



United States Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on Privacy, Technology, and the Law
*Algorithms and Amplification: How Social Media Platforms' Design Choices
Shape Our Discourse and Our Minds*
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Thank you Senator Coons and Senator Sasse.

I was featured in the Netflix documentary, *The Social Dilemma*, which has now been seen by more than an estimated 100 million people in 190 countries and 30 languages. The film burst into the public conversation because it confirmed what so many people knew and felt already: that the business model behind the social media platforms that have rewired human civilization with addiction, mental health problems, alienation, extremism, polarization, and breakdown of truth. Now the world wants to see real change.

Why did the film take off? Not because it spoke to a few nuisances of technology, but because insiders who were involved spoke clearly about why tech's deranging influence was existential for democracy. Quoting the film: "*If we can't agree on what's true, then we can't navigate out of any of our problems.*"

In the Cold War, the United States invested heavily in *continuity of government*. Faced with the threat of a nuclear attack, we spent millions on underground bases and emergency plans to ensure a continuity of U.S. government decision-making to maintain our capacity to respond to adversaries. But today, an invisible disruption to the continuity of U.S. government has already happened underneath our noses. Not by nuclear missile or by sea, but through the slow, diffuse process by which social media made money from pitting our own citizens and Congressional representatives into an online Hobbesian war of "all against all"—making agreement or good faith impossible, shattering our shared reality and effectively disabling our societal O.O.D.A. loops (Observe, orient, decide and act). The gears have jammed.

Meanwhile, we face genuine existential threats that require urgent attention: from the rise of China, to a climate crisis, nuclear proliferation, vulnerable infrastructure, to dangerous inequality. Today's tech platforms disable our capacity to address these urgent problems.

That is why we must reset our criteria for success. Instead of evaluating whether my fellow Facebook, Twitter and YouTube panelists have improved their *content policies* or *hired more content moderators*, we should ask what would collectively constitute a “humane” Western digital democratic infrastructure that would strengthen our capacity to meet these threats. Instead of shortening attention spans, distracting us, competing for addiction and outrage... they would compete from the bottom-up to deepen and cultivate our best traits, sustained thinking and concentration, better critical thinking, facilitating easier ways to understand each other and identify solutions built on common ground. We should be interested in structural reforms for tech platforms’ incentives that would *comprehensively strengthen* rather than *disable* our capacity to respond to these existential threats, especially in competition with China.

My fellow panelists from technology companies will say:

- We catch XX% more hate speech, self-harm and harmful content using A.I.
- We took down XX billions of fake accounts, up from YY% last year.
- We have Content Oversight Boards and Trust & Safety Councils.
- We spend \$X million more on Trust & Safety in 2021 than we made in revenue in an entire year.

But none of this is adequate to the challenge stated above, when the entire model is predicated on dividing society. It’s like Exxon talking about the number of trees they have planted, while their extractive business model hasn’t changed.

As *The Social Dilemma* explains, the problem is their attention-harvesting business model. The narrower and more personalized our feeds, the fatter their bank accounts, and the more degraded the capacity of the American brain. The more money they make, the less capacity America has to define itself as America, reversing the United States inspiring and unifying motto of *E Pluribus Unum* or “out of many, one” into its opposite, “out of one, many.”

We are raising entire generations of young people who will have come up under these exaggerated prejudices, division, mental health problems, and an inability to determine what’s true. They walk around as a bag of cues and triggers that can be ignited. If this continues, we will see more shootings, more destabilization, more children with ADHD, more suicides and depression— deficits that are cultivated and exploited by these platforms.

We should aim for nothing less than a comprehensive shift to a humane, clean “Western digital infrastructure” worth wanting. We are collectively in the middle of a major transition from 20th century analog societies to 21st century “digitized” societies. Today we are offered two dystopian choices: either to install a Chinese “Orwellian” brain implant into society with authoritarian controls, censorship and mass behavior modification. Or we can install the U.S./Western “Huxleyan” societal brain implant that saturates us in distractions, outrage, trivia and amusing ourselves to death.

Let’s use today’s hearing to encourage a 3rd way, to have the government's help in incentivizing Digital Open Societies worth wanting, that outcompete Digital Closed Societies.