

Media Literacy

champions

Lesson 4 How did this get here?

Years 8-10

This is the final of four lessons on digital and media literacy for years 8-10. This lesson focuses on how algorithms target information and news to people online, the intended effects of algorithms on users of social media and other online services, and strategies to manage targeted advertising and information.

No lesson should be taught in isolation, but always as part of a planned, developmental PSHE education programme. These lessons would work well as part of wider learning about life online, including managing personal and professional reputation online, and responding to harmful online behaviours.



Learning objective

To learn about how algorithms target information to people.

Learning outcomes

Students will be able to...

- explain that online media uses data to target information and advertising to people
- describe the intended effect of targeting users through algorithms
- describe strategies to manage the effects of targeted advertising and information

Resources

Student mind-maps from Lesson 1:
Unit baseline assessment

Resource 1 – Algorithm map [1 per pair]

Resource 1a – Algorithm map cards
[1 per pair]

Resource 1b – Algorithm map completed
[1 per class]

Resource 2 – Algorithm interview
[1 per pair]

Box for questions

Overview

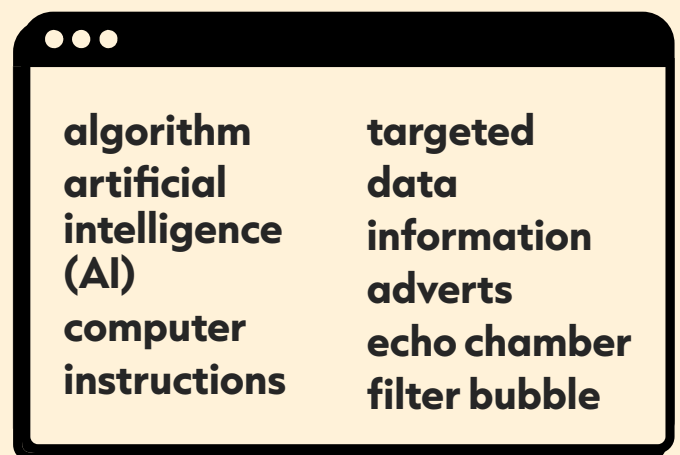
Activity	Description	Timing
Reconnecting activity	Students guess what they think the lesson is about from keywords.	5 mins
Algorithm map	Students identify missing parts of online journeys, and explain why the algorithm is showing users particular types of content.	20 mins
Pros and cons	Students create a list of pros and cons of algorithms from talking heads describing people's experiences of engaging with them.	10 mins

Think, feel, do	Students explain what a character might think, feel and do in response to seeing extreme content promoted to them via a social media algorithm.	10 mins
Unit endpoint assessment	Students return to their mind-map from Lesson 1 and make additions and changes to demonstrate their progress.	10 mins
Signpost support	Respond to questions and signpost students to relevant support.	5 mins

Climate for learning

Make sure you have read the accompanying teacher guidance notes before teaching this lesson. These include guidance on ground rules, the limits of confidentiality, curriculum links and relevant subject knowledge.

Key words



Reconnecting activity - Slides 2-4

5 mins

Ensure that the topic of this lesson is not discussed until after the baseline assessment.

Using **slide 2**, establish or revisit ground rules for the lesson. Remind students of the question box and that they are welcome to add questions at any time, anonymously or with their name.

Show students the words on **slide 3**. In pairs, ask them to decide what they think today's lesson will be exploring. Take feedback from students, asking them to explain how they think the words connect to the topic.

Use **slide 4** to introduce the learning objective and outcomes for the lesson, explaining that today's lesson will explore how algorithms are used online to target individuals with data and information, the effect this intends to have on people, and how to manage targeted information and advertising.

Algorithm Map - Slides 5-6

20 mins

Show students the characters on slide 5 and hand pairs **Resource 1: Algorithm map** and **Resource 1a: Algorithm map cards**. Explain that the map shows parts of each character's journey online, and the kind of content that a social media algorithm is going to recommend to them based on this data.

Some parts of the map are missing. Ask pairs of students to use the cards at the bottom of the resource to complete each character's journey. Circulate with **Resource 1b: Algorithm map completed** to support students where required.

Once students have sorted the cards, ask them to discuss the questions on **slide 6** in their pairs.

Key learning:

1. Algorithms use people's online activities and data to show them content and advertising that the individual person will be interested in, making their online experience different to someone else's. The algorithms try to personalise the experience of using the internet for each user.
2. Companies use algorithms to earn money while providing services to people. These algorithms study the online activities of users to learn what they like and show them adverts or content that they are likely to enjoy. When people engage with these adverts or buy products, the companies make money, and at the same time, users get to see things that interest them which keeps them on the platform for longer, which benefits the social media platform.
3. Algorithms recommend more extreme content over time to keep people engaged on the platform. When users interact with provocative or extreme content (for example, by continuing to view the content, liking, sharing or following) the algorithm shows them similar content, leading to a gradual increase in intensity. This process can lead to users being stuck in an 'echo chamber' in which a person is repeatedly shown content that aligns with their views and continues to intensify more extreme beliefs.
4. **Cassidy** is being shown riskier content in relation to crafts and DIY that are inappropriate to carry out without proper supervision, equipment or training; this may mean Cassidy is at risk of getting injured.
Lottie is being shown content that may promote unrealistic beauty standards and encourages disordered eating. Lottie may become concerned about her own appearance.
Elin is accessing her older brother's social media accounts, which is an invasion of his privacy. Algorithms use data like age and gender to make recommendations, so Elin may come across content that is too old for her. She's also seeing disinformation or misinformation about science which may give her misleading information on important topics.
Jakob has been recommended content that has directed him to misogynistic videos that contain hate speech. The algorithm may continue to promote this and direct him to more extreme content and influencers, which may in turn have an impact on Jakob's beliefs and attitudes.

Support:

Ask students to focus on identifying which parts are relevant to Cassidy's journey and answer the following questions:

- Is Cassidy always choosing what they see?
- When might Cassidy have concerns about what the algorithm is promoting?

Pros and cons - Slide 7

10 mins

Give pairs of students **Resource 2 – Algorithm interview** and explain that a local news station has interviewed students and asked them what they think about algorithms being used online. Ask students to create a list of pros and cons of companies using algorithms from the quotes, and add any of their own that they can think of.

Key learning:

- Algorithms provide personalised experiences, efficiency in finding content that is interesting for different individuals, and targeted advertising which can feel convenient.
- However, people need to be aware that algorithms might skew the content they see to certain perspectives on a range of issues (this can sometimes be referred to as ‘filter bubbles’ or ‘echo chambers’).
- There are also concerns about data privacy, biases algorithms may reinforce, changes in the kinds of jobs available as algorithms and AI may replace some but open up other opportunities, as well as being directed to more extreme content, being influenced to spend more money than someone might otherwise, and unintentionally spending more time than intended on social media platforms.

Challenge:

Ask students to evaluate whether algorithms are generally more harmful or more beneficial: “To what extent is the way companies use algorithms online harmful or helpful?”

Think, feel, do - Slides 8-9

10 mins

Show students **slide 9** and ask them to choose one character from **Resource 1: Algorithm map**. Ask students to reflect on the final point on the map for that character, where the algorithm has begun to recommend concerning and more extreme content.

In their pairs, ask students to think about how the character might feel in that situation, what they might be thinking and what they might do next.

To take feedback, ask students to suggest what the character might be thinking and feeling, and identify if there are any similarities between the characters. Then share the strategies for reporting or managing feelings about being shown more extreme content on **slide 9**. Ask students to decide which strategy they think would be most helpful for their character.

Key learning:

- Encountering concerning content could cause the characters various emotions, such as confusion, alarm, discomfort, scepticism about other content they see online, and self-doubt (for example, in their own values in Jakob's case, and in regards to their body image in Lottie's case).
- For all characters, they may be thinking about whether the content is interesting and engaging, or thinking about the risks to their physical wellbeing, or impacts of the content on their emotional wellbeing.
- Harmful content can be reported to platform moderators. CEOP provides guidance on where content can be reported across different platforms (see signposting support).
- The characters could also seek support from trusted adults, like parents or teachers, to help to manage their emotions and develop strategies for coping with distressing content and to discuss whether the information they've come across is inaccurate, unfair or harmful.
- They might also use a range of strategies to manage their feelings if they've seen concerning content, such as: taking a break from the platform; taking a break from being online altogether; trying other activities to help them manage feelings that might arise from seeing this content; following more positive content creators; or engaging with different topics/types of content.

Unit endpoint assessment - Slide 10

10 mins

Show **slide 10** and ask students to revisit their mind-map baseline assessment from Lesson 1. They should use a different colour pen to make any changes or additions they would like to their answers, and add any additional learning they have gained during the lessons.

It may help to remind students of the learning objectives for the past four lessons.

To learn about...

- the variety of media sources available and how to establish their reliability.
- strategies to identify and manage misinformation and disinformation.
- how fact, opinion and bias are presented in media.
- how algorithms target information to people.

Use students' additions and changes to their mind-maps to evidence their progress across this series of lessons.

Signposting support - Slide 11

5 mins

Respond to any questions from the question box. Ensure that students know where they can seek help and advice, both now and in the future, if they are worried or concerned about media content, misinformation and disinformation, or what they've seen on social media. Students wishing to seek further guidance can:

Speak to someone in school, such as a tutor or head of year.

Contact

Childline: www.childline.org.uk 0800 1111

[ThinkUKnow](#) from NCA-CEOP has guidance on how to report content on different social media platforms

Extension activity - Slide 12

Students write a short letter to a social media company targeting individuals with adverts and content via algorithms. They should explain how they think the company could support young people to have a better experience on their platform.