

The Attention Deficit

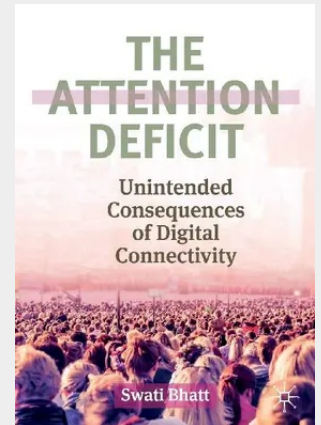
Unintended Consequences of Digital Connectivity

Digital technology has enabled connectivity on an unimagined scale. Human beings are social animals and economic activity promotes this socialization. Market transactions are based on optimism about the future, faith that the world is good and trust that growth is organic or coming from within the system. Individuals therefore invest in the future by having children, by extending credit and accepting risk, and by building connections with others in the sincere expectation of this connectivity being reciprocated.

This book explores the unintended consequences of ubiquitous connectivity. The first effect is captured by the sharing model. Technology offers multiple avenues for sharing experiences and personal information, so active engagement with this increased content uses mental effort. Connection inevitably leads to comparisons with other groups and individuals, so despite the benefits of affirmation and group inclusion, these links corrode social networks, leading to depression and mental apathy. The second effect--the result of the commercialization of sharing--is encapsulated in the attention deficit model. Loss of self-worth, driven by the first effect, encourages further connectivity and sharing as buyers seek more comfort and reassurance via social media, paying with time and personal information. The product is digital content and the payment is with time and data. Correspondingly, social media fulfills this demand with exuberance, both via user-generated content and commercially curated content. We are overwhelmed with even more information, paying with increasingly scarce time and attention. Finally, the third and most consequential effect is diminished risk taking. Attention scarcity, as a consequence of the content tsunami, throttles cognitive effort, impairing judgment and decision-making. So the safe bet may be to do nothing . . . take no risks and no gambles.

Weaving together the latest research on economics, psychology, and neuroscience, this book fills a void for readers wanting a smart, clear analysis of communications markets and the commercialization of Internet-inspired connectivity.

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