

Center for Humane Technology | *Your Undivided Attention* Podcast
[Big Food, Big Tech and Big AI with Michael Moss](#)

Tristan Harris: Hey, everyone, it's Tristan. In the next couple of episodes, we're going to explore how we might preemptively mitigate the AI harms that we outlined in our earlier talk, The AI Dilemma. To do that, we're going to talk about the mistakes and missed opportunities of some of our past efforts to limit the damage of other races to the bottom, and how they might guide us into making more effective decisions about AI. On our next episode, we'll look at how social media litigation could take us a step closer to making tech companies accountable for the externalities of their products, but right now I want to bring you a conversation I had with New York Times bestselling author, Michael Moss, which points to a different metaphor for a toxic product we've had trouble regulating, which is cheap processed food. Michael is a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and the author of *Hooked: Food, Free Will, and How the Food Giants Exploit Our Addictions*, and *Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us*. Michael, welcome to the program.

Michael Moss: Oh, it's so great to talk to you again.

Tristan Harris: So you and I met in New York City actually in 2013. I was at Google, and I had just made this presentation about how social media companies and tech companies were really caught in this arms race to hack human social psychological instincts in the name of getting attention and engagement. The race to the bottom of the brainstem, as we would later call it, and your book was really a profound influence on me because it detailed how another industry faced up to the ways that it was reverse engineering the predictable traits of our stomach instincts, our psychological instincts, our dopamine, our craving instincts, which is the industry of food, and your book, *Salt, Sugar, Fat*, opens up with a 1999 meeting of when 11 CEOs and presidents of the most influential processed food companies got together to discuss the health crisis that their products were causing. Could you talk through what happened at this legendary meeting of the food companies, and what we can learn from it?

Michael Moss: Yeah, so this meeting, as you said back in 1999, was organized by a cabal of insiders at the companies who were growing alarmed about their culpability, responsibility for all of the troubles that we're having multifold times, even more so now, but even sort of beginning back then, obesity, type 2 diabetes, on, and on, and on, and they wanted these CEOs and the heads of the companies to sort of sit down and think about the ways that they could address their culpability, deal with that, and do something to sort of change their behavior, their corporate strategy on behalf of their customers. So it was an extraordinary meeting, and it was done rather in secret because they'd never met before like this. I mean, these are giant companies that are normally at each other's throats for stomach share, as they call it, right? Which is our stomach and their share of stuff that they put in it.

So it was extraordinary that they were meeting in the first place, and up on the stage, the senior vice president of Kraft, the largest company at the time, starts

Center for Humane Technology | *Your Undivided Attention* Podcast
[Big Food, Big Tech and Big AI with Michael Moss](#)

going through his deck of slides presenting the case to the CEOs that, "Look, we're getting blamed for this. People are getting sick on that." He even starts linking their products to cancers, and he's urging them to do some things on behalf of customers, and he sits down, and then the reality sort of happens, the reality being that the most powerful person in the room, he was the head of General Mills at the time, he just has this look of fury on his face.

He's assaulted, just this affront that this lower echelon vice president would sort of come to him with this proposal, and he goes, "Look, we're already doing things on behalf of customers. If they want a low fat version of a product, we've got that on the shelf or a low salt, but for you to stand here and suggest that we're going to mess around with the 'company jewels'" referring to salt, sugar, fat. He goes, "You have to remember that we're not just responsible for our customers. We're responsible for our shareholders, and there is nothing that we will do that could risk diminishing the powerful appeal that we've built into these products."

Tristan Harris: So what's interesting to me here is that at least inside of Kraft, one of the biggest food companies on the planet, there was a sense of responsibility about the harms of their products and a willingness to act for the greater good, and this is kind of being repeated today when we see people like Sam Altman from OpenAI voicing their own concerns about the dangers of AI, but just voicing those concerns is not enough. So I just want to zoom back into this meeting for a moment, because sometimes I just wonder what would've happened. Would it have been possible for that meeting to succeed?

Michael Moss: So I think a couple things might have made a huge difference at the time. One, if there was some sort of some external force threatening the industry, causing it to sort of, "Hey, wait a minute, maybe you really, really do need to think about this," and that can happen in two ways with the food industry. One could be a lawsuit from some powerful group of people, or it can simply be an awakening among customers, because the slightest dip in sales will drive these companies crazy and will drive them to that point where they're recognizing that, "Hey, wait a minute. We do need to change what we're doing here. We need to focus on this," because otherwise this is going to continue at their own leisure, at their own pace, thinking they can do what they want to do.

Tristan Harris: Right. So I'm hearing from you, government pressure, the potential for regulation, and the second being consumer demand. If the companies actually saw suddenly all those buying signals going from Yoplait yogurt, which had more sugar at the time than Lucky Charms cereal, and suddenly people stopped eating that, they would listen to that because it would directly affect their profits.

Michael Moss: Yeah, and what was really fascinating about this meeting was that this was an attempt to sort of have this industry act together in unison, because what did come out of that meeting was an attempt by Kraft, the largest company at the time, to unilaterally do some of these things its insiders were urging the entire industry to do it all, and it was incredible what they did. I mean, they looked at

Center for Humane Technology | *Your Undivided Attention* Podcast
[Big Food, Big Tech and Big AI with Michael Moss](#)

the cartoon and the advertising they were doing on Saturday morning cartoons and said, "We're going to cut back on the sugary stuff we're selling to kids." They went to their food chemists and said, "Thou shalt not simply keep adding as much salt, sugar, fat as you want to. We're going to put limits on how much you can add to these products to help people."

And then they looked at the label, and they go, "We're kind of tricking people here, because we're packing so many calories into these bags and boxes of snacks and treats, knowing that a third or more people are going to eat the whole bag in one sitting, but we say on the label that there's only so few calories per serving and expect them to kind of do the math themselves. What if we tell them on the front of the package the total amount of calories in the package, so give them fair warning and educate consumers?" And Kraft did these things for about 30 seconds. Well, really it was about two months before the competitors realized what was going on, and they swooped into the aisles doubling down on all of those aspects of their products, and Kraft had to give up and go back to its old ways. So I think that that meeting in '99 and that notion that you could get the whole industry together and act in a way that could help them all was kind of critical to that strategy.

- Tristan Harris: So just to dwell here for one last minute before we start getting into the mechanics of why we're talking about food and its parallels to technology, there's this other belief sometimes that, well, if you just had that leading actor do the right thing, then that would cascade and cause the other actors to do a different thing, and in this case it was only a temporary thing, and they were forced right back to the drawing board
- Michael Moss: Because of the competitive nature of the business.
- Tristan Harris: Can you just walk us through the kind of core mechanics that the processed food industry uses with some products that listeners might eat themselves and what goes into them?
- Michael Moss: Yeah, so some of it is sort of chemistry. They rely on food chemists, who formulate the design of their products in ways to maximize the allure, and I focused on salt, sugar, fat because those are kind of the big three, the unholy trinity, if you will, in which the industry lies. Sugar maybe is one of the most powerful because it affects kids so much. I was lucky to meet and spend some time with this icon in the industry in named Howard Moskowitz. He was trained in high math and then experimental psychology at Harvard.
- He invented the term, "The bliss point," to describe the perfect amount of sweetness in a product, and he walked me through his recent creation of a new flavor for Dr. Pepper in which he started with some 60 different versions of sweetness, each one just slightly different than the next one, and subjected those to thousands of consumer taste tests around the country, put the data in his computer, and did his high math regression analysis thing, and out come this bell shaped curves, right? Where at the top of the curve, kind of like kids get

graded on in school, is the bliss point for sweetness, the perfect amount, not too little, not too much. When you talk to nutritionists though, the problem is not that the industry has engineered perfect amount of sweetness for things like cookies, and ice cream, and desserts, things we know are sweet and we should treat them judiciously. The industry marched around the grocery store adding sugar to things that weren't sweet before, engineering in bliss point, so bread came to have added sugar and a bliss point for sweetness.

Yogurts came to have sugar per serving as ice cream. Spaghetti sauce, one of my favorite places in the store to Marvel at, right? Some of the brands came to have the equivalent of a couple of Oreo cookies in a tiny half cup serving, and what this did arguably was convinced us that everything should be sweet. We expected everything to be sweet. So when we dragged ourselves over to that tiny part of the store where every nutritionist says we should be spending more time, the produce aisle, right? And we get some of those other flavor notes, the sour and the bitterness, and your brain is revolting, going, "Take me back to the middle of the store in that sweet place."

Likewise with salt and fat, which the industry calls the mouth feel because of that luscious sensation it gives you a biting into a toasted cheese sandwich, mouth feel was a term they come up with to talk about the lusciousness of oil that they add to foods. Salt they call the flavor burst because it's typically the first thing that touches the saliva in your tongue and sends that signal to the reward center of the brain that says, "Wow."

Tristan Harris:

I think both what the food industry has in common with the social media industry, and we'll get into how AI relates to this later, is the precision reverse engineering, or hacking, or sort of discovering of how we work, what are our deepest vulnerabilities, our paleolithic brains, what are they vulnerable to? Because on the Savannah 2000 years ago, we were evolved to appreciate salt, sugar, and fat in a different context and with a different likelihood that we'd be encountering those kinds of ingredients than we do now. And in a way it's like arbitraging the speed of... We're not used to the timing upon which we get that flavor, and then it melts, and then we're hungry again. It's sort of like TikTok. I'll give you this video, and then you swipe before you even know what you intended to do in an unconscious way where we're kind of arbitraging the human nervous system.

And I think what these two industries have in common is the amount of engineering that happens in the tech case behind the screen that you don't know. You think you're just getting a like button. You didn't know that 100 engineers might have AB tested all the different colors, and variations, and animations of how that like button works. You think you're just eating a Cheez-It, but you didn't realize that there was a thousand engineers who actually had a thousand different variations of how Cheez-Its could be dosing salt, sugar, and fat in different combinations to arrive at the final combination that's now the one on the market.

And one of the principles that I think we would want to get to is a world where whatever the engineering that's going into these things, people should be aware of that, and that's actually if you look at how whether it's tobacco, or in our work, and social media, and the social dilemma, or what your book does is by revealing the asymmetry of how much power, and money, and resources, and energy went into engineering these things. No one wants to feel manipulated, and I think there's something that gets activated in people when they see how much goes into something. So let's make sure we're just briefly linking this back to our work on technology. Why are we spending so much time talking about these subtle scientific facts about how caloric density and bliss point relate to the human mind when it comes to social media where instead of pouring salt, or sugar, or fat on a product, I can pour social validation on a product? When I post something, do I get 10 likes on average, or do I get 100 likes, or 1,000 likes on average if I live in the TikTok world?

So TikTok is winning the arms race by dosing us with bigger bursts of social validation. If I want to hack, like you said, sort of how does the mind know when I'm done eating, how do I know when I've had enough calories, there's sort of a stopping cue. You eat something, and then there's a cue that maybe I should stop. And then when I think about infinite scroll or TikTok automatically loading the next video, or YouTube automatically auto-playing, these are all examples of a different set of salt, sugar, fat for the media that we consume, and the asymmetry of power between the number of people and the food scientists who are creating a precise language and a precise engineering of how to manipulate your gustatory instincts and your stomach instincts in the same way that there are thousands of engineers at tech companies that are working on manipulating our social psychological instincts, and what keeps us scrolling, and how we know when we're done. I think that's the basic parallel that I want people to get.

When I bring it back to that meeting in Minnesota at Pillsbury's headquarters where the CEOs gathered asking, "Are we contributing to this global crisis," and it's not one bad guy, it's a collective arms race, a race that ends in tragedy, I imagine, "What if Mark Zuckerberg, and the CEO of TikTok, and YouTube, and the other social media tech companies got in a room, and they said, 'What if this race to the bottom of the brainstem was causing the collective not public health crisis like food, but causing the climate change of culture, the collective unraveling of truth, the mental health crisis of teenagers, addiction, loneliness, more incels, more extremism, less common ground? And collectively, it's not that any one of us wants to do that, but if one of us holds back from that race, we're going to cause something to happen.'" So what if they were meeting at the Geneva Convention for the Attention Accords or the Humanity Accords?

Now you can move that to the AI companies, and you say, "Well, what if I have Sam Altman running OpenAI, and I have Demis Hassabis running DeepMind, and I have Sundar Pichai from Google, and I have Satya Nadella from Microsoft, who are all now caught in a different race, which is the race to deploy AI as fast as possible and entangle it with our society?" Because if they don't race to onboard humanity onto their AI system, even if it's dangerous or not complete, they'll

Center for Humane Technology | *Your Undivided Attention* Podcast
[Big Food, Big Tech and Big AI with Michael Moss](#)

just lose to the companies that will, because this happens in pharmaceuticals, this happens in food, this happens in oil, and it happens with technology, but now with technology, if we fail to coordinate this race, it ends in a global tragedy where we lose control of AI forever, for example.

Michael Moss:

So there was this second meeting, which I haven't talked about much, but it's actually even more fascinating because what happened after the 1999 meeting, Kraft went off and tried to do it thing unilaterally that didn't work, but gradually more and more people caught on, more and more people began thinking about what they were putting in their bodies, thinking about food, and it was just enough people to cause sales to diminish ever so slightly, which is the proverbial bottom line. I mean, these are companies in business to make money, and it's what they understand, and when that happened, there's a second meeting.

It was 2015. It had investors. It was a public meeting, and up in front of that crowd gets the CEO of Campbell Soup. She gets up before this crowd, and she says, "We are losing the trust of our customers," and that phrase so shocked to the industry, it was just heretical to sort of say something like that in public, but she was getting that it was in their own economic interest to really truly start doing some things to turn the corner and change the nature of their products in a way that would allow us to regain control of our eating habits and still enjoy these products. I mean, unfortunately, from my perspective is that what the companies did was what's called health washing. I mean, they started inventing fake ways of making their food seem less addictive or less troublesome.

They started adding fiber to everything, even though the fiber they were adding was made in the laboratory and it didn't have any sort of satiating powers that the fiber in a piece of fruit might have. They started adding blobs of protein to otherwise sugary cereal on the notion because protein became this darling that people kind of fixated on. So I think we're in this phase now where the companies are super sensitive to food. They're super sensitive to competition, and here's the other thing that's happening too is that there are insiders at these companies who are switching sides, becoming whistleblowers, talking to people like you and me, but also using the skill that they used to sell us junk to sell us good food, and I think that's super exciting to see those people start working in this landscape.

Tristan Harris:

So I'm hearing kind of in tracking the way that one of these unhealthy races that ends in tragedy evolves is as say consumer pressure, losses in trust, or something like that show up, companies feel that pressure, and they feel like they have to adjust what they're doing. High fructose corn syrup becomes marked as that's a bad ingredient, we shouldn't give that to our kids, but then people start renaming it. They rename it to concentrated fruit juice or find some other clever abstract name for it. You probably have 10-

Michael Moss:

62 different sugars. 62 names for sugar you'll find in the supermarket.

Center for Humane Technology | *Your Undivided Attention* Podcast
[Big Food, Big Tech and Big AI with Michael Moss](#)

Tristan Harris: Right. And so I think, as we know, what are the kind of classic responses that we can expect to see from a space that has a perverse incentive and a race to the bottom is as pressure builds, as awareness builds, as films come out like Fed Up that sort of show people what's really going on with food, and parents get active, as the social dilemma comes up, and parents get active around social media, maybe Instagram will add time spent controls, and TikTok will add parental controls, and you can control and choose how much time you want to spend on that app while they're still doing the exact same manipulative stuff and making people feel crappy every day.

And so this safety washing we can name as one of the sort of follow up trends, but then you're saying as we follow the more optimistic side of that curve and responses, then you have more insiders that are switching sides. I would say that in the social media world, there are more people working at these major social media companies that have seen the social dilemma, and agree with its core diagnosis, and want to change them from the inside, but are mostly trapped under those perverse incentives, and then when you see another phenomenon, which is that as they get frustrated, they peel off from that industry or peel off from those big companies and try to start maybe their own alternatives.

Michael Moss: Yeah, and I wanted to go back just quickly to that information thing too, because I used to think that the nutrition facts box on these products was our friend, right? We could go there. We could see what's going in these products, but I've totally changed my mind on that. In fact, it turns out those facts box were the result of lobbying by none other than the food companies. So when you look at the nutrition facts box, some of the things there are things we should be eating more of like calcium, protein. Others are stuff we should be eating less of, but you can't really tell like what's a gram and what's a serving.

And that information is there to get us to lower our guard and basically say to ourselves, "Well, this can't be that bad. I mean, the government is in charge, right? It's got all this data, and it's got information," and it's totally backfired, I think, in terms of helping us understand what these products are truly about, which is not their nutritional components, which the companies can change any which way they want to placate latest concern that we have about components in their products. It's about something much more fundamental like what's real food, and how do you help people change the way they value food in a way that they can recognize real food like they can recognize technology that will help them?

Tristan Harris: The real question is how do we create systems that enable coordination to happen? That's kind of the only question. It's not about what one company does, or what one CEO does, what one good-hearted person does, what one consumer does, what one boycott does, what one piece of law does. It's about a system that enables coordination that prevents these unhealthy races from ending in tragedy. It's about preventing and melting down these multipolar traps, because they really are everywhere in our society. There's a kind of good

news in that because it means that we don't have some evil companies, or some bad CEOs, or lack of consumer will. We just have coordination problems.

We need culture that can understand and see the perverse incentives and then be literate to the fact that there's an unhealthy race. That kind of culture sets in motion institutional responses, the kinds of law, litigation, regulation that enable the coordination to happen by focusing not on bashing one company like an Exxon or like a Facebook, but instead dealing with and creating the coordination mechanisms that allow all the actors to do a better job, and that can be done with markets, pricing, taxes, sugar taxes, soda taxes, tobacco taxes, latency taxes on social media that's perverse, and we need law that helps us coordinate. For example, we need laws that allow the transparency and attribution to occur, so we need to know how much of the problem are each of the companies maybe contributing to a perverse incentive.

For that we need to have transparency requirements of ingredients that go into food or the kinds of amplification rates that go into algorithms. What if we could have coordination that collectively focuses the activities of an industry in pro-social directions, or at least some large percentage of them? And to do all of this coordination you have to have trust. One of the things that's preventing the large AI labs from getting together right now is they don't believe that the others are going to act in good trust about the shared future that we really want, and that's never been more important than in a world where social media has been degrading trust in ourselves, and in each other, and institutions for the last 10 years.

So what does it look like to build processes and systems that increase the trust, so that when we gather around a table like the food executives in Minnesota, we can actually trust that we're all doing it in good faith to get to a better outcome for our children? I think a society that is pointing its attention at unhealthy or bad races rather than bad guys is a society that can actually defeat these kinds of problems. So we sort of explored self coordination, self-regulation, increasing consumer awareness, and then how that changes the habits of companies in response. We've explored, hey, what if we create some nutrition requirements or transparency requirements so people know what they're eating, but then that gets weaponized. Let's talk about the role of regulation and litigation in changing the way the industry functions.

Michael Moss:

So one of the small things that government tried to do, and this is only happening in a few places in the country in the world, is that they've tried to impose a tax on sugary products like soda, just a few pennies, but kind of knowing that through the miracle of nudge and marketing, somebody standing in the aisle making a decision whether to buy something or not, just a few cents of added tax on something can be enough to discourage them from buying that product. That's one of the most powerful things I think that the government has done, and the industry has fought it tooth and nail, so you know inherently it's like it's really effective, but the other thing that people have been thinking about in terms of how do we change the dynamics of this, how do we level the playing

field for people in the world of litigation, they've gone back and looked at the litigation against big tobacco.

Because as you recall, back in the mid 1990s, the state attorneys general got together, and they sued big tobacco, not because tobacco was evil, but because they were having to pay the cost of so many people dying from lung cancer and other pains, and so that huge settlement with the tobacco industries developed out of this idea of holding the industry accountable for the financial harm they were doing for people. And there are now attorneys as we speak, who are looking at doing the same thing with big food, figure out a way to evaluate the whole range of products in the grocery store and hold each of them apportion accountable for the obesity, diabetes pandemic in the country. I think that's really, really fascinating, but one of the key things that you need for that, and this was really critical to tobacco, which is I don't know if you remember, but up until the mid-nineties you asked most people about smokers, and they would go, "It's their fault. All they had to do was stop smoking."

We blamed the smoker, and that was part of a playbook by the industry to kind of shift the blame to us to deny addiction, right? And then suddenly in the mid-nineties it changed, and Philip Morris began losing lawsuits when the jury said, "Hey, wait a minute, these cigarettes, this tobacco, hey, maybe it is in fact addictive. Maybe the companies are at least partly culpable." And I think we're in that same spot now with food, possibly technology, where we're beginning to see real solid scientific evidence that, wait a minute, these products are not our fault. They are designed in a way to destroy your free will, your ability to say, "No."

They're designed to fire up the go part of the brain so quickly and so powerfully that the stop part of the brain, which tells you, "Hey, wait a minute, is this really a good thing to be doing," is asleep and behind the wheel, has no time to catch up. Once I think people realize that and stop looking at these food products as these cute little cartoonish friends that we grew up with and realize that they are so powerful in causing us to lose control over our habits, I think that's when there can be a huge turn in the dynamics.

Tristan Harris:

When I think about where we are, the harms, externalities, and damages that are showing up on the balance sheet of society, in general, we're good at dealing with discrete harms. Institutions are good at dealing with emergencies, a specific person died. We're not good at dealing with slow, hard to attribute, chronic, and diffuse, meaning spread thin one bit at a time, and then you wake up 15 years later, and everyone has diabetes and hypertension, and everyone has attention deficit disorders, and the entire planet is slowly warming, and ocean acidification has gone up by a lot.

So when I think about the gap in how in E. O. Wilson's famous quote that, "The fundamental problem of humanity is we have paleolithic brains, medieval institutions, and god-like technology," one of the god-like technologies we're exploring on this podcast with you is hyper precision manipulation of the human

mind and the human social psychological instincts, and then AI is an extension of that. And I think one of the things that we need to get better at is dealing with these systemic harms that are chronic and diffuse, and what I get curious about is what does litigation look like there?

Michael Moss:

Yeah, I think that's so interesting, and actually with food, we actually do have causality now. There's super smart scientists at the NIH took two groups of people, put them in the eating lab, and fed them two very different diets, and sure enough, the people on the processed food started gaining significant amounts of weight. It's the first time that you can actually say that these food products cause weight gain, and to your point, it's not just one brand, one product. It's the vast majority of the grocery store, and this overall kind of food environment we're in, which makes food so inexpensive and so accessible that the overeating comes through the accessibility of it. So I think that litigation would have to look at that entire industry and not only the food products in the totality, and maybe assign blame, apportion it to some products that are more alluring, more irresistible, more addictive, if you will, than others, but also looks at the environment that we're in that makes us so vulnerable and susceptible to those products, and kind of look at this question of speed [inaudible 00:29:22], right?

I mean, that's one of the things that make these food products so powerful is that the faster they hit the brain, the more apt we are to act compulsively, and so when you think about measuring the harm of these products, the speed that they have could be one component of that. And I think that may be true with tech as well. I mean, if you're looking at one click Amazon as being a super fast way to get people to act impulsively, you could see a real parallel there as well.

Tristan Harris:

Yeah, when I think about what you're saying, what litigation does is it puts a price on harm, right? But that happens after the fact. The litigation is about saying, "Okay, these externalities have been accumulating on the balance sheet of society. They've been unaccounted for. Now let's put a price on those externalities." So that's kind of the model, but now the problem is as you move into exponential technologies like artificial intelligence that literally will affect the entire world like that, and change the structure of the world, and eliminate 300 million jobs super quick, we need to have almost a fore looking how do we internalize the cost before we allow this unmitigated race to end in tragedy, and then we won't have time to come back around on the other side and do litigation. So one of the things I think would be good to talk about is what are examples of good news in the processed food conversation, and is there reason to believe this situation will improve?

Michael Moss:

One of the good things happening in the industry are startups, food that's yummy coming along and putting pressure on big food to change its ways, either by adopting these products or maybe reformulating their products. It's a complex world. There's lots of things to think about when you buy a food product, not just your health. There's the environment, which is where you saw the whole sort of meatless trend came along, but that to me is really

Center for Humane Technology | *Your Undivided Attention* Podcast
[Big Food, Big Tech and Big AI with Michael Moss](#)

encouraging, smart people inventing new products in a way that sort of get a toehold in the marketplace.

Tristan Harris: Okay. So as we wrap up this episode, and we return to the failed meeting of the processed food company's CEOs, and how a similar meeting from the AI companies or the social media companies, if we were to stage that meeting again now in 2023, how would we make it succeed? How would we do it differently? What conditions would we need for that meeting to be productive? And I think in this episode we've explored a number of the factors that actually make a difference. We've explored putting a cost on the externalities, whether it's through litigation or preemptive law that says, "Hey, we're going to put a cost on that externality before it even happens." We talked about the power of insiders, and whistleblowers, and people who are on the inside switching sides and then starting the alternatives. We've talked about the power and need for public awareness and for the size of public awareness matching the size of the problem, so that there's as many people who know about the harm as there are who are getting harmed by it, and not knowing that there's something going on.

And in the same way that, well, hey, all the AI companies claim they're going to solve cancer and have climate solutions and energies, but what if they could all be brought together and say, "Let's put our money where our mouth is. Let's have a negotiated agreement that this huge chunk of our portfolio is going not into market dominance, but into the pro-social things that are actually going to help society," but they would all need to agree on that together. And what I'm hearing you say is we would need a regulator in the room. We would need some civil society groups in the room who know what those stats are, maybe some insiders who can back it up by saying, "Here's what we know are in the companies," and there's some kind of negotiated agreement there that could happen, and we probably also need some caveats for antitrust doing that, and so we would also need that collaboration from governments.

Michael Moss: Let's make it happen.

Tristan Harris: So on one final note, which is that I met with President Biden recently when he convened civil society leaders here in San Francisco on some of the externalities and risks with AI, and we're really hopeful the US government will soon start to introduce meaningful regulations around AI, but if our past sort of history on junk food is any guide, then consumer awareness and pressure, public pressure will be critical in forcing companies to cooperate in putting safety over profit. In the next episode, we're going to take a really close look at some of the big litigation cases against social media companies, and what they teach us about the cost of assigning blame after the harm has been done instead of before those externalities happen, and the races that drive those externalities to happen. So please join us for that.

Your Undivided Attention is produced by the Center for Humane Technology, a nonprofit working to catalyze a humane future. Our senior producer is Julia Scott. Kirsten McMurray and Sarah McCrea are our associate producers. Sasha

Center for Humane Technology | *Your Undivided Attention* Podcast

[Big Food, Big Tech and Big AI with Michael Moss](#)

Fegan is our managing editor. Mia Lobel is our consulting producer. Mixing on this episode by Jeff Sudakin. Original Music and Sound Design by Ryan and Hays Holladay, and a special thanks to the whole Center for Humane Technology Team for making this podcast possible. Do you have questions for us? You can always drop us a voice note at [Humanetech.com/ask](https://humanetech.com/ask) us, and we just might answer them in an upcoming episode. A very special thanks to our generous supporters who make this entire podcast possible, and if you would like to join them, you can visit humanetech.com/donate. You can find show notes, transcripts, and much more at Humanetech.com. And if you made it all the way here, let me give one more thank you to you for giving us your undivided attention.