

How 'engagement' makes you vulnerable to manipulation and misinformation on social media | The Conversation

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Facebook has been quietly experimenting with reducing the amount of political content it puts in users' news feeds. The move is a tacit acknowledgment that the way the company's algorithms work can be a problem.

The heart of the matter is the distinction between provoking a response and providing content people want. Social media algorithms – the rules their computers follow in deciding the content that you see – rely heavily on people's behavior to make these decisions. In particular, they watch for content that people respond to or "engage" with by liking, commenting and sharing.

As a computer scientist who studies the ways large numbers of people interact using technology, I understand the logic of using the wisdom of the crowds in these algorithms. I also see substantial pitfalls in how the social media companies do so in practice.

[...]

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