

How social media algorithms create echo chambers

Teacher Tips – Lesson 6

Is there an echo in here?! Are you only seeing posts on your social media feeds that you agree with? You might be stuck in an echo chamber. This lesson will teach students about algorithms, confirmation bias and how to avoid getting stuck in an echo chamber.

Students will be able to:

- Explain how social media **algorithms** create an **echo chamber**
- Explain what **confirmation bias** is and how it can lead to misinformation.
- Avoid echo chambers on their social media accounts

KEY VOCABULARY

1. **Echo chamber** – *an environment where a person only encounters information or opinions that reflect and reinforce their own*
2. **Algorithm** – *set of rules used to rank, filter and organize the content for users within certain social media platforms.*
3. **Confirmation Bias** – *the tendency to seek out or give greater weight to information that supports our pre-existing beliefs and expectations.*

BEFORE YOU WATCH

Warm-up question: Why do you think it is often important to listen to more than one side of an issue?

WHILE YOU WATCH

Tell students to preview the questions and then answer them while they watch the MediaWise Teen-Fact Checking Network (TFCN) video.



According to the video...

1. The main goals of social media algorithms are to keep you **interested** so you stay on the platform for as long as possible, **engage** with the content by sharing or commenting and come **back** to it later.
2. What are the positive aspects of social media echo chambers?
 - *You will find information about things you want to learn about, such as Minecraft.*
3. What are some negative aspects of echo chambers that can lead to bad consequences?
 - *Many are filled with information that can lead someone to believe something that is not true and take action on it, such as Robert Stanford and the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol.*
4. How can you avoid echo chambers on social media?

- Follow left and right-leaning sources of information—diversify your news sources
- Avoid interacting with controversial posts—the algorithm will stop feeding them to you
- Fact-check political, scientific or conspiratorial posts
- Like everything to confuse the algorithm

AFTER YOU WATCH

Watch this [teen CBC reporter explain how algorithms work](#). Use the words below to fill in the blanks as you watch.

day	hate	recommendations	order	longer	search
don't	see	sorting	extreme	engage	

1. (:25) On social media, algorithms decide what you're going to SEE and in what ORDER.
2. (:30) Mathew Johnson lists three goals of social media algorithms:
 - Keep you on the particular site LONGER
 - Make sure you come back every DAY
 - Make sure you ENGAGE with the content
3. (1:00) The algorithm may serve up content you love or HATE to provoke a reaction.
4. (1:13) This results in more and more EXTREME content being served when you engage with posts that create a reaction and people get angry.
5. (1:32) The algorithm decides what you see and what you DON'T see.
6. List three tips for breaking out of a social media echo chamber:
 - Tip 1: Change SORTING
 - Tip 2: Turn off RECOMMENDATIONS
 - Tip 3: Don't click. SEARCH instead.

EXIT TICKET

What are two things you can do to try to avoid an echo chamber on your social media feeds?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

If you have a social media account, ask the following questions about the content in your feed.

1. What echo chambers do you belong to that provide a positive, healthy forum to share interests?
2. What topics in your social media platform seem like they represent only one perspective and could be a more toxic echo chamber that excludes multiple perspectives about controversial topics?

Search for a topic or issue in your feed using the platform's search function. Analyze what you see in the results.

3. Do the posts reflect a variety of perspectives or opinions about the topic?
4. Are there more posts reflecting one particular viewpoint?

COMING UP NEXT

Be MediaWise Lesson 7: Evaluating a scientific claim—Students will learn how to combat online science misinformation using lateral reading by investigating a post about an NFL football player’s collapse on the field.

*These lessons were developed by [PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs](#) in partnership with [MediaWise](#) and the [Teen Fact-Checking Network](#), which are part of the [Poynter Institute](#). **This partnership has been made possible with support from Google.***

Standards

Common Core ELA —CC.8.5.6-8; CC.8.5.9-10.A; CC.8.5.11-12.A - Citing informational text

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3)—D3.1.6-8. Gather relevant information from multiple sources while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

D3.1.6-12. Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.

Additional Media Literacy Resources

- MediaWise [“Is This Legit?”](#) Series
- [Fact-Checking Lesson](#) for Student Journalists
- [Misinformation Overload](#) Interviews from PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs
- [StoryMaker Media Literacy Learning](#)

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