

Passive Facebook use undermines how a person feels

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Using Facebook only to scroll through your news feed or browse other people's profiles can have a negative impact on your well-being, says a University of Michigan researcher.

Ethan Kross, U-M associate professor of psychology, and colleague Philippe Verduyn of the University of Leuven in Belgium, examined how passive versus active Facebook use affects users.

The findings, which appear in the current issue of the *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, elaborate on the researchers' earlier work about how increased Facebook use, overall, leads to declines in

people's well-being.

In the current work, Kross and Verduyn completed two studies: one laboratory experiment, which allowed the researchers to draw inferences about cause and effect, and one experience sampling study, which allowed them to examine how Facebook use undermines [emotional well-being](#) in daily life over time.

Across both studies, they found that passive use of Facebook leads to consistent declines in how good people feel over time, mainly by increasing feelings of envy toward others.

Interestingly, people spend most of their time passively using Facebook, rather than being more active—posting status updates, responding to other people's posts and chatting—which has no implications for people's well-being.

"These findings help illuminate how using Facebook undermines the way people feel," said Ethan Kross, the study's senior author who is an associate professor of psychology and faculty associate at the Institute for Social Research. "They also provide people with a blueprint for how to reduce the negative effects that interacting with this technology may have on the way people feel."

The first study involved about 80 undergraduate students. They were instructed to use Facebook actively or passively for 10 minutes in a controlled lab environment. When students passively used Facebook, they felt significantly worse at the end of the day. This was not the case for the student who used Facebook actively.

In the second study, the researchers examined whether passive Facebook use predicted similar outcomes when people engaged in this behavior spontaneously in daily life. About 80 undergraduate students were text

messaging five times a day over six consecutive days.

Each text message contained a link to an online questionnaire that asked them to complete a series of questions to gauge their emotions and assess how frequently they used Facebook passively versus actively. Passive Facebook use predicted increases in envy, which in turn predicted declines in how good people felt over time. Active Facebook usage did not.

There was a silver lining to the second study. Directly replicating their prior findings on this topic, the authors found that the more people interacted directly with other people "offline," the more their moods improved from one moment to the next.

The researchers noted that the findings raise a question about why people continue to passively use Facebook if it negatively affects how they feel over time. The data did not address this question, but the researchers had at least one explanation for this phenomenon.

"It is possible that people's motivation to 'stay in touch' outweighs concerns they have over how interacting with this technology influences their feelings," said lead author Philippe Verduyn of the University of Leuven.

Provided by University of Michigan

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