

## Movie Review

*The Social Dilemma* successfully illustrates the negative aspects of social media, while also glossing over its many positive aspects. The potentially harmful impact of recommendation systems and the risks of fake news were compellingly explained, while the incredible access to useful connections and information went undiscussed. In this review, I will justify why *The Social Dilemma* makes good critiques of social media while failing to acknowledge that it is ultimately a useful technology.

An issue that *The Social Dilemma* dealt with well was the negative consequences of unsupervised recommendation systems. Specifically, the spreading of fringe beliefs and overuse of technology. The film argued that while the content recommendation systems in platforms such as Facebook and Youtube were intended to merely provide engaging content thereby increasing profit, they quickly became harmful in their propensity to recommend "rabbit holes" (trains of misleading, addictive, hateful, or extreme content or groups). This was not an intentional design feature, but rather AI systems found this optimised engagement and profitability. Thus, these consequences are not a deliberate malicious act but rather the result of an amoral tool (the AI) being misapplied. From a consequentialist perspective, this can be seen as an overall reduction in utility due to reduced social cohesion, wasted time, and poorer decision-making. The film didn't cover the positive impacts that could counterbalance this.

I found it quite revelatory to consider that the hyper-personalised nature of recommendations could have a significant impact on my psychology and thought process. Specifically, the tendency towards a strong belief in a particular narrative dictated by the majority of recommendations. This is exemplified in the film with the Pizzagate conspiracy theory, which was recommended to thousands of users. It is easy to see how less extreme but still somewhat harmful groups could be recommended, for example far-leaning political groups. These groups could instill certain unhealthy or unrealistic perspectives. It is therefore even more important to approach content found online with a critical and cautious attitude.

Another issue the film addressed related to the spread of fake news enabled by social media. Sandy Parakilas, the former operation manager for Facebook, states "we have created a system that biases towards false information, not because we want to, but because false information makes the companies more money than the truth." Sandy's statement implies that the technology was not intentionally designed to spread harmful misinformation. However, businesses are in fact financially incentivised to facilitate misinformation. Tristan Harris, the former design ethicist at Google, argues from a different stance claiming "You make money the more you allow unregulated messages to reach anyone for the best price. Facebook has trillions of these newsfeed posts, they can't know what's real." Rather

than placing accountability onto these companies, he claims the issue is rather an unfortunate side-effect of a large user base. Tristan's comment on the volume of newsfeed posts challenged my view on the issue and led me to further research. Initially, I thought companies were intentionally promoting fake news to maximise profit, a view similar to Sandy. However, Facebook responded directly to the film, claiming they actively fight to remove such content.

When looking at this issue from a Kantian perspective, it is clear that these companies can't be held accountable when their intention was to develop a platform to bring people together, share views, and spread information. The film did not present the flip side of the dilemma and instead represented social media companies like Facebook as entirely complicit. Whilst fake news can cause serious harm, real news allows for important information to be spread worldwide. When looking at this from a consequentialist perspective, the real news brings more utility to the general public than fake news brings negative utility.

The film brings to light some serious concerns such as addictive technology design, the consequences of fake news, and the polarisation of society. The film taught me how small and unnoticeable features, such as refreshing applications with new content, are designed intentionally to keep users on the application. However, this film presents these as ethical problems rather than dilemmas and fails to show the positive aspects of this technology. The overall utility provided by this technology allows people to connect worldwide and share their thoughts. Technology is a tool just like a knife is a tool; it can be used to create delicious meals, or it could be used for harm. The technology itself is not the main problem, but rather it is how this technology is used that is the problem.