



in social media



“Have you ever wondered why social media is so addictive?”

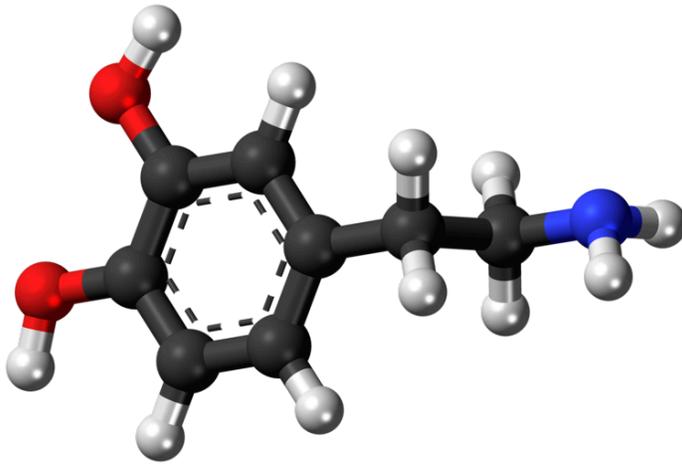


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Have you ever wondered why social media is addictive, why you can't seem to drag yourself away from scrolling through Facebook? Or maybe why you get that feeling when you get a notification? Do you ever check your news feed for "five minutes", and then half hour later you're still scrolling? People aren't addicted to social media per se, it's more of an addiction to the dopamine the brain produces every time you receive a notification. It's all down to a bit of neuroscience.

IT MAKES YOU FEEL GOOD EACH TIME THE LITTLE "PING" PLAYS, DOESN'T IT?

Well, unless you're busy chances are you like it and you get a little rush. Personally, I get happy when people retweet me, it makes me feel good that people enjoy the content that I share and I'm pretty sure some of you will feel the same.



Yep, you guessed it, dopamine Dopamine, chemical sign C₈H₁₁NO₂, is a neurotransmitter that helps to control the brain's pleasure and reward centres.

Dopamine was first "discovered" by Arvid Carlsson and Nils-Ake Hillarp in 1958 at the National Heart Institute of Sweden. Dopamine is created in various parts of our brains and it's uses include vital brain functions like thinking, regulating movement, attention, motivation as well as finding and seeking rewards.

It is an ancient chemical and has been found in everything from lizard brains to human brains, however, human's have a much larger amount present. Dopamine is a monoamine compound with positive inotropic activity that not only enables us to feel the reward but to move towards them as well.

Dopamine isn't all sunshine and rainbows though, it also forms the basis of addiction to cigarettes, gambling, cocaine and heroin. Both cocaine and heroin produce bigger

jolts of dopamine than gambling or nicotine and thus get people addicted to the “high”. That’s why heroin is known on the street as “dope”. Dopamine is also the reason that we experience the “phantom phone buzzing” phenomenon, where we feel like our phones are buzzing when they’re not.

When dopamine is released, it is in anticipation of a reward. The reward, in this case, is the notification. When you receive a notification, dopamine is released from the neurotransmitters and makes you feel a temporary high. As a chemical messenger, dopamine is quite similar to adrenaline as it is part of the “fight of flight” group of chemicals. Recent studies have shown that more dopamine is released when we are anticipating rewards compared to when we actually receive them. So the second that your audience shares your content, dopamine is instantly released in the brain whilst they are waiting for people to respond to your post, pretty cool, right? However, dopamine doesn’t just help you feel rewards and pleasure, it also aids learning too.

Unpredictability stimulates dopamine production. When we receive texts, see tweets or random Facebook updates, we never know who they are from or what they are going to say until we look. This is what entices us to [look at our smartphones around 27 times a day!](#)

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA KEEPS US ADDICTED

Many people spend so much time on social media because the endless scrolling that Facebook and Twitter, subconsciously you do want to reach the end, but it is just a bottomless pit of content. We as people scroll and scroll, partially because of fear of missing out, partially because we are anticipating a reward. People like seeing what their friends are up to, their family, their favourite businesses, the offers.. Everybody loves gossip and offers!



After time, we start to feel the reward just by hearing the sound of a notification. When a notification sounds but we don’t see it, we know what it is. Each application has it’s own different tone and the brain automatically differentiates them. That means our brain already knows what the notification is for even when we can’t see our devices. Well that is, unless you have the same text and email tone like me, then it’s a bit harder.

Each notification that a person receives works like a dose of cocaine or heroin, just on a much smaller scale. Many online companies have now released what the tobacco industry knew years ago – addiction is great for business.

Dopamine also plays a part in the reason we feel compelled to share information about ourselves and our days on Social Media. We are sharing this information in anticipation of an award, the award being the shot of dopamine. In short, publishing a status update gives us brain candy.

IS THIS GOOD?

For the platforms such as Facebook and Twitter – yes because they generate revenue from advertisers who want eyeballs on their platforms and the longer you stay on the site the more adverts are seen. Is it good for you? Yes and no, spending too much time on social media can take you away from other more important things but equally if you are having engaging and relevant conversations on social media that is a positive thing and the more the better. You need to be using social media effectively to get noticed in the right ways. When you create great content for social media, if it's relevant, people will read it because they don't want to miss out.

The main problem with dopamine is that it exhausts us, the constant dopamine loops we are put into on Social Media with the endless scroll and unpredictability.

HOW YOU CAN USE THIS

You see, the dopamine produced from notifications is a brilliant way to engage with your customers. Engagement with your customers or prospects releases that same shot of dopamine, because you're giving them a notification whether on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or Google+. This then makes them feel special because they have been mentioned or even noticed.

In the hustle and bustle of social media it is very hard to get noticed, especially by those who just have a personal Twitter and not a lot of followers. This is where you should focus. As long as it's natural and genuine you cannot go wrong. Favourite or liking posts is essentially the same thing, however, a lot of people misuse this and use the favourite option to gain attention and that's not what we are advocating.

So if you're mentioned in a post or your product is mentioned, you don't have to reply, but people will feel special if you favourite it or share it because they know you've seen it. If it's relevant, share it to your own audience and show what people think of your brand or your product.

If you keep your customers and prospect happier, even just by letting them know you've seen their post it makes them feel special and they will often share it on-line. They want to feel like they have an input to your brand (which they definitely should) and whether they can influence it.

The other way you can use this is by creating funny, interesting or useful content that your audience will share on their own timelines. Your audience loves to look

good, it's a known fact that we are all at least slightly narcissistic on Social Media, and so we share content to make ourselves look good (not just because we like the brand sharing this content). When your audience shares this content and receives likes and comments, again, more dopamine is released into the brain and our pleasure and rewards centres are again activated. The more likes and comments that somebody gets the more dopamine gets released.

However, if you begin to share too much promotional content and your audience is anticipating a "reward" (piece of content), your audience will become disappointed (think like a heroin addict who hasn't gotten their dose today, it's the same concept just a LOT less harmful) and will discontinue supporting your brand and sharing your content – they may even unlike/unfollow you too.

To create the right content, you must tap into your audience's values, aspirations and emotions. Here are some questions you should ask about researching your audience.

What are your **buyer personas values**?

What are their **aspirations**?

What will **trigger an emotional response**?

What will **help your buyer personas help someone else out**?

What will **entertain them**?

Does your **branding fit** in with the above?

In essence, you should listen to what motivates your audience and adapting your brand and content.