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Big Tech's Dark Side: Killer Apps, Abs, and Acqs

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Technology has been (and can continue to be) used as a force for good in society. However, the largest players in this industry (known as Big Tech) have been under increased scrutiny in recent years due to their size, lack of regulation, and impact on society at large. Three of the Big Tech companies (Meta, Twitter, and Google) have deployed social media apps (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube) whose use has exploded in the last fifteen years. People use these **killer (practically indispensable) apps** to stay connected to friends and family and to increase social capital. Researchers have found that social capital allows individuals to more easily affect their environment (e.g., the more followers, comments, and interactions based on trust, the more influence) and create potential for advantage from their social network. Individuals also use social media for information control, reciprocity, social affiliation, boldness, investigation, news, or loneliness mitigation.

Enterprise-level users employ social media to promote content, collaborate and share knowledge, increase sales and business visibility, employ target advertising for brand awareness and demand increases, and increase user engagement. Social media is also used as a communications tool for exerting collective or social influence. Social media use allows novel forms of collective engagement, crowdsourcing and crowdfunding, political activism, proactive grassroots activism in driving and sustaining a social movement, and collective crisis communication for societal change.

Yet, for all of the possible good uses of social media killer apps, there are also negative influences, known as the dark side of social media. **Abuses** from social media companies and the users of their apps abound. Research has shown that envy of others, due to the use of social media, has a negative impact on an individual's cognitive and affective well-being. Other negative influences of social media include stress and social overload, depression contagion, and antisocial behavior. Abuses can lead to addiction, privacy neglect, the display of inappropriate content to minors, disinformation, censoring and free speech violations, sex trafficking, cyberbullying, and threats of violent crime. Another aspect of the dark side of big tech companies results from their size and power. Big tech companies have lots of money and have grown by finalizing **acquisitions** ("*acqs*") of rival companies and gobbling up innovative startups to take them out the market. For example, if you use a Google product, chances are it originated from one of the hundreds of Google acquisitions.

What are the possible solutions to these issues? Are social media companies too big for *our* own good? Are innovative new entrants impeded in the Big Tech industry due to the sheer size and potential anti-competitive practices of the tech giants? The untenable status quo is not an option, even as we grapple with the best approaches to mitigate the power of the social media platform "tres-opoly" of Meta, Twitter, and Google. It is time to decrease the power of Big Tech and open social media for multiple views and discussion. This move is important to tame the Wild West of social media by insisting that social media Big companies become *better*, not *bigger*. Not only for us, but also for the generations to follow.