

Center for Humane Technology | Your Undivided Attention Podcast

Bonus Episode: The Social Dilemma

- Tristan Harris: Today on Your Undivided Attention, instead of a podcast guest, we would like to tell you about something really exciting. Netflix just released a new documentary called The Social Dilemma. The film has been in the works for more than three years and includes appearances from me and from Aza and our co-founder, Randy Fernando. But what really has us excited is the incredible number of tech insiders at Facebook, Instagram, Twitter. They're all there in the film.
- Tristan Harris: What the film discloses, clearly from the people who built these systems, is how it is warping the collective consciousness of humanity. When you look outside and you see the madness of shortening attention spans, increasing irritability, increasing anxiety, more polarization escalating into conflict and you say, "Is this just natural? Is this just where we were headed from the start?" Or, if you rewind 10 years and you imagine putting on a pair of outrage and conflict colored glasses, so everywhere you looked, you went to your kitchen, you would see things you should be outraged about that your spouse left the cups in a different location than when you left it and you see the sneeze that someone sneezed onto the refrigerator handle before you walked in, what would your world be like if you wore those glasses for 10 years?
- Tristan Harris: Now, imagine that you didn't wear those glasses, but everyone else around you wore these outrage and conflict colored glasses. Well, that's what this film I think will expose, is the way that we've all been wearing these warped glasses that have totally distorted the way that we make meaning and perceive reality.
- Aza Raskin: One of the most powerful reactions that I've received from the film, a friend, not in Silicon Valley, she said, "I used to think that it really, it was us versus them." And after watching the film, she's like, "It's not us versus them. It is the system which is making us fight and making us outraged." And what gives me hope is that if we can all see that it's not the other people on the other side's fault, that lets us wake up together and actually tackle the problem.
- Tristan Harris: And if you're a technologist, I know that the issues that this film covers will matter to many of you. And if you've been waiting for the time to talk openly about them with your friends, with your family or with your coworkers, this is the moment. This film is a catalyst, hopefully a tool, for creating the conversations that will transform the tech industry. But it only works if people like you pick up that tool and use it.
- Aza Raskin: So what can you do after you've watched the film? Well, you can share it with a friend or better yet host a screening, especially if you and your kids struggle with this stuff.
- Tristan Harris: If you work in the tech industry, if you work at a tech company, why not invite your coworkers to actually see this film together? If you are a venture capitalist and an investor, why not host a screening for other venture capitalists and host a conversation about what kinds of technologies do we want to fund in the future? If you're a policymaker, get other policymakers to see this film and to create the political will and collaboration that we need to write the right policies that will give us more humane technology.

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- Aza Raskin: Then dig deeper into the themes of the film by listening to our podcast. If you're new to Your Undivided Attention, listen to our interview with Guillaume Chaslot. He told us how YouTube's recommendation systems inevitably tilt users towards conspiracy theories.
- Guillaume Chaslot: It's like you have this huge current that pushes you towards being more aggressive, more divisive, more polarized.
- Tristan Harris: You might also go back and check out episodes with Renee DiResta about how state actors sow discord in the United States.
- Renée DiResta: If you want to reach a particular group of people, you can, in a way that you never could before, not just according to where they live or what they read, but who they are.
- Aza Raskin: Journalist Maria Ressa reveals play by play how an aspiring strong man can use social media and subvert democratic institutions.
- Maria Ressa: I remember getting 90, nine-zero hate messages per hour. And I went to Facebook and I said, "I think I need help here."
- Aza Raskin: And if you want to learn more about how we get ourselves out of this mess, listen to our episodes with Audrey Tan, digital minister of Taiwan or Fred Turner, a communications professor at Stanford who explained how democracies can respond to the rising tide of digital authoritarianism worldwide.
- Fred Turner: We've done this before and we can do it again. The effects will be slow, but they will be real and our democracy depends on them.
- Tristan Harris: All these episodes and many more are available at humanetech.com/podcast. Google for The Social Dilemma today and find it on Netflix. This film creates a window where the change we've been waiting for can actually happen, so let's use it.