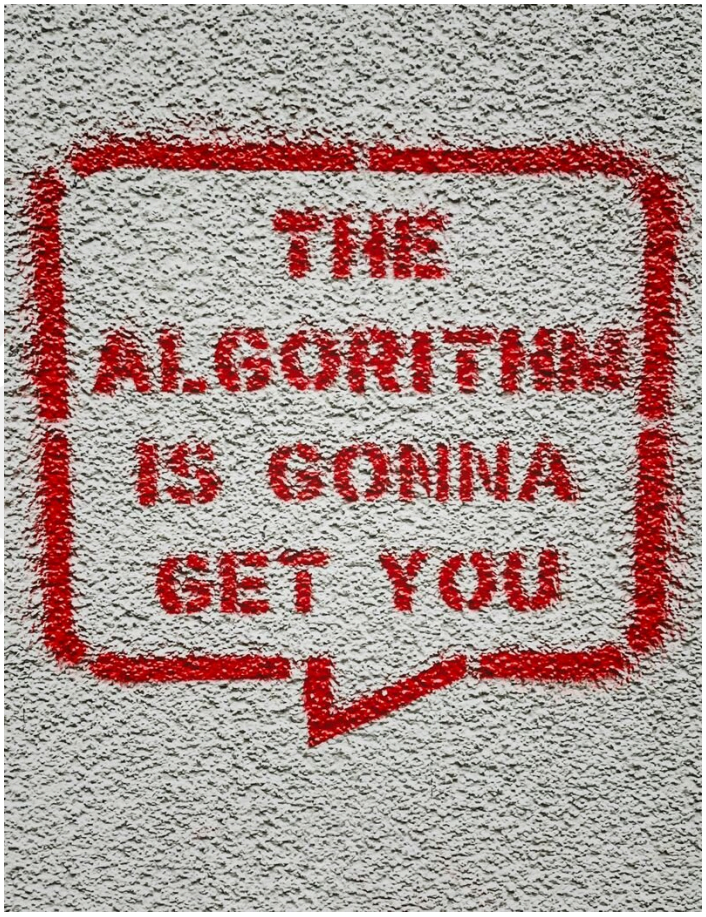
Fed, Not Informed

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As technology advances, algorithms increasingly shape what we see, how we communicate, and even how global policy is made.

How Feeds Reshape Beliefs

Nowadays, citizens have access to more information than at any other time in history, yet feel more polarised and less knowledgeable. The influence of the media on our everyday lives has grown considerably over the last few decades. Furthermore, the way news are delivered and received has undergone enormous changes.

Digitalisation gave birth to faster and more dynamic communication, which is open to everyone and where anybody can contribute with their

own opinion. By definition, social networks are websites that allow people to share information online using a computer or mobile phone. These tools have given us the ability to publicly express our views on any topic. While the concept is extremely democratic, in reality, what someone says online seems to be filtered by the platform's algorithm. This phenomenon is known as "Filter Bubble" and occurs when personalised internet algorithms limit a user's exposure to diverse viewpoints and information, ultimately shaping their perspective in a narrow way. The term was coined by Eli Pariser and refers to the fact that individuals often receive information that only reinforces their existing beliefs. The engines of social media platforms that prioritise 'active' interactions (such as likes and shares) create a dynamic feedback loop that systematically amplifies extreme content, exposing users to what is in line with their preferences and ideologies. This creates a significant issue for individuals who rely on social media for updates. News do not circulate stably, and the number of critiques and appreciations surrounding a particular event will differ for each member of the public.

Migration narrative case

Correct information has always played a crucial role in helping us cultivate our political perspective, and it is vital for democracy to function. However, the new instruments of communication pose a danger when they are not subject to any control over their ability to influence our political behaviour. The public discussion on migration offers a clear example of this dynamic at work. European countries have different views on immigration policies, as it is a complex topic, but the perception of it on social platforms is polarised. False narratives surrounding refugees are often amplified rather than challenged, thus giving rise to manipulated ideas. At the same time, xenophobic and anti-immigration rhetoric is rife in some social media groups, such as on the Facebook group "Stand Up for Sweden".

Social media affects people's views on migrants' integration trajectories, on their role in the host society, and beliefs about the effectiveness of policies to attract and retain new immigrants. The findings of the 2020 European Policy Centre's (EPC) study into the prevalence of online disinformation narratives relating to migration showed that European media have been dominated by stories identifying migrants as an invasion force, a vector for the transmission of diseases, a source of violent crime, or the undeserving recipients of social benefits. In this case too, then, the internet divided people, creating echo chambers and never encouraging discussion of different standpoints. Propagating specific migration policy narratives, and never examining in depth their impact, can only bring further confusion and conflict among a fragmented public. This weakens the vital democratic aim of providing correct information, mentioned before, which, instead,

would enable us to develop an overall understanding of an issue by offering more context, objective data and greater analysis.

Is politics becoming a "trend"?

The leap in communication technology in recent years has allowed us to gain more information every day, at the expense of deeper explanations. Audiences seem to have adapted to vertical media that reinforce their convictions, and consequently are no longer looking for accuracy. The real change is that politics is increasingly becoming a 'trend' on these platforms, not supported by any valid sources. Leaders use compelling data to create catchy videos for the feed. Users endure information overload, and, faced with too many stimuli, they give up on understanding the dynamics and simply start to 'cheer'.

Public debates have turned into conflicts, and whoever has a different opinion is seen as an enemy who must be destroyed and insulted. What started as a place for free expression has turned into a cage where critical thinking is discouraged. In a society that spreads false certainties, institutions can help the next generation, who are more connected to this 'trend politics', by strengthening their ability to evaluate information online and recognise the biases in polarised debates. Students must develop critical skills that make them aware of the sources they are consulting, and help them understand that good communication doesn't hand out conclusions; it unsettles what was previously taken for granted. More often than not, the right question sparks more reflection than a quick answer ever could. Real resolutions are born from the debate that doubt creates – not from the certainty that ends it.