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The Smarter Screen: Surprising Ways To Influence And Improve Online Behavior



Synopsis

A leading behavioral economist reveals the tools that will improve our decision making on screens. Office workers spend the majority of their waking hours staring at screens. Unfortunately, few of us are aware of the visual biases and behavioral patterns that influence our thinking when we're on our laptops, iPads, smartphones, or smartwatches. The sheer volume of information and choices available online, combined with the ease of tapping "buy," often make for poor decision making on screens. In *The Smarter Screen*, behavioral economist Shlomo Benartzi reveals a tool kit of interventions for the digital age. Using engaging reader exercises and provocative case studies, Benartzi shows how digital designs can influence our decision making on screens in all sorts of surprising ways. For example: You're more likely to add bacon to your pizza if you order online. If you read this book on a screen, you're less likely to remember its content. You might buy an item just because it's located in a screen hot spot, even if better options are available. If you shop using a touch screen, you'll probably overvalue the product you're considering. You're more likely to remember a factoid like this one if it's displayed in an ugly, difficult-to-read font. Drawing on the latest research on digital nudging, Benartzi reveals how we can create an online world that helps us think better, not worse.

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Customer Reviews

This may be the best book I've read all year, and I've read dozens. I'm insatiable when it comes to behavioral economics and big data, and a fan of Thaler, Gneezy, and Pendleton. While

this book covers some of the same territory, even a few of the same studies, two things set it apart. First, it is applied behavioral economics, the use case being the screen. • Second, Jonah Lehrer's narrative is excellent. Whatever his past sins, they are irrelevant here. What matters is the readability. If the everyman was left to his own devices to try and muddle our way through the scientific studies and academic journal articles on which this book stands, he'd be lost in no time. The key takeaways by chapter for me were:

1. The Mental Screen. It's an attention economy. Whoever commands our attention wins, because in an age of ever more information, our minds are bounded. We are like at the end of a fire hose having 125 times more water pushed at us than a kitchen faucet, but with the same mouths and minds that we always have had.
2. Function Follows Form. This flips the old paradigm. A well-known study showed that people make link-type assessments of websites. In particular, they factor two things: colorfulness visual complexity. Visual complexity is the more important of the two. In general, you want things to be simple, but not too simple. There is a halo effect to these blink aesthetic reactions, and indeed, function follows form.
3. Display Biases. We all have patterns of looking and they are filled with bias. For example, in a two by two matrix, we always look at the top left. When scanning tables, people will look at the rows, more often than the columns. Knowing that enables you to optimize what a user sees on screen.
- 4.

If you've ever felt adrift in today's technological world, helpless amid infinite options, unable to make meaningful decisions in buying or reading or even just watching five hundred TV channels, you're not alone. UCLA behavioral economist Shlomo Benartzi has reliable scientific evidence demonstrating what perceptive people already know, that today's online environment creates a panicked, lost-in-the-woods feeling in most people. Fortunately, wise engineering can reverse this paralyzing trend. From its earliest origins, pro-Web enthusiasm has gushed over the Internet's capacity to provide users more information, more choices, and more autonomy. It's been the classic capitalist assertion, that simply having more options available flushes bad choices away and consolidates good choices. But anyone who's shopped for consumer electronics online recently knows that simply having more choices isn't good enough. Without guidance, increased options generate snap judgments, haste, and paralysis. Benartzi himself has participated in new research demonstrating how screen users handle information overload. His conclusion, based on his own research and the published discoveries of his peers: human attention isn't adapted for broad, undifferentiated knowledge dumps. (Anyone who's read government reports recently knows this.) Wise information merchants going forward will need to make the digital screen conform to

what Benartzi calls "the mental screen" — our attention capacity. It's not that screens are making us more superficial," Benartzi writes. "Rather, the world of screens merely makes it easier for us to act on those superficial first impressions. We gravitate toward first options, self-indulgence, and whatever™s placed in the center of the screen.

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