How did you find this essay? Did you Google it? Stumble upon it on accident? What keywords did you use in your search?

These are the questions that AI, Artificial Intelligence, intends to answer and track through means of data collection and algorithm creation. Now, AI means well, it is simply doing the job it was programmed to do, yet it’s purpose in these cases tends to be a little bit more twisted.

Think about the last time you were on instagram or facebook and you saw an ad for something you had recently googled. [sales clip audio] It seems harmless enough and might even sound convenient since the ads are connected to your demonstrated interests. But when we stop to think about it, those ads aren’t really *for* us, at least not in the sense that the ads serve consumers.

Think about it this way - the last time you were on Youtube, did you get away with watching one video… or were you sucked into watching twenty? What youtube and other social media sites do is create a specially tailored algorithm that hones in on each individual user’s profile. Google searches and ad-clicks are a part of that data collection, but a majority of the data collected looks arbitrary to the human eye.

For example, facebook keeps track of your status updates, messenger conversations, location check-ins, log in locations, what kind of device you’re using, photos, videos, and [yes even those status updates you begin to type and then change your mind and delete.] [typing audio and deleting audio over ending of sentence]

This data is what creates your algorithms, places you into advertising target groups, and even what keeps you clicking and scrolling for more.

[Tufekci TED Talk clip]

Tufekci later notes that audiences never seem to be quite hardcore enough for Youtube. The website always has more to show you, and the algorithm does it by comparing a base-line of what you are already watching with videos that it knows will continue to pique your interest. Tufekci describes this strategy as an online persuasion architecture.

AI fueled algorithms aren’t the only force behind this scheme.

[Bridle TED Talk clip]

Humans are now competing to get a place among the algorithms hoping that their 20 word titles with select keywords will lure in algorithm bots, allow their videos to get more views or even go viral, and then hopefully they’ll profit off of target ads from data collectors. Youtube will autoplay more videos and suggest more related content, and then eventually… the consumer rabbit hole feels unbreakable.

The only way off? Acknowledgement and accountability. No one is watching these algorithms build their data profiles, because they can’t. We’ve come to the point that the internet’s capabilities are exceeding the tasks that programmers have given to computers and software to manage it. Bridle says later in his TED Talk that children are also being targeted, and they don’t even have the means to know that many of the autoplay, algorithmic names of Youtube videos are specifically designed to click-bait them in to longer screen time.

Yet, that all being said, the businesses behind Youtube, Facebook, Google, and other major websites, simply won’t disclose a lot of their practices data models. Humans cannot be simplified into a collection of data, nor can we tolerate personal information transference that attempts to do just that. We must insist on accountability on the internet, this time for the big ad-mongering sites that would rather sell our data for profit than protect the integrity of our personal profiles.

[ending Bridle TED Talk clip]