

Gap Fill: The Attention Economy

Read the explanation carefully below and fill in the gaps using words from the word box. Definitions and images for the words have been provided to help.

WORD	Subsidize	Curate	Influencers	Attributed	Algorithms
<i>Definition</i>	To pay part of the cost of something.	To select from among many possibilities.	A person able to influence on social media	Created or believed to be created by.	A set of mathematical instructions.
<i>Image</i>					

The business of social video sharing platforms such as YouTube and TikTok is best explained through the concept of an ‘Attention Economy’.

The ‘Attention Economy’ is a term widely _____ to former Google employee and founder of the [‘Centre for Humane Technology’](#), [Tristan Harris](#).

Harris highlights that “the amount of total attention in the world isn’t growing. We only have so much in our lives, we can’t save it up or put it in a bank account” ([Medium, 2017](#)).

Indeed, just as we demonstrate our love and care for family, friends and partners by giving them our attention, brands, political movements and _____ only survive when given attention.

Your attention is the lifeblood of the businesses that _____ social media and video sharing platforms with their advertising dollars. For advertisers, it doesn’t matter how slick, targeted or impactful an advertisement is, if no one sees it.

Have you ever caught yourself looking at YouTube or TikTok way longer than you intended?

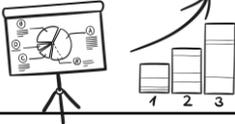
For these companies, this is a core part of their business. More watch time means more opportunities for you to pay attention to and eventually click on an ad.

Rather more creepily, more watch time also allows these companies complex _____ to harvest more data about what you like, when you like it and how much. With this information YouTube, TikTok and others _____ a personalised playlist designed to keep you watching.

Whose interests does it serve if you’re up at 2am watching TikToks or another YouTube video?

Speaking in the US Senate, [Senator Schatz](#) from Hawaii summarized how this works,

Continued on next page...

WORD	Statistically	Inflammatory	Rabbit hole
<i>Definition</i>	Results according to or by means of statistics.	Speech or video resulting in angry or violent feelings.	A metaphor for going from one video to another, journeying ever further from the original video or plan.
<i>Image</i>			

“Social media [companies] and other internet platforms make their money by keeping users engaged so they’ve hired the greatest engineering and tech minds to get users to stay longer inside their apps and on their websites. They’ve discovered that one way to keep us all hooked is to use algorithms that feed us a constant stream of increasingly more extreme and inflammatory content” (Schatz in [‘Rabbit Hole by Design’](#) 2019).

This rabbit hole of “more extreme and _____ content” leads girls who search for fitness videos getting recommended diet videos and then later being recommended anorexia videos. The same _____ leads from ‘alternative news’ to flat Earth conspiracies ([2019](#)).

There is no evil plan behind this rabbit hole, it is simply an algorithm that delivers people the videos they are _____ most likely to keep watching. This keeps the platforms growing and brings in more and more advertising dollars. But it comes at a cost.

That’s why one of the creators of the YouTube algorithm, [Guillaume Chaslot](#), is campaigning to change it. YouTube’s own data shows that 70% of watch-time comes from videos ‘recommended’ by its algorithm ([CNET, 2018](#)).

Social video sharing is here to stay. TikTok is the fastest growing App of 2020 and YouTube amasses over one billion hours of watch time every day. Both platforms also have lots of interesting, relevant and creative content. But there is a dark side to their attention economy business model. They are “rabbit holes by design”, engineered by some of the finest human minds to gain your attention and keep it for as long as possible.

a) In your own words, explain how and why YouTube and TikTok are “rabbit holes”.

b) Have you ever gone down a YouTube or TikTok “rabbit hole”? If so, **describe** it. 

Reflect: Time Spent

Being intentional about how you spend your time is your best defence against getting sucked down a social media, streaming or gaming rabbit hole.

“Based on the latest research, I recommend that children, teens and their parents sit down together and actively approach their 24-hour day as valuable time to be used in ways that support a healthy lifestyle. Thinking of their day as an empty glass, they should fill it with the essentials; enough sleep to grow and avoid getting sick, school, time to spend outdoors, play, socialize, do homework... Once these activities are totaled, remaining time can be used for other experiences.”

– [Dr. Michael Rich](#), Harvard University



While we haven't discussed gaming rabbit holes, they can be summed up in this meme.

Task: On the template below, create your own “daily glass”, based on how you spend your time. Use the example on the slide to help guide your work.



Time

8pm – 12am

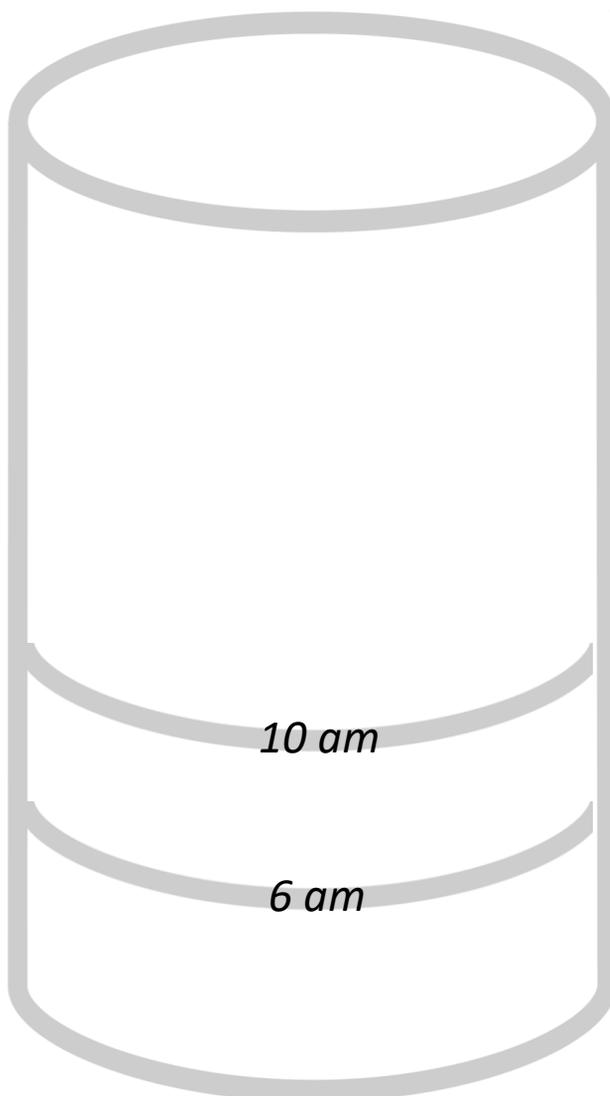
4pm – 8pm

12pm – 4pm

8am – 12pm

4am – 8am

12am – 8am



Explanation of time

Reflect: Time Well Spent

Reflect on your “Time Spent” glass. If you’re comfortable, share your glass with two friends and compare your time spent. *Once complete, answer the questions below.*

1) Does your glass reflect the “healthy lifestyle” Dr. Michael Rich recommends (*see quote on pg. 7*)? Why or why not?

2) What is one thing you would most like to change about your “daily time spent”? *Why?*

3) Set one time spent goal to try over the next week.

If you’re stuck looking for practical goals read the [‘Take Control’ information at the Centre for Humane Technology](https://www.humanetech.com/take-control) for ideas.

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