

# Social media stress can lead to social media addiction

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Social network users risk becoming more and more addicted to social media platforms even as they experience stress from their use. Credit: Lancaster University

Social network users risk becoming more and more addicted to social media platforms even as they experience stress from their use.

Social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook and Instagram are

known to cause stress in users, known as technostress from social media. However, when faced with such stress, instead of switching off or using them less, people are moving from one aspect of the [social media platforms](#) to another—escaping the causes of their stress without leaving the medium on which it originated.

Research into the habits of 444 Facebook users revealed they would switch between activities such as chatting to friends, scanning news feeds and posting updates as each began to cause stress. This leads to an increased likelihood of technology addiction, as they use the various elements of the platform over a greater timespan.

Researchers from Lancaster University, the University of Bamberg and Friedrich-Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, writing in *Information Systems Journal*, found that users were seeking distraction and diversion within the Facebook platform as a coping mechanism for stress caused by the same platform, rather than switching off and undertaking a different activity.

Professor Monideepa Tarafdar, Professor of Information Systems and Co-Director of the Centre for Technological Futures at Lancaster University Management School, who co-authored the study, said: "While it might seem counter-intuitive, social media users are continuing to use the same platforms that are causing them stress rather than switching off from them, creating a blurring between the stress caused and the compulsive use".

Assistant Professor Christian Maier, of the University of Bamberg, who collected the data from the Facebook users along with Professor Sven Laumer, Schöller Endowed Professor and Chair of Information Systems and the Deputy Director of the Dr. Theo und Friedl Schöller Research Center. said: "Because social network sites offer such a wide range of features, users can find they act both as stressors and as a distraction

from that stress".

"Even when users are stressed from SNS use, they are using the same platforms to cope with that stress, diverting themselves through other activities on the SNS, and ultimately building compulsive and excessive behaviour. As a result, they embed themselves in the social network environment rather than getting away from it, and an addiction is formed."

The research team looked at various different forms of technostress caused by using social media, such as users feeling that SNS were invading their personal life, adapting their SNS use to conform to that of their friends, experiencing excessive social demands and too much social information, and facing constant changes and updates to the SNS platform.

They further examined two separate ways of coping with the stress. The first included users creating a diversion by partaking in other activities away from social media, which is the more obvious path. They would switch off, talk to friends or family about issues they were experiencing and spend less time on the platform.

However, the other method consisted of diversion through engaging in different activities within the same SNS app itself, and potentially moving on a pathway towards SNS addiction. This method was more prevalent among those social media users who used the sites more regularly.

Professor Sven Laumer said: "We found that those users who had a greater social media habit- needed less effort to find another aspect of the platforms, and were thus more likely to stay within the SNS rather than switch off when they needed to divert themselves. The stronger the user's SNS habit, the higher the likelihood they would keep using it as a

means of diversion as a coping behaviour in response to stressors, and possibly develop addiction to the SNS."

"Users go to different areas of the platform which they see as being separate and that they use in different ways. With Facebook, there are features that take you into different worlds within the same [platform](#). You can be in many different places all from the same application, for example following friends' activities, posting pictures about daily activities, switching to a chat feature or playing games".

Professor Monideepa Tarafdar added: "The idea of using the same environment that is causing the stress as means of coping with that [stress](#) is novel. It is an interesting phenomenon that seems distinctive to technostress from [social media](#)".

**More information:** Monideepa Tarafdar et al, Explaining the link between technostress and technology addiction for social networking sites: A study of distraction as a coping behavior, *Information Systems Journal* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/isj.12253](https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12253)

Provided by Lancaster University

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