Social Media

Huai Jie (Dante) • 3 May 2026

How to Beat Social Media Addiction

Dr. Anna Lempke & Dr.Andrew Huberman
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D34KyceGhPE&loop=0

So first of all, how addicting is social media, and what does healthy social media behavior look like?

The first message I want to get across is that social media really is a drug—and it's engineered to be. It's based on potency, quantity, variety: the bottomless feed, the likes, the way it's enumerated, and so on. That doesn't mean we can't use it. But we need to be very thoughtful about how we use it, the same way we need to be thoughtful about any drug.

And that means using it with intention and in advance planning—trying to use it as an awesome tool to connect with other people, rather than letting it use us or getting lost in it.

Of course, people have different propensities for addiction to any substance. That's true for social media, too. Some people can use it in moderation, or in an adaptive way. Others get sucked in immediately.

The key thing about addiction is this: when it's happening, nobody who is getting addicted thinks they're getting addicted. It's only after the fact that people say, "Whoops—what was that about?"

Think about texting and driving. There were books about how terrible it was. Even the governments largely gave up. You still see billboards—"Don't text and drive," or "Any text can wait," or "Not worth dying for"—but everybody's texting and driving.

And if you look at young people today, teenagers especially, they're almost cybernetically enhanced—like the phone is right there. They're talking to you and texting twelve friends at the same time, and there's no stopping it. The genie is out of the bottle. We're not going back.

So we need to figure out how to make this tool good for us instead of ultimately harmful. I don’t have all the answers—but I do think some of the wisdom we’ve learned from other drugs applies here too.

That means putting barriers in place so we can remain in control of our use: not too much, not too often, and not too potent.

Do you think going back to this idea of a “unit of the day”—a manageable, attractable unit of time for most people—helps? So are you saying allocating two hours where you allow yourself free reign to use the phone and all its apps, or even more restrictively, like: “I’ll allow myself thirty minutes a day to post, comment, and then I’m done”?

Yeah—it depends on the person. It’s a combination of things we talked about earlier: having an itch and scratching it.

With smartphones, people have reached a point where they’re pulling them out, utterly unconscious of doing it—pulling them out, sending a couple texts, swiping a couple times. They don’t know they’re doing it.

I have a friend who delivers babies. Many pregnant mothers won’t actually deliver without their phone in hand. This used to be the hand that was connected to their spouse, so maybe that’s more about the spouse—but it still sounds like a security blanket. Like a transitional object.

Yeah. That reminds me: you’ve referred to the phone—maybe it’s the phone, but maybe it’s our online persona, our selves as we’ve become sort of infantile in our need for it. It’s like a baby in a bottle.

And I wonder whether we’ve regressed—whether in online behavior we’ve lost the ability to act like adults. Adult behavior is about controlling your actions.

You need a developmental neurobiologist to see it clearly: a young organism can’t control its behavior, while an older one can. To me, a mature organism that can’t control its behavior is essentially a baby—an immature version of itself. There’s neuroscience that supports that.

I look at my own behavior sometimes and think, “I’m a grown man—what’s the problem here?” I don’t eat baby food, but I act like a baby with my phone.

All right. In the sense that I’m reflexively picking it up. I’m not being intentioned and deliberate with it.

Do I need a full thirty days, Anna?

So yes—thirty days away is my recommended full reset. If you're severely addicted, I recommend the full thirty days. But if you're just a little bit addicted—like most of us—you probably don't need thirty days. In fact, even one day would be challenging, but probably sufficient.

My phone is off for substantial segments of the day. Okay, that's great. It drives other people crazy. People expect me to respond, but I don't care. I take pleasure in the fact that—well, why isn't there a clause on text messages or emails that says, "Must be responded to within X amount of time, or else"?

I reply when I'm able. Or when I want to.

And that touches on a big challenge about social media: as more and more of us spend more and more time online, we divest our "libidinal energies" from real-life interactions. So even when we want to choose not to be online, we go outside—and there's "no there there." There's nobody to connect with. So our collective challenge—our mission—should be to preserve offline ways to connect with each other.

Because if we don't, we'll be lonely. But if you have a tribe of people you can be with—none of whom are on their phones while you're together for that short, intentional period—it's wonderful and liberating. Nobody's distracted.

I think young people are figuring that out. They're trying to create spaces where they do it together—like instead of doing a dopamine fast alone, do it with friends. Then the fear of missing out is less intense, because you're all doing it together.

Those are some of the tricks we can come up with.

I like that. I don't allow my phone in my home gym. I love working out, and I live in an area where I don't get reception—like two feet outside my door. So all my dog walks now are just with the dog. They were boring at first. My bulldog doesn't like to walk—really slow.

But they became one of my favorite parts of the day because it's inefficient to use the phone there. If the phone suddenly worked—if I got calls, or if they brought reception to that area—I'd be dismayed.

I can attest to that. And I don't think I'm a phone addict, but I do put work into regulating my behavior.

The key is this: you have to, with intention, prior to being in that situation, think of literal physical and metacognitive barriers you can put between yourself and your phone—or whatever your "drug" is.

Create intentional spaces that prevent you from constantly interrupting yourself. I really do think we're losing the ability to have sustained thought. You get so far, and then you hit the point where it's harder to know what comes next—and it becomes very easy to check your phone, check your email, or look something up online. Then you never get the opportunity to finish that thought, which is really the source of creative energy and original thought. You're not just reacting to something—you're creating something that could contribute to the world.

That's right. I'm a big believer that you're either consuming or you're creating.

I should mention something important: I do believe in "neutral time." I think sleep is great. I'm a big proponent of sleep—and I've talked a lot about it on the podcast. I care about sleep not just for performance, but because I genuinely like sleep.

And I think being a constant consumer of visual information—and information of all kinds—can be a problem. But there are some really great sources of information on the internet, and I certainly benefit from having those channels available.

How to Successfully Delete Social Media

Dr. Cal Newport & Dr. Andrew Huberman
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUSBKj5ZQpo&loop=0

Recently, my podcast team was in Australia, and my producer and close friend, Rob Mohr, instructed all of us to get rid of social media on our phones—except one guy, who would post our weekly episode announcements.

It was pretty brutal at first. But when we came back to social media, it actually turned out to be more challenging. You really experienced the friction coming back the other way. And then, when you experience the lack of friction, that's where it gets scary.

It's so interesting the way the brain can adapt: the friction leaving something behind, and the friction coming back to it.

And for people listening to this—I bring this up because many people are, you know, dealing with work they really need to focus on. They may be having issues with productivity and burnout, etc. A lot of people use their phones and social media because it fills their life. It provides enrichment, but they aren't necessarily committed to specific projects.

But through the lens of, let's just call it, the Cal Newport view, one might argue that those people almost certainly have untapped creativity and untapped resources within them that they don't yet know about—because they're essentially using that energy elsewhere.

Yeah. I mean, for a lot of people, it's papering over the void. You have this void in your life because there's unmet potential, unmet interest—living in misalignment with the things you care about.

I mean, a lot of people, this is the classic catastrophe of life. Social media—and before this, other intoxicants or other kinds of distractions—become a way for some people to put a screen over a gaping void, and it makes it bearable enough that you can kind of go on with life.

And so it's true: if you rip it out, you see the void. And that's really difficult.

I did this experiment for one of my books. I ran an experiment with 1,600 people, and they all turned off all their social media for 30 days. Thirty days. Thirty days.

Were they young people or older people? A whole mix—a whole mix, not just university students. I recruited them from my newsletter readership, so they weren't necessarily university students. And it wasn't formal research—it was, "Here, I'm going to walk you through this." I put out the call, and I got information back.

What I heard most clearly was this: it's really hard at first.

So who succeeded for those 30 days versus those who didn't? The ones who didn't succeed tended to "white-knuckle" it. They tried to stop because it was bad—they didn't want to do a bad thing—so they just clung to the idea that they were going to avoid it. They wouldn't make it 30 days.

The people who did succeed followed my advice to incredibly aggressively pursue alternatives during those 30 days. So it's like: go learn new hobbies, join things right away, get really structured about your day, get back into exercise, learn how to knit again.

A lot of people said, "Oh, I forgot how fun libraries were." Like, you can go into a building, and the books are free—you can grab whatever. It's okay if you don't like the book, because you didn't have to pay for it. I'm going out with friends again. Okay, every week we're going to have drinks with this person. Every Thursday morning, I'm going running with this person."

The people who aggressively tried to put in place a more positive alternative—through self-reflection, experimentation—lasted the 30 days and beyond.

Then I realized: unmet needs are what's happening here. These tools can give you a kind of simulacrum of meeting them.

I'm a social being; I need to be connected to people. So I'm texting and commenting on social media, which touches that need just enough that you don't feel hopelessly lonely—but it's not really fulfilling.

I have a need to see my intentions made manifest concretely in the world—humans want to do this. So I'm posting these things and people are responding, and it's sort of a simulacrum of real creation. It's satisfying just enough that it's not intolerable.

So what happens is: if you remove that, you have to fill those needs the right way. Now I'm not socializing on social media—I'm going out of my way to sacrifice time and attention on behalf of other people. I'm feeling the social void in the right way.

Now I don't really feel like I need to go back. I'm actually making my intentions manifest. I'm learning skills and building things. This kind of pseudo-construction and collective attention economy of social media—"I'll post this and you'll like it"—I don't need it anymore to fill that void.

So it's like you have to fill the void first.

You know, five years ago I wrote a book. It was about reforming this part of your life. A lot of the book had nothing to do with technology—it was about how to rebuild parts of your life. And on my podcast, honestly, one of the big topics we talk about—which is crazy that I'm a technologist and I write about trying to find focus in a distracted world—is this thing we call the deep life. It's just straight-up building a meaningful life 101.

It's crazy that my podcast is talking about it, but on the other hand, it's not, because my podcast is the one people go to when they're fed up with the digital world.

It turns out: if you don't get the analog world working right for you, you need something to avoid staring into that void—and the digital world will do that well enough. It's just good enough to keep life tolerable.

How Social Media Is Rewiring Your Brain

Dr. John Kruse & Dr. Andrew Huberman

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeuBfPFpgko&loop=0

We hear pretty often that social media and scrolling—X, scrolling Instagram, or TikTok—is “giving people ADHD.” Are there any data, either clinical or otherwise, that suggest that the mere practice of looking at 10 thousand different contexts—or even, you know, 15 videos for a minute while standing at the bus stop—is somehow creating more distractibility in other domains of life?

Yeah. I’d say there’s a lot of good neuroscience research—or neuropsychological data—that the more time you spend immersed in social media—constant barrage of information—and not just the volume of information, but that you’re constantly being interrupted. And most of these interruptions are intentionally designed to attract your attention.

The more people practice thinking that way and being in the world that way, the harder it becomes to sustain attention for long periods. You train yourself to overreact to any new distraction.

So the core elements of some of the executive functions that are impaired in ADHD—we are all becoming more ADHD-like.

That’s the thesis of the book I’ve been working on. It’s still several months from going to print, but I call it an “attention deficit world.” One thing that’s been frustrating is that there’s been this huge disconnect in the literature and in people writing about this question: Are brains getting more distracted? Are we becoming more distracted? It’s not just distractedness. It’s immersion in this media world—social media, smartphones, however you break it down.

But it’s not all bad. It’s not just that concentration is worse.

For example, detecting visual items in the environment—some people become more adept at that. Whether that’s actually a good thing, I don’t know. People do multitask more quickly. They switch in and out faster. But they’re still not doing as well on the task as they would if they had no distractions and could just focus solely.

So they multitask better than people who don’t immerse themselves in the internet—but there’s still a tradeoff.

There’s a whole literature—popular books, too—on attention, and we know everyone’s getting a little more distracted. But all the books that talk about it say, “This is just sort of everyday stuff, and it has nothing to do with ADHD.” And they’re wrong.

There are lots of wonderful ADHD books out there that say ADHD is a discrete condition—though they might acknowledge it's on a spectrum—but that it's serious stuff. We want to make sure that people respect that ADHD is a serious, potentially disruptive condition.

When I say serious, let me go on a tangent: the caricature of ADHD is the squirrel, the silliness—people being distracted, ditsy, late, doing things we make fun of, and we ignore how some of those things can have serious repercussions.

A kid with ADHD has a life expectancy about 10 years shorter than their non-ADHD peers. That's the same extent of cutting off life as having diabetes or major depression.

Is that because of accidents, addiction, injury—almost all of it? Two factors, and they're almost equally one: accidents. Driving distracted increases the risk of accidents. But it's also the kid who's more likely to be daring with a tractor on the farm, or daring the bull—accidents in lots of contexts, not just motor vehicle accidents.

The other factor is suicide. Some of the suicide risk overlaps with depression and anxiety and other factors. But I'm convinced—at least, I don't think enough people look at this angle—that impulsivity is a major part of it. Many people feel really bad. But we know that having guns in the household increases the likelihood of someone shooting themselves because the tools are accessible—quick to use. And this also shows something important: if you slow down the thinking process, if you give people more time, if they are less impulsive, they're less likely to act on it.

They still might be miserable—but they're less likely to die.

That's my explanation for why, even though during COVID lockdowns we saw increases in depression and increases in PTSD and increases in domestic abuse and battering, we actually saw decreases in suicide during that time. How does that make any sense?

It wasn't huge, but suicide had been going up every year prior to that, so the data during COVID stands out. My claim is that so many more people were at home. Kids weren't around to play with the gun, or to find the gun, or to notice what was going on—or to prevent access to other means, whether it's poisoning, hanging themselves from a door, or whatever else might happen.

It's very interesting—I didn't realize ADHD carried this kind of lifespan liability. Ten years is certainly significant.

There’s also the middle ground. I mentioned the caricature: the trivial side—being late to meet friends at the restaurant, forgetting your car keys. And the extreme side: death. But in between, we know ADHD measurably derails education, disrupts social relationships, and impacts earning potential.

ADHD isn’t just an academic or cognitive problem. It isn’t just who can jump through hoops and get through school, or who turns in reports, or who can do work on time at their job.

It’s also social implications, and in all those areas, it has measurable, detrimental, significant impacts on people’s lives.