

SXSW 2016 INTERACTIVE THEMES CURATED BY CARAT



The annual interactive, film, and music get together in the free-spirit capital of Texas has come a long way over 30 years.

The festival – not a conference – is a mixture of events, panels, speeches, meet ups, mentoring sessions, exhibits, pop-ups and shows. The model has proven successful, aided due to the sunny weather, delicious southwestern cuisine, and the hospitable attitude of Austinites (just don't call them Austonians).

With over 72,000 registrants, this year's fest is sure to be the largest to date when it ends just days from now. The 2016 gathering of artists, marketers and scientists, trendsetters and nerds has already proven successful in more ways than one; within two days, Tinder (the global dating app) achieved 182,000 successful matches. For many, that's reason enough to do 'South by'.

Aside from the great atmosphere, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of excellent sessions covering themes like Convergence, Intelligent Future, Content Distribution, Start-ups, Entertainment, Government Policy, etc. From our curated list, we attended talks titled 'Big Data and AI: Sci-Fi vs. Everyday Applications', 'We're Not Gonna Take It: Ad Blocking and User Revolt', 'Diversity and Tech: Breaking Down Unconscious Bias', 'Innovators or Idiots – Mobile's Next Hits or Misses'. And of course, there were the keynotes from **Brene Brown** (scholar, author and speaker exploring vulnerability), **Kevin Plank** (Founder and CEO of Under Armour), **Casey Gerald** (founder of MBAs across America), **Andy Puddicombe** (founder of Headspace) and last but definitely not least, **Barack Obama** (The President of the United States).

This report covers the themes, new news, exciting talks and sadly, the sessions that were skip-worthy.

@CaratGlobal #SXSW #RedefiningMedia

THEME 1: AI, ROBOTS, AND ANDROIDS, OH MY – DYSTOPIA OR UTOPIA. SORTING THE MYTH FROM REALITY.



Throughout the festival, there were many sessions related to the before mentioned. For the most part, the theme was consistent. Yes, vast amounts of cleaned and stored data will eventually lead to AI, and when paired with robots with human characteristics, we get androids that could live with humans....but that is a long way away (unless you live in Japan). 'We all need to just chill out' was the overwhelming message from most speakers on the topic of AI. Yes, machine learning is advancing, but we are far from the point where machines can think beyond the data put into them and explain the choices it makes. Today, most AI systems are still based on key word recognizing patterns. There is little progress in connecting disparate pieces of data and understanding emotion.

Ask an AI machine a complex question like, 'who was president when JFK was born?' and you will likely get pages of search results but not answer, Woodrow Wilson. It is difficult to connect disparate bits of data, and in the marketing world, this will be exasperated by the inability to match data sets and consumer IDs across differing ecosystems, e.g. Facebook to Google to Twitter.

Having said that, expect the marketing community to lead in AI within single ecosystem platforms as an error in advertising is far less threatening than an error in say healthcare, finance or transportation. After all, advertising isn't brain surgery.

In the near term, expect AI to help teach and tutor. AI will propose hypothesis, but a person is still needed to apply an emotional and lateral-thinking filter to the hypothesis.

In the area of robotics and androids, exciting work is coming from **Hiroshi Ishiguro** (and his Android). He is creating humanlike androids and other robots to assist in everything from teaching children, keeping the elderly company and speaking at conferences. At the most basic level, his creations can incorporate smart phones and teach new languages. At a more complex level, his creations can serve as a sort of a human form Skype call or even and translate conversations.

Expect more headlines about AI, Robotics and Androids over the coming months.



THEME 2: YEH DATA, BUT FOR WHAT?

Data was a reoccurring theme in many session titles, yet the talks were often about an outcome or an insight from the data. 2016 is the year that the masses comprehend data as an input, an ingredient, for other great things. The takeaway is that data proficiency is now table stakes.

A slew of talks explored how data can be used for public good, especially via the US government. Many representatives from the Obama administration and government were on differing stages exploring ways that data is improving policy. There were even talks exploring how data can predict social uprisings and war.

Data was also referenced in almost every AI talk, as it's widely known that AI is only as good as the data that feeds it. As a tangible example, key words search has led to Google's AI efforts. Expect the advertising industry to lead the data for AI efforts.

During the keynote address from the founder and CEO of Under Armour, data was explored as a way to turn the healthcare industry into one of maintaining wellness by monitoring personal health data instead of simply treating sickness. The wealth of data from Under Armour's scaled apps and wearables will alter the fitness industry in 2016 and continue their streak of 20 consistent business quarters at +20% growth.



THEME 3: VIRTUAL REALITY, AS AN EVERYDAY REALITY

The powers that be – especially Samsung and Oculus – are determined to make VR a reality in 2016. The headsets were everywhere, from the Samsung popup to pedicabs to startups exhibits. With so many using the headsets as a storytelling device, VR is sure to be a part of our world at home or at work.

It was reported that many waited in line for over two hours to experience the Samsung Virtual Reality roller coaster.

It's important to note that while Oculus did not have a booth at the festival, Mark Zuckerberg did announce this week that Oculus will launch with 30 games available just weeks from now.



If experience leads to trust than VR is the next best thing to being there. See the hotel room or apartment before you rent, experience a holiday before booking, test drive a car from your living room, learn the subject first hand, the scenarios for this technology and content are endless.

THEME 4: CIVIC GOOD – WHEN YOU KNOW BETTER, YOU DO BETTER

Civic duty and social good were topics covered on many stages. President Obama visited the festival to call for attendees to participate in solving the challenges facing America and the world. He stressed that a democracy needs public participation. On other stages, war and injustice were being tackled through data and technology.

It's clear that businesses and brands will need to increasingly take a stand against inequality and injustice.

The Human Rights Foundation and North Korean defectors specifically raised awareness of efforts to penetrate the hermit kingdom with outside media through air-ballooning donated USB devices over the border. David Mace explored how to use data to predict and prevent war. Even #blacklivesmatter was on stage calling for new ideas behind the movement. Ken Burns and Henry Louis Gates explored race in America.

BLACK LIVES MATTER



THEME 5: PIXELATING THE REAL WORLD – BEYOND THE SCREEN & KEYBOARD

Perhaps some of the newest thinking came from those sessions exploring the use of IoT, wearables and human interface. In one session titled 'New Human Machine Interface and the Future of Work', the person that inspired the interactive computer screens in the movie *Minority Report*, explored how rooms can now be turned into interactive spaces for collaboration through scanners, sensors, projectors, videos, voice recognition, and hand gestures.



THEME 6: GENDER AND DIVERSITY EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

There seemed to be a concerted effort to represent men and women equally on stage. This was refreshing as all too often the conference circuit stages are crammed with white middle-aged men.

One keynote address chaired by the US Chief Technology Officer, titled 'Elephant in the Valley', explored female inequality and representation in tech.

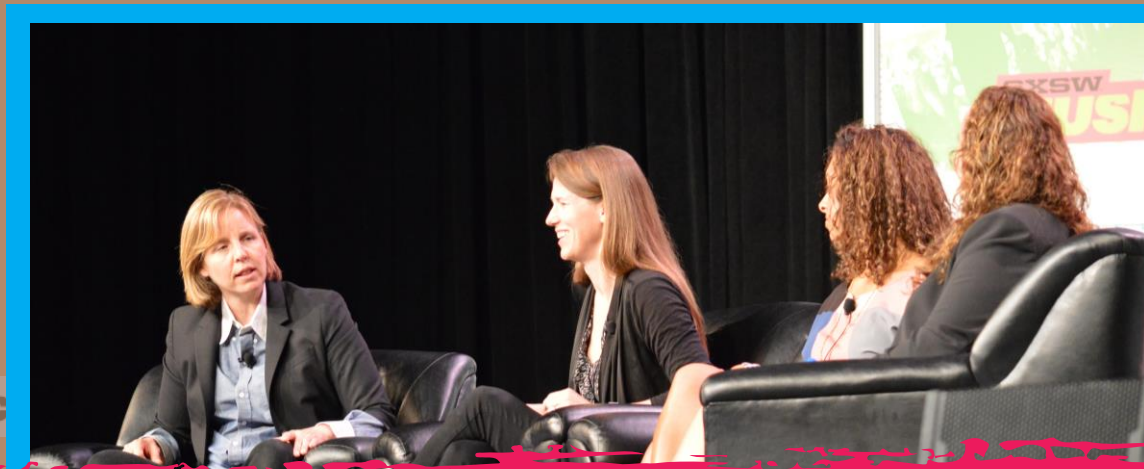
There were many sessions and meet ups related to gender and LGBT issues.

Sadly, while racial diversity was discussed in a few sessions, SXSW is still very much an event attended by a lot of white people.

Female Engineers and Intrapreneurs

There's still a lot of work to do, so the women's equality and inclusion movement continues to garner worthy attention.

Women Byte Back: Tech



America's LGBT Spies: Sec

THEME 7: HEY, BLOCK YOU! THE RISE OF ADBLOCKERS

You would think adblockers were born out of a mission-driven movement. With session headlines like 'Were Not Going to Take It – Ad Blocking and User Revolt', 'Adblockageddon – How to Survive and Prosper' and 'Economic Realities: Ad Blocking and Consumer Control', the battle lines were clear. Those that champion ad blockers, e.g. Head of Operations at Adblock Plus, are on a mission to save the consumer from a 'laggy, tag-strewn, data-guzzling user experience'. Whereas agencies and publishers are determined to win back the 'eyeballs and emotions of the adblock generation'. It seems all agree that great content should make it to consumers but few will admit that their content is worth blocking. Some serious self-reflection is needed to preserve the digital-ad-serving model as we know it as those on a blocking mission are gaining momentum.



In one of the more tense panels, representatives from Adblock Plus and publisher, Forbes, debated the topic of adblocking. Emotion gets involved when two sides have such strongly opposing views. D'Vorkin from Forbes used words like 'black mail' whereas Williams from Adblock Plus argued, "when there are fewer ads online, the quality conceivably could go up."

THEME 8: NERDS – IT'S COOL TO BE UNCOOL

While not an overt theme, there does seem to be something in the air where techies, coders and entrepreneurs carry a certain renewed confidence as top politicians and Hollywood stars, the President of the United States to J.J. Abrams and Kerry Washington, participated in the Interactive portions of SXSW.

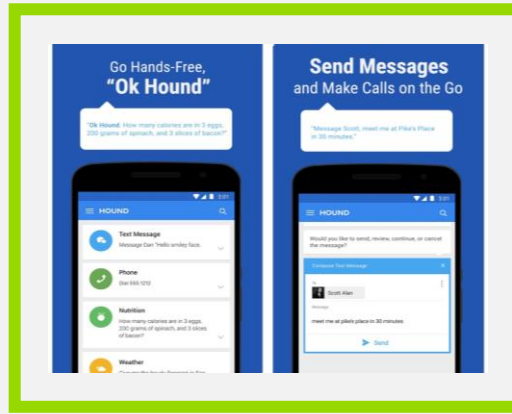
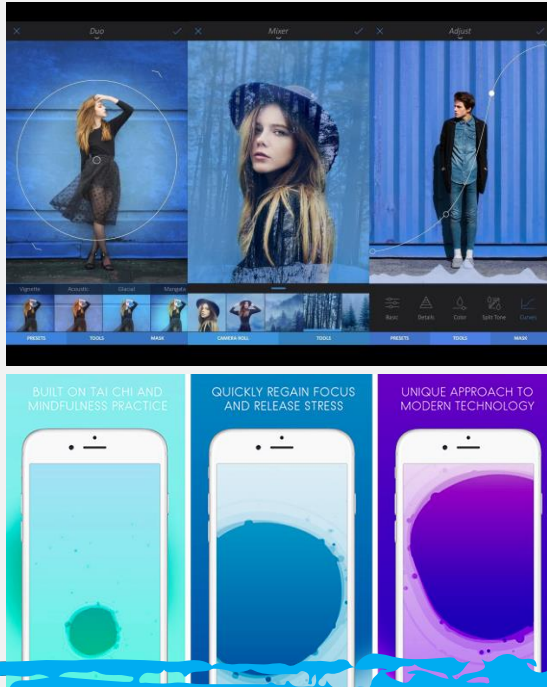


THEME 9: NEW NEWS – NOT SO MUCH.

Whilst SXSW has witnessed launches like Twitter, Foursquare and Meerkat, there were no big launches this year. However, that may mean we are moving out of the app and platform economy and into the data, AI and robotics economy – those topics were all the rage this year.



THEME 10: MOBILE, A MUCH OF A MUCHNESS – WHAT THE SPEAKERS CONSISTENTLY DIDN'T SAY



Knowing that mobile penetration and consumer usage has never been higher, we attended as many mobile sessions as possible. Sadly, none presented us with new solutions. Interestingly, there was almost no talk of Facebook, which is odd considering how much time consumers spend on that specific mobile app. It is almost like few want to admit to what degree their hands are tied with such an omnipresent walled garden platform. Even talks focused on the mobile journey seemed to not offer up any solution other than push notifications and geo context. And in terms of social apps on mobile devices, there were very few talks focused on this topic.

While there were no big mobile launches, there were some apps receiving praise, the included:

- Enlight – An addictive and creative photography app.
- Vibble – An app that turns absolutely anyone into a DJ by accessing and mixing tracks from all major streaming music services.
- Slack – the collaboration platform continues to be praised by the community.
- Recharge – an app available in California that allows you to rent unused hotel rooms by the hour (for napping and showering!)
- Skirt – LA-based car rental app that makes renting a car much smoother procedure.
- Likeso – app that measures your verbal fillers while talking or giving speeches
- Flycar – why not rent your car to others while in long-term parking at the airport?
- Hound – voice search, yes. But it actually works very well. Hound takes speed and accuracy to a whole new level by combining speech recognition and language understanding. This speech-to-meaning capability makes Hound the new way to search and do things faster without typing.
- Pause – much like the headspace app, this new app helps you relax, except it uses mesmerizing visuals activated by your fingertip to do so.

THE SIMPLY IRRESISTIBLE SESSIONS – THE SESSIONS THAT INSPIRED THE MOST.

Space and Mars exploration was a hot topic covered in a few different sessions by [NASA](#), [Mars One](#), and [Google Lunar Xprize](#).

AI, Robotics and Android advancements made for some jaw-dropping moments. From witnessing a talking android to shaking hands with robots, the non-human were some of the best presenters.

Unrelted, the keynote from [Brene' Brown](#) about 'daring greatly' struck at a few heart strings and motivated the crowd. Her studies and famous Ted Talk about vulnerability are important for anyone that has or will fail in life and work.



'It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.' – Theodore Roosevelt