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Welcome back to the Unfinished newsletter, where we explore the intersection of tech, ethics, and social impact.

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What we're thinking about

We don't have "flight simulators" for social media where we can simulate, before going live, the impact of product and algorithm changes on the behavior and mental health of *literally billions* of users.

This was one of the key points that Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen drove home at Unfinished Live when she sat down with [Alex Kantrowitz](#), the Founder of the "Big Technology" podcast for a [special live-recorded podcast](#) on Meta, the lack of transparency in social media algorithms, and the need for greater accountability.

Haugen's work is motivated by the fact that there are no classes you can take on building an ethical social media platform; big companies train the experts instead of experts training big companies. "There is no lab bench for social media," she said.

That's the impetus behind [Duty of Care](#), a new initiative Haugen launched at Unfinished Live in collaboration with [Project Liberty](#) that aims to develop this bench of talent and expertise.

Duty of Care is part of Haugen's Beyond the Screen nonprofit, a coalition of technologists, academics, designers, and leaders fighting against online harms. It will pool expertise and then work to identify best practices and deter harmful activities and outcomes. Ultimately, the initiative is designed to hold social media platforms accountable and ensure that these platforms are optimized for the public interest.

[Listen to the entirety of the podcast](#) for a rich and nuanced take on why Duty of Care is so needed; in the meantime, here a few more gems we picked out from the conversation:

Transparency of Algorithms & Content Moderation

When the algorithms driving social media content aren't published and transparent, the public is unable to have a conversation about what content that algorithm is elevating, what content it is burying, what factors led to those outcomes, and how to make changes. When we can't have societal conversations about transparent content moderation, then we risk censorship by artificial intelligence.

Moments of Intentional Friction

One of the core metrics at Facebook is MSI, or Meaningful Social Interactions, which tracks and ranks the interactions and engagement of its users for the purpose of boosting engagement across the platform. The problem is that a focus on MSI has led to amplifying negative and divisive content. Facebook [knew the MSI metric was fostering negativity and division](#), but was hesitant to change it because it was extremely successful at driving engagement (and as Haugen described on the podcast, MSI is tied to Facebook employee bonuses). But changes are exactly what are needed, and they can be as small as what's considered a "soft intervention." Soft interventions create intentional friction to slow the virality of divisive, negative content. One example of a soft intervention is a pop-up that asks a user if they want to click on a link from a post before they re-share it. These prompts introduce an extra step and can reduce MSI, but they also are an effective bulwark against the viral spread of harmful content.

Acknowledging Power vs. Denying Power

One of main differences Haugen sees between Facebook and other platforms like TikTok is that TikTok acknowledges its power, whereas Facebook denies its power and influence. This denial, coupled with a lack of transparency into the underlying algorithms driving content, could be seen as an abdication of responsibility for the harms these platforms are causing. Acknowledging power expands the space for conversation, dialogue, and accountability, whereas denying power shrinks that space.


The Addictive Metaverse


Haugen is less concerned about censorship and the virality of misinformation in the metaverse because it's more of a person-to-person experience, but she is worried about the ways it will be habit-forming and addictive. She's particularly concerned that we might use the metaverse as a stopgap for people who are on the margins of society or are at risk of falling through the cracks. Will we simply nudge at-risk teenagers, isolated elderly, and others to escape reality by spending all of their time cultivating perfect digital lives?


Haugen concluded her podcast on an optimistic note, expressing enthusiasm for her partnership with Project Liberty and reflecting that every new technology in human history has been disruptive, but we've risen to the challenge every time, and this time will be no different.




Other notable headlines


 This week Amazon premiered [Ring Nation](#), a nationwide television show featuring videos captured on Amazon's Ring doorbell cameras. Before they were connected to the internet, doorbell cameras were for private, closed-circuit use. But increasingly their purpose has expanded beyond just home security and into public, nationwide entertainment. As [Parmy Olson writes in Bloomberg](#), "Reframing surveillance as fun and quirky makes it more normal, which takes a sinister turn when that monitoring comes at the expense of people's privacy and civil liberties."

 [WIRED explores the surveillance in faith communities](#) across the U.S. with the rise of accountability "shameware" apps that are marketed at churches and parents to police online activity and enforce spiritual and moral teachings. Churches like Gracepoint, which serves college students on 70 U.S. campuses, are encouraging their members to install apps like [Covenant Eyes](#) as an accountability and anti-pornography tool. For a monthly fee, these apps monitor everything users see and do on their phones, sending all of the user's online activity to an accountability partner (sometimes a member of church leadership).

 A coroner in the UK has listed the Instagram algorithm as a contributing cause of a 14-year-old's death. Molly Russell took her life after liking, sharing, or saving 16,300 Instagram and 5,700 Pinterest posts in six months that "romanticized self-harm." [Ars Technica](#) reports that in response, Pinterest has apologized while a Meta spokesperson has doubled down, calling the content "safe" by its own standards. The coroner has said Molly's death cannot be ruled a suicide, but rather "an act of self-harm whilst suffering from depression and the negative effects of online content."

 [One in five Americans wears a smartwatch](#), and with new smartphone technology hitting the market that can detect increasingly nuanced biometric data, experts are warning that such watches are not proven screening tools. [The Wall Street Journal](#) explores the risks such watches have in over-diagnosing or misdiagnosing conditions like atrial fibrillation, the irregular and

rapid heart rhythm that can cause blood clots and stroke. Smart watches can be helpful in early-detection, experts say, but they often aren't worn by the populations who could benefit from them the most.

 [TikTok tracks people across the web, even if they're not using the app](#). Unfinished Network Partner [Consumer Reports](#) unveils how TikTok has built partnerships with brands to embed trackers in their websites, allowing TikTok to better target ads to customers and glean valuable data. Consumer Reports found that hundreds of companies are sharing data with TikTok, including organizations like Planned Parenthood, Weight Watchers, and the Girl Scouts.

Unfinished Network Partner Events

[For Freedoms News Residency](#)

The Brooklyn Museum | October 27 - November 6

For Freedoms News (FFN), an artist-led reimagining of television news as well as an art installation, performance, and conversation, is launching this fall during a residency at the Brooklyn Museum in New York. Each day, guest artists will anchor in-person news programs, reporting breaking stories. Visitors will have the opportunity to engage with the anchors and share their own takes on current affairs. In addition, a Special FFN News Report featuring renowned artist and activist Bryonn Bain (Lyrics from Lockdown) and transformative justice practitioner Claudia Peña (UCLA Prison Education Program / For Freedoms) titled [“News from the Inside,”](#) will take place on October 22, from 2:30–4pm in the Brooklyn Museum auditorium.

[2022 Aspen Cyber Summit](#)

92nd Street Y, NYC and live streamed | November 16

The 2022 Aspen Cyber Summit will take place on Wednesday, November 16, 2022 at the [92nd Street Y](#) in New York City. [Aspen Cyber Summit](#) is a unique, annual gathering that brings together top leaders from business, government, academia, and civil society to discuss the world's urgent cyber issues. An event of the Aspen Institute, the nonpartisan summit is one of the most significant stages for cyber policy discussion, and spurs dialogue and momentum to act on the challenges of today and tomorrow. The day includes a plenary session and breakout roundtable lunches. A free live stream will be made available of the plenary session to viewers around the world.

Thank you for reading.

Follow Unfinished ([@byUnfinished](#) on Twitter and [@thisisunfinished](#) on IG) for ongoing chitchat on the changing web.

Have a great, restful weekend.

The Unfinished team

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