

## The Social Dilemma

By: Jeff Orlowski

"The Social Dilemma", a Netflix documentary-drama, directed by Jeff Orlowski addressed the potential harm social media could have on society. Former executives and engineers from well-known digital firms like Google, Facebook, and Twitter are interviewed for the movie to share their insights and express alarm and caution about what they had produced. After all, this interesting film examines not only how social media affects people, but also how riots, protests, and economic uncertainty are on the rise.

This documentary is such an all-in-one piece. It highlights different factors that is seem unnoticeable in real life. The documentary mainly revolves around social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Google's attention extraction model that keeps you tied to their product even at the cost of your own welfare, creating a make believe world of appreciation, compliments & likes, polarization, and manipulation on our behavior. While some may argue that social media has positive effects, such as helping families reconnect despite distance and providing convenience in all areas, these platforms also play a significant role in the polarization of social, cultural, and political beliefs.

The dilemma is primarily about how we use our phones to access social media platforms every time. Exaggeration is used extensively in the documentary to show how social media negatively affects every aspect of our life. It talks on how a single "like" button could lead us to mistakenly link our sense of worth to other people's approval or how a selfie filter could lead to inflated and unattainable ideals of beauty. Instead of how you use or control your phone, the focus is on how you let it dominate you.

The documentary uncovers the matter of privacy and data in social media by exposing how companies secretly obtain personal information from users. Facebook and Google, for instance, meticulously track every user's action, creating a comprehensive

profile of each person for targeted marketing and political campaigns. These practices pose a severe threat to our privacy and security since our personal data is vulnerable to misuse and exploitation. This concern is especially relevant given the enormous number of people utilizing social media daily. As reported by Statista (2021), more than 4.26 billion individuals worldwide are active social media users, with an average daily usage of 2.45 hours. The Philippines has one of the highest social media usage rates, with users spending approximately 3 hours and 53 minutes per day.

Teenagers' usage of social media has been linked to depression and even suicide (Memon et al., 2018). In the movie, a teenage girl who is troubled by the response to one of her selfies serves as an example of how this may transpire. Recreations also demonstrate how a person may be encouraged by platforms to act in a certain way. The adolescent son radicalized by YouTube suggestions espousing an ill-defined philosophy. This serves as an example of the limitations of the documentary's focus on the medium rather than the message. For instance, the characters in the film blamed social media use for an increase in mental illness while ignoring other variables like a rise in economic uncertainty. Without providing any historical background, polarization, riots, and protests are presented as specific symptoms of the social media era.

The possibility of dramatic non-fiction does not surprise the filmmaker, Jeff Orlowski. His critically acclaimed 2014 film *Chasing Ice* depicted the terrible effects of the climate crisis. But in *"The Social Dilemma"* it greatly highlights the negative impact of social media to the individual well-being. While the documentary provides valuable insights into the business model of tech giants and how they manipulate users, some experts have criticised it for being overly dramatic and alarmist. Additionally, some argue that the film oversimplifies the complex issues surrounding social media and doesn't offer practical solutions for individuals or policymakers. Nonetheless, Orlowski's background as a filmmaker known for thought-provoking films lends credibility to his work, and the documentary serves as a wake-up call for users to be more aware of the impact of social media on their lives.

The music, bass, and cuts, was like an action film. The movie makes use of cinematic techniques to enhance the educational material and encourage viewers to feel the right way. Unsettling background music suggests the dismal future civilization is moving toward with each click, like, and scroll. It's like the music to a horror movie but this one is what we're actually experiencing. Also, the music is used in conjunction with interviews with influential people in the IT sector to convey a sense of urgency.

This documentary offers a thought-provoking evaluation of the impact of social media on society, making it essential viewing. As the technology expert pointed out, the adage "if you're not paying for the product, then you are the product" rings true for social media. It's evident that social media does not only impact personal lives, but also politics. We must keep in mind that, as long as we uphold democratic values, it's up to us, not the creators of these platforms, to determine whether we become beneficial or detrimental products of these powerful tools.

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Reference:

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