

WHO DECIDES WHAT WE SAY/SEE?



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INTRODUCTION

Social media has become integral to modern society, culture, and communication. It has enabled people to **connect** with each other across geographical and temporal boundaries and to **express** themselves and their opinions. Some popular social media platforms include Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. Most people are using them, and they have become the **most important source of information** for many people.

- **4.80 Billion** - About 60% of the global population are using social media.
- **2H24M** - The average daily time spent on social media.
- **35%** - About 35% of users' main reason for using social media is reading news stories. This is also the second main reason after friends & family. [1]

HOW?

The company that owns these social media can **suspend** accounts, temporarily or permanently, and also can **change algorithms** to make everyone sees something.

- **1,126,990** - Twitter "actioned" 1,126,990 different accounts between July and December 2020 for infringing its hateful conduct policy. [2]
- **Ban** - Twitter permanently suspended US President Donald Trump's account on 8 January 2021, because of "the risk of further incitement of violence." [3]
- **Weights up** - Elon Musk rigged Twitter to allow his tweets to bypass filters meant to feed people the best content and the weights boosted by a factor of 1,000. [4]



ETHICAL CONSIDERATION OF TECH COMPANIES

Rights of Account Suspension

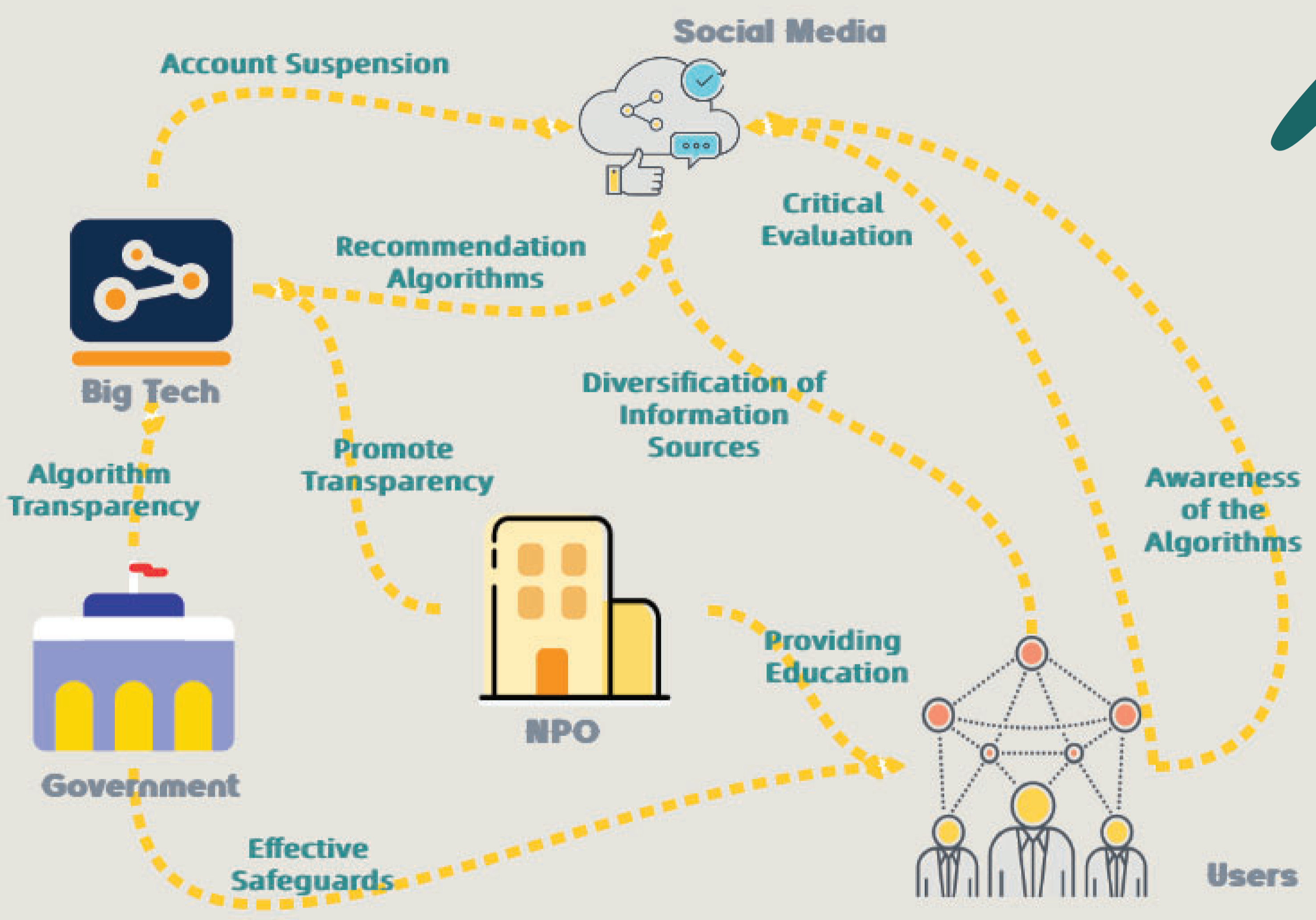
- Is it a violation of 'freedom of speech'?
- What if the speech **incites** or **instigates** potentially harmful actions?
- Who decides if someone's speech requires restriction? Has Trump met such criteria?
- Can tech companies provide uniform standards for account suspension? Or, do they even have the **right** to set such standards?

Recommendation Algorithms

- As people increasingly rely on social networks rather than traditional news media for their information, this kind of "**echo chamber**" effect can significantly contribute to societal polarization and intensification of viewpoints.
- Should tech companies bear responsibility for these **externalities**?
- If it's possible to **modify the recommendation algorithms** to present diverse perspectives on social issues, would these companies be motivated to take such action?

WHY?

Social media usually bans users when they **violate the platform's rules** or when they are **subject to government or legal pressure**. But when they decide what kind of content is allowed on their platforms, they always **consider their own profit**, rather than users'.



GOVERNMENT



The Digital Services Act

- **Effective safeguards for users**, including the possibility to challenge platforms' content moderation decisions
- **Ban on certain type of targeted adverts on online platforms** (when they target children or when they use special categories of personal data, such as ethnicity, political views, sexual orientation)
- **Transparency measures for online platforms** on a variety of issues, including on the algorithms used for recommendations
- **Obligations for very large platforms** and very large online search engines to prevent the misuse of their systems by taking risk-based action and by independent audits of their risk management systems
- **Oversight structure to address the complexity of the online space**: EU countries will have the primary role, supported by a new European Board for Digital Services; for very large platforms, supervision and enforcement by the Commission.



WHAT CAN USERS DO?

- As users, we always can **delete our social media accounts** to avoid being 'controlled'. But it's not solving the real problem. We still need our accounts, but there are some things we can do:
- **Be aware of the algorithms and echo chambers**: Algorithms are designed to keep users as long as possible by showing what users are interested in. Try to diversify the sources of information and follow people who have different views.
 - **Don't be fooled**: Remember that people can exaggerate or lie on purpose, always critically evaluate information and question the motives behind the content.
 - **Stop worrying about missing out**: No matter how often the check is, there are always misses. Instead, focus on the things that matter and give more attention to offline life.



NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- Non-profit organizations (NPOs) play a crucial role in addressing the challenges posed by social media control and promoting a more responsible and informed digital environment.
- The Center for Humane Technology is **providing education** to enhance media literacy skills among individuals. They point out the negative impact of social media and seek strategic solutions.
 - Snopes is **fact-checking** and **debunking misinformation**. They investigate and verify the accuracy of various claims, rumors, and stories that circulate online, including those shared on social media platforms.
 - The Electronic Frontier Foundation works to **promote transparency**, privacy, and free expression online by advocating for policies and practices that ensure accountability from technology companies and governments.

CONCLUSION

In the digital age, **social media platforms** have a profound influence on our information landscape. However, we are not merely passive consumers. **Understanding the algorithms** that drive content and **critically evaluating** what we see online is crucial. It's our responsibility to **diversify our sources of information** and **challenge the echo chambers** these platforms can create. While we navigate the world shaped by social media, we also have the **power to shape it**. By being informed, critical users and supporting responsible digital practices, we contribute to a balanced and healthier digital ecosystem. Remember, the future of our digital environment is a **shared responsibility**.