

# Social Media Addiction Examined

By Jim Rachels



Many people have now become addicted to using social media. This is a fairly new addiction that has now become a global problem. It is estimated that 220 million people worldwide might suffer from social media addiction. 5-10% of Americans also are showing signs of a social media addiction. Some people are spending upwards of 10-15 hours a day on social media sometimes even more. Some people are letting their responsibilities go by the wayside and some even run into employment issues. Social media has also been shown to cause anxiety, depression, and even eating disorders in people of all ages.

What is it that gives us the need to always feel up-to-date and connected about everything that is going on social media? I think the answer to that question is going to widely vary among the people you ask. The main problem with this is that social media addiction is socially acceptable so it is not something that we talk about enough. Another problem I see is that we are giving children access to social media at an extremely young age. We are opening them up to develop an addiction so early on in life that it will become a huge problem later on in life and much more difficult to quit.

It has also been shown that when scientists do scans of someone's brain before and after their addiction takes hold you will see a major difference the same as a drug addict. It affects the same part of the brain.

And large tech companies have learned how to use our brains to their advantage. They purposely design their platforms to get the user as hooked as possible. Some companies have gone as far as hiring neuroscientists and behaviorists to work with their programming teams. And social media distorts our reality.

I know for me I have to keep an eye on my social media intake. It's just so tempting to go through all the platforms that I'm on adding posts as well as checking out what's going on in other people's lives. Not only do I look at a lot of this stuff I also make comments and give likes. I feel connected when I do this. I think something that I need to learn and others do as well is that we can connect to others and have relationships right there where we are without social media.

It has been shown that using social media comes with a release of dopamine similar to that of drugs and alcohol. And from what I have learned pretty much anything that has the ability to send a rush of dopamine to the brain can become addictive and that person will continually repeat the behavior that elicited the response. It has also been shown that continued exposure to social media it can actually rewire the way your brain functions.

Another way this has affected our brains is it has actually decreased our attention spans. As of 2000, the average attention span was around 12

seconds. Then moving along to the year 2015 and it decreased to 8.2 seconds. That is a dramatic decrease relatively speaking.

They have also done studies that show part of our brain called the Amygdala actually grows based on your activity on social media. The Amygdala is the part of the brain that regulates emotions as well as examines our place in society. We tricked our brains into thinking that our social media friends are just like our real friends.

And there are many ways to get your so-called fix. There are cell phones, tablets, computers and laptops. So pretty much where ever you go you are able to carry your addiction along with you making it that much harder to try to quit.

And it ends up social media can be just as deadly as any other type of drug out there. Many teens who get addicted to social media platforms like Snapchat, Facebook and Instagram can have far-reaching negative effects on someone's self-image. There have been children who were addicted to social media who ended up committing suicide because of the way they were treated on social media. And there are studies that have been done and more are being done all the time to gauge and monitor the effects that social media is having especially on our children.

To give you some type of idea of the impact social media is having on people here are some statistics from a study that was done. It was found that 13% of British users and 6% of American users traced their desire to kill themselves back to Instagram.

And social media also leads to low self-esteem. Many people are not happy with their current life and see everyone else posting stuff seeming to have the times of their lives and people then feel left out and alone. It also leads people to be envious of each other and what the other has. Some people also seem to see others having great relationships and careers or at least it appears that way and they want their life to be like that. Even though sometimes looks can be deceiving as people mostly only show the good parts of their lives and keep the bad parts hidden so people only see the good side of their life.

Some people get to the point where it is more important to seem to be happy and having a great time versus showing people what's really going on in their lives and all the fights and struggles they go through just like the rest of us. So to many people, the made-up perfect life is the most important thing to keep going and showing others. Some people would simply rather fake their life instead of actually living their life. A large part of this addiction comes from envy. I heard someone say that these social media companies have learned to quantify envy and use that as a tool to keep the user coming back for more.

Social media can also have far-reaching negative effects on someone's mental health. There was a study that looked at 32 hospitals over a seven year period and found that their hospital admissions rate of children aged 5-17 doubled. They were hospitalized for things such as depression, suicidal thinking and suicidal actions. There is also another survey reports that there has been a 200% increase in suicides among young girls aged 10-14, and a 50% increase in boys the same age. Many of these suicides were linked to an online incidents. Also, things like admissions to hospitals from people who have developed eating disorders after being exposed to a lot of social media have more than doubled.

Nowadays children are growing up in an entirely different world than the world people my age grew up in. Everything is done online. And once you put something online it is there forever. A lot of children get extremely depressed when they see other people's posts getting a lot of "likes" and theirs is not getting any type of response. Children attach a lot of worth to these things and in turn, it can dramatically hurt them. They live in a world of apps. There have also been cases where people and especially children develop eating disorders.

Another thing that social media has a huge impact on is the relationships that children have while dating. Children go on all these social media sites and see a lot of sexually charged posts. This is something that the children see that this is the way things are supposed to be. Many children are now sending nude photos of themselves to other people through social media. When this is the way children see things happening on the internet they copy what they see. Then there is also "sexting". This is sending nude photos along with provocative text messages. Then one person will get mad at the other for one reason or another and then to get revenge these children will share the naked photos with others. This is something that can impact a child beyond anything we could think of. Children also see that people are starting to have sexual relationships before they even start dating. These are things they learn are normal through social media. And this is something that the children who do send these types of photos get a bad reputation and get called things like a slut. Then the ones that don't send these photos are called prudes. Then there is "sextortion" which is when someone bribes someone in order to not have the nude photos distributed to everyone they know. Then there are sexual predators that use social media to go after young girls and boys that are still minors.

Another thing that happens through social media is cyberbullying. This has become a real problem in recent years. Cyberbullying can happen in the form of cyber-stalking, giving out someone's personal information posting different types of hateful messages to someone. Some children do this to one another and think this is fun. They don't realize the negative effects this is having on the person being bullied. Some people tell the

person they are bullying “go kill yourself” “you’re so ugly” and things like “why are you still alive.” Cyberbullying even pushes people to the point where they have suicidal ideations and some even attempt suicide.

And a major problem is that this happens in silence. I heard 9 out of 10 children being cyberbullied do not tell anyone about it. And holding onto this and going through it all by yourself can have an extremely negative impact on someone’s mental health. So many are embarrassed about what’s going on or think that no one else will understand how they feel.

In Canada, a study was done in Canada that found 41% of internet users reported an emotional, psychological, or mental health condition. This shows how much social media is affecting us personally and mentally. Another study showed that 60% of Canadian youth reported seeing cyberbullying or online abusive behavior within the last four weeks.

Then there is the phenomenon of something called schadenfreude. Schadenfreude is defined as “getting pleasure derived by someone from another person’s misfortune.” So in essence people are doing this to make themselves feel better.

It’s gotten so bad that there are laws being passed around the world to help protect people from others who would be harmful to them through their communications on social media. People have already been jailed in the UK for comments they made that the police determined were too far and broke the law. And all over the world, people are reporting cyberbullies they believe are going too far to the police. And many times the police investigate these incidents and arrest anyone that has broken a law while in the process of cyberbullying. This is up to the person being bullied to stand up and tell someone about what is going on and then take the necessary steps including calling the police if you believe this to be someone breaking the law with their actions on social media.

Something else that makes it more difficult to battle cyberbullying is people can post anonymously. This way there is no tracing their comments back to them. This allows people to say awful things and get away with no one knowing who they are. This also makes it much more difficult to get the police involved. Sometimes the police just don’t have the resources to go tracking down someone online.

I believe our best tool in the fight against cyberbullying is awareness. People need to know more about what is going on especially if they have children using social media. We need to make sure we know exactly what our children are doing while online and who they’re interacting with. And this goes for people of all ages not just children. Everybody is a potential target for cyberbullying. We need to stay vigilant in our fight against cyberbullying if we are to do anything about it.

So what can we do to help with this problem? Some say you simply need to cut down on your social media use. Then some say you should completely delete all your social media profiles. So which is the right answer? I think the truth is there is no one right answer. The answer will vary depending on each person and their own goals and personality. In order to get better, each person has to figure out their own path in the fight against social media addiction.