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A PHILOSOPHICAL-ETHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FORMATION OF ADOLESCENT LIFE GOALS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ALGORITHMS

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Abstract

This article examines, from a philosophical-ethical standpoint, the influence exerted by social media algorithms on the formation of adolescent identity and moral autonomy. Drawing on a critical analysis of international and Uzbek scholarship published between 2020 and 2025, the study clarifies how algorithmic curation impacts the theory of autonomy advanced by J. Raz, and explicates the philosophical-ethical consequences of the phenomena commonly described as the "information bubble" and the "echo chamber." The article conceptualizes algorithmic foreclosure as a new identity status and discusses how it can be used to extend the classical four-stage paradigm of identity advanced by J. Marcia.

Keywords: Algorithmic identity, moral autonomy, information bubble, digital ethics, adolescent identity, algorithmic foreclosure, philosophical anthropology, digital literacy, "Tuzuk-i Timuri."

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Introduction

The digital environment, and social media in particular, has come to function as a decisive factor shaping the personality, worldview, and moral orientations of the rising generation. According to Statista, by 2024 the number of active social-media users worldwide had surpassed five billion, with projections indicating that this figure will exceed six billion by 2028 [Statista. 1]. The most disquieting aspect of these data is that adolescents aged 13–17 constitute a substantial share of these users: in the United States, between 93 and 97 percent of young people in this cohort use at least one social-media platform on a regular basis [De D. 2.45]. These figures are not merely statistical details; they constitute a philosophical-anthropological reality that reveals the environment within which an entire generation's personality is now being constituted.

The algorithms that operate beneath the surface of digital platforms are designed to capture the user's attention, time, and focus. They deliver personalized content that is calibrated, on the basis of every click, view, and pause, to the user's observed patterns of behavior. While at first glance this process appears to serve the user's interests, in substance it gives rise to the phenomenon described in E. Pariser's now-classic theory as the "filter bubble" [Pariser E. 3.18]. As S.A. Laczi and V. Pózer (2024) observe, "manipulated reality is an especially dangerous and invisible enemy, particularly relevant for adolescents and young adults, who absorb such curated content precisely while their personalities are still being formed" [Laczi S.A., Pózer V. 4.1]. This formulation places before us a serious philosophical question: if the individual constructs his or her worldview not on the basis of free choice but rather upon information that has been filtered by others, can such an individual truly be called an autonomous agent?

The period of adolescence carries particular weight within the process of identity formation. The "psychosocial moratorium" conceptualized by E. Erikson — that social space carved out for the adolescent to experiment with beliefs, values, and future roles — is today subjected to severe pressure within the digital

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environment [Erikson E.H. 6.128]. Neurological research conducted by J.L. Andrews and colleagues demonstrates that, during adolescence, the amygdala (the brain's emotional center) matures more rapidly than the prefrontal cortex (the seat of self-regulation), opening a "window of vulnerability" between the ages of 10 and 19 [Andrews J.L. 5.110]. It is precisely during this delicate phase that algorithmic systems exploit reward-based learning processes, deflecting and re-routing the adolescent's worldview in deep and chronic ways.

A further reason for the urgency of the present subject is that we now stand at a historically singular moment: the cohorts of Generation Z and Generation Alpha represent the first human generations to come of age within an algorithmic environment. As D. Janssen and S. Carradini have observed, "members of Generation Z may not perceive a fundamental difference between online and face-to-face communication" [Janssen D., Carradini S. 8.137]. This is not merely a matter of generational difference; it is an ontological transformation occurring for the first time in the history of humankind. The human being remains a creature whose self is shaped through others, but in many cases the place once occupied by "others" is now held by algorithmic forces.

The aim of the present study is therefore to illuminate, through philosophical-ethical analysis, the influence of algorithmic curation on the formation of adolescent identity. The investigation seeks answers to the following questions. First, to what extent do social-media algorithms violate the Razian conditions of autonomy? Second, in what manner does the concept of "algorithmic foreclosure" extend the classical paradigm of identity advanced by J. Marcia? Third, what role can the Eastern moral heritage, and the principles articulated in the "Tuzuk-i Timuri" in particular, play in addressing the problems of contemporary digital ethics? Fourth, what practical approaches are required if the genuine autonomy of the adolescent is to be preserved and protected within the digital environment?

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Materials and Methods

Research methodology: The article employs the systemic-functional analysis of philosophy together with the principles of objectivity, historicity, and logical consistency, the methods of analysis and synthesis, content analysis, hermeneutic analysis, and a systematic literature review. The principal methodological approach is critical document analysis. As the central theoretical framework for the philosophical analysis, the three conditions of autonomy set out by J. Raz in The Morality of Freedom were adopted: the capacity for rational deliberation, access to an adequate range of valuable options, and freedom from coercion and manipulation by interested parties [Raz J. 9.155]. This framework has made it possible to evaluate the phenomenon of algorithmic curation from a normative-philosophical standpoint.

Literature review. The article draws extensively on the work of Western, Eastern, and Uzbek scholars in the fields of algorithmic ethics, digital autonomy, adolescent psychology, and identity formation. In particular, the analysis engages with the contributions of J. Raz (The Morality of Freedom. – Oxford, 1986), E. Pariser (The Filter Bubble. – New York, 2011), L. Floridi (The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. – Oxford, 2023), M. Coeckelbergh (AI Ethics. – MIT Press, 2020), N. Couldry and U.A. Mejias (The Costs of Connection. – Stanford, 2020), B.-C. Han (Infocracy. – Polity, 2022), S.A. Laczi and V. Pózer (Digital parenthood: manipulated reality. – IEEE, 2024), D. De et al. (Social media algorithms and teen addiction. – Cureus, 2025), K. Vombatkere et al. (TikTok and the art of personalization. – ACM, 2024), Y. Zhang et al. (A systematic review of social media use and adolescent identity development. – Adolescent Research Review, 2024), S. Karimov (The Use of Tuzuk-i Timuri in Shaping the Spiritual and Moral Qualities of Students. – Jizzakh, 2026), and U.T. Kushshayev (The Impact of Social Networks on the Spirituality of Young People. – Washington, 2025), among others.

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Discussion and Results

Mechanisms of algorithmic curation and their hidden character. The investigation indicates that contemporary social-media platforms operate more than seven distinct categories of algorithm simultaneously: content recommendation algorithms, behavioral analysis algorithms, profiling algorithms, advertising algorithms, search algorithms, social-network analysis algorithms, and ranking algorithms [Laczi S.A., Pózer V. 4.3]. All of them are oriented toward a single objective: holding the user's attention for as long as possible. K. Vombatkere and colleagues, in their analysis of TikTok's "For You" algorithm, established that between 30 and 50 percent of recommendations on this platform are issued on the basis of the user's narrowly demonstrated preferences [Vombatkere K. 10.3791]. This rate represents the highest level of personalization yet documented.

Concealment is the most dangerous property of these algorithms. While users are aware that the technology exists, they have almost no understanding of its mechanism of operation or of its impact upon themselves. According to a survey conducted by S.A. Laczi and V. Pózer, 75 percent of respondents aged 14–18 are aware that the platform displays personalized content to them, yet most of them do not regard this as a problem [Laczi S.A., Pózer V. 4.4]. From a philosophical standpoint, this situation gives rise to a deeply troubling phenomenon — "consent through indifference." Although the user retains the formal possibility of refusing personalized content, he or she finds it convenient to accept it, and thus surrenders personal autonomy in an imperceptible manner.

K.Yeung has proposed the concept of the "hypernudge," arguing that the choice architecture of digital platforms governs decisions not by "mere recommendation" but by "the exploitation of cognitive frailties" [Yeung K. 11.118]. Developing this idea further, R. Shelby and colleagues, in their taxonomy of harms produced by algorithmic systems, write critically: "Algorithmic harm is not simply an outcome but a natural product of system

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architecture; it should be understood not as accidental malfunction but as a design choice" [Shelby R. 12.725]. This conclusion has become a central postulate of contemporary digital ethics, indicating that the harms produced by algorithms reflect not technical errors but specific interests and decisions.

The information bubble and the echo chamber from a philosophical perspective. The immediate consequence of the operation of social-media algorithms is the formation, around the user, of a distinctive "information bubble." Within this bubble, information that contradicts or remains foreign to the user's views is systematically excluded. Although A. Anderson and colleagues, in a study published in Scientific Reports, write of an alternative concept — the "diversified scale effect" — their final conclusion likewise confirms that algorithmic curation maintains the user within a "narrow semantic range" [Anderson A. 13.5]. The echo chamber represents a still deeper variant of the bubble: within it not only are foreign perspectives excluded but identical views are amplified through their continuous repetition.

From a philosophical standpoint, this phenomenon stands in opposition to the Socratic tradition of dialogue. As Socrates emphasized, truth is born from the encounter of opposing viewpoints. In the echo chamber, opposition itself is dissolved, and with it the path to truth. The notion of a "common world" articulated in the writings of H. Arendt — the idea that different people perceive the same reality from different points of view, and that a common truth emerges through this very plurality — is itself placed on trial under conditions of algorithmic fragmentation. N. Couldry and U.A. Mejias have termed this process "data colonialism," demonstrating that digital platforms manage the inner lives of their users as raw material [Couldry N., Mejias U.A. 14.2].

Empirical evidence corroborates these theoretical warnings. B. Kitchens, S.L. Johnson, and P. Gray, in research published in MIS Quarterly, demonstrate that as the intensity of platform use rises, the diversity of news content consumed by

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Facebook users falls significantly [Kitchens B. 15.1620]. S. Hardman Taylor and Y.A. Chen, examining what they call the "lonely algorithm problem," establish that the higher the level of personalization on TikTok, the lower the user's sense of social connectedness [Hardman Taylor S., Chen Y.A. 16.5]. The result may appear paradoxical: contemporary social media, rather than drawing us closer together, is in fact intensifying feelings of loneliness.

Algorithmic foreclosure: a new identity status. When J. Marcia developed his classical four-stage identity paradigm, he had in mind a personality formed under the influence of visible authorities — parents, teachers, and the community — that the individual could recognize and evaluate [Marcia J.E. 7.553]. The adolescent of the twenty-first century, however, finds himself or herself in a wholly novel situation, one without precedent from a philosophical-anthropological standpoint: the choices that constitute personhood are now shaped by an invisible, ungraspable, and indisputable algorithmic authority. It is for this very reason that the paradigm must be extended to admit a fifth identity status, which we may term "algorithmic foreclosure."

In classical foreclosure, the adolescent consciously accepts the values placed before him or her, and may, if he or she so wishes, mount a rebellion against them. In algorithmic foreclosure, by contrast, the adolescent remains within a domain of content selected expressly for him or her, and is not even able to imagine what lies beyond it. He or she feels that decisions are being made and that the self is free, yet the "choice" set before the adolescent has already been narrowed and curtailed. Y. Zhang and colleagues, in a systematic study published in Adolescent Research Review, describe this paradoxical situation by noting that "within the digital environment the adolescent feels himself to be in a sea of possibilities, yet his swimming territory has been determined in advance by an external algorithm" [Zhang Y. 17.250].

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Philosophically, this development bears a close affinity with the conception of "enframing" (Gestell) elaborated by M. Heidegger. Within technology, both nature and the human being are reduced to raw material and made to conform to a technological order. Under algorithmic foreclosure, the personhood of the adolescent is converted, for the digital platform, into a mere stream of data, and that stream itself shapes the matrix that organizes the adolescent's future in advance. The eleven-year longitudinal study conducted by A.I. Becht and colleagues has shown that the dynamics of identity during adolescence exert a substantial influence on personality stability in early adulthood [Becht A.I. 18.1610]. Algorithmic foreclosure is therefore a phenomenon with grave consequences not only for the individual adolescent but for the future personalities of an entire generation.

The violation of the Razian conditions of autonomy. J. Raz defines autonomy as the simultaneous fulfillment of three necessary conditions: first, that the person possess the capacity for rational planning and the comprehension of cause-and-effect connections; second, that he or she enjoy access to an adequate set of valuable options; and third, that he or she be free from coercion and manipulation by interested parties [Raz J. 9.155]. The investigation has shown that contemporary algorithmic platforms violate each of these conditions to varying degrees.

The first violation concerns the capacity for rational deliberation. By means of the "hypernudge" mechanisms theorized by K. Yeung, algorithmic systems bypass the user's rational decision-making and act directly upon the cognitive-emotional system. Infinite scroll, notifications, and dopamine-reward schemata are concrete manifestations of such exploitation. As D. De and colleagues observe, "social-media platforms intentionally exploit the dopamine pathways and reward circuits that are naturally present in the developing adolescent brain"

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[De D. 2.3]. Under such conditions, the philosophical sense of the term "choice" is hollowed out for the adolescent.

The second violation concerns access to an adequate set of valuable options. It is here that algorithmic curation produces its most evident violation: the user's "option set" is contracted in advance in accordance with the platform's interests, and possibilities lying beyond it are not displayed at all. As A. Anderson and colleagues note, although the user is presented with new content, he or she is unable to step beyond the "algorithmically constrained range of topics" [Anderson A. 13.7]. This stands in direct conflict with the Razian requirement of "sufficient diversity."

The third violation concerns freedom from manipulation, and constitutes the sharpest of the philosophical problems. According to Razian theory, if an adviser — whether a person or a system — harbors hidden financial motives that diverge from the interests of the one being advised, then any decision based upon such advice cannot be regarded as autonomous. Algorithms operate on precisely this scheme: they are oriented not to the development or wellbeing of the user but to the maximization of platform revenue. S. Parker, the former president of Facebook, openly admitted in his 2017 Axios interview: "The thought process that went into building these applications, Facebook being the first of them … was all about: 'How do we consume as much of your time and conscious attention as possible?' … It's a social-validation feedback loop … exactly the kind of thing that a hacker like myself would come up with, because you're exploiting a vulnerability in human psychology" [Allen M. 20.1]. For precisely this reason, M. West, S. Rice, and D. Vella-Brodrick, in research published in the Journal of Adolescent Research, characterize adolescents' conduct on social media as "the most striking example of heteronomous motivation" [West M. 19.10].

The formation of the heteronomous self and its consequences. The simultaneous violation of the three conditions enumerated above gives rise to a

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new and dangerous mode of personhood: the heteronomous self — that is, the self dependent upon external governing forces. The heteronomous self perceives itself as autonomous, even though its decisions, perspectives, and values have in fact been formed by interests alien to it. Such a self is the characteristic product of the contemporary digital environment. M. Faverio and O. Sidoti, in the report Teens, Social Media and Technology 2024 published by the Pew Research Center, demonstrate that 35 percent of American adolescents make near-constant use of at least one social-media platform [Faverio M., Sidoti O. 21.1]. Behind these figures lies not merely a fact of technological use but a new regime of personhood formation. D.A. Parry and colleagues, addressing this matter in Nature Human Behaviour, have shown that users routinely underestimate their screen time and that actual digital engagement is substantially higher than previously assumed [Parry D.A. 22.1540]. The user is therefore not only being manipulated; he or she is also unable to grasp the full scale of that manipulation.

The intersection of algorithmic ethics and philosophical anthropology. The foregoing analysis confronts us with a fundamentally important philosophical question: if the self is formed under conditions of algorithmic manipulation, to what extent does its moral responsibility persist? This is one of the central questions of classical ethics, and the great philosophers from Aristotle to Kant have sought to answer it in differing ways. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle defines the nature of moral virtue as that which arises from habit; Kant, on the other hand, holds that the moral law derives from the rational self-determination of the person. Under the conditions of algorithmic foreclosure, these two classical perspectives come into tension with one another: are the habituated actions of the adolescent in fact grounded in free choice, or are they programmed reactions originating elsewhere?

In his work The Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, L. Floridi writes: “The ethics of artificial intelligence is not a product of engineering but a philosophical summons

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indicating that humanity must reconsider the very nature of its existence" [Floridi L. 23.42]. This view of Floridi's carries considerable significance for our analysis. Algorithmic curation is not a merely technical problem; it is, at its core, a problem that seeks answers to the most fundamental philosophical questions concerning who the human being is, how he or she lives, and how he or she comes to find himself or herself. M. Coeckelbergh, in AI Ethics, develops the same line of thought: "Digital ethics is not simply the application of older ethics to new situations; rather, it is an invitation to rethink ethics itself" [Coeckelbergh M. 24.7].

From this perspective, algorithmic foreclosure is to be understood not merely as a problem of technical safety but as a central existential problem of human existence in the twenty-first century. The space of psychosocial moratorium that the human being requires in order to discover his or her own essence is being systematically narrowed within the digital environment. This stands in direct conflict with M. Heidegger's conception of the authentic existence of Dasein. For Heidegger, authentic existence is the process of recognizing finitude, confronting anxiety, and seizing one's own possibilities. The algorithmic environment, however, encourages flight from this process: by perpetually moving on to the next item of stimulating content, the user conceals himself or herself from the genuine existential questions.

There is a further significant philosophical nuance to be observed here. Classical ethical theory has explicated the autonomy of the self as "inner freedom" — that is, as the capacity of the person to make decisions in conformity with his or her own reason and conscience. Yet the contemporary digital environment makes plain that the boundary between "inner" and "outer" is itself dissolving. The algorithm penetrates so deeply into the inner world of the self that it is no longer recognized as an "external influence" and is experienced as the self's "own thoughts." This phenomenon corresponds closely to what the philosopher B.-C. Han has termed the "society of transparency": governance is exercised not

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through outright external pressure but through the voluntary self-disclosure of the individual [Han B.-C. 27.18]. It is for precisely this reason that algorithmic manipulation is more powerful than overt prohibitions or coercion, since it dismantles even the ideational basis of resistance.

Eastern moral heritage and the dialogue with digital ethics. The problems of contemporary digital ethics need not be resolved solely within the framework of the Western philosophical tradition. The Eastern moral heritage, and the Uzbek-Turkic ethical legacy in particular, can offer distinctive and, in many cases, more comprehensive responses to these problems. The principles of justice, responsibility, and the pursuit of knowledge set forth in the "Tuzuk-i Timuri" provide deeply meaningful foundations for the construction of a digital ethics. As Academician I. Mo'minov has observed, the maxim of Sahibqiran — "Might resides in justice" — "was the principal measure not only for state administration but also for the personal cultivation of the individual" [Karimov S.S. 25.220].
When this principle is reinterpreted in the context of digital ethics, the maxim "might resides in justice" acquires the following meaning: if technological power — namely the algorithm and the platform — is grounded not in justice but in interest, that very strength is itself, from a moral standpoint, a sign of weakness. This is a philosophical intuition of considerable importance: however powerful a profit-seeking algorithmic system may be, if it violates the moral autonomy of the user it is to be regarded, by the standards of the Eastern ethical tradition, as "weak." S.S. Karimov develops this idea further: "In the precepts of Amir Temur, a series of moral principles — justice, compassion, patience, and the pursuit of knowledge — are advanced not as mere declarations but as the practical program of life for the individual" [Karimov S.S. 25.218]. Such an approach can supply a substantive framework of responsibility for digital platforms.
U.T.Kushshayev, in studying the impact of social networks on the spirituality of Uzbek youth, observes that "the tendency toward attachment to the network can

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damage the inner life," and emphasizes the necessity of securing a balance between the national spiritual foundation and digital culture [Kushshayev U.T. 26.195]. From a philosophical-pedagogical standpoint, this approach acquires special importance for Uzbek society: the formation of our young people's identity occurs not only under the global pressure of the algorithm but also in conditions that allow them deep access to a rich moral heritage of their own. The second factor can substantially mitigate the consequences of the first.

Practical recommendations in the spheres of policy and education. The findings of the present analysis lead to the formulation of practical recommendations along four lines. The first line of work concerns algorithmic transparency and rights. It is proposed that adolescents (those below the age of 18) be granted a "right to reset," under which they may, every quarter, erase their algorithmic history and return to a neutral baseline. This represents the practical application of Raz's second condition, freeing the user from the narrow algorithmic niche formed during early experimentation.

The second line concerns digital literacy and ethical education. "Digital ethics" and "algorithmic awareness" should be introduced into school curricula. As R. Ishmuhamedov has observed, "if a moral idea is delivered by way of traditional rote learning, it is forgotten; if it is delivered through interactive dialogue, debate, and lived situations, it becomes part of personal experience" [Karimov S.S. 25.220]. Digital literacy must therefore be conducted not in the form of theoretical lectures but in problem-based practical exercises: adolescents should analyze their own algorithmic feeds, identify manipulative techniques, and consciously test alterations in their own behavior.

The third line concerns the responsibility of parents and educators. As S.A. Laczi and V. Pózer have observed, "parents must understand that digital platforms form an important part of their children's social life, and that for this reason a complete prohibition or strong restriction can in fact yield the opposite of the desired effect"

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[Laczi S.A., Pózer V. 4.6]. Balance is required here: parents must not reject technology outright but must become a partner who can engage critically with the adolescent in evaluating it. The fourth line concerns the ethics of platform design. The moral responsibility of the architects and operators of algorithmic systems must be reconsidered in principled fashion. Along this line, mechanisms of "algorithmic audit" should be instituted, and platforms should be required, at the very least with respect to vulnerable users — namely adolescents — to offer a development-supporting mode as a matter of obligation. As R. Shelby and colleagues note, "algorithmic harm must be understood as a design choice"; design itself, therefore, lies at the center of moral responsibility [Shelby R. 12.730].

Conclusion

The present analysis has demonstrated that social-media algorithms are not mere technical instruments; they are moral and philosophical forces that shape the personhood of the adolescent in deep and concealed ways. The analysis conducted within the framework of J. Raz's theory of autonomy has shown that these platforms violate, to varying degrees, all three of the conditions necessary to personal autonomy: the freedom of rational deliberation, access to an adequate set of valuable options, and freedom from manipulation. The result is the emergence of a fifth identity status — "algorithmic foreclosure" — which serves to extend the classical paradigm of Marcia.

From a philosophical standpoint, this phenomenon is not merely a problem of technical safety or psychological wellbeing but is converted into a fundamental existential question concerning who the human being is and how he or she exists. The Eastern moral heritage, and the principles of justice, responsibility, and the pursuit of knowledge set forth in the "Tuzuk-i Timuri" in particular, can supply a distinctive and enriching framework for addressing this problem. Reinterpreting the principle that "might resides in justice" within the context of digital ethics

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opens the way to a renewed examination of the relation between technological power and moral responsibility.

The final conclusion to be drawn is this: the overcoming of algorithmic foreclosure requires a comprehensive, four-fold approach — algorithmic transparency and user rights; the enrichment of education with digital-literacy competencies; the active assumption of responsibility by parents and educators; and the demand for ethical accountability in the design of platforms. If these approaches are elaborated in Uzbekistan in harmony with the national moral heritage, they will provide not only a defense against technical risks but also serve to enrich the moral and spiritual physiognomy of the new generation. A digital culture cultivated in the spirit of wisdom and justice is among the most important challenges of contemporary moral thought, and we must respond to that challenge with our labor and our responsibility.

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