



CAN WE
HAVE YOUR
ATTENTION
PLEASE ?

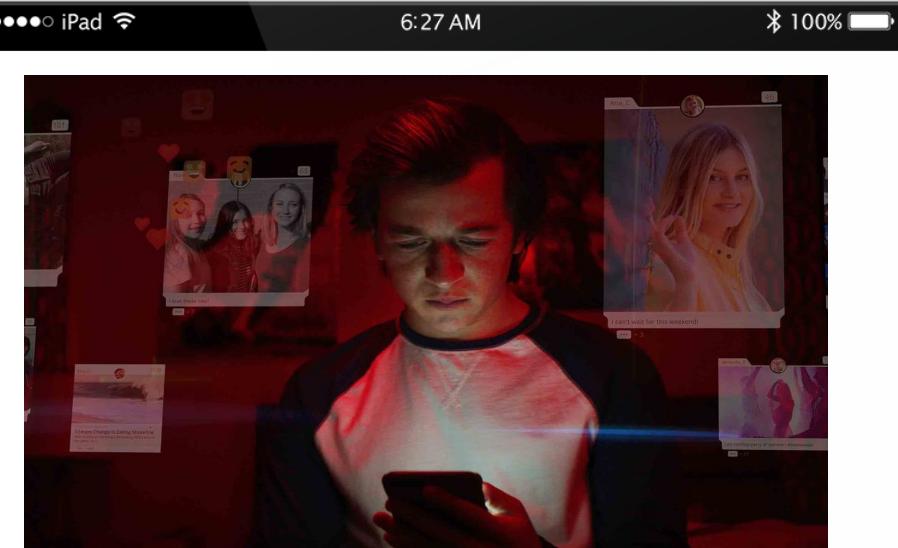
WATCHING
THE SOCIAL
DILEMMA

- ▶ **ENC1939**
Unfollow: Culture & Identity on the Internet



► In the opening scenes of **The Social Dilemma**, (the 2020 Netflix documentary, which offers the viewer a "wake up call" about the dark side of social media) a series of nervous-looking interview subjects appear to stumble over a simple question:

“What’s the problem?”



Technology’s promise to keep us connected has given rise to a host of unintended consequences that are finally catching up with us.

If we can’t address these problems in our broken information eco-system, we’ll never be able to address the larger challenges that plague humanity.



MEET THE SUBJECTS:

Who are these people and why do their
opinions have value?



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FORMER GOOGLE DESIGN ETHICIST; CO-FOUNDER & PRESIDENT OF THE CENTER FOR HUMANE TECHNOLOGY



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COMPUTER SCIENTIST AND FOUNDING FATHER OF VIRTUAL REALITY



SHOSHANA ZUBOFF

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ROGER MCNAMEE

EARLY FACEBOOK INVESTOR; AUTHOR OF 'ZUCKED: WAKING UP TO THE FACEBOOK CATASTROPHE'



AZA RASKIN

FORMER HEAD OF USER EXPERIENCE AT MOZILLA; INVENTOR OF THE INFINITE SCROLL



JEFF SEIBERT

FORMER SENIOR DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT AT TWITTER



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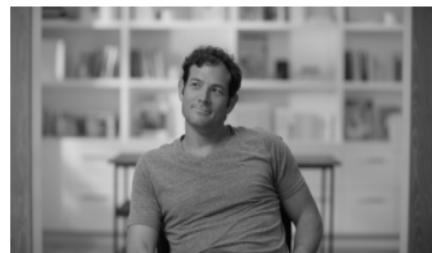
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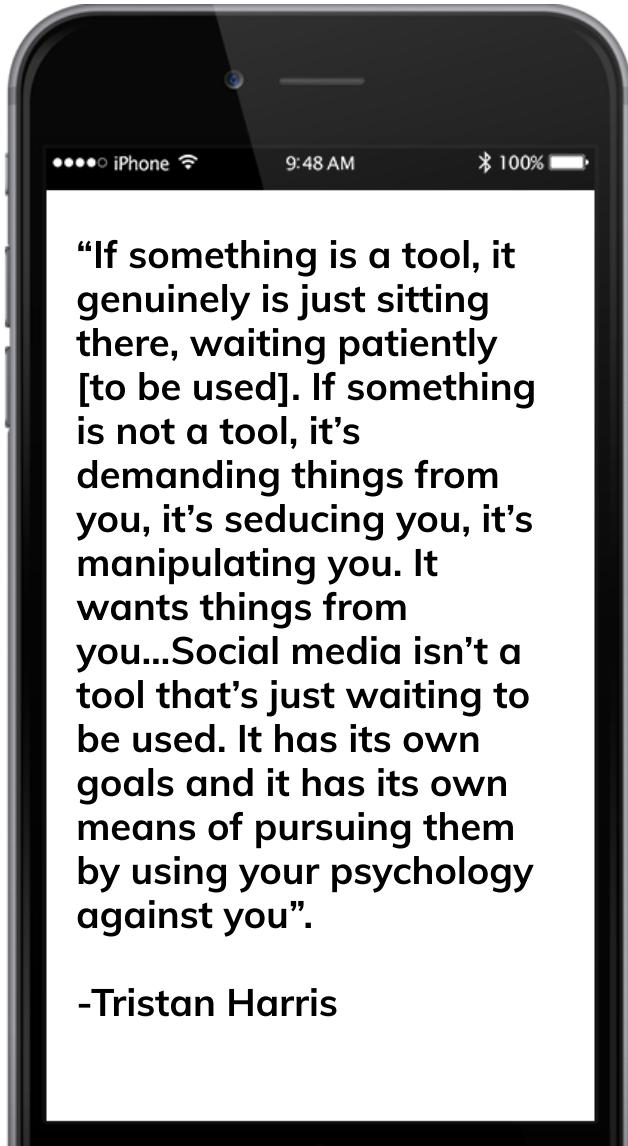
RANDIMA (RANDY) FERNANDO

RANDIMA (RANDY) FERNANDO, CO-FOUNDER & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT THE CENTER FOR HUMANE TECHNOLOGY

The film's subjects include former employees of Google, Facebook, and other tech giants, technologists, researchers and scholars (such as the Harvard professor and [The Age of Surveillance Capitalism](#) author Shoshana Zuboff).

Throughout the course of the film, each interview subject tries to illuminate the "problem" mentioned in the film's opening montage:

That the advertising-based, engagement-fueled business model that has come to dominate the internet is fundamentally built on manipulation.



In the quote seen here, film subject Tristan Harris talks about how humanity has moved away from having a tools-based technology environment to an addiction and manipulation-based technology environment.

Do you consider social media as tool before this movie? In thinking about what Harris said here, how might you explain how social media is a tool for you or how might you make it one?

► Scholar, Harvard Professor and Author **Shoshana Zuboff** points out during her interview how extractive technology (like social media platforms) has made internet companies “**the richest companies in the history of humanity.**”

How would you define the business model of these sites/apps? What are they selling?



6:27 AM 100%

A Sunday Times bestseller

THE AGE OF SURVEILLANCE CAPITALISM

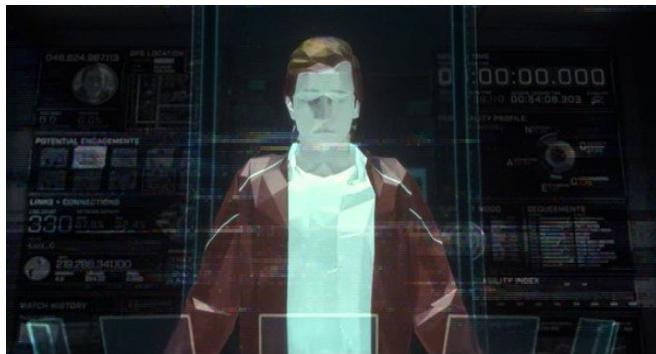
THE FIGHT FOR A HUMAN FUTURE AT THE NEW FRONTIER OF POWER

SHOSHANA ZUBOFF

'Groundbreaking, magisterial ... unmissable' FT

LISTEN
Surveillance Capitalism
Shoshana Zuboff
Harvard Business Review

CLICK HERE!



One of the ways in which Filmmaker Jeff Orlowski illustrates the harms of social media is through the dramatizations.

A key concept in *The Social Dilemma* is a focus on the ways big social media companies manipulate users by using algorithms that encourage addiction to their platforms. The film conveys this through the storyline of a fictional character named "Ben" who is given an "executive team" of people operating behind the scenes to maximize his interaction with a social media platform.

The team projects content to a 3-D rendered 'voodoo doll' version of Ben who flops back and forth looking at content...The more time he spends on his phone, the more digitized the rendering of Ben becomes...thus losing his "humanity" to the algorithms.

How does Ben's dramatization connect to the concepts we saw in Harari's essay?

Using a combination of dramatizations and the expert interviews that all seem to illustrate the ways in which social media is "reprogramming" civilization, the movie primarily centers around **THREE** "Dilemmas" produced by the widespread use of various social media sites, apps and platforms.

/the democracy dilemma_



THE # OF COUNTRIES WITH POLITICAL DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGNS ON SOCIAL MEDIA DOUBLED IN THE PAST 2 YEARS.

NEW YORK TIMES

Social media advertising gives anyone the opportunity to reach huge numbers of people with phenomenal ease, giving bad actors the tools to sow unrest and fuel political divisions.

/the mental health dilemma_



A 5,000 PERSON STUDY FOUND THAT HIGHER SOCIAL MEDIA USE CORRELATED WITH SELF-REPORTED DECLINES IN MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH AND LIFE SATISFACTION.

AMERICAN JOURNAL OF EPIDEMIOLOGY, 2017

Persuasive design techniques like push notifications and the endless scroll of your newsfeed have created a feedback loop that keeps us glued to our devices.

/the discrimination dilemma_



64% OF THE PEOPLE WHO JOINED EXTREMIST GROUPS ON FACEBOOK DID SO BECAUSE THE ALGORITHMS STEERED THEM THERE.

INTERNAL FACEBOOK REPORT, 2018

Algorithms promote content that sparks outrage, hate, and amplifies biases within the data that we feed them.

/the mental health dilemma_

Addiction, anxiety and depression.

Platforms are designed to reward distraction and keep us hooked – at the expense of our wellbeing – to fuel their business.

FAST FACTS

- ✓ A third of American adults – and nearly half of those ages 18-29 – say they are online “almost constantly.”
- ✓ Teenagers who spend 3 hours/day or more on devices are 35% more likely, and those who spend five hours or more are 71% more likely, to have a risk factor for suicide than those who spend less than one hour.
- ✓ A 5,000 person study found that higher social media use correlated with self-reported declines in mental and physical health and life satisfaction.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ✓ Do you find yourself unconsciously checking your phone or certain apps? Did this – or the impulse to – happen at all while watching the film? What emotions seem to trigger this behavior?
- ✓ What kinds of emotional responses do you have to the content in your feed? What content tends to have a negative impact on your well-being?

Tristan Harris tells us in the movie that before artificial intelligence overpowers human strength, it will “overpower human weakness.”

What does he mean by that? In what ways do you think technology has overpowered your own vulnerabilities? How is it shaping your behaviors day-to-day?

/the discrimination dilemma_

FAST FACTS

- Researchers found that leading AI models for processing hate speech were 1.5x times more likely to flag tweets as offensive or hateful when they were written by African Americans.
- 64% of the people who joined extremist groups on Facebook did so because their algorithms steered them there.
- Until 2019, Facebook allowed advertisers to use discriminatory targeting in ads: those advertising jobs, housing, and credit offers, could choose to exclude people on the basis of gender, race, disability and other characteristics, in direct contravention of federal laws such as the Fair Housing Act, which bans discrimination.

Algorithmic bias & the amplification of hate.

Algorithms are not equipped to detect hate speech and the data harnessed by our online activity is used by institutions in ways that can harm and discriminate against marginalized communities.

/the discrimination dilemma_

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- In thinking back to your opinion on the ethics of using/trusting algorithms that you wrote about in paper one, how has The Social Dilemma changed or corroborated your original stance?
- Should we trust an algorithm to make major decisions such as employment, financial, or housing outcomes as well as what information we see?
- Is it possible for algorithms to be objective when they are written by humans – mostly white upper class Americans in Silicon Valley – who are shaped by their own biases and experiences?
- Are there ways that the use of your online data might contribute to institutions discriminating against you? How might this kind of behavior disproportionately impact marginalized communities?
- Do you think algorithms that prioritize outrageous and divisive content amplify hate toward minority groups? What should be done?

/the democracy dilemma_

FAST FACTS

- Fake news spreads 6x faster than accurate news on Twitter, and falsehoods are 70% more likely to be retweeted
- The number of countries with political disinformation campaigns on social media doubled in the past 2 years.
- Google search results can shift the voting preferences of undecided voters by 20% or more — up to 80% among some demographics.
- An internal memo to Facebook senior executives in 2018, which was largely ignored, read, “Our algorithms exploit the human brain’s attraction to divisiveness. If left unchecked, [they’ll feed users] more and more divisive content in an effort to gain user attention & increase time on the platform.”

Political polarization & divisiveness.

Content that promotes outrage, deception, and conspiracy is promoted as a way to drive more engagement.

Stronger ideological rifts make cooperation and compromise increasingly difficult and ultimately sabotage our democracy.

/the democracy dilemma_

Political polarization
& divisiveness.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Film subject Justin Rosenstein says, “You look over at the other [political] side, and you start to think, ‘How can those people be so stupid? Look at all of this information that I’m constantly seeing. How are they not seeing that same information?’ And the answer is: they are not seeing that same information.”
Do you think it's important for everyone to have the same set of facts? Do you follow people and sources you disagree with? Why or why not?
- Film subjects Aza Raskin and Renée DiResta have written that there’s “a difference between freedom of speech and freedom of reach.” **What do you think they mean by that?**
- Should all – or any – ideas be amplified by algorithms? Should the same standards be used for individuals as for public figures or advertisers? Who should decide?



"As long as social media companies profit from outrage, confusion, addiction, and depression, our well-being and democracy will continue to be at risk. It's time to change that."

– Center for Humane Technology

Before moving on to the writing assignment, please take a few minutes to explore the Center for Humane Technology's website: <https://www.humanetech.com/>

What resources can you find to help solve the problems outlined in **The Social Dilemma**?