MALGORITHM

WHO WE ARE - UK/ US non-profit that disrupts the spread of digital hate and misinformation.
MALGORITHM REVEALS - Instagram’s new algorithm, launched August 2020, amidst the pandemic, publishes recommended posts containing vaccine misinformation to users not following anti-vaxx accounts. We discovered the algorithm also cross-fertilizes radical world views by publishing recommended posts about hate, conspiracies including QAnon, and election lies. This has contributed to creating the hybridity that policy-makers and law enforcement are observing on the ground, e.g. the coalition of fringe forces who rioted in Washington on January 6. Millions of users will have already been affected.

WHAT WE DISCOVERED

➔ Amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, Instagram is recommending anti-vaccine and Covid misinformation to its users.
• We simulated user experience after Instagram’s new algorithm launched in August 2020.
• We reviewed recommendations from Instagram’s ‘Explore’ feature and the new ‘Suggested Posts’ feature, which publish content into users’ feeds based on an algorithm that seeks to what may maximize user time on platform and engagement.
• More than half of posts recommended by Instagram contained misinformation related to Covid-19, followed by anti-vaxx, QAnon, antisemitism, and election misinformation.
• By extrapolating from the user profiles we used for the test accounts, we calculate millions of users are being recommended dangerous misinformation right now.

➔ Instagram’s algorithm leads users down rabbit-holes to a warren of extremist content
• Users who engage with anti-vaxx misinformation are being directed to antisemitic posts and election conspiracy theories, while those who engage with QAnon or far-right content are presented with Covid and vaccine misinformation.
• Instagram promoted posts that actually carried warning labels, meaning Instagram’s systems screened the content, saw it contained misinformation, yet continued to amplify it.

RECOMMENDATIONS
• Instagram must fix its algorithm. To change the outputs of an algorithm, you can change the underlying equations or change the inputs.
  o Facebook must follow through on its own promises and deplatform anti-vaxxers.
  o Facebook should thoroughly audit its algorithms for major failures such as actively recommending misinformation.
• Recommending content is not the act of a neutral platform. There must be legal liability.
• Lawyers pursuing anti-trust cases need to explore how changes to Instagram to reflect Facebook machine learning algorithms has damaged consumer interests.

To see the full report, go to www.counterhate.com/malgorithm
For more information contact CCDH at info@counterhate.co.uk