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## **Visibility matters: an exploration of YouTube ranking culture**

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YouTube is a site of participatory culture where non-professional content creation intertwines with official discourse, which makes the site an interesting locus of research to understand the changing relationships between new technologies, business and popular culture (Burgess & Green, 2009). In a moment where social media sites sustain the majority of online sociability and creativity (van Dijck, 2013), the study of platforms and their role as content curators is crucial to understand the techno-cultural constructions of public debates (Gillespie, 2010, 2013). In 2012, YouTube changed its video discovery features—how its viewers find videos to watch via search and suggested algorithms—to surface videos that drive watch time over clicking (YouTube creator Blog, 2012). With this move, the platform sought to increase user engagement, which increases revenue opportunities for its business partners (YouTube creator Blog, 2012). This economic driven

algorithmic change is part of YouTube rationale for content curation, which influences the way we consume information and get to know about things. However, algorithms are constantly changing due to machine learning components and the process to understand the decisions mechanisms involved in the ranking of videos in YouTube search is complex (Rieder, 2015).

Building on Rieder's (2015) approach to describe the structure and dynamics of outputs of the YouTube ranking algorithm, this paper seeks to interrogate YouTube's role in the curation of content and culture production with regards to different socio-cultural issues. By examining over time the ordered videos returned by YouTube when querying "Islam", "Syria", "Trump", "refugees" and "Gamergate" we seek to explore YouTube ranking culture around different issues. First, we describe and compare the outcomes of the algorithmic work, and second we qualitatively analyse the top results over time and for each issue.

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