

To like or not to like – how Facebook affects our sense of belonging

April 29 2014, by Helen Burdon



To like or not to like - that is the question.

(Phys.org) —Loneliness and a lack of self-worth could result from a lack of 'likes' on Facebook, according to researchers from The University of Queensland.

Two projects led by Dr Stephanie Tobin from UQ's School of Psychology have identified the effects [social networking sites](#) have on [users'](#) feelings of social belonging.

Dr Stephanie Tobin said the studies found that active participation on

social media sites gave users a greater sense of connectedness.

"Social networking sites such as Facebook, which has more than a billion users a month, give people immediate reminders of their [social relationships](#) and allow them to communicate with others whenever they want," she said.

"Our research shows that feelings of belonging are threatened when users stop generating content or participating online, and when information they have posted does not receive a response from others.

To examine how [participants](#) felt when deliberately ignored, the researchers conducted two studies on 'lurking' or passive Facebook participation and on ostracism.

The first study recruited users who frequently posted online. Half the participants were asked to actively post, while the other half, dubbed lurkers, were to simply observe friends' [status updates](#).

In the second study, participants used accounts set up by researchers and were encouraged to post and comment on the posts of others on Facebook.

Half the participants received the feedback while the other half didn't and were effectively ostracised.

Dr Tobin said the findings showed that both lurkers and ostracised participants from each study experienced lower levels of belonging and meaningful existence than those who participated and received a response. Those who were ostracised also experienced lower levels of self-esteem and control.

"The studies allowed us to examine how belonging depends on how

much people are sharing on Facebook, the kinds of experiences they are having on the site and whether they are being ignored or validated by others," she said.

"The results clearly identified that active participation is necessary to decrease feelings of social rejection."

The researchers are doing follow-up studies to examine the effects of being 'seen' but not validated by audiences of different sizes and how sharing different kinds of photographs affects belonging and well-being more broadly.

More information: "Threats to belonging on Facebook: lurking and ostracism." Stephanie J. Tobina, Eric J. Vanmana, Marnize Verreynne & Alexander K. Saeri. *Social Influence*, 07 Mar 2014. [DOI: 10.1080/15534510.2014.893924](https://doi.org/10.1080/15534510.2014.893924)

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