

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/ways-to-retake-control>

Acknowledging the impracticality of telling tech companies to drop attention-grabbing features that their bottom lines depend on, design ethicist Tristan Harris recommends consumers turn to the makers of the devices and interfaces that set up the "choice architecture." Harris, the co-founder of Time Well Spent, gives several examples that limit the intrusiveness of today's technology.



Transcript

- Yeah, so the question is really in the attention economy where everyone, doesn't even matter if you're building Snapchat or you're building a meditation app, even meditation apps need your attention.. You have to figure out how to put a habit inside of your body so that you use it every day.. How do you tell any company not to get people's attention or to subtract some of these manipulative features from their products, is your question.. So the answer is you cannot obviously get any person whose business model is to maximize how much attention they get from you to not do that.. You can't tell YouTube to not try to show people the next videos.. You can't get Snapchat to now subtract the streaks feature.. So the way to do it is you have to go up a level.. And you go up a level by going to the device and the platform.. So in other words we can't actually ask Facebook to do something against its business model but you can ask Apple, Microsoft, or Amazon, or Samsung, who are companies whose business models set up the choice architecture, which is the interface between you and this army of things that wants your attention.. And so right now that choice architecture, because we have this model of human nature that says, "People are clicking or choosing freely", is just wild west, right? Like basically when you get a phone it's like Apple and Google give totally open door access of all those apps to just reach into you and do all the stuff that they wanna do..

So there's a bunch of ways they can clean up and mediate that relationship.. So it's like if we're jacking people into the matrix do we wanna jack their impulses or do we wanna jack basically the top part of their reflective minds? And there's ways of designing the choice architecture on a phone, like a home screen or notifications, that are basically asking the most reflective part of ourselves what we want.. And to make that concrete, that's the theory, the concrete version are things like conversational interfaces.. So Siri, the AirPods, watches, things that have supplemental interactions that are peripheral interactions, in which you basically are doing something with the device but you're not giving people a bottomless bowl of things to scroll through and explore in an infinite world, which is what they're all based on now..