

Social Media Algorithms and Behavioural Influence: Dubai Youth Case Study Analysis

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Abstract: In an era where algorithmic systems increasingly mediate digital experiences, social media platforms have emerged as powerful agents in shaping user behaviour, particularly among youth populations around the world. This paper examines the phenomenon of algorithmic amplification and its influence on the social media habits, perceptions, and civic engagement of young people living in Dubai. Through qualitative interviews and digital ethnography, the study investigates how the recommendation algorithms on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram curate content streams that reinforce existing beliefs, preferences, and social imaginaries. These algorithmic processes often lead to the formation of echo chambers and filter bubbles, narrowing the diversity of perspectives available to the young users and subtly guiding their cultural and political orientations. The research highlights the ways in which the youth actively engage with algorithmically curated content, demonstrating both agency and vulnerability in their digital practices. It explores how such engagement shapes their understanding of social issues, contributes to identity formation, and influences their sense of digital citizenship in a rapidly globalizing yet locally situated media environment. Particular attention is given to the ethical implications of algorithmic design, including the prioritization of engagement metrics over accuracy, and the risks posed by the amplification of misinformation and polarizing content. By situating the study within broader debates on social media regulation, media literacy, and critical digital engagement, the paper contributes to ongoing conversations about the role of algorithms in shaping public discourse and civic participation. The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted media literacy interventions that equip the youth with the skills to critically navigate algorithmic environments, as well as policy frameworks that hold platforms accountable for the social consequences of their design choices. Ultimately, the study calls for a more equitable and transparent digital ecosystem that empowers young people to participate meaningfully and responsibly in civic life.

Keywords: Social Media Algorithms, Behavioural Influence, Dubai Youth, Algorithmic Amplification, Digital Citizenship, Media Literacy

1. Introduction

Social media platforms increasingly rely on algorithmic systems that curate and personalize content to maximize user engagement, and these systems have become central to the way young people experience digital culture (Benjamin, 2019). Algorithms are not neutral; they are designed to optimize attention, prioritize certain forms of content, and amplify patterns of interaction that align with platform business models (Gillespie, 2018). In this sense, algorithms act as cultural intermediaries, shaping not only what users see but also how they interpret social realities (Noble, 2018). The United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Dubai in particular, presents a unique socio-technological environment where youth are highly connected, globally engaged, and exposed to an interplay of local cultural norms and transnational digital platforms (Flaxman et al., 2016). Emirati and expatriate youth in Dubai exhibit among the highest levels of digital media usage in the Middle East, with platforms such as TikTok and Instagram dominating their daily routines (Salem, 2021). This makes Dubai an important case study for examining how algorithmic systems influence behavioural patterns, identity formation, and civic engagement among youth.

Recommendation systems, which rely on machine learning models to predict user preferences, maximize engagement by serving content aligned with prior behaviours and interests (Kitchin, 2017). For Dubai youth, this means digital experiences are increasingly personalized but also siloed (Pariser, 2011). Echo chambers and filter bubbles, where users are exposed primarily to reinforcing content, have been widely documented (Pariser, 2011; Flaxman et al., 2016). Within Dubai, these dynamics intersect with cultural, religious, and political frameworks that shape how youth interpret algorithmically curated content. While global platforms promote transnational trends in fashion, music, and political discourse, local norms and regulatory frameworks influence the boundaries of acceptable expression (Noble, 2018). Algorithms thus mediate between global digital cultures and local socio-political realities (Benjamin, 2019).

The behavioural influence of algorithms is particularly significant among youth, who are early adopters of new technologies and more susceptible to persuasive digital environments (Bucher, 2018). Young people's sense of identity and belonging is increasingly mediated through social media, where algorithmic systems amplify certain

narratives and suppress others (Boyd, 2014). In Dubai, where youth represent a diverse demographic, social media becomes a site of negotiation between local identity and global connectivity (Kitchin, 2017). Algorithms curate content that reflects both global trends and localized imaginaries (Benjamin, 2019).

The civic implications of algorithmic influence are equally important. Scholars argue that social media algorithms shape political attitudes and public participation by privileging content that generates high engagement, regardless of accuracy or civic value (Noble, 2018; Tufekci, 2015). In Dubai, amplification of certain narratives can influence how youth perceive social issues and their role as digital citizens (Kitchin, 2017). Entertainment-driven prioritization may foster disengagement, while amplification of civic campaigns such as those related to sustainability, can encourage new forms of digital citizenship aligned with national priorities (Pasquale, 2015).

Ethical concerns arise because algorithms often amplify sensational or misleading content to maximize clicks and shares (Vaidhyathan, 2018). This raises risks of misinformation, polarization, and erosion of trust (Gillespie, 2018). For Dubai youth, exposed to both global and local ecosystems, these risks are compounded by the transnational nature of platforms (Pariser, 2011). Addressing such challenges requires culturally sensitive environments and media literacy practices that foreground diversity and inclusion (Kitchin, 2017).

This study, drawing on qualitative interviews and digital ethnography, situates algorithmic analysis within Dubai's unique cultural context. By focusing on behavioural influence, identity formation, civic engagement, and ethical regulation, it highlights the interplay of global platforms and local realities. The findings underscore the need for targeted interventions that empower youth to critically navigate algorithmic environments, resist manipulative practices, and participate meaningfully in digital public life (Salem, 2021).

This study guided by four carefully framed research questions was designed to align with algorithmic amplification, behavioural influence, identity formation, and civic engagement, while remaining open enough to allow for qualitative exploration and critical analysis:

1. How do social media recommendation algorithms shape the content exposure and consumption patterns of youth in Dubai?
2. In what ways do algorithmically curated social media environments influence the identity formation, cultural imaginaries, and self-expression of Dubai youth?
3. How does engagement with algorithmically amplified content affect the civic attitudes, social issue awareness, and digital citizenship practices of youth in Dubai?
4. What ethical and regulatory challenges emerge from the behavioural influence of social media algorithms on Dubai youth, and how can media literacy interventions address these challenges?

2. Literature Review

The growing scholarly interest in algorithmic governance reflects broader debates about the role of digital infrastructure in shaping public discourse and social behaviour (Benjamin, 2019). For instance, Cheney-Lippold (2017) argues that algorithmic systems increasingly act as mechanisms of classification and control, influencing individuals' digital identities and interactions. Moreover, Bucher (2018) extends this discourse by focusing on the politics of platform design, emphasizing that algorithmic decisions are neither neutral nor invisible but instead actively construct and prioritize particular forms of participation. Research in this area suggests that algorithms determine not only what users encounter online but also how they interact with it by structuring forms of visibility, virality, and engagement (Eslami et al., 2015). These studies situate platforms as powerful actors that mediate digital experiences in ways that can reinforce social, cultural, and political hierarchies, raising questions about the extent to which algorithmic systems shape collective imaginaries and civic practices (Barqawi et al., 2023).

Scholars have increasingly examined the ways in which algorithms function as cultural intermediaries (Boyd, 2014). For instance, Gillespie (2014) highlights that algorithms are not simply technical tools but socio-cultural constructs that embody values, priorities, and biases. By determining what content is visible and what remains hidden, algorithms influence the contours of public discourse and the boundaries of social participation. This perspective aligns with Noble's (2018) work on search engines, which demonstrates how algorithmic systems can reproduce and amplify structural inequalities, particularly along racial and gendered lines. In this sense, algorithms are not passive mediators but active participants in shaping social hierarchies and reinforcing dominant ideologies (Bucher, 2017). For youth populations, who are often at the forefront of digital adoption, these dynamics are particularly significant, as they influence identity formation, cultural belonging, and civic engagement (Benjamin, 2019).

A parallel body of literature focuses specifically on youth and their interaction with social media (Flaxman et al., 2016). For instance, Livingstone (2019) argues that young people's engagement with digital platforms represents a central arena for experimentation with self-representation, identity performance, and social belonging. Social media has been identified as a significant site for civic participation, where young people engage in public discourse, share opinions, and mobilize around social issues (Hamad & Shehata, 2024). For instance, Boyd (2014) similarly emphasizes that youth use social media to negotiate complex social dynamics, balancing peer relationships, cultural expectations, and personal identity. In the context of the Middle East, Tufekci (2017) highlights how digital connectivity and social platforms have facilitated new forms of civic expression and transnational participation. These shifts have been particularly salient in Gulf urban contexts, where young people are embedded in highly digitized environments and globalized cultural flows, making them both consumers and producers of algorithmically mediated content (Barqawi et al., 2023).

The literature on algorithmic personalization raises significant concerns about the implications of recommendation systems for informational diversity and democratic discourse (Benjamin, 2019). For instance, Pariser (2011) warns that recommendation systems can produce echo chambers and filter bubbles, limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and reinforcing pre-existing beliefs. Similarly, Flaxman et al. (2016) provide empirical evidence that algorithmic curation can lead to ideological segregation in online news consumption, contributing to polarization and fragmentation of public discourse. These concerns align with broader debates about misinformation and the erosion of trust in digital environments (Boyd, 2014). Furthermore, Vaidhyanathan (2018) argues that platforms such as Facebook prioritize engagement metrics over accuracy, amplifying sensational or misleading content in ways that undermine democratic deliberation. For youth populations, who are often less experienced in critically evaluating information, these dynamics pose particular risks for civic knowledge formation and digital citizenship (Cheney-Lippold, 2017).

Research has also examined the affective dimensions of algorithmic influence (Flaxman et al., 2016). For instance, Bucher (2017) introduces the concept of 'algorithmic imaginary,' referring to the ways in which users perceive and interpret the role of algorithms in shaping their digital experiences. Youth often describe algorithms as both empowering and manipulative: empowering in their ability to curate content that aligns with personal interests, but manipulative in their tendency to limit exposure to diverse perspectives (Benjamin, 2019). In this regard, Eslami et al. (2015) found that users often misunderstand how algorithms function, leading to perceptions of bias or unfairness in content curation. These perceptions influence how individuals engage with platforms, shaping trust, satisfaction, and patterns of participation (Boyd, 2014). For Dubai youth, who navigate both global digital cultures and local socio-political contexts, the algorithmic imaginary may be particularly complex, reflecting tensions between global connectivity and local cultural norms (Barqawi et al., 2023).

The civic implications of algorithmic systems have been widely debated in the literature (Benjamin, 2019). For instance, Tufekci (2015) argues that algorithms shape political attitudes and forms of public participation by privileging content that generates high engagement, regardless of its civic value. This dynamic can lead to the amplification of populist or sensationalist narratives, while marginalizing nuanced or critical discourse. In the context of youth engagement, this raises questions about the extent to which algorithms foster informed participation or contribute to civic disengagement (Bucher, 2017). For instance, Barqawi et al. (2023) suggests that youth civic engagement is increasingly personalized and digitally mediated, with algorithms playing a central role in shaping the issues and narratives that resonate with young people. For Dubai youth, whose civic participation is shaped by unique cultural and regulatory frameworks, algorithmic amplification may influence not only what issues are visible but also how they are interpreted and acted upon (Boyd, 2014).

The ethical implications of algorithmic design are central to these debates (Flaxman et al., 2016). For instance, Pasquale (2015) critiques the opacity of algorithmic systems, describing them as 'black boxes' that conceal the logics and priorities underlying content curation. This opacity limits accountability and makes it difficult for users to understand or challenge algorithmic decisions (Bucher, 2017). For instance, Benjamin (2019) extends this critique by highlighting how algorithms can reproduce systemic biases, reinforcing inequalities in ways that are difficult to detect or contest. For youth populations, the ethical stakes are particularly high, as they are both vulnerable to manipulative practices and central to the future of digital citizenship (Cheney-Lippold, 2017). Media literacy initiatives, which equip young people with the skills to critically evaluate algorithmically curated content, are therefore essential in fostering resilience and agency in digital environments (Flaxman et al., 2016).

Despite these converging debates, there remains a noticeable gap in the literature when it comes to the specific contexts of the Gulf region and Dubai in particular (Al Ketbi et al., 2025). While global and regional research has offered important insights into social media usage and youth engagement, few empirical studies have examined

how algorithmic systems actively shape perceptions, identities, and patterns of participation among young people in Dubai (Barqawi et al., 2023). The existing literature has tended to focus either on broader political communication or on technological aspects of platforms, without situating these dynamics within the socio-cultural context of a rapidly globalizing, multicultural urban environment (Mohamed et al., 2024). This gap is significant, given that Dubai represents a unique case where youth are simultaneously embedded in local cultural frameworks and global digital networks (Hamad & Shehata, 2024). The interplay of algorithmic systems, cultural diversity, and regulatory frameworks in Dubai offers a rich site for examining how algorithms influence behavioural patterns, identity formation, and civic engagement (Tahat et al., 2023).

The literature also points to the importance of considering intersectional perspectives in analyzing algorithmic influence (Boyd, 2014). For instance, Noble (2018) and Benjamin (2019) emphasize that algorithms can reproduce and amplify existing social inequalities, particularly along lines of race, gender, and class. In a multicultural city like Dubai, where youth come from diverse backgrounds, algorithmic systems may inadvertently reinforce cultural hierarchies or stereotypes (Al Ketbi et al., 2025). For example, content that aligns with dominant cultural narratives may be amplified, while content that reflects minority experiences may be marginalized (Bucher, 2017). This dynamic has implications for identity formation, as youth may internalize algorithmically amplified narratives while overlooking alternative perspectives (Tahat et al., 2023). Addressing these issues requires a commitment to equity-oriented algorithmic design and media literacy practices that foreground diversity and inclusion (Flaxman et al., 2016).

In sum, the literature on algorithmic governance, youth engagement, and civic participation highlights the complex ways in which algorithms shape digital experiences and social behaviour (Cheney-Lippold, 2017). Scholars have emphasized the role of algorithms as cultural intermediaries, the risks of echo chambers and misinformation, the affective dimensions of algorithmic imaginaries, and the ethical challenges of opacity and bias (Boyd, 2014). At the same time, there remains a gap in empirical research on the specific contexts of Dubai youth, whose experiences are shaped by the interplay of global digital platforms and local cultural frameworks (Tahat et al., 2023). This case study contributes to filling this gap by investigating how Dubai youth experience and interpret algorithmic curation, and how such experiences influence their behaviour and civic engagement. (Flaxman et al., 2016). By situating the analysis within broader debates on algorithmic governance, media literacy, and digital citizenship, the study offers insights that are relevant to educators, policymakers, and platform designers seeking to foster more informed and resilient digital communities (Benjamin, 2019).

3. Methodology

This research adopted a case study design to explore how Dubai youth engage with algorithmically curated content, a methodological choice that enables in-depth examination of complex socio-technological phenomena within a bounded context (Yin, 2018). The case study approach was particularly appropriate given Dubai's unique cultural and regulatory environment, where youth are simultaneously embedded in global digital networks and local socio-political frameworks. By focusing on a specific group of young people, the study generated rich qualitative insights into how algorithmic systems shape perceptions, behaviours, and civic practices. Case study designs are widely recognized in media and communication research as effective for capturing the interplay between technological infrastructures and lived experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The participant group consisted of twenty-six individuals aged 18-24 residing in Dubai who demonstrated active usage of TikTok and Instagram. These platforms were chosen because they dominate youth digital routines in the region (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in online practices and demographic backgrounds while focusing on individuals most relevant to the research questions (Palinkas et al., 2015). The sample included Emirati nationals and expatriates, reflecting Dubai's multicultural composition and allowing the study to capture variations in how different cultural groups experience algorithmic curation and negotiate identity.

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews lasting 45-60 minutes. This format provided flexibility to explore participants' perceptions while maintaining consistency across key themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Interviews were conducted between August and November 2025, with data collection ending at saturation, when recurring themes consistently emerged (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Interview questions examined perceptions of algorithmic recommendations, content consumption habits, awareness of personalization mechanisms, and experiences with misinformation and echo chambers. Participants reflected on how they understood algorithms, whether they felt their feeds were personalized, and how they responded to repeated exposure to similar content.

To triangulate findings, researchers also observed participants' publicly accessible feeds, interactions, and shared material. This digital ethnographic component allowed comparison between self-reported perceptions and observable patterns of algorithmic curation (Palinkas et al., 2015). Observations focused on recurring themes such as recommended content, reposted material, and trending hashtags. Platform analysis was conducted to examine design features of TikTok and Instagram, including TikTok's 'For You' page and Instagram's Explore tab. Together, interviews, ethnography, and platform analysis provided a holistic view of how algorithms shape youth experiences.

Ethical considerations were central to the study. All participants provided informed consent, and anonymity and confidentiality were maintained. Protocols followed established frameworks in qualitative research ethics, emphasizing respect, privacy, and sensitivity to cultural contexts (Yin, 2018). Pseudonyms were used in transcripts, and data was securely stored to prevent unauthorized access (Fairclough, 2013).

Additional methods included discourse analysis to examine how participants articulated identity and belonging through language, hashtags, and narratives (Fairclough, 2013), and thematic coding to identify patterns in civic issues, misinformation, and digital citizenship practices (Yin, 2018). Policy analysis and expert interviews with educators and digital literacy advocates contextualized findings within UAE regulations and global debates on algorithmic governance (Pasquale, 2015).

The combination of case study design, purposive sampling, semi-structured interviews, ethnography, discourse analysis, thematic coding, and policy analysis reflects a mixed-methods qualitative approach suited to the complexity of algorithmic influence. By triangulating multiple methods, the study captured both subjective perceptions and observable patterns, ensuring validity and reliability. This methodological framework aligns with best practices in qualitative research, emphasizing depth, contextual sensitivity, and reflexivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

4. Data Analysis and Results

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following Yin's (2018) guidelines. The process combined inductive and deductive approaches, beginning with open coding of interview transcripts and field notes. Codes were compared across platforms and participant backgrounds, then clustered into broader conceptual categories. Three salient themes emerged: algorithmic familiarity and passive acceptance, filter bubbles and identity reinforcement, and misinformation, civic perceptions, and selective engagement. These themes frame the findings around the four guiding research questions.

The first research question examined how recommendation algorithms shape youth content exposure. Most participants acknowledged that algorithms influenced their feeds but generally viewed this as convenient and entertaining rather than problematic. As one participant explained, *"The app just knows what I like as it saves me time."* Another noted, *"Honestly, I don't think about it. Whatever shows up is usually fun anyway."*

TikTok's For You page and Instagram's Explore tab were consistently described as delivering personalized content aligned with prior interactions. This passive acceptance reflects the normalization of algorithmic governance (Bucher, 2018). Observational data confirmed that feeds were dominated by humour, lifestyle aspirations, and locally relevant commentary, reinforcing Pariser's (2011) concept of the filter bubble, where personalization narrows informational diversity. One participant captured this dynamic succinctly: *"I keep seeing the same type of videos... it's like the app decides my mood for the day."*

The second research question explored how curated environments influence identity and self-expression. Recommendation systems amplified existing preferences and cultural identities, creating homogeneity in content exposure. Emirati participants often encountered content tied to national pride and heritage, with one noting, *"My feed is full of UAE traditions such as poetry, falconry, and National Day stuff. It feels like home."* In contrast, expatriate youth described feeds shaped by transnational cultural flows: *"I get a mix of K-pop, UK memes, and stuff from back home. It's like all my worlds in one place."*

This duality illustrates how algorithms mediate between local belonging and global cosmopolitanism. Discourse analysis revealed that youth framed identities through hashtags and captions resonating with algorithmically amplified trends. As one participant put it, *"If you use the right hashtag, the algorithm pushes your post, and it becomes part of the trend."* This echoes Boyd's (2014) argument that algorithms act as invisible architects of self-representation.

The third research question addressed civic engagement. Findings revealed contradictory responses: while civic issues appeared in feeds, participants often expressed scepticism about accuracy. One participant remarked, *“I see news on TikTok, but I never know if it’s real.”* Another added, *“Sometimes it’s just drama and people exaggerate to get views.”*

Despite doubts, sensational or emotionally charged content circulated widely, with engagement driven more by relatability than factual verification. This supports Tufekci’s (2015) claim that algorithms privilege engagement over civic value. Civic campaigns on sustainability or heritage did attract attention, but participation was typically superficial. As one youth explained, *“I’ll like or share it, but I don’t really follow up.”* This reflects Barqawi et al.’s (2023) notion of personalized civic engagement, mediated through digital personalization rather than collective deliberation.

The fourth research question examined ethical concerns and regulatory responses. Participants demonstrated limited understanding of algorithmic processes, consistent with Eslami et al. (2015). Several expressed uncertainties, with comments such as *“I don’t know how it works and maybe it listens to us?”* and *“It feels a bit creepy, but I’m used to it.”* This opacity raises accountability issues, echoing Pasquale’s (2015) critique of algorithms as “black boxes.”

Expert interviews highlighted risks of amplifying dominant narratives while marginalizing minority perspectives. One expert noted, *“When the algorithm rewards what’s already popular, smaller voices disappear.”* This reinforces Noble’s (2018) argument about systemic inequalities. Policy analysis showed that UAE regulations emphasize safe online environments but focus more on content moderation than algorithmic transparency. Media literacy interventions were identified as essential, equipping youth to critically evaluate curated content and resist manipulative practices.

Collectively, the analysis demonstrates how algorithm structure online engagement, identity formation, civic awareness, and ethical challenges among Dubai youth. Algorithms are perceived as convenient and entertaining, yet they reinforce filter bubbles, shape identity performance, and privilege emotional resonance over factual accuracy. Ethical concerns about opacity, bias, and misinformation highlight the need for regulatory frameworks and media literacy initiatives that empower youth to critically navigate algorithmic environments. By situating these findings within broader debates on governance, identity, and digital citizenship, the study contributes to understanding how algorithms influence behavioural norms in a multicultural, globalized urban context.

5. Insights and Discussion

The findings illustrate that algorithmic recommendation systems significantly contribute to the amplification and reinforcement of socio-cultural imaginaries among Dubai youth. Rather than perceiving algorithmic curation as manipulation, participants understood it through personalization and relevance. Suggested content was often seen as reflecting their identities, interests, and social positions, reinforcing lifestyle choices, cultural markers, and symbolic values. This perception highlights the seamless integration between digital identity and everyday social experience (Boyd, 2014).

The study also reveals the emergence of echo chambers and bounded civic discourse as a consequence of algorithmic filtering (Bucher, 2017). Participants were repeatedly exposed to content aligned with prior interactions, particularly regarding political commentary, religious perspectives, and local cultural issues. Instead of encountering diverse viewpoints, digital environments reproduced familiar categories and reinforced existing beliefs. This suggests that platforms indirectly shape civic imagination by privileging engagement-driven content (Noble, 2018). These observations echo concerns about filter bubbles (Pariser, 2012) and underscore the constraints algorithms place on informational diversity.

Another dimension relates to the interplay between platform design and user agency (Benjamin, 2019). While participants demonstrated some awareness of algorithmic influence, this rarely translated into critical evaluation or resistance. Platform-curated content was largely accepted as convenient and inevitable, allowing infrastructures to decisively shape exposure and engagement. This raises ethical and regulatory questions about priorities embedded within algorithms, particularly their orientation toward maximizing engagement metrics rather than ensuring diversity or civic responsibility (Gillespie, 2018).

The final insight concerns the regional specificity of digital engagement. Unlike Western contexts where civic participation is often overtly political, Dubai youth expressed civic engagement in more subtle, culturally grounded, and lifestyle-oriented ways. Their digital interactions reflected the multicultural and globally connected nature of Dubai’s environment, producing civic expression mediated by community norms, cultural

narratives, and regional expectations. This highlights the importance of understanding digital behaviour as context-specific rather than universal (Mohamed et al., 2024).

Overall, the Dubai case underscores the need for localized analyses of algorithmic influence, particularly in multicultural and rapidly developing societies (Tufekci, 2015). Algorithms are not merely technical systems but cultural intermediaries that reinforce identities, shape civic discourse, and raise ethical challenges. Addressing these dynamics requires both regulatory frameworks and media literacy interventions that empower youth to critically navigate algorithmic environments.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the significant role social media algorithms play in shaping the consumption habits, perceptions, and civic imagination of young people in Dubai. Findings show that algorithmic curation produces highly personalized environments reinforcing users' identities, preferences, and social interests (Cheney-Lippold, 2017). At the same time, these systems limit informational diversity by privileging familiar narratives and behaviours (Pariser, 2011). Platforms thus provide convenience and engagement while constructing bounded digital spaces that influence how youth perceive social issues, cultural values, and civic participation (Barqawi et al., 2023).

The research underscores the need to address these implications through education, regulation, and policy (Gillespie, 2018). Strengthening media literacy, particularly algorithmic awareness, can help youth critically evaluate the information they encounter (Flaxman et al., 2016). Increased platform transparency and responsible design are also essential to mitigate risks of misinformation and civic disengagement (Noble, 2018). Youth-oriented educational initiatives can further equip individuals with skills to navigate misinformation, assess credibility, and engage in digital citizenship more reflectively (Boyd, 2014).

By situating Dubai's case within global debates on platform governance and algorithmic design, this study contributes to scholarship on how digital infrastructures shape civic and cultural life (Barqawi et al., 2023). The analysis emphasizes empowering youth to critically engage with algorithmic environments rather than passively adapting to them (Pariser, 2011). Ultimately, a comprehensive, context-sensitive approach is needed to address the influence of algorithms on youth engagement, recognizing the complexities of digital participation in multicultural, rapidly evolving urban contexts such as Dubai.

Ethics Declaration

Ethical clearance was not required for the research.

AI Declaration

AI tools were not used in the creation of this paper.

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