(00:00): John

She leaked I think a month or two ago. So that was in the Brazil sub folder. And I, I like that document only because when most people think about, you know, Cambridge and how they, you know, targeting people, I think their understanding of that targeting is much, much different from what they actually were trying to do when they first started, which is in the *Mind Fuck* book. Um, right. Which was really, really that, that they were trying to find the behaviors that were moving people is they started with their focus groups then polling, then they would attempt to implement. And as they grew and were looking for data sources, that's when they started virtually watching people buying data sets. Yeah.

(00:42): Tim

Well, uh, you know, one of the things that I think we want to talk about today is going to be the, you know, the how to get to why rather than just what, um, and so, um, so I'm hoping we can spend some time on that. Um, is there, uh, we, we often start these, uh, you know, I mean we'll, we'll do it by the way. We'll do a post-production where we do a full intro and an outro and that sort of thing. But, um, is there anything that you'd want to cover? I mean, are there some specific things that you really want to cover and are there some specific things that you just want, like, yeah, let's just stay away from that.

(01:17): John

I think it's really up to you all. Uh, certainly I don't want to be associated too much with Cambridge.

Kurt & Tim:

Yeah, right, right.

John:

But it's kind of kind of hard not to on some level. Um, we do have to keep some of the names of our clients just as you know. Yeah. Understood. But other than that, other than getting too much into the detail in terms of how things are actually working, I'll probably keep it at kind of a 10,000 foot level, unleash a hundred people interfering in elections in the next 6 months?

(01:48): Kurt

yeah. Although don't we already have over a hundred people?

(01:52): John

Ooh. I mean, today I picked up a number of Russian accounts that they've just, they've gone active since, since, uh, Saturday. Oh, I can only imagine. Amazing.

(02:01): Tim

I w I, I'd like to talk about how you pick those up, how, how you can detect interference. I think that that's, that's really kind of cool. Um, what about the Claire McCaskill case study? Is that something that we can, uh, we can talk about?

John:

We certainly can talk about that. Okay.

Tim:

Cause I thought that was, that was a really cool, um, just a really cool story, you know, as, as a, as a case study, cause you're monitoring it day after day after day and then uh, this interference comes in and

things change dramatically. And you, you have this great story about how change and influence the election.

([02:39](#)): John

Ultimately I think that it's interesting to understand how it happened from a business standpoint. And what would you do about in the future? That's depressing to talk about in terms of the, um, you have to realize **90% of the U S budget is offensive. Cyber not defensive. And so the, the tolerance for having foreign countries interfere is fairly high.** Um, so Claire, Claire McCaskill's case, a great example, when we found it, everyone we talked to knew about it, you know, lights are flashing. They want to do something immediately. We get to the campaign and they're like, we don't care.

([03:16](#)): Kurt and Tim

Hmm. Wow. Hmm. Wow. Okay. Terrific. Any, um..

([03:24](#)): Tim

We're also just to, just to let you know, uh, you know, we'll do post-production everything later. We're probably, you know, four or five weeks out, uh, in terms of actually getting, getting published. Um, but when we, when we do, we'll, uh, we'll give you a heads up and, uh, we publish on Sundays and we certainly appreciate any kind of, um, social media support that you can, you can give to kind of keep the, keep the messaging going.

Kurt:

Are you gonna talk to music?

Tim:

Oh, yeah. Yeah. I'd like, you know, one of the things we like to do on behavioral grooves, John, is talk a little bit about music and, uh, just want to make sure that that's cool and absolutely, you know, are you, uh, you're, you know, uh, a nighttime jazz saxophonist or anything like that that we should,

([04:06](#)): John

No. About, no, I play no instruments, unfortunately. You're more likely to find me listening to Pet Shop Boys at night or, uh, some other random, you know, The Nationals or some other band…

([04:18](#)): Kurt

Oh, The National. Yeah. All right. This is, this is right up my air. I don't play an instrument either and I, I am not the musical guy here.

([04:26](#)): Tim

So we were my, my, my wife is a, is 50 and uh, she w we were listening to something. We were just on the music class night and she heard, uh, men without hats. And she's like, Oh my God, man, without hats, I'm like, God, total one hit wonders, you know, these guys dearly do anything.

([04:45](#)): John

And there's that big eighties concert that was just announced in LA yesterday. So I didn't know a lot of those. Blondie and a lot of the groups are coming back to do a one day show.

My why not. If there's, if there's money in it, you know, people will pay to go see him.

Definitely. Yeah, that'd be cool. Alrighty. Um, and we're, and we're good to the top of the hour. Is that right? Good whenever you need me. Alright. Oh, terrific. Thanks John. Thank you, John. All right. Okay. Um, well then let's get started. Okay.

Tim: John Fuisz, welcome to the Behavioral Grooves podcast.

John: Thank you Tim and Kurt for having me.

Tim: All right. We're excited about this. It's, it's terrific. We're going to start with a little speed round, uh, if that's okay. Kurt, do you want to, you want to get started?

Kurt: Sure, I'll start. So if you had to choose between a bicycle or a unicycle, which would you do?

John: Bicycle. Oh, nice. Okay.

Tim: How about which would you prefer to give up for a year? Your cell phone or a laptop?

John: Cell phone.

Kurt: Yeah, there's a certain, uh, demographic age group that's, that goes with the cell phone versus the laptop that we've found. Um, would you rather be expert in a new language or master a new instrument?

Instrument.

Tim:

Okay. So, which is the bigger driver of business results? Previous actions or emotion?

John:

Emotion.

Tim:

Emotion. Okay, good. That's, that's a, that's a great tee up for, for where we want to get started. Um, so first of all, uh, your, your work, your, your company is very fixed and we've got a bio in the, um, in the show notes. But tell us in, in just a couple of sentences that are really high level, what does Veriphex do? So Veriphex is a behavioral analytics company. We've developed a software product that is given, we think are three key insights that are missing from the current, um, kind of marketing behavioral stack. And that is, uh, behavioral vectors where we can go in and in a population, understand how their emotions are moving against the baseline topic. We can extract emotional triggers. So those are issues that have amplified.

We'll move those emotions and then we can also test, um, the effectiveness of those issues. We call that the implicit delta where we actually measure the emotional kind of impact of an issue.

Kurt:

Um, so let's talk a little bit, can you, can you explain what a **behavioral vector** is? Tell us a little bit about that.

John:

So that what we do is inside a society, it's not social listening. We're not limited to social media. We're looking at people's emotions on a weekly basis. And so, so I pick a topic, any topic you want to pick. Um, bicycles. **How did people feel about bicycles on their sidewalk, on their street, on a weekly issue, uh, on a weekly basis? How do people feel about that** rented bike sitting out in front of their house some weeks they may like it, some weeks they may, they may not. And so we measure that on a weekly basis in a society against the topic. Um, which kind of baselines. I think most of the other marketing data that people look at, um, is much different from what you see on social media.

([07:56](#)): Kurt

Okay. And so then you're getting, you're getting this baseline kind of seeing trends happen. So then **emotional triggers**, you're talking about emotional triggers. So help us understand that and use the bike example again. What are, are you identifying what an emotional trigger is that would get people to change their belief about that bicycle sitting out in front of their house?

([08:17](#)): John

Yeah. When you, when you think about most people in terms of their emotions, right? It's almost a bell curve. **They'll be the people in the middle that are kind of the centrists emotionally, there'll be the people on the, on the right end that are leading the pack and maybe the people on the left and the laggards that don't want to see change.** Um, we have a way to process the data. We can extract the issues of the people on that front end. Okay. If amplified right, that is If a lot of people, now perhaps red makes people more positive about bikes as opposed to orange or yellow, that if you, if you amplify that issue red, the entire population emotionally, we'll to move towards that position.

([08:58](#)): Kurt

So in other words, if, if there was, uh, some element of say, Oh, bicycles have increased the number of accidents, you know, the number of bicycles and that that was found to be a, uh, an emotional trigger that you've identified because it's in the right hand quadrant of the, of the bell curve. And that leads then that the everybody else is that, am I getting that right? I just want to make sure that,

([09:21](#)):

yeah, cause it's a way to change. It's a way to change messaging to accentuate the positive. Okay, so we're in another way to think about dogs. Do you, if someone sees a dog and an ad, does that provoke a positive emotion or a negative emotion?

([09:36](#)):

Okay. For my daughter it would be a positive emotion. I know that,

([09:40](#)):

but for some people in inner cities, et cetera, it'd be a negative emotion. And then if I'm a large car company, do I put dogs in the ad because I'm going to have an emotional transference from that color, from the dog to my product, and it's ultimately going to affect my product. Okay. Right. That's kind of traditional marketing where products were, were, were provided to consumers and kind of culture

would move to a product and they would adopt a product and they create a culture around it. It's, it's the issues that push people towards that product naturally.

(10:13):
Yeah. So you're going beyond the stereotype because I think it'd be fair to say that a marketer that's kind of living in the world of stereotypes would say, Oh, dogs are good. Let's just let you know, dogs are soft and furry and, and happy. So let's use a happy dog, uh, in, in our ad. And that will enhance the value of our product, right? That's kind of stereotypical broad-brush approach.

(10:34): John
Yeah, it may work, but there also might be changes on a weekly basis and there might be regional differences. And you, you might do that as a national campaign, right? Everyone wants to advertise nationally, assuming that were homogenous, but the reality is your sales may be down in the Northeast and it may in part be for the same reason your sales are up in the Midwest where you know, people like fluffy dogs more.

(11:00): Tim
Yeah. The fluffy dogs could, it could have maybe not a negative impact, but a less positive impact, right?

(11:07): John
Yes, correct. And there's also then the **anchor**, right? Some of the, you shift too far to the left accidentally hit an issue and you kind of anchor people firmly into a position and actually reduce the chance of change. Ah,

(11:18): Tim
so how do you find them? How do you identify that? Uh, if we go back to the bicycle story, that red all of a sudden is the leading indicator for what makes bicycles cool. That, that, that the people at the very front of the the curve are adopting or are choosing red. How, how do you identify that red is going to be the emotional trigger for the next bicycle story?

(11:32): John
We start with one of your pals and said was that it was something that she actually noticed **Annie Duke** in her book write her book thinking in bets. I mean, Annie, Annie had a great comment where I think she, she commented that **when people place bets, that's a sign of their emotion, right**? That's their emotional response. So we've developed a proprietary front end where we use ethical data. We don't data mind, we don't use other people's data sets. We go out and we basically sorts have people place bets on issues and have them place those bets on a weekly basis. Um, and so we're basically, then we're looking at the difference in those bets is for using forecasting those forecasts on a weekly basis to identify the emotion change.

(12:27): Kurt
Would it be similar to like the Iowa, uh, political, um, betting pool that, that they've been doing for years, uh, around political, you know? All right. I, I think, you know, I'm going to put a wager on, um, you know, Biden, this, this, this month because I think he's gonna win because that's actually the money I

get even though I don't necessarily agree with him, but he's the one I'm going to win versus say, you know, Sanders or whatever, liking versus betting. Yes.

([12:54](#)): John

Yeah. And so that's where actually a lot of a lot of this work came out of an original was intelligence advanced research project IARPA, their ACE proposal where they went into forecast and they went into betting and then out of that program spawn out all of those forecasting companies and all of those betting companies. Now that you see that you're talking about. Um, so we played in that, um, and it's some of the problems that are inherent in that system we've taken advantage of, which is how we then extract our data, but it's a similar concept.

([13:25](#)): Kurt

Okay. And I think for our listeners that's at least grasping the concept I think is like there's a part here that's actually really cool though. So you're able to look at that weekly data and say what, what's the trend, what's happening? And then be able to discern what those, as you said, leading indicators are out of that, that component.

([13:45](#)): John

Yeah, the, the trick versus we actually collect re we're collecting data weekly so we can analyze the change in the data. And then when we do our, our emotional triggers extraction, um, is as much as we'd like to think we're all individuals, it's actually somewhat formula

([14:05](#)): John

in terms of, uh, think of us as a zebra herd. You know what, **if the zebra on the very edge of the herd takes two steps over, do we all move towards ed zebra? Does he ever take 10 steps over in his near Elian? We let that zebra go and get killed**. So there's, there's a, there's a comfort range and it plays into swarms. It plays into a lot of other technology that people are comfortable with allowing themselves to be led by someone on the outside. [Kurt: Very cool.] So that's what we basically, we can analyze that relatively quickly, um, and provide our emotional triggers and or just correlation at that point, right? We identify three or four things that we think are the triggers. We don't get to causation. We actually go and do an AB test on them. Um, how do you, let's if we,

([14:52](#)):Tim

I love this bicycle and red thing because I think it's so random. I really kinda caught on it John before. So, uh, in order to discover that red is going to be the next bicycle thing, it's the leading indicator. How do you end up testing red?

([15:10](#)): John

So say we had two potential indicators. So we, red and yellow, we could take, we take red, we take our panel, um, that following week we split it to a control group of non-control group and to the control group. **We expose them to a story about red. It doesn't have to be about red bicycles. It's just we're seeding and planting the idea of red into their head right before they place their bet. We look then at the effect of red on the bet and quantify that emotional response.** Right. Cause their feelings of bicycles really shouldn't change from this week to the next week. Right? No, it should be somewhat constant.

([15:46](#)): Tim

Right. Well there was some intervention unless, you know, their brother-in-law was hit on, you know, by a car on a bicycle and died or something. I know that maybe that's a little dark, but in a large enough panel, the one or two outliers, yeah,

([16:05](#)): John

But in a large enough panel, we can account for. Um, but we'll see, you know, a three to 4% change in emotion in the beds off of simply amplifying an issue. Um, then we know we can then take that and then go into a brand new panel retested, see if it had the same impact tested. The East coast has the West coast has that nationally and start to see where that issue plays out and how it impacts people. At which point you may find out there's still a lot of red bikes in the Northeast. What you want to sell yellow in LA. Um,

([16:38](#)): Tim

yeah, no, that's, that's terrific. And given, uh, given the, the, the variances and the vagaries of, of context and the human condition, does this vary when you w if you have a client that says, well, I want to figure out how to boost sales in the Northeast, uh, do you, do you get pretty specific with, well, let's test it. Um, not just in New York city, like not just in Manhattan, but maybe we're going to look at the lower East side and we're going to look at the upper East side and like, do you get that specific?

([17:07](#)): John

We have not yet. You know, we're only in our, we're on our third beta right now. Yeah, we can, because our sample size is much, much lower than surveys. We're using roughly a hundred person panels. We can go in and take apart issues that require much smaller groups. So one of our current betas, it's super cool. I'm not sure how much I can really say about it, but it looks, it's looking at, um, **the general issue of multiculturalism**, but it's letting us come in and take that apart in a very specific area that nothing else has been able to take it apart, you know? So could we, could we take, you know, take you red, yellow bikes apart in New York city? Absolutely. Okay. You don't need that many people to start to identify those issues.

([17:47](#)): Kurt

And so you're just taking all of component and using that to identify these emotional triggers and then you test the effect, the effectiveness of that and, and kind of moving that forward. So…

([17:58](#)): John

Yeah, that's basically it. I think most, I think in traditional marketing, you know, people have been used to staying with what's old told works and so they just kind of repeat that, which is why I think data mining is so popular because it's just repeating past trends and those trends work until they don't. Um, and with social media, these new groups are forming. What motivates them, what doesn't motivate, motivate them. It's changing. Um, and that's interesting.

([18:30](#)): Tim

You gave a great example, uh, when we first talked about, uh, some, uh, some data that you were collecting on Claire McCaskill's campaign and, and what happened when, uh, there was some

intervention and things change. Can you, can you talk us through that, that particular case, uh, for the listeners? Cause it's pretty, pretty cool.

([18:55](#)): John

Sure. So once, once you can understand what emotional triggers move people, um, if you were a foreign government interfering in a U S election, you may choose to use those same issues. And that was our hypothesis when we approached the State Department in early '18 about a Russian disinformation and social media was instead of getting stuck looking at all the social media data out there, we would simply look for issues most likely to have an impact on people. So we looked at this issue in terms of Claire McCaskill's race in Missouri. So that was May '18 in February we identified, um, data that would provide us with the issue **Korea** that for whatever reason when Korea was amplified, it had a negative emotional impact on climate, Claire McCaskill and a positive impact on her competitor. Um, having that information, **we were able then to monitor the use of that term in social media saw tested and its impact on the raise and somewhat predicted what, six months ahead of time that we would see foreign accounts push the issue of Korea right before the election**.

([20:05](#)): John

And we gathered a bunch of nice students from George Mason University who were willing to become tail gunners and help me go through about 30 or 40 accounts worth of data that month. And each week we would meet, they'd get their data sign was, they go through the data and I warned them ahead of time what I thought we were looking for. But I also told them I really didn't think it was going to work cause I truly didn't. Um, and then low and behold within that last week, **Korea** just starts shooting through the roof. And there was no reason for those accounts to have Korea. Some of those same accounts get caught in terms of some other voter manipulation issues that Twitter takes him down 48 hours before the election.

([20:48](#)): John

Um, but it worked.

([20:53](#)): Tim/Kurt:

Yeah, it's fascinating. And so you're not going in and understanding, like trying to figure out why a Korea is negative for McCaskill and positive for the opponent. You're just, you're seeing that you're, you're, that you're identifying that as this trigger that is going on, and then you can make some predictions based upon that. Right? You're not getting, you're not delving into the psychological elements behind why voters would see Korea, you know, negatively for McCaskill versus the opponent. Yeah, we haven't.

John:

And that's, you know, ultimately, right. That's part of the issue with the whole issue of behavioral dynamics where so many of these connections are so random and they're irrational and they make no sense in theory. Right. I'm sure that makes sense to the person's impacting how they were, grew up, what culture they're wearing, what they were exposed to. Their brain has locked certain connections together, you know, that that impacts their behavior.

([21:47](#)): John

Um, could we go back and take it apart? I'm sure you could go down, down and do focus groups and start interviewing people and understand exactly why that was happening. In our case, we didn't, um,

the way the software works, once we've extracted it, we have it. Um, and that was, that was '18. That was a very, very early version of the product or just trying to see does it really work?

Kurt:

Well, there's been a lot of, uh, talk regarding **Cambridge Analytica** and you know, the work that they were doing back before the 2016 election and bringing in some of the psychological profiles of, of the big five ocean and applying those into these messages, which gets to some of that psychological profile. But what I'm hearing you say is you don't even need to go that far in order to influence an election. Is that, is that, yeah, that's correct?

(22:36): John

And I think that's consistent. You know, when you can go back DARPA, the Defense Advanced Research, they experimented with psychometric profiling and I think they found that it was only repeating 30% of the time. Okay. Right. And I think part of the problem is because as they were developing psychometric profiling, it's really of a discrete group and whether that really applies to the world as a whole or to other cities, it's a crap shoot and that's why they were getting a 30% return. **So psychometric profiling is not, it doesn't really work**. Um, and if you're a foreign government trying to jump in and interfere in an election, you don't have the time or the ability or the presence on the ground to go, you know, do that type of profiling necessary to even go down that path.

Kurt:

But you don't need to do that is what I'm hearing you say. So if I'm a foreign country and I want to influence an election in the United States or anywhere else in the world, I don't need to actually do that. I can just, uh, take some of these pieces and identify what those triggers are and then use those in an inappropriate manner in order to, you know…

(23:39): John

It's an odd area. We're being ethical, better result.

Kurt:

Okay. Explain that.

(23:46): John

Well, there's no need to steal people's data. There's no need to be on Facebook watching people. There's no reason to data mine, right? That entire, the entire kind of privacy violation path. What do they get at the end of the day? They get huge amounts of data they can't use. They get past, past, past patterns that may or may not repeat and they have no idea why they've repeated and what to what to amplify to change that pattern. Right? And so there's big data sexy cause it's costs money and big must be better, but big is not better. That is not better. Small, good ethical, you'll get a better result. Um, and because it's small and easy, that's how you can have foreign governments pop in and pop out and never see what they're doing.

(24:37): Kurt

So when you're saying ethical, it's, it's the data collection part to identify that that is ethical. It is not the intent of the foreign government trying to influence an election as, as you're saying, is the, the ethical part. I just absolutely correct.

John:

So that we could get, go down the path of sailor and Sunstein's discussions on nudges and are they ethical? Are they not a sludges versus nudges? Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Kurt:

And so it's, it's, it's this component though that as we, we look to what is going on in our society. I think there is this, and I don't have any research to back this up outside of just, you know, the, the just that's out there in the world that we are trusting information less because we're getting, we're feeling like we're being manipulated by businesses, by governments, by whoever else, because they are able to go down to a level that, that identifies those pieces. What do you, are you thinking of that? Or are you seeing anything like that? Yeah.

(25:42): John

You know, it comes into the honesty, honesty of having like an authentic interaction with a customer, with another person. Right. And that authenticity has gone when there's a heuristic, as soon as you think you're being manipulated, you reject it. Right? And so in many regards, when you're scrolling down on your screen and you're getting these ads for random things and you're pretty sure someone's targeted you based on you reject them, and in fact you then have a negative connotation association with those companies. It's really, it's really counterproductive. Um, and that I think is that is that difference where marketing switched from products being brought to customers, culture moving to the product and authentic discussion. Coke, right? Panda Bears were hugging Panda Bears and Coke adds life. And we're seeing it in the streets too. You know, Pepsi and I forget which are the Kardashians or whomever that tried to create an inauthentic moment, but as soon as you think you're being manipulated, boom, it's rejected. And that's, I think that's the problem with most of the digital marketing right now. It loses its authenticity because it's not addressing people at their core emotional level.

(26:56): Kurt

It. It's, it's funny, we, we interviewed Charlotte Blank who's the Chief Behavioral Officer at Maritz and she talked to us about this study that they were doing. Um, and she said, don't be creepy. Right. And so what they found is that, you know, you get that again, you, you, you clicked on the, let's just say the red bicycle, right. Um, cause you were kind of interested in it and now all of a sudden you're just inundated with red bicycle, you know, that are coming in even in different spots. Like where it, that's where it gets really creepy. Like all of a sudden, yeah, I did that. Or I go, I checked out a red bicycle at a store and now I'm getting red bicycles on my, you know, on my Facebook feed. But she was saying that one of the things they found is that **if you just gave a reason, like you're getting this ad because you had clicked on this, you know, prior that removed a lot of that, as you said, the, the part of you're trying to being manipulated that you understand.** And so she said it was a much better result when they were doing that then when they weren't having that information.

(28:06): John

Totally consistent that human need to understand why. Yeah, yeah.

(28:12): Tim

We humans, we have pretty good bullshit meters. On the other hand, we are also susceptible to all of the nefarious factors out. You know, the actors out there, you know, they, they work to, to some degree

(28:26): John

without, you know, going back to Annie Duke and that book. That's why I think if you want to understand social medium media manipulation, you got to at least read that book that's on our internal, our **must-read list**. Um, you know, and I think she points out that it's humans, uh, you know, they believe in rationalize. They they're not right. They're not providing, they're not checking the information. They just, if it's from a source they believe or, or if it conforms to their belief, they just adopt it. It's true. Um, and then they move forward cause **we don't have time to look behind each blade of grass and decide if there's a tiger or not. We just accept it and we move forward.** Um, where then if you can see if you, you know, someone is trying to manipulate you or not, if you have a reason, whether the reason makes sense or not doesn't make a difference, but it ticks off the box. There's a reason I'm not being tracked and they move forward. Um, and they're kind of funny.

(29:18): Tim

Yeah. Well, and ethical actors can, can do a good job of, of helping explain and lay out that because, and sort of give us rationale, uh, unethical actors can, could, like in the Claire McCaskill case can just say, just bring the word Korea into a post and it, and it still has the same trigger or the same kind of priming, right?

(29:42): John

Yeah. Look, we're, we're from the ethical standpoint, privacy. That's one of the big issues as we build out the company in terms of trying to maintain that. What's an ethical use of this tool and what's a non-ethical use of the tool? If you are a pro Holly, I'd say it's ethical. If you're pro McCaskill, you'd say that's not ethical. Um, it's, it's a difficult issue, uh, in terms of how we market and how we move people and what's, what's for the greater good or not.

Tim:

Do you have a, do you have a rubric, a, some kind of a tool that you use to say, this is kind of where we're going to land or how, how are, how are you and Veriphex making decisions about those ethical applications?

John:

I wish we did. We actually just had a very nice chat with Jeff Kreisler, I think, who was on your network, for instance not too long ago. Um, in terms of really pulling apart this issue and trying to establish, uh, an ethics board for oversight, trying to get people in, in the business as well as some, you know, those that haven't been represented on board to try and really look at this and decide, um, you know, can we be used for gun violence? Sure. You know, to sell vapes. No. Okay. And trying to try to pull it apart in terms of where we want to work and what we're willing to kind of use the technology for.

(31:01): Kurt

Yeah. Almost an **IRB** board for, uh, kind of looking at things that, that makes great sense. That's the interesting part about this and what scares me. Right. And, and I had read, uh, Christopher Wylie's *Mind Fuck*, which I know we had talked about a little bit before this, is that this too, to the degree that, you know, the vast majority of people I think are ethical and are going to be using these technologies and the insights in an ethical manner. We know that not everybody is ethical and that there are governments and, or individuals or corporations that might use this information in a way that either skirts that line or directly just jumps off right over that line and just goes for it. Um, and, and I don't know what there is, you know, what can we do about that? Is there anything from your perspective on trying, again to inoculate ourselves against those unethical uses of this, or are we just kind of screwed?

([32:07](#)): John

Yeah. Well, right. We've, we've already been screwed, so I'm not sure we're past that look. Well, yeah. So when we, when we realized that we had right, that we could, we could run circles around kind of the manipulation that was happening around us. Right? We could, we could find it faster, we could anticipate it, we could stop it in real time. Um, we could be used for good. We also realized we could be used for evil. So internally within the group we kind of saw it almost as developing the atomic bomb right visit good or is it bad and who's using it and how, um, which is to start and make sure from day one we're set up with this ethical oversight before money becomes already busy. But before money becomes too huge and people are too tempted to chase the dollar, **let's start with ethics and try and hold that ethics and try and set up a structure from day one that lets us technology grow but also always keeps, always keeps a firm ground in terms of what's good or what's not good**.

([33:13](#)): Kurt

So, I want to go back to the McCaskill thing that you talked about because one thing you mentioned to us offline was that you found this out and you presented it to the McCaskill group and they said, so what? Right. They, they basically didn't really give it very much credence. And where I'm going with this is, you know, there's a possibility here to be able to, as you said, you, you hypothesized about this, you predicted it and then when it came, you were able to capture that, that information quickly and then transfer it to a group that you thought would probably benefit from it. But if we're unwilling to take that insight and to do anything with it, uh, it doesn't have an impact. I mean was, is there anything that you, that a gift, the McCaskill, uh, you know, group had taken it, what, could they have done anything at that point or is it too late by that, that, that time?

([34:05](#)): John

So this, this gets to who we are under understanding how social media is really used and can be a little bit of a slap across the face for most people. **And that is the U.S. uses social media offensively. Okay. I think we see it. We see it more when we've destabilized countries. Libya, Egypt, right. We've, we've used Facebook and Twitter to go after groups.** Um, the us has even started, I think it was since 2013 under the Obama administration started targeting, uh, propaganda inside the United States in English going after ISIS groups and ISL groups in the United States, right?

([34:45](#)): John

Uh, all those platforms are used by the United States government. Coming in and adopting a solution or doing something to randomly take people off is not a high priority because it does much, this is the good versus evil. It's doing much more good than the potential for tweets about Korea against McCaskill. [Kurt: Right.] Add into the fact that U S elections, although it's a federal election, they are run by the States. Even at the federal level, **you don't know until you find the bad actor, whether it's an FBI issue or whether it's a CIA, NSC issue, you don't know. And so you get into this government quagmire in terms of who's really responsible.** So in the McCaskill issue, her view was it's an issue for the federal government. Federal government's issue is until you tell me exactly who is controlling each one, those accounts, I don't even know what agency to send you to.

([35:40](#)): Kurt

Got it. Wow.

([35:42](#)): John

Let alone get down to Twitter. They don't want controversy. And we've met with, when we've met with Twitter, it was guys don't, don't cause trouble. Happens not a big deal. Um,

(35:57): Kurt

So it's just the world that we're living in then is that, I mean we just have to be so me as a, as an individual, Tim, as an individual, any of our listeners as individuals to that degree, we just have to understand that it's happening and we need to be skeptics on a lot of the stuff that we see. Would you or am I just really downplay making those worlds seem more difficult?

Tim:

Or like you said, it's, it's too hard to, to question every twig. Snap is, is that a tiger? It just gets to be debilitating.

(36:36): John

Yeah. So I think as, as humans, the best that we can do is if we see something in our social media feed and we see the fifth or sixth post about the same thing, ignore it because something's probably going on, right?

(36:49): John

It's that amplification. So would it be weird for your friend to send you something about Korea? It'd be not if they're talking about current Coronavirus or something else. Maybe there's some rational reason to do that. It's when there's an irrational mention of any topic that has no basis in kind of existing fact, what should be happening should take note of it and try and ignore it to the extent you can. But once that seed has been planted in your brain, you're to buy the red bike.

(37:18): Kurt

Yeah, yeah. No, and that's, I mean, you, you bring that up, right? It's, it's, we get anchored in and then it's very hard for us to move from that anchor in, particularly if we don't think that that red bike was placed there by somebody else, that that's our own thought coming in and those, those patterns that make that happen. So…

(37:40): John

It plays right. **We want to believe that we're rational humans. They're right, but to actually have an effective defense, you have to admit you're irrational** and then try and deal with deal with a world where it's, you're dealing with irrational emotions and triggers and things like that. But we don't have enough self-realized people and there's not enough therapist in the world to get us all.

(38:03): John

I'm not sure, analyze what our mothers have done to us when we're program does so well.

Kurt:

And even to the part that Tim talked about, right? I mean you can't, we're living in an age where every snap of the twig, you know, it's not like we get one or two snaps a day, we get thousands and thousands of snaps a day and we just, you know, are not able to process that in the manner to really take that to this rational actor examining each of them. We just to, as you said, it's, you know, who's the, who's the messenger, does it align with what I thought previously? You know, some motivated reasoning, confirmation bias in there and I'm just going to run with it. But I do like your idea of saying, Hey, in that

social media thread, if this is something that's out of the norm and all of a sudden you see a lot of it that's a, that's a good heuristic to, to say, all right, I should probably double check this and take a look at it.

(39:04): John

Yeah, right. Like right, right now in social media, just even in the, in the political ads, right, there's a lot about height, one candidate being short, one being tall, that those are emotional triggers. I mean, probably what's being mentioned is not really height. It's the euphemism that trigger for what's sitting behind it, which is more likely an antisemitic attack. Um, and so, but it will hit people, it will affect people. And you're not going to back it out. Yeah.

(39:31): Tim

Yeah. Uh, John, I'd like to, uh, I'd like to talk a little bit about music. Yeah. Oh my God. I, I'd like to know, I'd like to just start with a, if we could, what's on your playlist? Let's, let's talk a little bit about what, what, what'd you like to listen to at any given time

(39:49): John

Playlist? What I was listening to last is probably Depeche Mode.

(39:53): Kurt

Oh, he is a man after my heart.

(39:59): John

There was a **Depeche Mode** playlist sitting on this, uh, phone. A lot of **The Nationals** lately. Um, see what shows up first. There was a little **Ziggy Marley**. Um, yeah, I'm all over the place. I have some old **Sinead O'Connor** in here. **Gary Clark, Sharon van Etten**. Very anything **New Order** is always good. I'm all over the place. Oh, go ahead. I was gonna say there's always a reggae station on Saturday. For some reason. The KXP's reggae program on Saturday is one of the best.

(40:40): Kurt

Wow. Is there a, there are a lot of eighties bands in there, so I appreciate that. I know, I know Tim, Tim's musical interest staph after 1970, you know, so, so, uh, I, I can, I can go with that, that, that's such crap.

Tim:

Okay. So, but do you, so when you're listening, do you like to listen to music while you're working?

(41:02):

or not?

(41:03):

And if, so, is there a particular kind of music that you write?

(41:06):

I prefer when you're, when you're working. Depends what I'm doing. Okay. All right. Uh, so yeah, I'm, I'm all over the place in terms of music. If I'm into something heavy, I want something with no words.

If I'm uh, just trying to chug through data, I need something dancy and have the, have the beat drive and me on some level. Um, we, we actually got to bring this back to business but play a with music, right? Because you can use it. What do you like and how, how much does it, Sharon van Etten or The Nationals sound like an old band from the 80s such that that jump is not too much and you loved that music. Um, right. That's all of what Spotify and uh, all of those groups of sprinters, the huge amount of money research and, and to try and predict where people are like mixed into their playlist, spectrum channel on Sirius right now. Right? **They play all these and they throw in those two or three, five new groups that sound like the old groups to get you to kind of pushed forward on new music**.

([42:06](#)): Kurt

Yeah. And which is one of the great things I think about some of the uh, streaming station, you know, like a Spotify or Pandora and different things that if they can do that, what I found and they're get, they've gotten better actually Pandora's the one that I typically listen to and they have now given me the option to say, do you want to do a deep, deep dive? So if it's a Depeche Mode, which I do have, I have my Depeche Mode station, I can do a deep dive. So that means going into like some of their, you know, besides, and some other pieces on that I can do a, I'm going to get these wrong, but you know, another one is basically variety. Another one is the deep dive, actually the is there's a back catalog that's one of them deep dive anyway. So it allows you that opportunity to cure rate that playlist in a manner that if you just want to hear Depeche Mode, all right, that's fine. Right? They can, you can do that. But if you want to hear depression mode and, and you know, maybe newer bands that sound similar to the batch mode that you would like, then you'll, they'll throw some of those in. Or if you just want to have a wide variety, you can though they'll be able to do that too. So those are always nice because there are times when I just want to listen to Depeche Mode and then there's times when I want to have a

([43:19](#)): Kurt

wide variety. All right.

John:

I have, I've been enjoying hitting random on my playlist lately with the entire catalog and I'm, I am impressed with some of the music I've purchased in the past, no recollection whatsoever having purchased. And that's always interesting ideas, the safe thing.

Kurt:

And sometimes my, uh, when I hop in the car, if it's on, uh, on the audio piece, it, it'll just turn on my, my playlist and I'm like, Oh, the radio station is playing some good music. And then I realize, Oh wait, no, it's coming from my phone. Oh, that's why. So I thought when you were talking about, you know, going back to business and talking music, I thought you were going to go into, again, music can be some of those triggers. And so, so again, to that degree, and I know that all the, there's been research on the wine shops and playing German music and more German wine sell and playing French music and more French wine sell. But I was just wondering if you have looked at any of that or is that just a way outside the realm of, of what you guys are working on?

([44:24](#)): John

We, we have not tested songs yet. Um, that is definitely something in the, in the queue. We've been looking at it more from the standpoint of, right, with all these streaming services, you play your depression mode, you play what you like. And so you're not listening to new, you're not exposed to now. Whereas when you were listening on the radio,

(44:42):

okay,

(44:42): John

you got exposed to new stuff every day and you knew you're supposed to like it because anyone who listened to that radio station should like those songs before you shine on NA or whatever else you're listening. Um, and so right in the problem right now, streaming services having is that everyone's listening to the same thing.

(45:01): John

Yeah. New artists aren't getting played. Um, and then that, how do you, how much new is good and when is it too much of a leap of faith that people say, I'm going to reject it? Cause then seem too far away from the herd.

(45:15): Tim

Yeah. This is the, this is a big problem. Uh, and, and it's evidenced in the w in the way the streaming services are paying out. Uh, our, our paying artists, uh, that the top 1% are earning 99% of all the revenues that they're earning as much as, you know, the remainder, uh, total, you know, add it up. And so, uh, people are listening to the same artists. And that's it. Uh, and they're not deviating from that. They're not, they're not getting, they're not having DJs curate, uh, playlists that introduce new music to them on a regular basis. Uh, you know, we, we used to trust, as you said back on the radio, we would trust the DJ to cure rate something. I listened to that station, I listened to that show. I like what Wolfman Jack has to say, I love you.

(46:02): Kurt

Well Wolfman Jack was pre-1978, there you go. For all our people, he was a very famous DJ back in the '70s.

(46:11): John

That's a great example because in music you can see where that music, right exposure to that new music push culture forward, right? We're still not listening to the same bands from the seventies or eighties as the push mode fans right there. It's moving forward.

(46:25):

When you don't have that, that kind of authentic emotional connection, you stagnate. And that's what, that's what digital marketing is. It's still essentially messages from the fifties, sixties. So, you know, pick, pick your decade. It's not moving forward because it's not driving culture forward. Like traditional marketing has done no different than music. Yeah.

Kurt:

And is that, is there a part of that because it is so localized that you don't have the big, now again going back to the car or Coca-Cola as you said and uh, you know, I'd like to give the world a Coke, which everybody knew that advertisement, but now there's such micro-targeting in the ads that there isn't that overarching cultural impact that would have happened as compared to a national campaign. Know

(47:22):

When we first started, when my first foray into digital marketing and data mining was like '98, '99 when we created a credit, a cloud form for RX store, which ultimately became their futures by X, you might like Y type of thing. Right? It was a data mining product tool. I'm sure you use the technology cause it was licensed onto some famous people. Um, **but that was never supposed to replace traditional marketing. That was a tool to help you find a product when I'm in an online shopping store and not walking through my local drugstore.** Right. But it was an easy hit because you're just looking for that incremental purchase and it was too easy from a revenue standpoint and I think people would become too dependent upon it, which I think is now as a backlash now the popularity of, you know, kind of the behavioral analytics that people wanting to behavioral sciences, people wanting to understand how do I actually move people because we have that huge gap where, you know, traditional marketing people have forgotten about, well I forgot about what it does.

(48:20): Tim

Yeah. You know, and at the same time we're probably pretty happy with the **status quo**. We are generally pretty happy with the status quo. We like the consistency. We like hearing the same music over and over again. Our brains are still not satisfied with, with total stultification and we, we want something new. We still desire, uh, new sounds and new images and, um, you know, we like to break the status quo. Uh, maybe not as much as we prefer the status quo, but our brains still need it. I remember Google, you know, uh, for a while was said that their part of their algorithm was to serve up in a search criteria. They'd serve up 80% of what was exactly part of your search criteria, but 20% that was outside of it, just to kind of stimulate the maybe.

(49:05): Kurt

I get a weekly newsletter from, um, Ozan Varol, who, who's writing a new book called "Think Like a Rocket Scientist." Um, I really like him, but he wrote this article this week in the newsletter, which is an easier, life isn't a better life. And what he's talking about is though he, I, he, he hates grocery shopping, hates it. You know, he said, it's an hour of my life that I can never get back and I'm going. And so, so when all of a sudden Instagram, Instacart, not Instagram, Instacart came along and he could just, you know, order online and it would show up at his door. He goes, that was the, you know, it was great. **But then what he realized is he said, I am not, I'm missing some of those, a personal interaction of just being out with people, seeing people and talking to random strangers. But I'm also missing that opportunity to be walking down the aisles and something catches my eye on the shelf that goes, Oh, that's new, that looks interesting**. I might try that. And all of a sudden, you know, finding new foods or new things and he said, we're giving, you know, this ease of life of, of having everything just a brought to us and this is the identity, you know, here's what you would like by what Google thinks as opposed to you just going out and exploring. Said that may not be the best life. So

(50:25): John

I mean it looks, serendipity is good, accidents are good, and when we remove all of that, that kind of stagnates us. Right. And so that's culture stagnate.

(50:34): Kurt

Yeah, that's a really interesting topic and conversation and just a thought experiment to go through to what happens when everything is just, you know, curated for you without you actually having any input on it. And to your point, I think John, is that it's stagnation, right?

(50:56): John

So that's ultimately what we're trying to do, right? We're trying to, if we can explain why, if we can explain emotional triggers, we can write that off. Sent a communication back to brands. Back to people. Let's not, you know, **let's not deliver customers to products with digital, but let's recreate brands**. I mean there's, there's another Coke out there, right? Yeah, we've gotta be, yeah, there has to be. I would hope so.

Tim:

Yeah. And by the way, Coke isn't gonna last forever. I mean it's been around for a long time, but it's not gonna last forever. So what are you talking about? So why not, why not have the next one?

(51:34): Kurt

Well, again, if we look at, you know, automobiles and, and you kind of think about the, you know how in the fifties and sixties it was three car companies and then, you know, the 70s you got Japan coming in and different things. And now, you know, even today we're getting all the new electric vehicles that are coming out and there's a number of new companies that are doing that. So yeah, we are evolving, but how does that work and are we going to be open to that if we aren't open to, to exploring and having some of that big brand being presented to us, how are we ever going to find them? So yeah, it is. We would run down that rabbit hole too much maybe. All right.

Kurt:

Well John, thank you so much. This has been fascinating. It's got me thinking, which I think is always my favorite part about doing these interviews. And so thank you very much.

John:

Thanks for having me. I really appreciate it.

(52:32): Tim

We'll end the recording there. John. Thanks so much. That was cool. Yeah, man, I am just fascinated with the work that you're doing though. I love that you're, you're absolutely an evangelist for do something different, right. Don't do the same thing. Uh, and I mean, I, I didn't want to mention it, but I mean that's what star Starcom is, is I'm throwing a lot of money behind trying to take the multicultural issue apart. You know, whether simply throwing a nondescript uh, ethnic identity in a commercial satisfies that multicultural need. Um, right. But we're going to, we're going to go in over the next few months and break down on different panels and different ethnic backgrounds in terms of how they're actually reacting to ads. Cause most ads are still written for the white male. We're in certain cities that's flipped and they're the minority now and kind of taking that apart and they're going to be pushing that big, this, uh, we get some good results. It'd be pushing a big the summers, spring, summer. Um, we really cool.

(53:31):

Well, and it is interesting because you do see some companies that are working towards that and I would just, I, I bring this up and it's just an interesting thing. So I, fly Delta is the major airline out of here. So I always typically fly Delta and in the jetway going down, they always have these posters that are up there. Like, you know, Delta is the, you know, fly, you know, eat and drink while you're flying. I don't know what the words are, but five years ago, the vast majority of all of the people in those pictures were what, you know. Um, and today they are of a much larger, uh, diversified group even to

the point. Um, uh, you know, the one that that keeps catching me is there's, uh, two guys and they're obviously, you know, they're there, they're leaning on each other and various different things and I've gone, wow, you know, that's a, you're gay couple. Yeah. And so it's, it's looking like I'm going, Dave, they're pushing that edge I think with some of the potential, you know, riders have the plan, but to the degree, I don't know how they're, you know, what kind of testing they've done to see how they people respond or anything or if that's just what they've doing.

(54:45): John

That's right. Thanks. Star comes trying to dive into that cause no one's really tested it. People are just flying blind hope and they're fixing it and no one knowing if they are so, so we're doing that. That's really cool. And then we'll find out in another 60 days if we'll be in the Balkans fall, um, Balkans. Oh wow. Russian disinformation. Yeah. Wow.

(55:07): John

We'll be set up over there in each of the four countries.

(55:12): Tim

Oh, so tell me about that. You're actually going to go and set up shop. Um,

(55:18): John

We can do it remotely. So we'll do, we'll do everything from the U S but the local, the data feeds will go locally in terms of what they need and that will feed into the Voice of America feed into whatever they're doing locally in terms of, um, we monitor it for the Russian stuff, attacking us, that the perception of the U.S. as well as the perception of NATO, right. Cause all the, all the propaganda coming in is to drive those countries away from NATO. And so it's looking at that and then looking at ways to feed stories back into those countries to keep people inside. NATO.

(55:52): Tim

Well, is there a symmetry between, uh, the kind of disinformation or, or whatever sort of propaganda is coming from Russia into the Balkans? Uh, and, and the information or disinformation that's happening in the U S is there some symmetry between those

(56:09): John

Haven't measured Balkans yet, so don't know. But when we did our work in the UK, um, it's the same accounts. So the same accounts today that I saw picking on Bloomberg were the exact same accounts being used in a target on local UK politicians, which you right. If you're,

(56:24):

if you're really that interested in politics in the U S you wouldn't care about a local election in the UK so much. It's Rachel, you're also right. It's an odd individual who has 24 hours a day to only be concerned about all these political races around the world, which is how we can trace some of that stuff back to who might be pushing it and arresting. Well, and wow.

Kurt:

I just, I, I'm, I'm fascinated and I don't know, but I would be, if I was the democratic national committee, I would be hiring somebody like you to be coming in and saying, here's what's going on. And again, how

much can you push back on that? I don't know, but at least understanding what that's coming in. I would have [inaudible]

([57:09](#)): John

I thought so as well. But the reality is companies like 270 Strategies, all Obama's will guys and their political consulting groups are just reselling the same product. It didn't work in '16 it didn't work in '18 but if they can resell it to someone and it's being used now, **that's because there's no accountability in elections. If the person loses, it's not the fault of the technology. It's the fault of the candidate**. And these and these groups come together and then disband. So unlike a company where you would be called to task because your campaign didn't work and you didn't move enough Coke that month, these guys just disappear. So it's who knows who. And if it's Obama's associated with it, then yeah, I was, I mean I've, I've, I've met them all, I've been up to New York to meet the Bloomberg people and team. But, um, part of our problem with the Balkan work is we're not allowed to work in U S election.

([57:57](#)):
Yeah. Hmm. Got it. The, the,

([58:00](#)):
there's a restriction on that cash that keeps us out of actually working in us politics. Yeah, no, no problem. Which is weird.

([58:08](#)):
It is. It is. That's interesting. Hey, you were terrific today by the way. Thank you for your explanations were really boiled down. Uh, cause I think that there's a lot of listeners who are curious but not sophisticated. And so you did a great job of really keeping your answers in a really, you know, high level simplistic. Um, you know, someone who's not really sophisticated in this arena is going to get it. I think so. Well, well done.

([58:37](#)):
Yeah. Thanks for sure. Thanks so much, John. All right. Yeah. Well thank you. I think that's it. And uh, yeah.

([58:43](#)):
All right. Yeah. Like, like I said, we'll, we'll, we'll be in touch, but four or five weeks out and we'll, we'll be, uh, we'll be in touch.

([58:50](#)):
All right. Appreciate it. Thanks very much. Thanks Jeff.