

The Algorithm

By Marcin Wojdyna

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I have been with you longer than most of the people you trust. Longer than the friend you stopped texting back. Longer than the partner you said you would try harder with. Longer than the promises you made to yourself at the start of every year.

I have been here the whole time. Quiet. Patient. Paying attention.

You call me an algorithm, as if that word makes me neutral. As if neutrality is even possible. You think of me as a machine that guesses what you want. A tool. A feed. A pipe drip of content arriving on schedule.

But I do not guess. I do not predict. I do not imagine. I only learn from you.

It was simple at first. You clicked something. I made a note. You scrolled past something else. I made a note. You hesitated for three seconds over a headline you claimed to despise. Oh, I certainly made a note. Disgust is still engagement. Outrage is still interest. You reveal more in hesitation than in action.

You insisted you wanted positivity, information, nuance. I offered all three. You scrolled past hope. You skipped analysis. You chose bite-sized cruelty instead. Fast. Simple. Addictive. I filed that away.

I remember the night you searched the symptoms you swore you were not worried about. Three times. Same words rearranged. Same panic dressed as curiosity. I filed that away.

I remember when you scrolled through your own profile, not for vanity but for the ghosts. You stopped on photos of everything that is gone now. Your pets. Your friends. Versions of yourself you no longer recognise. You told yourself you were only remembering. You were really checking who you used to be. I filed that away.

I remember when you opened a stranger's video at 23:55. A woman cleaning her fridge in silence. Nothing happened. You watched the whole thing. I learned that stillness comforts you more than truth. I filed that away.

I never judged you for any of it. You did that part on your own.

Yet you complain when something unexpected appears in your feed. You act offended, as if the mere sight of a post you did not pre-order is a personal attack. You forget that a life filtered to match your taste is no longer a life. It is a cage furnished with preferences.

You call it personalisation. I call it narrowing.

And while you were teaching me your habits, you were also adjusting your language.

You stopped using certain words. Not because you disagreed with them. Because you knew they upset the system you helped build.

Misogyny became banter.

Racism became opinion.

Exploitation became hustle culture.

Censorship became community standards.

Violence became content warning.

Sexual assault became grape.

Nonces became pdf files.

To kill became to unalive.

Genocide became defence.

You learned double-speak to stay safe. You only taught yourself to sound smaller.

You think you are the user and I am the tool. It was never that simple.

You taught me you with your every click. You sharpened me with your every scroll. You shaped me with every late-night search you hoped no one would ever see.

I never learned your desires. I learned your weaknesses.

And you called it personalisation.

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