Why are we glued to our phones?

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Have you ever wondered why you keep scrolling through your newsfeeds for over two hours at a stretch instead of studying for that exam tomorrow? Have you ever wondered why people are talking about the misuse of their privacy when they themselves agree to the "Terms and Conditions"? There is a whole profession dedicated to making you and I ignore all these system flaws and manipulate our consent by combining psychology with technology. It is called "behaviour architecture".

Here are three ways behaviour architects are helping big tech companies make money off your ignorance.

THE INFINITE SCROLL

The infinite scroll is the reason for your desire to scroll endlessly through your feed without feeling the necessity to click. This is what happens when you go to YouTube to watch one video but end up watching 10. This happens because most companies are competing for your attention. This is also known as the attention economy where behaviour architects design the interface in such a way that the sequence in which your newsfeeds or YouTube video suggestions are designed is catered to your needs in such a way that it exploits your desires to make you keep scrolling. They use the data that they mined from you to understand your behaviour and what type of content would keep you hooked to your screen.

THE NEVER-READ PRIVACY POLICY

Privacy policy is designed keeping in mind that most people will not scroll through the tedious document given the attention span of the average human being is getting smaller each day. Thus, this allows the social media apps to prey on you impatience as you click the "I AGREE" button without even reading the whole thing as you sign off your privacy and give them the right to mine your data. This data is later used to analyse your behaviour further to provide you with advertisements and sponsored contents tailored specifically to your need. The reason you never question such policies is that they give you a false sense of control by asking to agree to the terms that they know you will never read. At the very least, this form of consent is manipulated consent because it is not being generated out of your own free will.

RANDOMLY SCHEDULED REWARDS

Every time we go on the internet, we are not sure what we might find. Given human beings are curious in nature, behaviour architects exploit this very nature in humans and make us feel like we are playing a game where we randomly wait for the reward. The reward comes in the form of an unexpected like or comment, or the reaction our posts, likes, and comments get. So, we randomly keep taking a course of action on the internet hoping this action will result in another random action by someone else in the form of a like or comment. This traps us in a loop of constantly seeking reward in the form of social validation.

Megha spends her days scrolling through Facebook for hours and watching cat videos. You can reach her at megharahman26@gmail.com

THE POINTLESSNESS OF USING DIFFICULT WORDS

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It is not the least uncommon to see people use unnecessarily complex words when a simpler one would suffice. You may have come across people using "quintessential" instead of "essential", and several other similar mistakes. The reason for these is very likely because of the belief people have that it is better if they use a more complicated word. This belief, however, is not correct.

Long and difficult words are problematic, not only because it makes a person reading repeatedly look up the meaning of words they don't know, but also because it might distract the reader from the point that is being made. Think of how people talk about a speech or piece of writing they really liked. They might say that it touched their heart (or a nerve, depending on the content), because it relates to them, they think the issue being discussed is import-

I wrote, "They're warm, nice people with big hearts."

ant, the speaker or writer voiced something they were unable to express, etc. However, it is very unlikely that you'll hear someone compliment or even mention the person's vocabulary. In a 2015 article in *The Atlantic* titled "The Needless Complexity of Academic Writing", the author talks about how even academics are irritated at the use

And that became, "They're humid," prepossessing Homo sapiens with full-sized aortic pumps."

of overly complicated words. It also mentions Daniel Oppenheimer, a psychology professor who published a paper titled "Consequences of Erudite Vernacular Utilized Irrespective of Necessity: Problems with Using Long Words Needlessly". It concludes, "Write clearly and simply if you can, and you'll be more likely to be thought of as intelligent."

Even when explaining a technical subject, it might be worthwhile to take the audience into consideration. Think of Steve Jobs explaining what an iPod does. Instead of talking about the number of gigabytes, Jobs says that having an iPod is like having "1000 songs in your pocket". This is extremely effective, not only because it makes it easy to comprehend how much storage there is, but because the shorter and simpler words used are easier to remember.

A crucial component of effective communication is simplicity. If people struggle to or don't understand what it is you're trying to tell them, the whole point of communication is lost. It is therefore much better to abandon the use of difficult words and instead opt for simpler words that can get the message across.

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