

Workshop

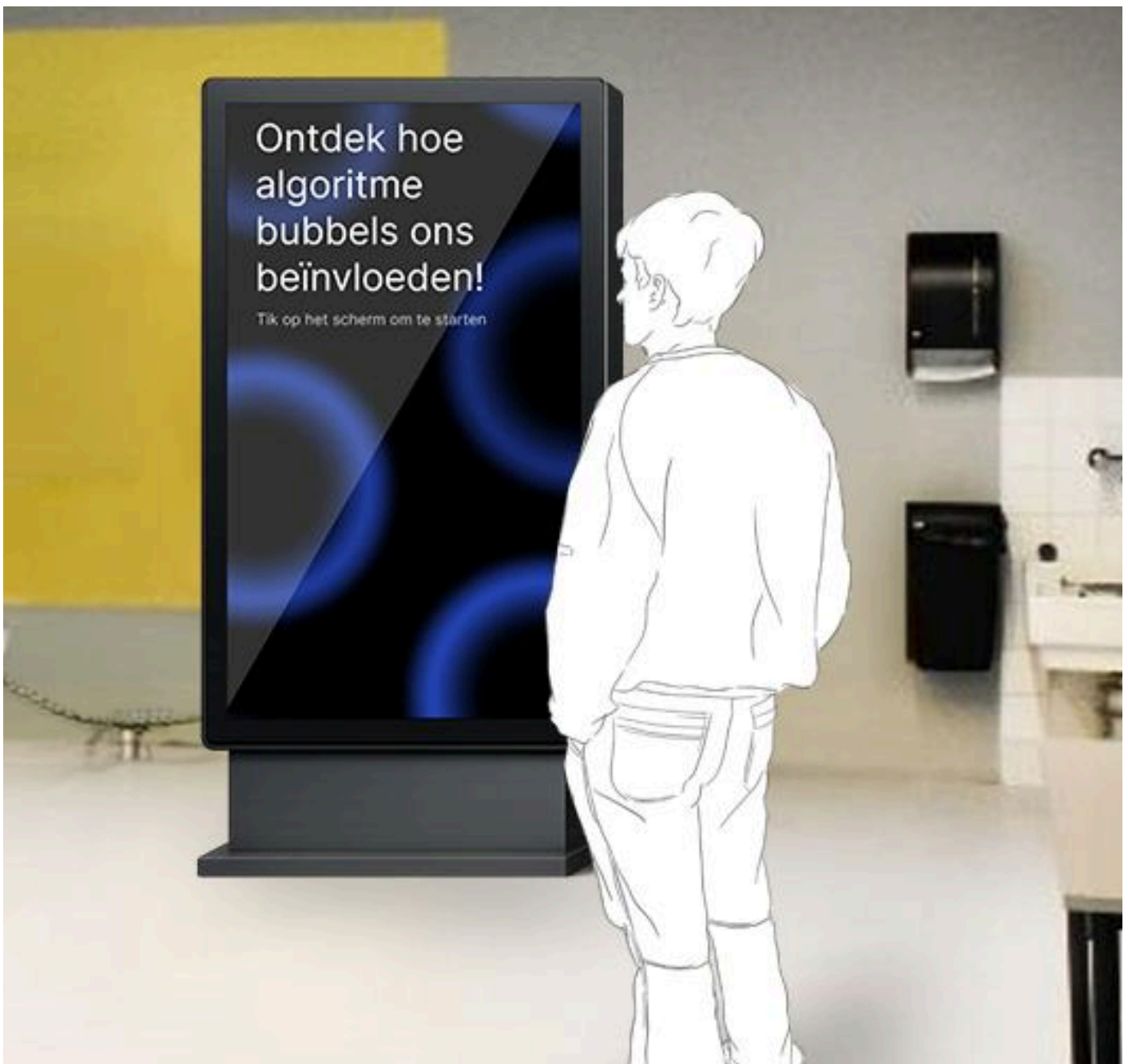
# **Exploring algorithms**

Facilitator booklet



# Facilitator booklet

for a workshop to explore how  
algorithms online contribute to  
polarising views.



Social media play a big role in how polarisation among young people develops. Most adolescents know that algorithms influence what they see, but often underestimate how strongly these systems affect their own thoughts and behaviour. Algorithms tend to push emotional or extreme content to the forefront, as this keeps users engaged. Over time, this can create “bubbles” where you mainly see one type of perspective, reinforcing polarised views. Because these mechanisms are abstract and difficult to grasp, young people often don’t fully recognise their influence. As a result, they tend to see algorithms as affecting others more than themselves, creating a gap in awareness of how much these systems influence their own views.

This workshop makes the effects of algorithms more visible by moving from explanation to experience. Instead of just talking about algorithms, participants explore three different social media feeds, donated by anonymous adolescents, and reflect on what they see and feel. By stepping into someone else’s feed, it becomes easier to recognise how algorithms shape what we see, and to realise that there isn’t just one online reality. The workshop encourages conversation and reflection, helping participants think more critically about how their digital environment influences their perspectives.

It is designed for young people aged 16–25 across all educational levels, and invites them to explore others' social media feeds and reflect on their own feeds.

## Learning goal

To help adolescents become aware of how algorithmically curated social media bubbles shape their perspectives and contribute to polarisation, by letting them experience different online bubbles.

## Where to host the workshop?

The workshop is designed to be flexible and can be organised in a variety of educational and public learning environments. The space should be relatively quiet and enclosed, with access to a digital screen or projector. Participants should have enough room to move around, to support interaction and active participation.

### Suitable locations include:

[Public library](#) | [Classroom](#) | [Workshop spaces](#).

## Materials

The workshop uses three main components: a shared digital interface, on which the participant explore three donated social media feeds together. A individual control panel, on which the participants individually map their response. Together, these elements allow participants to collectively explore algorithmic content while reflecting on their own emotional responses. For the final reflection, a small brochure is provided.

### Material list:

[Shared digital interface](#) (screen or projector, preferably with touchscreen) | [Individual control panels](#) (tablets or phones) | [Brochure](#) | [Writing materials](#)

## Format

The workshop combines individual emotional mapping with group reflection, allowing participants to compare their own experiences with others.

## Role of the facilitator

As a facilitator, your role is to guide participants towards deeper reflection and discussion, while allowing them to explore the interface independently and stay in control of their experience. Sharing your own experiences can help create openness and a more equal, non-hierarchical atmosphere. Do this intentionally—use them to connect, not to steer participants' responses. Avoid overly direct questions (for example, asking who gave a specific response). Instead, create space for participants to share their thoughts more freely, making it clear that they can choose what they want to share.

### Scan to see:

*Shared digital interface*



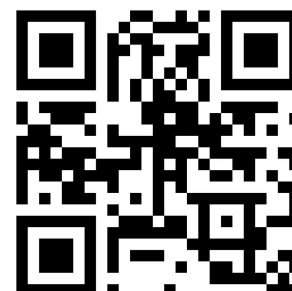
### Scan to see:

*Individual control panel*



### Scan to read:

*Brochure*



# Instructions

## 1 Introduction - 10 minutes

### Goal of this step

Create a comfortable atmosphere and introduce the workshop.

### What to do

- Welcome participants
- Do a quick round of introductions (*if needed, do a small introduction activity, see the example*)
- Briefly explain what the workshop is about, what participants will be doing and how to use the interface
- Set ground rules for safe discussion together with the participants  
*For example: Respect each other's opinions, share only what you feel comfortable with.*



### Optional example of an introductory activity, feel free to adapt

Use simple statements that participants can respond to (e.g. by raising their hand or moving in the space). Start light and gradually move towards the topic.

For example:

- *I had to travel far to get here*
- *I spend too much time on my phone*
- *I feel in control of my screen use*
- *I can scroll for more than an hour without stopping*

Optionally, end with:

- *What role does social media play in your life?*

## 2 Ice breaker - 10 minutes

### Goal of this step

Trigger curiosity and connect the topic to participants' own experiences.

### What to do

- Introduce the fun fact and question

*On the interface:*

*8 out of 10 young people feel that opinions on social media are becoming more extreme.*

*Have you recently seen an extreme or emotional post? How did you experience it?*

- Give participants a moment to reflect individually
- Invite a few participants to share their experiences (for deeper reflection see optional questions)



### Optional questions to support deeper reflection

- *How did that content make you feel?*
- *Why do you think this content appeared on your feed?*
- *Do you think others would have seen the same content? Why or why not?*
- *Did that content influence how you thought about a topic or person?*

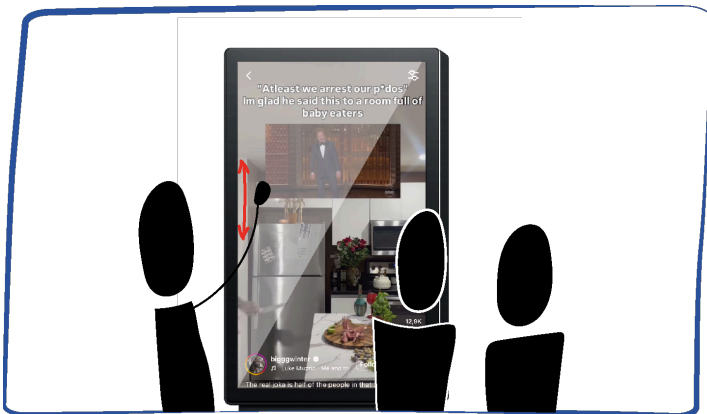
### 3 Exploring algorithmic feeds - 3 × 10 minutes

#### Goal of this step

Allow participants step outside their own social media bubbles and explore three different social feeds on the interface. Participants explore three social media feeds on a shared screen and individually map their emotional responses per video. Their emotional responses are visualised and discussed together after each feed.

#### What to do

- Guide participants as they explore the different feeds *on the interface*
- Ask them to record their emotional responses per video using the emotion-mapping tool
- Keep conversation during the feeds minimal (*if discussion happens naturally, you can support it with the optional questions*)
- Discuss the following *key questions* during the fun facts at the end of each feed
  - Feed 1:** *To what extent does infinite scrolling affect your life?*
  - Feed 2:** *Do you sometimes encounter illegal, harmful, or violent content?*
  - Feed 3:** *What do you consider to be trustworthy news platforms? What not?*
- After each feed, pause the exploration and guide participants to Step 4 by reflecting on the emotional map together.



#### Optional questions to consider during this step

- *What do you notice first when you see this post?*
- *What kind of perspective is being shown here?*
- *Would this normally appear in your own feed? Why or why not?*

## 4 Comparing the emotional maps - 3 x 10 minutes

### Goal of this step

After each feed, reflect on the emotional responses by comparing the emotional maps shown on the interface and explore how different content influences perceptions.

### What to do

- Start with a general reflection before zooming in on specific moments

*On the interface:*

*Let's compare how you felt. What stands out?*

- Zoom in on specific posts using the questions on the interface and the optional questions

*On the interface:*

*Here is a high peak. What makes this post stand out or feel positive?*

*This post triggers different responses. What makes you experience it differently?*

*Here is a low point. What makes this post less engaging or feel negative?*

- Reflect on what effect the feed might have on someone

*On the interface:*

*What effect might this algorithm have on how someone thinks or feels?*



### Optional questions to consider during this step

- What might this emotional "rollercoaster" do to someone over time?
- What is being said in this post, and how might that influence people?
- How might different people interpret or respond to it?
- Can you see how this could lead to more extreme or polarised views? Why or why not?

## 5 Reflection on personal algorithm - 10 minutes

### Goal of this step

Let participants recognise patterns in the explored feeds and the emotional responses. Let participants reflect on their own social media environment.

### What to do

- Guide participants in comparing the explored feeds using the axes on the interface

*On the interface:*

**Place each feed on the axes based on how you experience it, using the following dimensions:**

- Diverse - one-sided
- Positive - negative
- Discuss patterns that appear across the emotional maps
- Invite participants to reflect on their own feed using *the brochure*

*On the interface:*

**What effect might your algorithm have on how someone thinks or feels?**



### Optional questions to consider during this step

Comparing the feeds

- What patterns do you notice across the emotion flows?
- How might similar patterns appear in your own feed?

Reflecting on your own feed

- Are there perspectives or types of content you see more or less of?
- What could be a blind spot in your feed?
- Is there anything you would like to change about what you see?

## 6 Call to action - 5 minutes

### Goal of this step

Let participants reflect on what they take away and how they want to approach their social media use going forward.

### What to do

- Invite them to think about small, concrete actions

*On the interface:*

*What could you do differently next time you scroll to break your algorithm?*

- Use *the brochure* as inspiration for possible actions
- Guide participants in reflecting on their key insights



### Optional questions to consider during this step

*What is one key insight you are taking away from this workshop?*

- *What is one small thing you could do differently when using social media?*
- *What is one thing you want to stay aware of after today, and how can you do this?*

## Want to know more?

Read the Master's thesis '[Overcoming Polarisation: Exploring Ways to Address Algorithmic Influences on Polarisation Among Adolescents](#)', developed within the Master's programme Design for Interaction, which formed the basis for this workshop.

Or check out the [demonstration video](#) of the workshop.



**Scan to read:**

*'Overcoming  
Polarisation: Exploring  
Ways to Address  
Algorithmic Influences  
on Polarisation Among  
Adolescents'*



**Scan to watch:**

*Demonstration of the  
workshop 'exploring  
algorithms'*



