

Google Australia
Questions on Notice
PJSCIS Inquiry into Extremist Movements and Radicalism in Australia

Q: Whether banning content reinforces pre-existing prejudices and views and actually makes it harder to combat the risks of extremism? [Posed by Tim Wilsom]

Combating extremism online has always been difficult, and it has always required looking beyond mainstream services to numerous smaller sites like Stormfront, which has been around since 1996.

The effects of deplatforming in the context of extremist influencers / groups is a growing area of interest to academics. [This study](#) examines some case studies involving the deplatforming of Alex Jones, Milo Yiannopoulos, David Duke, Richard Spencer and some groups on the far right that were removed from Facebook, Twitter, and/or YouTube and reappeared on alt-tech platforms. There is also an interesting study on [FB's deplatforming of UK extremist group Britain First](#), which reduced their reach by >10x.

Q: How are algorithms applied to the serving of personalised ads and when did Google start using algorithms to serve ads? [Posed by Celia Hammond]

Google does use algorithms to determine the most relevant ad to show to a user (regardless of whether the ad is personalised, this is also true of contextual matching or the use of basic signals like general location). These algorithms are predictive models that incorporate relevance as the primary goal.

We also use algorithms to make sense of different types of signals that are relevant to ad personalisation, for example, we might use a signal like browsing or searching for children's products to infer via machine learning that a user is likely to be a parent, and may enable that category as a targeting criteria in our products for advertisers looking to reach likely parents.

Algorithms have been a part of Google's ad systems since inception, as a core value to users from our products, like search, is showing relevant results, including ads, in response to their queries.

Request for research on echo chambers [for Julian Leaser]

- Academics from Harvard and the University of Pennsylvania have concluded that YouTube's algorithm does not cause echo chambers of far right content ([Hosseinmardi, 2020](#)). Instead, they've concluded that radical content on YouTube appears to reflect broader patterns of news ([Hosseinmardi, 2020](#)).
- Researchers at Berkeley have found that YouTube's recommendation algorithm actively discourages viewers from visiting radicalising or extremist content by favoring mainstream media and cable news content over independent YouTube channels ([Ledwich, 2020](#)).

- Similarly, [Pew Research Center](#) has shown that YouTube's recommendation system points users to popular content, no matter which criteria was used to select the starting video.
- And another set of researchers at Berkeley ([Faddoul, 2020](#)) went further by confirming that YouTube's policies have led to a reduction in conspiratorial recommendations.
- Researchers at Penn State refuted the "zombie bite" theory of YouTube radicalisation. They found that moderate audiences are not radicalised on YouTube. The audience for this type of content are individuals who seek it out generally, and YouTube comprises a small portion of their overall news diet ([Munger and Phillips, 2019](#)).