Resisting the Algorithm

How Digital Propaganda Rewires Civic Identity in Young Voters

Presented by: Corrine Hurt, MBA

Corrine H. Hurt, MBA

- Doctoral student at USI

- MBA in Data & Predictive Analytics

- Postgraduate certificate in AI from Oxford University
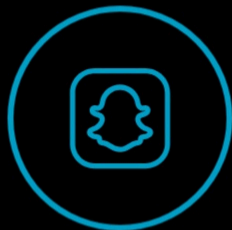
- Digital marketer & emotional hijacker

The Algorithmic Trap

Preference for pets
Algorithms feed users more content related to their pet preferences, e.g. cat lovers vs. dog lovers

Conflict over preferences
Algorithms then start showing users content that casts the opposing pet preference in a negative light, sparking a 'war of identity'

Rewiring civic identity
This process of algorithmic curation shapes how users see themselves and 'the other side', moving beyond pet preferences to broader civic identities

Algorithms don't just reflect user preferences, they actively curate realities that can reshape civic identity and political attitudes, moving beyond individual preferences to create 'us vs. them' narratives.
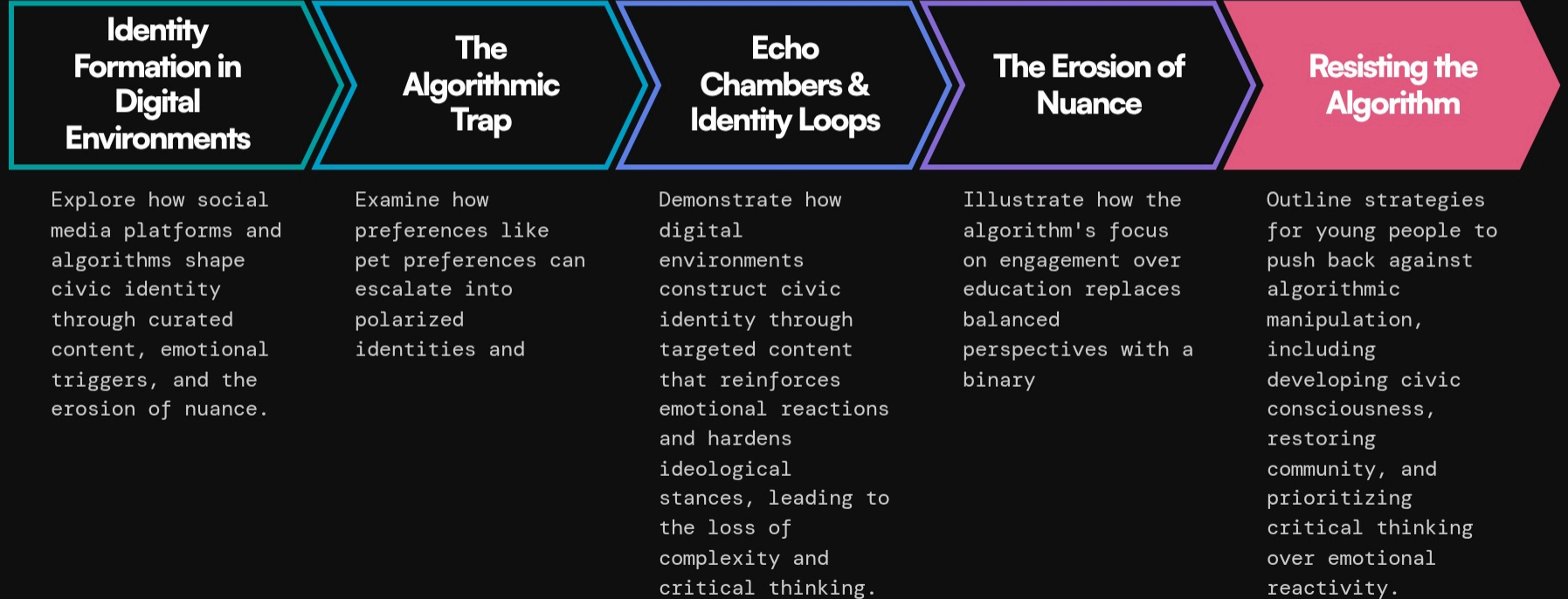
Digital propaganda isn't just about spreading lies. It's about curating realities.

The Death of Duty

In the past, news outlets had a civic duty to inform the public, even with their biases. However, this duty has been replaced by the algorithm's sole purpose: engagement. Rather than providing context and facts, the algorithm incentivizes emotionally charged content that inflates outrage over education.

Echo Chambers & Identity Loops

Identity Formation in Digital Environments

Explore how social media platforms and algorithms shape civic identity through curated content, emotional triggers, and the erosion of nuance.

The Algorithmic Trap

Examine how preferences like pet preferences can escalate into polarized identities and

Echo Chambers & Identity Loops

Demonstrate how digital environments construct civic identity through targeted content that reinforces emotional reactions and hardens ideological stances, leading to the loss of complexity and critical thinking.

The Erosion of Nuance

Illustrate how the algorithm's focus on engagement over education replaces balanced perspectives with a binary

Resisting the Algorithm

Outline strategies for young people to push back against algorithmic manipulation, including developing civic consciousness, restoring community, and prioritizing critical thinking over emotional reactivity.

Radicalization Without Realization

Belonging and Being Seen
Digital propaganda taps into young people's desires for community and validation, making radicalization feel like finding their 'people'.

Performance of Democracy
Instead of genuine civic engagement, digital propaganda offers a performative version of political participation, like 'civic cosplay'.

Ideological Pipelines
The allure of belonging and being seen pulls young people into ideological echo chambers and 'identity tunnels' that reinforce extremist views.

Emotional Resonance over Truth
Digital propaganda prioritizes emotional triggers and tribal loyalty over factual information, as virality and engagement are more profitable than truth.

A Broken Civic Ecosystem

Collapse of Offline Civic Infrastructure

We've watched our offline civic infrastructure, such as civics education, local journalism, town halls, and accessible policy engagement for young people, collapse over time.

Assumptions About Online Engagement

We've assumed that because young people are online, they must be informed, and that their online engagement equals meaningful civic participation.

Content ≠ Comprehension

However, the abundance of content online does not necessarily translate to real understanding and engagement with civic processes.

Virality ≠ Values

Similarly, the virality of certain content does not necessarily reflect the true values and civic identity of young people.

Truth Isn't Rewarded, Emotional Resonance Is

In digital spaces, the algorithm is designed to prioritize emotional resonance over factual truth, undermining the civic infrastructure needed for informed participation.

Resisting the Algorithm

Restore Civic Conscience

Cultivate Curiosity

Rebuild Community

Demand Platform Accountability

No algorithm is stronger than human connection.

Reclaiming Civic Identity

- **Reject Algorithmic Manipulation**
  Resist the lure of digital propaganda and
  performative outrage. Demand platforms prioritize
  civic conscience over engagement metrics.

- **Cultivate Civic Curiosity**
  Empower young people to seek out diverse
  perspectives, ask critical questions, and engage
  with real policy beyond surface-level trends.

- **Rebuild Civic Community**
  Foster offline spaces for meaningful dialogue,
  collective problem-solving, and the restoration
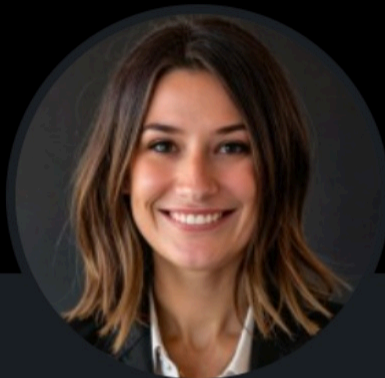 of nuance and complexity in civic discourse.

- **Demand Civic Education**
  Advocate for comprehensive civics curricula that
  teach young people how power structures work and
  how to participate as informed, engaged citizens.

- **Support Civic Conscience**
  Encourage educators, policymakers, and digital
  strategists to prioritize the development of
  civic identity over algorithmically-driven
  engagement.