



blackout
EDUCATION



Tech Basics - Understanding the Digital World

Assembly objectives:

- What is an algorithm?
- What are cookies, and what do they do?
- How do app permissions work?
- Why does your data have value?

What is an algorithm?

An algorithm is the system apps use to decide what appears next on your feed.

- It learns from what people watch, like or scroll past
- It tries to predict what might keep someone interested
- It creates a personalised feed, which means you may not see every point of view

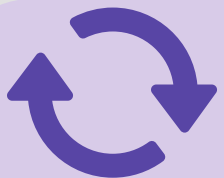
Apps build this picture by noticing:



What someone watches



What someones likes



What someones rewatches



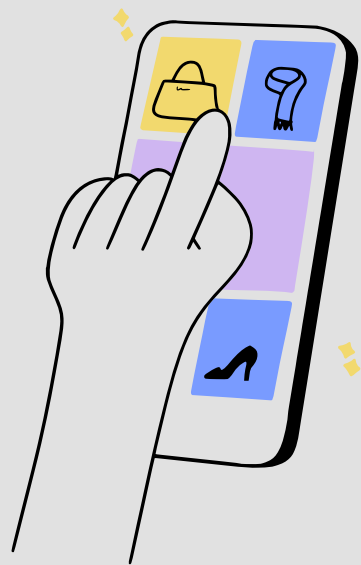
What someone scrolls past quickly



The Algorithm Playbook: Common Tactics

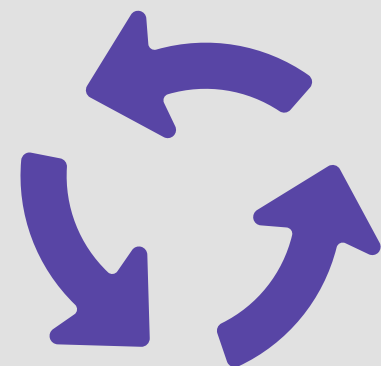
These techniques are not random. They are carefully designed to keep people on apps longer.

According to Ofcom (2023), these design choices prioritise engagement over wellbeing, particularly affecting younger users who are still developing impulse control.



Infinite Scroll

Eliminates natural stopping points, encouraging continuous scrolling without a clear end.



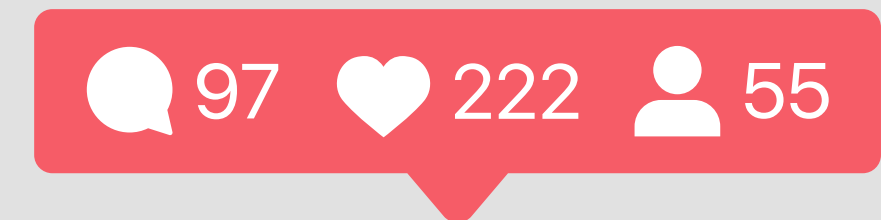
Autoplay

Automatically transitions to the next content, minimising pauses.



Personalisation

Delivers content uniquely tailored to your preferences, making the feed highly engaging and relevant.



Notification and

Dopamine hits

Regular alerts and unpredictable rewards (likes, comments) pull you back into apps.

Platform Spotlights: How Different Apps Hook You

TikTok's FYP ('For You Page')

- Learns quickly from what you watch, like and skip
- Creates a highly personalised stream of short videos
- Easy to keep scrolling without noticing time

Instagram Feeds

- Uses visual content and social updates.
- Its algorithm prioritises content from accounts you engage with
- Encourages you to keep up with friends and influencers.

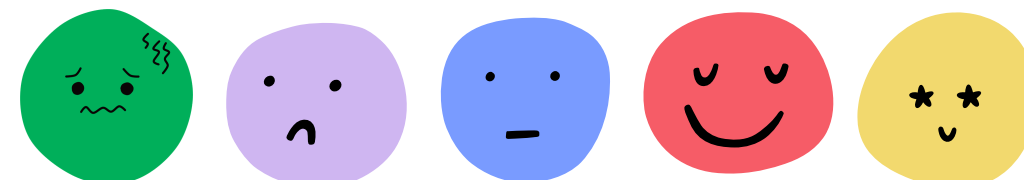
YouTube's Recommendation Engine

- Suggests the next video based on your watch history
- Leads from one video to another
- Can turn a few minutes into hours



Reflection time

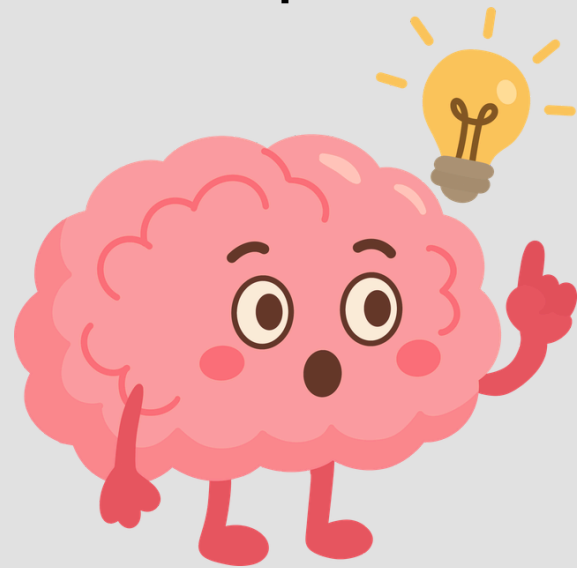
- How do you feel after doomscrolling/deep diving into videos and content?



Taking Control - Your digital wellbeing

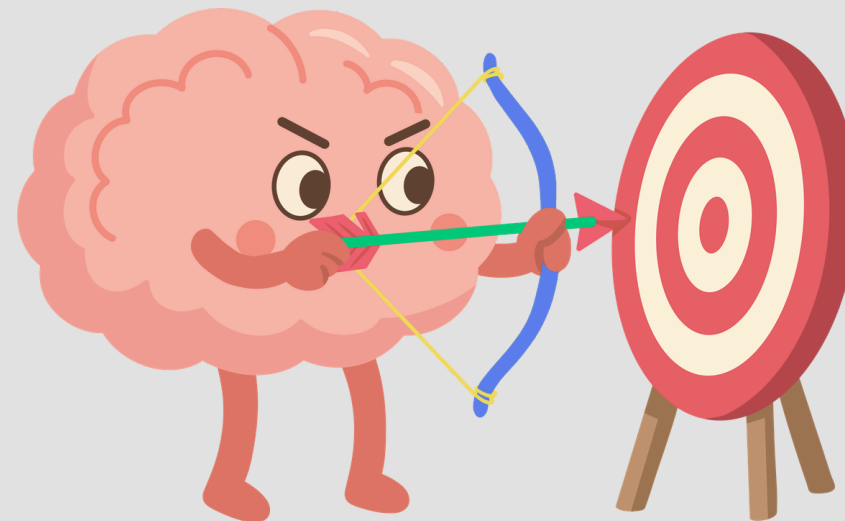
Awareness

Recognise when algorithms are influencing your behaviour and consumption choices



Intention

Set clear purposes for each app session rather than mindlessly scrolling



Boundaries

Use settings, timers and tools like Blackout to create healthy digital habits



Reflection: What can you do to have more control over your digital wellbeing?

What Is a Cookie?

A small file stored on your device.

It remembers:



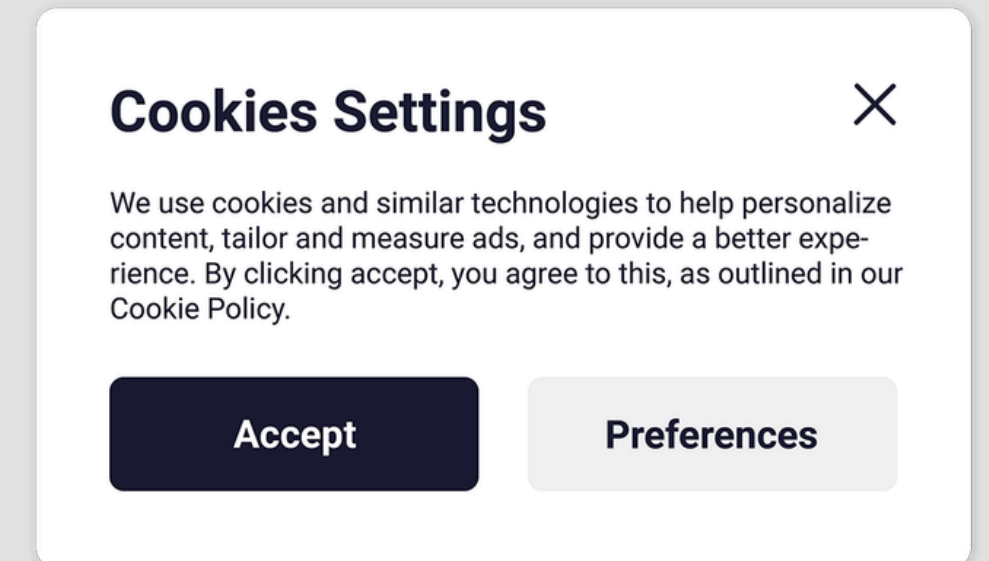
Logins



Preferences



Behaviour



- Online cookies help websites remember you, like keeping you logged in or saving items in your cart on sites such as Amazon.
- However, some cookies track what you do online, so it's important to be careful.
- Always check privacy settings, don't accept cookies from websites you don't trust, and clear your cookies sometimes to stay safe.

What Is a Permission?

Apps sometimes need certain permissions in order to work correctly.

Sometimes an app may ask for:



Camera access



Microphone access



Location access



Contact access



Did you know:

- WhatsApp requires 66 permissions
- TikTok requires 41 permissions
- Snapchat requires 20 permissions



Always ask:

- Why does this app need this permission?
- Do I want this app to have access to this permission?

Be Curious

Instead of just tapping "Allow all cookies" or "Accept all permissions":



Pause



Read



Think



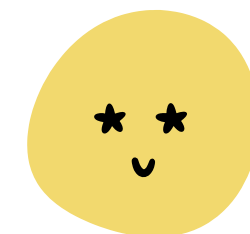
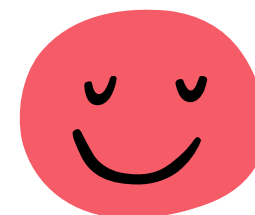
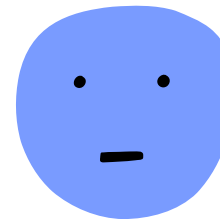
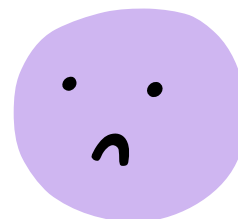
Decide

Thank you for listening!

- Algorithms decide what content you see.
- Cookies track preferences and behaviour.
- App permissions give access to your data.
- Understanding technology gives you the power gives you the opportunity to get the best out of your online and digital experience.



Do you feel more confident with some tech basics now?

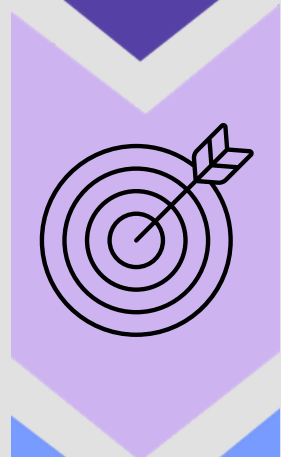


Extra slide for older students

How algorithms shape spending decisions



Data collection - Platforms gather browsing history, location data, and even time spent looking at specific items



Precise targeting - Algorithms identify the perfect moment to show advertisements based on mood and context



Purchase influence - Repeated exposure creates artificial needs and normalises specific spending behaviours

This cycle makes spending feel like a personal choice while being heavily engineered by advertisers and platforms.



Can you recall a time when you felt an algorithm influenced your spending decision? - how is this different to adverts on the TV?

Challenge: For the next week, critically evaluate ads you see online. Try to identify why you are seeing them and if they are influencing your desire to purchase.

The different types of cookies

1st

First-party cookies

- **What they are:** Created by the website you are currently visiting (the "first party").
- **What they do:** They make your life easier! They remember your username so you don't have to log in every time, keep items in your shopping cart, or remember if you prefer dark mode.
- **Safety Level:** Generally safe and helpful. They only work on that specific website and cannot track you elsewhere.

Example: You go to a clothing site, pick a shirt, and close the browser. When you return, the shirt is still in your cart. That's a first-party cookie.

3rd

Third-party cookies

- **What they are:** Created by a different website (a "third party") than the one you are currently on.
- **What they do:** They track what you do across different websites to build a profile of your interests. Advertisers use them to show you ads for things you looked at earlier.
- **Safety Level:** Generally considered intrusive and can raise privacy concerns.

Example: You look at a pair of trainers on a shoe website. Later, you go to a news site to read an article, and an ad for the *exact same* trainers pops up. That is a third-party cookie following you.