

Class Activity: “Who Shapes You? Algorithms and the Modern Self”

Module: Academic Writing – Master 1 (Cultural Studies)

Time: 90 minutes (can be extended to 2 sessions)

Focus Skills: Critical reading, argument development, essay organization, evidence use

Learning Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will be able to:

1. Analyze how digital algorithms influence personality and self-expression.
2. Develop a critical argument supported by evidence and examples.
3. Apply academic essay structure (introduction–body–conclusion).
4. Integrate source material through paraphrase and quotation.

Essay Writing Activity: Personality and Algorithmic Curation

Part 1: Reading

Algorithmic Curation and the Shaping of Personality

In the age of digital media, personality formation is no longer shaped solely by family, culture, or education. Increasingly, it is molded by algorithms — invisible systems that curate what individuals see, read, and experience online. The rise of algorithmic curation, from social media feeds to personalized recommendations, has transformed the self into a product of data-driven selection. What appears as individual choice often conceals a deeper logic of technological control.

At its core, **algorithmic curation** refers to the automated selection and ordering of content based on user behavior. Every click, like, or pause contributes to a profile that machines interpret as preference. Yet these preferences are not neutral reflections of personality — they *produce* personality. As Eli Pariser warns in *The Filter Bubble* (2011), algorithms isolate users within echo chambers that reinforce existing attitudes. In this sense, identity becomes recursive: the more one engages with a certain type of content, the more the algorithm supplies similar content, narrowing the horizon of thought. What results is not freedom of choice but a subtle automation of taste and opinion.

The consequences for personality development are profound. Classical theories of subject formation — from Freud’s psychic structures to Foucault’s notion of disciplinary power — assumed that the self-emerged within social or institutional frameworks. Today, the algorithm operates as a new form of **psychotechnology**: it monitors, predicts, and nudges individual behavior, often without awareness. The “digital self” becomes fragmented across platforms, constantly recalibrated according to metrics of visibility and engagement. This datafied identity is dynamic but fragile, shaped more by feedback loops than by introspection.

Nevertheless, the algorithmic condition is not entirely deterministic. Users still negotiate, resist, and reinterpret digital environments. Scholars like Shoshana Zuboff in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019) remind us that understanding algorithmic governance is the first step toward reclaiming agency. Critical literacy — the capacity to read and question algorithmic structures — thus becomes essential for authentic personality formation in the digital era.

In sum, personality today is co-authored by algorithms. The digital subject lives within curated worlds that reflect as much as they construct who we are. Recognizing this entanglement is vital if individuals are to move from passive consumption to conscious self-fashioning in an algorithmic age

Part 2: Comprehension and Discussion

1. 1. What is the main argument of the essay?
2. 2. Identify two examples the writer uses to support the claim.
3. 3. What does 'algorithmic curation' mean in this context?
4. 4. How does social media affect the way individuals form their identity?
5. 5. In what ways do algorithms both empower and limit personal choice?

Part 3: Critical Reflection

- Do you agree with the author’s view that “algorithms silently shape who we are”? Why or why not?
- How does this issue appear in Algerian online culture (TikTok, Facebook, YouTube...)?

Part 4: Writing Task

Prompt:

To what extent do social media algorithms influence personal identity among young people?

** To what extent do algorithms shape who we are?*

** Can individuals resist algorithmic influence and remain authentic?*

** Is social media personalization a form of empowerment or control?*

Guidelines:

- Begin with a clear **thesis statement**.
- Use **at least one paraphrase or quotation** from the provided essay.
- Support claims with **examples** from personal or observed experience.
- Conclude with a reflection on digital selfhood in Algeria or the student's own cultural context.

Your essay should include:

- A clear thesis statement
- At least one counter-argument
- Linking devices and topic sentences
- Academic tone and structure (introduction, body, conclusion)

Part 5: Peer Feedback

After writing, exchange essays in pairs and provide feedback:

- One positive comment on argument or style
- One constructive suggestion for improvement
- Check for thesis clarity, cohesion, evidence, and academic tone