

Many young adults show more cruelty on Facebook than in everyday life

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Dr Val Hooper, an associate professor and head of Victoria's School of Information Management, guided student research, in which young people aged between 18 and 20 were interviewed to determine what behaviour they regarded as acceptable and unacceptable in social networking.

A large number of respondents admitted that they gauge what is acceptable behaviour online by watching and copying others.

"They will try something and then watch to see to what extent their Facebook friends sanction their behaviour—the reaction they receive determines how they develop their norms of interaction," says Dr Hooper.

Most respondents believed there were differences between the way people behaved offline and on Facebook. The protection of the computer screen and the ability to talk to someone without seeing their facial expressions meant that people felt freer to say what they wanted without worrying about the immediate consequences.

"If you post something hurtful you don't see the hurt in the recipient's eyes," says Dr Hooper. "You also have time to think about how to word your post to have the most powerful impact."

Dr Hooper is concerned about the implications of an online world that does not have strong guidelines in terms of behavioural norms.

"There is potential for what happens online to spin off into the offline environment—in fact we have seen evidence that it is happening. If young people become accustomed to bullying people online, what is to stop them becoming more violent offline as well?"

The study also showed Facebook to offer many benefits, especially for [young people](#) who are striving to establish their identity as young adults. Positive experiences respondents mentioned included being able to catch up with old friends, getting to know people better, and meeting new people.

Most of the respondents' negative experiences were associated with security, privacy and undesirable postings. For instance, the majority of respondents indicated that they didn't want to see information that was too personal, particularly problems and private information such as explicit romantic and sexual details.

People also felt an obligation to befriend people they would normally avoid offline—with many confessing that they had Facebook friends they actually didn't like.

"This has raised some interesting questions that would be worthwhile to explore further," says Dr Hooper. "For instance, if we are supposedly freer online, why is there an obligation to accept unappealing friendship invitations?"

Provided by Victoria University

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