

Is Tech Neutrality above Murphy's Law?

Technology is an extraordinary compliment to human intelligence. The advent of the internet, which empowered us to connect on a large scale, combined with the evolution of computers into ubiquitous pocket devices, has formed a central nervous system for our species. Information has always been valuable, but this nervous system has created a wealth of quantifiable metrics, making data the most important asset of our century.

That is amazing, but as we know, Murphy's Law states that "Everything that can go wrong will go wrong". Why would Tech Neutrality be the exception?

There are some side effects to being connected all the time. Getting bombarded with more information than we can process is one of them. Tech companies originally set out to help users cut through the noise and find what they're looking for. However, they didn't stop there.

Nowadays, news feeds are curated by algorithms based on our browsing habits; creating information bubbles and lowering the chances of being exposed to new information and ideas. This is the unintentional consequence of tech companies improving their capabilities and services to be able to engineer an experience that leaves you wanting more.

While it may seem like we're at the mercy of these algorithms, they're not as smart as you might think. More specifically, they can't think in the sense of Artificial General Intelligence, which requires computers to be able to perform root cause analysis and [ask why](#). The technology products we use (video platforms, social networks, etc.) are smart about making predictions based on association.

Connecting associations might seem like common sense for when you're talking about friends and family online, but not so much for media. If a social media platform is a tool to connect with family and friends, then does it make sense for it to also provide you with news? If you want to stay connected, then you have no choice but to use it. You can, however, choose which features and services to use and how to have a healthy relationship with them.

Tech Neutrality is a mindset around tech as purpose-driven tools, and the ethics of user experience and data use. It requires technologically-conscious users, because our behaviour and needs dictate the direction of tech and, in turn, tech affects our behaviour. Users who have a basic understanding of how platforms use their data, have a better shot at recognizing the nature of what they're dealing with and can make wiser decisions regarding usage.

If we are to understand how our data is going to be used and for what purpose, then tech companies need to make it crystal clear. We all lie when we click "I've read and agree to the terms of use". Because they're too long and therefore not practical. A user rights initiative, suitably called "[Terms of Service; Didn't Read \(ToS;DR\)](#)", calls this the biggest lie on the web.

An enterprise solution has no rights to a company's data and is responsible for keeping it confidential, while the opposite applies to our personal data. Because we don't want to pay for online services that we're used to getting for free. Everything comes at a price. "FREE" products cost you your data, and in some cases, your privacy. As they say, if you're not paying for it, there's a good chance you're the product. Tim Berners-Lee, the inventor of the World Wide Web, has a plan to upend the web using decentralized technology so that "[individuals control their own data](#)".

Given the exponential evolution of Artificial Intelligence, mobile devices, wearables, and recently neurological implants for enabling a powerful brain-computer interface, we're at a crucial point as a species. Data ownership is paramount.

Taking steps to maintain Tech Neutrality now is vital. Considering the hackability of technology and human behaviour, as the line between human and machine becomes more blurry, the stakes are high. If Tech Neutrality is maintained, we'd be able to harness the benefits of technology while controlling for the downsides, in order to opt-in to a utopian future.

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