



10 SIGNS OF SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION

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Many people consider social media an essential means to connect with others. It's tied into their identity and sense of self-worth, which makes it a possible trigger for addiction.

Moreover, social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are designed to be addictive, to keep you clicking and scrolling, chasing the next "like" or retweet. For people with addictive tendencies, social media can be as powerful a narcotic as a drug.

Los Angeles entertainment lawyer Jon Pfeiffer teaches at Pepperdine University and also hosts a podcast about social media called, "The Creative Influencer". He regularly assigns essay topics on the dangers of social media and hears firsthand about students' own ambivalence toward it.

"Social media can have harmful effects on your physical health," says Pfeiffer, in addition to "your mental health and relationships. It distracts you from work and school (yes, college students, your professors see you scrolling under your desk)."

Here are some signs of social media addiction. Many people are able to integrate social media into their lives without becoming addicted, yet still display the following signs from time to time. It is only in the aggregate, and when displayed consistently, that they become a problem.

1) Checking social media constantly

How often do you refresh your Instagram feed or check for Snapchat notifications? Many people check their social media throughout the day, but if you're checking it every five minutes, this may be a sign of addiction.

2) Thinking about social media even while offline

Are you always trying to think of your next Tweet? Steering yourself toward situations that would look good on your Instagram story? When you start to organize your offline activities, and even your thoughts, around the next time you're on social media, it may be too central in your life.

3) Using social media makes you depressed, anxious, or angry

Gauge your mood before and after using social media. Did it leave you feeling happier, or more upset or hollow? If the latter, consider cutting back on your use or seeking treatment.

4) Measuring your self-worth through social media

Do you count the number of likes and comments on your posts and use them as validation? Is social media like a game where you have to keep score with others? As soon as social media stops being fun and starts being a competition, it becomes unhealthy.

5) Social media use impacts your sleep

Do you check social media right before going to bed? Does it trigger a line of thought or emotional distress that keeps you from going to sleep? "With the dominance of social media comes an increase in the time we spend staring at screens," Pfeiffer says. "Screens emit blue light, which is well documented to have adverse effects on our vision and sleep patterns." Health experts advise that you turn off all screens at least an hour before bed.

6) Social media use impacts your performance at school or work

Has social media become more important to you than grades or work projects? Are you getting in trouble with teachers or supervisors by checking it all the time?

7) Social media has lowered your attention span

Remember that social media is designed to grab your attention and fragment it. Apps such as Facebook and Twitter literally retrain your eyes to scroll across a screen and only glance at each passing post. If you cannot focus or concentrate offline, social media may be to blame.

8) FOMO has made you miss out

Many people, especially young people, use social media because of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out). But is social media making you actually miss out on real-life events happening around you? Do you ignore the real people in the room because you're on social media?

Jon Pfeiffer hears complaints about FOMO all the time from his students, which "feeds a comparison culture, where scrolling through Instagram, for example, can make you feel inadequate or like you're missing out on something.

This, in turn, feeds into a vicious cycle of people not being transparent on social media because they want to appear a certain way or seem cooler than they really are."

9) You hop between multiple social media apps

If you've caught up on Instagram posts, do you immediately hop on Snapchat? When you get bored with Twitter, do you switch to Facebook? Different social media apps give you different kinds of stimulation. You may be addicted to just one, or many at once.

10) You've tried to reduce your social media use without success

Have you deleted your social media apps or accounts multiple times, but you always get them back? Have you tried to limit your use, but blown right past your timer? If you want to get rid of social media but can't, that may be a sign of addiction.

With his lawyer's perspective on social media, Jon Pfeiffer suggests a new legal safeguard around these ubiquitous apps: "While social media should probably not be banned (free speech and that pesky First Amendment), it may be helpful and even necessary to add warning labels or age restrictions."

If you've developed an unhealthy addiction to social media, the first step is to avoid blaming yourself. Social media is deliberately designed to hook you. If you're experiencing problems with social media addiction, or any other digital addiction, there is no shame in seeking out professional help.