known. Platforms determine the content of life for the public and influence various aspects of society and popular culture. As these platforms continue to develop, they will gradually integrate into people's lives. Social Media is changing how people communicate, buy, make friends and see themselves. Therefore, platform capitalism is a whole system of culture and society, not just an economic structure.

3.2. Surveillance Capitalism and Behavioural Prediction

Surveillance Capitalism, as presented by Shoshana Zuboff, can also be used to study the behaviour of social media platforms. Zuboff believes that a large number of data have been collected about what people do online in the digital economy to predict their future behavior[5]. Continuous Observation will be carried out on social media. Users' all movements are continuously recorded in their digital lives. The platforms know what the users are watching, what they are looking for, how long they stay online, and when they are more likely to be emotionally vulnerable.

Based on the above contents, we will enhance the accuracy of the advertisement and user interest. Surveillance Capitalism is no longer data collection. Platforms want to guide the behaviour of the public through information control.

For instance, if a user regularly views exercise and health-related content on the platform, the system will gradually increase the recommendation frequency of weight-loss products, dietary supplements, gym membership services, etc. Over time, the user will start to think that these products are necessary for self-improvement.

At the same time, the platform makes people want something without them knowing about it beforehand. Consumers' Intentions are being more and more influenced by algorithmically recommended products.

Additionally, the two sides of the power relationship are unequal. Platforms have gathered a large amount of user data, and these algorithms' work has gone unnoticed by most users.

This imbalance will reduce the extent of free expression online. Although users believe they are independently choosing what to watch online, algorithm systems have already created a curated digital world for them.

4. Shifting Consumer Demand via Social Media

4.1. Personalised Recommendations and Consumer Psychology

Personalised recommendation systems have been widely used in recent years to change the behaviour of consumers online. Continuously analyse the data and create highly personalised digital spaces for users.

Many users believe that the social media platform "knows" them and thus recommends content they will find interesting. Individualised Experiences will help the user feel more at home on the platform.

At the same time, a recommendation system will continuously learn users' preferences. For example, after a user has watched several skincare videos, the platform will recommend other

beauty-related content in the feed at that time. Repeatedly show consumers the same information.

The other is emotional appeal via social media platforms. Many videos promote the idea of self-improvement, attractiveness, a good life, a luxurious life, or personal success. The content shows that people's lives can be better off after buying some products.

Algorithms often recommend content naturally and are therefore less intrusive than traditional ads. Sponsored products are integrated into the entertainment content more smoothly and are less noticeable to the users.

Influencers often show off products in their daily lives and are less likely to appear in direct advertising. The above can give the audience a feeling of trust and emotion.

Over time, people associate their consumption behaviour with their self-concept, happiness, etc. As a result, the platforms will also guide the behaviour and perception of the users.

4.2. Influencer Culture and Digital Consumption

Influencer culture is a form of social media consumption. Influencers introduce the products in an easy-to-understand and pleasant manner for the public.

Influencers regularly post pictures and videos of their own lives, clothing, hobbies, etc., on TikTok and Instagram. As influencers are perceived as more relatable and authentic by the public, people have begun to follow them.

Algorithms have also spread influencer culture more widely by promoting popular content and helping well-liked influencers gain a large number of likes, thereby attracting more attention through recommendation systems. Thus, some products continuously appear in the feeds of different users. To be part of the online culture and socially acceptable, people are eager to buy fashionable goods.

TikTok has given rise to a new form of consumption that is driven by algorithmic recommendations, and as a result, has increased the demand for goods. Many viral products have been promoted through recommendation systems rather than traditional advertising and spread among users.

At the same time, influencer culture is frequently intertwined with advertising. Sponsor content is often presented as a person's own life story and is thus less likely to be perceived as advertising.

It can be seen that digital advertising is gradually becoming more emotionally appealing and engaging for the public.

4.3. Filter Bubbles and Consumption Homogenisation

Algorithmic personalisation is convenient, but it has also created "filter bubbles", and Eli Pariser refers to these as digital environments where people are mainly exposed to information in line with their own interests and beliefs. Recommendation systems on social media are continuously reducing the scope of content available to users. Those living in a luxurious way will be more exposed to expensive fashion advertisements, travel videos and beauty-related recommendations[6].

As a result, the users are confined to a narrow band of repeated consumption and are less exposed to other kinds of life experiences.

Thus, there will be less demand differentiation. Social media makes people want to keep up with the latest trends, buy similar goods, and have a certain style.

The platform is also promoting group behaviour through functions such as popular tags, viral challenges and "best-selling lists", and people frequently purchase products just because they have seen many others do so online.

Therefore, consumer culture is increasingly driven by algorithmic visibility rather than the people's real needs.

5. Ethical Problems of Algorithmic Systems

5.1. Privacy and Data Collection

A serious problem with the platforms for the masses is their lack of privacy. Most users do not know what kind of personal information the platforms collect, and where and how that data is stored or shared.

Social media companies are collecting a large number of data on users' online activities, their locations, purchase history, faces, etc., as well as how they interact. Some platforms still collect data for the system in the absence of users' active use of the application.

There are serious problems with the ethics of consent and openness. Although the users have consented to the privacy policies, the contents of these policies are usually too long and difficult to read.

Data breaches and unauthorised disclosure of private information are also occurring more frequently. When the user's data is revealed or distributed by third parties, the individual can no longer control this data.

Therefore, the distribution of users and platforms is uneven. The platforms and users have differential levels of information on digital surveillance at this time.

5.2. Algorithmic Manipulation and User Autonomy

Another is whether the algorithm system will reduce the autonomy of the user.

Users believe they have full freedom to choose what to view or buy online at present. However, the platforms will enhance the promotion of content via recommendation systems.

Algorithmic Prioritisation favours content with high engagement and disregards other balanced or meaningful data. Emotional content, controversial issues and very stimulating videos are more likely to be recommended as they can hold people's attention for a longer time[7].

As more and more people have been using algorithmic systems for recommendations over the years, they have become increasingly reliant on such platforms. Many people no longer actively look for information but are instead exposed to algorithm-recommended content passively.

It fails to help students think critically and independently. Although the user believes that the selection of consumption is voluntary, it is often determined by an algorithm that repeatedly presents recommendations. As a result, the idea of "free choice" in the social media environment has been diluted to some extent. Although the users are making independent choices, the underlying algorithmic systems are influencing these choices implicitly.

6. TikTok and Instagram as Case Studies

6.1. TikTok's Recommendation System and its Effects on Consumers

TikTok is one of the world's most popular social media sites now, and it is especially favored by young people. TikTok has become popular because of a recommendation algorithm for short videos, rather than through the use of social networks. Continuously provide personalised content for users based on their behaviour data on the "For You" page.

The TikTok algorithm has begun to understand people's likes in recent days. A few more seconds of viewing time will change the next suggested content. Many users believe that TikTok "knows me well" and, based on their experiences, are thus very fond of the platform.

TikTok's recommendation system promotes the purchase of impulsively. Now, popular trends, product reviews and short-video ads have been combined with entertainment content to arouse the public's purchasing interest. The promoted products on TikTok often become popular briefly due to a high-spread algorithm. Beauty products, fashion accessories and kitchen gadgets are often the objects of people's interest on TikTok at present. Users are exposed to these products frequently through many videos and begin to feel a desire to buy.

The typical feature of algorithm-driven consumerism has been the hashtag "TikTok made me buy it". Many people did not plan to buy the goods initially; however, through repeated exposure to them, their wish to purchase gradually grew.

TikTok's Design is also Endless Scroll. Users can switch from one video to another smoothly, so they will spend a long time in the app. Prolonged Use provides more times for ad display and product influence.

TikTok is also more favourable to emotionally resonant content. The algorithm will recommend more videos that create a sense of excitement, desire, humour or even anxiety. In a way, it is to make the user feel better emotionally about a product. At the same time, the algorithm for TikTok also creates a very immersive environment that is hard to detect as commercial manipulation by users. Often disguised as entertainment, recommended content or stories about one's life.

Therefore, the platform is no longer just for organising social events; over time, a good commercial area has also gradually emerged to support both entertainment and consumption.

6.2. Instagram, Lifestyle Culture and Digital Identity

Instagram does not work the same way as TikTok, but it also influences consumers' desire in various ways. Instagram is a visually oriented platform for life and style that promotes influencer marketing.

The platform is presenting its users' idealised lives in a select manner via pictures and videos. Fashion, beauty, travel, fitness and luxury lifestyles are now the top contents on Instagram.

Visual culture has significantly changed people's consumption patterns, and many goods and services are now linked to self-image and social identity. Many consumers are not buying the goods for practical purposes; instead, they are seeking to embody a certain way of life. Instagram's recommendation system will also promote this way by showing people more popular visual-oriented and interesting content. Influencers have many followers and regularly partner with brands for promotion in an authentic-seeming, personalised manner. Beauty bloggers may post skincare routines or makeup tutorials and subtly promote sponsored products at the same time. As the recommended content is related to the people's daily lives, they are more likely to be trusted by people than traditional advertisements.

Instagram has added a shopping function and is now a full-fledged e-commerce platform. Users can now complete purchases directly in the app via posts, stories and ads, without leaving the app at all. Thus, entertainment and online shopping have been integrated into people's daily lives through social media consumption.

Instagram has also promoted a sense of inferiority. People are always scrolling through idealised life pictures, expensive goods, and carefully arranged self-images. The Environment may induce feelings of inferiority and social anxiety in the young people. Many users believe that buying some goods will help them live a certain way or gain the approval of society. Thus, the phenomenon of consumerism has become linked with the digital age.

Therefore, Instagram shows that algorithmic systems have changed people's ways of consuming and affect self-esteem and emotional expectations.

7. Social Impacts of Algorithmic Consumption Culture

7.1. Digital Addiction and the Attention Economy

Algorithms for social media have led to an increase in the problem of digital addiction. Social media platforms have been set up to hold people's attention for longer and make them stay on the platform longer. Infinite scrolling, autoplaying videos, push notifications, and personalised feeds all help keep users engaged in the platform for a longer time. The above are the reasons for the logic of the attention economy.

Users' attention is now an economic resource in the era of attention. The longer a user stays on a platform, the more ads they will see and the more data generated. Therefore, there is a contest among many people for their attention online. Algorithms are generally favourable to content that is emotionally moving, entertaining or highly addictive; therefore, such content will attract more users' attention.

TikTok is a short-video platform that provides a large amount of personalised, emotionally stimulating short-form content. Users tend to forget about time while watching, as well as algorithms continuously provide entertaining videos for them. Although the addictive structure of the platforms is economically favourable for the platforms, it may also harm the mental health and daily life of the users. Many users have had trouble controlling how long they use screens or opting out of the organized digital world built by algorithms.

Many advertisements for consumer goods will make the public want to purchase them more readily. People are in a bad mood and want to buy something without really needing it.

Digital addiction and consumerism are connected; thus, algorithms now influence all areas of life for people, not just entertainment.

7.2. Social Comparison and Consumption Anxiety

Social media platforms have also intensified the phenomenon of social comparison and consumer anxiety.

Through Instagram and TikTok, people are regularly exposed to the lives of others, including fashionable clothes, fancy cars and so on. These pictures generally have unrealistic hopes.

Some people will start comparing their lives to the lives shown online. The above comparisons are likely to cause anxiety, feelings of inferiority and consumer pressure. Fashion influencers often show expensive clothes, skincare products, holidays or exercise in their daily lives as if they were ordinary things. Some people need to buy similar items in order to meet the demands of society.

The algorithm will also recommend more and more similar content repeatedly. If users are more familiar with luxurious and beautiful contents, then their exposure to such subjects will be relatively high and their desire to acquire them will be stronger.

Therefore, many scholars have described this as a "desire-driven consumer culture", and people's feelings of success and happiness are closely linked to consumption.

At the same time, social media also promotes the public display of consumption behaviour. Users often post about their shopping history, favourite clothes and eating habits, etc., on the internet. Therefore, people's behaviour has gradually become associated with digital identity and social status.

Therefore, the platform creates a situation in which social comparison and consumption behaviour continuously reinforce each other.

7.3. Young Users and Algorithmic Influence

Young people are easily swayed by algorithms because they use social media for a long time. Young people are usually good at finding both leisure and social activities on TikTok and

Instagram. At the same time, the environment of algorithms is also shaping their sense of self and consumption patterns.

Many young people are heavily influenced by trends, internet celebrities and popular products. Algorithms continuously present these aesthetically pleasing or aspirational lifestyles, and thus people feel pressure to conform to them.

Popular trends on TikTok for skincare, weight loss, fashion and so on, are being quickly adopted by young people and changing their consumption patterns. Some users will buy products that are popular on the internet for no particular reason.

In addition, young users often have a limited understanding of how algorithms adjust the display and recommendation of content; thus, they are more likely to believe that algorithmically promoted content is genuine or credible.

Therefore, there are serious ethical problems regarding the responsibility of social media platforms; although these platforms earn substantial profits by attracting the attention and behaviour data of young people, they are at the same time indirectly influencing the psychological development and consumption habits of these young people. Therefore, there is an increasing number of discussions about digital literacy and algorithm education.

8. Resistance, Regulation and the Future of Digital Platforms

8.1. Algorithmic Transparency and Platform Accountability

With the rise in popularity of social media over the years, people have started to pay more attention to algorithm transparency as well.

Most of the social media companies have not fully disclosed how their recommendation systems work at present. Algorithms are at the heart of platform profit, and thus are kept as trade secrets.

Therefore, the user cannot verify the correctness of the information. Most people do not know why they are seeing specific content or advertisements, so they are unable to recognize that this content has been manipulated or promoted by a particular platform.

Increase the openness of algorithms to make them more user-friendly. Some scholars think the platform should offer more transparent information on the recommendation system, data collection and advertising[8].

At the same time, the company of the social-media platform should bear more responsibility for the social problems that have occurred because of its algorithm. Although the platforms are presented as neutral technologies, they are in fact producing their own culture for the public and influencing consumer behaviour. Given that they have a large-scale impact on the spread of information, they should also be held responsible for the harmful recommendation behaviour and excessive monitoring and manipulation by advertising.

8.2. Government Regulation and Data Protection

Around the world, some countries have begun to introduce policies on digital privacy and platform regulation. For example, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in the European Union wants to strengthen the rights of individuals over their own data and has also stipulated that companies must provide simple-to-understand information to people about the collection and use of this data. At the same time, some countries have banned or restricted TikTok on the grounds of data security and other negative impacts on young people. However, the regulation of social media platforms is still problematic because these companies are global in scope and laws generally have national jurisdictions. Technology enterprises are also large in scale and power. Platforms have brought great changes to the advertising industry, communication systems and the digital economy, and are thus difficult to regulate strictly[9].

Stronger Regulations are increasingly necessary. Without the above legal guarantees, users will be exposed to the risks of extensive data collection and observation without their knowledge. In the future, the new regulations will address the problems of privacy and algorithmic accountability for advertising transparency and the protection of young people.

8.3. Digital Literacy and User Awareness

At the same time, users need to improve their digital literacy to some extent.

Digital literacy is people's ability to know how to use social media and what effects algorithms have had on the dissemination of information.

Many users are still unaware that the recommendation system is influencing their interests by providing a series of related information and emotion-inducing content.

Helpful Critical awareness will allow users to better understand why and how the platform displays certain information. Educational institutions can also be utilized to teach students about digital power, surveillance and online advertising. [11, 12]

Media literacy education can help young people learn to identify sponsored content and how to collect data; thus, they can be more critical in their view of life on the Internet.

Strengthened digital literacy cannot completely eliminate the effect of platforms; rather, people will engage more actively and make more independent selections. [13-15]

Strengthen institutional supervision and raise public awareness to build a good digital environment.

9. Conclusion

Research on how big data and algorithmic systems affect the intention to consume among people on social media platforms. Using the concepts of platform capitalism, surveillance capitalism and algorithmic governance, analyze how digital technologies affect consumer behaviour and power structures on TikTok and Instagram in this paper.

According to the above studies, in addition to providing a place for people to communicate, these social media platforms are often used to attract the attention of users and collect behavioural data for targeted advertising by businesses in a commercial system.

Algorithmic recommendation systems continuously shape people's interests and desires through personalised content, emotional connections, influencer culture and repeated exposure. With the increase in online time for the population, its consumption mode has been moving towards convenience and is increasingly platform-dependent.

At the same time, these systems have also raised serious ethical and social problems, such as privacy risks, information bubbles, reduced autonomy, and an increasingly widespread digital surveillance system.

Although the user thinks they are choosing what to eat freely, the structure of algorithms will have steered their choices. Therefore, these platforms can have an impact on the spread of information and changes in society.

Future discussions on social media should focus on new technologies for a long time to come as well as problems of power and openness. Strengthen regulations, improve the accountability of algorithms, enhance the digital literacy of users, and thus protect them from undue manipulation and surveillance[10].

Finally, Big Data and algorithm systems have changed the nature of modern consumer culture. To know how these systems will change the behaviour of people, we can promote the construction of a moral and balanced digital society.

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