Truth Decay and the Technology Threat, WEF 2020, 27.01.2020

Whole video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3IZt5MeIP3Y&utm_

Yuval Noah Harari:

› Willingness to listen to consequences = existing already, change of business model not yet
› Good thing: Today you cannot hide the death of millions of people
› **Fake news is not new, what is new is tailoring the fakes and targeting very small groups**; "*Hitler gave one speech to everybody, today you can have various speeches to different groups*"
› People who create fake news want to destroy the discussion
› Democracy is based on the idea that voters know best, if something knows more than the voter, democracy is destroyed, same for customers, if customers' wishes can be predicted and manipulated, markets are destroyed
› **Easiest to manipulate: those who think they cannot be manipulated** and believe in free will
› **Thinks we can do**:
  » **Individual level**: get to know yourself as well as possible, e.g. through meditation, hiking for two weeks, therapy… whatever works, do it – it is a race, corporations/governments try to get to know you better, so you should run faster than them
  » **Collective level**: in the long run important
    ▪ Engineers have to learn ethics ("*We are not coding computers, we are coding human lives and society*"), philosophy and sociology
    ▪ Question of who-owns-all-my-data needs to be asked and answered, there needs to be a political discussion (no good models yet)
    ▪ Different kind of technologies: surveillance can be turned around to not be on citizens but on governments/corporations
› "*We see a fundamental challenge to the humanistic world view, the basic assumptions about individuality, individual agency and free will are crumbling because auf new technologies*" – we don't know yet what new kind of value system/worldview will emerge, but it has to be translated into new policies
› Terrorism, Immigration etc. get a lot of political attention, because there is a reassuring feeling as we are familiar with the discussion; talking about AI regulation, is way more difficult as there are no preceding discussions of that kind
› "*Technology can do wonderful things for humans*" – there are many people who praise it, some people (e.g. historians) have to also look at the consequences

Tristan Harris:

› MIT Study: **Fake news travels six times faster than actual news** → the unconstrained actor wins in such a situation; people mostly share accurate things in real life, in the virtual world the same is expected but it is not the case

› YouTube recommended 15 million times Alex Jones conspiracy theories

› **Illusory Truth Effect**: the more something is repeated to you, the more receptive to are to similar information, even if it is not true – "*if you can make it trend, you can make it true*", everybody is vulnerable to this → technology companies can help, e.g. through putting the right date on an article shared online

› "*There is a bug in the Silicon Valley philosophical operating system which is the inability to distinguish what we want from what we can't help but look at*" – technology companies can't distinguish values from vulnerabilities (e.g. looking at a car crash does not mean you want to see more car crashes)

› "*The largest supercomputers in the world are pointed at your brain playing chess against your mind and seeing a billion steps ahead on the chessboard*" – e.g. when Facebook shows you ads of things you just talked about (people think Facebook spies on them, which is not the case, they just have enough data to predict you)

› **Baader-Meinhof Effect**: We perceive if two things happen around the same time, they must be linked, there is a coincidence.

› Cambridge Analytica derived your personality traits (OCEAN), those traits can be predicted with 80% accuracy just by looking at click patterns → **Asymmetry of power**, technology has asymmetric access to vulnerabilities, emotions etc. → **Fiduciary relationship necessary** → Solution: applying fiduciary law on Facebook et al (instantly kills the business model; therapist cannot simultaneously get all information about you and then sell that information)

› **Addiction**: "*Answer to addiction is not sobriety, but connection*"; technology could e.g. help to make social coordination with meaningful relationships easier

› Internal employees: using pressure of employees of technology companies

› **Fundamental issue**: "*You don't want to question whether technology is good at all for people, you just want to say, that there are bad use cases, bad apples…. That in the same way that in industrial capitalism a whale is worth more dead than alive and a tree is worth more as lumber than as a tree, **a human being in the attention model is worth more if they are addicted, distracted, outraged, polarized and disinformed**, than if not, whether that's a kid, a person or a citizen in a democracy. This is not because everyone is evil, it just what the model prefers, in the same way that the model would prefer if someone is diabetic first, so that we can sell a subscription plan. That's what the system prefers, but that's not a conversation we have in Davos.*"

› Technology companies could use all the infrastructure that they have built in order to tackle climate change

› "*When the internet is just tool, it is a library, it's actually mostly okay, it's the active recommendation system, it's when it wants something from you, when it has an incentive to personalize, this is when all those other issues show up*" – it is not okay, if technology e.g. inserts narcissism (likes, followers…) into children's brains as a value, "***Culture has to be above technology***"