

Social Media And Social Pressure In A Changing World

The center of today's human interactions is here to stay. What to do about it.

By Faust Ruggiero, M.S.

It tells us who we are, who we are not, and who we should be. It is becoming the guidepost for the way we think, and the way we express ourselves. It is our emotional/intellectual soapbox, and our way to stand out in the world that can make us feel invisible. It is social media, the new conscience of the nation, and an important driving force behind our relationships with each other. It has redefined the context and the perspectives we have with regard to our feelings about ourselves, our families, and the way we believe others should live their lives. It is, in its truest sense, becoming a powerful addiction, both personal and societal, and we are becoming slaves to it.

Social media usage is arguably the most popular online activity. In 2021, over 4.48 billion people were using social media worldwide, a number projected to increase to almost six billion in 2027. In a study done by the University of Maine, the following statistics were reported:

- **4.48 billion** people currently use social media worldwide, up more than double from 2.07 billion in 2015
- The average social media user engages with **an average of 6.6 various social media platforms**.
- The social media growth rate since 2015 is an average of **12.5%** year-over-year. However, growth is on the decline with 2019-2020 data revealing a **9.2%** growth rate
- By region, social media growth in 2019-2020 is led by Asia: **+16.98%**, Africa **+13.92%**, South America **+8.00%**, North America **+6.96%**, Europe **+4.32%**, and Australasia **+4.9%**
- **60.99%** of the 7.87 billion people in the world use social media, of eligible audiences aged 13+, there is **63%** are active users
- **93.33%** of internet users are on social media; however, a titanic **85%** of mobile internet users are active on networks
- Out of **4.48 billion** social media users, **99%** access websites or apps through a mobile device, with only **1.32%** accessing platforms exclusively via desktop
- Globally, the **average time** a person spends on social media a day is **2 hours 24 minutes**; if someone signed up at 16 and lived to 70, they would spend **5.7 years** of their life on it

- [Facebook](#) is the leading social network at **2.9 billion** monthly active users, followed by [YouTube](#) (**2.3 billion**), [WhatsApp](#) (**2 billion**), FB Messenger (**1.3 billion**), and WeChat (**1.2 billion**)
- **72.3%** of the total US population actively use social media, totalling a number of **240 million** people
- In the US, **54%** of social media users are female, while the remaining 46% are male, compared with a global average of 45.6% for female, and 54.4% for male.
- 40% of all internet users worldwide utilize social media for work purposes. In the U.S., only 27% of people actively use social media in their jobs, compared with the highest by country in Indonesia at 65%, or the lowest at 13% in Israel.

The Media, And The Herd Mentality

Growing up, especially before the days of social media, children played a game called follow the leader. In this game, someone was designated as leader, performed a variety of gestures and other actions, and to stay in the game, followers had to duplicate those gestures and actions. If you didn't play the game, other children did not pay attention to you. They might even tease you about not playing. It was all done in good fun, didn't last long, and had little effect on the child who chose not to play. If you did choose to play, then it was important to duplicate those gestures and actions, and if you didn't, you were counted out. If you were able to duplicate them, you were in the "in crowd", and that was the goal of the game.

Social media is the new version of yesterday's follow the leader. Once again, there are leaders, or as they like to be called *influencers*. They may be ordained in this capacity by other members of society, but more often than not, they, themselves, make the call. They are the follow the leader, social media direction callers. They set the tone, and everyone else's responsibility is to follow along. Those who choose not to play the game are assumed to be out of sync, and out of the flow. They quickly assume their position in the lower social media strata.

If you play the game, there are definite rules that must be followed, and you must adhere to those rules, or be counted out. Being counted out is even worse than not playing the game at all, since it comes with the label of the person who couldn't make it. The willingness to follow along, and the ability to show that in fact you can, provides the advantages of membership, but it also includes the pressure to stay there.

The difference between the old version of follow the leader in today's new follow the social media leader is that this is no longer something played in good fun. There are ramifications for not belonging, and for the unwillingness to play. A quarter century ago, peer pressure was all about dressing up to date, how you wore your hair, how you spoke, and what crowd you belonged to. There was bullying, even then, but the difference between then and now, is connectability. At the end of the day, you could leave that social crowd, return to a safe place, typically your home, and catch your social breath. Today, with the addictive difficulty in disconnecting from our devices, every little action, every little thought, and every little word, can find its way to social media texts, apps, and web pages. You are never alone, and the game never ends.

The Force Is With Us

There are inventions, and there are the way we use inventions. The human mind likes to continue to develop anything it embraces to its maximum potential. That's part of our survival mechanism, and when used properly, it has huge payoffs. Profitability, control, and power, have other ways of doing business. Social media, and its propensity to be addictive, have paved the way for a type of pressure and control which we have never before seen. What we perceive as being part of that more prominent social flow is really about the pressure that comes with making sure we are *in* the social flow. We have developed social media to the point that we steadfastly believe we cannot live without it.

In the flow means making sure that we know the issues as the influencers are presenting them, that we understand the parameters and boundaries associated with them, and that we adhere stringently to the rules of the game. It has become commonplace to verbally attack someone we feel is not in the flow, and whose opinions violate the conditions set forth by the influencers. We respond to social posts quickly, either showing our steadfast support for the trending social flow, or quickly admonishing anyone who seems to be violating that flow.

Though we believe that we are actually part of the leader's game, the real truth is that we must be, or else. There is force and social pressure here to do as we are being told to do. Our addiction to our cell phones, computers, tablets and other mechanical devices keeps us connected, and keeps the pressure on. We firmly believe that we have the facts when all we really have are someone else's conclusions. Our quick reactions have robbed us of our precious fact finding abilities, and we mindlessly follow the crowd, so intent on protecting our membership in the game.

A Simple Blueprint To Regain Your Social Control

There is something peaceful and liberating when one understands and can initiate the concept of freedom in one's life. To disconnect from the social pressure cooker, it's important to understand that doing so will not put you in a position to be left out, uninformed, or labeled. Some of the most important influencers in our world do not follow social media, and quite frankly, most influencers will tell us that someone else manages their page, and that they, themselves, do not follow social media.

As far as the self-ordained influencers, those individuals who like to tell you that they're in some type of leadership position, stay away from them. They possess no leadership abilities, and will only mislead you into following their egotistical personal agendas. Personal control and empowerment do not come at the hands of a social media influencer. That is nothing more than social slavery. If you'd like to regain control of your life, stop following the social crowd, and be your own empowered person, consider the following:

- ❖ *Be willing to disconnect from social media, at least for the time being.* Get an idea of what your life would be like without it.
- ❖ *Turn off all alerts and notifications.* Stop letting other people invade your personal space and have you responding to a simple ring. You're not a robot.
- ❖ Delete some of those unnecessary apps, particularly the ones that tie you so closely with what you think you need to do.
- ❖ *Sign off for at least a few days at a time.* Regardless of what we're doing, everyone's mind needs a break to regain perspective. Take a significant amount of time off, and give your brain a chance to regroup.
- ❖ *Respond to others off-line as often as you can.* Return to some of the old personal ways of communicating. At the very least, include them and the way you currently do business.
- ❖ *Substitute other activities for your social media use.* If you attempt to simply disconnect, and don't fill the time productively, you will quickly notice the void.
- ❖ When you're involved in another activity, talking to another person, or in places where you are not in need of social media, *don't respond to texts and other app generated motivators.* Stop being a slave to social media. Nothing, and no one should be able to violate your time and your space, unless you invite them in.

- ❖ *Put a little pause in your response time.* All too often, the problems associated with social connectivity have to do with response time. Give yourself time to ask two questions. First do I want to respond to this, and second, what do I want to say? Stop letting others control the pace of your life.
- ❖ *Employ a delay signal.* When the phone rings, or the text bell sounds, don't respond to anything right away other than emergencies, or absolutely necessary situations. Give your brain enough time to understand that you are an individual, living in your own space and time. Get back to them at a time more appropriate than the one they used to intrude your world.
- ❖ *Try to be honest with yourself on this one.* Instead of defending your social media use, take some time off, give it a good close look, and work with the facts. If it is controlling your life, you may want to make some changes.
- ❖ *Do a self-test.* See how long you can go without social media. Don't set a finish line on this. Turn the phone off, stay off of all social media pages, and respond to nothing about social media. Make it a contest. You can do this with yourself or other people. **See how long you can go without this addictive life controller.**

If you're having trouble disconnecting from social media, and you feel as though it's controlling your life a bit more than you would like, then do get help. There are many studies that have explained the relationship between social media and neurological addiction. You do not have to be a victim of social media addiction. Get help if you need it.

There's nothing more powerful than a person who runs their world by their own standards. Herd mentality doesn't get us anywhere. The meaningless few moments of quasi fame mean absolutely nothing. In the end, if we stay plugged into social media, and let our lives be controlled by it, we lose our freedom, our productivity, and we become powerless to a machine generated way of living that is taking control of our lives. Take control back. Make your life more important than the social media which is directing it. Become the master of your own destiny, control your world, and be the powerful person you were meant to be.

Faust Ruggiero is the award-winning author of *The Fix Yourself Empowerment Series*, and the new *The Fix Your Anxiety Handbook*.

<https://www.fastruggiero.com/>

