The Anti-Internet Crusade: A Rhetorical Analysis

Kelsey Flannery

Advisor: Michelle Gibbons

Honors Research Project

University of New Hampshire

Abstract

The purpose of this analysis is to understand the successful uses of rhetorical strategies in "tech backlash" discourse, taking Tristan Harris's TEDTalk "How a Handful of Tech Companies Control Billions of Minds Every Day" and the website *Center For Humane Technology* as examples. Harris is one of the few speaking out on the necessity for a "tech backlash." The tech back lash is a term created to explain the current reaction to increased technology use and internet dependence. I will introduce research completed on the creation of the digital society over the last 20 years, and the inherent addictive strategies in commonly used social media applications. This sets the stage for Harris's TEDTalk. Using these research articles support the claims Harris makes enforce his use of successful rhetorical strategies. From a thorough analysis of Harris's TEDTalk and the *Center for Humane Technology*, I was able to identify Harris's use of deliberative rhetoric, which he uses to ask the audience for their support regarding a societal change in how we use technology. Identifying and analyzing his rhetorical strategies within deliberative rhetoric will reveal which strategies are currently at work within tech backlash discourse. He used the persuasive rhetorical devices and effective tools to demonstrate the existence of this societal problem, while still offering applicable solutions.

Introduction

Need to check up on a friend? Check Facebook. Curious about how their last vacation went? Check Instagram. Missing your parents who live out of town? Send a quick text. Communication today is instantaneous. This is a change that many of us have become accustomed to. The benefits seem infinite; parents can find their child's location at any given time, friends can be in constant contact, and people never feel left out. The world could not be

more connected. According to the Pew Research Center, since 2005, social media usage by the public has risen over 60% (2018). The influx of social media into the daily lives of the public has been one of the fastest advances we have made as a society and is one that we continue to dive into head first. The companies behind these applications have created an addictive and manipulative source of entertainment. Both the companies and the applications they sponsor have helped to create a world that lives off of social media.

One of the first attempts at social media was the creation of Myspace. While today it seems like an antique, the creation of Myspace paved the way for the more influential media sites that are used today. Social media influence continued to increase with the rise of Facebook around 2005 (Miller et al, 2016), and the slow roll out of smartphones. The first examples of personal devices, like home computers and Blackberry's seemed ingenious at that time, but now are looked at as ancient. The updates, advances, and creations within technology that are pushed out every year have continually changed how society functions. Our societal culture has become intertwined with the expansion of social media. Within ten years, we have become completely dependent on the devices that live inside our pockets. They now have the ability to decide what we think, how we are thinking, and what we choose to consider important. On these devices, we are controlled by a myriad of different applications, all of which have one constant goal: to retain our attention for as long as possible. This becomes a problem when each application we are using to run our lives is fighting for each second of our attention span.

L.M Sacasas is one of the few who has begun to witness this danger without being blinded by the comfort technology offers. He introduces the need for a "tech backlash" (2018), which he claims is the reaction to the implementation of technology. Sacasas quotes French tech theorist Pail Virilio, "When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck; when you invent

the plane, you invent the plane crash.... Every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress" (2018). Technology cannot exist without dangers. The downfalls associated with technology can be seen every day, within the creation of digital addiction, the decline of social skills, cyberstalking, or the disappearance of privacy. The power given to the individuals within the control rooms of these companies is a completely new territory. The speed that our society has let social media advance led us to a dangerous tipping point. The convenience and comfort offered by technology and by its devices, like social media applications, smartphones, and computers distracts from its addicting counterparts. The public does not focus on the possible manipulative qualities in social media. They do not notice that the people who have the power to affect each of our thoughts and perceptions have their own self-serving goals. Sacasas discusses the attempt to use the backlash to create a more "humane technology", a desire and term used constantly by Tristan Harris, the former design ethicist for Google. Sacasas and Harris are two of the early fighters within this anti-tech war, exploring the dangers that accompany heavy dependence on technology.

To gain support from the public, it is necessary to find ways to bring attention to some of the more negative aspects of technology. This includes creating the foundation for identifying the increased addiction to social media and internet applications within accessible platforms that inform people on what is happening "behind the screen". Tristan Harris has attempted to do this on two different platforms. In 2017, Harris provided a TED Talk titled "How a Handful of Tech Companies Control Billions of Minds Every Day", which discusses the control rooms present behind many popular applications. These control rooms are where people work to steer the thoughts of billions in a specific direction to benefit their organization in some way (Harris). He provided examples of the growing problems within social media, discussing the power given to

those within the control rooms, and what avenues should be looked at if we hope to improve on this issue. His TED Talk discusses the race for attention, which lives behind each application we use every day. This platform was one popular way to gain an audience on the increasing social media manipulation.

Along with offering the lecture through TED's website, in 2018, Harris created the *Center for Humane Technology* with two other co-founders. *Center for Humane Technology (CHT)* is an organization with the goal of "realigning technology with humanity's best interests" (2018). On *CHT'*s site, Harris states the problem, including his belief that social media and technology have been "eroding the pillars of society" (2018). These pillars include: our mental health, our children, our social relationships, and our democracy (*Center for Humane Technology,* 2018*). CHT* also offers a way forward to escape the addictive and manipulative nature of social media, areas in society that can lead to national change, and ways that we can make changes in everyday life. Both the website and the TED Talk offered different ways of diagnosing the same illness, the underlying manipulation within many of our favorite applications, causing many forms of digital addiction.

Through the site and his TED Talk, Harris identifies why the direction society is heading in, one obsessed with social media presence and dependent on technology, is much more dangerous than any advances in the past. The usual worry that technology will deteriorate society is no longer a faraway fear. Today's media is different, he argues. It now has algorithms that work constantly to predict exactly what will keep you on the screen. Smartphones have perfected the ability to enable 24/7 access to each type of social media, and each of these applications have infiltrated specific areas of human life. Through consistent access, they have started to redefine how we view ourselves and others within our social lives (*Center for Humane Technology,*

2018). The danger here lies in the popularity of these applications, and the devices that we use every day. The goals of the corporations do not lie with the best interests of the people who use them. They profit from the more time users spend on their sites, and because of this, they considerable incentive to push outrage, fake news, or target vulnerable audiences. As discussed by Sacasas, this revelation is something we need to take hold of, and use as an igniter to fuel the technology backlash. Technology is evolving faster than we can control, and is leading to a very dangerous future. Harris uses two separate platforms to persuade people about self-serving goals existing within each of the companies that control the devices and applications we use the most, asking the audience to become more aware of the addictive properties in these applications.

In what follows, this project will review multiple resources that discuss the introduction of smart devices, like iPhones and smartphones, and the eventual progression into the current social media consumed world. The fast evolution into a primarily digital society, and the importance placed on the successful use and creation of these prominent social media sites will be discussed in detail, providing the reader with more thorough understanding of the tech evolution. Understanding this will also clarify why some believe it has become necessary for society to begin a tech backlash. It will contain a rhetorical analysis of Tristan Harris, a prominent figure in Silicon Valley, along with an analysis of the *Center for Humane Technology* website. These two sources are early influencers of tech backlash, and can act as exemplars of the discourse emerging out of this anti-tech movement. These analyses will highlight the successful uses of rhetorical strategies within both sources, and discuss the ability to educate and persuade the public on the societal problem that has been recently titled the "downgrade of humanity."

Evolution of a Digital Society: A Review of the Literature

In the last 50 years, humans have worked to create a society that creates and feeds off of social media interaction, digitization of conversation, and the successful creation of these applications. Since 2005, the percentage of people active on social media has risen over 60% (Pew Research Center, 2018). Nearly everything we do or need to do has been digitized; education, communication, shopping, working, leisurely activities like watching television, and the use of the internet for nearly anything. People are expected to have, at minimum, at least one device that provides them constant access to this digital version of the world. The transition into a mobile and digital society has spurred primarily from the creation of the mobile phone (Rainie and Wellman, 2012). It laid the groundwork for people like Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg to build the tools that created our digital reality. They built their legacies from the inventions beforehand; the first telephone, the mobile phone that preceded the smart phone, the television, and the first computer that led to the development of the internet that consumes and controls much of everyday life.

The mobile phone is looked at as the stepping stone to smart phones and the start of the eventual revolution that led to the 'new world' (Gordon, 2016, p.431). While computers stood as the predecessors to smartphone's eventual creation, they did not achieve the same level of freedom and inseparability that cellular devices could. Even before smartphones were considered the appropriate cell phone for the masses, mobile phones were cementing themselves into the public's subconscious. Across North America, "…the devotion to mobile phone use [had] grown. In a 2009 survey, nearly half (45 percent) of Canadians said they "can't leave home" without their mobile phone, with 10 percent of Canadians saying they "can't live" without it" (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p.86). There was a growing sense of 'need' wrapped around the

creation and use of the cell phone; it was similar to someone's house key, or their wallet. The desire to be constantly connected exploded with the cell phone: "The arrival of the mobile phone in the 1980s brought a new element of immediacy" (Gordon, 2016, p.411). Instantaneous responses became necessary and expected. When phones introduced texting, the amount use and activity on mobile phones increased heavily. Between 2006 and 2011, texting became a habitual activity for all Americans, the habit doubling within the teenage age group (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p.89). The ability to text on a mobile device forever changed the way interpersonal communication took place. Suddenly, there was this inherent need to be constantly available when owning or communicating on a mobile device. Rainie and Wellman acknowledge "with increased texting, the sheer volume of communication greatly increases, and individuals become more networked" (2012, p.89). The separation from the outside world was becoming odd, rude, and unnecessary. The internal need to have constant access to the original mobile phone only increased at the invention of the smartphone. Once people had constant access to the internet, even in its youngest forms, the behavior of society changed completely.

It's been suggested that the unveiling of the smartphone caused society to skip ahead multiple generations. It was a tool that seemed to emerge directly from the future. The birth and proliferation of social media "…turned the former two-pound "mobile" calling device into a light, compact multi- functional Swiss Army–style tool, able to communicate, browse, create, and amuse—and to be in touch with social networks in an instant" (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p.91). These devices have become an extension of the human self. They offer individuals the ability to be constantly connected, and permanently entertained. They are a necessity: "Phones, apps, and the web are so indispensable to our daily lives—a testament to the benefits they give us—that we've become a captive audience" (*Center for Humane Technology,* 2018). This

transition from a 'dumb world to a smart world' happened faster than anyone could have predicted. It's been recorded that "between 2004 and 2009, cell phone ownership increased by almost 25%" (Blackwell et al, 2014, p.358). The influx of smartphone ownership affected groups of all ages, but had the largest impact on children, teens, and young adults. The smartphone became a tool that is now intertwined with their culture and their sense of self (Piotrowski and Valkenburg, 2017).

When the smartphone became part of society, entering the households of the rich and the poor, it broke down the final walls between the digital world and the real world. Life was lived through the applications on the device as much as they were lived off of it. In more ways than one, the "…youth brought their offline interests and social contacts to their online media activity" (Haan et al, 2014, p.511). The more channels these applications spread to, like laptops, phones, computers, even watches, the less and less separation between the physical world and the virtual one. This increase occurred both in teenagers and adults. The transition into becoming "networked individuals" (Rainie and Wellman, 2012) has occurred at surprisingly fast speeds. The first iPhone was released in 2007, and by the end of 2010, 35% of U.S adults had mobile phones with applications downloaded to them (Rainee and Wellman, 2012). Following that, by 2011, 83% of Americans owned a cell phone (2012). The rate of advancement and influence with these devices affected a person's ability to understand the negative properties associated with them. People became bewitched by the technology, and engrossed in the opportunities it offered. Smartphones were the final piece in the creation of this digitally addictive society.

Children and teenagers are two of the groups that have been most affected by the immersion into smart-tech culture. From a young age, children are placed in front of different types of smart technology, including tablets, phones, TV's or 'child-safe' computers. Their time

spent in front of or on these devices only increases at they get older and choose to make their presence on social media. It has created what many have referred to as "The Smartphone Generation" (Piotrowski and Valkenburg, 2017). The smartphone has affected teenagers widely because they have used the applications within the phone (Instagram, Facebook, etc.) to create and sustain their identities and relationships. These applications encouraged the users to update their 'friends' about their lives through these applications. Rainee and Wellman state, "Additionally, their access nudges them into an internet-first frame of mind, encouraging them to use their smartphones, laptops, or desktops to access the internet when they have a question to research or something to publish—a status update, a picture, a video" (2012, p.95). This idea of "internet-first" becomes more than just a frame of mind; it's a social movement that changes the way an entire generation thinks. They are omnipresent and always involved with their social groups which means they are constantly being impacted by and through their involvement with media. There is a sense of being interconnected, even when you are asleep or alone. Slowly the world is "…recognizing that technology is both socially shaped and socially shaping" (Haan et al, 2014, p.509). Technology is infiltrating young adult's lives at lightening speeds and is able to both be continually shaped by them while simultaneously altering the way society communicates. Continual and uncontrolled change is dangerous because humans are impressionable. Without full understanding of what this constant internet presence is doing to the minds of young adults, the results are impossible to predict.

The reality of the unknown surrounding the increased use of iPhones, and the heightened presence of social media has raised a sense of urgency and concern within many parents. Social media and its associated devices have become part of the younger generation's self-identification and social dynamic. Today, at least a third of adolescents choose to use social media to talk

about anything that could be embarrassing, like sexuality, love, or personal problems rather than talking in person (Piotrowski and Valkenburg, 2017). If a smartphone has become an extension of the human body, then social media is an extension of human identity. Adolescents build and create their identities through interactions with their families and peers; in recent years, these interactions have been occurring less in person and more on mobile devices and social media applications (Piotrowski and Valkenburg, 2017).

Since the creation of the Smartphone Generation, "The everyday experience of most U.S young people today is deeply ensconced within the media environment" (Clark, 2013, p.78). The youth invest much of their time into maintaining a strong presence within their media environment. In many ways, they seem to be asserting and expressing their own independence by using "the ''like'' button, posting of pictures, and writing on friends' walls" (Blackwell et al, 2014, p.363). They are not just receiving media, like with television or music. They have become the creators and the receivers of the constantly changing media, and the power of both these roles has made parents feel nervous (Piotrowski and Valkenburg, 2017). The adolescents and children also have constant access to these media that are frequently changing and evolving. In many cases, parents are unsure where to 'put their foot down' on internet usage, because it is also where the teens have created and maintained their identity (Clark, 2013). There is a constant concern about what the impacts will be with constant access to this type of media, and what would happen if the wrong steps were taken to attempt control.

The types of concerns centered around the smartphone are not unique to the current generation. Similar fears arose at the introduction of television, and quickly increased as televisions took their place in the majority of American's homes. George Gerbner, a communication scholar through the late twentieth century, wrote extensively on impacts and new

characteristics of television. Referred to as the cultivation theory, this theory assess the special

characteristics and new dangers imposed by the home television, and suggest that the television

and its characteristics were the predecessors for the type of media-infused environment that is

present today (Gerbner, 2013).This theory, in its most basic sense, maintains the belief that long

term exposure to *media* subtly redefines and develops the audience's perception of reality.

Gerbner focused on television during his studies, identifying many of the characteristics that

made television, and more specifically televisions placed within the homes, a new type of media.

Many of these characteristics act as antecedents to the commonplace characteristics found in

smartphone culture today. This suggests that his theory can be relevant today with the uses of

smartphones, and the expected impacts that can already be seen in today's culture.

Gerbner argued that the television had special characteristics that differentiated it from

any other media of the time. He made these arguments regarding the television, but the idea of

the theory can be applied to any media that offers the ability of long term exposure. Three of the

biggest characteristics of in-home televisions were the time spent consuming its media (viewing

and interacting with the messages produced), its ability to be placed in the center of the home,

and the reality of a cradle-to-grave experience (Gerbner, 2013). The cradle-to-grave experience

refers to being introduced to media at a young age (children watching television, using tablets or

parents' phones) and continually being influenced by the media or its devices throughout life.

There is no real transition "off" of the dominant media of the century. Gerbner states that the

time consumed by television is more than any other type of media, and fills the silence in many

American homes (2013). This is similar to what has been happening with the smartphone. The

ability to just 'be' with your own thoughts, alone, has been quickly disappearing, much like the

ability to sit quietly at home, without a constant distraction. Gerbner was also concerned with the

idea that the television was in the home; people no longer had consciously choose to go and watch a movie. They walked in the room and it was always there, waiting to take away more time. He states that it "[had] become a member of the family, telling its stories patiently, compellingly, untiringly" (Gerbner, 2013, p.465). It became a subconscious action to sit in front of the television before breakfast, after dinner, or when family came to town. The television became a symbolic piece of the American lifestyle.

As culture shifted, the television became more than just a part of the American family household. It became available for people at each section of their lives. Creating a cradle-to-grave experience through a specific form of media was a complete culture change (Gerbner, 2013). Children were born into a world revolving around television, and they died in a world revolving around television. Gerbner believed that for the first time, there was a media that "socialized members into the community" (2013, p.466) regardless of their age. The television was like a third, separate parental figure that taught its audience to how to fall seamlessly into society, and it did so without the training wheels and caution tape that often goes hand in hand with parental teaching. It taught the young and the old how to continue to grow and change with the fluid society body. Many chose to learn how to see their placement within social classes by observing how their group was portrayed on television (Gerbner, 2013). This portrayal was often what the majority believed or expected these groups, especially minority groups, to act, live, or think. Gerbner claims that this portrayed television reality, along with the other characteristics created through its popularity, created a massive public conscious that was continually hammered by repetitive messages. This media followed and reformed the lifestyles of its audience members, forcing them to learn and believe the same values. This power instilled in the

television, the power to change and create a culture entirely through the messages pushed by the majority, has amplified massively since the debut of the smartphone.

If the simple placement of a media-sharing device gave people fear that it would impact and change the subconscious, what happens when that device is placed in your pocket, and is constantly waiting, gathering more data and information to fill more time? The smartphone takes the dangers that were suggested during the spread of the television, and multiplies them. While the television was heavily consumed, "the global uptake of the mobile phone is probably the most rapid embrace of a consumer technology in history" (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p.107). Gerbner believed television had both the reputation and power that rivaled the control and influence of the church in ancient times. It generated a ritualistic practice that influenced the beliefs of millions while in many ways being 'tied' to the home or other stationary places. Now, instead of being tied to a single place, these ritualistic practices are amplified by being present constantly within a person's pocket.

Gamification of Social Media

As stated previously, social media has increased at least 60% since 2005 (Pew Research Center, 2018), and there has always been a consistent concern on what kind of impact this will have on society. While much of the concern rests heavily with the type of information circulating through these applications, some focus has shifted to the nature of the applications themselves, and their increasingly addictive nature. Social media applications (Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, etc) are in a constant battle to retain more human attention than their competitors (Center For Humane Technology). They have become "a monopolistic attention economy, directed from the top" (Lanham, 2007, p.20). As more and more applications are created, human attention becomes a "commodity" (Lanham, 2007) that corporations will work endlessly to own.

The success of these businesses depend on their ability to retain the attention, which supports the creation of the attention economy.

The average young adult spends 43% of their time consuming media on their digital platforms (Nielsen, 2018), much of this time focused on whichever application can retain their attention the most. Since they are all competing for the same thing, the owners of these media applications implement strategies to encourage longer time spent on screen. This includes the gamification of social media (Lampe, 2014) and the use of auto-play in specific applications like Facebook and YouTube (Harris, 2017). The societal attitude and interactions that are present on these sites inflate these strategies, making users feel that without constant access to these applications, they will experience fear of missing out, (FOMO), isolation, and withdrawals (Parnell, 2017). The combination of these factors on social media applications has led to a wide-spread digital addiction.

The effects of gamification can be seen in many different social media applications, and are often integrated into the original creation of the application. Gamification refers to the use of game play elements and terminology, like point scoring or competition with others, within different platforms (Lampe, 2014). The presence of gamification on social media is studied by Cliff Lampe, who discusses the reputation system, feedback loops and motivators within the applications that encourage consistent and repetitive use (2014). Each of these systems contain addictive qualities that achieve the corporations ultimate goal: to keep audience members on their app the longest. Lampe pulls from Resnick to explain the reputation system as "where users create persistent profiles and accumulate some form of points to indicate the strength of their participation" (Lampe, 2014, p.465). He associates this with Amazon reviews and Reddit (2014), where the user gains "points" through interactions, and they encourage other users to trust them.

The reputation system can also be seen on platforms like Twitter, or Instagram. The accumulation of likes and followers on both applications is directly related to how successful they are as users on a site. For example, a young woman who is popular in school would have her popularity reinforced if her Instagram was successful, having consistently high numbers of likes, and a growing number of followers. These applications were inherently gamified through their reputation systems, and the way individuals have used them has enforced it.

Another important element present in social media is the feedback loops. These motivational triggers can be seen across different platforms, in many different forms. Lampe writes "…social media tools may help provide feedback loops that help trigger intrinsic motivations to participate in generating content" (2014, p.465). These feedback loops are very important, because social media content is almost all user-generated. Without users feeling a desire or compulsion to be present on the application, it would slowly become an empty wasteland. In Facebook, these motivators come in many forms, including: the status prompting question "What's on your mind?", the push to post old memories and anniversaries on Facebook, and the prompts to add stories, friends or tag people to create and retain connections. On Instagram, users are prompted to like, comment and share their own stories as a way to successfully use the app. When the users accomplish these goals, they find themselves having larger social circles, which enforces their presence within these digital realities. It provides users with the assumption that their contribution is valued, and therefore necessary (Lampe, 2014, p.466). These seemingly small features have created an addiction present in much of the younger generation.

These feedback loops are clear when understanding how teenagers evaluate their self-esteem and their value within their social groups. Lampe states that these feedback loops "…help

trigger intrinsic motivations to participate in generating content" (2014, p.465). In the case of social media, the intrinsic motivations can be linked to the way users value themselves, their friendships, and their social status. By interacting successfully on these platforms, teenagers and young adults are maintaining control over their lives and reinforcing their social dynamics. "Social media offer teens both, by providing numerous possibilities for control and positive feedback (for example, Facebook's "like" button)" (Piotrowski and Valkenburg, 2017, p.228). These "triggers" are significant when evaluating why people return to social media repeatedly, despite any of the negative information released on the sites. The use of triggers "…is very similar to a primary use of gamification, which is to provide feedback that triggers intrinsic motivation to engage in a behavior" (Lampe, 2014, p.466). The goal of the tools that make it possible for these motivators to exist (ex. Facebook's like button, tracking likes on Instagram, Snapstreaks on Snapchat) is to incentivize participators to continually contribute (Lampe, 2014). The general idea behind social media applications is that people are choosing to contribute because they want to, without any outside encouragement. It's a platform for the people, filled with their user generated content (Lampe, 2014). It's important to understand that these gamified strategies are present on social media because even though these sites are perceived as "…a space with broad participation" (Lampe, 2014, p.467) and the ability to choose to generate content, they also work to create addictive tendencies within their users. These tendencies are to support their end-goal; to continually increase their monetary value and their social importance by keeping their users on the screen for as long as possible.

Health Risks in Media

These addictive qualities and strategies on social media applications are more than just an annoyance that tends to eat away at free time. They filter through to the use of the technology

itself, causing the behavior and style of interactions to change from generation to generation (Critchlow, 2018). The growing presence of the smart technologies that house these applications are increasing the amount of time people are introduced or on them. The idea that this is dangerous is not a new topic. Since the introduction of anything consumed by the masses, there are the fears that it can negatively affect relational dynamics, society, and the way the government functions (Gerbner, 2013). The recent changes over the last decade have asked scholars to take a closer look, due to the way youth and now young adults have structures their time and lifestyles due to new media (Haan et al, 2014, p.508). Data found by Critchlow identifies the youth surrounded by and consistently using this type of media (smartphones, social media) can be linked to higher negative health risks both mentally and physically (2018). While social media and advanced technological devices have benefitted many aspects of human life, slowly research and data is being published that suggests there are many negative physical and mental health effects associated with increased media usage.

While the impact of social media, smartphones and computers is slowly infiltrating the lives of all individuals, much of the data produced on its implications focus on young children (ages 3 to 12), teenagers, and young adults (ages 20 to 25). In young children, the implications of technology are not directly connected to social media, but instead the behaviors the devices will teach them (Radesky et al, 2015). One very dangerous consequence of early device use by children is the creation of the "shut-up toy" (Radesky et al, 2015, p.2). Research discussed in *Pediatrics Perspective* suggests the use of devices like tablets and parents' smartphones as "behavioral regulation tools" (2015, p.2) which will later impact the child's emotional and social response in future situations. They can start to associate the device, and eventually the applications it will contain, with contentment and control (Radesky et al, 2015, p.2). This could

lead to a more receptive generation when the children age and utilize social media applications with inherent addictive properties. The skills that children learn early in life that teach them how to properly function emotionally and within society can be stunted when parents encourage them to utilize technology as a time filler (Radesky et al, 2015, p.2). While extensive research in this particular case is limited due to the recent interest in the implication of technological devices, the effects of increased device usage and social media presence are studied in other age groups.

The use of social media within middle school aged children and older coincides constantly with their self-representation. Much of the time younger individuals spend on social media is dedicated to finding ways of expressing themselves and strengthening their social status (Martin et al, 2018). Many of the teenagers and children who are considered to be part of the "smartphone generation" (Piotrowski and Valkenburg, 2017) have taken to relying on social media as their primary avenue for self-identification and building connections. This increase of interaction and 'sharing' on the social media sites contributes to the lack of boundaries experiences by teenagers on these websites. They experience illusions of control due the accessibility and freedom they have within these applications (Piotrowski and Valkenburg, 2017, p.224). The illusion of control on these applications, coupled with the possibility of possibility of approval from peers has created a link from social media to self-esteem (Piotrowski and Valkenburg, 2017, p.228). They also define and judge themselves through the successful use of these applications. To be successful on these applications, the users have to have enough followers, the right posts, and the right number of likes on each post. Incorrectly using the applications in any way can affect their social position by their peers, and will damage their evaluation of their own self esteem (Martin et al, 2018, p.222). The increased use of social media

as a way to self-identify and find placement within their social sphere has also led to less

separation between the success of the virtual self and the physical self.

Tech Backlash

The term "tech backlash" was created to identify the increase in criticism and negative

responses toward the influence gained by massive tech corporations. L.M Sacasas describes it as

the "public outcries over egregious cases of malevolent use of digital tools or of ethical

negligence on the part of tech companies themselves" (2018, p.36). He explains how the

response tech backlash is not focused primarily on "technology" but on both the ability for its

negative counterpart, and on the negligence present in the corporations that support it. The

progress of technology is neither good nor evil; it is just continual advancements of humankind.

Individuals like Sacasas accept, but also believe that those in charge of these advancements, and

who are benefitting from them, have an ethical responsibility to how these advancements impact

society. He also believes the people who use these technologies should be more aware and

invested on their impact. Tech backlash thus far has focused primarily on the privacy dangers,

data collections, and ethical implications with targeted advertisements present within social

media today. They do not focus on what Sacasas considered to be a more important aspect of the

tech backlash discourse.

Sacasas urges the focus to be more on the impact tech has on social interactions. He

states, "the tech backlash, in other words, leaves untouched the consequences of technologies

that are successfully integrated into our social milieu" (Sacasas, 2018, p.40). He asks for a more

impersonal focus, not on the companies in power but on the smaller, more widespread impacts of

increased social media use that affect billions every day. Much like Harris, Sacasas emphasizes

the integration of technology as now woven into our social fabric. By this, they both understand

that asking for a complete rejection and separation from social media and its' related devices is highly unlikely. Instead, they focus the tech backlash discourse on "desire to see the machine more humanely calibrated" (Sacasas, 2018, p.40). It's the same belief that has become the tag line for *Center for Humane Technology*, to "realign technology with humanity's best interests" (*Center for Humane Technology*, 2018). This is the attitude of the tech backlash discourse; to understand permeance that media devices now have in our lives, and to find ways to grow from these advancements, instead of allowing them to consume us.

 Methods

For this research project, I created a review of the literature to give the reader context to understand the current attitude surrounding the controversy of social media. Then I completed a rhetorical analysis of Tristan Harris's TEDTalk, along with a rhetorical analysis of the digital rhetoric present on the *Center for Humane Technology's* main pages. The reasons for completing a rhetorical analysis of these two sources are multifold. Tristan Harris has gained a powerful reputation in Silicon Valley as "the closest thing Silicon Valley has to a conscience" (*Center for Humane Technology*, 2019).He has created multiple works on the negative and dangerous side effects of social media, and used his experience at Stanford and Google to gain more information on how these applications are run. Within the TEDTalk and on the *Center for Humane Technology's* webpage, he discusses his accumulated knowledge and experiences. He also presents on both platforms positive directions that can be taken in the future. Creating a rhetorical analysis of these sources will show which rhetorical strategies, if any, were present in the creation and presentation of the information. The rhetorical analysis "…requires the analyst to consider both the overall communicative purpose of a text and how its constituent parts contribute to (or sometimes detract from) the realization of that purpose" (Zachry, 2009, p.69). If

specific rhetorical strategies are employed successfully in conjunction with the overarching goals of both the website and the TEDTalk, tentative conclusions can be drawn regarding Harris's ability to resonate with the public. Since the debut of the TEDTalk and the creation of the website, both have received a lot of attention, furthering Harris's popularity with the public. Due to the high profile of Harris, identifying the strategies he uses to contribute to tech backlash discourse can act as an exemplar for what strategies could continue to be at play within the discourse. As more people become a part of the tech backlash discourse, it will be useful to understand what rhetorical have been utilized previously.

Having a clear conclusion on Harris's rhetorical abilities' will showcase what type of language is currently being used to discuss tech backlash. Being one of the first to continually shape tech backlash discourse, Harris can offer an idea of what is currently in play. Logically, if he uses his rhetoric effectively, and adheres to the strategies discussed by previous rhetoricians that allow for more persuasive speeches, then we can expect this type of rhetoric to be continually used in the tech backlash discourse. The replication of Harris's definitions, delivery and organization of the information he contains can offer the chance to educate billions on the manipulation currently taking place within their most used applications. The purpose of rhetorically analyzing his speech and the website he co-created is to recognize the rhetorical strategies at work in a high-profile example of tech-backlash discourse. If people are both successfully persuaded and educated by him, then we can assume that attempting his style on a large scale operation can produce a similar result.

Rhetorical Analysis: Harris's TEDTalk and CHT Website

Tristan Harris is one the up and coming internet warriors emerging from Silicon Valley with an inside understanding on what the future may hold for those growing up in the Smartphone Generation. As the former design ethicist for Google, Harris "studied how do you ethically steer people's thoughts" (Harris, 2017) and was behind the scenes of what he called the "control room" (2017). This control room is what engineers the millions of little applications that are now part of each person's everyday life. Harris uses his experience in these rooms to provide a TEDTalk on "How a Handful of Tech Companies Control Billions of Minds Every Day" to educate the public on the amount of influence the websites, applications, and devices used every day have on the individual. The information shared in this TEDTalk is reiterated and elaborated on through the website for his organization, *Center for Humane Technology*. Harris makes the case within his TEDTalk, and the organization's website, that the current level of consumption of social media, along with the constant access to its messages is eroding the current society in more ways than one (2017). His TEDTalk is a concise organization of where this problem is present, and why he believes "this problem is critical infrastructure for solving every other problem" (Harris, 2017). An analysis of his TED Talk and the *Center for Humane Technology* website will provide a clear understanding of the rhetorical theories and styles he deployed to formulate a message to inform the public of his desired goal, and attempt to persuade them.

Following his TEDTalk, in 2018, Harris and two others founded the *Center for Humane Technology,* website and organization that is focused on creating awareness around the dangerous tech that fills everyday life. The co-creators of the organization, Aza Raskin from Mozilla, Randima Fernando, and Tristan Harris from Time Well Spent, worked to create a space that could clearly articulate how "technology is hijacking our minds" (*Center for Humane Technology,* 2019). From the home page to the resources, *Center for Humane Technology* pushes

the reader to understand the reality of how technology is slowly wearing away at different sections of society. Providing the reader with visual statistics, this website combines emotionally stimulating language and informative statistics to continually persuade the reader about the level of urgency and importance this problem has. The website then directs the reader the next possible outcome, recreating technology that no long overwhelms human weakness, and instead supports human design. The *Center for Humane Technology* organization created a website that used specific language, images, and website design to persuade the audience both where this societal problem is present, and what steps can be taken to start pushing society in the right direction.

Descriptive Imagery

Both of these resources purposefully employ vivid imagery within their descriptions of tech backlash, and the current situation digitized society is in. The use of imagery is a rhetorical tool that can more coherently connect each individual both in the audience, or visiting the website to the broad societal problem Harris is addressing. The creators of the website, along with Harris, ask for more aggressive public deliberation and attention to be directed at the impact of social media. Public deliberation is requested when a need arises to solve "problematic situations that cannot be settled without interpersonal coordination and cooperation" (Jasinski, 2001, p.162). By incorporating imagery that many audience members can relate to, Harris and the *Center For Humane Technology* connected to the audience and attempted to provide them with reasons why they should become educated on society's current trajectory with social media.

Within his TEDTalk, Harris utilizes the styles and tools within deliberative rhetoric to inform the public on what is currently happening due to social media's influence, the race for attention behind the application, and what this will mean for the future if action is not taken.

Consistently Harris remarks on the downward slope society is on in in relation to how they use technology. Deliberative rhetoric is a style of rhetoric that is directed at deciding whether a course of action is useful or harmful, often in association within the public (Jasinski, 2001, p.161). As Aristotle explains, deliberative rhetoric is associated solely with policy change and legislation, but as times evolved, the uses of deliberative rhetoric spread to speakers advocating for public change outside of legislation committees. The deliberative speaker wants to convince its audience to make a decisive judgement on an action or policy that will realistically affect their way of life (Rorty, 1996). Repeatedly, using examples of Snapchat and Facebook, and their uses of addictive strategies, Harris paints a destructive image of the future. He also suggests that this direction the virtual world is heading in and affecting the way people interact can be reversed. He supplies the viewers with many ways improvement could take shape, including reinventing social media and technology to offer positive outlets and opportunities that encourage interconnections and individuals working together. Creating vivid and emotional imagery to generate a stronger connection to the audience is a strategy seen repeatedly throughout Harris's speech on technology control.

One of the ways Harris uses specific rhetoric to persuade and hold his audience is his ability to describe specific actions and moments. Aristotle dictates that the use of "vivid and well-known examples" in a rhetoric's speech showcase what exactly will happen in the future, either with or without policy change. Immediately Harris's TED Talk offers a visualization of the smartphone driven society we live in today. He provides these visuals through rich and detailed descriptions encompassing the uses of these mediums, and the scenes occurring behind these screens. His first sentence states "imagine walking into a room, a control room with a bunch of people, a hundred people, hunched over a desk with little dials, and that that control

room will shape the thoughts and feelings of a billion people" (Harris, 2017). This futuristic visual is purposefully dramatic to encourage the audience to feel fear about what is happening.

This language provides explicit and obvious images to appear in the listener's mind. An individual hunched over a desk with buttons and dials is a negative visual often associated with mistrust and deception. Harris is consistent with his use of imagery to declare and cement the sense of urgency he wants to instill within his audience. It's a part of his style: "the orator's speech—what he says and how he says it—links the character and desires of his audience to the decisions and actions the orator wants them to take" (Rorty, 1996, p.10). Emotional investment can increase an individual's drive to become educated on a societal problem that may not be currently impacting them. Harris tries repeatedly to emphatically create situations that the audience can step into, and replicate their own desires alongside his. He continues to do so when discussing his passion about solving this problem. He states "I don't know a more urgent problem than this, because this problem is underneath all other problems" (2017). He describes situations that could happen to anyone, at any time, because he believes this is a growing addiction that isn't being discussed enough. Digital tools and applications are available for all ages and types of people. From children to the elderly, the 'downgrade of humanity' can infiltrate their daily lives. The audience can seem themselves and their children within the descriptions Harris provides.

The website also embodies this strategy, associating images with the creator's ambitions
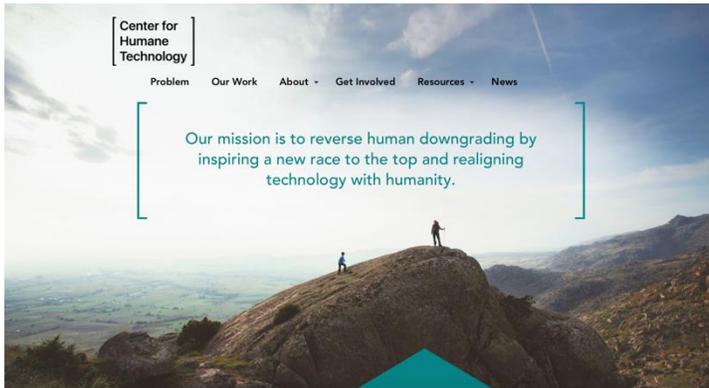

and goals to build a stronger connection to the audiences' desire. Immediately on *Center for Humane Technology's* website, the style and arrangement of the information they present has rhetorical value. The site's home page starts with their mission, which is positioned over an image of two people hiking on a beautiful landscape. The image itself carries specific connotation that ties into the rest of the website, and specifically ties into their mission statement. Placing the mission statement over the image is a rhetorical strategy, "…note the importance of juxtaposition as a form of arrangement that serves as a key rhetorical method for remix production" (Eyman, 2015, p.70). By placing this image directly behind the sentence that defines what the organization stands for, it ignites a larger response from the viewer. They now can associate the statement "…inspiring a new race to the top and realigning technology with humanity" with successfully overcoming a difficult trek and making it to the 'top' of a mountain. They encourage the viewer to associate tackling the societal problem of human downgrading with the experience of overcoming a mountain; a difficult journey with a rewarding outcome.

Throughout the *Center for Humane Technology* website, icons and images emphasize the messages the campaign are promoting. Repetition within texts is used to reinforce messages, specific ideologies or claims that the speaker, author or creator want the audience to remember. It is a specific rhetorical pattern that encourages the audience to follow the argument presented by the author (Eyman, 2015, p.69). This repetition through imagery is seen with the use of

arrows throughout the webpages. The arrows coincide with the use of a phrase coined by *Center for Humane Technology* creators, "While companies have been upgrading technology, they've been downgrading humanity" (*Center for Humane Technology,* 2019). The downgrade of humanity is their title for the effects and implications of digital addiction. They enforce this ideology by placing red arrows pointing down throughout different sections of the webpage, and contrast them with light blue arrows that signify the "race to the top" for humanity. The light blue arrows are placed next to possible beneficial outcomes that could arise from creating more mindful technology. When focusing on the dangers that have grown from the normalization of social media, the creators place the red arrows next to each 'downgrading' aspect of technology. Within this attention economy, it is often difficult to hold individual's attention long enough to leave a powerful impact (Lanham, 2007). They repeatedly attach this red arrow next to any downside presented within social media. In this digital world, "…it is attention that is needed to make sense of the overwhelming availability of information in its raw state" (Eyman, 2015, p.71). Without consistently of these red arrows, the emphasis on the idea of "downgrading humanity" will not leave a lasting impact on viewers.

  These red arrows also serve as a reminder of the tech companies main objectives. Harris states repeatedly during his TEDTalk and on the webpages that these massive organizations, like YouTube and Facebook, are in a race to get to the bottom of the brain stem. For individuals to be fully aware of the manipulative strategies in use on these sites, they have to be aware of the
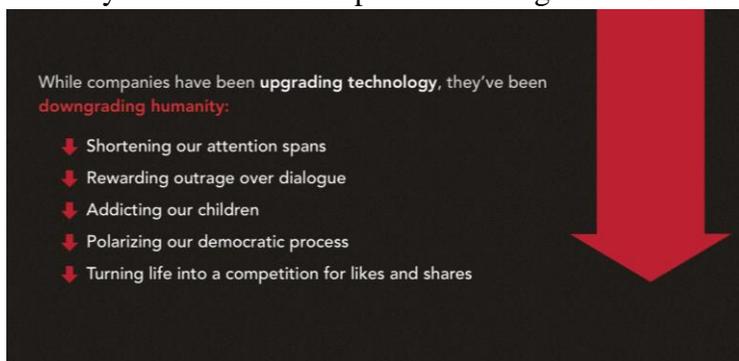
companies eventual goals. As a rhetorical tool, "…digital rhetoric requires a shift from memory-as-storage only to seeing memory as a range of practices, one of

which is memory-as-persistence" (Eyman, 2015, p.72). To keep this ideology in the mind of the website visitor while they travel throughout the site, they impose the image of the red arrows facing downward, toward bottom of the brainstem and the total consumption of human attention. The arrows are placed next to the aspects that are associated with downgrading the evolution of humanity, including: "Shortening our attention spans" and "Addicting our children." Associating the image of the arrow facing downward with the negative reality that has been created through the social media applications cements the reality of the situation; while applications and technology continue to be updated, humanity will continue to be downgraded as the creations prey on human weakness.

While the images on the *Center for Humane Technology* work to reiterate the negatives within social media, Harris creates the verbal, visual situations to showcase the same dangers within his TEDTalk. He provides examples which he describes in great detail that showcase the growing manipulative danger accompanying these applications, like the auto-play feature introduced by YouTube (2017) and used by Facebook and Netflix, or the growing numbers of teenagers present on applications like Snapchat. He attempts to persuade the audience logically, reminding them of social media corporations' most basic function: they need to benefit monetarily from attention, finding ways to outlast the competition. He discusses the dangers of Snapchat in detail because "…the internet is not evolving at random. The reason it feels like it's sucking us in the way it is, is because of this race for attention" (Harris, 2017).

Harris redefines these platforms to acknowledge the addictive tendencies present within them. He reframes the public vision of social media applications. He utilizes "…'framing effects', situations where often small changes in the presentation of an issue or an event, such as slight modifications of phrasing, produce measurable changes of opinion" (Hullman and

Diakopoulos, 2011). An application described as a 'tool to bring humanity closer' compared to an application that wants to buy attention can yield different public responses. By repeatedly reminding the audience social media's ability to constantly "schedule little blocks of time" in our subconscious, he brings greater attention to the latent but dangerous abilities of commonplace applications. The examples work as situations that the audience can relate to and increases his chance of connecting emotionally with them. By stimulating a more relatable and understandable experience, the urgency he addresses throughout his talk will seem appropriately placed.

Persuasive and Aggressive Language

Harris incorporates rhetorical pathos within his TEDTalk, the stirring the emotions of the audience members to further their belief and support (Zachry, 2009, p.71). The visuals he provides act to influence the audience and change their understanding of social media, in particular the parents that may recognize or connect with them. Harris attempts create anger and outrage within the audience. When focusing on emotional response, "the rhetorician evokes a cluster of *pathē*-laden memories…" (Rorty, 1996, p.17). The end-goal with this strategy is to make an emotional connection that is strong enough to influence and change the audience's opinion or belief. In Harris's case, he attempts to change the audience's view of a social media app, from a tool for communicating, to an addictive application driven by companies only interested in money. He elaborates on these companies; "There's a hidden goal driving the direction of all of the technology we make, and that goal is the race for our attention. Because every news site, TED, elections, politicians, games, even meditation apps have to compete for one thing, which is our attention, and there's only so much of it" (2017). He uses examples of applications people trust, like TED or their news, and reminding them that even these companies have to rely on addictive tendencies to guarantee time spent on screen.

> It's only accountable to maximizing attention. It's also accountable, because of the business model of advertising, for anybody who can pay the most to actually walk into the control room and say, "That group over there, I want to schedule these thoughts into their minds." So you can target, you can precisely target a lie directly to the people who are most susceptible. (Harris, 2017).

By inciting outrage from the audience, Harris has the ability to direct their anger into "actions that appear to satisfy long-standing attitudes and desires" (Rorty, 1996, p.17). This strategy acts as a way of removing the blindfold from the audience, and revealing an upsetting truth that requires immediate attention. The examples align with his sense of urgency, to encourage immediate action due to the danger within the situation. He uses this style with the examples of both Snapchat and Facebook, reframing the objectives of the application so the 'users' can see what benefits the corporations are searching for. Media was not just created for human benefit, it has internal goals that override the individuals.

In the case of Snapchat, he focuses on the creation of 'Snap Streaks', which is when the application tracks how many days two people have been 'snapping' and rewards them as the number increases. These rewards include a fire symbol next to the number, to encourage increasing the number, a "100" emoji once you've hit 100 days, a mountain emoji for extremely long streaks, and an hourglass next to the number when you're close to losing the streak, as a warning that your time to answer is almost up. He states

> Because if you're a teenager, and you have 150 days in a row, you don't want that to go away. And so think of the little blocks of time that that schedules in kids' minds. This isn't theoretical: when kids go on vacation, it's been shown they give their passwords to up to five other friends to keep their Snapstreaks going, even when they can't do it. And they have, like, 30 of these things, and so they have to get through taking photos of just pictures or walls or ceilings just to get through their day. So it's not even like they're having real conversations. (Harris, 2017).

The Snapstreaks is one of the latest changes to the applications teenagers use every day, and one of the key examples that Harris uses to portray the addictive qualities in media. As Harris points out, this change to Snapchat increases how addictive the application is, and heavily influences its young adult consumers to return to the application daily. It removes normal communication from Snapchat, instead encouraging empty responses that are only to control that increasing number. As the Snapstreak tool begin to infiltrate teenagers' everyday lives, it began to change how they evaluated their relationships. This is incredibly dangerous when placed into the lives of teenagers, who are acutely aware of the social dynamics and relationships. This seemingly innocent feature has completely changed an entire generation's sense of self and evaluation of relationships with others. The danger increases as users realize their every move and decision on these sites is reviewed and watched by others. This is different than past ways of communicating, because "…there [weren't] a hundred engineers on the other side of the screen who knew exactly how your psychology worked and orchestrated you into a double bind with each other" (Harris, 2017). The update to the app increased the applications ability to retain users on screen, and cemented itself into the social dynamics of teenagers.

The Snapstreak update was added to increase the user's time on the application: instead of using the application to reach out when needed or to answer a message, they have to check it every day to ensure the permanence of the streak. It accomplishes the owner's goal of achieving maximum time spent on the app. For the teenagers, it confirms their identity and reassures them that they are socially acceptable. If they choose not to do this, they risk losing those relationships, and their place within society. The presence of the Snapstreaks have also effectively changed the way these teenagers communicate. As Harris states, since the teenagers have so many streaks, "…they have to get through taking photos of just pictures or walls or

ceilings just to get through their day. So it's not even like they're having real conversations" (2017). The emphasis begins to fall less on the conversation being had, or the contact made, and instead surrounds the belief that they just "have to" keep that streak number. Photos of chairs, floors, and ceilings take the place of phones calls that discuss their lives and what they've been experiencing. They begin to build their identities and friendships around these applications that only have one goal; to keep them using the app in any way possible.

The majority of Harris's speech discusses the ways the new and constantly changing media outlets are changing the way society functions. He attempts to clear the cloudy understanding surrounding the actions that take place behind every comment sent through Facebook, every Snapchat received, or each like sent through Instagram. To logically influence the audience, to explain the importance of understanding these applications, and the new dangers they offer that are unlike the relics of their past, like landlines, he provides a comparison to the 1970s. He claims that many people believe Snapchat, texting, or other new ways of communicating are just the advanced way of "gossiping on the phone" (Harris, 2017). Harris continues, "Well, what this misses is that in the 1970s, when you were just gossiping on the telephone, there wasn't a hundred engineers on the other side of the screen who knew exactly how your psychology worked and orchestrated you into a double bind with each other" (2017). Acknowledging this difference between how people communicated in 1970 and how they communicate now is pivotal to Harris's speech. It's expected that "…the successful rhetorician must be able to construct contrary arguments: he must first represent and then refute the considerations that appear to weigh against his position" (Rorty, 1996, p.8). He draws the parallel between the two styles of communicating, a common comparison made when advocating

against the concern for new media influence. The way in which he does this acts as a powerful rhetorical tool.

Referencing this common place analogy within his argument is a powerful strategy that reframes the way they audience understands the analogy. When taking a stance on a controversial and often personalized topic, it is important to acknowledge popular arguments in favor of the opposing side (Jasinski, 2001). Completing this successfully will provide your argument more validation. Harris realizes this need, and both acknowledges the common analogy that opposes his beliefs, and he explains why the argument is weak. Since the invention of the television, people have panicked the presence of new technology will permanently change society (Piotrowski and Valkenburg, 2017). Much of the time, these concerns wither away as the new media becomes a part of daily life. Harris's concerns revolve around the idea that 21st century media is a more consuming media. Everything is tracked, recorded, and used to change our experience on these social media apps into a more personal, and time consuming activity. In many ways, it's impossible to compare smartphone culture to the 'new media' of the past. Harris begins discrediting this analogy when he says "We have a temptation to think about this as, oh, they're just using Snapchat the way we used to gossip on the telephone" (2017). This comparison tends to act as a way of dulling the urgency that Harris is repeatedly asking for throughout his speech. It is a comparison that often negates the importance of the issue, and can affect the belief people have. Harris sees this problem as the most important one to find a solution to; his urgency comes both from what he witnesses in the media every day, and his previous experience from Google. These common comparisons between eras act as strong oppositions to the tech backlash.

Harris strengthens his discourse again tech backlash by openly discussing and deflating the opposing arguments against his cause. A strong and powerful contradiction to these blasé

responses on tech backlash is necessary when discussing such a controversial topic. As noted by Harris and many other scholars interested in youth media, this type of technology, and its uses are entirely different than those of the past. It's believed that "young people are often claimed to be different from those born before the advent of the Internet in their familiarity with and use of technologies, and thus referred to with terms as 'the Net Generation' or 'Digital Natives'" (Haan et al, 2014, p.508). To successfully convince the audience that his argument is an indisputable claim and encourage them to follow his lead, he has to address the fears that many people feel when they use and consume media. (Rorty, 1996). His statement, mentioned earlier "…there wasn't a hundred engineers on the other side of the screen who knew exactly how your psychology worked and orchestrated you into a double bind with each other" (2017). The idea of being watched, controlled and manipulated ranks high on many individual's list of fears. The reality of what is happening behind the curtain at Facebook, Instagram, and even Google is often kept at bay. When used correctly, rhetoric"…attempts to bring an audience to a decisive judgment in such a way that they will not be easily swayed" (Rorty, 1996, p.8). By creating an image of teenagers using an application every day, then defusing the image by acknowledging the active mind control behind the scenes that affects billions, he fuels the audience's latent anger, motivating them to believe and support him.

    Harris does not step onto the TED stage to just convince audience members that social media will be their downfall. He concludes his first section of his speech, which has been attempting to place the audience into the same frame as mind as him, by tying together the sections of society that are impacted by digital addiction.

> I don't know a more urgent problem than this, because this problem is underneath all other problems. It's not just taking away our agency to spend our attention and live the lives that we want, it's changing the way that we have our conversations, it's changing our democracy, and

it's changing our ability to have the conversations and relationships
we want with each other (Harris, 2017).

This is his last attempt to connect with the audience. Stating the idea that this problem is

"underneath all other problems" (2017) and listing categories within society that are connected to

this issue reiterates the urgency of this problem. He works to make sure no one present in the

audience can separate themselves from this issue or claim they are not affected. By being

specific about how broadly this societal problem has spread, he pushes the belief that everyone

should want a change. The expectation is that "In order for the rhetorician to form just the right

sort of action-guiding desire, rather than whirligig diffuse pathē, he must be quite precise about

the implications of his speech" (Rorty, 1996, p.20). He has to engage the audience both

emotionally and logically, so no matter their race, class, gender or age, they can relate to the

problem, and feel the similar urgency for a solution.

On the *Center for Humane Technology* webpage, working alongside imagery, the

language on the Problem page is purposely persuasive, associating specific responses to the

discussed problem, "downgrading humanity." Harris's choice to title the problem of digital

addiction with social media "downgrading humanity" is a powerful rhetorical strategy.

Deliberative rhetoric asks the audience or viewer to come to a decision on a public action for the

good of their community (Rorty, 1996, p.6). It is difficult to persuade people to become invested

in an issue when they do not have a name to associate with the problem. By creating a title that

showcases the dangers affects technology have been having on humanity, people have the chance

to become more invested and state what problem they are dedicated to solving. Inciting the

response of one emotion (anger, shock, or grief) can lead to a stronger urge to create change

(Rorty, 1996, p.17). Along with providing the situation with a title, they used persuasive and

purposeful language when describing the problem. The first sentence on their Problem page states, "The extractive attention economy is tearing apart our shared social fabric" (*Center for Humane Technology,* 2019). Multiple words within this statement are used to stir up specific emotional responses to the problem of downgrading humanity. 'Extractive attention economy' describes an economy that takes natural resources, like human attention, without supplying or planning to supply replacement. The creators of *Center for Humane Technology* claim that the currently attention economy is focused on finding and consuming humanity's finite attention.

Later within the same sentence, the phrase "…is tearing apart our shared social fabric" also employs persuasive strategies. They associate this visual of tearing apart with the image above the statement, which looks like a ripped piece of paper. They are asking the visitors to feel that their own social fabric is being ripped, and that this tear is due to the modern day attention economy, which has formed due to increased use of social media. This is an important strategy, because "Ideally, the successful argument uses credible evidence, emotional conviction and personal character to influence the judgement" (2015, Soules, p.23). The creators of this webpage worked to maintain strong emotional conviction by using aggressive wording. The language "tearing apart" coupled with the image connects this digital addiction with violence and malice. Even when noting the benefits these companies and devices have given the world, *Center for Humane Technology* reminds viewers that these major media applications have brought an equal amount of harm. Their language encourages viewers to respond with shock or anger, emotions that will inspire them to become more mindful on these platforms.

On the same page, the *Center for Humane Technology* incorporates another rhetorical strategy to identify human downgrading as a societal problem that is fully inclusive. Jasinski discusses the importance "producing claims in a wide enough scope" (2001, p.162) so that they

resonate with a majority of the public. A campaign that connects with a large portion of the public on any discourse that is asking for policy or public change and support from the people, will only benefit from creating that connections to multiple types of individuals. *Center for Humane Technology's* webpage does this when they list six different areas individuals can see themselves being influenced by these media platforms and corporations. These categories include: "Digital Addiction, Polarization, Political Manipulation, Superficiality, Mental Health, and the Breakdown of Truth." This touches on many of the negative aspects of social media and its influence, including the need for social validation, social reciprocity, and the presence of artificial intelligence which manipulates and emphasizes the hostility between political parties. Sections of the public may not be affected by aspects of polarization or feel that they are addicted to digital platforms like Instagram or Snapchat. By listing multiple areas where "tears in our shared social fabric" can be identified, the creators of the *Center for Humane Technology* have created diverse connections to different sections of the public to encourage a more complete societal response.

A Glimmer of Hope

To successfully embody the use of deliberative rhetoric, Harris offers the audiences ways to escape and outgrow these dangers, to become more mindful of media, and how they can start pushing for these media companies to do the same. Jasinski claims that "…deliberate discourse offers counsel or advice on questions of public policy or 'public business'" (Jasinski, 2001, p.160). The counsel Harris offers on the public business of digital addiction are the three radical changes he discusses in the end of his speech. He begins by saying "The first is we need to acknowledge that we are persuadable" (2017). Starting with this includes each and every person in the audience. It is impossible to deny the human trait of being persuadable. He continues with

"Once you start understanding that your mind can be scheduled into having little thoughts or little blocks of time that you didn't choose, wouldn't we want to use that understanding and protect against the way that that happens?" (Harris, 2017). He links the decisions of people currently listening, and who often use any sort of social media, back to the stories that he began his speech with. This strategy invokes the same emotions that were present when he first told the stories of "anyone" using Snapchat or Facebook, but now he places the audience within that role. "*You*" (the audience and anyone listening) are now the one losing blocks of time, having *your* attention absorbed by a few massive corporations, and *you* need to understand that it doesn't have to be this way. Starting the more 'positive' section of his speech this way asks the audience to become part of the solution.

As a way to end his speech while still maintaining a successful continuation of deliberative rhetoric, Harris asks the audience to imagine a world that incorporated more mindful technology. Instead of having the audience reimagine their past experience with social media networks, he directs their attention to what 'could' be, and what impacts could emerge with the more positive direction of their attention. He does this by saying

> It doesn't have to be this way. Instead of handicapping our attention, imagine if we used all of this data and all of this power and this new view of human nature to give us a superhuman ability to focus and a superhuman ability to put our attention to what we cared about and a superhuman ability to have the conversations that we need to have for democracy. (Harris, 2017).

Positioning the audience to look more toward the future and imagine the world with this public change in effect is a key tool within deliberative rhetoric. It has been noted that "deliberative discourse is most commonly oriented toward the future" (Jasinski, 2001, p.161). He couples the repetition of "superhuman ability" with this strategy of ending his talk with a focus on the future.

Both tools in this case act as strategies that persuade the audience to visualize a stronger and more powerful society evolving from the implementation of Harris's ideas. The audience will walk away from the TEDTalk with an idea of what world 'could' exist, if people were more committed to creating and using mindful technology.

Conclusion

The presence of tech backlash discourse has been around for decades, but the implications of ignoring the discourse are slowly surfacing. Harris a well-known and very active individual on the topic of social media addiction, and has created some prominent examples of discourse on this topic. Between the website *Center for Humane Technology* and Harris's TEDTalk "How a Handful of Tech Companies Control Billions of Minds Every Day", he utilizes a multitude of rhetorical strategies. He uses deliberative rhetoric constantly, asking the audience to become involved in their future, creating visuals of where social media is heading, and addressing how they can become more aware, changing the future. He reintroduces imagery within many of the sections in *Center for Humane Technology*, again using visuals to persuade the audience. In the TEDTalk, he created comparison analogies to dissuade the audience from making assumptions, and to enforce his attempt at reframing the current state of society and its use of social media. He embodies a sense of urgency; he incorporates this attitude through the entirety of his speech and on the website to further persuade his audience.

The strategies Harris uses are ancient, coming from persuasive rhetorical tools identified by Aristotle and others thousands of years ago. While the societal issue of tech backlash is new, the tools used to inform, educate and persuade people are evolving from ancient rhetorical strategies. The applications that are discussed within tech backlash discourse are working constantly to maintain our attention. They are the social media applications present on

smartphones, ones that follow us around and are asking for our attention every second of the day, For over a decade now, they have been incredibly successful, infiltrating our day to day lives and changing how we communicate with each other. From the effects of gamification to the self-serving goals in the corporations, maintaining human attention, these applications are created to keep us addicted. To successfully create a discourse that opposes the infiltration and obsession of these applications, people like Harris must use the rhetorical strategies identified centuries earlier. These strategic choices assist him in his endeavor to persuade the public, and increase the possibility of success for the website.

Given the recent development of tech backlash discourse, this research has the ability to continue in many different directions. Over the course of this project, Harris and his team updated the *Center for Humane Technology,* adding more sources and information on their definition of the "downgrade of humanity." The website now incorporates more language on the current addictive tendencies in social media applications, and how it has been affecting the way people interact within society. Recently, Harris posted a live stream on the website that went into more detail on this topic, and offered more of their ideas for solutions. This live stream (which was later posted on the site) gained over three thousand views within two days, highlighting both Harris's popularity, and the increase of visits on the website. A review of the website's success could offer a clearer answer of how successful Harris had been in his delivery of the tech backlash discourse.

There is also the option to complete a content analysis on the comments and likes or dislikes on Harris's TEDTalk or the live stream offered on April 23rd. Both of these videos have received views and comments, spanning from aggressive dislike to high support of Harris's delivery. A content analysis won't dictate whether or not Harris was successful, but it could

further enlighten scholars on the types of responses that he received from the public. It would be interesting to see how the content analysis would compare to the current conclusions I have come to on his use of rhetorical strategies. A comparison of both videos would also enlighten scholars on how much his reputation has grown since the debut of the TEDTalk in 2017. Both of these options allow for further exploration in Harris, his use of tech backlash discourse, and the possibility of understanding his level of success with his audience.

The study of tech backlash discourse is far from over. The repercussions of tech backlash are coming to light slowly, allowing for more individuals to explore the possible changes people in society may have to make. Harris is one of the first to embody this discourse and create multiple resources and speeches on the subject, making use of rhetorical strategies to strengthen his argument. Technology, social media, and the devices we use will not disappear: they have become a permanent part of our evolution. They more integrated they become, the more necessary tech backlash discourse becomes. As I mentioned in the beginning of the paper, every invention comes with its own downfall. Technology is no different, and if we do not pursue this discourse, the downfall will approach faster than we expect.

References

Blackwell, C., Cingel, D. P., Lauricella, A. R., Wartella, E., & Conway, A. (2014). The Mobile

Generation: Youth and Adolescent Ownership and Use of New Media. *Communication

Research Reports,31*(4), 357-364. doi:10.1080/08824096.2014.963221

Critchlow, N. (2018). Health and well-being in the digital society. In *Social Determinants of

Health* (pp. 103-117). Bristol University Press, Policy Press.

doi:https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt22p7kj8.14

Center for Humane Technology. (2019). Retrieved from https://humanetech.com/

Demographics of Social Media Users and Adoption in the United States. (2018, February 05).

Retrieved from https://www.pewinternet.org/fact-sheet/social-media/

Eyman, D. (2015). Digital Rhetoric: Theory. In *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice* (pp.

61-92). ANN ARBOR: University of Michigan Press. Retrieved from

http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv65swm2.6

Gerbner, G. (2013). Television: The New State Religion? *ETC: A Review of General

Semantics, 70*(4), 462-467. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/24761814

Gordon, R. (2016). ENTERTAINMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS FROM MILTON BERLE

TO THE IPHONE. In *The Rise and Fall of American Growth: The U.S. Standard of

Living since the Civil War* (pp. 409-440). Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press.

Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvc77bwm.16

Haan, M. D., Leseman, P. P., & Kruistum, C. V. (2014). Youth Media Lifestyles. *Human

Communication Research,40*(4), 508-529. doi:10.1111/hcre.12033

Harris, T. (2017). Transcript of "How a handful of tech companies control billions of minds

every day". Retrieved September, 2018, from

https://www.ted.com/talks/tristan_harris_the_manipulative_tricks_tech_companies_use_to_capture_your_attention/transcript

Hullman, J., & Diakopoulos, N. (2011). Visualization Rhetoric: Framing Effects in Narrative Visualization. *IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics,17*(12), 2231-2240. doi:10.1109/tvcg.2011.255

Jasinski, J. Deliberative Rhetoric. In *Sourcebook on Rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary Rhetorical Studies* (pp. 160-163). Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA, 2001.

Lampe, C. (2014). GAMIFICATION AND SOCIAL MEDIA. In Walz S. & Deterding S. (Eds.), *The Gameful World: Approaches, Issues, Applications* (pp. 463-480). MIT Press. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1287hcd.36

Lanham, R. A. (2007). Stuff and Fluff. In *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Martin, F., Wang, C., Petty, T., Wang, W., & Wilkins, P. (2018). Middle School Students' Social Media Use. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society, 21*(1), 213-224. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/26273881

Miller, D., Costa, E., Haynes, N., McDonald, T., Nicolescu, R., Sinanan, J., . . . Wang, X. (2016). Academic studies of social media. In How the World Changed Social Media (pp. 9-24). London: UCL Press. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1g69z35.9

Parnell, B. (2017). Is Social Media Hurting Your Mental Health? *TEDx*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Czg_9C7gw0o

Radesky, J. S., Schumacher, J., & Zuckerman, B. (2015). Mobile and interactive media use by young children: The good, the bad, and the unknown. *Pediatrics*, *135*(1), 1–3. https://doi-org.unh.idm.oclc.org/10.1542/peds.2014-2251

Rainie, L., & Wellman, B. (2012). The Mobile Revolution. In *Networked: The New Social Operating System* (pp. 81-108). MIT Press. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org.unh.idm.oclc.org/stable/j.ctt5vjq62.8

Rorty, A. O. (1996). Essays on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Retrieved April, 2019, from https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=vd7fEb1wOmYC&oi=fnd&pg=PA1&dq =deliberative rhetoric&ots=C5HFR54wvA&sig=GpS-H-MnPdsFIHH9-c3llWsfLmE#v=onepage&q&f=false

Sacasas, L. (2018). The Tech Backlash We Really Need. *The New Atlantis,* (55), 35-42. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/26487782

Soules, M. (2015). Rhetoric and Persuasion. In *Media, Persuasion and Propaganda* (pp. 19-36). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09zzm.7

Nielsen. Time Flies: U.S. Adults Now Spend Nearly Half a Day Interacting with Media. (2018). Retrieved from https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2018/time-flies-us-adults-now-spend-nearly-half-a-day-interacting-with-media.print.html

Valkenburg, P., & Piotrowski, J. (2017). SOCIAL MEDIA. In *Plugged In: How Media Attract and Affect Youth* (pp. 218-243). New Haven; London: Yale University Press. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1n2tvjd.16

Zachry, M. (2009). Rhetorical Analysis. In *The Handbook of Business Discourse* (pp. 68-79). Edinburgh University Press. doi:https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09zrh.14