

Introduction

Social networks are becoming increasingly central to our lives. This document discusses the responsible use of these networks in a professional or personal context.

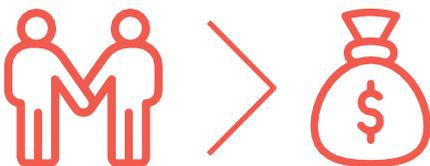
MAIN POINTS:

- Users have the power to decide how they use social networks.
- Becoming aware of your cognitive biases will help you understand how they can be manipulated on social networks.
- You can avoid falling into the trap of "groupthink" by taking a step back and working on your critical thinking skills.
- A state of voluntary servitude can quickly set in when the focus shifts from the public interest to audience interests.

Please note: In the context of this document, “responsibility” and “responsible use” refer to a better informed and more conscious use of social networks.

Commodification of Online Social Interactions

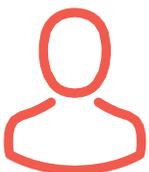
THE EMERGENCE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY HAS ALTERED THE FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS



Over the last two decades, social networks have gone from building social communities largely based on ties of friendship to the commodification of online social interactions. This process of monetization undermines the original objectives of social networks.

HOW SOCIAL NETWORKS ARE USED AND HOW THEY IMPACT USERS

Social networks have become integrated into all areas of social life:



Private /
Individual



Family /
Social



Financial



Political



Activism

HOW ARE USERS AFFECTED?



Digital
Addiction



Fear of Missing
Out (FOMO)



Emotion-Driven
Behaviours



Cultural Isolation
of Youth

USERS' RESPONSIBILITIES: WHAT ACTION CAN THEY TAKE? WHAT POWER DO THEY HAVE?



Users are responsible for deciding how they use the services offered by social networks. Both individually and collectively, users need to reflect on how they can take back control of social media in a well-informed and conscious manner.

Social networks: Why do we get hooked?

HOW DO WE GET HOOKED?



One important factor in digital addiction is the way that social networks display customized content for each user. Algorithms that analyze user behaviour are what makes it possible to personalize content.

The constant display of new content intended to catch a user's attention stimulates them both emotionally and visually. This can make it very hard to simply log off.

HUMAN FACTORS AND COGNITIVE BIAS



“Cognitive bias” refers to an inappropriate way of thinking or reacting when faced with a particular situation. This “bad reaction” results from the fact that the human brain prioritizes emotion over reason when analyzing a given situation. The brain's emotional responses are instant and instinctive. A rational response takes longer because it requires you to take multiple factors into account. A particular response can be both emotionally justified (“That’s noisy, so it must be dangerous!”) and irrational (“Don’t panic, it’s just a transport truck going by”).

The businesses that want to keep our attention focused on social networks are very familiar with the idea of cognitive bias. After all, the human brain's tendency to prioritize emotional responses serves as a basis for filtering information. And a person will be more likely to accept information that matches their filter.

For example, cognitive bias comes into play when a person receives information from someone they like. People generally assign more credibility to the opinions of close friends and family. Social networks like Facebook assess the value of information based on the strength of the relationship between two users. These platforms have managed to commodify friendship, which is the basis of social interaction.

People who are friends tend to automatically like each other's posts on a social network, as a way of being nice to each other. This makes a "like" both a way of expressing your tastes and a tool of interpersonal interaction that helps satisfy your basic social needs.

SOLUTIONS TO SOCIAL NETWORK ADDICTION



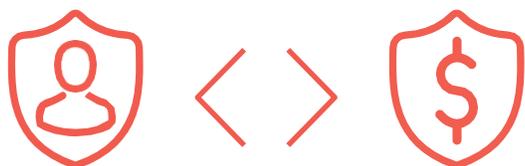
- Addressing social media addiction doesn't mean giving up digital technology!
- Becoming aware of your cognitive biases will help you understand how they can be manipulated.
- Recognizing your addiction is often the first step toward overcoming it.
- Taking a step back and working on your critical thinking skills.

Voluntary Servitude

A state of servitude can develop between dominant and dominated social groups in cases where the dominated group lacks the resources or knowledge (technical and theoretical) required to assert itself.

Social networks, like the Internet and digital technology in general, can foster servitude in situations where not all community members enjoy equal access to resources.

THE PUBLIC INTEREST VS. AUDIENCE INTERESTS



Public Interest

Audience Interests

Working in the public interest means looking out for the well-being of the community as a whole.

Responding to audience interests means working to meet the individual needs of many different people.

On social networks, a state of voluntary servitude can quickly set in when the focus shifts from the public interest to the audience interests. Initially designed to build communities and foster social ties, social networks have become laboratories for analyzing the habits of human beings, with the aim of selling goods and services to those same people.

AN ILLUSION OF SECURITY

The dynamics of voluntary servitude are sustained by the illusion that our online activity is risk-free and remains under our control.

For instance, Facebook claims that it doesn't sell users' personal data. However, if you read the General Terms of Use in full, you'll see that your information is indeed collected and analyzed, before being sold for commercial purposes. Advertisers may not be able to identify you personally using your data, but it still ends up being sold.

SOLUTIONS TO VOLUNTARY SERVITUDE

- Reading all the way through a social network's General Terms of Use and Privacy Policy is no easy task. However, tools like <https://tosdr.org> let users easily and quickly access information on their rights.
- Before using a service, be sure to ask yourself if you really need it, especially if it's free to use. Because that means the service is most likely monetizing your personal data. The following questions will help you dig a little deeper:
 - What kinds of information does the service collect?
 - What companies and businesses are behind the application? Do you trust them?
 - How do you benefit from this app, which collects your data? Is it a fair trade?

Did you know?

Canada is in the process of amending its legislation dealing with digital technology, based on Canada's Digital Charter (2020). The aim is to:

- Tighten oversight and transparency requirements governing how businesses use personal data.
- Ensure the secure transmission of personal data.
- Make it possible to withdraw consent, destroy personal information and impose harsh penalties (5% of income, up to \$25 million).

References

Here are some reliable sources of information:

- <https://ricochet.media/en>
- https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/062.nsf/eng/h_00108.html • <https://lundi.am>
- <https://theconversation.com/ca>
- <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/spark>
- <https://theconversation.com/its-time-we-demanded-the-protection-of-our-personal-data-94960>
- <https://www.arte.tv/fr/videos/085801-002-A/dopamine/> • https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/Media_487729_smx.pdf
- <https://www.cairn.info/revue-hermes-la-revue-2011-1-page-105.htm#> • <https://www.cairn.info/revue-les-cahiers-du-numerique-2014-2-page-63.htm> • <https://www.cairn.info/revue-la-pensee-2016-4-page-97.htm>
- <https://www.cairn.info/revue-mouvements-2014-3-page-13.htm#no4>

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