

The Attention Merchants

Notes & Cues:**Article:**

The history of the slow exploitation of our consciousness — whether by television commercials, war propaganda or tweets — is the subject of Tim Wu's new book, "The Attention Merchants."

Mr. Wu's chapters about the early days of advertising are some of this book's most enjoyable. But it's the last third of "The Attention Merchants," in which Mr. Wu charts the rise and fall of the internet, that is truly memorable.

Mr. Wu is aware of the web's virtues, not least of which is that it connects us to others. But we pay a price for our e-mail and social media habits. Google and Facebook keep track of our purchases and wishes and fears — we've become their product, their content. And how connected are we, really, under the new terms and conditions of our lives?

So in the final chapters of his book, Mr. Wu implores us to regain custody of our attention. We are what we choose to focus on. What will we choose? This is an age of glorious individualism. Yet never, it seems, have we belonged less to ourselves.

Summary: