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Data Ethics 5

After watching "The Social Dilemma," I have got some thoughts for myself. I would say

the documentary feels a little bit dark and provocative, but I think it is necessary to be like that so

that we can be aware of the technologies we use every day. First of all, I agree with the claim

that nothing is free. Social media and internet services we use daily incur a hidden cost that

service providers will collect in lieu of our "payment": personal profile and sociogram. This can

have a two-sided effect on us. On the good side, collecting users' information can help enhance

their personal experience, just like in the documentary when related posts are suggested based on

our behaviors. However, a lot of time, such information was used for or fallen into bad purposes.

I bet that if one is a social media user, there must be at least one time that they receive

advertisement or spam messages through their phone numbers or emails. This is not a

coincidence. I can recall one time back in high school when my club was finding a monetary

sponsor for our coming event, and there was one organization agreed to sponsor us upon

condition that we had to share our participant database with them, which contained phone

numbers, email addresses, demographic information, and more. Of course, we had to turn down

the offer as it was unethical to do so, but I reckon not every organization would do so.

Advertising companies and service providers constantly seek this information, as Tristan Harris

said, to create an "avatar voodoo doll-like model." Frankly speaking, I would say the notion that

companies build machine learning algorithms like this to improve our experience is really

welcoming, as long as they have the responsibility to protect them. We develop services and technological tools to serve us and our society, and the only way for it to truly serve us is for them to understand us. Regardless, we are walking on a slim line of ethics considering using that information. In one of the earlier ethics assignments, I discussed having a uniform, standardized ethical code so that every company can uphold it and we, as users, can feel more comfortable sharing our information. Nevertheless, I would say this is impossible to obtain. To have one's personality profile is like having a cloned version of that person, which is highly vulnerable to unwanted behaviors that we might not be able to think about. For example, this could be purposefully targeting a group of the population with misinformation in order to shift their beliefs or convey untrue facts. And sadly, we are seeing this pattern being repeated, especially in politics. More concerningly, just like the "slot machine" analogy in the documentary, information is kept being fed to us by machines, and we might not be able to distinguish between them which is facts and which is fake news. Therefore, information that is "planted" unconsciously in our minds might be one the most destructive ways to alter someone's thoughts, in my opinion, if it is used wrongfully.