

THE SOCIAL DILEMMA

Culture of Social Media

TEN COMMANDMENTS

FROM: Tool based technology environment
TO: Addiction-manipulation based tech environment.

The Tech Shift in the last decade.

If something is a tool, it is simply sitting there, waiting patiently.
If something is not a tool, it is demanding things from you, its seducing you,
manipulating you. It wants things from you.

The Social Dilemma: An Eye Opener!

Recently I encountered a new documentary - The Social Dilemma. It opened my eyes, it shook me to the invisible, all pervasive context, we all live and breath in. Our world, our virtual culture - The Social Media. Something I was totally oblivious to, unconscious about how it all works. And how it makes us work to its tune...

Applying the Semiotics Lens, I worked overnight, transcribing the entire text of the documentary, to decode the 'Invisible Culture' of the Social Media context, we are all so invested in.

I am sharing the Ten Commandments decoded of Social Media Culture

- **CODES, the unwritten rules that are subconsciously influencing our attitudes and behaviour living in today's virtual culture.**

Black and White, it is, for us to learn unlearn relearn, what's happening behind the screen, in front of the screen; and how it's subliminally, subconsciously impacting our world, our world view.

Aiyana

This Netflix documentary film explores the dangerous human impact of social networking, with tech experts, tech-creators sounding alarm on their own creation. The social media context = Google, Facebook, Email, Youtube, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, LinkedIn Snapchat etc

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COMMANDMENT # 1

If you are not paying for the product, then YOU are the product.

ADVERTISER IS THE KING, (*NOT THE CONSUMER*).

- All social media companies are competing for our attention. Their business model is to keep people engaged on the screen.
- *How to get as much of this person's attention as we possibly can. How much time we can get you to spend? How much of your life we can get you to give it to us.*
- **Advertisers are the customers. We are the ones being sold.** Social media is FREE for all, but it's the advertisers who pays. Our attention is the product being sold to advertisers. Advertisers pay for the product we use free, in exchange of showing their ads to us. We are the products and our attention is the products being sold.
- **Three Goals** of all the social media companies - Engagement goal that keeps you scrolling; Growth goal that keeps you coming back and inviting as many friends; Advertising goal to make sure that, as all that's happening, we are making as much money as possible from advertising.
- Each of these goals are powered by algorithm whose job is what to show you to keep the numbers going up.= high level of precision
- **Surveillance Capitalism** - profiting from large tech companies tracking everywhere everyone goes. Business model is to make sure advertisers are successful. We now have marketplace that trade in human futures at scale = making internet co the richest co in history of humanity
- *It's the gradual, slight, imperceptible change in your own behaviour and perception that is the 'product'. That's the only thing for them to make money from = Change what you do, how you think, who you are*

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COMMANDMENT # 2

It's a misconception that they sell the data. They use the data to build models to predict our actions and whoever has the best model wins.

DATA (OVER)RULES - *the business of selling their Users.*

- Social Media sells certainty. In order to be successful you have great predictions . that begins with one imperative - you need lot of data!
 - Everything they are doing online is being watched, is being tracked, is being measured. Every single action you take is carefully monitored and recorded. They know everything about you, your behaviour, preferences, personality etc
 - They have more information about us than ever imagined in human history, it is unprecedented. Data pouring all the time is fed into these system, **with almost NO human supervision**, who are making better and better and better prediction of what we are going to do and who we are .
-

COMMANDMENT # 3

Social Media model built on manipulating human psyche, without the user's knowing it. Like Magicians, who understand the part of our mind we are not aware of and that is where the illusion works. They know how minds work?

BEHIND THE SCREEN

- The Tech Driver = How you could use all that you know about people's psychology and build it into technology.
- **Algorithms are opinions embedded in codes**, not objective. Algorithms has mind of its own, even though a person writes it, it's built in a way that you kind of build the machine and then the machine changes itself. **They are optimised to some definition of success.** *If a commercial organisation builds an algorithm to drive their definition of success then it is **a commercial interest driven by profit.***

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- **Algorithm is actually trying to find a few Rabbit Holes, that are very powerful, trying to find which rabbit hole is the closest to your interest.** And then if you start watching one of those videos, then it will recommend it over and over again.
 - **Artificial Intelligence-** behind the screen, they *create a avatar voodoo doll like model of us* ...all the things we have ever done...from all the clicks and all our usage...basis that, built a model that can predict what the person does...what triggers the person...emotions... Human gives the computer the command - what it wants, but there is NO HUMAN CONTROL over tech functioning.
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COMMANDMENT # 4

As humans we have almost lost control over these systems because they are controlling the information we see. *They are controlling us more than we are controlling them..*

BUSINESS TACTICS & PSYCHOLOGY

- **Persuasive technology** designed to persuade people to take an action - plant deep inside you, as an unconscious habit, so that you are being programmed at a deeper level...you don't even realise it.
- **Machine learning** -you are giving the computer the goal state - this is the outcome I want -then the computer is itself learning how to do iteveryday its improving and getting better and nobody is knowing what they are doing to achieve that goal.
- **Growth hacking** = hack people's psychology so that they can get more growth.
- **Labrats-** Use of scientific A/B testing of small feature changes - roll out lot of little tiny experiments that they were constantly doing on users...to develop the most optimal ways to get users to do what you want them to do = Manipulation.
- **Labrats tactic does not to benefit us but we are just zombies and they want us to look at more ads, so that they can make more money**
- **Facebook Mass Contagion experiment** - how do we use subliminal cues on the fb pages to get more people to vote. **We now know we can affect real-**

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world behaviour and emotions without ever triggering the user's awareness.

- **Tech Vs Human-** On the other side of the screen we have an army of tech and supercomputers whose goals are different than others ...who is going to win. AI already runs today's world right now
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COMMANDMENT # 5

We are all operating on different set of facts. When that happens at that scale...you are no longer able to reckon with or even consume information that contradicts with that world view that you have created.

WHO FEEDS MY NEWSFEED?

- **Others don't see what you see.** They see completely different worlds because they are based on these computers calculating what's perfect for each of them.
 - **Each person has their own reality, own facts.** We accept the reality of the world which we are presenting - as simple as that.
 - You have a **false sense** that everybody agrees with you because everyone in your newsfeed sounds just like you! And that once you are in that state it turns out **you are easily manipulated**. Just like the way a magician does.
 - It is not a function of truth but from where you will be googling from (polarised local). Even the same friends, with same set of friends with will see totally different feeds , they will not see the exact same set of updates,...**That means we aren't actually being objective, constructive individuals.**
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COMMANDMENT # 6

It's a disinformation for profit business model. You make more money the more you allow unregulated messages to reach anyone for the business.

PERPETUATING THE FALSE/FAKE NEWS

Fake News becoming more advanced and threatening societies across the world.

- **We have created a system that biases towards false information. Not because we want to but because false information makes more money than the truth.**
The truth is boring.
 - Fake news spreads six time faster than true news. What will the world look like when fake news has six times more advantage than the other
-

COMMANDMENT # 7

It's not just about taking control over the attention but social media is digging deeper into the brain stem to take over kid's self-worth and identity

SOCIAL MEDIA IS A 'DRUG'

- Humans have a biological need to connect to people - directly affects the release of dopamine in the reward pathway. It's an evolutionary process to get us together, in communities and find mates to propagate species.. ***There is no doubt that SM which has the power to connect people is going to have the potential for addiction.***
- Online connection has become primary, and yet in that world **anytime two people connect, the only way its financed is through a sneaky third person (AI) who is paying to manipulate those two people.** Eg You are on app and you are playing against artificial intelligence that knows everything about you. It can anticipate your next move and you know nothing about it except that there are cat videos and bdays on it= not a fair fight.
- **We curate our lives around our perceived sense of perfection because we get rewarded in this short term signals - likes thumbsup, comments etc and**

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we conflate that with value and we conflate it with truth. We were evolved to care about what people in our tribe think of us - whether they think well of us or not. **But were we evolved to be aware of what 10000 people think of us?**

What it really is **fake brittle popularity**. It is short term and it leaves you even more vacant and empty before you did it. It forces you to a vicious cycle - *whats the next thing I need to do now? Cause I need it back.*

- When we are uncomfortable or lonely or uncertain or afraid, we have a **DIGITAL PACIFIER** for ourselves.. that is atrophying our own ability to deal with that.

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GEN Z born after 1996 are the first gen who got on social media in middle school- a generation who are more anxious, more fragile, more depressed, much less comfortable taking risk, rate of romantic dates dropping... Mental Health and Social Media addiction - **you can isolate yourself now in a bubble. These services are killing people and causing people to kill themselves. Parental Trauma=** Parents earlier cared about protecting their kids, what they watched, what was not allowed on kids channel but not now YouTube for kids gobbles up all the attention and all kids are exposed to everything. **All those parental protection and regulation no longer exist.**

COMMANDMENT # 8

The tech industry has created tools to destabilise and erode the fabric of society, in every country, all at once, everywhere. We have less and less control of who we are and who we believe

PERPETUATING THE DIVISIVE & POLARISED.

- When you look at the world outside. - you say - how can they be so stupid- look at all the information I'm constantly seeing. How are they not seeing that same information?? **The answer is that they are NOT seeing that same information.**
- If everyone is entitled to their own facts, then there really no need for compromise, no need for people to come together. Infact there is really no need for people to interact.

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- *It's about making two sides who couldn't hear each other, who didn't want to hear each other anymore, who didn't trust each other anymore = racial violence= create culture wars*
 - If we cannot agree on **WHAT IS THE TRUTH**, then we can't navigate out of any of our problems. We need to have some shared understanding of reality. Otherwise we aren't a country
 - **People more divided with personal and political polarisation.**
 - **It's not that highly motivated propogandist have not existed before, it's that the platforms make it possible to spread manipulative narratives with phenomenal ease, and without much money.** Algorithm and manipulative politician are becoming experts at creating fake new that we absorb as if it were reality, and confusing us into believing those lies
 - **It has led to real time offline harm.** *It gave military/hate propaganda a new way to manipulate public opinion (Burma) and to help incite violence against a community.*
 - **Democracy is facing a crisis of confidence. What we are seeing is a global assault on democracy.** *Russia 2016 election used the tools that fb created for legitimate advertisers and legitimate users, and applied it to a nefarious purpose. One country can invade another without invading its physical borders*
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COMMANDMENT # 9

Social media is not a tool waiting to be used, it has its own goals and it has its own means of pursuing them by using your psychology against you.

LIVING IN A STATE OF UTOPIA /& DYSTOPIA.

- What's dangerous is that's its driven by technology that's advancing exponentially ...our brains has not evolved anywhere close to that rate.
- **The moment when technology overwhelms and exceeds human weakness, it's the root of addiction, polarisation, radicalisation, outrage- ification ,vanity-fication...It is overpowering human nature and this is a checkmate on humanity.**
- Social Media amplifies exponential gossip and exponential hearsay to the point we don't know what's true...no matter what issue we care about.

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- **NO ONE knows the Truth?** AI cannot solve the problems of fake news. Google does not have the option of saying - is this conspiracy? Is this truth? Because they don't know what is truth. They don't have a proxy for truth that's better than a click. Fb has trillions of these news feed...they can't know what's true or not.
-

COMMANDMENT # 10

An existential threat?

- It's not the technology or using tech gadgets, features etc being the existential threat. BUT **it's the ability of technology to bring out the worst in the society- that's the existential threat.**
- If tech creates mass chaos, incivility, lack of trust in each other, loneliness, alienation, more polarisation, more election hacking, more populism, more distraction and inability to focus on the real issue...now that's the society ...BUT now the society is incapable of healing itself... devolving into a kind of social chaos.

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APPENDIX

ABOUT SEMIOTICS

The Art of Cultural Decoding.

Semiotics is an outside-in perspective where culture and communication is the object of the study.

People don't have answers to everything. Their perceptions and behavior are largely influenced by the society and culture, that helped shape their identity, beliefs and values. By looking at the '*hidden meanings*' behind all communication and cultural contexts, Semiotics decodes the framework of cultural codes, - the '*unwritten rules*' that define the attitudes and behaviour within that cultural context.

The Semiotics Lens views people as decoders of messages and carriers of cultural meanings.

- ✓ An expert cultural analysis of all communications and cultural contexts (any kind of message in any medium) that shape people's ideas, beliefs and identities within the world they inhabit. .
- ✓ Brings the unconscious universe of hidden meanings and association to the surface,
- ✓ Accesses the direction and pace of cultural changes across time. - the residual Vs. dominant Vs. emergent codes.

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