

Video transcription:
How to Fix Social Media (Grannon - Vaknin Convo).
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2rKrWNWkS0&t=60s>
18. august 2019



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Headlines and text sections are added for readable reasons.

Richard: Good evening ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for joining us. I'm joined tonight by Sam Vaknin.

Sam: For a change.

Richard: For a change ([laughing]). His name is Sam Vaknin. He is the author of Malignant Self-love.

Sam: My name is Sam Vaknin and I'm the author of "Malignant Self-love: Narcissism Revisited". The introduction that all of you threat, hate and despise, that's me.

Richard: Instant triggering [laughing].

Sam: Instant triggering, the audience numbers fall by 70%, people emigrate to places without internet connection etc., yes [both laughing].

Richard: Tonight, we will be discussing social media toxicity. Obviously, this follows on from – it has been 2 months now since "The Plugged In Documentary" has being out - so following on from The Plugged In Documentary. Obviously, there's this new research, new development all the time. We're going to be talking about some of the elements of our social media toxicity tonight. I think we're going to start from a place of trying to offer some solutions there, right?

Sam: Yes. Maybe a bit before that, with all your permissions, let's talk about the most recent studies, because some of them are really counterintuitive.

1:12

The most recent studies.

Let's start with the fact: France as a country prohibited the use of any kind of device, smartphones, tablets in schools. The reason the French government gave is, that they have established beyond any doubt, that access to social media and the usage of such devices is, I'm quoting: "Harmful to anyone under the age of 18". So, in France such devices are banned in all academic institutions for students under the age of 18, which is the first country which did this.

Then there's been a slew of studies since 2017, some of them obscure, some of them not so, and I will try to give a very brief overview of a few of them.

2:00

As early as 2017 there was a study in an obscure country called the United Kingdom [Richard laughs], where they asked British school children: Would you have been happier had social media not been invented? And 63% of school children said "Yes, we would have been considerably happier". That was a 2017 study.

2:30

Then a research firm by the name of Ampere Analysis conducted a series of studies, not one, about social media. I think this is possibly the biggest body of research and studies about the various impacts and dimensions of social media.

A few pertinent points: Among the age group 18 to 24: The level of satisfaction with social media, and: The level of importance of social media in the user's life. The questions were: How important is social media in your life, and: How satisfied you are with social media?

The level of status both dropped from 66% to 57% in less than two years. The first study was conducted in 2016. The second study was conducted in 2018. There has been a drop of essentially something like 20% from 66 to 57.

3:39

Totally surprisingly there's been a similar increase in satisfaction and importance among the age group 45 to 65, also known as the late dinosaurs [smiling]. These people found social media much more appealing than they have only 2 years before. The increase was from 23% to 28%.

It seems that social media usage, the pivotal importance of social media in the user's life as satisfaction with social media, are actually increasing dramatically among middle-aged and old people. It's a very interesting new trend, while teenagers are getting seriously disenchanted.

4:31

I will back this claim up by citing additional studies. The marketing agency Hill Holliday conducted again a series of studies and discovered that 50% of all teenagers - by the way, technically as of 2010 in Psychology, teenage years are defined 15 to 25 - in this age group 50% have quit social media permanently, at least one platform of social media. 50% of them have quit Facebook or Twitter or Instagram or something permanently. That's an enormous number.

5:18

Generation Z.

We must realize that still overall 'Generation Z', the digital natives, the one born after 1995, constitute the majority of social media usage and social media users. If disenchantment among them reaches the level of 50 percent, that bodes very ill for the future of social media.

5:47

Among generation Z 44% considered social media "an utter waste of time". 41% said that after each time they access social media they experience enhanced emotions of sadness, depression and anxiety. That's 41%. A caveat here: These kids are not qualified to diagnose anxiety, depression and sadness or, maybe sadness, but definitely not anxiety and depression. Anxiety and depression are chimeral, they wear many guises. Very often you don't realize that it's depression or anxiety.

The numbers are probably much higher. In studies conducted by Twingear for example of similar age group, but in the United States, the rate of anxiety quintupled among this age group in five years alone during 2010 to 2015. So I think 41% is an understatement is self-reporting.

6:55

Dr. Amanda Lenhart conducted a series of studies among US teenagers in the United States, and she discovered that 58% of teenagers in the United States broke, up so to speak, with social media at least once in the preceding year. That's very interesting, because this is proof of addiction. If you break up and then you can't help it you go back, and then you break up and you can't help it you go back, that's proof of conditioning actually. It's more than addiction, its conditioning. If we needed any proof of conditioning, it's the fact that 58% of teenagers desperately try to break up with social media, but fail, keep coming back. This 58% in dr. Amanda Lenhart studies: All of them returned to social media, they broke up and came back.

Richard: They couldn't help themselves.

Sam: They couldn't help themselves.

7:54

Finally, in the United Kingdom among Facebook users 18 to 24 - I think it's also Hill Holiday but I'm not sure - 1.8% vowed, committed themselves to closing their Facebook accounts in 2019. Actually it's the first time since the inception of Facebook that the growth rate is negative among this age group.

8:29

What can we learn from these studies? We can learn that the natural constituency of social media, which is generation Z, is utterly disillusioned, disappointed. They understand, even at their tender age, that social media is essentially toxic. They want to break free and they failed, which is proof positive that we have talking about conditioning and addiction.

What can we do about it? I personally would suggest several steps.

9:16

Operational/functional recommendations.

1. Usage Meters.

First of all I think all social media should come with usage meters. When you sign on to a broadband service, when you use your iPhone, almost all electronic services and electronic devices provide you with clear feedback as to the amount of usage. This is not the case with social media, not the case with the majority of social media to be precis. The Instagram does, but majority of social media don't do that, and they don't reveal it, for good reason, because you would be terrified.

In studies conducted in the United States people spent an amazing 4½ hours a day on social media. 4½ hours a day which was four times, four times the amount of time they spent with their children and family. It was also twice the amount of time they spent on television and infinitely more how much the amount of time they've read books. Social media is taking over. Social media is becoming the preferred screen.

10:28

Social media needs to provide usage meters. When I say 'needs to provide', let's be honest about it. Social media has to be forced to do that, they will never do that of their own accord. They have to be subjected to legislation, regulation. There has to be a regulatory agency and this regulatory agency has to punish, penalize severely social media companies which do not abide by new guidelines.

Richard: To be absolutely clear: You're not suggesting that the total solution would be that the social media platforms regulate themselves?

Sam: No, self-regulation failed utterly. With the Russian interference in the elections, which is considered to be a much more serious business than the mental health of teenagers - after all only a hundred thousand teenagers committed suicide in the last five years - which is fewer than the number of adults who died in car accidents, so it's nothing. But even when we deal

with the question of Russian collusion, Russian interference in the elections, much more serious issues fake news, still self-regulation by the industry failed miserably. Generally self-regulation fails. It failed in Wall Street. Ultimately you have to step in as a regulatory agency mandated by legislation by Vox Populi, by the voice of the people.

11:54

And the people are speaking. I've just quoted, cited a series of studies which show, that the main body of users of Facebook actually, in my view, beg for help. It's a cry for help. They ARE trying to break. We are not talking about 5.8%, we are talking about 58%, the majority of them are trying to break free. They are imprisoned, they're hostages you know.

So, the first thing is usage meters. When such feedback is provided, people will be so shocked by the numbers that it might, it might influence behavior. That's number one.

12:31

2. Self-limiting clocks.

Number two: All social media must be equipped with self-limiting clocks. That means if you reach a level of usage, a certain level of usage per day, your access will be blocked. Simple, blocked. That's it, no way around it unless you're a hacker and use sophisticated VPN and spoof your IP or whatever. If you're a regular user your access will be blocked.

You can say this is against free speech, this is not okay, but actually there are similar laws about alcohol usage. There are similar laws about other forms of behavior, other practices. There is no reason not to introduce this, so I think self-limiting clocks are important.

13:20

3. Minimum age requirements.

The third thing is: We should consider a minimum age for social media. I don't know what this minimum age mark should be. In the United States, in most states, no one under the age of 18 can drink alcohol, no one under the age of 18 can vote, no one under the age of 16 can drive a car. These are good numbers. I would strongly recommend a minimum age for social media.

Richard: I think they have it set as 13 for Facebook and Instagram but they're not enforcing it, so it's so easy to go around.

Sam: First of all, it's very easy to go around. In many other platforms which are not social media, for example you must provide a copy of a government ID or something like a driving license, passport and so on. This is nonsense, they ask you 'are you above the age of 13', yes, thank you, go ahead. When I say minimum age requirements, of course authenticated and verified and so on so forth, not the nonsense of 'are you above the age of 13' - even I'm above the age of 13. I know it's hard to believe [Richard laughing].

14:30

Minimum age requirements because we have a plethora, we have an abundance, a critical mass of studies that show, that resilience to conditioning and addiction, addictive behaviors and so on, increases with age. And that above a certain age, which usually is 21 to 25, 26 depending on the country, the chances of developing a new addiction are very low. The chances for conditioning are almost nil. Above age 25 or 26 they're almost nil, which is precisely why in Psychology we redefine teenage years and we put the upper boundary at 25. That's the third recommendation I would make.

I have a few more interesting recommendations. Some of them I think would be heard here for the first time. If all implemented together, I think it would solve, detoxify the platforms. Let's proceed therefore.

15:37

4. A Real-Life-Correlate.

I would institute a mandatory real-life-correlate. I will explain what I mean:

You cannot have friends unless you really know them, and there must be an algorithm a way for you to prove that you know them. For example: If I want to become friends with Richard Grannon on Facebook I must first certify that I know Richard Grannon, that I really know him, that I've met him, that I've shaken his hand, that I stole his wallet, which I regularly do [Richard laughing]. I must have a real-life-correlate.

How can I prove that I've met Richard Grannon? Richard Grannon would provide something, some information that only he and I know, and then the social medium will ask me. If I confirm this information, then I can become friends with Richard Grannon.

16:33

Why is this important?

Because one of the main utterly poisonous features of social media is their unreality, their virtuality. The fact that they create an alternative universe, which is essentially, by any definition of Psychology, psychotic, "Shared psychotic disorder".

We must rid ourselves of the visual unrealistic aspect of social media. If I have 100 friends, of course let me be in touch with them through Facebook, why not? If I have 1000 friends, let me be in touch. If over 1000 students and I know all of them, like Jordan Peterson, let me be in touch with all of them. But I must prove that I know these people and I'm in touch with them outside the confines of this utterly psychotic space.

17:27

Richard: The phones are smart enough and the apps are smart enough, that they know if we're close together in proximity, so if I don't see you for a period of time, the app could actually say 'you haven't seen some in 18 months', whatever they says, as 'you've not seen each other face to face'. And then you could have, I'm not suggesting this, but you could have a sort of a fading process where you say 'well, these ones are people you haven't seen them'.

Sam: Yes, you could have a nudge, 'you haven't seen your friend in 5 years' or 'these 2 friends' and so on so forth, of course, but it must all be based on reality. The social media must be grounded in reality. That by itself, that alone will eliminate 80% of the toxicity.

So, mandatory real-life-verification: The only friends you could have on Facebook are the friends you really have or at least acquaintances, let's not be harsh. Someone you know, someone you've met, someone you shared experiences with, someone you can access outside Facebook by calling him, by meeting him, by having a pint and so on so forth. So mandatory real-life.

18:31

5. Curation and moderation.

The next thing I would make obligatory or mandatory, if I were in the position to do so - and these are recommendations that I was invited to make to several Parliament's in Europe, latest one is Bulgaria. They are considering a social media law and I made these recommendations to them. Possibly they will adopt some of them.

Richard: You said Bulgaria is right progressive with their social media?

Sam: Strangely Bulgaria, France. I mean these so-called "backwaters", allegedly backwaters in terms of Technology; they're not exactly Silicon Valley. They are much more progressive in the social engineering aspect of social media. They're much more aware of the pitfalls and the risk and the potential, because social media is an instrument, that has wonderful aspects and dimensions.

19:22

One thing I'll make obligatory is curation and moderation. If you have 5000 friends, which is the limit in Facebook for individual accounts or unlimited number of friends if you have a page, then of course it's impossible to curate and to moderate. The number of messages is overwhelming, but if by virtue of your life, real life, the maximum number of friends you can have is 100, because who has more than 100 friends, then curation and moderation becomes absolutely possible.

19:55

I think curation should have two phases:

All messages must be first curated and moderated by the recipient. There is no such thing as automatic posting. This should be utterly limited. So if I receive a message with ISIS beheading a captive, I must first vet it as a user. I know you think it sounds insane, but actually there's been campaign of ISIS and they have hacked into, or leveraged thousands of accounts on Facebook and placed videos of decapitations and so on so forth.

Had there been obligatory curation and moderation, two phase curation – moderation, first the user and then a "curation moderation center", for example in Facebook or Instagram or Twitter, which would then have a second look and decide by Community guidelines if this is permissible or not permissible.

20:51

I believe the whole story of fake news, terrorism news and all this will vanish, absolutely vanish.

In a minute we'll come to the business aspects, because Facebook and similar, they would say 'well, we cannot survive with a hundred friends, we need eyeballs, we need to monetize'. We'll come to that in a minute. But, curation and moderation:

I believe, that if users will be forced to curate or moderate because the majority of the feed will come from real friends and so on so forth, it will create a community in effect. It will have a communal effect, an effect of community. There will be much much less loaded, much less adverse. Users will be much less averse to moderating and curating, because I would be interested to see your posts and so on. And I think it will create much higher quality of feed, of content on Facebook. Plus it will get rid of all the pernicious, criminal, dangerous content that is now.

22:01

6. Storytelling.

Finally, and before I come to the issue of the business model, I would make storytelling obligatory. This sounds a bit on the crazy side. Today anyone can post pictures of peeling bananas. I hate this girl, she has 16.8 million users!

Richard: She is a real issue for you [both laughing]

Sam: She's a real issue for me.

Richard: Banana girl.

Sam: I talk about geopolitics, history, culture and so on.

Richard: It's banana girl that upsets you.

Sam: And banana girl at the same time peels a banana and she gets 443 thousand likes! I mean, it's humiliating, my entire life has been misdirected, I've never payed attention to bananas [Richard laughs, Sam smiles].

22:50

There's no storytelling there. I think the algorithms of social media should be reconstructed so as to generate stories. Today we have an option to create a story. Your story is on Instagram and Facebook, but that's an option, and most people misuse this option. They just take series of random images and they upload them as a story, so bulls*** like this. But the algorithm

could be extremely easily reconstructed to take, even a series of totally random posts, and create a story.

Facebook started with this. Facebook today offers you a summary of the year, so every year you get like a summary of 'what have you been doing this year'. They show you a photo from here, a photo from there and suddenly it's a story. I SO like these videos by Facebook that I download them, and then upload them to my YouTube. They're wonderful because they remind me of things I've done during the year, people I have met, people I have talked to. As Facebook is doing now every year, it is no problem whatsoever to do every hour or every day or every month, no problem.

24:04

Social media should be reconstructed as storytelling platforms, narrative platforms. Today they are not. Today they are anecdotal platforms, not even information, definitely not knowledge but anecdotal platforms. We must transition from anecdote to storytelling.

You could say 'why is it so important'? Because - again starting with a very famous psychoanalyst Bruno Bettelheim - we know that storytelling has a therapeutic effect. Frankly, what we do in psychotherapy is, we reconstruct the patient's narrative, we propose to the patient another story. The patient comes with one story - let's take all your Facebook posts and let's make another story - and suddenly the patient is healed or feels better, because storytelling is therapeutic.

25:03

When you look at Facebook it's disjointed, it's chaotic, it's discontinuous and in this sense it's horrifying in the sense that it create an angst, it create anxiety. If I were to give you 3 random, totally disjointed, disconnected facts right now this very second, you would react with anxiety even there's absolutely no reason to react with anxiety. Well, I'm here maybe there is [Richard smiles], but generally speaking. If Richard were to offer you three unconnected, disconnected fact, you would react with anxiety.

Richard: My brain would be compelled to try and make sense of it because it's annoying.

Sam: Yes, then you will try to make patterns and you try to think why did Richard do this, what does it mean?

25:54

It's ominous, it's minacious. Imagine an avalanche of utterly disjointed, disconnected, discontinuous, discombobulated, utterly fantastic sometimes, and not fantastic avalanche of factoids, of anecdotes, so of course we are in consistent state of anxiety.

Now imagine we take all these things and we put them into a story. We love stories, we grow up on stories. Never mind if the stories are on television or in a book, storytelling is the foundation of everything. This is actually of all the recommendations I've made, the third easiest. The easiest is usage meters, the second one is limiting with clocks and the third easiest is this, because Facebook is already doing this actually.

These are the operational recommendations I have, the functional recommendations.

26:50

The crux of the matter.

Now we come to the crux of the matter. The crux of the matter is greed. Social media were invented, not by accident, in the United States. Most of the technology of the internet has been invented outside the United States. People don't know that. Firewalls have been invented in Israel, antivirus has been invented in Slovakia. Most of everything you have on your laptop screen has not been invented in the United States. Even www the World Wide Web, has been invented in Switzerland. So most of it is not American.

The only thing that is quintessentially purely American is social media, absolutely the only thing. Why? Money. It's an expression, the reification of avarice. Nothing wrong with avarice, nothing wrong with greed, especially if I'm the one who's getting the money [Richard laughs].
27:50

One of the counter arguments including in the testimony of Zuckerberg in front of Congress is 'Listen guys, I mean if I do all this I'll not survive'. First of all, that is a lie. Maybe you will not be making 10 billion dollars, so you will be making a hundred million dollars or you'll be making a million dollars, of course you will survive. It will not be a multibillion company, but you'll survive. It's not about survival; it's about increasing your profits via addiction and conditioning as your own engineers have testified, Sean Philips, others, multiple times. You're using psychopathology to generate profits, not nice, not nice.

The business model of social media is very simple. We monopolize your attention, we use your data and the fact, that you are glued to the screen. We package it and we sell this to the advertisers. Of course that means the real clients of social media are advertisers and not users. This is the business model.

Facebook can say 'If we implement all this it's very worthy, if we implement all this the amount of eyeball-time will decrease by 90%. How can we survive?' Well they can survive by charging a fee.
29:19

All social media should be compelled to move from monetizing to charging a fee. Now you could say 'wait a minute, this will never ever work because people go to choose free internet and they will rebel'.

In all previous electronic media this is exactly what happened: Television started as a free service. There were three networks in the United States, then there were six networks and they were all free. Then someone came up with the idea 'let's sell television' and this is what is known as cable TV. Today cable TV is 7 times larger in terms of revenue than all the networks combined. So it's not true that if you transition to a fee structure, your industry will be destroyed.
30:18

If you look at any type of electronic communication, starting with the telephone and coming to the internet and social media, they all started free. They all start free. I don't know if you know: The first telephone services were highly localized affairs with like a 100 numbers. They were free and then they began to charge, when they connected into regional hubs. Radio was the same. I don't know, I mean you're not old enough to remember, you were kids, but when radio first came on the scene, it was known as "Ham Radio". The first came on the scene, Marconi and so on, it was utterly free. Then there was legislation, that if you wanted to own a radio, you needed to pay a license fee and became Ham Radio. Then, if you wanted to own a radio set, you had to pay a license.

In most countries in the world today, to own a television set or to own a radio you must pay a license fee. ALL electronic media started as free and moved to a fee structure. Increasingly this is what's happening with print media. All print media started as advertising sponsored. The real cost of a newspaper is much higher than what you pay; the rest is subsidized by advertising. They're all advertising based. Then they discovered that they actually can sell subscriptions online and so on, so today the main stream of income of the New York Times is from subscriptions online. To hell with advertisers, they don't even solicit advertising anymore.
32:09

Zuckerberg and his ilk, they are capitalizing on the fact, that we have become an ahistorical society with no institutional memory and no knowledge of history. They are capitalizing all this. The whole structure of social media and the Internet is atemporal. I know there is a date when you upload your video, but it creates a timeless space. For example, if you go to websites, it's very difficult to tell which website came before which. It's a timeless space.

Zuckerberg and his ilk are using this, abusing this. He is abusing and they are abusing every other thing. He is abusing this. He goes to Congress and say 'listen, what are you talking about? For any medium to survive they must have advertising, they must have eyeballs'.

That is a lie. That is not true. There has not been a single medium ever which survived by selling advertising. They all started by selling advertising or by being free. They all ended up charging fees. All. All. All: Telephone, telegraph, radio, television, all, print media, ALL.
33:38

So it's not outlandish to suggest that social media reached the level of maturity in their history, that now they must transition to a fee structure. The minute they transition to a fee structure, that's the end of the toxicity.

Richard: Prevent frivolously uses, wouldn't it? It would stop trolling or reduce trolling.

Sam: It would stop trolling. You will get rid first of all of a lot of fluff, people who are on social media just to post cakes. I mean, people who pay a fee would work with social media seriously, for political ends, for social ends for whatever. Additionally you would be able to get rid of relative positioning, also known as 'likes'.

Likes is by far the most venomous aspect of social media, by far, because it creates competition. Not only against other people, how many likes did I get, how many likes did you get, but it creates competition against previous versions of yourself: How many likes as I get yesterday against how many likes I get today. It's absolutely sick.

You need that when you are advertising based, because likes creates something called "stickiness". In other words, you come back to the same post to see how many likes you receive. You come back once, they can charge the advertiser once. You come back a hundred times; they can charge the advertiser hundred times. Simple.

35:02

Likes were invented to create stickiness and conditioning and addiction, but you don't need that if advertisers are not your main source of income. You don't need that. You can get rid of the likes and the relative positioning and competition and the depression and the anxiety and the suicide and the bully. All these can vanish.

Finally, here is the irony: Media that transition - really finally, I give you my word, Richard stop kicking me, bloody hell, enough! [Richard laughs]. Finally we come to the irony which is where the mind boggles. There is a history of well over 70 years that shows that once you transition from free to fee, advertisers after some lag actually flock in. Your advertising revenue increases.

36:02

Take the New York Times. The New York Times was about to die and it was an extreme impediment. They opened a portal, a fee-based thing behind the paywall. They went behind the pay wall, they started to pay subscription to read the news online. After they opened the paywall there was a period of 2, 3 years, the paywall became profitable. Now the New York Times is selling more advertising than ever before.

Richard: Why is that?

Sam: Because you get quality audience. The fee is a filter. You don't get stupid girls with bananas, because stupid girls with bananas buy bananas, period.

Richard: I buy advertising space and I would..

Sam: If I'm sufficiently wealthy to pay a fee, I'm also sufficiently wealthy to buy an iPad. So now the New York Times has the highest advertising revenue in its 168, I think, years of history.

37:02

A second example - and that's a company I was a consultant to, so I know that company intimately and very well: It's called the Encyclopedia Britannica. I've worked with them for 10

years as business consultant and so on. Encyclopedia Britannica stopped printing, stopped the print sets; I think in 2006, they moved all the content behind the paywall.

They were terrified: 'This is wow, I mean what's going to be here', because for about two, three years they were advertising-based. Britannica for three years was free and just advertising, exactly Facebook, same model like Facebook, and they also began to look a bit like Facebook. They were kind of attracting you, conditioning you, with all kinds of quizzes and schmizzes. They became very entertainment in the company. Then they said 'no', they recoiled. They said 'what's happening to us? We're stopping this. We have been established since 1768, we have a tradition.

38:14

They sold the DVD and print rights to another company called Britannica India. Now India is printing and producing the DVD's. Britannica United States - and all this move was orchestrated by a guy called Tom Panellas - moved behind a paywall. They were terrified. They said 'listen, we are getting rid of advertisers, people will never pay for Britannica. This is Wikipedia, why on earth pay for Britannica. Britannica is more profitable than ever today, more profitable than ever.

It's not true, that when you move to a fee structure, you destroy your business. Normally there is a period of adjustment until people decide that they want to pay for the service and so, but after that period... If Zuckerberg bothered to look at things, at numbers, he would have realized that had he switched to a fee structure, he would have delivered quality audience with minimum levels of income to advertisers. He would have also a much different profile of advertisers. Today he has Russian hackers, sixth rate businesses. Tomorrow he can have top quality brands and so, because if I can afford to pay a fee, I can afford to buy products and services and so on. It's a filter filtering mechanism.

39:35

It's exactly what happened in cable TV. Cable TV advertising revenue is greater than the advertising revenue of all other media combined, print, Amazon, ALL other media combined. This is the greatest enormous generator of advertising revenue, although it's fee-based. This what I recommend.

Richard: There could be no reasonable opposition or argumentation to that, not on the basis of money or anything else. Other than that, I guess there would be the momentum, what it would take to actually turn the thing around. That's it.

Sam: I actually think that social media executives got trapped in their own defensive positions, some of them fallacious and openly fallacious, but they got trapped and I like 'how do I go back from this, I told the whole world that I can't go back from this'. And also it's uncharted territory.

40:51

For example, imagine Zuckerberg wants to get rid of the 'like'. It's like very frightening. Don't forget he is a young man. We keep forgetting these are kids, they're young men. They started these businesses in their teens or latest 20, 21. They're young men with very limited experience. It sounds like a joke, but think about it. They're young men with very limited experience and their businesses are what we call serendipitous businesses, businesses that happen by accident. Zuckerberg didn't sit in his dormitory and say 'wait oh wait, now I'm going to come up with a killer'. It just happened. To him it was as much of a shock as it was a shock to Trump that he became president.

He was not prepared. Zuckerberg and his generational group, the people who created social media, were not prepared for their success. They were utterly prepared for failure but they were ill-prepared for success. They are young and they're frightened and they're in panic. They have a million advisers but they don't know how to decide among these advisers. They don't have a historical perspective, because their generation is truly ignorant and illiterate.

42:05

By the way, every word I say (for the producer not to jump on me), every word I say is utterly backed by research. Generation Z is the most illiterate generation in the history of the United States. 45% of them find it difficult to read a bottle label, labels on bottles and labels of medicines. It's a serious problem. Zuckerberg and his generational group, they are not exactly generation Z but they're more or less generation Z, generation X, there is the Y, so these generations is latest generations.

Their businesses were created despite themselves; it just drops from the sky. I think they're frozen. It's like exactly like a PTSD you know, fight flight freeze. I think that they chose to freeze. There is something in Psychology called "The Fraud Syndrome", let me refer to it: People who experiences serendipitous totally unexpected success, develop the inner conviction that somehow they are defrauding the world, somehow they are cheating the world and that the only thing they are good at is hiding the fact, that they are cheating the world. That is called The Fraud Syndrome.

43:25

I think all social media executives, owners suffer from the fraud syndrome. I think they all - Zuckerberg gets up in the middle of the night to say, 'how the hell did this happen to me [Richard laughs], how did I became one of the world's richest people, what's going on here, and can I maintain this momentum for another year?'

I fully believe that he feels fraudulent, I can't prove it, I didn't have access to it, but I fully believe that he does. You know what? To very large extent he should. Why should he? Because we don't know why social media work and succeed. There's only one certainty: It was designed - for lack of a better word - maliciously.

If you are an executive of a social media or something or owner of social media, the only thing you know for sure, is that at some point you took design decisions which should be seriously frowned upon, seriously, not to use [grinning] much harsher words. It was your only contribution, you did nothing else, everything came to you out of nowhere.

44:46

The only thing you did do once the avalanche started, you took big snowballs and throw them on people. The only interference you had, the only contribution you had, your only involvement was in a sliver of history of the social media, where there are some design decisions - and those design decisions are immoral. That is an excellent background to feel fraudulent.

Richard: Definitely, definitely.

45:17

Audience: From what you are just saying there... discuss micro fame... these people... and kids are getting an element of fame... but also what you said that The Fraud Syndrome seems to be attached to that... they have this micro fame and suddenly they're famous with these followers these young people... fraud... they know they are not brilliant... can you two discuss that, what happen to do to someone who... [fuzzy sound]

Richard: So you're talking about a 17 year old girl post pictures of herself eating bananas?

Sam: With bananas!? 16.8 million (both laughing), I absolutely hate it. I have only two options: To marry her or I mean... No other way.

46:14

Audience: What would that do to someone having that fame, that micro fame?

Richard: Sudden escalation of celebrity, micro fame where she would, what, five hundred thousand followers something like that, you mean? Knowing that it's fraudulent?

46:27

I would think that it would create massive anxiety, cognitive dissonance, because one part of her would be - as Sam has gone to lengths to distinguish between addiction and conditioning - she's conditioned to think that that is normal and something to be desired. But another part of

her knows very well that 'what am I famous for? For eating bananas, taking pictures of myself in a thong or', meaninglessness. Even people I think who have got seriously diminished IQ must know, they must on some level realize that they're offering very little of value. So I would imagine it would create, at the very least, anxiety and possibly really negative effects on the self-concept.

47:11

Sam: Can I? I would like to systematize what Richard said [looking at Richard] Richard stop kicking me [Richard laughing].

First of all, I fully agree. When there is a discrepancy between real reality and your perception of reality, this usually creates severe anxiety and depression. It's one of the major sources of depression. I think anxiety in this case would have at least two, maybe three tiers.

1. The first one is the issue of value: Am I giving value. Here I would beg to differ a little bit, Richard, but only because he's kicking me, otherwise not [Richard laughs]. Many of these users are not sure what is value. They've not been inculcated, they've not been brought up to realize the difference between value and not value. Like Gideon Botha said, there is a confusion between spectacle and real essence. They regard spectacle as value. If I'm peeling bananas in very creative ways, that's the value, the spectacle is the value. Many of them think they're actually giving value.

48:39

There are two other tiers where I agree with Richard about the founts, the sources of anxiety, only mostly to dissonance of various kinds. Cognitive is another.

2. The second tier: It's not real. So distinguish the two, I'm giving value but the value I'm giving is an apparition, is ephemeral, is mist, it's smoke and mirrors, so I'm giving value but it's not real. That's what we call reality test.

49:13

Whenever there is a conflict between appearance and reality, this creates enormous anxiety. Actually the strongest anxiety we know. The strongest anxiety we know is when we are disoriented by feedback from reality that runs contra to our theory of the world, our theory of mind. For example, I have a theory that the only thing of value in the world is education. I believe in education, I believe in teaching people. Then I open a channel, an Instagram channel, personal channel, and in this Instagram channel I sing Russian songs, and suddenly I have 50 million followers.

Richard: You would like to sing Russian songs?

Sam: I should try later [Richard laughs].

Of course it will be gratified and I would also maybe believe that I'm providing some kind of value, because I have a good voice and you don't want f*** with the Russians [Richard laughs]. But on the second level I would know it's not real, because I believe the only real thing is education, knowledge and I know I'm not providing education, knowledge or anything else. I would know it's not real and that would create enormous anxiety distance.

50:40

3. There is a third tier, which in my view becomes later the most critical: How sustainable is it? How long can I continue to peel bananas and attract 16.8 million? When will people get tired of me and my bananas? The sustainability of the act, of the spectacle is a crucial factor, because social media users are very fickle and capricious, and they are nomads. We call them digital nomads. They gravitate, they emigrate, they are itinerant. Today you are Jordan Peterson with millions of followers; tomorrow you're utterly forgotten.

I can mention names of Jordan Peterson's five years ago and 10 years ago that no one in this studio ever heard of. They were as big as Jordan Peterson. I'm sure he's asking himself 'how long can this continuum last, let me capitalize as soon as I can, as fast as I can'. All these users are asking this sustainability question, which creates enormous angst and enormous anxiety. These are the three levels of anxiety.

52:00

Richard: The image I got in my mind was of trying to sustain a toppling tower, which it must always be. No matter how pretty you are, no matter how beautiful you are. However you are trying to get your likes or are skilled at skateboarding, whatever the thing is, it's spectacle. It's all spectacle based as Sam just said. Spectacle in itself is ephemeral, it's transitory, it can't last. So if I'm that young girl, I will experience massive amounts of status anxiety and I'm going to have to keep going back and checking. It must be obsessive.

When you see the young with their phones there is something nervous about the pulling out of the phone. It's compulsive and it reminds me of when I used to smoke. I used to smoke predominantly in situations where I felt socially exposed. I would put a cloud around my own head, because I felt alone or isolated, it was nervous. I was doing with my fingers the tapping where the phone is. I saw a girl do this with her nose a day in Portugal, so lazy. She wanted to swipe, and I've never seen it before, it was beautiful.

Sam: It's Slavoj Zizek's daughter [both laughing].

Richard: Yes, he's laughing and says 'this is pure, pure ideology' [said while he lisp] [both laughing].

53:13

Audience: She swiped with the nose?

Richard: She was slumped in a shopping mall and I walked past it, it was like a 3-second. I just looked and she couldn't be bothered to lift a right hand to the phone. [Lisping:] So she simply swiped with her nose and then what? She moved on with her life, beautiful life, ideology at it's purest [both laughing out loud].

Sam: He's amazing. Why make a movie about social media, make the whole thing with a star like Richard [big laugh].

53:40

Richard: That dabbing, the opposite of what they call it down smooth nowadays, which confuses that, but dabbing to me also was when I was involved in the drug culture. When I was in my early twenties, cocaine and speed, dabbing was also taking drugs. If your high was coming down you dabbled to bring yourself back up. This IS a drug, like you were saying to me today [looking at Sam]. It's a drug and if my high comes down and I'm not anesthetized anymore, reality's coming in. At that moment, to use that proper psychoanalytic terminology, probably the super-ego gets activated. The inner critic says 'you know those followers you got today, you're not going to have them tomorrow'. Phone comes out, check, must look and see what's going on.

54:26

Sam: Check and radicalize. Make a new post, even more extreme than yesterday's post. If THAT doesn't work, make it more extreme. It pushes it to extreme behavior, radicalized behavior and finally ego-dystonic behavior. Behavior that you're ashamed of or frightened of or wouldn't want your parents to see. It pushes you not to be you. This is social anxiety. By the way, maybe is the time to talk about the psychology? Would you like to introduce?

Richard: Yes. There are other elements to the psychology of how this plays out, that we're going to have a look at. Part of it was, that we would look at some transactional analysis as it relates. Yes, there are psychological fields.

Sam [looking at the audience]: I don't know if you can make use of it or not, but just to have it as, you know. Last time I didn't want to be too elitist, so I didn't want to name-drop and everything, but now I would like to mention a few.

Audience answer: Yeah but in this one we want you to move on from the second one. The first one was 'here is the issue'. Now we really want you guys to move to how to understand the issue, to point it out.

Sam: Yes. I want to give some psychological background to why is it addictive and conditioned and so and so forth. Then you could either make use of it or subdue it. At least you'll have it.

55:55

The effects of attention on conditioned behavior.

First of all, one very important behavioral scientist. He focuses on economics, but is still very important: Dan Ariely. One of the most famous experiments he has conducted is the following: He took group of students and divided them to 3. He gave all of them a piece of paper where they had to identify repeated letters, for example G G X X. An utterly meaningless, utterly meaningless task. For each piece of paper they were paid, if I remember correctly, a dollar. They had this stack and they had to take the first one and gg xxxxx. There were 3 groups.

1. The first group of students went to hand the paper. When they handed the paper, the guy who received the paper looked up and said: "Wow, you did a wonderful job" – 'like', 'like'.
2. The second group of students, when they handed the paper, the guy took the paper and ignored them completely, just put it aside.
3. The third group of students, when they handed the paper, the guy took the paper and shredded it in front of them. I would have liked to have been this guy [Richard laughs], it's incalculable pleasure.

It's very fascinating because these are three modes of relating.

One mode is: You are being seen and you're being liked.

The second mode is: Well I acknowledge you weren't but you're not being seen. I mean you are in the anonymous type of processor paper pusher.

The third one is actually aggressive: Your work is worthless, meaningless; I'm going to shred it.

57:57

Here's what happened:

Group 3 and group 2, the shredded and the ignored, reached a certain point and stopped, even though they could have continued to mint money. There was like a stack, but they stopped. After some time they simply stopped, they couldn't anymore. They left all of them, there was not one exception, all of them. Group 1 continued and continued and continued and continued and could not stop - not for the money - until they cut the experiment.

Technically the results of the experiment is that group 1 produced 35% more papers than group 2 and group 3, but that's only because they actually cut the experiment. They would have continued further. We see here conditioning in action. The only difference between these three groups is that when they handed the paper, they received a 'like', exactly like Facebook. This is a foundational study in the effects of attention on conditioned behavior.

59:10

Recognition hunger.

There was a guy called Eric Berne. Eric Berne wrote a book "Games People Play". In this book he said 'listen, we all have recognition hunger', hunger to be recognized. He also said that we have something called 'stimulus hunger'. Never mind, for our purposes he said 'there is something called recognition'. We are eager to be recognized.

We seek strokes.

Later on he invented Transactional Analysis, a kind of Psychotherapy. Eric Berne said this is such a fundamental force, that we will go to extremes to be recognized. He called this process "stroking". We will seek strokes. We will go to people and we will look them in the eye and we'll say 'Do you see me, do you recognize me, do you know what I'm doing, do you appreciate my work'. He said that aggression will escalate until a stroke is established. That's Eric Berne.

Richard: So you force people to stroke you?

Sam: Yes, I do. He said most strokes are forced. He says aggression will escalate until people stroke. Stroking is solicited, conjoined, coerced to some extent. He said luckily most people stroke. For example I acknowledge you, I acknowledge Richard sometimes [Richard laughs]. Most people stroke. He said if they are denied stroking, their aggression will escalate.
1h:00:45

On this basis he created Transactional Analysis. One remain techniques in transactional analysis is - I don't know how well you know the technique [looking at Richard]: The patient seats and you are the therapist. The therapist strokes the patient 'I see you, I recognize you, your work is important'. There's active process of stroking, narcissistic supply built into transactional analysis.
1h:01:19

Do you know which year Eric Berne published his book? 19-bloody-67. This is such old knowledge, that it is shocking to me, that anyone can debate the psychology of social media. This is not newfangled thing that now we need to invent. This is old.

Berne conducted a series of studies on games. He was the world authority of games, on how people play games. He discovered that people would seek positive stroking, but if they fail with positive stroking - and I based my work on narcissistic supply based on that - if they fail with positive stroking, they will revert to solicit negative stroking. They will continue with whatever works.

If what works is positive stroking they will be conditioned and if it is negative they will be conditioned. They cannot exceed this range; it's a critical issue. Once they have been conditioned, negatively or positively, it's for life, except intervention, therapy or whatever.
1h:02:33

He gave the example of a child. He said a child would try to solicit positive stroking from his mother, but if she doesn't pay attention to him, he would begin to cry. If this doesn't work he will misbehave, he will become naughty, he will break things and so on. If the mother gives him attention only when he breaks things and cries, this would be the established pattern of his interaction with his mother. By the way, later a work by Jean Piaget and so on proved it, absolutely proved it.

Why is this important? Because in social media it is almost impossible to obtain positive stroking. I explained it in my previous interview and it was partly of part of Plugged In. The platforms are built to encourage competition, envy, aggression. These are not platforms where you can receive positive stroking. You can receive only negative stroking. What means negative stroking? It means trolling, bullying, this and that or if you post something and you receive many likes and so on so forth.

The negative stroking will be self-generated. How? You will be competing, competing against others, competing against yourself and so on. There is no positive stroking on Facebook. Even if I post something now and all my very good friends like it, the outcome is invariably negative stroking. Because only 80 liked it, yesterday 100 liked it, why only 80, Richard's post got 200.
1h:04:17

Eric Berne said that behavior also is modified and changes. The more strokes you get, the more you forget everything else. Very sadly, 1967, it's absolutely amazing that it's not known. He said: The more strokes you get, the more you get addicted - he didn't use the word 'addicted' - the more you kind of direct all your mental energy in everything to stroking. You forget everything else, you forget intimacy, you forget relationships. Stroking becomes absolutely the be-all and end-all of your life. He called it 'reinforced stroking'.
1h:05:01

Two more things:

Abraham Maslow, a very famous psychologist, later sociologists, made the Pyramid of Human Needs. At the bottom there is food, shelter, but the third rank of the pyramid is belonging and love. What is not known is that this pyramid, Maslow drew, it I think, on a napkin or

something. Seriously, he like drew it casually. He drew to explain his work, but his work is a volume like 900 pages, and retards like me have read the work. He explains what is belonging and love, and it sounds suspiciously like narcissistic supply coupled with the algorithm of social media.

What he means by belonging and love is actually ingratiating yourself with the group, so that the group provides a confirmation of your worth, which suspiciously sounds like narcissistic supply. He also says that the group has structured ways to communicate with you that you belong, that you are loved and so on so forth. He details these structured ways and will you read them, you'll say it looks like some psychologist's advise Facebook how to construct – or Instagram - how to construct and conform to Maslow's work.

1h:06:38

Now I'll mention THE intellectual giant in all this list and that is Tony Robbins. Tony Robbins had... what? [looking at Richard, who is laughing].

Richard: You told me – sorry, just a quick thing - you said you would recommended Adler to me. I read Tony Robbins first. I read through Adler - and Tony Robbins has ripped him off to the core.

Sam: Do NOT broadcast this, the guy can sue your ass.

Richard: I heard someone else say it and I said 'listen, don't talk about my man Tony like that', absolutely wonderful good man.

Sam: I think it goes like Freud, Jung and Tony Robbins. Every cloud has a silver Robbins [Richard laughs].

1h:07:35

Tony Robbins came with something that he called "The Six Human Needs". Within the six human needs two of these needs are "Significance", feeling significant, and what he call "Love and connection". To his credit: As far as I know he's among the first, if not the first, to have put together that love and connection actually generates significance.

But of course being Tony Robbins, what he means by love and connection is actually much closer to the banana peeling girl in Instagram. What he means about love and connection is adulation, admiration, popularity - he openly says it - you need to be popular. Popularity is for him love-connection. This, he said, yields significance. He says you cannot feel significant. For him significance means: How you influence the world, I influence others. What he's saying essentially: If you don't become popular, you cannot influence others, essentially. But he describes it in a way that eerily, eerily resonates of the likes of Instagram.

1h:09:02

If I had to compile a list of works to read, someone like Tony Robbins epitomizes, rarifies the new ethos, which also is epitomized and rarified in social media. He is a creature of the age and a creator of the age. One ignores people like Tony Robbins and now Jordan Peterson, at your own peril. You must have a deep look at them. This is whatever to add about psychology. Use, don't use, it's up to you, but has it at least.

The difference between addiction and conditioning.

Richard: Once we end this psychology theory area, could you explain to people, who have no psychology background, what the difference in conditioning and addiction is. Because there's a layman's term conditioning and I think people misunderstanding that you're using it in the psychological realm, especially as it relates to positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement.

Sam: You did a very good job with that. I saw a video of yours - I don't remember what type of video - where you actually explained the difference between addiction and conditioning, but okay.

1h:10:22

The difference between addiction and conditioning is the following: Conditioning is much more biological, much more neurological. It's much more grounded in neural pathways, neuroplasticity, reactivity etc. etc. etc. That's one element.

The second element: Conditioning connects to utterly *unrelated* behaviors, while addiction connects to utterly *related* behaviors. That's a crucial difference. In addiction you connect to related behaviors, you consume drugs, you feel good. There are cause and effect.

Not so in conditioning. In conditioning you ring a bell, the dog salivates. No connection between these two. That's exactly what happens in Facebook and in Instagram where there are likes, because the likes create condition. If you look at the like objectively, what is 'like'? It's nothing, but it creates a sense of well-being or a sense of depression. It affects mood.
1h:11:33

We test whether it's addiction or conditioning via to what we call "mood congruence". If for example I'm depressed and I get likes and I become more depressed, that might be a casual connection, because whether I'm depressed or maybe more depressed, there is some line. But for example if I'm depressed and then I get likes and I suddenly become euphoric or elated, that would be conditioning, because theoretically there is no possibility for likes to affect or shouldn't be a possibility for likes to affect this way.

How do they affect? How conditioning is created: By what we call "metanarrative". The dog salivates because he has a story in his head in the past: When I heard the bell, I received food. That's the story the dog has - if he is Jewish [Richard laughs], intelligent dog [both laughing].
1h:12:45

But there's a story behind it and there must be a narrative connecting this apparently totally unrelated behaviors or moods or affect or? (1h:12:57) or cognitions, thoughts.

The narrative in Facebook for example: 'Likes' signifies love or 'likes' signifies popularity or 'likes' signify influence. That's the metanarrative. Of course it's utter nonsense. The thing in conditioning as opposed to addiction is that conditioning is irrational, and the narratives are nonsensical. Addiction is actually a rational activity, because if I take drugs I feel much better. It's a fact. That's why the opioid crisis exploded, because it works. It's totally rational.

If I get likes, I'm more influential, or if I get likes, I'm more loved or more liked. That's an irrational narrative, because it cannot be substantiated. It's totally a nonsensical narrative.
1h:14:18

Cognitive differences between conditioning and addiction.

Both behaviors, addiction and conditioning, are compulsive behaviors in the sense that the behaviors cannot be stopped by a sheer exertion of will, but there are important cognitive differences between conditioning and addiction:

In addiction the activities are usually structured. They are nonchaotic, they are structured, they are goal-oriented and they provide some meaning.

Conditioning on the other hand is utterly chaotic, it's non-structured and the meaning is the conditioning itself. There's no external meaning. To make it more clear:

If I'm a drug user, a junkie, it provides me first of all with structure. It structures my life. I have to get up in the morning, steal money for mum, from other, use it to buy drugs, inject the drugs. It provides you a structure. It also provides you with meaning. The meaning of my life is to feel good. The aim is to feel good, so I'm taking drugs or whatever it is. There is some meaning there, meta-meaning.

It's also very structured in the sense that I have a pusher, an identifiable pusher, I will go to the pusher, I know when to go to the pusher, I know how to talk to the pusher. It's a totally structured activity. Not very different for example from going to university and study. They are all purposeful. We call them 'directional'. They're all directional activities. Not so conditioning.
1h:15:58

Conditioning is utterly chaotic. That's why you see people with smartphones. It's not like they say 'well I'm going to check the smartphone on the 18th minute of every hour'. That would be directional structured activity. Conditioning is chaotic and it's compulsive, and it leads nowhere and it has no meaning. That's why you see people taking the smartphone every two minutes to check how many likes. You can see their behaviors. What did Richard just describe with this girl? The behavior is chaotic, totally chaotic.

These are critical differences between conditioning and addiction. That's why addiction is in principle curable, but not so conditioning. Conditioning is a notoriety of being almost impossible to cure, because conditioning is so embedded in the brain. There's no structure, no predictability, no possibility to intervene, nothing you can do there.

In addiction you can sit with a person, tell them 'listen, you can feel better in many ways, there's only one way, let's see, let's do, let's this etc. There's nothing you can do in conditioning. What will you tell this girl who is checking her account 50 times in a minute? What can you tell her? 'Listen, don't check it 50 times, check it 10 times'? She would ask you why? Why should I check it only 10 times?
1h:17:36

Richard: You almost have to bypass the conditioning, you have to bypass the personality and the ego and go straight to training them like an animal.

Sam: Yes.

Richard: Where Tony Robbins did a good job, I'll give him credit, is when he was banned from using the term NLP. Back in 1991 he came out with a system called NLP, Neuro Linguistic Programming. He did neural associative conditioning and it was actually physiologically superior, it was more advanced. It never caught on, but it was more factual and is based on these principles exactly. His system for personal development was about conditioning. So he would condition you for success, he conditioned you for making money, for whatever it is.

With the social media, with the tech, when they're pulling out the smartphones, the reinforcement is only ever intermittent. Which adds into their chaos that Sam was talking about: I don't know whether I'm going to get my hit this time. I'm pulling out because the dealer might be there, but he might not. He might not be showing up and I might need to do, maybe it's the fifth one, s**t that's the sixth times I've looked. I didn't get my hit, do it again, do it again, do it again, do it again.

You'll get your hit, but you've got to keep going, kid, you've got to keep. The brain, the neural pathways just being grooved in like 'do it again, do it again, do it again'.

1h:18:52

That's where you can't do like CBT. We can't chat about childhood trauma, 'do you feel lonely'. You've got to kind of bypass the conscious mind completely, because it's now biologically in the same way I would reach for cigarettes, in this stupid unconscious way. That you can say you feel lonely, there's a beginning of it, and you will do this so that you feel X Y Z, that's an addictive behavior. This [social media conditioning] has no real logic to it - so it's hard to tackle.

The thing I just wanted to quickly add on this issue of the negative hits, the negative stroking. You'll see that in schools amongst these teenagers with bullying. I remember observing it the first time in boarding school, and it's like there's kids here who are looking to be bullied. I'm not saying like it's some victim mentality, literally they would aggravate other children to 'some attention is better than nothing'.

1h:19:49

We do have this phenomenon online. They've called it "Digital Self-Harm". I looked it up with the first mention of it, I don't know the researcher who came up with that, but digital self-harm is a thing.

Sam: Cal Newport.

Richard: That was Cal Newport. When you see somebody pull out their phone, we can't just go 'oh this person's looking for a hit of narcissistic supply to feel good'. They might be looking for actually somebody to abuse them. We know this, because they're sites set up where kids just post a picture of their face and then say 'roast me', other people tell me how ugly stupid I am, tell me about other pointless people I look like, insult me as much as you can, give me pain, but give me recognition, give me something. That's where it's gets very very dark.

Convert conditioning to addiction.

Audience: When you were saying the difference between conditioning and addiction. Conditioning seems to have no story... [words missing, bad sound 1h:20:48]. Do you think, what you were talking about earlier, bringing storytelling back into social media will turn it back from a conditioning talk to addictive talk, and then would be easier to treat?

Sam: Yes, excellent observation. Absolutely. I think we should convert the conditioning to addiction.

1h:21:06

First of all, there is - as Amanda Lenhart discovered in most recently studies that were published in a few months ago - an enormous group of teenagers, 58%, teenagers who are dying to disconnect from social media. They're trying again and again, they keep coming.

We can't go from conditioning to healing, this is a lost case. That's why the experiment you made in Plugged In is actually very interesting, because conditioning cannot be solved by taking away the devices or signing off social media. That's good for addiction, baby. When you go to a rehab for drugs, they strictly inhibit or restrict your access to drugs. They restrict your access to previous friends, friends from the street, your access to drugs. Restricting your access to drug is critical in addiction, that's true, but restricting your access to a drug of conditioning will have zero impact. It will not work. It's not the right way.

1h:22:13

You're absolutely right that we must first convert conditioning to addiction. The only hope of healing. So while addiction requires a two-step process, addiction -> rehab, actually here we need conditioning -> addiction -> rehab.

To convert social media from conditioning to addiction: We need storytelling. We need community, because community support is critical in curing addiction. We need to create a community, force to create a community, for example by having friends or only friends who you really know. All these measures actually precisely what you just said. We have to create a holding environment, a community, to introduce meaning into the whole mess, because meaning negates conditioning. These dogs were dogs, so we couldn't test this hypothesis, but for example we have studies of Holocaust victims.

1h:23:15

Fight conditioning with meaning.

Holocaust was a form of mass conditioning, not addiction. Of course no one was addicted to Auschwitz, but it was a form of mass conditioning. The first person who actually identified this was Viktor Frankl. What was Frankl's solution? Frankl says: The only way to fight such conditioning is 'meaning'. He came up with Logotherapy, therapy via meaning.

We must actually implement a form of Logotherapy. We must take this girl who is peeling bananas, I hate her, peeling bananas and has 16.8 million followers. We must take this girl

and we must convert her, we must move her from a totally arbitrary, chaotic, meaningless environment, where she keeps peeling bananas, bananas, keeps peeling, getting likes, peeling bananas, getting likes [moving his arms rhythmically forth and back on the table]. I'm doing this on purpose, it's precisely the mindset of social media users.

We must take this girl and we must introduce some meaning into her life. The meaning can start with the bananas. You never stray too far from the conditioning, because what Richard mentioned, there's an issue of reinforcement. Reinforcement is a term borrowed from behaviorism, Skinner and the likes, and today it fell a bit out of favor, but I agree with Richard, it's totally pertinent.

1h:24:41

There is in social media, one of the worst features is that you are captive to total uncertainty, your well-being, your mood, your ability to function, your very cognitive processes. Everything is hostage to utter unmitigated uncertainty, 'will I get likes, will I not get likes, will I be ignored'. When outcomes are not certain, this is what Richard said 'intermittent reinforcement'. No, wait a minute, reinforcement is the foundation of bullying, foundation of abuse, it's the foundational mechanism of these things and foundations of something called Trauma Bonding. I'm surprised that Richard didn't mention it [Richard laughing]. The relationship between users and social media platforms is Trauma Bonding. That's my view.

1h:25:44

Trauma Bonding.

Trauma bonding has powerful elements of conditioning, which is exactly why it's almost impossible to break. Any therapist will tell you that any abusive relationship can be broken easily, listen to me, easily - except trauma bonding. Trauma bonding is unbreakable no matter what you do. The woman has PhD in engineering, physics, archaeology, history and - nothing. She could be as intelligent, as beautiful, as breathtaking, as rich as you want, but she has trauma bonding with her abusive partner. It's finished, she will not leave him. Why?

This has nothing to do with relationship, its conditioning. He conditions her by approach - avoidance, giving - withholding, berating - complimenting, loving - hating. The process of conditioning as the level of the dog: There is a bell, you salivate, you don't salivate. When we try to break trauma bonding (now we're talking from a therapeutic practice), it's precisely what we do:

1h:26:49

We take for example the woman - because most cases are a woman that trauma bonds with a man - and we offer her alternative narrative. We create meaning, we inject meaning into this utterly chaotic insane process, because she can never predict when her abusive partner will do anything. It's totally capricious like 'likes', she don't know if she'll get 50 likes, more likes or three snaps. Nothing.

You take this situation and you imbue it with meaning. The minute you imbue it with meaning, the trauma bonding is finished. There's another phase, now she's addicted to him. That's another phase. She says 'I cannot leave him, he is like a child, he needs me'. Okay that's addiction, that's easier. If you succeed in the narrative phase, where you introduce a narrative and the narrative is accepted by the victims (users of social media victims), you're halfway through. Unfortunately, the success rate is not high.

1h:27:55

I don't know about social media. Trauma bonding in a relationship is bad enough. Social media is a seriously bad form of conditioning, because it's much more primitive. The more complex the interaction, the more difficult it is to condition. In a relationship we have men, we have woman, we have children, you have work, you have history. It's a very complex environment.

For the abuser to trauma condition or trauma bond with a victim, it takes a lot of work, a lot of imagination, gaslighting, this and that. It's not easy and there maybe the chances for success

are, but the more primitive the conditioning, the more impossible it is to break. When the conditioning is very complex and built on multiple factors, you can dismantle, break some of these factors, reverse some of them, offer alternatives to some of them, can do something.
1h:28:52

But what if the conditioning is 'likes'? What do you do then? What if the conditioning is bell - saliva, bell - saliva? What do you do then? You take the bell, you take the saliva, you take the dog, what the hell do you do? It's a problem.

The potency of social media.

Social media are so primitive. They appeal to the reptilian part of our brain if you wish and they're very primitive. Because they're primitive, they are in my view omnipotent. Their power is unlimited. You see their power is unlimited. Now they are beginning to capture new age groups, which I by the way fully predicted. I said the next victims are old people. Remember that the next 5 years. Suicide rates among old people will go up by 50%, 100%, I think even more than teenagers. Old people are much more vulnerable.

Suicide rates will go dramatically up, will explode among old people, because they are becoming addicted to social media. They finish with one population group, then moving on to the next population group. This is uncanny, uncanny. If we had a drug like this. Like Richard said it's not regulated. Not to mention the fact that if you want to buy a gun, there is a background check. What do you think, what's the reason for all these nutcases who shoot up 50 people in New Zealand? They are all using social media. People say 'listen, what is social media? The main act was shooting people in the mosque, social media was incidental'. No! The main act was streaming the murder on social media. The mosque was incidental.
1h:30:44

This is what people don't understand. It's a spectacle, it's a production, it's a theater production. But why? Because they don't run background checks. This nutcase was able to access social media totally freely. Had he wanted to buy a gun, there would have been a seven day period, where he would be like 'mentally ill - not mentally ill - are you Sam Vaknin'. Not anyone can buy a gun, but anyone can use social media.

Do you think social media is less potent weapon than a gun? ISIS just don't think so. ISIS dedicated 70% of their budget to social media, and they know a thing or two about killing people, or three. Social media is a much more potent weapon than any gun, tank or combination of guns and tanks. Putting quakes in his boots, it's not Nate of a Triton ship, it's social bloody media. He has dedicated in the last two years an inordinate amount of time to legislate against social media. He banned VPNs, he banned for a while Google, Amazon and YouTube. I think he's preoccupied with China, Saudi Arabia, you name it.

These people know a thing or two about conditioning, repression, abuse, killing. What are they worried about? ISIS dedicated about 10% for weapon purchases, 70% to social media. This should tell us something.
1h:32:18

Audience: Making films like this, talking like this and putting this ... information out telling the story of social media ... would that give a context of social media that's giving an ending, so people won't feel so lost in social media because they can see what's happening, therefore the story's becoming clearer ... discussions ... what is your take on that therefore making it less of a conditioning talk [bad sound].

Richard: "If you can name it, you can tame it", which is cheap aphorism, but it tends to be true. Like if something is dwelling in the unconscious and we can't say it and we don't know how to define it, then it will still have power. But if you can actually go 'look, this is what's happening'. Sometimes in coaching this is little more than that I do. They tell me their story

and I retell it back to them with a few changes, and they go 'yeah I didn't think of that' and there's something 'yes there's something in that'.

It seems to affect our ability to create boundaries and overcoming any traumatic event, needs to involve the re-establishment of a new story or a changing of the map of reality in order to accommodate it. Yes, I think there's a possibility that just through retelling the story of social media, some people will have a light switched on and withdraw from it. Absolutely, it's possible.

1h:33:50

Iconoclastic labelling.

Sam: What we're doing is what I call "Iconoclastic labelling". We are simply taking a phenomenon; we label it so we give people handles, some handle. Then we break the idols, we iconoclast and this is very useful. Abraham did this. Abraham's father was a manufacturer of statues of idols. Abraham took a big stick and broke all the idols, but that was not enough. He had to invent monotheism.

It's not enough to destroy, which is essentially what we are doing. It's important, but there must be an alternative provided. Unfortunately the alternative must be only case-by-case, on an individual level. You can't offer a meta-narrative that would feed 65 year old, 16 year old, banana peeler's, Sam Vaknin. You must go essentially case-by-case or at least group-by-group. Slicing must be extremely raw, 'white women in the East Coast with this'; it must be very finely cut, finely sliced. It's a lot of work. The damage is incalculable in 13 years. In 2004 Facebook officially started, but after 2006 it became an open platform. We talk about maximum 15 years.

1h:35:25

Damages are utterly incalculable in human lives, in many other respects. I'm not optimistic that just being an evangelist, spreading the good work, the good news, I don't think it work. I think it's very important to create awareness TO DO the work. It's an indispensable first step: Iconoclastic Labeling. More or less it's what I did with narcissism. When I started with narcissism, there was no language, so I invented the language, "Narcissistic supply", 'these, that', so people then had words.

Words create consciousness. Consciousness is formed by words, not the other way. Once you have words, you can say: Wait a minute, he's a narcissist, is this Narcissistic Supply, is this somatic.

1h:36:11

It's the same here. We are giving people a vocabulary, we're labeling for them and we are breaking all kinds of taboos. To the credit of films like "Plugged In", hopefully what you'll be doing now, these are taboo breaking films. This is not something you will see on CNN or, it takes courage. I gave an interview to TRT World, which is serious television, not small. They were terrified. They were panic-stricken and they refused to broadcast the interview. That's how much taboo there is. And I don't think Facebook picks up the phone.

Richard: You were only discussing the things we've been discussing tonight?

Sam: Listen, I've been mild, moderate, cowed, tame, domesticated, under the table and totally not Sam Vaknin, trust me. 'Listen, there are some studies by Twingear, that there might be some effects', but even that was considered too sacrilegious, too blasphemous, so they did not broadcast. People involved with the interview were ashamed, they felt ashamed simply.

Richard: Just for saying there might be something possibly, maybe wrong with social media?

Sam: Trust me, might be, something possibly, maybe. Listen, I'm very experienced, I give interviews to CNN. I can't talk on CNN as I'm talking here. That's why I am working with you,

because here I can talk. No one can talk in mainstream media because it's taboo. Why is it taboo? Maybe a hundred million dollars in lobbying fees in last year by the industry may have something to do with it you know, could be. Or the fact that Google is one of the biggest advertisers on earth could also have something, maybe something to do with it, but the fact is you can't. Here I'm giving a case, I gave an interview.

1h:38:08

By the way, luckily part of the interview was captured. It's available on my Instagram. Have a look and tell me if there's something outlandish there.

People are terrified, it's an economic power. People are terrified. Do you know, the people are telling me 'listen, you'll be killed, they're crazy, you and Richard, they will kill you'. Of course this is paranoia, no one will kill us, but it's indicative of state of mind with people. We live in a Facebook world and they will kill you, don't do this, they will kill you. That's the situation.

But it's important work that you do [looking at the audience]. This needs to be said, and I think we're saying important things, taboo-breaking things.

1h:39:05

Social media triggers.

Richard: You can strike deep with interviews like this, from the storytelling like this. If I can put the idea into the mind of a mother with teenage kids, that when her daughter is pulling out her phone with a shaking hand, with what is clearly "Anticipatory Anxiety", that mirrors the behavior of somebody who's being abused. When they hear the lock in the door open, they don't know who's coming through. Will you be nice this time, maybe, will you be nastier this time, maybe, the locks turning in the door and you're about to find out. So Schrödinger's cat in that moment: Alive - dead, you'll see when you open the box.

That's a huge adrenaline spike for a child to go through. To see not even an external person, that would be traumatic enough, but some faceless external thing is going to say: 'Yes, you're a good object today', or 'NO you're a piece of s**t today'.

It's catastrophic when it's a 'no'. We don't brush it off and just kind of 'oh never mind I'm gonna play tennis later', 'I'm gonna hang out with my mates', it's everything to them. The locus of control of their emotional state is totally externalized by this thing. That anxiety, if I can - that idea, it's a pretty gory idea - but if I put that idea in the head of parents and they said 'my god, that's what my teenage children are doing and that's what they're going through', they might be more motivated to take it a little bit more seriously. I actually say 'listen we need to moderate this to an extent, maybe'.

1h:40:29

Sam: Richard is talking about triggers, triggering, social media triggers. Triggers by comparison, triggers by what we call "relative positioning" - that's a technical term - social media triggers by a relative position and the leveraging of negative emotions like envy, recklessly. But it's triggering, its abusive, and that's why I'm saying they're victims, and that's why I'm saying this is trauma bonding.

That's very lucky, because we have all the tools to cope with trauma, trauma bonding; luckily we have like hundred years of... [sentence not finished]. If we just shift the narrative, just shift how we see social media we know how to help. But this is the core problem: People refuse - at a stage, beginning to but still refuse - to see what is social media. If you take 100 people in Sweden and ask 'do you think social media is a drug?' I think 95 would say 'no'. If you ask 'do you think you are being abused by social media?' 'No way I'm being abused, why am I being abused? On the contrary, I'm using social media, connecting with friends, getting news' and so on.

The social media propaganda is still working extremely well, the image building, it's still working very well. The overall attitude to social media is, "If it affects you badly, it's your

fault". Social media encourages alloplastic defense in the sense that 'listen, it's never the social media, it's never the instrument, it's how you use the instrument'.

1h:42:00

Never mind, the instrument is built to force you to use it in only one specific way. That's the core, that's the message. Because people make the following mistake: They say 'listen, social media is like a knife. I can use the knife to cut bread or I can use the knife to kill someone. If I misuse or abuse social media, that's my problem. I'm guilty, I'm responsible, I'm to blame'.

Yes, but what if you had a knife that refused to cut bread and forced your hand via some electrical current to stab people? I mean, you could difficult control it. The minute you took it, IT took over and stabbed people. That's the correct analogy!

You can say 'listen, I like to stab people', or 'I don't like to stab people', but the correct analogy is not 'an innocent instrument, that has a multiplicity of possibilities to be used and people abuse it, poor poor social media'. The correct analogy is a pernicious, mind control, brainwashing tool.

1h:43:04

Audience: [Words not recognizable because of fuzzy sound].

Richard: Yes, I suppose to the extent that the intent of that was to bind people, to control them. I think to establish like a totalitarian state. Yes kind of, as Sam says. I don't think that was the intent from the outset. I think it's the way things go. I blame capitalism. It's money. There's only one way to win the game of capitalism and it's the bottom line. The profit and loss on the sheet that you look at: How much money are we making? Not as much as last year, we need more eyeballs on screen. What generates eyeballs on screen? Arguments, jealousy, political turmoil, a horrible article, comparison with others, envy. It's an exploitation of human vulnerability. It's a very definite, very calculated explicit exploitation of human psychology, no doubt, no doubt whatsoever.

To people who keep saying that it's ridiculous, 'it's just how you use it':

Would you deliberately put your consciousness in a space, that has been designed to alter the way you feel, to generate - as we said in the first interview - negative emotion?

Guaranteed, that's what they're doing. To keep you on the screen because of a stickiness. Then you will look at the thread for longer. Of course you do, it's a trick. You're not looking at the article, you're writing your shitty post back to the person, who sent the shitty post to you. And the screen goes, well they've been there for 17 minutes Mr. advertiser, that's a long time isn't it? And they go: Great, I'll pay you, whatever the ridiculous fee is you're going to charge me, per click on Facebook.

That's what all of this has become about, so the idea that it's some pH neutral environment that's totally infantile.

1h:44:56

Sam: Exactly, it's not a publishing platform. We must make a distinction between "publishing platform" and "behavior conditioning" platform. This is NOT a publishing platform. A blog is a publishing platform. You have platforms like WordPress and so on. Some part of it is fee-based, some part of it is advertising-based, but it is utterly neutral platform. So there you go. By the way, very successful platform, hundred of millions. There you go, you post your content, you can communicate this, that. It's a neutral - I call it - background platform.

1h:45:40

Facebook is intrusive, Instagram is aggressive, this is not a neutral platform. The minute you post you are flooded with offers, advertising, News, likes. You are alerted to the likes. By the way, did you ever stop to ask yourself 'why on earth are you alerted to the likes'? They send you alerts, you have received a like, you have received a like, this like, why?

There are so many features on Facebook, that force you to return to the platform via alerts. Facebook has 40 different types of alerts. You can opt out of all of them, extremely very true. I don't know how many people can do this. People are not computer savvy. We think they are, they are not. Facebook keep sending you messages, you receive this like, this like, this guy commented and they send you the comment, and the comment is incendiary.

Richard: It's like some sneaky friend, who wants to get you into a fight.

Sam: Yes, exactly. Did you hear what Richard said about you?

Richard: 'Do you know what they, check it out'. Generate drama, the little drama queens. It's an aggravating system, it's blatant an aggravating system. I switched it off and then I have to turn it on, because somebody sent me a message about some things from work or whatever. I have to go back in.

1h:47:00

Every time I go back into Facebook, Messenger it says: 'Can we add your contacts, can we send you notifications'. I say no, 'are you sure we can't have your contacts', no you definitely can't, 'can we send you notifications'? I just told you NO!?

I'm not making this up. They asked you five f**king times, no no no, let me read my message and let me leave. 'Why'd you want to leave, is it something we did, is it something we said'? You have to go through this form, which now I know exactly - I've done it that many times - just click here, you just fill out the thing 'ABCDFG...' with garbage [tapping on the table like he was writing on a keyboard], and then just click OUT. But it's really, they cannot claim that they're not trying to coerce people.

Sam: It's a push system, a push notification system. We distinguish an internet between "push and pull-systems". It's not a system where you volunteer into a process you obtain. It's not an opt-in process, is an opt-out process. It's forced on you, unless you opt-out. This is called a push. They are pushy in the sense that for example they would invade your PC, when you are actually working on a smartphone or vice versa. They're ubiquitous or pervasive and they don't let you breathe. They're hounds, they're after you, seriously, they don't let you breathe. I turned off completely, I couldn't anymore. I was like, my screen was exploding, this guy like, didn't like.

1h:48:25

There was a period where they were comparing likes. Saying 'Zoan liked you 49 times this month' - or in total. By the way, I can tell you: Last week I received 'In total your page received 6,008 likes' (I have a page). 'In total your page received 6,008 likes' (why don't we remove that?) and 'Would you like to compare yourself to similar pages or?' [Richard laughs].

It's deliberate, it's calculated, it's well-informed as far as psychopathology, not psychology, psychopathology. It's not a game anymore. It needs to be tackled, the sooner the better.

Richard: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for tuning in. Thank for your time and your attention and thank you, Sam, for joining us tonight.

Sam: Thank you Richard for kicking me [both laughing].

Richard: We're actually doing interviews all day tomorrow with Richard for the sequel to Plugged In. If you want to know more about that, you can go to Richard's Facebook page which is Plugged In Documentary to be updated there. I will probably do a YouTube live video as we're going around shooting different things at some point. So I'll be speaking to you through afternoon. Thank you very much for your time and attention and I'll speak to you soon.

Cheers.