

We understand that social media does not equal social interaction

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If you worry that people today are using social media as a crutch for a real social life, a University of Kansas study will set you at ease.

Jeffrey Hall, associate professor of communication studies, found that people are actually quite adept at discerning the difference between using [social media](#) and having an honest-to-goodness [social interaction](#). The results of his studies appear in the journal *New Media & Society*.

"There is a tendency to equate what we do on social media as if it is social interaction, but that does not reflect people's actual experience using it," Hall said. "All of this worry that we're seeking out more and more social interaction on Facebook is not true. Most interactions are face to face, and most of what we consider social interaction is face to face."

According to Hall, social media is more like old-fashioned people-watching. "Liking" something is similar to a head nod. It's not social interaction, but it's acknowledging you are sharing space with someone else.

"Keeping tabs on other people sharing our social spaces is normal and part of what it means to be human," Hall said.

Hall is no stranger to research on social media. *New Media & Society* published an earlier study of his that found people can accurately detect the personality traits of strangers through Facebook activity.

In his current paper in the journal, Hall details three studies. The first demonstrates that when using social media, most of us are engaged in passive behaviors that we don't consider social interaction, like browsing others' profiles and reading news articles.

The second diary study demonstrates that most of what we consider social interaction with people in our close circle of friends happens face to face. When interaction with these close others is through social media, it's not something passive like browsing or "liking" but rather using chat or instant message functions.

Here's where it gets interesting, Hall said. The first study found that chatting and commenting—things that we would even consider social interaction—are but 3.5 percent of our time on social media.

The third study had participants contacted at random times throughout the day. This study drives home how adept we are at separating social media use with social interaction. People reported 98 percent of their social interactions took some other way than through social media.

"Although people often socially interact and use social media in the same time period, people understand they are different things," Hall said. "People feel a sense of relatedness when they're interacting face to face, but using social media does not make them feel connected."

All three studies, Hall said, circle around the idea that we still value face-to-face time with close others for the purpose of talking.

"If we want to have a conversation, we're not using social media to do it," he said.

The findings speak to a broader anxiety that many still have regarding social media.

"There's a worry that people are seeking out more and more social interactions on Facebook and that social media is taking over our face-to-face time," Hall said. "I'm saying, 'Not so fast.' People use social media to people-watch and still seem to enjoy a good face-to-face conversation."

Provided by University of Kansas

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