

## Center for Humane Technology | Your Undivided Attention Podcast

### Episode 10: Rock the Voter

- Tristan Harris: So before we get into the show, we just wanted to provide a little update or reflection on why we're doing this. The problems that we look at every day, at the Center for Humane Technology, are really serious. They have to do with election integrity, social isolation, shortening of attention spans, the toxification of the information environment. We have to fix these things. And so as a small organization of no more than 10 people, work full-time on doing that. Oftentimes, people look at us and they say, are so glad that those guys are working on that. And we don't want that to be the case at all. This is something that requires every single person, especially those people who are inside technology companies to stand up and be part of the solution. And what that means is sometimes you'll see episodes every week and sometimes there might be a little delay.
- Aza Raskin: The only thing I'd add here is you know how Alan Greenspan used to walk around with a briefcase and reporters would look at the size of his briefcase and try to guess like... if it's really thick, they knew something was about to happen in monetary policy. You guys can do the same with us. If it's been a little while, that's because there's a lot of... like you can make some guesses about what's going on behind the scenes.
- Tristan Harris: So if you see a delay from us and it's been a couple of weeks, it's not that the podcast is stopped. It's just that we have some big things going on. We want to hear from you about how you're finding this valuable. We are doing this to try to have everybody step in to being part of the solution to put our hands on the steering wheel and change the system and let other people know about the podcast. We're growing in incredible double digits right now.
- Aza Raskin: Not that that's the goal.
- Tristan Harris: Not that that's the goal. We don't care about metrics. But it certainly is encouraging to hear how much it seems to be impacting people inside of technology, policymakers and media. So thank you for listening and on with the show.
- Brittany Kaiser: In December 2016, everybody from Cambridge Analytica that had worked on the Trump campaign and the Trump super PAC gave us a two-day long presentation of every single thing that they had done.
- Tristan Harris: That's Brittany Kaiser, a former Business Development Director for Cambridge Analytica, which harvested the personal data of up to 87 million Facebook users without their consent, of course.
- Brittany Kaiser: So for two days, they showed everybody else in the company what they had done from data collection to modeling to audience building and the building of the audiences was the first really shocking thing that I saw. I'd seen the word persuadables used before especially in our commercial campaigns. It's a different concept to a swing voter. A swing voter, I mean somebody that will vote one way or the other and they might switch which candidate they're supporting. But persuadables mean people that can be persuaded to do something or not to do something and unfortunately, they had persuadables categories called

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deterrence. So they had deterrence campaigns to stop persuadable people who were definite Hillary Clinton supporters and would never vote for Trump to deter them from going to the polls at all. That was one of the first things we were shown on day one.

Tristan Harris: What Brittany saw that day is a new form of political campaign in which candidates greet voters with 1,000 faces and speak in 1,000 tongues. They exploit our individual vulnerabilities and they automatically generate messages that are increasingly aiming toward an audience of one.

Aza Raskin: And they do this invisibly. Even Brittany, who worked at Cambridge Analytica recalls the shocked reaction of her coworkers as they took into presentation.

Brittany Kaiser: You should have seen the looks on some of the people's faces in the New York boardroom, New York was just a commercial office. These are people trying to sell cars and toothpaste. Lot of them had been executives from PepsiCo and Unilever. I think I remember my chief revenue officer's comment which was, "Wow, that's not how you sell soda, is it?" No one really knew what to do.

Aza Raskin: Today on the show, we talked with Brittany Kaiser about the methods of persuasion she first witnessed at Cambridge Analytica. She describes the experience in detail and her new memoir *Targeted*, and she's about to explain how the same practices are now available to essentially any candidate with a Facebook account.

Tristan Harris: And to be clear, these methods will proliferate regardless of whether our data remains securely within Facebook servers or slips into the wrong hands. If Cambridge Analytica was a weapon, then Facebook is the arms dealer, and they continue to profit from those who deploy those weapons today.

Tristan Harris: I'm Tristan Harris.

Aza Raskin: I'm Aza Raskin and this is Your Undivided Attention.

Brittany Kaiser: I joined the Obama campaign in 2007 and was a part of the team that invented social media strategy, not just for politics, but in general.

Tristan Harris: And this was the beginning of figuring out what social media was because this is about three years or so after Facebook was born.

Brittany Kaiser: Exactly. And not too long after they removed the requirement for college email address.

Tristan Harris: That's right.

Brittany Kaiser: So seeing the very beginning of it, I got really excited about the types of basic data collection we were doing, because I saw that as soon as we sent targeted messages at individuals, they were engaging and they were engaging in a wholly different way than with the blanket messaging that most politicians were used to

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sending out. We were getting young people to register to vote for the first time, we were getting people who had been politically apathetic to come back and actually care and engage with their government again. So I saw data collection as wholly positive and I did for many years after that, as well.

Tristan Harris: So what are some maybe some specific examples where, before the data without any Obama campaign, you got X response, but then when you add the data, you get this other higher response and some of these examples you're talking about, take us back?

Brittany Kaiser: Well, yes, I mean, in the first time I ever worked on a political campaign was for Howard Dean and we started using targeted emails in order to fundraise and we broke all political fundraising records ever, when Howard Dean lost and that translated to John Kerry, again, we used a lot of those same tactics. Now on the Obama campaign, we went obviously a lot further than emails going to social media and instead of Barack giving speeches where he might have 10s, or 100s of people, all of a sudden, 1000s and 10s of thousands of people were showing up to these rallies. And this was completely revolutionary. I mean, it was exponential political engagement, which meant more than you could possibly measure for a politician who had very small name recognition, was a one term senator at the time.

Aza Raskin: I remember from being on the outside of that. What that felt like, to me as a general public was, oh, there's a groundswell of support for Barack Obama.

Brittany Kaiser: Absolutely.

Aza Raskin: It's invisible to me that there were sort of targeted messages, there was even a change going on and how voters are being reached.

Brittany Kaiser: Yes, I mean, it was not just targeted messaging on social media, but we built new platforms for the first ever one-to-one interactions between a campaign and supporters. So for instance, a head of debate watch parties, we built a platform where you would text into the campaign and you could text in your questions. So we built a platform with basic algorithms that would sort through everyone's questions. We had different teams and campaign headquarters that would receive the healthcare questions, to the foreign policy questions, the environment questions and we would be answering those questions one on one, while the debate was actually going on.

Tristan Harris: In real time while it was going on.

Brittany Kaiser: Yes, in real time. We would spend the night on the floor of the campaign office.

Aza Raskin: I was just talking with a VC who specializes in B2B sales kinds of things and he was explaining a new sector he's really excited about which terrifies me. And it's the idea that on sales calls, you have, essentially what you're talking about, you have an AI system, listening, diarizing the call in real time, matching it to what other sales people have found successful and offering prompts in real time to

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change the conversation. And so you think you're talking to real person, you are talking to a real person, but that real person is backed by-

Tristan Harris: It's a Cyborg.

Aza Raskin: Yes, it's true on Cyborg and you're unaware. It's an asymmetric power that the salesperson now has over you.

Brittany Kaiser: Wow. I'm sorry to say that I find that system incredibly attractive because I used to do phone banking for a lot of political campaigns and fundraising for nonprofits and charities and I wish I would have had that back then.

Aza Raskin: Yeah. I mean, the first thought that popped into mind as I heard him talk about this was like, yes, you this is going to be 1) effective, 2) it's going to be used not just for B2B sales calls, this is clearly going to be used for, I don't know whether it's the 2020 or 2024 election like, this is coming for your ears.

Brittany Kaiser: Yes, absolutely. And that, again, is where we saw the evolution of our one to one messaging platforms that we built specifically for the debates where a lot of answers started becoming quite similar to questions that were grouped together. So we started having blanket messaging for specific types of questions. So in healthcare, we might have five different types of general questions that came in and so then we would eventually get those templates and suggested answers so that we could go through them a bit more quickly.

Tristan Harris: I mean, so when you go back to the... you're talking about the targeting, I mean, I think there's sort of what was 2007 targeting as opposed to today targeting? Because I think we just we throw on this first area, we're just targeting the messages. Well, of course, we target the messages, we tailor things all the time. I say something to you in a different way, because I know you versus if I don't know you, but what kind of targeting back then was going on?

Brittany Kaiser: It was incredibly manual. So that would be us actually collating names and saying, in our own spreadsheets that we're building by hand, this person cares about these issues, this person has been to these events, this person has donated for these causes, and trying to build a campaign database where if there's an event around health care or a specific call to donation around health care, that those people all see that message.

Tristan Harris: This wasn't, for example, generating brand new messages just because we know that's what you want to hear, this was, hey, we already have an event that's going on, we already have this other thing that's going on. We just need to make sure that these people who we know care about it, do get to hear about it.

Brittany Kaiser: Absolutely. Which is why many years later when I joined Cambridge Analytic I realized that what we were doing on the Obama campaign was incredibly basic. We were speaking to supporters we already had, not finding new ones. That's the big difference. Facebook tools didn't exist at the time for you to find people who were similar to the people you already talking to. If an individual that

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interacted with your post wanted to share that with their friends and family, okay, great and we would encourage that, but there wasn't any. Look alike targeting-

Tristan Harris: Did you want to define look like...

Brittany Kaiser: Of course, yes. So look like modeling is a concept where if you already have an audience that you're going to advertise to, say it's 10,000 people that you already know, care about the environment, they care about climate change. I can upload those people into Facebook and I can say Facebook, I want to find 500,000 or a million people that are as similar as possible to these individuals, and Facebook will find everybody who has as similar as possible behavioral data to the individuals that I know for sure are my climate change supporters. And then it'll be able to send my message or my advertisement out to as many people as I want to widen the audience, right?

Aza Raskin: To make it more concrete, sometimes I'll ask a friend like, hey, have you ever had somebody say like, "Yo, I met somebody just like you. Like you sort of have a doppelganger. They look like you or they talk like you, they behave like you, you have your kind of like humor." What a look alike model does it lets Facebook say, cool, I'm going to find all of your behavioral doppelgangers, all the people that sort of act-

Tristan Harris: Your susceptibility doppelgangers. Like I know that this particular form of sugar is something that's your bubble tea or whatever your thing is. That works with you, but your susceptibility look-alikes.

Aza Raskin: Right, exactly. And then that image in my head is like I sort of like tap you on the shoulder and all of a sudden I see highlighted in a giant crowd, all the other people, is sort of like walking a little bit like you, like that's the power that Facebook has.

Brittany Kaiser: Exactly. So in 2010, Facebook developed something called the Friends API, which is now quite famous, because that was the way that over 40,000, developers were given access to most people on the platforms personal data. So not just the individuals who would take a quiz, but also everybody else in their network, once they consented, that data would also be transferred to the developer. So that's the famous API that Cambridge Analytica used, but it was also used in the Obama campaign in 2012.

Brittany Kaiser: Now, that was one of very many tools that were rolled out not just for politics, but for advertising in general. And from 2010 up until the last election, the amount of different advertising tools really became exponential in the ways I can decide to target you and everybody else like you based off of any different category that I decide to including race and religion. But over those many years, the difference between what was done in 2012 and 2016 really came with the intention of the messaging. I didn't see micro-targeting in 2012 that used negative messaging, that used kind of counter campaigning, that spread the types of hate and fear and, dare I say it, but voter suppression tactics in the way that it

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was used in 2016. The negative and counter campaigning just was not advanced in that way.

Tristan Harris: You've specifically said Obama had a policy not to do any negative campaigning, including against other Democratic candidates.

Brittany Kaiser: Yes, exactly. So actually, part of the '07/'08 campaign was that I would have to have tons of volunteers that on a daily basis would go and delete off of all of our social media accounts, anything that was negative against Hillary or other democrats as well as any republicans because we had a policy of zero negative messaging. We didn't allow any of that. I saw that as fantastic. Every single thing that we pushed out of the campaign in terms of messages was wholly positive. And that's it was only encouraging people to take action to care about issues and to believe in Senator Barack Obama's ability to accomplish those things, which was great.

Tristan Harris: So what was different about that to what was used in 2016 and Brexit or in Trump? What's been different?

Brittany Kaiser: So, in 2016, there were PACs and super PACs and even parts of campaign messaging that the entirety of the campaign was negative, especially the super PAC Make American Number One, which was the main Trump super PAC. It was 100% negative messaging. There was nothing that was supportive of Trump, not even one single message, every single thing was negative against Hillary. I had never seen those tactics used before, ever. Usually, a campaign splits... most of the time is positive messaging for a candidate and they'll also have counter campaigns against specific opponents. But I've never seen entire organizations that are dedicated to negative messaging and dedicated to negative messaging in a way that is not just an undermining of democracy, but contravening a lot of laws that we have in the United States. We have laws against voter suppression, but somehow on our technology platforms, the FEC, the Federal Election Commission, has not found a way to enforce our election laws, and any other government agencies or lawmakers have not found a way to enforce a lot of our other laws on technology platforms. And it was really shown in 2016 how vulnerable those loopholes actually are.

Tristan Harris: Imagine you're in New York City, and imagine that we get rid of the police force, you can break the law and like no one will know. How long does it take for the city to go crazy. Like how many hours is it? How many days is it? You have all of our previous social norms in which we have assumed there's accountability, we do the kind of good thing. But what happens when you discover there actually is no accountability and you can do whatever you want. That's basically the world we have right now online. Where, yes, it's true that people can use the advertising micro-targeting tools to just target shoes to good people who want those shoes. But the problem is that the bad actors will out-compete the good actors and there's nothing stopping them.

Tristan Harris: And so when Facebook or someone says, let's just keep it as it is, it's not that bad, because we actually haven't seen everybody abuse it all at once. And the system allows for everyone to abuse it everywhere, all at once. This is it. I

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mean, this is the election year of the United States. And whether the Facebook engineers or the Twitter engineers listening to this, leave it as status quo and allow the complete unregulated use of algorithmic machine optimized, toxic speech to be the thing that wins, we're talking about real consequences here.

Aza Raskin: I think one of the hopeful messages here is that if you're sitting inside of one of these companies, especially Facebook, it could be Twitter, it could be Google, you actually have an incredibly high amount of agency for making hugely impactful decisions. Twitter actually banned political advertising, like it is all possible.

Tristan Harris: And if you think about those kinds of decisions, it's just a bunch of people speaking up and having conversations with their executives, with their teams asking transformative questions that do not fall down the excuse aisle of, we're just giving people what they want. People just... haters are going to hate, technology is a neutral tool, who are we to decide what's good for people? These are inadequate statements that are mostly evading responsibility for what is in our direct hands. Even according to the Facebook employees, I think in that in the Facebook employee letter, they think that there should be blackout periods in the at least few days before an election.

Aza Raskin: Is it so much to ask that they turn it off 1% of time? They're keeping on the other 99% of the time. So it's actually pretty small ask. It should be something they've agreed to almost immediately. What do you think the pushback is and what do you think they would say for why they wouldn't do that? What's the defense?

Tristan Harris: I think they would be worried about the fact that it would demonstrate that they don't have a way to solve it. So it's sort of like, first they came for the election blackouts and then they came for me. First they came for the 24 hour blackout and then suddenly Center for Humane Technology and the rest of the nonprofit civil society groups demand that they just turn off all the advertising. It's a slippery slope for them to admit that if the reason why they're turning it off is because an exponential number of advertisers targeting an exponential number of things, run by machines is unsafe fundamentally, they're admitting that the entire system is dangerous, fundamentally. So that's one reason why they might be pushing back.

Aza Raskin: One of the things that sort of arises in my mind, the resistance is like, okay, I can believe that maybe other people are persuadable, but I don't believe that I'm persuadable. Connect that for me. Sort of show me why I can be persuaded if I'm sort of on the fence about something.

Brittany Kaiser: Yes. So you would measure an impact of persuadability by what someone's activities were before you show them a certain messaging campaign, then what their activities or opinions are afterwards. And you can actually tell what people are searching for after they've seen a particular ad, how people answer questions after they've seen a particular ad and what their changes...

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- Tristan Harris: When you say searching for, how would you know what they're searching for after they've seen a particular ad?
- Brittany Kaiser: I mean, depends on how you're using tracking cookies and what platforms they're inside of. But yes, usually you can track what they're searching for afterwards.
- Aza Raskin: So like Google, you can see their Google searches or something?
- Brittany Kaiser: Yes. Uh-huh (affirmative). Yes. So if people have 20% more searching for like Trump in the economy after you've just shown them an ad about how Hillary's terrible in economic policy, then you know that that's specifically related to that ad because they're going and searching right after they've seen it.
- Aza Raskin: Got it. And so you're actually, you're getting a closed loop of messages you show someone, and the way that their behavior immediately changes right after to what they're interested in.
- Brittany Kaiser: Yes, exactly.
- Aza Raskin: Something that we've been talking about, audience can't see, but I'm just trying to Tristan here is that it's hard for me to see how messages Facebook wherever else will change my behavior, but it's much easier to see how, they might start to influence my bias, but then bias over time becomes behavior. And so if you can own someone's bias, you eventually own their behavior.
- Tristan Harris: You take the example of Crooked Hillary as a meme.
- Brittany Kaiser: Defeat Crooked Hillary, yes.
- Tristan Harris: Defeat Crooked Hillary. The logo of that came from Cambridge Analytica, they invented that, but the phrase came from Trump when he first did that.
- Brittany Kaiser: Yes, just like he had Lion Ted and little Marco and Crooked Hillary was his phrase, but Defeat Crooked Hillary that campaign and the logo was made by Cambridge. Yes.
- Tristan Harris: Right. And so the reason I'm going here is once you implant, what Trump does in general, as you say, Sleepy Joe Biden and Lying Ted Cruz and Crooked Hillary, you're doing a binding, a cognitive binding to the person with an anchor that says, this is the bias you should have. Every time you look at Hillary, see her as crooked, every time you see Joe Biden, see there as sleepy, every time you see Ted Cruz, see him as lying.
- Brittany Kaiser: Yes, I go a little bit more into that. In my book, I talk about Trump's kind of pairing of every single one of his opponents with a specific negative phrase. And that was one of the first times that really the drop in support for Marco Rubio was so easy to measure. Lying Ted was pretty successful as well, but Little Marco actually had a big effect on his campaign from our measurements.



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- Tristan Harris: Wow. And so I think the common narrative is, oh, yes, the persuadables, they're so easily duped. Not any of us at this table Brittany, Aza, and Tristan we're so smart, we could never be influenced. But if you say bias, our bias is much more easily. I think we can admit that there's invisible ways that we are looking for certain evidence or others, but something that caught my eyes when you said, well, the thing about the big five personality traits is that neurotic people, which is the fifth one, neuroticism, always respond to fear-based messaging, it works very well. Do you want to talk about that?
- Brittany Kaiser: Of course.
- Tristan Harris: Because that's a quite a clear example of a deep bias that you can tap into.
- Brittany Kaiser: Right. So through all of the behavioral, clinical and experimental psychology that Cambridge Analytica brought into our modeling infrastructure, we found that there are around like 32 different personality types and people that are very high in neuroticism respond to fear-based messaging. I mean, neuroticism means you're a bit emotionally unstable and you can be triggered quite easily.
- Tristan Harris: And we mean neuroticism in a formal psychological sense so just so people know, we're not talking about like an adjective level judgment, we're talking about there's a clinical sort of view of what a neurotic personality type is.
- Brittany Kaiser: Absolutely, we had a team of psychologists that were working on this with the data scientists on how to measure it using large scale qualitative and quantitative testing. And so the Defeat Crooked Hillary campaign which was run by the Make America Number One super PAC, after seeing how successful it was sending fear-based messaging to neurotics, they only sent fear-based messaging to people measured to have high amounts of neuroticism for the entirety of the campaign. That was the entire point. In the beginning, they mixed hopeful messages to open-minded and extroverted people and assertive messages with fear-based messaging, and it was only fear that really had a massive impact. So they spent the rest of the super PACs money on-
- Tristan Harris: On fear.
- Brittany Kaiser: ...on fear, yes.
- Aza Raskin: Sort of like you find a crack in somebody's psyche and you pay to take a chisel and a giant hammer, you just start whacking against that one fault again and again, and that's sort of the image I have for what's going on with our democracies.
- Brittany Kaiser: Yes, I mean, the first ever stuck example that I saw of this and these ads are all available on YouTube, Cambridge designed five different ads that were put out on both television and YouTube pre roll for John Bolton super PAC on national security. And some of the ones that were for again, the open-minded and extroverted individuals showed families playing out in the sunshine and bright waving American flags and lush green hills and the hope for the future of

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America. And then you saw the ad that was cut for neurotics. And it was dark, nearly black, really dark images of some of the most iconic buildings in America with surrender flags waving on them. So a white surrender flag and nearly black and white very dark image of everything from Lady Liberty to the bridge in San Francisco. And then it has really ominous music, and it stops to a black screen and says America has never surrendered. We're not going to start now.

Brittany Kaiser: It was so incredibly dark compared to everything else that was cut. And when I used to show that video in meetings, people would say, "Hey, I remember that. I saw that on TV." "Hey, I remember that. I saw that on my laptop." It really stuck with the people that were targeted by it. They remembered it very well. They just kind of would stop and pause and their face would go a bit blank. You could tell how impactful it actually was that it made them feel afraid that America was being attacked, and that if we didn't do something about foreign policy, that we were in danger, and that was what made them feel like national security was important because they were afraid of being attacked, not because they had hope that America was an amazing place and that we had a bright future.

Tristan Harris: What's amazing to me is that the speaker in this case that the Trump advertising team, is saying two completely different messages to different audiences, it's the same speaker. Imagine you meet a friend and you talk to that person and then they talk to you and they talk about this super upbeat tone and then they talk to someone right next to you when you're not around and they say this totally opposite thing about the exact same topic. You would call that person untrustworthy, sociopathic sort of way to operate.

Brittany Kaiser: Someone you wouldn't ever want to do business with. If someone sits down with you and out of one side of their mouth, they say, I can't wait to do business together and out of the other side they say, I'm going to destroy your company if you don't work with me.

Aza Raskin: That's right.

Brittany Kaiser: It's kind of like that.

Tristan Harris: And we've created this sort of mass infrastructure for automated sociopathy because each like campaign company can basically run these split tested ads and actually be in a constant rolling state of saying different things to different people about the same topics and being 100% self contradictory and opposite, but it's almost like we have this phrase we've been playing with. It's sort of like socially subliminal messaging. It's like a drive by message and you say, "Did I just hear that thing?" You try to refresh the page and it's gone. And you ask, "Hey, did you see that thing that I saw?" They say, "No, I didn't. What are you talking about?"

Brittany Kaiser: Absolutely. I mean, we had a very smart group of people who built the ad tech at Cambridge and they were testing sometimes hundreds, thousands 10s of thousands of messages at once, and that would be a slight change in words, images, phrases, even the coloring and the sound in ads, until it was optimized for the most amount of clicks. And that means that most people saw an ad that

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maybe hardly anyone else saw, maybe tens or hundreds of other people saw it or maybe it was just for them. Definitely in the primaries when Cambridge was working on the Cruz campaign, there were some messages that were just for like 50 people.

Aza Raskin: And the Facebook or these campaigns are whispering different messages into each person's ear. Is it any surprise that we end up with societal incoherence, inability to agree on truths, because everyone's hearing a different message? Recently we've started also playing with this is that micro targeting is a little bit of an unfortunate phrase because it sounds so small, oh, it's just micro targeting, but really this is human targeting. This is like taking the world's largest supercomputers armed with enough data that the algorithms can make better predictions about you than your colleagues, your spouse, and sometimes even yourself, finding the right brains to target and then selling the bullets to whoever the highest bidder is.

Brittany Kaiser: Right. And that's very much what it was. I mean, from what I understand, the Clinton campaign only served about 50,000 messages over the whole duration of the campaign and there are over a million that came out of the Trump campaign, even though it was run over a shorter period of time.

Aza Raskin: Another thought that came to mind is sort of in attention capitalism, hate has a home field advantage.

Brittany Kaiser: Yes.

Tristan Harris: That's well said.

Brittany Kaiser: That's unfortunately how a lot of news feeds and search algorithms are built something that is more inflammatory, something that is more fear-based, gets more clicks, so it rises to the top.

Tristan Harris: We now have automated content generated by machines, uploaded to automated content ranking systems, mapped to automated users, aka bots, mapped to automated advertising and it's like computer generating stuff for computers.

Tristan Harris: The question is, can algorithms know when they're being gamed? And when they're amplifying hate or false things or bad things? And according to Facebook's own logic, they can't know. What's the example of that? The example of that is, do you remember trending topics on Facebook?

Aza Raskin: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Tristan Harris: They used to have on the right hand side, here's the most popular news stories. And they had human beings, human editors who are curating that, they had some contractors. Facebook got accused by conservatives in the United States saying, oh, you're biased against conservatives, they said, fine, fine, fine. We're going to get rid of our human editors and we're going to have just the machines

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decide what are the trends topics, so you just count up how often are each of the words mentioned and the topics that are mentioned the most they show up on the right hand side. After they do that, within just like 24 hours, three out of the top eight news stories are fake news articles. And so what do they decide to do? They say we're shutting down trending topics. So essentially, you have millions of pieces of content, trillions of pieces of content surging through their system every day and when they delegate it to machines to decide, is this true, is this good, is this helpful to society, they don't have a way to decide. And according to their own logic, they say this is an unmanageable problem. We have to shut it down. Now take that exact same structure and apply it to the automated advertising system. They've got more than 6 million advertisers sloshing through their system every day running 10s to hundreds to thousands of campaigns each, generating millions or trillions of possible combinations of ads being matched to human eyeballs all run by machines. The machines don't know what's true, what's good, what's beautiful or what's helpful to society and yet they're saying we're not going to shut it down.

Tristan Harris: It's like the reverse CDC, like the Center for Disease Control. Instead of trying to block a virus from spreading virally throughout the entire population, it's the reversal, we've actually laid the train tracks for viruses to spread as fast as possible, with as little ability to respond and prevent that damage as possible. And I think the fundamental tension here, these systems are always demanding greater and greater automation, because automation means I don't have to pay people to do it. So it's more profitable to have machines decide rather than to pay human brains to sit in rooms and make decisions for us. So the incentive is to take as many of these human decisions and turn them into machine decisions. But if we just categorically deny that machines cannot make critically important decisions that have to do with democracy or children's health or what safe or what's good, we're basically saying there's a limit to how much we're willing to automate with machines. If you're building systems that are beyond the human capacity to course correct or to make moral judgments, they're not safe.

Aza Raskin: I sort of want there to be an X Prize for trustable trending. Like if somebody or groups of people could crack this maybe it's coming from the blockchain community, maybe it's coming from anthropology and social biology community, I don't know, but that just seems like such a perfect use case to be able... If we can get to trustable trending, that's a huge advance.

Tristan Harris: It's sort of a unit test. It's almost like the AlphaGo chess game when the AI can figure out the thing. It's like, how good can the AI approximate good moral human decision making?

Aza Raskin: Yes, that gets me excited. That gets my engineer design hat, sort of like, all my gear is starting to spend me like, oh, how would I do that? I don't know if it's possible. You remember that solution it was one of our listeners provided. It was like for every hateful message, it would donate to an opposite cause in equal or greater amount? I wonder what the equivalent of that is for political advertising if you go all fear.

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- Tristan Harris: That's interesting. Yes. The more fear you use, the more we show the other candidates ads for free.
- Aza Raskin: Yes, exactly.
- Tristan Harris: That creates the counter disincentive that actually prevents you from even wanting to do in the first place.
- Tristan Harris: Tell us about some of the other countries that there were campaigns because I think in the film, *The Great Hack*, which by the way, everyone should see details, the sort of unveiling of Cambridge Analytica onto the world stage.
- Brittany Kaiser: Absolutely. So the SCL group in Cambridge Analytica worked in over 50 different countries. There were nine or 10 national elections for prime minister and president every single year that the company was around. Alexander Nicks, the former CEO is probably run more political campaigns than anyone else in the world, as far as I know, and a lot of the smaller countries such as Trinidad and Tobago or a lot of different Caribbean nations, their company had a lot of experience there.
- Brittany Kaiser: Now, when I joined the company, specifically to work in defense and social and humanitarian projects, I was shown Trinidad and Tobago example of what they had done, and it looked fantastic. I was shown a youth engagement campaign, where they managed to be able to figure out how to turn out more youth and get them to the polls. And this was a landslide victory for the political party that they worked for. Now, throughout the years, I worked there, the executives of that company got a bigger and bigger head, a bigger and bigger ego and near the end of my time there, they started being a little bit more honest about the way that they had worked at other countries and I would participate in meetings where I would hear out of my CEO's mouth really terrible, underhanded and probably even illegal things that were done in other countries, actually only yesterday or the day before Trinidad and Tobago started a criminal investigation into the last campaign that the SCL group ran there. And the way that this youth engagement campaign was then described to me was, they undertook a large scale data collection in the country and found out that there's one party that is of an Indian background, one party that's of an African background, the SCL group was working for the Indian party. And through their research, they found out that the youth that supported that party, were always going to listen to their parents and always show up to the polls no matter what, but the youth that supported the other party could be convinced to not go to the polls.
- Tristan Harris: They were persuadables.
- Brittany Kaiser: They were persuadable to becoming politically apathetic.
- Tristan Harris: How did they know that? How do you figure that out?
- Brittany Kaiser: So that's very large scale complex research that actually more comes from the **PSYOPs background of** the company. So PSYOPs is psychological operations. It's

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something that's usually used by militaries and that is psychological research that is used to fully understand everybody's leavers of persuasion and motivations, their religious affinity is their caste systems, whatever it happens to be. And usually you can start to see what are the biggest triggers or what are certain triggers that are never going to work for people. And just because of their cultural background in Trinidad and Tobago, the Indian youth are always going to go to the polls with their families. And so what they did in order for, I suppose not to be obvious that they were doing this for a political party, they started a youth movement called Do So which means don't do it.

Tristan Harris: Do so.

Brittany Kaiser: Yes, Do So with crossed arms.

Tristan Harris: They cross their arms as the... the thing everyone takes away from the film is just seeing all of these make the gesture because that gesture was constructed mimetically by the Cambridge Analytica creative team, correct?

Brittany Kaiser: Yes. They constructed this, I suppose youth apathy campaign, which was saying, everyone in government is corrupt, turn off of politics, like they don't care about you type of thing, and if you want to be an activist, go out there and do things for yourself because the government isn't going to take care of you. And this movement spread and so the youth of the entire nation were out there and demonstrating and making videos and graffiti and all of this stuff with their crossed arms Do So logo, don't do it. And so on Election Day, half of the youth population nearly didn't go out to vote like compared to the election before that, but all of the Indian youth were dragged to the polls by their parents and they still voted and so therefore that party won.

Tristan Harris: It's amazing as I think people... you think about these things as Aza I often do, we focus on the technology platforms as the vehicle and the delivery vehicle for all sorts of psychological mimetic flows. But then with these examples like you're talking about, you see how it spills out into the real world. It's almost like we have this vast oil spill and spills out all over the world and we have this like, hate spill over here and then we have this disinformation spill over here. Now we have this dissuasion from voting democracies broken spill over here. But we've created this, like... the whole world just feels like it's spilling out from these tactics.

Tristan Harris: I'd love for you also to talk about some of the other examples. I know, I mean, people just don't, you said operate in 50 countries, I know Nigeria, Ghana, Mexico, Indonesia. When I saw you over the summer, we were talking with someone who said they were from Indonesia, and they'd left the country when they were a kid fleeing the sort of new government or something you said. You said right in front of me, "Oh yeah, Cambridge Analytica worked on that election" and I remember being like, whoa.

Brittany Kaiser: Yes. It was always given as one of our earliest examples, which was that Cambridge Analytica's parent group, the SCL group was hired to help build a movement in Indonesia that overthrew Suharto, which at the time, was seen as

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a good thing by I suppose whoever was paying for it likely an intelligence agency and Suharto was overthrown and was replaced by someone even more corrupt. So yes, you overthrew a dictator. And some people might see that as good, but you destabilized a country and put in someone who is much worse, which I think we've seen in very many countries around the world and you always think, was there someone like the SCL group behind that? And now, through my experience, I would say, yes, there's probably many organizations like SCL group around the world who are involved in movements. Since I left the company I've seen a lot of "movements" around the world that do not look like they were created organically whatsoever.

Aza Raskin: What are the markers? There's something to look for?

Brittany Kaiser: I would say, a very exact unifying message that spreads like wildfire and spreads a lot faster than something that's organic, and that more quickly turns into protests than a lot of other protests. A lot of times a movement gathers momentum for quite a long time before people actually go out into the streets, I would say if something is in an inorganic movement, you will see one catchphrase and one symbol that is used by absolutely everybody. Whereas in organic movement, usually there's tons of different messaging all around the same concept and it takes a little while to actually physically go out in the streets. Whereas you'll see one unified message and then people are out in the streets protesting something with all the same poster, a lot faster than you would expect to see.

Tristan Harris: What was amazing to me in the example of Trinidad and Tobago was the way that the right memes kind of carry themselves forward, because after they invented that meme of the crossing hands, they were kids who made like YouTube videos, music videos, thinking that this is cool for themselves. They weren't like bought by Cambridge Analytica to do that. They were doing this on their own. And so if you find the right meme, it's like you're knocking the first domino off, and then you can you know that it's actually going to spill out and a lot of people are going to do it. And so, I think this is a critical point to get is that when you start to do this, you can actually then take your hands off and automatically now following through with the mimetics that have already implanted.

Aza Raskin: Sort of persuadables cascade.

Tristan Harris: There's this is really interesting question at the root of what we're talking about here, with you and when we first met, this is the fundamental conversation is, what is ethical persuasion? How does the persuader respect the values of the persuadee? But then if you tie that conversation, but people often say, "Well, people actually don't know what their own values are and we the persuaders, we know and so we're just going to do it anyway because they don't even know themselves. So we might as well put it in there." But then you end up with the situation which is actually what successful advertising is where the advertisers values become your values. So now you think that that's what you want that by yourself, but that was actually the sort of infrastructure of Facebook or YouTube guiding people towards that.

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Brittany Kaiser: Absolutely.

Aza Raskin: And this gets to sort of a question I have for you is, what is 2024 start to look like? What do we have to get in front of right now? How much worse is it going to get?

Brittany Kaiser: I definitely think that right now we don't have too many obstacles to it getting worse. We don't have legal or regulatory frameworks in place and we don't have the technology to stop some of the abuses of the current tech that we have. So I think that's important to say is that technologists need to be working very hard on some of these problems. I mean, looking ahead to 2020. I'm terrified over what people are going to see in the next year. I'm terrified at how unprotected we are and I'm disappointed in the executives at Facebook that have made a decision that politicians will not be held to the same standards as you and I. If I decided to libel someone, or slander or put out disinformation, my content would be blocked and removed. I might even be banned from Facebook myself as an individual. Yet, if Donald Trump does the same thing, his content is likely going to go viral and millions of people will see it even if it is disinformation and it will not be removed at all, even if it is identified as disinformation.

Brittany Kaiser: That's a huge problem and I'm not saying that I think that all political advertising should be banned. No, I want everyone to care about politics. I want people to engage with issues that are important to me. I want them to be able to hear what candidates have to say. So Jack Dorsey's heroic action of hopefully a temporary ban of political advertising is to try to fix the problem on the back end before letting it get worse and that's an important conversation we need to have right now, which is between now and next November, is there going to be no political advertising on Twitter except for voter registration? Okay, that'll be interesting. Let's see how that goes. But I hope that doesn't last too long. I hope that they're investing on the back end and identifying disinformation and hate and racism and finding better ways to block and remove that content so that we can put political advertising back up and a lot of the issues groups and candidates that I think are well intentioned, can continue to have a voice. But what Facebook has decided to do is the opposite of what Jack Dorsey has done. Everyone can say everything that they want all of the time. And so completely unchecked political messaging is obviously a danger, but also an opportunity for the well-meaning people out there.

Brittany Kaiser: And then complete blanket banding is also a stifling of political voice when we can still have people sell us cars or petrol products. And that's really not productive, either. To be honest.

Tristan Harris: But what we talked about when we met over the summer was, we used to have the fairness doctrine that politicians had equal airtime and we guaranteed that and we took that away, I think in the Reagan era, but we could actually say, well, look, what is democratic speech from politicians supposed to be about? Is it supposed to be about who can basically in a TV debate where you have, what do you think about the Middle East? You have 30 seconds to respond and game theoretically, it's better to attack the other guy than even say anything about the



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Middle East. Like, that isn't what we want. We could actually have a thing where instead of, I think this is how it works in France and in England, you get like one slot and you get to say one thing and you get to say, what's my message? What's the thing I'm trying to say? And Facebook could actually introduce a kind of mass Fairness Doctrine, where in every country, there isn't this like, it's how much you pay me with this sort of Citizens United problem that we all know. Facebook, Twitter could actually each introduce these sort of fair spaces of equal speech.

Aza Raskin: Facebook could, in fact, and Twitter could be the very best tools we've ever invented for humanity as a whole, to make sense of the world and to have collective action to solve the existential problems that are facing us.

Brittany Kaiser: I agree.

Aza Raskin: But they have to stand up and say, actually, we realize that we are constructing the social world we live in as a technology platform and take responsibility for doing it. And it's great because if you can make that flip, you go from just being responsible to actually empowering to solve the biggest problems that we have.

Brittany Kaiser: Yes. And that's really where technology should be able to play a role but right now we do not have the laws, regulations, education or technology to stop the negative use cases of that and that's where we need to concentrate in order to be able to take advantage of the good.

Aza Raskin: Let me just throw one more sort of thing that is scaring me right now. I don't know whether this is already happening about two. So 2018 December, Microsoft releases a paper on an implementation of an AI that quotes satisfies the human need for communication, affection and social belonging. It's deployed already to 600 million people mostly through Asia. And here's just one little quote which is, an emotional connection between the user and the AI became established over a two-month period. In two weeks the user began to talk with AI about her hobbies and interests by four weeks to begin to treat the AI as a friend and asked questions related to her real life. And after nine weeks, the AI became her first choice whenever she needed someone to talk to. So when I think about the loneliness epidemic, that seems like it's about to become the biggest national security threat and election security threat.

Tristan Harris: What happens when your best friend is a computer that's for sale to any message can pipe through it.

Brittany Kaiser: I mean that's the situation that we're already in.

Tristan Harris: That's the thing.

Brittany Kaiser: Our Facebook feed and our Google Search feed is up to the highest bidder. We can't consent whether our data is given to the highest bidder in politics or commercial and who those people are and what their intentions are, that lack of transparency and consent mechanism. It's just not there right now.

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- Tristan Harris: Brittany, thank you so much for coming on the podcast and for what you're doing in regulation and I know that lots of state legislators here you're working with to try to pass new laws, and we'll be in touch for many more. But thank you so much for coming.
- Brittany Kaiser: Definitely. Thank you guys for having me.
- Aza Raskin: Thank you very much.
- Aza Raskin: So owning your data and education are both really important first steps, but while they may be necessary, they're not sufficient. Because it's what you can do with the data that matters, the predictions that let the machines know what you're going to do before you know yourself. This is exactly what machine learning is good at is detecting patterns and then mimicking those patterns. So figuring out how you speak, mimicking them and then modifying them in a little way. That's to the heart of what machine learning does the best.
- Tristan Harris: They can just wake up the avatar voodoo doll of you each of those voodoo dolls, each of those avatars act and think and speak more and more like us, which means that you can actually kind of predict more and more steps ahead of what all those avatars are going to do. And then you can sell those predictions to an advertiser and say, "Hey, do you want those future choices that you don't know you're going to make to go in this other direction that you can pay me to create?"
- Aza Raskin: Yes, I wanted to bring up a fairly new technology that I think many of our listeners might not be aware of, and that's style transfer. Style transfer is where I can teach an AI pointed at Van Gogh and it learns the style of Van Gogh, I point it at Warhol, it learns the style of Warhol, you point it at Magritte, it learns the style of Magritte. And then I can take any other image and the AI will transfer the style. Turn that photo of you into an image that looks like it was drawn by Warhol, Magritte or Van Gogh.
- Aza Raskin: It's pretty cool honestly. And recently that technology has been moving from style transfer for images to style transfer for text. That is, I can point the machine at Shakespeare it learns how Shakespeare writes, and then I can give it any message, something you wrote to a friend and I can rewrite it as Shakespeare. That doesn't sound so bad until you realize the other ways that could be used. Gmail could point the AI at every email you've ever written and they can now write any message as if it's coming in your voice or if you pointed at every message that you've responded to quickly or positively, it can learn the style that's most persuasive to you. And obviously, this is a kind of asymmetric power because Google or Facebook was doing this they could turn around and give that ability to any advertiser, just click a checkbox and then whatever marketing message you have runs through their AI so that it's uniquely persuading you.
- Tristan Harris: That is so creepy. Jaron Lanier metaphor for this is imagine going to Wikipedia except this new version of Wikipedia in which each article was personalized just to manipulate you. So you're actually getting a different version of that article

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than everyone else who's getting that article. That makes people realize how creepy that is. It's actually sort of invisibly, dividing us socially.

Aza Raskin: And sort of reminds me of that, a house divided cannot stand. This is dividing the house down to its individual people.

Tristan Harris: Which is this which is why we say this is unsustainable business model and system. The reason micro-targeting is so dangerous and why we should have never even allowed and look alike models is because it enables like in Othello, the Shakespeare story, Iago is that character who's gossiping strategically in Othello's ear and he's able to create a sense of distrust in one person and another by controlling the messages that two people receive and then making them hate each other and then making them hate each other just enough so that they never actually talk to each other and compare notes about what information each of them was receiving. So that's essentially what micro-targeting allows and that's why it has to stop. It cannot be allowed, because it enables the mass strategic division of society by spreading the kind of gossip that makes it impossible for us to ever compare notes and realize that there's this massive artificial divide.

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