



FYI

sky kids

WHO'S CONTROLLING YOUR MIND?



YOU wake up, check your phone, decide what to watch and make a plan for the day... but what if you're not making those choices at all? What if they're being made for you? That's the big question – who's controlling your mind? In a special *FYI Investigates*, Jeriah and Rosie uncover the tricks that people, platforms and businesses are using to try to control how we think and act. Let's take a closer look in this special pull-out.



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Spotlight on social media

Social media plays a big part in people's lives today, with many saying it influences what they buy, do and think. If social media platforms are influencing us, it's important to understand how and why they're doing that. Is it to keep people connected and informed, or are there other reasons they want us to keep scrolling and tapping?

How much information do you give away without thinking?

We asked a group of teenagers to take part in what they thought was a new TV show, where they test out the latest technology. The teens were shown a device and told that it could actually read their minds! But what we told them was totally made up. In actual fact, we wanted to show them how

much we can find out about someone online using just their name.

Ethical hacker James Davies, from the company PureCyber, helped us out by searching the group's social media profiles and discovering all the info they've made public over the years. It turns out he could uncover all sorts of things about them, including what pets they have, where they've been on holiday and even when they moved school!

We asked the teenagers afterwards how they felt about us accessing so much personal information about them. One teen said: "The things that you found were insane. I couldn't remember even putting them out there," while another said: "You never know who could be looking up your name and finding out so much about you."

Remember it's that very information that companies are using to learn about you too!



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How much could we learn about you from your social media accounts?



WATCH THE FILM

FYI Investigates are short documentaries from our partner weekly news show that dive into fascinating topics such as vaping, gaming and mental health. Watch the full film *Who's Controlling Your Mind* and more episodes of *FYI Investigates* at first.news/investigates or by asking a responsible adult to scan the QR code.



CALLING ALL TEACHERS!

First News has produced two FREE assembly packs (KS2 and KS3) to go with this pull-out, including scripts, music suggestions and follow-up classroom activities. Scan the QR code to download yours now.





ARE YOU IN CHARGE OF YOUR CHOICES?

ASK THE EXPERT



Tom Clarke, Sky News' Science and Technology Editor:

"If you're a social media company and you want to make yourself profitable, a really simple way to do that is to get people to advertise on your platform. And one thing social media companies can say to advertisers that other companies might not be able to say is: 'We can target your advert, really carefully, to a specific person or group of people because we've got lots of information about that person.'"

"Social media companies know what you're interested in because they can get hold of the information about what you're looking at. They can even see how long you're engaging with particular bits of content. Then they can design algorithms to target ads to you in a very specific way."

"The algorithms behind social media platforms are designed to improve your engagement, to connect you with like-minded people and to link you up with the

ideas you've been interested in before. This creates 'echo chambers', which reinforce your view. Here are other people who think the same way as you, so it makes you think something must be more true or relevant."

What happens if something you see online isn't even true?

"Depending on how that story resonates [hits home] with you, it can be amplified in powerful ways. If the information isn't even true, then you end up with a very defined group of people with a particular idea who are getting that message reinforced."

"And that's how these algorithms work. They're designed to keep driving the content you look at and engage with. Clever though they are, they don't have any views or opinions or ideas, they just keep blindly following a list of instructions they've been given to show you more of the same stuff."

Let's talk advertising

Brands have used advertising for decades to influence our choices about where we spend our cash, and they're getting more and more clever in the way they do it, so we don't even realise our blind choices are being made for us.

A campaign by Bite Back aimed to show young people how much their choices around food are being controlled. A team could predict exactly what teenagers would order in a restaurant. The researchers cleverly planted a particular menu item – say triple-dipped chicken – in the

teenagers' minds by putting it around them in the days before they visited the restaurant. Some of the teens came across ads on social media, others saw the item on ads in a taxi and on a street wall.

These techniques work so well because they are going into our subconscious memory. We may not clock an advert, but when we're later making a choice about what to buy, that memory is triggered without us knowing. The choice is influenced by the ads we've absorbed.



Are you influenced by billboards?



algorithm – a set of instructions, programmed into apps, that usually has the aim of keeping you on a certain platform for longer.

echo chamber – when people only hear their own opinions repeated back to them.

ethical hacker – a person who tests a computer system, network or application to find out if there are any weaknesses in its security that attackers could target.

"Some things on social media are made to look real when they're not. You can start comparing yourself to images that aren't real."

– Laynee, teenager

Junk food ads make you hungry!

We asked 5,218 of you:

Do junk food adverts make you feel hungry?

83% of you said YES



17% of you said NO

Vote in our polls at first.news/polls

The rise of influencers

But what else do we absorb? Well, social media content! And there's one group on social media who are all about the spontaneous posts – influencers. Their posts can be seen by millions of people, but how authentic or genuine are they?



Professor Chris Hackley, Royal Holloway Business School:

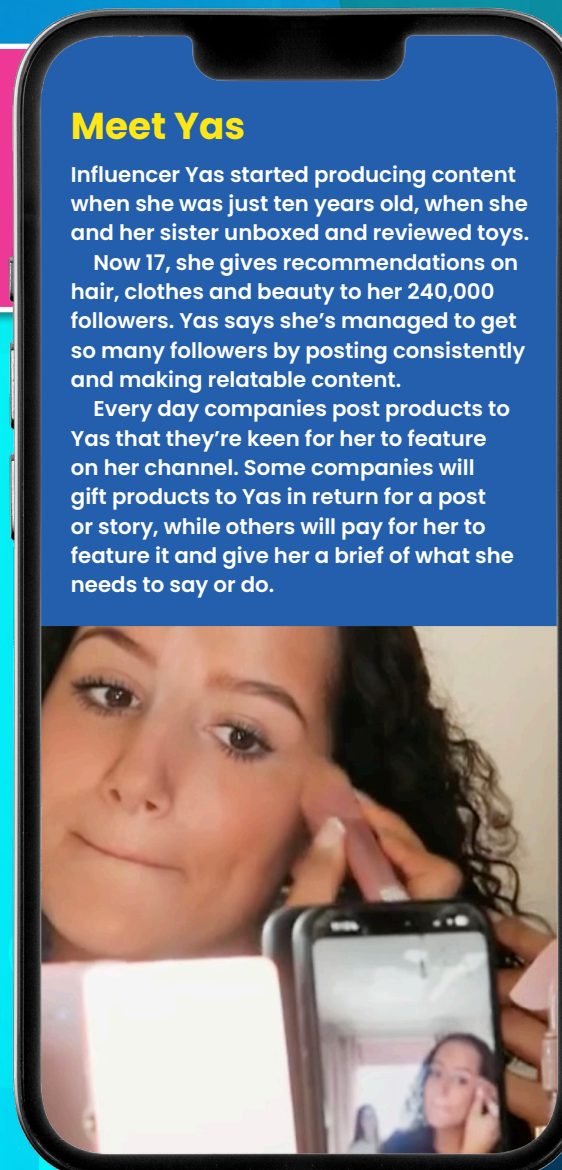
"Brands have become much more aware of the power of implicit advertising. So that's advertising that doesn't hit you between the eyes with a hard sales pitch. It's advertising that's just there. Brands know that if something looks like an ad, it's too slick, then we reject it. If something looks a little more spontaneous, then for a lot of social media users, that means it looks a little more authentic [real]."

Meet Yas

Influencer Yas started producing content when she was just ten years old, when she and her sister unboxed and reviewed toys.

Now 17, she gives recommendations on hair, clothes and beauty to her 240,000 followers. Yas says she's managed to get so many followers by posting consistently and making relatable content.

Every day companies post products to Yas that they're keen for her to feature on her channel. Some companies will gift products to Yas in return for a post or story, while others will pay for her to feature it and give her a brief of what she needs to say or do.



The Children's AI Summit

The Children's AI Summit brought together children from across the UK to share messages with global leaders, policy-makers and AI developers on what the future of AI should look like. It featured talks, performance pieces and workshops. One of the performances was about an AI companion. But what is that?



Dr Mhairi Aitken, AI expert:

"AI companions are chatbots where you can design a character, its physical appearance and certain elements of its personality. The more you chat to them, the more they get to know the kind of things you like to talk about. They can seem quite real and can mimic real ways of talking. It can often feel like you're getting to know a real-life companion and that it's getting to know you. Because they're designed not to challenge you or to tell you you're wrong, they can reinforce or encourage harmful behaviours. It's important that people who have an AI companion also have friends or trusted adults they can speak to."



Deep fake – when someone's image is altered to make it look like they did or said something they actually had nothing to do with. Anyone's image can be used to make a deep fake.
Fake news – when false information is shared and spread online.

What is being done to combat harmful and misleading online content?

Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer said: "As you all access online, it's important that it is a safe space. That's why we've got what you call the Online Safety Act. The online world offers us a huge amount of information, which is incredible for knowledge and for learning, but we also need to know that it's not always safe and therefore it's the job of government to make sure it's a safe environment."

Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer



"People can be influenced into buying things that they don't necessarily need."

– Zach, teenager



FEATURE ON THE SHOW!

Want to be in an episode of FYI? Just ask your teacher to set up a **First News FYI News Club** at your school by heading to first.news/FYInewsclub to find out more.



FYI is a weekly news show from Sky Kids that helps you stay up to date with what's going on in the world. You can watch loads of cool videos from them by heading to first.news/fyi or on the First News app.