

No Need to Wait - Dystopia Is Almost Upon Us

By [True Publica](#)

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Theme: [Intelligence](#)

Microsoft's CEO has [warned](#) the technology industry against creating a dystopian future, the likes of which have been predicted by authors including George Orwell and Aldous Huxley. Satya Nadella kicked off the the company's 2017 Build conference with a keynote that was as unexpected as it was powerful. He told the developers in attendance that they have a huge responsibility, and that the choices they make could have enormous implications.

They won't listen of course. The collection of big data along with management, selling and distribution and the systems architecture to control it is now worth exactly double global military defence expenditure. In fact, this year, the big data industry overtook the worlds most valuable traded commodity – oil.

The truth is that the tech giants have already captured us all. We are already living in the beginnings of a truly dystopian world.

Leaving aside the endemic surveillance society our government has chosen on our behalf with no debate, politically or otherwise, we already have proof of the now and where it is leading. With fingerprint scanning, facial recognition, various virtual wallets to pay for deliveries, some would say your identity is as good as stolen. If it isn't, it soon will be. That's because the hacking industry, already worth a mind blowing \$1trillion annually is expected to reach [\\$2.1 trillion](#) in just 14 months time.

The reality of not being able to take public transportation, hire a car, buy a book, or a coffee – requiring full personal identification is almost upon us. Britain even had an intention to be completely cashless by 2025 – postponed only by the impact of Brexit.

Alexa, the Amazon home assistant listens to everything said in the house. It is known to record conversations. Recently, police in Arkansas, USA demanded that Amazon turn over information collected from a murder suspect's Echo — the speaker that controls Alexa, because they already knew what information could be extracted from it.

32M is the first company in the US that provides a human chip, allowing employees “to make purchases in their break-room micro market, open doors, login to computers, use the copy machine.” 3M also confirmed what the chip could really do – telling employees to “use it as your passport, public transit and all purchasing opportunities.”

Various Apps now locate people you may know and your own location can be shared amongst others without your knowledge and we've known for years that governments and private corporations have access to this data, whether you like it not.

Other countries are providing even scarier technologies. [Hypebeast](#) Magazine reports that [Aadhaar](#) is a 12-digit identity number issued to all Indian residents based on their biometric

and demographic data. *"This data must be linked to their bank account or else they'll face the risk of losing access to their account. Folks have until the end of the year to do this, with phone numbers soon to be connected through the 12 digits by February. Failure to do so will deactivate the service."* The technology has the ability to refuse access to state supplied services such as healthcare.

Our article "[Insurance Industry Leads The Way in Social Credit Systems](#)" also highlights what the fusion of technology and data is likely to end up doing for us. *An astonishing 96 per cent of insurers think that ecosystems or applications made by autonomous organisations are having a major impact on the insurance industry. The use of [social credit mechanisms](#) is being developed, some already implemented, which will determine our future behaviour, which will affect us all – both individually and negatively."*

The Chinese government plans to launch its Social Credit System in 2020. Already being piloted on 12 million of its citizens, the aim is to judge the trustworthiness – or otherwise – of its 1.3 billion residents. Something as innocuous as a person's shopping habits become a measure of character. But the system not only investigates behaviour – it shapes it. It "nudges" citizens away from purchases and behaviours the government does not like. Friends are considered as well and individual credit scores fall depending on their trustworthiness. It's not possible to imagine how far this will go in the end.

However, to get us all there, to that situation, we need to be distracted from what is going on in the background. Some, are already concerned.

Distraction – detaching us from truth and reality

The [Guardian](#) wrote an interesting piece recently which highlighted some of the concerns of those with expert insider knowledge of the tech industry. For instance, Justin Rosenstein, the former Google and Facebook engineer who helped build the 'like' button – is concerned. He believes there is a case for state regulation of smartphone technology because it is "psychologically manipulative advertising", saying the moral impetus is comparable to taking action against fossil fuel or tobacco companies.

"If we only care about profit maximisation," he says, "we will go rapidly into dystopia." Rosenstien also makes the observation that after Brexit and the election of Trump, digital forces have completely upended the political system and, left unchecked, could render democracy as we know it obsolete.

Carole Cadwalladre's recent Exposé in the Observer/Guardian proved beyond doubt that [democracy has already departed](#). Here we learn about a shadowy global operation involving big data and billionaires who influenced the result of the EU referendum. Britain's future place in the world has been altered by technology.

Nir Eyal 39, the author of Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products writes:

"The technologies we use have turned into compulsions, if not full-fledged addictions." Eyal continues: "It's the impulse to check a message notification. It's the pull to visit YouTube, Facebook, or Twitter for just a few minutes, only to find yourself still tapping and scrolling an hour later." None of this is an accident, he writes. It is all "just as their designers intended".

Eyal feels the threat and protects his own family by cutting off the internet completely at a set time every day.

“The idea is to remember that we are not powerless,” he said. “We are in control.”

The truth is we are no longer in control and have not been since we learned that our government was lying to us with the Snowden revelations back in 2013.

Tristan Harris, a 33-year-old former [Google](#) employee turned vocal critic of the tech industry agrees about the lack of control.

“All of us are jacked into this system,” he says. “All of our minds can be hijacked. Our choices are not as free as we think they are.”

Harris insists that billions of people have little choice over whether they use these now ubiquitous technologies, and are largely unaware of the invisible ways in which a small number of people in Silicon Valley are shaping their lives.

Harris is a tech whistleblower. He is lifting the lid on the vast powers accumulated by technology companies and the ways they are abusing the influence they have at their fingertips – literally.

“A handful of people, working at a handful of technology companies, through their choices will steer what a billion people are thinking today.”

The techniques these companies use such as social reciprocity, autoplay and the like are not always generic: they can be algorithmically tailored to each person. An internal Facebook report [leaked this year](#), ultimately revealed that the company can identify when teenagers feel “worthless or “insecure.” Harris adds, that this is “a perfect model of what buttons you can push in a particular person”.

Chris Marcellino, 33, a former Apple engineer is now in the final stages of retraining to be a neurosurgeon and notes that these types of technologies can affect the same neurological pathways as gambling and drug use.

“These are the same circuits that make people seek out food, comfort, heat, sex,” he says.

Roger McNamee, a venture capitalist who benefited from hugely profitable investments in Google and Facebook, has grown disenchanted with both of the tech giants.

“Facebook and Google assert with merit that they are giving users what they want,” McNamee says. “The same can be said about tobacco companies and drug dealers.”

James Williams ex-Google strategist who built the metrics system for the company’s global

search advertising business, says Google now has the “largest, most standardised and most centralised form of attentional control in human history”.

“Eighty-seven percent of people wake up and go to sleep with their smartphones,” he says.

The entire world now has a new prism through which to understand politics, and Williams worries the consequences are profound.

Williams also takes the view that if the attention economy erodes our ability to remember, to reason, to make decisions for ourselves – faculties that are essential to self-governance – what hope is there for democracy itself?

“The dynamics of the attention economy are structurally set up to undermine the human will,” he says. “If politics is an expression of our human will, on individual and collective levels, then the attention economy is directly undermining the assumptions that democracy rests on. If Apple, Facebook, Google, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat are gradually chipping away at our ability to control our own minds, could there come a point, I ask, at which democracy no longer functions?”

“Will we be able to recognise it, if and when it happens?” Williams says. “And if we can’t, then how do we know it hasn’t happened already?”

The dystopian arrival

Within ten years, [some are speculating](#) that many of us will be wearing eye lenses. Coupled with social media, we’ll be able to identify strangers and work out that a particular individual, in say a bar, has a low friend compatibility, and data shows you will likely not have a fruitful conversation. This idea is literally scratching the surface of the information overload en-route right now.

It is not at all foolish to think that in that same bar a patron is shouting at the bartender, who refuses to serve him another drink because the glass he was holding measured his blood-alcohol level through the sweat in his fingers. He’ll have to wait at least 45 minutes before he’ll be permitted to order another scotch. You might even think that is a good idea – it isn’t.

Google’s Quantum [Artificial Intelligence](#) Lab, already works with other organisations associated with NASA. Google’s boss sits on the Board of the Pentagon with links plugged directly into the surveillance architecture of the NSA in the USA and GCHQ in Britain. This world, where artificial intelligence makes its mark, as Williams mentions earlier, will deliberately undermine the ability to think for yourself.

In the scenario of the eye lenses, you might even have the ability to command your eyewear to shut down. But when you do, suddenly you are confronted with an un-Google world. It appears drab and colourless in comparison. The people before you are bland, washed out and unattractive. The art, plants, wall paint, lighting and decorations had all been shaped by your own preferences, and without the distortion field your wearable eyewear provided, the world appears as a grey, lifeless template.

You find it difficult to last without the assistance of your self imposed augmented life, and accompanied by nervous laughter you switch it back on. The world you view through the prism of your computer eyewear has become your default setting. You know you have free will, but don't feel like you need it. As Marcellino says the same neurological pathways as gambling and drug use drive how you choose to see the world.

This type of technology will be available and these types of scenario's will become real, sooner than you think.

Our governments, allied with the tech giants are coercing us into a place of withering obedience with the use of 360 degree state surveillance. New technology, which is somehow seen as the road to liberty, contentment and prosperity, is really our future being shaped by a system that will destroy our civil liberties, crush our human rights and it will eventually ensnare and trap us all. This much they are already attempting in China and Japan with [social credit mechanisms](#) and [pre-crime technology](#) which is a truly frightening prospect. Without debate or our knowledge, here in western democracies, these technologies are already in use.

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