Twitter Thread by Cory Doctorow #BLM

Cory Doctorow #BLM
@doctorow

We hear a lot about Facebook as a platform for manipulation - using machine learning to bypass our critical faculties and trick us into believing things that are bad for us - but the real show is in Facebook's ability to target, not manipulate.

1/



People who hold disfavored views struggle to find one another and mobilize. To find other people that feel the same way as you and make common cause with them to effect political change, you have to reveal your views and suffer social sanction.

2/

Search allows people who hold these views to find one another. If you have a deep feeling about your gender being nonbinary but don't know the words for it, you can search for communities of people who have those words, join them, and

discover who you've been all along.

3/

This is why, in this moment, so many ideas are migrating from the fringe to the center: ideas about racial justice, gender identity, alternatives to market systems, etc. People have harbored these views all along, but have held back on expressing them.

4/

Being able to express yourself in private, among people who share your views, is a prelude to going public and putting your case to the wider world in hopes of effecting change.

5/

This goes for ALL disfavored views: not just ones we laud, but also the ones we deplore. Many Americans have nursed secret white supremacism but only whispered about it, because saying it aloud would attract social sanction, with real consequences.

6/

Search let these people find each other. Having formed groups, they were able to brave social consequences and begin to shout about it. When they did, they converted people who were sort-of racist all along to their cause. "Radicalization" is closely related to "convincing."

7/

But search isn't the only way that groups with hard-to-find traits can be discovered: there's also targeting. Ad-tech companies spy on us, ascribe traits to us, then sell the right to target those traits to advertisers.

8/

"Show my ad to midwestern high school cheerleaders"

"To people shopping for a new fridge"

"To the owners of senior dogs"

"To people with diabetes"

"To readers of cyberpunk science fiction novels"

"To people skeptical of Big Tech"

"To Bernie Sanders supporters"

9/

"To violent, Trump-addled conspiracists plotting insurrection"

https://t.co/Q8lsg2yCXg

10/

To be fair, the Facebook ads "for body armor, gun holsters, and other military equipment next to content promoting election misinformation and news about the attempted coup at the US Capitol" were probably not necessarily targeted at "coup plotting" per se.

11/