#AddictiveDesign

1. Designed to be addictive?

We spend **more time** in front of our **screens** than we intend to. One key reason? The **design**.

Addictive design is intentionally crafted to capture our **attention**, encourage **interaction**, and keep us online **as long as possible**.

The goal? To show us as **many ads** as possible.

But what's behind it?

+5 tips

alia
Autorité luxembourgeoise indépendante de l'audiovisuel

Mechanisms such as **infinite scrolling**, **autoplay**, and **notifications** play a key role. They not only **influence** our behavior but also **make impulse control harder**.

2.

Over time, reaching for the smartphone becomes a reflex.

Simple **time limits** or **blocking apps** can only interrupt this habit temporarily while the **impulse remains**.

Going "cold turkey" can even **backfire**, intensifying cravings because the impulse isn't consciously regulated—only suppressed.

So, how much control do we really have ?

alia
Autorité luxembourgeoise indépendante de l'audiovisuel

3. Victims of digital asymmetry

Platforms are **testing new features** directly **on users** and optimize them based on our reactions—often **without our knowledge nor our consent**.

They rarely explain how these features affect us. Also, they **don't inform** us about alternative settings or **intentionally** make them **difficult to access**.

More control through **conscious choices**.

alia
Autorité luxembourgeoise indépendante de l'audiovisuel

4. Chronological feed instead of algorithms

We **engage longer** and more intensely with **emotionally charged content**—whether positive or negative.

Algorithms precisely analyze **our reactions** and feed us content that constantly **stimulates our brain** and keeps us glued to the screen.

Choose to see posts in the order they were published. This way, you...

know **when to stop scrolling** because you recognize what's new and what you've **already seen**,

can **find interesting posts again**, even after refreshing the page,

decide for yourself what's relevant, as all posts are displayed.

The DSA **requires** very large platforms to provide an **alternative to the algorithmic feed**, and as a result, the **chronological feed** is often **available** again.

5. Group notifications

We **instinctively** react to **sudden stimuli** because of our survival instinct.

Notifications exploit this: sounds, vibrations, or screen flashes stimulate **multiple senses** at once.

Avoid constant distractions by:

receiving notifications in **scheduled summaries** instead of being notified continuously

hiding the notification content (e.g., no banner or preview, only a badge count).

restricting notifications to specific apps or contacts.

6. Reduce visual triggers.

Our **brain** releases **dopamine** when we receive a message or see a video **we like.**

Over time, **we associate visual cues**—such as notifications or app icons—**with this positive experience**. As a **result**, our **brain reacts** to these signals **before we even open** the content.

Avoid these triggers by:

Add a button to your home screen **to quickly toggle** this function (e.g., for taking a photo) without having to constantly access the settings.

activating grayscale mode: Colors lose their signaling effect, which often drives impulsive actions (e.g. red = danger → urgency).

removing distracting apps from the home screen or placing them in a separate folder.

7. Change habits and share them

We encourage each other to stay online. Social needs, **curiosity**, or the **fear of missing out** push us to **always be available** and to **respond immediately**.

Blue checkmarks, online status, and typing indicators **add pressure**.

Inform your contacts about your new habits. This provides:

stronger commitment that helps you stick to your goals.

motivation through shared rules or challenges.

distractions and social interactions you'd otherwise seek online.

the opportunity to replace negative habits with new, shared activities.

8. Decide consciously instead of consuming passively

Default settings, **autoplay**, **infinite scrolling**, **hidden navigation** elements, and **missing time indicators** make it harder to regulate our consumption. The **result? Passive consumption** and binge-watching.

Take back control by:

reflecting on why you're on your phone (boredom, frustration, distraction?).

setting clear intentions: What exactly are you looking for or planning to do?

choosing what you consume (e.g., through personal watchlists, notes, or bookmarks).

consciously spending your time with activities that inspire or relax you.

9. What is fair design?

At its core, user well-being comes first. Fair design:

creates transparency about psychological mechanisms in digital applications, the goals behind them, and how user data is handled.

avoids addictive mechanisms and supports conscious use through time limits, reminders for breaks, and offline activities.

tests new features for potential risks—especially for children and adolescents—before launching them and adjusts them if necessary.

provides in-app educational measures that address risks and promote self-control and healthy digital habits.