

Google Wants To Slow Your Internet Because You Are Seeing Too Much Truth About SJW Idiocy

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Justin Kosslyn leads product management at Jigsaw, the Google (erm, *Alphabet*) subsidiary working on technological solutions to problems like online censorship and radicalization. Before that, he worked at Google News, Google+, and Google AdSense.

The experience must have radicalized him a bit, because in [an essay](#) published at Motherboard, he takes direct aim at not just one of Silicon Valley's founding assumptions, but one of his parent company's core business strategies.

"The philosophy of the Internet has assumed that friction is always part of the problem," writes Kosslyn. But look around. The problem now isn't too much friction; it's too little. "It's time," he says, "to bring friction back."

Our digital lives dispense with friction. We get the answers we seek instantly, we keep up with friends without speaking to them, we get the news as it happens, we watch loops of videos an algorithm chose for us, we click once and get any product in the world delivered to our doorsteps in less than two days.

Less friction means more time spent, more ads seen, more sales made. Tech companies lose customers during login screens and security verification, and as a result of slow load times. The country's top computer science talent is paid billions of dollars to further reduce the milliseconds of delay separating our desires and their fulfillment.

But these technological wonders do not seem to have made our lives or societies more wonderful. [Depression](#), [anxiety](#), [loneliness](#), [drug overdoses](#), and [suicide](#) are rising. Productivity growth has [slowed](#). Income inequality has [skyrocketed](#). Politics is [more bitter and more tribal](#). Donald Trump is president of the United States. Something is wrong.

Kosslyn is focused on digital threats: malware, phishing, disinformation. All of these, he says, "exploit high-velocity networks of computers and people." But I wonder about the whole damn thing. Whether it's all gotten so fast and so easy and so frictionless that we're on an endless Slip 'n' Slide down the chute of our own worst impulses.

Harder, angrier, faster, lonelier

I'll start with media because that's the space I know best. I've been digital since day one. I was a blogger before I was a journalist, and I've always preferred publishing online to

publishing in print. It was, well, frictionless. You wrote something, you pressed publish, and there it was.

But as I look around today, I find myself yearning for a bit more of the friction of yesteryear. Twitter is almost perfectly frictionless — no editors, no formatting, built for instant reaction and in-group applause — and Trump is the result. YouTube, with its recommendation algorithm automatically directing us [to more extreme content](#), is a powerful force for radicalization. Cable news is fast, reactive, competitive, and thus sensationalistic, tribal, and conflictual.

Friction creates space in the system where judgment can intercede, where second thoughts can be had, where decisions can be made. Look at organizations with longer time lags and more editors and you get better, calmer, more considered coverage. I believe that one reason podcasts have exploded is that they carry so much friction: They're long and messy, they often take weeks or months to produce, they're hard to clip and share and skim — and as a result, they're calmer, more human, more judicious, less crazy-making.

Too much friction can be annoying — there are plenty of days I feel like posting something without waiting for an edit, and much news needs to be known quickly — but too little friction can be dangerous. It leads to reporting and commentary that's reactive, ill-considered, wrong. I wouldn't want to go back to the media of the '50s. But I don't want to double down on the trends of the present, either.

Let's put politics and media, with its unique dynamics, aside. Socializing is frictionless online. It's far easier to click around on Facebook than to plan a hike with a friend, a movie with a

cousin, a day out of the house. It's easier, but is it making us more connected?

The answer, empirically, is no. A [new study](#) paid people to limit their use of major social media platforms to 10 minutes a day, and compared them to a control group that didn't make any changes. The result? "Participants who reduced their time on social sites saw a statistically significant decrease in depression and loneliness," [reports](#) The Verge's Casey Newton. "The control group did not report an improvement."

Then there's distraction. I feel it myself, right now, writing this piece. It is frictionless to click over to Reddit, to my email, to any of a million sites that will take my mind off the work of writing a column and refocus it on the easy sugar water of social media and viral content and Slack conversation.

Writing, by contrast, is full of friction. It's hard and slow, and the words on the page fall short of the music and clarity I imagined they'd have. But it is, in the end, rewarding. It's where I have at least a chance to create something worth creating. The work is worth it.

This isn't a new problem, of course. It's always easier to play a video game than to craft a presentation. But the ease and availability of distractions has skyrocketed with smartphones and broadband connections, while doing hard, productive work remains as maddening as ever.

Dan Nixon, an economist at the Bank of England, has suggested that the slow productivity growth across economies reflects the growing ease of distraction, which is overwhelming the gains of new technologies. "Distractions can directly reduce the quality of

our work,” he [writes](#). “An influx of emails and phone calls, for example, is estimated to [reduce workers’ IQ by 10 points](#) — equivalent to losing a night’s sleep.”

Worse, there’s evidence that all this is changing our brains, making them resist long periods of focus and crave more distraction. “If every moment of potential boredom in your life — say, having to wait five minutes in line or sit alone in a restaurant until a friend arrives — is relieved with a quick glance at your smartphone, then your brain has likely been rewired,” writes computer scientist Cal Newport in [Deep Work](#).

Digital distraction isn’t an accident. It’s a business strategy.

When Facebook sends you a notification saying someone has tagged you in a picture, or when Twitter pings to say someone has mentioned you in a comment, they’re giving you a spike of anxiety and anticipation that raises the friction of not checking the platform. Cutting-edge behavioral science is being applied to the problem of how to make you pay less attention to your surroundings and more attention to your phone.

So too is cutting-edge lobbying. The blockbuster New York Times story on Facebook’s political tactics [reveals](#) a company paying off high-priced opposition researchers to make sure regulators don’t try to add the friction individual users don’t have the power to apply themselves.

And yet the world is full of friction that we recognize as valuable, much of it enforced by laws and regulations. Seatbelts in cars, restrictions on opioid prescriptions, banisters on stairwells. Silicon Valley, however, has developed a culture that prizes our

instant impulses and erases the space we use to question them. And the result is, well, the world we live in. Trump isn't just the president, he's also the perfect symbol of our age — a frictionless id; a Twitter account in human form; a man devoid of the shame, social caution, and second thoughts that curb most people's worst impulses.

"The internet is facing real challenges on many fronts," Google's Kosslyn concludes. "If we truly want to solve them, engineers, designers, and product architects could all benefit from the thoughtful application of friction."

Change needs to come, but I'm skeptical it will come from the employees of companies that get richer by greasing the path between our impulses and their profits. Rather, it's going to have to come from us rediscovering the value of things being a little slower and a little less efficient.