Marketing Addiction
The Dark Side of Gaming and Social Media

Gaming and social media have recently been scrutinized for their potential to negatively affect the mental health of users. The World Health Organization (2018) proposed that video game disorder be added to its list of mental health diseases. Other applications (apps) and social media companies, Facebook® specifically, have been “outed” by former employees in the tech industry for systematically making their services more addictive to consumers (Bort, 2017).

Marketing’s role in a business is to create a relationship between customers and the brand. By tapping into positive emotions, consumers identify with the brand. For the best and most trusted brands, this creates loyalty and sustainability.

Belonging, acceptance, and love are the feelings at play for social media brands. Consumers view companies, such as Facebook, as a service that connects them with friends and family and allows them to share life events with others. But in reality, Facebook is an advertising company.

Revenue is generated by delivering messages to users while they are using the platform for social interaction. The more time a user spends on Facebook, the more money it makes from advertisers.

This business model requires higher use to generate revenue, and social networking companies invest heavily in tactics to keep us coming back for more. The likes, comments, and notifications we receive on our mobile devices through social apps create positive feelings of acceptance. Companies use collected data to tweak their products to be more addictive, so that we become dependent on apps and social media for gratification.

Our minds are being “brain hacked” by these apps and social platforms (CBS News, 2017); research and development dollars are allocated to determining how technology can stimulate the release of dopamine during product use to make us feel good about ourselves. When we are not getting this dopamine release from our apps and smartphones, we feel fear, anxiety, and loneliness. The only remedy, for some, is to get back on the device for another pleasure release.

Corporate responsibility requires companies to protect consumers—building trust with honesty and ethical practices helps ensure long-term success. When a business is motivated to trigger addictive behavior through emotions, one must question the integrity of the brand. Is it focused on making our lives better through connection as it promises through marketing? Or is it capitalizing on human emotion at any cost to make money?

REFERENCES

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