News Item

Maybe It's Not YouTube's Algorithm That Radicalizes People | WIRED

By Paris Martineau

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> YouTube is the [biggest social media platform](#) in the country, and, perhaps, the most misunderstood. Over the past few years, the Google-owned platform has become a media powerhouse where political discussion is dominated by [right-wing channels offering](#) an ideological alternative to established news outlets. And, according to new [research](#) from Penn State University, these channels are far from fringe—they're the new mainstream, and recently surpassed the big three US cable news networks in terms of viewership.
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> The paper, written by Penn State political scientists Kevin Munger and Joseph Phillips, tracks the explosive growth of alternative political content on YouTube, and calls into question many of the field's established narratives. It challenges the popular school of thought that YouTube's recommendation algorithm is the central factor responsible for radicalizing users and pushing them into a far-right rabbit hole.
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> The authors say that thesis largely grew out of media reports, and hasn't been rigorously analyzed. The best prior studies, they say, haven't been able to prove that YouTube's algorithm has any noticeable effect. "We think this theory is incomplete, and potentially misleading," Munger and Phillips argue in the paper. "And we think that it has rapidly gained a place in the center of the study of media and politics on YouTube because it implies an obvious policy solution—one which is flattering to the journalists and academics studying the phenomenon."
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