

THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

Worksheet for Jaron Lanier | Why You Should Unplug from Social Media for Good (Episode 156)

On the surface, social media exists to keep human beings connected. But at its core, its business model relies on surveilling, analyzing, and manipulating your behavior in order to more effectively sell you things. It also deprives you of your economic dignity, hampers the democratic process, and even undermines your experience of humanity.

[In this episode](#) Jaron Lanier, author of [Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now](#), the man who coined the term “virtual reality,” and one of the architects of the early and not-so-early Internet, dissects how social media companies curate and essentially control what we see, think, and feel.

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Social Media Pros and Cons

During our discussion, Jaron clarified that he doesn't think all social media is bad, and mentioned GitHub in particular as one iteration that seems to be doing "the good work of civilization."

The objection he has with the majority of social media, however, is its predatory nature: its users must be monitored, their actions analyzed, and their habits manipulated in a way that drives sales to some third party in order for anyone to make money.

Make a list of your social media accounts and the minutes you *think* you spend using each one every day. Next to these estimates, jot down the benefits you enjoy from each of them. Knowing what you've learned from this interview, do you believe the positives outweigh the negatives?

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The challenge, should you choose to accept it: Try unplugging from one or more of these social media accounts for a week and noting how it affects you. If you succeed without experiencing immense hardship, consider unplugging for longer. Do you think you could do without social media entirely, or at least permanently cut back on its use? If not, what's holding you back?

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Algorithm-Curated Realities

Social media developers create algorithms that adaptively tailor a unique online experience for each of us -- constantly coaxing us to submit increasingly specific data about our preferences and reinforcing the way we see the world.

So the ads and the news and the posts that show up in your feed will differ greatly from what's showing up for your family, friends, and significant other. On a surface level, this doesn't sound like such a big deal. But when you consider how this selective information seals us in our own personal bubbles rather than giving us common ground to share with others, the threat of alienating even those closest to us becomes more apparent.

"The real world becomes less real," says Jaron. "It becomes less shared -- and it doesn't have to be that way. Sharing online shouldn't decrease the reality of offline, real-world stuff. But if you do it this way, it does."

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Think back to a time when you disagreed with someone on social media and let them know about it. Take note of these observations: How close is your real-life relationship with this person? In what way did you express your disagreement -- and was it civil? Do you feel bad about the interaction in retrospect, or do you think it served to demonstrate the point you were trying to make? Would you have handled the disagreement differently in real life -- if so, how so?

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#JerkLivesChatter

We've all witnessed the message of a social movement being shared across social media via memes, hashtags, retweets, stories, etc. Perhaps you've shared such a message yourself. But there's always a backlash as this message is taken by people (or algorithm-generated entities) with an opposing viewpoint and used as ammunition against its original, well-intentioned source.

"The algorithms take any information that was uploaded by [Enter Social Movement Here] and they're feeding it all over the place to random people to see who they get an effect from," says Jaron. "Because what they want is a rise that they can then use to further addiction and behavior modification -- because that's all they do...so the negative people get detected; they get introduced to each other; they get reinforced."

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Think about a time when you've seen a meme on social media that either strongly reinforced or strongly opposed the way you feel about a social movement. Whether or not you agreed with it, did you take further steps to verify the accuracy of its message, or did you take it at face value? How did the overall message make you feel about the person who shared it with you? If you found it to be inaccurate, did it motivate you to correct the source? Did you pass the message on to others or respond to it in some way? Now understanding how bad actors manipulate social media for agendas that dramatically contrast with your own, might you think twice before doing so in the future?

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What's Cheaper than Free?

Jaron's acronym describing how he sees social media is BUMMER, which stands for:

- **B**ehaviors of
- **U**sers
- **M**odified and
- **M**ade into an
- **E**mpire for
- **R**ent

If constant behavior modification and manipulation by third parties for profit is the high cost consumers are really paying to get everything for "free" on the Internet, Jaron believes we need to rethink the sustainability of social media business models if we want them to truly connect us.

We discussed Netflix as a great example of an online service that serves its intended purpose because it doesn't rely on predatory tactics to trick us into disclosing data that can be leveraged by a third party to sell us something later. It's supported directly by subscription dollars, and it thrives.

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Consider the services -- social media and otherwise -- that you use online today. Provided they were offered for a nominal fee that would fit within your budget, which ones would you consider paying for if it meant greater privacy from third-party interests? Which ones would you be happy to keep supporting in their current "free" format (even after hearing this interview)? If unhappy with either choice, could you give any -- or all -- of them up for good?



Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here.](#)

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We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth -- and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

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support@jordanharbinger.com

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