

Social Media Addiction

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INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social media has become an integral part of our lives, transforming the way we connect, communicate, and consume information. While social media platforms offer numerous benefits such as fostering global connection and facilitating information sharing, they also pose a significant risk. Social media addiction is the obsessive use and focuses on social media websites and apps such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, games, WhatsApp, Snapchat, etc. Even though the use causes negative consequences such as relationship issues, anxiety, and low self-esteem.

In this article, we look at what social media addiction is, why it is addictive, and the risks and downsides of social media. We also explore how to identify the signs of social media addiction and decrease time on social media.

What is social media?

Social media is an online platform that allows people to communicate with one another electronically. Examples of social media are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, Messenger, Snapchat, YouTube, and video games. Addiction to social media is a growing platform, particularly in adolescence.

Research suggests that by 2016 adolescents spend an average of 6 hours a day on social media.

What is social media addiction?

Social media addiction is when a person feels an extreme compulsion to use social media. They may also feel an overwhelming concern about social media and devote a large amount of time to it. Checking and scrolling through social media has become an increasingly popular activity over the last decade. Although the media is nonproblematic, there is a small percentage of users that become addicted to social networking sites and engage in excessive or compulsive use. Due to the amount of time a person spends on social media, there may be a negative effect on their daily activity and personal relationships.

Symptoms of social media may include:-

1. A compulsion to check social media
2. Expanding long period on social pages
3. Expanding less time doing offline activity
4. Changes in mood, particularly when not looking at social media
5. Withdrawal symptoms
6. Conflict as a result of social media use

In a 2019 survey, 40% of individuals in the United States aged 18 - 22 years reported that they felt addicted to social media.

Why is social media so addictive?

Social media platforms ignite the same reaction in the brain as gambling and recreational drug use.

When a person engages in a pleasurable activity, the brain releases dopamine, which is responsible for feeling pleasure.

Whenever you log on to your favorite apps, dopamine signals in your brain increase. The neurotransmitters are associated with pleasure. When you experience more dopamine after using social media, your brain identifies this activity as a rewarding one that is addictive. You ought to repeat it.

In some cases, social media can be a welcome distraction if you are isolated due to work or an illness. The more you engage the more your brain will tell you that this is an activity that can help reduce loneliness.

How does social media affect the brain?

Due to the effect that it has on the brain, social media is addictive both physically and psychologically. When someone experiences something rewarding or uses addictive substances, neurons in the principal dopamine-producing areas in the brain are activated and dopamine levels rise. This is observable in social media usage.

When an individual gets a notification such as like or mention, the brain receives a rush of dopamine and sends it along reward pathways, causing the individual to feel pleasure.

Social media use becomes problematic when someone views social networking sites as an important coping mechanism to relieve stress, loneliness, depression. Social media use provides these individuals with continuous reward that they are not receiving in real life.

This continuous use eventually leads to multiple interpersonal problems such as ignoring real life relationships, work or school responsibilities, and physical health, which may then exacerbate and individuals' undesirable moods. When social network users repeat this cyclical pattern of relieving and desirable mood with social media use, the level of psychological dependency on social media increases.

Recognising social media addiction

Although many people have usually use social media very few are genuinely addicted. To determine if someone is at risk of developing an addiction to social media, ask these 6 questions.

1. Do they spend a lot of time thinking about social media and planning to use social media?
2. Do they feel urges to use social media more and more?
3. Do they use social media to forget about personal problems?
4. Do they often try to reduce use of social media without success?
5. Do they become restless or troubled if unable to use social media?
6. Do they use social media so much that it has had a negative impact on their job or study?

A "yes" to more than 3 of these questions may indicate the presence of a social media addiction.

Downsides of social media addiction

Some possible downsides of social media include:-

1. Low self-esteem
2. Increased isolation and loneliness
3. Anxiety or depression
4. Onset of social anxiety disorder
5. Disrupted sleep patterns
6. Decrease physical activity
7. Ignoring the relationships in your real life

How do you know if you have social media addiction?

A mental health professional can help you determine whether you truly have social media addiction or just really enjoy using it a lot, they include:-

1. Negative effects to your job or school work due to the over use of social media
2. Increased reliance on social media as a way to cope with problems
3. Anger whenever social media use is reduced
4. Restlessness and irritability whenever you are not using social media
5. Increased use during other activities

Managing social media addiction

An individual can make their use of social media positive by:-

1. Turning off a smartphone's data connectivity at certain times of the day such as while travelling, driving, at work or in meetings.
2. Turning off data connectivity while spending time with friends and family.
3. Leaving the smartphone out of reach while sleeping.
4. Turning off notifications to make it easier to resist the distraction beeps or vibrations.
5. Limiting social media use to a computer rather than a smartphone

Support and treatment for social media addiction

Those suffering from a social media addiction are consumed by their needs to use and engage on social media networking sites. Luckily, the condition is very treatable and many have successfully recovered. Reducing screen time is a great way to combat problematic social media use; however, if the addiction is too severe, you may require professional help. Psychotherapy is an effective treatment approach to help you or your loved one overcome a social media addiction.

SUMMARY

Social media addiction is an increasing problem that is common among adolescent 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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