

*THE MACHINE ALWAYS WINS: WHAT DRIVES OUR ADDICTION TO SOCIAL MEDIA*  
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This article analyzes social media as an addiction machine. If social media is like gambling, the experience of going viral or trending can be compared to hitting the jackpot. Yet, like gambling, this sharp rise generates the conditions for an even harder fall when likes turned to disapproval. Following from the addiction theme, the author asks: why can't we quit social media? Why do we fail when we try? A 2015 study shows that when people quit one social networking platform, it is often because they have merely displaced their addiction onto another platform (for example, moving from Facebook to Twitter). Those that are ultimately able to step away often experience a boost in self-assurance and mental well being. This highlights the complex links between social media, depression and identity construction, as well as the particular types of social disciplining encouraged by social media. Like taking a drug or pulling the lever on a slot machine, the clicks and likes that are the hallmark of engagement seem to trigger our reward system in ways similar to other addictive behaviors. We keep coming back for the rush of dopamine. And like with slot machines, or even video games, we are drawn into what Schüll calls "the machine zone". During our endless hours of screen time, the outside world recedes, time disappears, and we enter the kind of trancelike state familiar to many addicts. Despite the integrity of these comparisons, there are many more variables to social media addiction than to drug addiction or even gambling. While we can examine the mechanisms by which we become hooked, or stay hooked, it's worth turning a critical eye to which social media-enabled behaviours we are really drawn

to. Because, after all, as users we are also complicit in our own dependence. And, like any addict, we cannot escape unless we choose to help ourselves.