

Social Media Addiction: Living in a World Hooked to the Net

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Abstract: *In the era of digital technology, social media has become an integral part of our daily lives. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and now Threads offer a plethora of opportunities for communication, networking, and entertainment. However, the rise of social media addiction has emerged as a concerning issue, warranting a closer examination of its impact on individuals and society. This article aims to shed light on the addictive nature of social media and its far - reaching consequences. Materials and Methods: Several electronic databases, including PubMed, Wiley, Springer, Google Scholar, Web of Science, WHO, Wikipedia, Research Gate, Forbes, Medline, Healthline were searched for this article.*

Keywords: social media, Addiction, World, Hooked, Net.

1. Introduction

“Social media is like crack - immediately gratifying and hugely addictive” –

Gary Vaynerchuk.

Smartphones, Snapchat, Instagram, and other social media technology help you stay connected. You're born with the drive to connect with others. It's good for your physical health and psychological well - being.

But what if you find yourself becoming too connected to social media?

“There's growing evidence to suggest that some individuals can develop a dependency on social media that's not unlike an addiction to alcohol or drugs,” says Paul G. Simeone, Ph. D., Vice President and Medical Director of Behavioural Health at Lee Health. “Their overdependence on social media has led to symptoms typically associated with substance - use disorder. A 2019 survey found that 40 percent of U. S. online users aged 18 to 22 years reported feeling addicted to social media. Five percent of respondents from that age group admitted the statement “I am addicted to social media” described them completely.

The findings correlate with another study that reported 4.1 percent of boys and 3.6 percent of girls who are intense social media users display internet addiction¹.

2. Methodology

The following article is based on data searched/collected from a wide source of books, National & International journals, Internet sources (Including WHO, Wikipedia, Biomed Central, Healthline) and various databases including PubMed, Google Scholar, Wiley, Research Gate, Springer etc.

What is Social Media Addiction?

Checking and scrolling through social media has become an increasingly popular activity over the last decade. Although the majority of peoples' use of social media is non -

problematic, there is a small percentage of users that become addicted to social networking sites and engage in excessive or compulsive use. In fact, psychologists estimate that as many as 5 to 10% of Americans meet the criteria for social media addiction today. Social media addiction is a behavioural addiction that is characterized as being overly concerned about social media, driven by an uncontrollable urge to log on to or use social media, and devoting so much time and effort to social media that it impairs other important life areas².

Why is social media so addictive?

- Social media platforms ignite the same reaction in the brain as gambling and recreational drugs do.
- When a person engages in a pleasurable activity, the brain releases a hormone called dopamine. Dopamine is responsible for feelings of pleasure.
- When a person receives certain social media notifications, such as a like, retweet, or comment, the brain may increase. Trusted Source dopamine levels. This could cause a person to experience a pleasurable feeling, positively reinforcing additional social media use.
- In a 2020 paper in Business Ethics Quarterly, the authors pointed out that those who design social media platforms benefit from people with social media addiction and may intentionally design these platforms to be addictive³.

Why Teens Are Particularly Vulnerable

Adolescence is the second biggest period of growth in the brain. Because teens' brains and social skills are rapidly developing, they are particularly susceptible to the addictiveness of social media.

“The overuse of social media can actually rewire a young child or teen's brain to constantly seek out immediate gratification, leading to obsessive, compulsive and addictive behaviours,” says DeAngelis. “This is what can make mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, ADHD and body dysmorphia worse.”

Adolescents who use social media from a very young age are more in danger of developing these disorders and future

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addictive behaviours. DeAngelis says, “It’s extremely important that parents and guardians of young children and teens pay attention to the symptoms of these mental health disorders and take note if their child is spending too much time on their screen or begins to lie about their internet use⁴.”

What Makes social media So Compelling?

Experts who study internet use say that the magnetic allure of social media arises from the way the content plays to our neurological impulses and wiring, such that consumers find it hard to turn away from the incoming stream of information. David Greenfield, a psychologist and founder of the Center for Internet and Technology Addiction in West Hartford, Conn., said the devices lure users with some powerful tactics. One is “intermittent reinforcement,” which creates the idea that a user could get a reward at any time. But when the reward comes is unpredictable. “Just like a slot machine,” he said. As with a slot machine, users are beckoned with lights and sounds but, even more powerful, information and reward tailored to a user’s interests and tastes.

Adults are susceptible, he noted, but young people are particularly at risk, because the brain regions that are involved in resisting temptation and reward are not nearly as

developed in children and teenagers as in adults. “They’re all about impulse and not a lot about the control of that impulse,” Dr. Greenfield said of young consumers.

Moreover, he said, the adolescent brain is especially attuned to social connections, and “social media is all a perfect opportunity to connect with other people.”

Meta responded to the lawsuit by saying that it had taken many steps to support families and teenagers. “We’re disappointed that instead of working productively with companies across the industry to create clear, age - appropriate standards for the many apps teens use, the attorneys general have chosen this path,” the company said in a statement⁵.

Understanding Social Media Addiction:

Social media addiction refers to the excessive and compulsive use of social networking platforms, leading to negative consequences on an individual’s physical and mental well - being. The addictive nature of social media is rooted in its design, which often incorporates elements like constant notifications, likes, and shares, triggering dopamine release in the brain, thus reinforcing the behaviour⁶.



Figure 1

How social media Affects The Brain

Due to the effect that it has on the brain, social media is addictive both physically and psychologically. According to a new study by Harvard University, self - disclosure on social networking sites lights up the same part of the brain that also ignites when taking an addictive substance. The reward area in the brain and its chemical messenger pathways affect decisions and sensations. When someone experiences something rewarding or uses an addictive substance, neurons in the principal dopamine - producing areas in the brain are activated and dopamine levels rise. Therefore, the brain receives a “reward” and associates the drug or activity with positive reinforcement.

This is observable in social media usage; when an individual gets a notification, such as a like or mention, the brain receives a rush of dopamine and sends it along reward pathways, causing the individual to feel pleasure. Social

media provides an endless number of immediate rewards in the form of attention from others for relatively minimal effort. The brain rewires itself through this positive reinforcement, making people desire likes, retweets, and emoticon reactions⁷.

Signs and Symptoms of Addiction

- Is preoccupied with the internet (thinks about previous online activity or anticipates next online session).
- Needs to use the internet with increasing amounts of time in order to achieve satisfaction.
- Has made unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop internet use.
- Has stayed online longer than originally intended.
- Is restless, moody, depressed, or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop internet use.

- Has jeopardized or risked the loss of a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of the internet.
- Has lied to family members, therapists, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with the internet.
- Uses the internet as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving a dysphoric mood (e. g., feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression)⁸.
- Keep the phone out of the bedroom.
- Download apps that can limit the time they spend on social media.
- Find a hobby that does not require the use of screens.
- Avoid taking the phone to family meals.
- Turn off app notifications.
- Remove all friends and followers that they do not know in real life.
- Ignore negative messages.
- Take frequent breaks from social media.
- Ask friends and family for help and support¹¹.

What are the downsides of social media addiction?

Engaging in social media once in a while is unlikely to be harmful. However, there are negative effects to consider when overusing social media.

Some possible downsides of social media include:

- low self - esteem, which may be prompted by incorrect perceptions that others' lives are "better" than yours.
- increased isolation and loneliness.
- anxiety or depression.
- onset of social anxiety disorder.
- a fear of missing out (FOMO), which can lead to even more social media usage.
- disrupted sleep patterns, especially if you use social media right before bedtime.
- decreased physical activity, which may affect your overall health.
- poor grades or work performance.
- ignoring the relationships in your "real" life.
- reduced ability to empathize with others⁹.

How to know if a person has a social media addiction

A person can ask themselves the following questions to identify social media addiction:

- Do they spend lots of time thinking about or planning to use social media?
- Do they have an increased urge to use social media?
- Do they use social media as an escape from personal problems?
- Do they try and find it difficult to reduce the time they spend using social media?
- Do they become restless and troubled when not using social media?
- Has their use of social media had a negative effect on their job or studies?

If a person answers yes to several of these questions, they may have a social media addiction. In some cases, individuals may want to consider speaking with a mental health professional¹⁰.

How to decrease social media use

Limiting social media may be difficult for people with social media addiction. However, it is an important step in dealing with excessive social media use.

While it is possible to try to limit social media use without medical intervention, in some cases, professional help may be necessary.

Some ways a person can try to decrease social media use include the following:

- Keep apps out of sight by removing them from their phone or most - used device.
- Leave the phone in another room.

How Parents and Guardians Can Help the youngsters

Fortunately, parents and guardians who notice these effects on their children can take several measures to help them develop a healthy relationship with social media instead. Try these strategies:

- Help your teen develop effective coping mechanisms and strategies to manage their stress, anxiety, frustration or sadness. This can include exercise, team sports or talk therapy. Try to get them outside to experience nature, if possible.
- Work with your teen to manage their screen time. Communicate with them and agree on healthy boundaries to help them reorient their relationship with social media from escapism and distraction to a tool for enjoyment or information. Encourage and empower them to practice these boundaries on their own with your support.
- Agree on long - term goals and strategies to help your teen sustain a healthy relationship with social media. Find the type of support that works for your teen—time with friends, talking to a loved one or therapy—and encourage them to seek out this support the next time they experience negative emotions, feel overwhelmed or are preoccupied as a result of social media.

If your teen is struggling with their mental or physical health, or the challenges of everyday life, talk to their primary care provider for resources to help¹².

3. Discussion

Social media generally refers to third - party internet - based platforms that mainly focus on social interactions, community - based inputs, and content sharing among its community of users and only feature content created by their users and not that licensed from third parties¹³. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok are prominent examples of social media that allow people to stay connected in an online world regardless of geographical distance or other obstacles¹⁴. Recent evidence suggests that social networking sites have become increasingly popular among adolescents following the strict policies implemented by many countries to counter the COVID - 19 pandemic, including social distancing, "lockdowns, " and quarantine measures¹⁵. What is for sure is that, according to many experts, the use of social media — and that includes instant messaging services — can lead to serious addictions and their associated consequences: anxiety, depression, irritability, isolation, distancing oneself from the real world and from family relationships, loss of control, etc. The usual profile of the addict is a young person aged between 16 and 24. Adolescents are at the highest risk of falling into

addiction, experts say, for three basic reasons: their tendency to be impulsive, their need for a widespread and growing social influence, and finally, the necessity for them to reaffirm their group identity¹⁶.

4. Conclusion

This review article points out the intensity of social media addiction and its related issues. Social media addiction is an increasing problem that is common among adolescents and young people. A person may feel the compulsion to check social media platforms and experience withdrawal symptoms when they do not.

Social media addiction can affect someone's mental health and result in physical problems, such as sleep problems. A person may be able to decrease social media use on their own. However, if this is not possible, they may want to seek help from a mental health professional

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