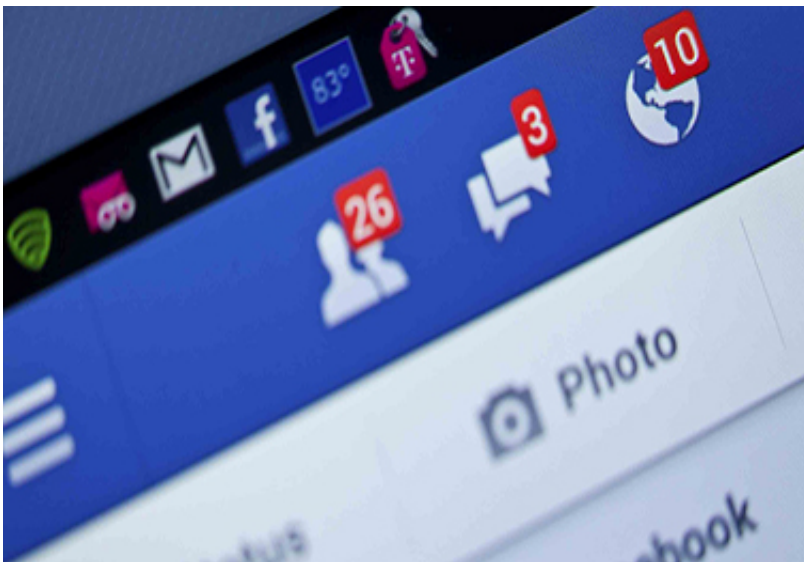


Study finds social media to be potentially addictive, associated with substance abuse

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A recent University at Albany study has concluded that excessive use of online social networking can not only be addictive, but may also be associated with other impulse control disorders, including substance abuse.

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psychologist Julia Hormes led a team of three researchers in assessing the addictive nature of social media - specifically Facebook. The study found an estimated 10 percent of users experience what Hormes' classifies as "disordered [social networking](#) use." It further determined that individuals struggling with social media addiction were more likely to report drinking problems.

In October, Facebook reported over 1.35 billion active users (MAUs), with 800 million people logging on daily. Of active users, a [2013 consumer report](#) found 71 percent are now accessing social media from their mobile device. Hormes believes that Facebook has several characteristics that may encourage the development of an addiction-like syndrome.

"New notifications or the latest content on your newsfeed acts as a reward. Not being able to predict when new content is posted encourages us to check back frequently," Hormes said. "This uncertainty about when a new reward is available is known as a 'variable interval schedule of reinforcement' and is highly effective in establishing habitual behaviors that are resistant to extinction. Facebook is also making it easy for users to continuously be connected to its platform, for example by offering push notifications to mobile devices."

Respondents who met criteria for disordered social networking use also tended to report problems with [emotion regulation](#), including poor [impulse control](#). Emotion regulation deficits have previously been shown to be risk factors for substance addiction. "Our findings suggest that disordered online social networking may arise as part of a cluster of risk factors that increase susceptibility to both substance and non-substance addictions," Hormes said.

Hormes' research targeted undergraduate students, 18 years or older. Participants were evaluated on a series of diagnostic criteria commonly

used to assess alcohol addiction. Questions were modified to instead measure addiction-like symptoms related to excessive Facebook use. For example one question asked "How good does Facebook make you feel?"

Nearly 90 percent of the 292 respondents reported an active Facebook page, spending on average, one-third of their online browsing time within the social networking site. Another 67 percent received Facebook push notifications to their smart phone.

Participants categorized as meeting criteria for disordered [social media](#) use reported addiction-like behaviors including strong urges or cravings to browse the site, irritability when access was out of reach and an increase in use over a length of time.

Hormes believes her study will help in officially categorizing disordered online social networking as a behavioral addiction. She plans on continuing to research its link to [substance abuse](#).

More information: "Craving Facebook? Behavioral addiction to online social networking and its association with emotion regulation deficits." *Addiction*, 109: 2079–2088. doi: 10.1111/add.12713

Provided by University at Albany

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