Jaron Lanier is considered one of the

fathers of virtual reality and a veteran

of Silicon Valley and he says social

media and its algorithms are harming

your health in his book ten arguments

for deleting your social media accounts

right now Lanier contends that sites

like Facebook and Twitter are dopamine

farms that are reprogramming how you

think and feel he says they're also

causing political instability and are

changing the global economy for the

worse while joining me now from Seattle

Washington is computer scientist

inventor of VR is even a classical

composer Jaron Lanier good to have you

on the program

Jaron tell me why we should unplug tell

me why we should delete our social media

accounts ah well there are ten reasons

okay one reason is that scientific

studies have shown that even though it's

hard to delete your accounts when you do

you get happier you get more productive

you have more time but that might be the

least of the reasons when a lot of

people do their society becomes better

it becomes more peaceful people believe

in facts more instead of silly

conspiracy theories what's amazing is

that just this one technology seems to

have made every layer of life worse but

since we're all addicted to it it's hard

to see that right and so full disclosure

one of the great perks of my job is that

I can read a book and then come and talk

to my team and say hey I read this book

it's fantastic we should get the author

on that's exactly what happened with

your book I read it about a month ago

while I was reading it it was actually I

posted my last tweet about a month ago

and I said guys this could be my last

because the book is so compelling your

arguments were so strong right so I

haven't tweeted in a month I haven't

gone on to Facebook I haven't gone into

my Instagram I've left them idle I

haven't deleted them yet but I found it

really compelling now I might be a

convert I don't know I'm sort of in this

in-between phase I will agree that I've

read more in the past month I've read

loads of books and I've found for me

personally I found my concentration back

I've been able to concentrate a bit

better right be that as it may

there's something a bit more nefarious

that you talk about in in the book you

talk about the fact that it's social

media is manufacturing you know in a

terrible way

it's it's making us behave differently

and it's it's designing bad behavior or

unnatural behavior now help me

understand that and explain that

properly sure well in this in the

business models for companies like

Facebook and Twitter but also I have to

say for Google the only product that

they make money from essentially is the

ability to persuade and change the

behaviors of their users so you're not

the customer of these things the

customer is the advertiser off to the

side and the advertiser believes that

they're able to gain some kind of

modification and what you do what you

think and it's sneaky it you don't

understand all that's being done to you

very strange behavior modification

algorithms are being applied and all

this data that's being taken is what

feeds those algorithms now the problem

with this is that if you have a society

where anytime two people do something

together the only way that's financed is

because of a third person who wants to

manipulate them you end up with an

entire society optimized for

manipulation for sneakiness for

trickiness and so what you do is you

open it up to all kinds of bad actors to

come in and create divisions ruin

elections make politics insane and I

have to say we've seen so many examples

of that that it's crazy to deny it

anymore if you ask how did an

organization like Isis become so

powerful so quickly well it's because

the social media technology is designed

to amplify exactly the worst people if

you ask why is violence returning to

areas that have been gradually becoming

more peaceful in rural India and

Southeast Asia and parts of Africa once

again we see the same phenomenon social

media arrives and then the violence

follows and they're just they're too

many examples to give to I think it's so

so the thing is though that people are

genuinely

the addiction is technically very

similar to gambling addicts right when

somebody becomes addicted to gambling

they don't want to believe it they think

they're in control but they're not

and so since everybody's addicted to

this stuff when you talk to them about

it it's very hard for them to understand

because they're addicted it's

essentially a form of being hypnotized

but by hypnotist who's working for

somebody else right it's a very strange

situation

okay so we're addicted that's fine we

get these dopamine hits from people

liking our pouty selfies oh you know our

posts of our kids or whatever even if

it's if it's well-intentioned we're

addicted to our own echo chamber and

people validating our thoughts and all

of that but on the other side of this

and this is a crucial point whether it's

Facebook or Twitter or Google and so on

are they deliberately nefariously trying

to modify our behavior and make us into

bad addicted people or is it just a

byproduct of good intentions gone bad

this is a fascinating question okay so

the first president of Facebook somebody

named Sean Parker now says that they

understood they were intentionally doing

something bad but the thing is I knew

him at the time when Facebook was

starting and he was the president of it

and I really believe they didn't

understand it and it was good intentions

gone bad and so this leaves me with a

mystery is he remembering himself as

being more of an evil James Bond villain

kind of a person because it's glamorous

I I really it's very hard to figure that

out I'm very confident that Jack Dorsey

and the other people at Twitter did not

realize they were doing something bad

and they were caught by surprise and now

are having trouble figure out what to do

and I think they're sincere I also feel

that's true about the Google people who

I knew and I actually sold a company to

them and they were just starting I

believe that they did not understand the

depth of the mistake they were making

I'm not sure if anybody fully did but in

the case of Facebook maybe they did at

least some of them say they did a lot of

people just say listen I used Twitter

for for work and for keeping up with the

news I use Facebook and Instagram for

friends and family and being sociable

what's the big deal aren't you a bit of

an extremist jaren or even to me like

what's wrong with you why taking us

so seriously bye-bye unplugging either

by leaving it idle or by by leaving all

together so what just reduce the amount

of time you spend on these things what's

wrong with you don't you have willpower

don't they have a point well the thing

is that people aren't aware of most of

what happens your immediate experience

of using these tools might be quite

positive and indeed from my perspective

this ability to connect with friends and

all that sort of thing is just intrinsic

to the Internet

that's what that's all good and that's

all authentic the main thing that goes

on that I'm concerned about is something

that you are by design not aware of

which is the modification of your own

behavior because it happens very

sneakily and very subtly using the

techniques of what's called behaviorism

a branch of science that studies how to

change the behavior of organisms like

people and so you know what this is

analogous to for me is in the past

Society has faced problems where there

was mass addiction and even though

everybody was addicted even though it

was hard we somehow were able to face up

to it and a very obvious example to me a

cigarette smoking which is greatly

reduced even though everybody used to

smoke all the time everywhere another

example is alcohol we've had a campaign

in most of the world to prevent people

at least from driving drunk because it

used to kill so many people and actually

that's worked you know that turned out

to be intelligent and was accepted so I

think in the same way when we start to

have a wider realization of how

troublesome these things are not only

will some people leave but when those

people leave they'll create the space in

the Society for conversation and I'm

fully confident that these services will

improve eventually and they'll improve

enough that I won't feel you need to

delete them anymore

but right now it really is important for

the health of society for people to

become aware of the degradation that's

going on for those who would say well if

there are a billion people using a

social media network and say a hundred

million of us stop posting that much and

another hundred million delete you still

have 800 million people who are

completely addicted and feeding the

beast and what impact

is staying off social media going to

actually have are they really gonna

listen and Google and Twitter and

Facebook even if only a minority of

people become skeptics of the social

media technologies and delete their

accounts that minority is enough to have

the conversation look here's the analogy

I would make if absolutely every single

person in a society is a drunk it's

going to be impossible to have a

conversation about the problems of

alcoholism right there needs to be at

least there has to be somebody who's

sober in order to even start that

conversation that seems to me to be

simple logic so in this case there has

to be to some subset some minority of

people who are not addicted to these

technologies and then we can have a

conversation and out of that

conversation will come better

technologies in a more moderate and

survivable form of them so I'm social

media teetotal for the moment or tweet

total but so would you would you allow

us from the from the shows Twitter and

Facebook account to share this interview

look I'll tell you one thing I never

tell anybody else what to do in the book

I'm very clear and I repeat it many

times I don't know you and for an

individual it might be that keeping

their social media accounts is the right

idea or whatever it's not my job to

judge individuals but it is your job to

know yourself it is your job to

experience yourself without addiction

it is your job to make to make judgments

so I have to leave it to ya we're gonna

we're gonna share the interview jaren

it's been a pleasure talking to you