The Social Dilemma Documentary

The Social Dilemma is a video documentary that argues that social media companies are causing significant damage to society. The video is mostly presented by **insiders** in the tech industry (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc.) who confess to the harmful nature of the technology they helped design.

"If you're not paying for the product, then you're the product."

The film clarifies that social media are not free platforms without a product. By using the system, the user and his attention *become the product* that advertisers aim to control. Although we fear these companies sell our data, social media companies **hoard** it to in order to *monetize us*. The data collected is not only **demographic**—every click is measured by algorithms to better understand our behaviour. The end goal is **manipulation**, which is described as a "gradual, slight, **imperceptible** change in [our] own behaviour and perception." According to Harvard professor Shoshana Zuboff, this has made tech companies "the richest companies in the history of humanity."

The Mental Health Dilemma

Justin Rosenstein, creator of the Facebook Like button, believed his feature would spread positivity. Such features provide us with social approval, which we tend to confuse with acceptance and truth. Sadly, the result is only a temporary joy that leaves us empty and depressed without it.

A study of 100,000 teenage girls in the U.S. found that hospital admissions for self-harm have increased by 62% in older teens and 189% in pre-teens (nearly triple). The same patterns exist for teen suicide. Social media became available on smartphones in 2009, and these changes began around 2010/2011.

The Democracy Dilemma

"If you want to control the population of your country, there has never been a tool as effective as Facebook."

Social media is perhaps too efficient at reaching the most **receptive** audiences for ads and campaigns. This allows bad actors such as political and hate groups to easily gain popularity and influence. Studies from MIT (2018) show that fake news spreads six times faster than true news. This leads to a **polarization** of society as newsfeeds make us more **extreme** in our views. We also filter out ideas that don't **align** with our worldview. As a society, we lose touch with the shared facts and reality that bond us.

The documentary uses the Flat Earth movement to show how regular people can be influenced to adopt incredibly idiotic beliefs. The movement was popularized by a Youtube algorithm that recommended the video to hundreds of millions of people.

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What do the film's experts believe will happen in the future to society? Their **earnest** answers include civil war and the end of civilization due to our own **willful** ignorance.

Match the words from the article with their meaning.

1. insider (n)	a) related to statistical characteristics of populations (e.g. age, income)
2. hoard (v)	b) collect and hide away valued objects
3. demographic (adj/n)	c) impossible to see/notice
4. manipulation (n)	d) agree with
5. imperceptible (adj)	e) the action of influencing someone cleverly or unfairly
6. receptive (adj)	f) willing to accept new suggestions/ideas
7. polarization (n)	g) sincere
8. extreme (adj)	h) division into two greatly contrasting groups or sets of opinions
9. align (v)	i) supporting drastic ideas/actions not supported by 'regular' people
10. earnest (adj)	j) a person with inside knowledge of an organization
11. willful (adj)	k) intentional, on purpose (often regardless of negative consequences)

Answer the questions based on the text.

1. **True or False**: The article claims that social media companies are selling our data.
2. In your own words, what is the 'mental health' dilemma?
3. What can we infer about the author's view on the cause of teenage health problems?
4. Describe the "**democracy dilemma**" presented in the article in your own words.
5. Does the author imply that Flat Earthers are in fact stupid?
6. Which claims in the article do you **agree** with? Which do you disagree with?
7. Do you agree with the article's thoughts on the future of society?

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