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My tech-savvy privilege

Published by [Ana Rodrigues](#) on the 26th August 2020

Many of us, myself included, have made jokes about how we are our family's tech support in an annoyed tone. I now regret those jokes. I wasn't empathetic and I regret it.

We expect parental controls to help children navigate the internet. The funny thing is that children have been online for the same time as our parents and older generations have been. We're very forgiving when a [child orders thousands of pounds worth of fake game coins online](#) but we're not when it comes to the mistakes of older people. We shame them for falling into Nigerian Prince's schemes, [romance scams](#), virus and [porn phishing emails](#). [Catfish](#) raised my generation and we have people our age doing stand up routines based on those scams - as if they are general knowledge. They are not.

How can I expect my parents to be tech-savvy when it was my generation (or my sister's generation) the ones who introduced them to a computer or a phone? My parents have been "online" since 2012. I've been online since 2000.

I saw it all, either via direct experience or via friends telling me at school - you know... the grooming, chat roulettes, obscure forums, scams, illegal downloads, fake profiles, photoshopping, editing videos, fake emails, rumours, cyber-bullying. Only to be now trying hard to protect my parents from those things.

I have tech-savvy privilege. Plus I work in the industry. I know how many things are built hanging by thread and I've witnessed terrible decisions behind made for the sake of clicks.

The ageism in tech (you know, besides the sexism and racism) is also when you completely forget about a group of users. Decisions made by product and design teams have an incredibly strange consequence and end up being the but end of jokes. The "[family tech support](#)". I must extend my understanding of the constraints here: more often than not, there isn't the money or time to test with all the possible people who could use tech products and it won't be people like my parents who would be in such testing groups either.

The ageism in tech is for example when your relatives call you because they can't sign in anymore on a website (usually social media). So you try to explain to them how to find the form input fields. You ask them what they are seeing only to suddenly realise that they are on the page that creates a new account instead of sign-in. This isn't about intellect. You're not this superior being because you know how to sign-in on a website. Firstly, we're probably seeing a design that is likely inaccessible due to colour contrast and hidden labels anyway and secondly is probably designed by someone who has been online for over 15 years now and we're just used to the pattern. We, tech-savvys, are not special. We just have muscle memory.

Next, next, next, install

I'm an immigrant. I use a lot of "free" services to easily communicate with my family and friends regardless of what devices we use. A lot of people have

mentioned this before, but the "rage quit social media" is a privilege. I tried it once for three months and we were miserable. The moment we don't have the same apps to communicate, things like [MMS](#) don't seem to work well between different operating systems of phones. They just want to communicate with me like... everyone else is communicating with everyone else. They are not going to be involved in a discussion about ethics and privacy of social media. I can't blame them. Why would they? Why would they assume ill intentions of this medium of communication when they grew up with phones and things they could use without hidden consequences? There is no easy and cheap alternative way to communicate that works on all devices.

Privacy is a privilege - but i'm not going to start on that one right now but for example: I know that if I go to a website to buy something and if I click "confirm and pay" and nothing happens, it is probably because my ad-blocker is on and I have to turn it off.

I know about ad-blockers and I guarantee you that the majority of people don't. The majority of people are not in dev twitter. The majority of people are on facebook and youtube and others. The majority of people don't know about VPNs either let alone even afford them. And again, I am not superior or better than anyone else because I know about this.

No, people don't have a choice

A while back my parents bought a new android phone. They called me and it was already set up. In that call they mentioned: "and my new email is something something". I asked "why? What is wrong with the email I created for you?" and they explained: "at the phone shop, we asked the staff to set up our phone and it asked for email and password and I didn't have a google account so they created a new one for me".

When I say "to most people, Facebook is the internet" I don't mean this in a patronising tone. I mean that when my parents bought that phone and were forced into a Google account, apps like Facebook and whatsapp were already installed. The majority of the people who didn't grow up with the internet, especially those who don't speak english, don't know about browsers. To most people it is: "Look up

on the internet". And the internet is this thing and no app on their phone is called "internet".

Speaking of which, the other day I picked up an android phone to test something in a browser and I couldn't immediately find how to type an url... and I'm tech-savvy. I was stuck in the google dot com landing page.

Anyway... I was on "family tech support" today. A relative added a comment in the wrong photo and couldn't figure out how to find it again and how to delete it. Admittedly, I struggled to find the page where I could see all the activity done by the person and find the correct post to even do this task and again... I'm "tech-savvy".

When I signed in on their account I was horrified with what I saw. Their timeline was just scam ads, people selling fake goods, fake/clickbait news and there is nothing I can do to stop it and protect them from making a mistake. I can click and remove an ad as many times as I want but new ones creep in immediately after. Technically, you aren't allowed to show the majority of these things on television but you clearly can on the "internet". Why wouldn't people assume that these things are regulated too?

I am not perfect. Sometimes I get annoyed with people and blurt out "how could you click in that?", "of course that's fake", "just click on the button!!" and I'm not empathetic or patient. I'm just sad that we got to this point when sometimes all people want is to communicate and connect with their loved ones.

While this is just a ramble without any solution, the more I thought about this the more I tried to remove myself from "the website world" and the devices we use to be online. I started to think about the user interfaces that also have technology and that lots of people can use without as many complaints: ATMs, ticket machines, television or anything with a screen really. It's interesting.

The internet and communication shouldn't have a one way path with arrows pointing. And things won't be fixed by only creating your own blog and sending your RSS feed to your parents. Things won't be fixed either by burning all the evil websites. The problem is much deeper as it isn't just websites: it's operating

systems, it's protocols, it's hardware, it's software, it's design, it's internationalisation and more. It comes from meetings that only do personas of people who are in the building. It comes from copying what "bigger players" in the industry have done which we assume are the right patterns. If we raise our hands and say "look, there has to be a compromise as we can't make things easy for everyone" then, in that case, the web isn't for everyone.



OH, HELLO!

My name is [Ana Rodrigues](#) and I'm a front end developer in London.

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