

MEDIA RELEASE

Give social media users' choice over their algorithms or risk democratic decline

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Today's call by high-profile sexual consent campaigner Chanel Contos for social media algorithms to be "opt-in" has been echoed by democracy campaigners who say algorithms are driving division and disinformation.

Ms Contos used her National Press Club address to call on the federal government to require social media platforms operating in Australia to give people back the choice over what they see in their feeds.

Democracy Counts Campaign Director Tom Mooney said this was a logical next step to the under-16s social media ban.

"We need to make sure that when young people do start using social media, they are not immediately bombarded with extreme content – whether that be misogynistic ideas, self-harm instructions or deliberate political disinformation campaigns."

An academic study has shown it takes just 23 minutes for social media accounts mimicking 16-18 year old boys to be fed misogynistic content, regardless of the account's viewing preferences¹.

Mr Mooney said opt-in algorithms would give all users, including adults, more choice and control over their experience and data.

"Social media users should choose what they see based on who they follow and what genuinely interests them, the way our feeds used to be before the algorithms," Mr Mooney said.

"If people want recommendations from an algorithm, they could opt in to that and turn it on and off, but it shouldn't be the default."

¹<https://www.dcu.ie/humanities-and-social-sciences/news/2024/apr/new-research-shows-how-tiktok-and-youtube-shorts-are>



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“The algorithms are designed to keep people’s eyes on the screen for as long as possible, and it’s extreme, polarising content that tends to do this.

“A healthy democracy requires people to start with a shared set of facts, and to be aware of the different experiences and opinions of others.

“But the algorithms are locking us in echo chambers, and that’s a major contributor to declining trust in our democracy and democratic institutions.

“As the government considers the introduction of a Digital Duty of Care, giving people back choice and control over their feeds must be a key priority.”

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