

Social Media

What Is Social Media Addiction?

Social media addiction is a behavioral 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 areas.

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.

Addictive social media use will look much like any other substance use disorder and may include:

Mood modification (engagement in social media leads to a favorable change in emotional states)

Saliency (behavioral, cognitive, and emotional preoccupation with social media)

Tolerance (ever-increasing use of social media over time)

Withdrawal symptoms (experiencing unpleasant physical and emotional symptoms when social media use is restricted or stopped)

Conflict (interpersonal problems ensue because of social media usage)

Relapse (addicted individuals quickly revert back to their excessive social media usage after an abstinence period)

The phenomena of social media addiction can be largely attributed to the dopamine-inducing social environments that social networking sites provide. Social media platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram produce the same neural circuitry that is caused by gambling and recreational drugs to keep consumers using their products as much as possible. Studies have shown that the constant stream of retweets, likes, and shares from these sites cause the brain's reward area to trigger the same kind of chemical reaction seen with drugs like cocaine. In fact, neuroscientists have compared social media interaction to a syringe of dopamine being injected straight into the system.

Social Media And Mental Health

Research has shown that there is an undeniable link between social media use, negative mental health, and low self-esteem. While social media platforms have their benefits, using them too frequently can make people feel increasingly unhappy and isolated. These negative emotional reactions are not only produced due to the social pressure of sharing things with others but also the comparison of material things and lifestyles that these sites promote.

On Instagram and Facebook, users see curated content: advertisements and posts that are specifically designed to appeal to users based on their interests. Users may see others posting about their great jobs, excellent partners, or beautiful homes and feel happy or inspired as a result. Others, however, may see these pictures and feel jealous, depressed, or even suicidal due to the fact that their own life is not as "perfect" as those that they see on Facebook or Instagram.

Recent studies have found that frequent social network users believe that other users are happier and more successful than they are, especially when they do not know them very well in real life. Social media facilitates an environment in which people are comparing their realistic offline selves to the flawless, filtered, and edited online versions of others, which can be detrimental to mental well-being and perception of self. Excessive social media use can not only cause unhappiness and a general dissatisfaction with life in users but also increase the risk of developing mental health issues such as anxiety and depression. Constantly comparing oneself to others can lead to feelings of self-consciousness or a need for perfectionism and order, which often manifests as social anxiety disorder.

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