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Technology and Democracy: What is driving us apart?

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Belmont University Research Symposium

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What do you know about big data and deep fakes? You have probably heard that companies sell our data and you most likely don't realize how much money big tech is making off of us. Not to mention the rapidly advancing technology of deep fake algorithms that make it possible to make anyone say and do things that they never said or did. Technology challenges our democracy in many ways but it is up to us to bring them together.

Our data is extremely valuable. Especially for companies who can use our personal data for profit. How convenient is it when you see an ad for something you've mentioned earlier that day or something that completely matches your taste. Can companies know our taste and therefore, define our tastes by streamlining us products they know we will want? One company that benefits from using our personal data is Amazon, and they are able to get our data through their services like Alexa and Amazon Go.

Our data is not safe; when you sign up for social media platforms, you are giving them the right to your personal information. And with that right, they are able to give that information to companies who seek it, and those companies will use it against you. What does all of this mean, and what can we as a democracy do to help us not fall apart? Cambridge Analytica is a British-based data company that collected over 5,000 data points on every United States voter back in 2016. They used those data points as a way to persuade Facebook users to vote a particular way. This has nothing to do with whatever political party you support, and everything to do with the fact that data companies like this exist and are driving us apart. We must know this in order to stop it.

Data ignorance is a big problem in society today. Due to the lack of advocacy and education on data privacy and the laws surrounding it. As of right now the only way to really educate yourself on this topic is through self research, and online courses. This is very concerning as it shows how far behind our education system is in teaching students about data privacy. I personally think that children should be educated on data privacy as early as middle school. Once kids are first introduced to smartphones, and smart devices they should at least know the basics of data privacy and how their data is being used.