



# DOUBLE EDGED Sword



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by Aditya Amar

**how**

often do you check your mobile phone? I mean even when you haven't heard any call/message alert. Are you addicted to Facebook and Instagram? How about Twitter?

Not surprisingly, many people who meet me at our holistic healing retreats, tell me that they are absolutely addicted to the social media platforms...and what it's meant for their lives, careers, and relationships with loved ones. One woman, says she's on Facebook and Twitter for five hours a day, but feels absolutely no guilt.

Not surprisingly, many people who meet me at our holistic healing retreats tell me that they are absolutely addicted to the social media platforms...and what it's meant for their lives, careers, and relationships with loved ones. Have we ever realized that these social media companies actually treat us, humans, as "A Product"?



"It's my vice," this house wife mentioned, "It's something I can do at home, It's my hobby,"

But she also said sometimes it causes tension between her and her husband, who constantly is begging her to not post their arguments or at-home anecdotes on Facebook for the world to see.

"But I usually do," she confesses.

"I have 550 Facebook friends, and only about six good friends in real life," she adds.

Then there's another person, who, at 29, says that without social media, she wouldn't have been a successful publicist. She cites Twitter and Facebook as ways she connects with people in her industry, and says her phone is always in her hand.

## Addicted to checking Facebook

"Whenever a news story breaks it is just so exciting to watch it unfold in real time. Plus, it's completely meritocratic: if you're sharp on Twitter and good with puns it's a really useful platform both socially and professionally," this "successful" person feels.

But this "successful" person also admits that Facebook was something she cited in her divorce from her husband.

"Facebook was a flashpoint between us - I didn't think he was intelligent or erudite enough for it and I found his crass posts absolutely mortifying," she says of her ex-husband. This 14-year-old girl whom I met in a meditation session at her school says the first thing she does when she wakes up in the morning is check her phone, and at lunchtime, she and her friends sit in the cafeteria staring at their mobile screens.

"My group of friends is really good at speaking to each other, but lots of other groups will just hang around in silence posting on Instagram," she told me. She often considers taking a break from the social networks but never goes through with it - "it would be social suicide."

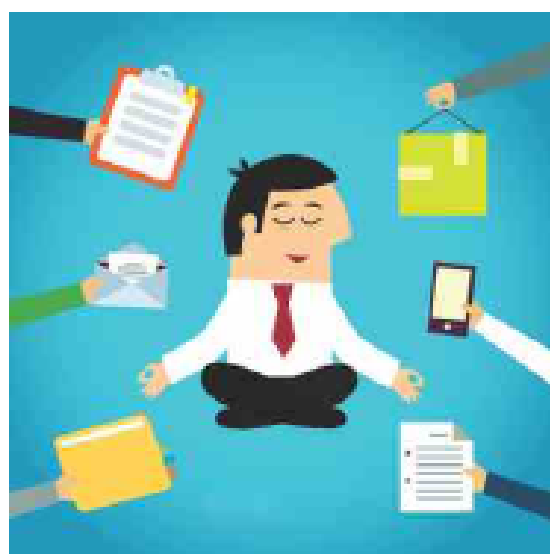


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## Have we ever realized that these social media companies actually treat us, humans, as "A Product"?

Come to think of it. Most social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and many others offer their services to members for free, yet still net significant income. Actually each one of them is a multibillion dollar enterprise. How? If the services are free, then, how do social networking websites earn such staggering sums of money? The answer is that you, the social network user, is the product these online giants seek to generate revenue. According to BBC News, social networking sites are uniquely positioned to make money by matching people to products. Since you generate content on a social networking site that indicates your interests, social and work background, and a great deal of other information about your personal preferences, the social networking sites can target advertisements specifically to you, a service for which advertisers are willing to pay significant amounts of money.

While many users feel their personal data is safe on social networking sites because they have set high levels of security settings, research suggests this is not the case. According to a study, researchers created an algorithm to discover an individual's personal attributes by examining the one thing that most people leave public even when all other privacy settings are place: their friend list. Using the algorithm, researchers were able to infer many personal traits merely from friend lists, including educational level, university attended, hometown and other private data.



## Are we using the technology or is it the other way round?

The more advanced technology becomes, the more it seems to have control over our lives. We shop, work, play, love, search for information, seek to communicate with each other and sometimes with the world online. We spend more time online than ever before. Yet people are not arguing about this startling new condition. I believe that people have too readily embraced technology, seeking only the benefits, and ignoring the many downfalls.

It does not matter if your home is a noisy urban metropolis or a quaint cottage on a secluded hill. If you have a screen and can pick up a signal, your mind is still in the same placeless place. This "placeless place" is the zone that your mind enters when you stare at a screen too long, and it feels like your mind stops "Thinking."

Recent developments in technology such as the internet also led to a decline in "normal" social behaviors. "The old-fashioned café provided a way to both share and abandon solitude, but sitting in your screen world is a whole other story. You are socially and psychologically cut off from your fellow caffeine addicts". In ages past, you could walk around town for a whole day without seeing all the people you know. Now, everyone you know is within arm's reach, taking that certain psychological feeling out of seeing people. You see them every second of every day, and hear nearly every single thought of theirs as soon as they think them.

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Years ago, it was predicted by many that the future would be an amazing and surreal place, yet, no one really seems very shocked about the advances. You can see evidence everywhere. The news is a great example- you see or read an interesting story, think about it for a second, and then you brush it over your shoulder, without any critical thinking, or wondering how it will affect your life.

The Internet has radically changed nearly every level of human experience in an incredibly short amount of time. Two decades ago, you would have had to write a letter to communicate with others far away; if you



missed an episode of your favorite show, you would have had to wait for reruns; and to read the news you would have to pick up a newspaper. These are but a few ways the internet has changed human experience and interaction.

Also with these advancements comes the fact that people are not always alone, even when physically isolated. With connectedness approaching ubiquity, physical isolation no longer ensures total isolation. Generally the word 'loneliness' exists to express the 'pain of being alone, while 'solitude' expresses 'the glory of being alone'." What most people feel upon being disconnected from technology is loneliness, or the pain; while if you are disconnected long enough you feel solitude, or the glory, of being alone.

In nearly every commercial, ad, and promotional, people encourage others to buy the latest gadget, or upgrade to the latest new thing. Is constant contact with the world really a good thing? If you are always in contact, there will be a decreasing amount of time to devote to yourself, and others will shape your opinions more and more. "Like the car, the internet has been made out to be a miracle of social and personal transformation, when it is really a marvel of convenience- and in the case of the internet, one that has caused a social and personal upheaval".

## Please pause and think

We live more in our heads than any society has at any time in history, and for some the only reality is the one inside their heads. Our society is a very work-oriented place- we try to fill up our schedules to the brim in an attempt to get as much done as possible. It has never occurred to many people that doing that much work may have negative psychological effects, such as preventing them from pursuing hobbies and spending quality time with family. Technology has a very much similar effect. First, when you get a phone you check it occasionally, maybe under the dinner table. Soon you start checking it more often and out in the open, sometimes not hearing what people say and even missing whole conversations. It can even get worse than that in some situations.

In conclusion, modern technologies can very well be a double-edged sword, from safety to connectedness. They do have their advantages, but as with many revolutionary inventions, they can radically change our lives, for better or worse.



*Padha suna seekha sabhi, miti na sanshay shool  
Kahe kabir kaso kahu, ye sab dukh ka mool*

पढ़ा सुना सीखा सभी, मिटी ना संशय शूल ।  
कहे कबीर कौसो कहू, यह सब दुःख का मूल ॥

***One may read, listen and learn everything. But after doing all this he has confusion.  
Kabir is at pains to explain that confusion is the root of sorrow!!!***

