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### Intelligence Squared U.S.

### Social Media Is Good for Democracy

For the Motion: Jeff Jarvis, Emily Parker

Against the Motion: Franklin Foer, Roger McNamee

Moderator: John Donovan

AUDIENCE RESULTS	
Before the debate:	After the debate:
36% FOR	34% FOR
46% AGAINST	63% AGAINST
18% UNDECIDED	3% UNDECIDED

Start Time: (00:00:00)

[applause]

John Donovan:

In a world that is absolutely without social media and there was a world like that. I think I remember living in it. I'm sure some of you do, too. In such a world without social media, lots of things that we now take as fact might never have happened. The women's march, for example, never would've happened without Facebook. The #MeToo Movement depended on Twitter. So, did Black Lives Matter and then there's the Parkland Student's hashtag. On the other hand, Facebook and also Twitter, these places were vehicles through which an election got itself hacked and fake news, real fake news, which is something of an oxymoron, that kind of fake news got itself spread around corrupting the democratic process and manipulating us by algorithm. So, we have social media as the great connector, a democracy enhancer, and we have social media as poison in the process and poison for the discourse, a democracy corruptor. And which of those things is social media mostly?

00:01:03

Well, we think that has the makings of a debate, so let's have it. Yes or no to this statement: Social Media is Good for Democracy. I'm John Donvan, and I stand between two teams of two, experts in this topic, who will argue for and against that motion -- Social Media is Good for Democracy. As always, our debate will go in three rounds. And then, our live audience here at the St. Regis Hotel in Aspen, Colorado will vote to choose the winner. And as always, if all goes well, civil discourse will also win. Social Media is Good for Democracy. That is our thesis; that is our resolution. Let's meet our debaters, beginning with the team arguing for the motion. Please -- once again, ladies and gentlemen -- welcome Jeff Jarvis.

[applause]

And Jeff -- this is the Alex Trebeck kind of moment, when we go over and we have a little chat.

Jeff Jarvis:

[laughs]

John Donvan:

Jeff, you're director of the Tow-Knight Center at the City University of New York's Craig Newmark Graduate School of Journalism.

00:02:01

You've written a lot of books, including one that I've written -- read -- you wrote it, I read it.

Jeff Jarvis:

[laughs]

John Donvan:

It's about technology. It's called "What Would Google Do?" You also wrote "Public Parts: How Sharing in the Digital Age Improves the Way We Work and Live." You also lead the News Integrity Initiative at CUNY, which is partially funded by Facebook. We wanted to say that. What is that initiative?

Jeff Jarvis:

I would emphasize I'm independent of Facebook, as I hope I prove every day. But the News Integrity Initiative is trying to attack this problem of so-called fake news through manipulation, and trust, and trying to rebuild journalism.

John Donvan:

And does that fit into the topic tonight?

Jeff Jarvis:

Uh, yeah.

John Donovan:

Okay. Sounds like absolutely. And can you tell us who your partner is, please?

Jeff Jarvis:

Oh. Emily Parker, here.

John Donovan:

Ladies and gentlemen, Emily Parker.

[applause]

Emily, you are a digital diplomacy advisor -- a very cool-sounding job -- and the author of a book called "Now I Know who my Comrades Are: Voices from the Internet Underground." And here, explaining what that title meant, you were a member of Secretary Clinton's policy planning staff at the State Department and the founder of Code for Country.

00:03:03

What is Code for Country?

Emily Parker:

Code for Country is something that is completely impossible to imagine today. It was Russian and American programmers getting together to solve issues of government transparency.

John Donovan:

Oh, how -- [laughter] -- how naive.

Emily Parker:

Yes. We solved it, yeah.

[laughter]

John Donovan:

Yeah. Thanks, Emily Parker. And once again, the team arguing for the motion -- Social Media is Good for Democracy. And we have two debaters arguing against it. Please welcome back to Intelligence Squared Franklin Foer.

[applause]

And Frank, you're a staff writer at the Atlantic. You're the author of a book everybody's been talking about last year and this year: "World Without Mind: The Existential Threat of Big Tech" - - named one of the best books of the year by the New York Times. You started to work on that

back in 2014. So, tell us; how have the tides changed between the time you started writing that book --

Franklin Foer:  
[laughs]

John Donovan:  
-- and the present day?

Franklin Foer:  
You know, when I told people I was working on a book critical of Google and Facebook, they looked at me funny. But now they consider me to be a lackey of the conventional wisdom.  
[laughs]

00:04:04

John Donovan:  
A lackey. And you would probably rather be -- if you're going to have to be in servitude -- a servant of the facts or --

Franklin Foer:  
No, it's --

John Donovan:  
-- a slave to the truth or something like that.

Franklin Foer:  
I am always a slave to the truth. There you go. Yeah.

John Donovan:  
Ladies and gentlemen, Franklin Foer. And please tell us who your partner is.

Franklin Foer:  
Roger McNamee.

John Donovan:  
Ladies and gentlemen, Roger McNamee.

[applause]

Roger, you're a venture capitalist and early investor in Google, Amazon, Facebook. Things worked out -- where you were a mentor to -- you were a mentor at Facebook to Mark Zuckerberg for a number of years. It's an important part of your story here. I also want to point out that you're a rock musician --

Roger McNamee:  
Yeah.

John Donovan:  
-- and you perform live. You performed last night --

Roger McNamee:  
I did.

John Donovan:  
-- you're performing tomorrow --

Roger McNamee:  
-- tomorrow --

John Donovan:  
-- in fact. You have called yourself -- you have said that you were once a technology optimist. Is that still true today?

Roger McNamee:  
I am temporarily in remission.

[laughter]

And I'm looking for a new entry point, hopefully around 5G or whatever the next big thing is. Hopefully it will be human-driven technology and not human-destructive technology.

00:05:00

John Donovan:  
Let's hope, ultimately, for all of us, that you're right. Thank you, Franklin, Roger -- the team arguing against the motion, Social Media is Good for Democracy.

[applause]

So, here are our four debaters, ready to get started. Let's get the debate started. We begin with Round 1. Round 1 will be opening statements by each debater in turn. This is where they lay out their basic arguments that we will be debating through the evening. Speaking first for the motion, Social Media is Good for Democracy, here is Emily Parker, digital diplomacy advisor and former State Department official. Ladies and gentlemen, Emily Parker.

[applause]

Emily Parker:

Thank you so much, everyone. I'll start by saying that I realize that our side is making a fairly unpopular argument. When you hear the word "social media," you probably think fake news, Russia hackers, bots, trolls, echo chambers, generally bad things. I get that. But the resolution here is not social media always brings out the best in humanity.

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The resolution is also not Facebook can do whatever it wants and we'll be okay with it. The resolution is essentially a world with social media is more democratic than a world without it. For evidence of this, I'd like to start by pointing to some examples outside of the United States. I spent 10 years interviewing internet activists in countries like China, Cuba, and Russia asking them how social media changed their lives. Fast forward until today and I think there's a widespread impression that in these countries the governments have won, right? Because China still has pervasive internet censorship. Cuba is hardly a democracy and Putin is still very much in power. However, this really should not come as a surprise. If we are disappointed by those outcomes it's because our expectations were out of whack.

00:07:00

Social media is a tool. It does not single-handedly create revolutions nor does it single-handedly bring about a change in government. If we have that impression it has to do with media hype and general over-exuberance around the time of the Arab Spring. What social media does do is widen the space for a democracy and I think China is a good example of that. China with social media is more democrat than China without social media. Before the internet in China there was one public voice, the state. There was one official version of history and there was official media. Now, there is an explosion of voices. We Chat, China's main messaging app by some accounts, has one billion monthly active users. But it's not just about freedom of speech. Social media is essential for promoting freedom of assembly, something that we in the United States take for granted.

00:08:06

But in authoritarian countries it is not easy to find people who share your views and your goals, especially if those goals are counter to the official narrative. So now in a country like China you have people from all over the country joining forces to protest local corruption, to demand a cleaner environment, or recently truckers protesting high fuel costs. This is a major development. Now, let's turn to Russia. When you hear Russia and internet, again you're probably thinking about state-sponsored hackers. The story is much bigger than that, however. In Russia, the opposition has used social media very effectively to achieve their goals. Alexi Navalni [spelled phonetically], for example, Russia's -- Putin's main political opponent, has used social media to call for large-scale protests and recently even tried to challenge Putin as -- for president of Russia.

00:09:05

This didn't work out obviously. Before this debate I actually reached out to Navalni and asked him given all these setbacks that the Russian opposition has experienced, does he still believe that social media is good for democracy in Russia. And his answer was a resounding yes. In a country with almost total censorship, he said he has access to millions via YouTube. His YouTube channel has over two million subscribers. "Without the internet we would all be dissidents," Navalni told me. "The only people who would know that we exist are foreign journalists." Thanks to the internet. Thanks to social media, he has been able to emerge as a politician. Was it enough to make him the leader of the country? No. But without social media the situation would be a lot more black and white.

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So finally, let's turn to the United States. I believe that Facebook is being scapegoated for revealing some of the dark sides of America. At the end of the day Facebook is just a mirror reflecting us and that mirror has revealed a nation that is deeply divided, susceptible to misinformation, willing to promote lies and spread hate. Some of the Russian propaganda on social media was taken from content that was posted by real Americans and neither Russia nor Facebook forced anybody to share misinformation. I also want to quickly mention my own experience in Silicon Valley, which caused me to see these platforms a little bit differently. I heard a lot of people saying, "I'm so sick of Twitter and Facebook. We need a platform for civil, thoughtful conversation."

00:11:00

So, a few years ago, I teamed up with two former Google employees to create just that platform. It was called Parleo [spelled phonetically], and it's since been acquired by Quora. Basically, what it was a platform for civil, thoughtful conversation. And it wasn't a perfect product. It had its flaws, but it did reveal some important truths about user behavior. First is that thoughtful debate takes time. Second, thoughtful debate is unlikely to go viral. And third, civility can be kind of boring. And basically, we are in a moment right now where we -- the users -- are addicted to this sugar rush of sensationalism and virality.

John Donvan:

Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, Emily Parker.

[applause]

Our next debater will be speaking against the motion, Social Media is Good for Democracy. Here to do that is investor and venture capitalist, Roger McNamee.

00:12:03

[applause]

Roger McNamee:

Thank you all. I just want to remind you that what this debate is actually about is the proposition resolved -- Social Media is Good for Democracy -- not that it leads to more democratic conversation, but it leads to better forms of governance. As John said, my story began in Silicon Valley more than 35 years ago. I was a technology optimist. I was lucky enough to be Mark Zuckerberg's -- one of his mentors from 2006 to 2009, before the current business model was created. I was able to introduce him and help to bring in Sheryl Sandberg into the company. I've known Google, YouTube, and Twitter -- three of the other social media platforms, since their very earliest days. I have had no relationships with Snapchat or to WeChat, but I pay really close attention. I worked in political campaigns since I was 12 years old and I've worked for a member of Congress.

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In January of 2016, I was on vacation and saw memes that were misogynistic and related to the Bernie Sanders campaign. They were not actually from the campaign, but somebody was spending money to make sure they spread virally on Facebook. On June of 2016, Brexit happened. That was the first time I realized that Facebook, as a platform, gave an advantage to inflammatory campaigns over neutral and positive ones. In October of 2016, after the news broke that the Russians were attempting to interfere in our election, I reached out to Zuck and to Sheryl with my fears, and I spent three months trying to persuade them just to do an investigation -- find out what was going on. I assumed Facebook was a victim. They claimed they weren't responsible. They're a platform; not a media company. They aren't responsible for third parties. The transformation in my view of social media began with a couple hypotheses.

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First, that rampant manipulation of users is not a bug; it's actually a feature. It's designed into the system. The Russians did not hack Facebook, they used the tools precisely as they were designed to be used. Secondly, the companies themselves are complicit. The business model and algorithms are built on behavior modification and manipulation, by design, because that is good for profits. They sell access to their users to anyone who will pay, because that's good for business. They will embed employees in campaigns, conferring an asymmetric advantage. As currently constructed, social media is not good for democracy. It collapses fact. It hurts deliberation. It undermines the public square and civility. My partner, Tristan Harris [spelled phonetically], has said that the business model is the problem.

00:15:00

It encourages addiction, which makes users easy to manipulate, to contrast what our opponents said. Platforms use surveillance to build incredibly detailed portraits. They then

prey on the weakest aspects of human psychology. The smartphone is a slot machine that enables engagement every waking moment. The platforms then control your choices. They tickle you. They appeal to your fear of missing out, your need for social approval, your need for social reciprocity. They give you endless news feeds and autoplay to keep you on the site and if you ever leave they interrupt you with notifications. Surveillance and brain hacking have generated \$1.4 trillion worth of market value and wealth for Google and Facebook alone. Manipulation of users is the goal. Undermining democracy is merely a side effect. The future of democracy is in the hands of corporations with user bases as large or larger than the largest religions in the world.

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These are corporations with authoritarian cultures driven by profits. They favor disinformation over fact because it's better for engagement. Earlier this year MIT pointed out that information spreads 70 percent farther and six times faster than facts. These platforms are designed to take advantage of that and I will stipulate the social media can in principle be employed to benefit democracy. We've seen examples with Black Lives Matter, the women's march, indivisible in the march for our lives. But social media, in contrast to our opponent's point, is actually only good at germinating political action. It is terrible at sustaining engagement. If social media were good for democracy it should have deterred the global rise of populism, demagoguery, illiberalism, and authoritarianism. Stanford political scientist Larry Diamond notes that between 2000 and 2014 there were 25 breakdowns in democracy.

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There have been many more since and the rate of change is accelerating on the negative side. It's almost going vertically down. Social media encourages people to be passive consumers not active citizens. Facebook is 2.2 billion. Truman Shows, everybody entitled to their own reality. Filter bubbles make opinions more rigid and more extreme. Users have no need to engage, much less to compromise. And Larry Diamond points out, there are four key elements of democracy, free and fair elections, active participation by the people in civic life, protection of human rights for all, and a rule of law which applies equally to everyone. We will make the case that social media has harmed all four. Our opponents must prove that social media is actually good for democracy as practiced in the world, not just that it gets some people engaged online in Russia.

00:18:00

I want to ask for your vote. I want you to vote against this proposition. I want to take back democracy. I want to thank you for your time.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Roger McNamee. You have heard the first two opening statements and now on to the third. Debating for the motion Social Media is Good for Democracy, Jeff Jarvis, director of the Town Night Center for Entrepreneurial journalism at City University of New York. Ladies and gentlemen, Jeff Jarvis.

[applause]

Jeff Jarvis:

That cacophony that you're hearing is the sound of democracy. Yes, it's noisy and it's messy, but if you truly listen it's glorious. For at long last we are hearing voices we could never, ever hear before. The internet has brought diversity to the public square and the public conversation. Going around gatekeepers like me, I'm a journalist, an old white man gatekeeper. Around institutions and this is why this scares them so much and so finally we have the opportunity as John has mentioned and Roger did, that without social media we would not have had Black Lives Matter or #MeToo or the amazing work of the Parkland students.

00:19:10

So, social media has already proven to be good for democracy. Are there also bad voices on the net? Yes. Just as there are on Times Square as well. And it's important to know that they come in various flavors. Some are motivated by economics as spammers, some by psychology or warped psychology, as trolls, some politically as propagandists from Russia. Should the platforms be doing more about this? Yes, of course, but what exactly? This is all so new. I believe strongly in the power of openness, but I've come to learn that extreme openness probably does breed trolls. The platforms probably should have had more anticipation of the bad things that could've happened, but who could've seen this? I want them to be more transparent, more collaborative, more open. I want them to build a technology that favors community over mere conversation.

00:20:05

There is much work to do but it's early days. But let's be honest. We have met the problem, and it is us. The problem here is not technology at all; it is human behavior on technology. And who handles that? Who normally deals with the limits of human behavior? Government. The government doesn't know what to do, so it outsources the problem and the solution to the platforms. Now, I'm also scared about government taking on its true role here, because I think we've seen many missteps in the regulation of the Net in Europe, where I think they've gone far too early and they've had an impact on free speech, on history, on all kinds of issues we can talk about later. And I think they're -- these unintended consequences come out of, potentially, a moral panic that I see developing out of good intention from our colleagues on the other side -- but that, in the end of the day, tries to blame all of society's problems on Facebook, and Twitter, and Google, as if they caused it.

00:21:04

Well, I stand here today in confession, that they didn't cause it: I helped cause it. As a journalist, as a member of media. We polarized this nation and the world. We invented the business model of clickbait that leads to cats and Kardashians, and ultimately leads to Donald Trump -- for remember, the heads of both CNN and CBS said that Donald Trump may be bad for this country, but he's good for their business. We hold a great deal of responsibility here, and we shouldn't just act as if it is the platforms. Indeed, I saw my own dear members of my family brainwashed by a certain TV network. So, is social media the cause? No. Is it the cure? No. But I have to say that these are early days. What social media and the Internet do is disrupt society in fundamental ways. That's why there's so much fear about this right now. And I want to remind you about the timetable of Gutenberg. He invented moveable type in about the year 1450.

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It took 150 days, a century-and-a-half before anyone thought to invent the newspaper. It was another couple centuries until the 1800s before it became mass. 1950 before television started to come in. 1994 before the Net came in -- the Web. That's a very long timeline. I will argue to you that we are in the very early days of the Net. We don't know what it is yet. It is too soon to limit it, define it, regulate it. We have to let people go where they may. And so, I'll remind you, from Elizabeth Eisenstein [spelled phonetically] -- a key scholar of Gutenberg -- how the book scared the bejesus of people when it came out en masse, that there was a complaint about an information overload, about a new age of barbarity, about making us stupid, about unrestrained discursivity [spelled phonetically] -- which is what I think we're doing right here.

John Donvan:  
[laughs]

Jeff Jarvis:  
So, the fear was the book was going to do this, but we figured it out, society. We human beings are smart.

00:23:01

We understood how to deal with this new technology. It took some time. It took some wars. All true. But we did figure out where to go. So, I would say to you here today that what you need to do is vote for the future. I would argue to you that you should have the faith, and trust, and respect for your children and grandchildren, that they will know what to do with this -- that they will understand how this is their world and their tool. And we are -- frankly speaking, for everyone in the room -- we are too old to understand this new world. It is their world, and we have to give them the freedom and the tools to do what they wish to do it. So, I beg you -- I urge you -- vote for your children. Vote for your grandchildren. Vote for the future. Vote for

optimism. Vote for respect to the intelligence of your fellow man and woman. Vote for our side. Thank you.

John Donovan:  
Thank you, Jeff Jarvis.

[applause]

00:24:03

Once again, the resolution -- Social Media is Good for Democracy. And here making his opening statement against the motion, Franklin Foer, staff writer at the Atlantic. Ladies and gentlemen, Franklin Foer.

[applause]

Franklin Foer:

I, for one, am not too old to be extremely upset about the trajectory that we're on. They're asking you to vote for some theoretical, abstract vision of the good that social media could do. But look at the world that we live in. Before I get into the question of democracy, I wanted to take a brief deviation into a personal question, which is, I wanted to ask, how many people in this room sleep with their phones? I did not mean it like that, pervert. I meant, I have to keep my phone in my basement, three stories below my bedroom, because I know if it's next to my bed, I'm going to reach for it, and grab it, and get stuck in an endless scroll.

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Roger likes to say that he's so addicted to his phone that the only question is, will he check it before he pees in the morning or while he's peeing in the morning?

[laughter]

This is not an accident. These devices, these social platforms, are behavior modification machines. They've been designed to addict us. They're engineered to elicit emotional responses and so they can wish for these pure reactions, but the system in the end is rigged. It's manipulated. There's a reason that the authoritarian guys always win in the end. How does the system work? Well, they take data. What is data? Data is this intimate portrait of the inside of your head. They know what you like. They know what gives you pleasure. They know what causes you anxiety. They delete nothing. You start to type a post on Facebook and you delete it, it saved on their packrat servers. And so, then they take this information and then they use it to sort how news comes to you in your feed.

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And so, the information is organized in such a way to try to keep you engaged, to keep you addicted on their site for as long as possible. Now, it's not hard to see the democratic danger. These platforms are giving people what they want. They're giving people information and news that confirms their own biases. They're triggering emotional responses to keep them engaged on their sites for as long as possible and this is the reason we've started to see the formulation of these filter bubbles where we're pushed into our ideological corners. I want to give you an example. The Wall Street Journal has something called red feed, blue feed. So, they show you if you're a liberal you can see what your news was this morning. Item number one, the insecure president displays antics -- the insecure president's antics on display. Item number two, he knows he'll never be as popular as Barak Obama.

00:27:00

Now let's turn to the conservative feed. Number one, Donald Trump, high energy, strong stamina. Number two, a break [unintelligible] story, Trump goes on offensive. They are pushing us into these corners and we're getting information that confirms our biases. We become intellectually weakened. We become susceptible to fake news, to propaganda, to demagoguery [spelled phonetically]. These trends that are so rampant in our world right now. There's -- one third of all Americans believe in something that is demonstrably false, whether it's arguments about vaccination, arguments about climate change, arguments about the world being flat, and they're being pushed to these positions by this filter bubble. In addition, we all know that we're becoming a more ideologically polarized society, a more ideologically polarized world.

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We exist within filter bubbles. Now, social media doesn't cause this in its entirety, but it has exacerbated that trend. According to the New York Times, -- sorry, according to NBC News, 52 percent of Americans have not had a conversation over the course of the last year with somebody that they substantively politically disagree with that. How is compromise possible? How are our politics going to function in such a world? And I mean the answer pretty clearly based on the United States and many, many other places around the world is that they don't. These platforms privilege the shrill. In order to get attention, you have to shout and the people who shout end up getting shared more and more. And I don't think I need to do more to illustrate this point than to point you in the direction of a certain feed of a major American politician to show you the way in which shrillness floats to the top.

00:29:00

And it's created this world where we have an epidemic of incivility where when you exist within your filter bubble it's harder and harder to entertain heterodox [spelled phonetically] thoughts and if you do you get shamed. People are cowed into suppressing thoughts for fear of eliciting the anger of the mob. Finally, the one antidote to fake news is real news and that is disappearing because Facebook and Google and the other platforms have amassed monopolies

in online advertising. 73 percent of all online dollars go to Google and Facebook. These are big systems we're talking about and they've come at the expense of media. Over the course of the last 25 years we've seen a 60 percent reduction in the number of reporters. Media has grown dependent on Facebook and so they end up producing clickbait because that's the only way that they can survive.

00:30:01

Facebook values become their values. Now, really ultimately this is a debate about citizenship. We ask so much of citizens every two years, every four years. And if they're fed fake news, lies, if they're being manipulated -- if they can't hold their attention span, then how are we going to expect them to do their duty? Thank you.

John Donvan:

Thank you, Franklin Foer.

[applause]

And that concludes Round 1 of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate, where our motion is Social Media is Good for Democracy. And now we move onto Round 2. And in Round 2, the debaters address one another directly and they also take questions from me, and from you, our live audience here in Aspen, Colorado. The team arguing for the motion -- Jeff Jarvis and Emily Parker -- they are taking a very, very optimistic look at the situation. They say -- they point out that the world is unquestionably more democratic with social media than without. Imagine, they say, China without social media, a place that used to have basically one voice talking now has millions talking; the same in Russia and elsewhere.

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But the core part of their argument is making the case that social media is neither the cure nor the cause of our political difficulties of the moment -- that it is a mirror of human nature as opposed to a catalyst. They point out that, centuries ago, people were scared of the book, and that what's going on now is something of a repetitive moral panic -- that Facebook is being scapegoated for problems that really relate to divisions that already exist among us and were there in place already. So, look to the future, they're saying, and be optimistic. The team arguing against the motion, Roger McNamee and Franklin Foer, say it's great to be optimistic about the future, but look at the present, they say. The trajectory is not good. If social media were good for democracy, we wouldn't see the sorts of things happening that we saw in the last election -- that the companies that are making fortunes on social media by signing us up to become addicted are, in fact, relying on an addictive business model that uses behavior modification, that collapses -- causes us to collapse fact, and to undermine the public square, and civility, and to make us easy to manipulate.

00:32:10

They say that if social media was good for democracy, trends like populism and terrorism, by this time, would have been deterred by them. But they say that the opposite -- it's basically not happening. So, they're saying, in fact, it is different this time. It's not the book; it's something else. So, that's sort of, I think, the shape of the two arguments we're seeing before you. I want to go to two things I want to definitely explore, is -- Emily's argument on this broad scale that I think is very intuitively powerful: that if you look at a place like China and the tools that people have been given to speak out, they -- that seems like a slam dunk case to say, "Look how much better it is." That's number one. And number two, I think we really want to explore this issue of whether it's different this time -- the catalyst versus mirror argument -- and whatever else comes up in the course of the evening. But first, to take Emily's opening point -- I'll take it to you, Franklin.

Franklin Foer:  
Yeah.

John Donovan:  
A place -- a place like China, a place like Russia, a place like Cuba, where social media was -- is completely disruptive to a regime that otherwise had total control.

00:33:09

Well, actually, Roger is shaking his head already. So, do you want to yield? Or whoever wants to take it first.

Franklin Foer:  
You can go, if you want.

Roger McNamee:  
So, I believe the fundamental assertion just is completely undercut by the facts. China has a social media program of its own it's going to kick off in 2020 called Social Credit. And it is both using the tools of Facebook, essentially -- the same techniques -- for behavior modification so it can control its entire population. This is a countrywide thing, using WeChat and other tools. Everybody will be required to conform to this model. The notion -- yes, this allows people to communicate, but within very narrow bands. It does not allow them to protest. It does not allow them to push back.

John Donovan:  
Emily?

Emily Parker:  
Okay. So, that's objectively untrue -- because if you spend time in China and you actually talk to almost anybody in China, they will acknowledge immediately that yes, social media and the Internet is very censored.

00:34:04

But the idea that it's just a kind of theoretical thing, that it doesn't allow them to organize, is just factually untrue, because people are using social media platforms to organize local and national campaigns all the time. And this was something that was completely impossible before the Internet. So --

John Donovan:  
Frank?

Franklin Foer:

I mean, but we can see empirically, the state is consolidating power in the era of social media. And then, I just want to describe a little more about what Roger is talking about, the social credit system. China is basically using its social networks in order to give you the equivalent of a credit score, your trustworthiness. And so, if you're friends with a human rights lawyer, your trustworthiness score goes down. They're exploiting social media that way. If you share an item from state-run media, your score goes up. I don't see how you could point to China as an example of how it's good for democracy --

John Donovan:

But how can you say the argument that having -- giving the opportunity for millions of people to have a voice in a place that, before, had a single voice -- does not represent real progress, a real breakthrough?

00:35:04

Franklin Foer:

So, very simply. It -- this is a bait and switch. So, it's exactly like Facebook in the early days, when it was free; nothing but puppy photos, nothing but family photos. No ads, no manipulation of any kind. The Chinese have got everybody into social media systems and they're going to do exactly the thing that Facebook did and they're going to take all the things that people believe are the Holy Grail and make those impossible. In fact, use the techniques to punish those who would seek to use them that way.

John Donovan:  
Emily or Jeff?

Emily Parker:

Do you want to say anything, Jeff? Oh, okay. Well, again, I think we're operating on the assumption that China is filled with people that are dying for a system that is identical to the United States. And again, that's just not true. Right? China has a completely different political system and social media by existing or not existing is not going to change that. The one objective fact here is that in a country where there was basically one voice there are now

millions of voices, people finding like-minded individuals, raucous debate having on social media channels.

00:36:05

Is this going to lead to a U.S.-style democracy? No, but that's not a social media question. That's a --

Male Speaker:  
But it's also --

Roger McNamee:  
I would like to push back because I think democracy is a very specific thing. It relates to a way that a government operates. It relates to those four pillars that we talked about. And again, you can sit there and say there's variants, pluses or minuses, but I think the notion that free and fair elections are part of China, the notion that there's active participation in the people in civic life, I'm willing to concede that that might happen. Protection of human rights for all citizens, demonstrably not true in China and a rule of law that applies equally to all citizens is again, demonstrably not true in China.

Emily Parker:  
Again, the resolution that social media is good for democracy not social media creates democracy or causes democracy, so the argument that I'm making that I really think most Chinese people would support is that social media has led to a more democratic situation than there was before.

Jeff Jarvis:  
Let me just argue here as a bridge builder that I think you're both right in the sense that Emily's argument is --

John Donvan:  
Both right like ruins the debate. So, don't go too far with that.

00:37:05

[laughter]

Jeff Jarvis:  
That's what I do. I ruin things. That China is more democratic than it was. However, I'll agree with you. I do not want a Chinese internet. Indeed, I fear that if we enable an allow governments throughout the world to regulate the internet to create highest common denominator of regulation and the lowest common denominator of freedom, we'll end up with the Chinese internet. So, I'm not -- I don't think either of us is supporting the Chinese internet, but we are supporting the idea that it is bit-by-bit inch-by-inch leading to more freedom there.

Franklin Foer:

But how can -- if it's -- if social media is a mechanism for social control ultimately, which is what you're saying --

Jeff Jarvis:

If it's misused.

Franklin Foer:

But it is in China. You're conceding, right, that there's this relationship between the state and social media companies that work hand in glove in order to create [unintelligible] system. It's called social management in China. We don't want that. We should be happy that there are pockets of organization that have cropped up, but we always need to look at the bigger picture here. You instructed us to say is it on balance good for democracy?

00:38:04

And I think that if you looked at China you'd have to say on balance China is moving towards a more status, authoritarian system and whatever pockets of democracy are popping up are not overwhelmed by this grand cooperation between the state and social media.

Emily Parker:

But the other thing about China and the internet, as someone who's looked at this for 10, 15 years, is that first of all, the Orwellian narrative of China that we see in the media is not accurate. It's -- China does not have this Orwellian perfectly executed social credit system, perfectly executed censorship. Information always gets through, always gets through. So, that's part of it. And two, it's a battle. It's always been a battle between the people and the state and yes, has internet censorship become more pervasive? For sure, but it's become more pervasive precisely because authorities recognize social media as a threat to their power.

Male Speaker:

And --

John Donovan:

Okay.

Roger McNamee:

And has Xi extended his unilaterally extended his term? Yes.

00:39:00

Are the people in China --

Emily Parker:

But would that have happened without social media? Maybe. This is a Chinese political question.

Male Speaker:

In order for it to be --

Emily Parker:

Social media is not going to overthrow -- there is not -- right now there is not a critical mass in China looking to overthrow the government. That's just not the reality. So, social media simply by existing is not going to change that.

Roger McNamee:

And there was not a majority of people in east Germany looking to overthrow that system until the opportunity actually happened. This is about democracy. This is -- the definition of democracy is the one that we all know, not some fictional idea. We're -- you're using Orwellian version of democracy where absolute state control is democracy because people get to talk to each other because they don't care about having control of their government.

John Donovan:

Jeff, let me give you the last word and then I want to move on to our --

Jeff Jarvis:

Well, maybe move on the next topic. I want -- let me talk about democracy. Democracy isn't about government. Democracy is about citizens and democracy is about the voices of the people finally heard. Democracy is about the ability of the people to now find each other and join together and find communities and take action together.

00:40:02

Franklin Foer:

To inflex outcomes, which is inherently a political activity, right?

Jeff Jarvis:

Well, let me answer part of what you said, Frank, which is about the notion that Donald Trump just like China is misusing this internet. True. But who amplifies every one of his Tweets? Who assigns reports to write stories -- entire news stories -- about every one of his damned Tweets? That's not news. They should be saying, "What he Tweeted today" --

John Donovan:

Jeff, thank you for --

Jeff Jarvis:

-- but instead --

John Donovan:

-- bringing this argument now to where I want to bring it to, U.S. politics.

Jeff Jarvis:

You're welcome.

John Donovan:

Very, very excellent move on my behalf. So, thank you. Your opponents --

Jeff Jarvis:

[laughs] I'm a bridge-builder --

John Donovan:

Your opponents are saying, "This is not a book. This is not the book technology" -- that this is a game-changer of a different kind because it actually is getting deep into our psyches, by -- on purpose, not to destroy democracy, but to make profits by manipulating our behavior, and for the worse -- that that's where the money is -- that this is different this time.

Jeff Jarvis:

Two arguments to make. One is that I think my august competitors here are dissing the public.

00:41:03

They're not giving the public credit for the agency, and intelligence, and self-respect that they have. I don't think that everyone I know is addicted to technology any more than people Erasmus feared would be addicted to books. But I think people do have the agency and do have the ability. I argued with a European regulator last week who said that, you know, everyone on Facebook is there just to make money for Facebook. And I said, "You're arguing, then, that 2 billion people are too stupid to know why they're there, to do what they want to do." I've been on Facebook last week with friends who had thyroid cancer operations, two in a row, and I've had the same thing. That's a miracle that we could talk about that kind of openness in a way never possible. So, first argument is, we do have agency. Second argument is, I see more and more this debate is really about media. This debate is about media and how media have ruined -- and I mean media; I'm self-confessed here -- that we have ruined democracy to a great extent. The media -- the democracy that we gave to the Internet age was deeply flawed, deeply polarized.

00:42:00

John Donovan:

All right. Let me have Frank --

[applause]

-- respond to some of what you said there.

Franklin Foer:

And -- are we dissing the people? Well, we're really upset about the democratic outcomes that we're seeing right now. We're -- to the election -- I don't know if Jeff is so happy with the people -- that he's happy about the election of Donald Trump, the rise of populism, all these other trends that have emerged from the social media world. And I think that they're missing the primary thing that we're pushing here, and [unintelligible] we're arguing is central to understanding social media, which is that it enables great things. But the system, at the end, is not controlled by the people; it's controlled by a couple monopolistic concerns that are out to manipulate the people, and they create hierarchies, they're sorting information. It's not this pure environment where people are able to express their will. Their will is being mediated through these companies that are trying to hijack everybody's attention, to make money off of how they toy with people's emotions.

00:43:01

And I don't see them having any response, really, to the way that Facebook works. And in fact, I see you conceding, largely, that there are huge problems with the way that Facebook exist. I mean, I've read the very eloquent things that you've written, pleading with Facebook to do better --

Jeff Jarvis:

Because I think it's up to all of us to collaborate and work together. This thing is new. And yes, I work with Facebook, and I criticize Facebook because I think they need to do better.

John Donovan:

But you're saying now, we actually don't know what it's going to be, and they're saying new, dangerous new.

Jeff Jarvis:

But that's the dystopian view that sells these days.

Roger McNamee:

Sorry, sorry --

Jeff Jarvis:

It sells very well.

Roger McNamee:

I can't allow that framing.

John Donovan:

All right. If -- am I --

Roger McNamee:

I'm really sorry. So, this stuff started in 2004, okay? I got involved in 2006. The science on which it is based originated in the early part of the 20th century with the propaganda efforts of the British government to recruit people for World War I, perfected by public relations, and then enhanced when the gaming -- the gambling industry went electronic with slot machines.

00:44:11

And this is -- there are 10 core techniques that they use to prey on the weakest elements of the human psyche. And it works -- it's been tried forever, but it really didn't work until you had the smartphone -- a single universal device available every moment that you're awake. People's behavior has changed really radically. And this notion that people have agency -- obviously, they do. They have less agency than they had. There have always been people who believed in flat earth and other nonsense. There are literally five times as many people who identify with a demonstrably untrue issue today as there were 15 years ago, before Facebook existed. If you look at democracy trends -- okay -- the trends of democracy, the chart goes straight down. The index of democracy, the Freedom in the World case [spelled phonetically], has gone from 94 to 86 since 2010. Okay?

00:45:02

And it is accelerating. It is going geometrically down. I'm sitting here and going, "I don't know how much time we have to wait," okay? The incentives are perverse here.

John Donvan:

All right. Let me take this to Emily. Emily, because --

[applause]

-- so, I think Roger is directly challenging your mirror metaphor that it's human behavior we're talking about and this is just one more tool. He's saying this is some -- that the DNA is changing in a way because of the mix with technology.

Male Speaker:

It's addiction. It's addiction is what it is.

Emily Parker:

Well, yeah, I guess you know the mirror catalyst argument, you know, if democracy if we are seeing antidemocratic trends across the world it's just not clear that social media is what's causing them or if social media, again, is just reflecting these trends. And so, as I've said many times, social media on its own is not going to create a democratic system of government. And I think, you know, as Frank said in his opening, you mentioned the statistic 52 percent of people have not had a conversation with someone who disagrees with them.

00:46:02

Is that really a social media thing? That's a real-life thing. How many times do you see a Trump supporter and a liberal like sitting in Starbucks and having a civil pleasant conversation? Not that often, right? How many ardent MSNBC viewers are also watching Fox? Right? These are not social media things. Social media is reflecting that reality and yeah, anyway.

John Donovan:

All right. Let me take it to Frank.

Franklin Foer:

All right, but if social media is reflecting a terrible reality how could it be good for democracy? I mean, isn't that -- I got to jump in here. What the hell did we do in media all these years but think we were a reflection of society and reflect society's worst and paint a terrible picture of society? I think what we have going on here, John, is actually fear two different kinds of fear about the future. At the elite level, which is where we are, my colleagues are, there's a fear of their institutions being challenged by these new voices and at the populist level there is a fear of losing jobs. There's a fear of an unknown future.

00:47:01

And I would argue this comes back to number one, media, in painting this [unintelligible] picture. And number two, government in having to get its act together to figure out how to give us a more secure life in the future. That's not social media's job, that's government's job.

John Donovan:

I'm not sure I've heard that fear voiced by this side, but --

Roger McNamee:

It's worse than that. We're not having a debate about whether media is good or bad for democracy. We're having a debate about whether social media is good for democracy. That is the case they must make. In order to show that we have to see some actual evidence of democracy improving somewhere. There are little anecdotes, right? #MeToo. There are the women's march, indivisible, black lives matter.

Jeff Jarvis:

Those are not little to the people who were involved in them.

Roger McNamee:

Black lives matter is an important movement in this country.

Jeff Jarvis:

May I speak? May I speak?

[applause]

Roger McNamee:

That matters a lot more than a little. Bear with me a moment. Those -- we look -- I look at the march for our lives. They've changed a law in Florida so now you have to be 21 years old to buy a rifle, okay?

00:48:02

And you have to wait three days. Is that going to end gun violence? No. My point here is that social media is unbelievably good at germinating a debate. It is terrible about sustaining one. The lesson, the lesson of the Arab Spring was that the problem of these whole things is you need to have organization. You need to have commitment. You need to have deliberation over time. And these networks have been designed to prevent deliberation. Literally it is a design function. This is where my experience having been there may be provide me with an advantage but I look at it as the sort of thing that we didn't realize that it was going to go wrong. And my point here is the future doesn't have to be horrible. Technology -- this is about the business model. It's not social media that's at fault here. It's the advertising business model and this desire to manipulate people to get them to see more ads.

John Donovan:

I want to let the other side respond, so, let's hear a response from -- you both want to speak actually.

00:49:02

Emily Parker:

Sure.

John Donovan:

Emily and Jeff. Emily.

Emily Parker:

So, I think there's getting a little bit of -- there's a little bit of confusion here about the definition of democracy. I mean, if democracy is, you know, the will of the majority, if democracy is, you know, reflecting the will of the people, you just said, you know, social media reflects the will of the people so that's not democratic, but is that really true?

John Donovan:

That's kind of a zinger line. I want to see what your response is to that.

Franklin Foer:

Because --

John Donovan:

If you don't mind and I'll come back.

Franklin Foer:

A democracy is not democratic outcomes. A democracy is a society based on a commitment to a certain understanding of how politics functions, a certain understanding of how civil society functions and how rights and liberty are maintained. And if democracy produces results like Victor Orban [spelled phonetically] or Brexit or things that actually undermine the underlying values of democracy that democracy that cannibalizes itself.

John Donovan:

So, you're saying you -- if you don't like the outcome of a vote, that you --

Franklin Foer:

No. I'm saying that we --

Emily Parker:

That's what he's saying, yeah --

Franklin Foer:

-- see -- we see the election of authoritarian leaders who are destroying the foundations of democracy.

00:50:07

And so, democracy -- yes -- okay. Great. Victor Orbonne [spelled phonetically] won a vote in Hungary, but he's also using it -- and Erdogan won a vote in Turkey. But they're using their powers to arrest journalists, eliminate core rights --

John Donovan:

Okay.

Franklin Foer:

-- to extend their terms indefinitely.

John Donovan:

I interrupted Emily. I want to let you complete -- if you could --

Emily Parker:

Sure.

John Donovan:

-- remember where you were --

Emily Parker:  
Yeah, yeah, sure.

John Donvan:  
-- because I -- okay. Thanks.

Emily Parker:  
I mean, I just think this debate is getting a little bit skewed between "Social media is good for democracy" and we're arguing, "Well, social media is good for the democracy -- or the outcomes that we like, the democratic outcomes that we like." And the truth is, democracy is -- sometimes yields results that we don't like. That's why it's democracy, right? If we all agreed on everything and we always -- democracy always worked out --

Male Speaker:  
Yeah, John.

Emily Parker:  
-- the way that we liked it, all of us on this stage, it wouldn't be a democracy, right?

[applause]

John Donvan:  
Roger, finish this point, and I want to go questions.

00:51:00

Roger McNamee:  
So, I understand it's a debate, and you want to try to frame what we're saying to suit your position.

[laughter]

The truth here is, there were three Facebook employees embedded in the Trump campaign, using a data set from Cambridge Analytica that was taken from 50 million Facebook users without their permission. The Facebook employees ran Trump's campaign. They focused in three states: Michigan, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania. Those three states determined the outcome of the election. The voter suppression -- I don't know how many votes it moved, but he won by a total of 77,000 votes. My point here is, social media is being used to distort democracy through actual -- and we're still waiting to find out what happened in Brexit. But there appears to have been funny games going on there. These tools are not patrolled. They're not policed. These companies have been irresponsible in their behavior. And it's all because the business model wants to permit everything, including beheadings. It wants to permit --

00:52:06

Jeff Jarvis:  
No. [inaudible] --

Roger McNamee:  
-- you know, all kinds of violence --

Jeff Jarvis:  
That goes too far.

Emily Parker:  
Just one thing -- one thing about the --

[speaking simultaneously]

Male Speaker:  
[inaudible] make money off --

Roger McNamee:  
I'm sorry -- you're -- we'll have a chance to see this very soon. There's going to be considerable revelations on this topic.

Emily Parker:  
I just think one thing on the Trump point. I mean, regardless of what you think of Trump, and you know, whether he should be president or not, I really do not think there is evidence that Facebook caused the election of Donald Trump. And I just --

Roger McNamee:  
I'm not suggesting -- I'm saying --

Emily Parker:  
-- I just don't -- I don't -- I think that --

Roger McNamee:  
-- he could not have won without them, which is a different point.

Emily Parker:  
I just don't think that's necessarily true. I think that's also not terribly respectful to all the people in this country that voted for him, and I'm not saying this as a Trump supporter. I just think, you know, that is democracy, and we might not like it, but we -- it's not -- I just do not think that there is evidence to say that Facebook elected Donald Trump.

John Donovan:

Okay. I'd like to go to some audience questions.

[applause]

Does anybody have any questions?

Female Speaker:

My name is Maria, and I have a question for Mr. Jarvis. In your presentation, you said you wanted to see development of tools that emphasized community over conversation, and I wondered if you could provide some examples of the types of tools you'd like to see and speak to the question of whether or not they can be monetized so that they are effective in an age where sensationalism sells.

00:53:12

John Donovan:

Okay. I'm going to allow the question, even though it's not strictly on the point, because I think your answer to it --

Jeff Jarvis:

It's a great question.

John Donovan:

-- will -- I know, but we do want to stay on the point of whether social media is good for democracy. I want to hear what your ideas are and see how these guys feel, if it ameliorates their concerns about social media.

Jeff Jarvis:

Thank you. That's a great question. And I think we're at, again, the infant days here. So, Facebook recently said it was going to go away from time-wasting videos toward deeper engagement between people. And I argued online that that wasn't going far enough. I argued that the conversation alone is a by-product of community and of democracy. That community is about people joining together because they have a shared need, because they share things with each other, because they have a shared goal. And I think that Facebook, as well as media and journalism, need to do more. So, NII -- which I helped start -- is funding a project called Spaceship Media -- which is bringing together communities in conflict on Facebook and bringing journalism into their conversations.

00:54:08

And you know what? It's working, because people care about having informed conversations, and they trust the journalists to bring them facts. And I find that to be a ray of hope for the future.

John Donovan:

And Jeff, would you -- to tie this to the resolution that you're supporting, would you say that the things that you're talking about help enhance social media as a -- help make social media an enhancer of democracy?

Jeff Jarvis:

Absolutely. And I think that the other side has been asking for some examples, and this is one small example [inaudible] --

John Donovan:

Okay. Now, I want to hear the response from the other side. Do you feel better, having heard that?

Franklin Foer:

No.

[laughter]

Actually, again, I'm looking at the big picture of what's happening and I actually think Jeff has laid blame on media and I'd have to say media itself has gotten worse in the age of social media. And I'll give you an example that illustrates that. So, when you -- as media has become dependent on Facebook for traffic and therefore revenue, it ends up doing the things that are popular on Facebook that it knows will work on Facebook.

00:55:00

Now, in 2012 there was a story about a lion called Cecil what was his name. He was like the Kardashian of lions and there --

Male Speaker:

Cecil. Cecil the lion.

Franklin Foer:

Cecil the lion who was killed by a --

Male Speaker:

Who needs Google?

Franklin Foer:

Yeah. Did I curse?

John Donovan:

I don't -- crap is -- I think -- is NPR approved word. Okay. Anybody from NPR here?

Franklin Foer:

It would not fly in Chinese media. So, Cecil the lion is the lion -- Kardashian of lions. Gets killed by a Minnesota hunter who posted an image on Facebook and the internet goes crazy. And so, every news organization tries to latch on to a little bit of the popularity of this story and in the end high ground magazines, low ground magazines. There were 3.2 million stories published about Cecil the lion and that's because everybody is trying to scrape traffic from social media and so in a way it's created homogenization. And I would argue that the trends that we're talking about like Donald Trump are equivalent to the Cecil the lion of politics, because media knew that they shouldn't give that guy attention when he was talking about Barak Obama's birth certificate, yet they did continuously because they knew that it would get clicks.

00:56:03

John Donvan:

It's totally true that the media did that. So, what's --

Jeff Jarvis:

But that's not social media's fault. That's media's fault. Thank you for making my argument, Frank.

John Donvan:

Right, but the incentive -- he's arguing the incentive for that came from the way social media does business.

Jeff Jarvis:

The ad model based on pure volume means that you will do anything to get attention. And you will rewrite everybody else's stories to get the same stories. Believe me, I'm in the business and I know that's exactly what happens but that is not Facebook's fault. That's our fault. No, but it's because we're living in a world where the economy, the online advertising market is so consolidated and dominated and we have all these tricks that we -- and these trending things that we glean off Facebook and it's hard to argue that click bait is not a product of a Facebook social media world. Media shouldn't go down that path, but media is pushed down that path and shame on media, but shame on social media too.

Roger McNamee:

I was the Sunday editor of the New York Daily News and I wrote click bait for headlines long before the internet.

Jeff Jarvis:

Right.

00:57:00

So, you were a tabloid. You weren't the New York Times. You weren't these other institutions that have been inflicted by --

Roger McNamee:

Oh.

[laughter]

Oh. The elitism shows itself.

[laughter]

John Donovan:

All right. Everyone calm down. I'm going to go on to another question.

Female Speaker:

Hi, I'm Kristin [spelled phonetically] and my question is how is social media affecting voter participation?

John Donovan:

I think that counts. That's on topic. So, you look ready for that Roger.

Roger McNamee:

So, it -- it's totally unclear. There was a study done recently that suggested that -- so, Facebook has told everybody that they can increase turnout and they in fact did do so a few elections ago. They did not do a campaign this time to do turnout. In fact, the thing that was primarily done on Facebook in 2016 was voter suppression. It turns out that because negative emotions are more viral than positive because facts are a fixed point and lies and disinformation can morph and suit the needs of anybody, it turns out that Facebook was a fantastic tool for voter suppression.

00:58:11

And there are 4 million people who voted for Obama in 2012 who did not vote in 2016. And there's considerable evidence that a portion of that, we don't know exactly what portion, was suppressed because the Russians and others on Facebook and on Twitter and other places, you know, confused them. They built up the Hillary email thing. And if I may just throw one thing back at this, in my opinion I'm not one of these people who thinks that the problem with Trump, you know, my problem the political disagreement with Trump means that he shouldn't be elected. That's not my problem. My problem is that I do not believe that the result was fair because of the Russian interference for certain and to some smaller extent because of Facebook's participation on behalf of one side and not the other.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Oh, I'm going to not ask you to respond to the Trump point, because it's not on point.

00:59:02

Right by the aisle there.

Female Speaker:

My name is Sara [spelled phonetically] and my question is, is social media good for people making contributions and developing projects as a result of the social media.

John Donovan:

Can you be more specific? I'm not --

Female Speaker:

Yes.

John Donovan:

-- quite sure what you're saying.

Female Speaker:

So, if somebody has a project and says, "I would like to raise a million dollars," and they go to social media, and they raise -- I'm making this up -- \$10 million, is that good or bad? Is that --

John Donovan:

Let's take it very quickly --

Jeff Jarvis:

We have an example, just from the crisis at the border caused by Donald Trump, where after his Tweets and after the video -- the audio that came out, thanks to journalism and Republica -- last I checked, more than \$15 million was raised on Facebook for an organization to bail out families and give them legal representation, to bring families back together, and I would argue, in the end, make America America again.

John Donovan:

Okay, sir. There's a question there.

[applause]

Male Speaker:

Hi. My name is Andrew from Boise, Idaho.

01:00:00

My question jumps off something Ms. Parker said in the opening, about social media being a tool. And I thought that this sort of mirrored language that I've heard about firearms, and that we shouldn't blame guns for violence; we should blame the people that use them. And so, my question is, if social media is a tool, is it a dangerous tool or a benign tool? If it is dangerous, should we regulate it and how? And if it's benign, how can it be bad or good for democracy?

John Donovan:

I'm going to let both sides answer that question, but I'll start with you --

Emily Parker:

Sure.

John Donovan:

-- Emily Parker.

Emily Parker:

Yeah. I think -- that's a good question. I think the tool -- yeah, it is a tool. And I think the firearms -- I mean, people have used that specifically to refer to social media. Yeah. I think we've established -- and I don't -- I think Jeff and I, even on this side, agree that social media can be used for bad. I mean, that's not really in doubt, right? We've seen that in many situations. Again, if we're talking about democracy, the good guys don't always win, right? Just as social media can be used for good, and it could be used for bad. You know, the regulation question is very, very tricky, because can Facebook itself do better? Yes. And I think we're already seeing people pushing Facebook to do better.

01:01:04

We're seeing some reforms inside the company. I think we can push these social media platforms. But then, you have to ask, who is going to decide what is the accurate? Who is going to decide what's the right social media? Is it going to be our own government? Is it going to be the Trump Administration? Is that what we really want? We want Trump deciding what is okay to say on Twitter? Okay. We can try that. Do we want Mark Zuckerberg, who kind of, like, you know, got us into this mess in the first place, do we want him deciding what is okay? Do we want an algorithm deciding what's okay? So, I think, a lot of times, you know, they're just like, "Let's just regulate, let's just fix this problem." But we have to think really carefully about, like, who is going to be the arbiter here?

John Donovan:

Okay. So --

Emily Parker:

Who's --

Roger McNamee:

So, that last point, just so we're clear -- Facebook, Google, they decide exactly what you see. There are, at any moment, at least a million stories they could show you that you would think were really interesting. They pick the 20 that help their business model most.

01:02:02

They censor like crazy. Okay. They have something called "community standards." Now, if you go to Myanmar, the community standards in Myanmar made it okay to persecute a religious minority. In December, Medecins Sans Frontieres [spelled phonetically] said there were at least 9,000 people killed in what the United Nations has said is a classic ethnic cleansing enabled -- enabled -- by Facebook, singularly enabled by Facebook. There are 43,000 missing parents, all presumed to be dead. These are real-life consequences. Since 2006, since the year I met Zuck, we've had -- Freedom Watch has talked for 12 consecutive years of declines in freedom globally. Now, maybe it's a coincidence, but our job here is really simple. It's to decide: is social media good for democracy?

01:03:00

If freedom is declining, I would say that's pretty definitionally an argument against the proposition.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Response from this side? I think it was just a bit of a rhetorical flourish, so well --

Male Speaker:

It's a good one.

John Donovan:

-- not meant to be pejorative, but a good one.

[laughter]

Roger McNamee:

113 countries have seen a net decline since [inaudible] --

John Donovan:

We're coming to the end of our question time. I just want to -- since the issue of regulation has come up, very quickly, I want to put the regulation question to you, Frank, because you've talked about, you know, we should do some things to break up these companies.

Franklin Foer:

Right.

John Donovan:

And we should do some things --

Franklin Foer:

Well, let me just say first that the resolution is not about --

John Donovan:

Regulation. I [unintelligible] --

Franklin Foer:

Regulation. And so, I have my opinions about it. And in fact, I agree with Emily. I feel like the problem in places like China is that you have this collaboration between the state and social media, and I fear that regulation could ensconce it. I favor solutions that create pluralism, because right now, the problem with social media is that it's monopolistic, it's highly consolidated, and if you have these massive concentrations of power, these massive systems that exert so much control over the public square, over markets, I don't see how that could be good for democracy in the end.

01:04:16

John Donovan:

Okay. You answered the question that way I was going to frame it. In fact, I want to make clear we are not arguing social media should be regulated, but I wanted to see how --

Jeff Jarvis:

But let me answer that even though -- because we're on it.

John Donovan:

Sure, and this will be the last comment.

Jeff Jarvis:

I think there's much well-intentioned regulation in Europe that has had horrible consequences. From the courts the right to be forgotten has Europe again rewriting and trying to erase history. The copyright rules have taken news out of countries. The privacy regulations, GDPR, means that American publishers are cutting off Europe. There's an effort in France to come up with a fake news law, which as Emily said, who decides what's fake and not? There's a simplistic view that all the problems of society were caused by social media and all of them can be solved if government just steps in, especially in Europe and that's the problem.

01:05:06

Roger McNamee:

That's not what we're debating here, okay?

John Donovan:

That's true, and that's why --

Roger McNamee:

That was a hyperbolic statement that I think seriously we -- may a yellow card maybe, because that --

[laughter]

We are not blaming all of society's ills on social media. We are debating whether social media is good for democracy and I think that's pretty clear-cut.

Jeff Jarvis:

I think, Roger, for much of what you said --

Roger McNamee:

Well, yes you did blame many of society's ills on social media that I don't think --

John Donovan:

And that concludes round two of this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate where our motion is Social Media is Good for Democracy.

[applause]

Now we move on to round three. Round three are closing statements by each debater in turn. They will be two minutes each. And speaking first to make her closing statement in support of the motion Emily Parker, digital diplomacy advisor and former State Department official.

[applause]

Emily Parker:

Okay. Thank you. Okay. So, just to conclude what I started in the opening, I just wanted to conclude a little bit with what I was talking about with my own experience in Silicon Valley where we did not have a complicated ad model and we did not have secret algorithms.

01:06:10

We were just using -- we were just a small startup trying to create a platform for civil, thoughtful debate and what I observed in that capacity is that there is a lot of problems on the platform side, but also on the user side. And what users generally wanted was more sensational content, viral content, sound bites, and you know, things that it's -- these are not platforms are not causing this, they are reflecting it. And I think the best analogy for this it's

like, you know, one day you're hungry and you think to yourself I'd really like a salad for lunch. It would be great if I had a salad for lunch, but in reality, you gravitate towards those cheeseburgers, right? You will gravitate towards a cheeseburger and I think social media platforms are sort of in that same world where, you know, people think that they want the salad, but they go for the cheeseburger and this is a free market.

01:07:01

This is a free market and, you know, social media platforms can provide more nutritional content, but they can't force feed people. They can't force feed people salads, you know? And so, there's a lot of onus' [spelled phonetically] on us as the user and if we're really talking about democracy one thing I don't like about the other argument is that it does portray people as sort of these passive victims that are being manipulated by these big platforms. We have agency here. We can create the social media experiences that we want, and I think that, you know, social media, it is allowing for an explosion of different voices. It's allowing for people to find others like them. It's allowing for mass association and organization and I think that is a fundamental part of the definition of democracy and so let's not throw out the good with the bad. Let's improve our social media experience but acknowledge that it's also life would be a lot worse without it. Thank you.

John Donovan:  
Thank you, Emily Parker.

[applause]

Our resolution Social Media is Good for Democracy.

01:08:00

Here making his closing statement against this motion, Roger McNamee, investor and venture capitalist.

Roger McNamee:

So, the proposition, Social Media is Good for Democracy, I believe social media does precisely the opposite. I think it undermines all four pillars of democracy. Our opponent has created a definition of democracy that is non-standard. I tried to pick the standard one. Free and fair elections. The openness of the of the platforms to bad actors has undermined elections around the world. Literally, every democracy in Western Europe, and now every democracy in North America -- other than Canada -- has experienced it. Citizen participation. Pervasive surveillance and manipulation undermine the user ability to participate as citizens. Social media empowers emotion, not deliberation. It isolates users in filter bubbles of like-minded people who do not engage with opposing views. Third pillar: human rights for all. Social media undermines human rights, notwithstanding what our opponent suggests.

01:09:04

Addiction is a real problem. Are any of you the parents of, say, teenaged girls between the ages of, you know -- well, let's say pre-teens through teens, or teenaged boys as well? On Instagram -- and look at what happens. Look at the behaviors. Look at what happens with mean girls. They're -- these things are tools that in the hands of the wrong people are terrible. In Sri Lanka, they had to shut Facebook down temporarily because hate speech led to real-life violence. And I've already talked about what's happened in Myanmar. I mean, that's tens of thousands of people potentially dead. And lastly the rule of law. YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter were exploited by the Russians, to first sow discord in the United States and ultimately to elect Donald Trump. As a result, the rule of law in the United States is under assault. It happens every single day. I want to just ask you -- think about whether the world feels like it's operating better than it was.

01:10:02

112 countries have less freedom. I want you, please, to consider voting against this proposition. This is our country. We can't forever for these guys to figure it out. Thank you.

John Donovan:

Thank you, Roger McNamee.

[applause]

The motion, once again, Social Media is Good for Democracy. Here to make his closing statement in support of the motion, Jeff Jarvis, Director of the Tow-Knight Center for Entrepreneurial Journalism.

Jeff Jarvis:

What's bad for democracy, I'm going to see, is this debate, because I think that the dystopia and the fear that is leading to moral panic is leading to a reallocation of our resources in society. Facebook is hiring 20,000 people to try to get rid of junk on its platform. And we'd say good to that. But for the sake of comparison -- it's not a great comparison -- in America, there are now fewer than 30,000 journalists working for newspapers. What does that say about our allocation of resources in a society? I would argue once again that this is a very new thing, this Internet. It is too soon to panic, my friends.

01:11:02

It is too soon to think that we've lost. It is too soon to think that the public has given up their sense. They haven't. If you didn't believe that, then you don't believe in democracy. So, the problem I have here in great measure is with the dystopia. When I look at my Facebook feed, I find generally good things. I don't find Nazis. I don't find Russians. I find good reason to be there. Same with my Twitter feed. Are there bozos, and trolls, and Russians there? Yes. But

the number is small, and I expect to see evidence -- journalistic evidence, scientific evidence -- of how bad this is before we proceed. I am, as you can hear, an optimist. That puts Emily and me at a bad position tonight, because dystopia sells. I know, because Frank's book is selling far better than my last optimistic book, and Roger is on TV every other hour -- because this story is out there, and sells, and because it applies -- it appeals to a fear, and a fear that is very rational. And I get that, and I'm not making fun of them for this.

01:12:02

We have many reasons to fear in this society, right now, but they are not the fault of social media. Indeed, I believe firmly that social media is what enables new voices to be heard in a democracy and to fix that. So, please prove me wrong about my pessimism and vote for optimism, and vote for our future. Thank you.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Jeff Jarvis. Once again, the motion -- Social Media is Good for Democracy. Here to making his closing statement against the motion, Franklin Foer. Staff writer at the Atlantic.

Franklin Foer:

Counter to our opponents. I'd like to thank you for participating in this glorious display of democracy, which has somehow managed to withstand the age of social media. We've had 15 years of social media. How has democracy fared in that area -- in that era? Well, we've given you so much evidence -- 12 years of declining freedom. The number of democracies in the world since Facebook was invented have shrunk by 25.

01:13:03

The prestige of democracy plummets each year, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit. Ronald Engelhart [spelled phonetically], the great political scientist, has said, "Democracy has never been in more precarious shape since the 1930s." Maybe we can afford to wait for a more glorious future to arrive, but there are a lot of people who are suffering now who can't afford to wait. Of course, we don't blame social media for all of these ills. You know, we're arguing that it has exacerbated problems that exist, it has done very specific things to undermine democracy. And if you think that the picture is muddled that social media has done some good, but it's also done a lot of bad, then you have to vote with us. If you're okay with the status quo that you're willing to take a flier, you can vote with these guys.

01:14:00

Authoritarians love this medium. Putin has exploited it to death. The Chinese are using it as a method for remaking their society. Orwell just didn't have enough imagination to grasp what this could do, but I want you to use your agency as they suggest. There are tech executives

here at Aspen who are watching this debate and you can tell them, you can send a message to them tonight that for the sake of our democracy they need to do better. You have the agency to make a difference with your vote tonight by sending them a message to clean up. Thank you.

[applause]

John Donovan:

Thank you, Frank Foer, and that concludes round three and our closing statements in this Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. I really want to thank the four of you for the way that you conducted this. I mean, you both -- both sides obviously felt passionately about it, but you thought about it at length. You came prepared.

01:15:00

You came prepared to hear what the other side has to say if only to try to demolish it, but there was respect in that. There was respect in that and you acted civilly, and you treated each other respectfully and that's what we aim for here, so I want to thank all of you for the way that you did this and give you a round of applause for that.

[applause]

If you enjoyed this debate, we would love it if you would tell your friends about it. It's going to be -- it's the thing that we do. We think that we do it well and we would love it if you help spread the word. You can learn about that by going to our website, IQ2us.org and of course as I said at the beginning we live on as a podcast that you can access through our website and through apps in the Google store and the Apple Store and we're also going to be on NPR station -- public radio stations so check your local listings for that. While we're waiting for the results to come I just wanted to ask a sort of practical question. The competition is over, but to see what all four of you think about this given everything that's said and that's as we look forward to the elections this fall, the 2018 elections, what do you think that voters should keep in mind as they work through and work with and expose themselves to social media.

01:16:08

I'll start with you, Roger, on that.

Roger McNamee:

So, I think that the core issues to look for is that the Cambridge analytic dataset is still out there. The playbook is out there for how to use it. In fact, for certain geographies like Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Florida, North Carolina, and Virginia, you know, the votes are going to be tight enough that voter suppression can be incredibly effective from that tool. We would anticipate that the Russian focus will be on denial of service attacks on counties to try to prevent the voter rules from being available in election offices to try to

prevent election machinery and all that, you know, power grid blackouts, that sort of thing. We don't know that this is going to happen, but this is the kind of stuff we have to watch out for. And then each of us, the most important thing to note is that this is mostly about voter suppression so we all have to vote. Please, vote for whoever you want to vote for, but everybody should vote. The problem in America is that we've become consumers, right?

01:17:04

In 2000 -- it began in the '50s, right? But by 2001 after 9/11 the argument for what we should do to be good citizens to go out and shop, right? Facebook didn't invent the consumer focus. They arrived late in it and took advantage of it and took it to another level. And so, when you go out there, just remember, we got to vote. We got to actually participate. We've got to care. And thank you to all of you for caring enough to come and be part of this -- whichever way you voted. I mean, they did an amazing job, right? I mean --

John Donovan:  
[inaudible] showing respect for the other side.

Male Speaker:  
That -- I mean, that was a hard thing to argue, and they did a brilliant job, right?

[laughter]

And --

John Donovan:  
Back to the question I asked about the 2018 elections. What would be your advice, Emily?

Emily Parker:  
Diversify your sources. Don't just read Facebook.

[laughter]

[applause]

John Donovan:  
And Jeff?

Jeff Jarvis:  
My fondest hope for both media, and Facebook, and Twitter, is that they can help make strangers less strange -- that the notion of the other is what has been demonized, not only in the U.S., but also in Europe.

01:18:00

And so, reach out to someone who is not like you -- whether it's on Facebook or whether it's in person. And do so with an open hand. If we can't do that, then we are kind of screwed.

[applause]

Franklin Foer:

Yeah. I worry perpetually about how we're ever going to back ourselves out of the mess that we're in -- because sometimes, it feels like we've just fallen into such a deep social ditch where -- with what Jeff is describing -- where the lack of interaction with people who we disagree with, the way in which everything -- it's not just Facebook, but -- and social media, but the way in which we geographically have sorted ourselves out. And then there's this whole question of civility that has come up in recent days, which I find to -- you know, I will get dinged by my people on social media for saying this, but I worry that we've lost -- we need to find a way to recover a discourse that aims at persuasion that does not view the people on the other side as somehow less than human.

01:19:11

John Donovan:

Yeah.

Franklin Foer:

And that's not going to happen this election, unfortunately.

Roger McNamee:

We have to find some way to bring the people -- roughly a third of population -- that identify with things that are demonstrably untrue -- we have to bring them back into the real world. And I don't know how you do that. There's no technology solution for that. Face --

John Donovan:

But there's debate.

Roger McNamee:

No, there is debate. My point is --

John Donovan:

Yeah. No, I mean, there is debate.

Roger McNamee:

-- there is a [inaudible] --

John Donovan:

And I have final results, so --

Roger McNamee:

Oh, okay.

John Donovan:

-- I'm going to cut to those final results. So, I have the final results. Once again, our resolution - Social Media is Good for Democracy. The way we determine victory is the difference between the first and the second votes. And the first vote on the resolution, Social Media is Good for Democracy, 36 percent of you agreed with that. 46 percent were against. And 18 percent were undecided. Again, those are the first results. Again, reminding you, it's the difference between the first and second vote that determines our winner.

01:20:02

Let's look at the second vote -- the team arguing for the motion, Social Media is Good for Democracy, their first vote was 36 percent. Their second vote, 34 percent. They lost 2 percentage points. The team against the motion, their first vote was 46 percent. Their second vote, 63 percent. They pulled up 17 percentage points on the against side. That means the team arguing against the motion -- Social Media is Good for Democracy -- are winners, here in Aspen, by our audience. Thank you very much, everybody.

Male Speaker:

I want to thank --

[applause]

John Donovan:

This debate is not over.

Male Speaker:

[inaudible].

John Donovan:

Our audiences are tuning in online, on public radio, and our podcast. They still have time to vote. You can still see those results ongoing at IQ2US.org. I'm John Donovan. Thanks very much. We'll see you next time.

[end of transcript]

**This is a rough transcript. Please excuse any errors.**