

# “The Social Dilemma” exposes the ugly truth about social media with a stark warning

ZARIF FAIAZ

We’ve all read about it from time to time. It is one of the most widely spoken about topics on news channels and talk shows. Critics and experts have warned us about it-- “Social Media is taking over all aspects of our lives and it’s not going to bode well for humanity. Big Techs have too much power in their hands.”

Now Jeff Orlowski utters the same warnings with his new Netflix documentary, only this time with exclusive insiders and an innovative storytelling style that keeps you hooked till the end until the movie is done conveying its message to you. And that message is sure to leave you shocked, if not scared.

What sets The Social Dilemma apart from contemporary materials on the dangers of social media, is its simplistic and straightforward narrative that aims to explain complex algorithms in layman’s terms. Coupled with honest, exclusive interviews of former Big Tech employees and a fictional second storyline that shows how a regular American household slowly disintegrates thanks to the influence of social media; The Social Dilemma desperately tries to tell a true horror story that’s stranger than fiction.

The documentary features interviews



from former employees of Facebook, Google, Instagram and so on; many of whom have directly worked on the addictive algorithm behind these social media platforms and many of whom—for the lack of a better phrase— “have blood on their hands”.

The Social Dilemma relies primarily on the narrative of Tristan Harris, a former Google Design Ethicist who realised the need for making tech ethical and less addictive and went on to become the founder of the Centre for Humane Technology; a non-profit organisation focused on the ethics of consumer technology.

Tristan and his former colleagues from different social media platforms take us on a one and a half-hour long journey as they explain how the algorithm of

these platforms is designed specifically to keep you scrolling, how precisely your data is being sold for profits, how these platforms manipulate internet’s ability to connect like-minded people to act as a breeding ground for fake news and how the entire process subtly, but surely, is disintegrating and restructuring the fabric of social life.

Dr Anna Lembke, Director of Addiction Medicine at Stanford, explains in the documentary how the use of social media releases dopamine in our brains, similar to that of addictive drugs; comparing social media as a digital drug of sorts.

Despite a well-told, well-intended storyline, The Social Dilemma makes the mistake of blaming all of societies problem essentially on social media. What it does, is that it takes the rest of the

socio-economic factors completely out of the picture and paints a menacing picture of a world (a matrix really) secretly controlled by algorithms. When the truth is perhaps a little more complicated than that.

Nonetheless, The Social Dilemma successfully portrays the core principal of the business models of the Big Tech, which is cashing on our addiction. It would be quite ironic, given that the reader of this article would most likely read this on their smartphones from their social media feeds. But the aim of the documentary was not to convince us to delete our social media accounts but to make us a little more aware and conscious of how the puppetry behind our screens work. Perhaps, this article too will make a case for it.

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