

Jiwn Cui

Are you addicted to social media? Experts explain the signs and symptoms you should look out for

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From turning to Facebook when in a queue to stalking an ex on Instagram - experts Judi James and Dr Joanne Stephenson lift the lid on social media addiction

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Social media has not been having a good week. When Facebook crashed on Monday, it took Tinder and Instagram with it - leaving millions frustrated, and even the police asking users not to call them.

With over one billion Facebook users and 300 million on Instagram, whether you like it or not, its accessibility and increasing importance means social media has become part of the fabric of society.

Social media has high status in the fabric of society.

Just think about how many times in a day you see someone glued to their phone, swiping and tapping away, oblivious.

But when does being an 'active user' turn into over-use, reliance, and possibly even addiction? Who is the most likely to fall into a pattern of reliance, and why?

We asked Judi James, TV behaviour expert and author and social media expert Dr Joanne Stephenson, a professor of psychology, everything you need to know about social media addiction - and how to spot if you're using it a little too much.

Do you think you're addicted to social media? Or are you worried someone you know

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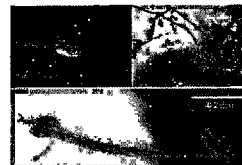
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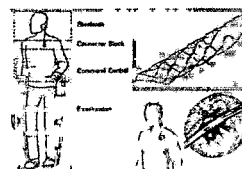
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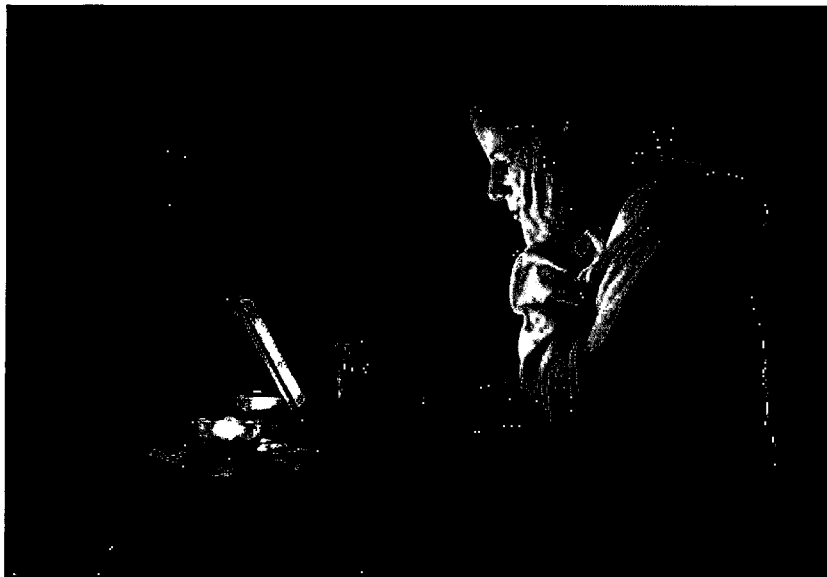
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1. How is social media addiction defined?

Like other addictions, Judi describes it as "being unable to stop using it even when you want to."

She continues: "If we look around we see people either messaging or being alert to online messages most of the time. messages ~~are~~ have occupied people's

"What this means is it might be up to the individual to judge the tipping point where time their usage seems to have gone out of their own control.



Social media provides an outlet for communities and a way of keeping in touch, but our reliance on it is increasingly excessive

"One suggestion might be when it has encroached on or even replaced your normal social life. Or when it takes time that you should be spending on your job or family relationships."

Does this sound familiar to you?

With reference to the recent outrage over Facebook crashing, Dr Stephenson adds:

"It's feeling 'shut off' from the world when you're unable to use social media due to power outages, etc."

people can't live without social media.

2. What are the signs?

As with other phobias and compulsive behaviours that get out of control, often marked by high levels of anxiety:

"Someone over-using social media might also suffer from increased levels of anxiety.

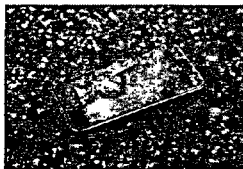


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Do you get distressed whenever Tinder's down?

"They could also make getting online their sole priority too, doing it first thing in the morning and as soon as they get home after work."

Dr Stephenson supports this, saying: "It's a need to check emails, tweets, Facebook VERY frequently, many times a day or even many times an hour."

3. What brings it on?

According to Judi, there are few factors which may exacerbate people's over-use:

"For most people its an interest or a hobby and something that can be mood-enhancing. *Social media can make people enhance their mood.*

"For some it can become something to use to avoid even the smallest moment of boredom, meaning we're using it in queues or breaks at work."

Social media kills time when people feel bored.

From this point it can take off, creeping its way increasingly into our real life.



Judi James' new book 'Being Confident' is out by Vermillion

"That's when people are using it when they already have company - or are even on dates. Or they are sitting up most of the night rather than getting rest."

Dr Stephenson attributes it to believing 'knowledge is power', saying: "We have a driving curiosity to know what other people are doing - those we know and

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people curious what other people are doing, they want to show their daily life to others.

celebrities.

People seem to have a need to tell everyone what they're doing, maybe an updated version of 'keeping up with the Joneses' or showing that they have interesting lives too."

This fascination can take a much darker turn, as Judi points out.



Getty

Are often seconds away from checking your email, Facebook or Twitter account?

"In fact people can be as addicted to reading insults from trolls as they are sending jokes or just chatting.

"Plus there can be the addictive pain of following an ex to see who they are hooked up with and how much fun they seem to be having without you."

social media appeals people's addiction to posts. more extroverts are sensitive to social media than introverts.

5. Who is most susceptible to it?

Between introverts and extroverts, Dr Stephenson says: "It seems like extroverts are more susceptible. It's an extension of people interactions for them.

"It seems like lonely people are 'less connected' online too."



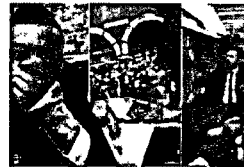
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6. What are the negative side-effects?

It's meant to help us feel more connected, but reliance on social media may in fact have the opposite effect, as Judi explains.



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"If the use of social media is eating into normal socialising time there can be a problem of being 'lonely in a crowd'.



In spite of all the followers and friends you have, it may make you feel even lonelier

"This is a new form of loneliness where people have lots of online 'friends' rather than the real thing. We need real human relationships for our emotional wellbeing.

"We tend to be busy in modern life and investing limited time in online relationships, rather than the real thing, is a bad idea.

"A mix is fine but losing friends because you're too busy with online strangers can lead to a growing sense of loneliness."

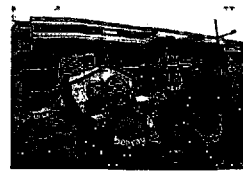
people who use social media frequently are lonely, because they would rather have lots of ~~one~~ online friends than the friends in reality.

Worryingly, Dr Stephenson adds addiction could even make users the victims of crime.

"Putting too much information 'out there" certainly makes pre-teens and teens much too vulnerable to predators."

"It makes adults vulnerable to break-ins too. I saw a recent story about a couple who mentioned they were going on vacation and where and for how long.

"When they returned, all their belongings had been stolen and sold on eBay and local auction sites."



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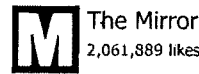


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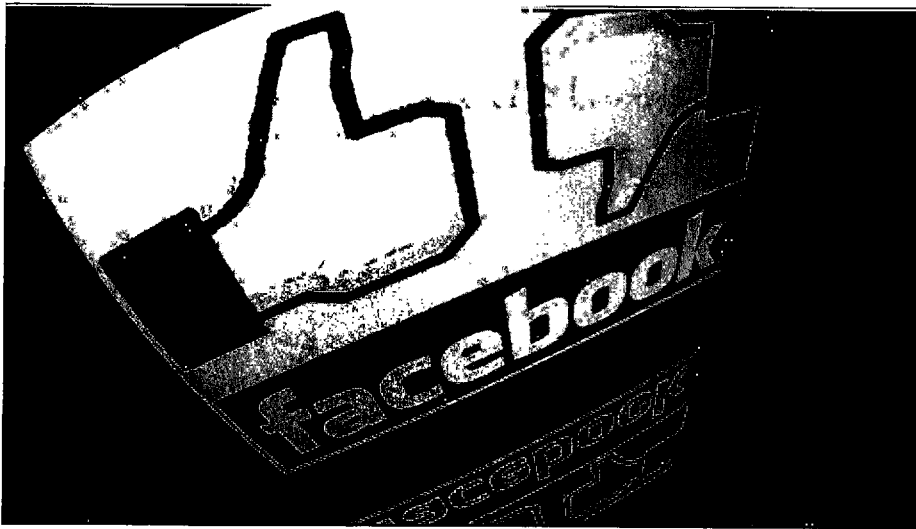
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By ELIENE AUGENBRAUN / CBS NEWS / August 22, 2014, 4:22 PM

How real a risk is social media addiction?



The "Facebook" logo is seen on a tablet screen on December 4, 2012 in Paris. / LIONEL BONAVENTURE/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

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A blog post by social media marketer Jason Thibeault, "Why I just quit Facebook," is sparking new debate about the risks of social media addiction. Thibeault's essay went viral soon after he posted it on LinkedIn on Thursday, getting more than 700,000 views the next day.

Thibeault wrote that he quit Facebook because "my news feeds were becoming an addiction. They were a constant interruption pulling me away from the work that I was otherwise enjoying." *News feeds on Facebook have more enjoyable than work.*

"Just imagine that Facebook is like a digital water cooler. I was drinking A TON of water every hour," he wrote. "Although I'm not a neuroscientist, I'd venture to say that what was happening was related to my Dopamine levels--when I was checking status updates on Facebook, my brain was rewarding itself with Dopamine; when I wasn't, and Dopamine levels dropped as a result, I started 'jonesing for a fix.'"

"So I quit," he wrote. "Cold turkey."

Social media addiction ~~is~~ cause mental problem.

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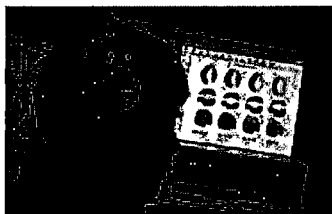
Thibault is certainly not alone in his experience of getting a rush online. Internet addiction was first proposed as a psychiatric disorder in 1996, soon after the Internet entered our everyday lives.

According to a 2012 study posted on the National Institutes of Health website, "Internet Addiction Disorder (IAD) ruins lives by causing neurological complications, psychological disturbances, and social problems." It is still not officially listed as a psychiatric disorder in the bible of psychiatric disease, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V), though the more narrowly defined Internet Gaming Addiction was added in May 2013.

Other subtypes of Internet addiction -- such as social media addiction -- have not been studied enough to receive their own clinical definitions or treatment recommendations. But some of the research on Internet addiction in general may shed light on Thibault's observations about social media.

Psychiatrist and neuroscience researcher Sean Luo of Columbia University told CBS News studies have shown that "3.7 to 13 percent of U.S. and 10 percent of South Korean Internet users express some symptoms of inappropriate Internet use." He estimates that at least 1 percent of Internet users worldwide need treatment.

Symptoms for Internet addiction can be similar to addiction to anything else, and fall into two types of behaviors: an ever increasing need to engage with the object of the addiction, and a bad feeling when not getting enough of it. Luo says an Internet user worried that their online use is getting out of control should seek a professional evaluation. "It is not so much the particular behaviors" that lead to a diagnosis of inappropriate Internet use or addiction, he said, but "the severity, the functional status of the patient" and whether their behaviors "interfere with school, work, or social activities." *Internet addiction causes emotional problems.*



A boy who was addicted to the internet has his brain scanned for research purposes at Daxing Internet Addiction Treatment Center in Beijing February 22, 2014. / REUTERS/KIM KYUNG-HOON

According to several recent brain imaging studies, severely affected Internet addicts show structural and functional brain abnormalities similar to those found in people with substance abuse problems. Other research has shown that Internet addiction frequently coexists with anxiety, depression, or an addiction to other things like alcohol or drugs.

Why did Thibault find Facebook, in particular, so addictive? He writes that it's because "we are essentially narcissistic and want to be the center of attention.... I want them to pay attention to me, to

'like' me, that's why." *People want to be popular on social network.*

According to Luo, so far "there are no published studies that demonstrate a correlation between personality disorders [narcissism] and any Internet addiction." But some aspects of social media activity (for example, getting "likes") appear to stimulate reward centers in the brain.

While Thibault's solution -- quitting cold turkey -- may work for him, Luo says it's not for everyone. (And it's worth noting that while Thibault quit Facebook, he remains active on LinkedIn, Twitter and other social media sites.)

According to Luo, "cold turkey might work for some, but others may need more help." He says there are "no FDA approved medications, and no randomized trials published for medications to treat Internet addiction."

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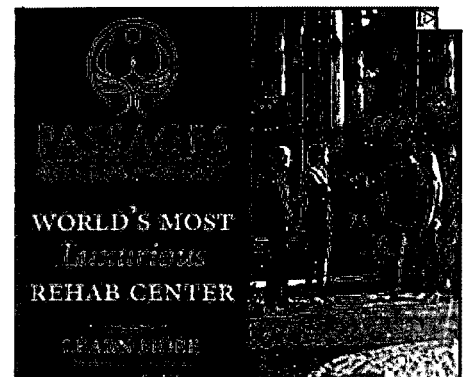
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Bootcamp for Internet addicts

Internet Addiction Treatment Center in Beijing, China, for example, treats addicted teens with military-like exercise and discipline, as well as medication and other therapies, which may not go over so well in other countries.

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and motivational interviewing have been proven to be especially useful for changing unhealthy behaviors.

In addition, studies of people who received treatment for conditions like depression or anxiety did report "improvement of symptoms of Internet addiction" when the other condition was treated.

Luo notes that potential treatments have to work in their own cultural contexts, and what works for one group may not work for another. The Daxing

Every country should have their own style
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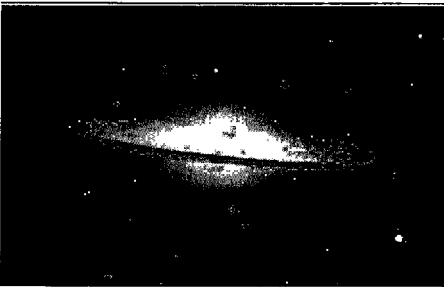
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By Ian Kerner, Special to CNN

⌚ Updated 5:59 AM ET, Thu January 10, 2013



The distracting presence of smartphones and other gadgets can put a damper on intimacy and relationships.

Story highlights

Technology can connect us to the world, but can disconnect us from each other

Keep cell phones out of sight and out of mind when on a date

Rethink social media, which can remove mystery from a relationship

Some apps allow you to create a social network just for two

Are you spending more time with your smartphone than with your partner -- even during romantic dates?

Technology allows us to be constantly connected to the world, but it can also make us even more disconnected from each other.

In fact, two recent studies show that cell phones can have a negative impact on close relationships.

Researchers from the University of Essex found that people who engaged in personal discussions when a cell phone was nearby -- even if neither was actually using it -- reported lower relationship quality and less trust for their partner. They also felt their partner was less empathetic to their concerns.

Cell phone addiction causes lower relationship quality.

Other studies suggest that cell phones can distract our attention from the present moment. And that's a

problem, considering the results of the Mobile Mindset Study, a recent survey that found three out of five U.S. smartphone users don't go more than hour without checking their gadgets.

Cell phone distracts people's attention.

Taken a few steps further, smartphones, tablets, and laptops -- and the social media they often support -- have the potential to tear couples apart.

Internet infidelity: Is it time to snoop?

I've talked before in this column about the capability of Facebook and other social media to threaten relationships: They provide a sense of instant gratification that stimulates our brain's reward centers, offering quick hits of novelty that can be downright addictive.

Plus, they allow us to connect with friends, co-workers, and even former flames, fostering an immediate and intense sense of intimacy that can lead us to romanticize these connections. At best, you're giving your energy to these digital distractions, not your partner. At worst, you could be setting the stage for emotional infidelity.

Social media can help you build your connection, but it also threaten relationships.

Of course, it's unrealistic to ditch your smartphone altogether, especially if you also need it for work. But there are things you can do to use it wisely -- and even help improve your relationship. Here are three tips for making technology work for you and your partner:

Set it aside. It should go without saying that cell phones are best kept out of sight and out of mind when you're on a date. Turn it off and place it in your bag or pocket for the duration -- the world won't end if you can't check your e-mail for an hour or two.

Sometimes turn off your phones is good for relationship and health.



COURTESY: IAN KERNER

I also recommend shutting down phones, tablets and laptops at night, or at least charging them in a room other than your bedroom. Not only can they interfere with your ability to relax and unwind, but their distracting presence can also put a real crimp in intimacy.

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Rethink social media. We've talked about the possible perils of connecting with your exes online. But I typically advise that you don't "friend" your partner, either. As Facebook friends, you have access to the most mundane parts of your significant other's day, from what he ate for lunch, to what new movies she wants to see. Talk about removing any sense of

Ian Kerner

mystery!

If you do want to connect online as well as off, consider joining a digital service that helps foster togetherness. Best described as intimate online spaces for just you and your partner, programs like *Between* or *TwoCup* offer a place to share private memories, messages, and photos -- away from the prying eyes of others.

Some programs provide private online space for couples which can be better to share their memories.

Make a sexy connection. Technology isn't all bad: It can actually bring you closer together -- and even add some spice to foreplay.

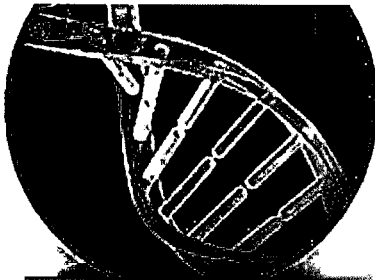
Use your smartphone to send your partner a sexy e-mail, voicemail message, or "sext" describing a fantasy or your plans with him or her for the evening. Engage in a little Skype or FaceTime flirtation, especially if one of you is out of town. Just a word of caution: Be sure to use personal, not company accounts.

Smartphones and other gadgets can clearly have a negative impact on your relationship -- but they don't have to. By learning to use them wisely, you can start to feel more connected to your partner than ever.

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