

Materialists collect Facebook friends and spend more time on social media

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A new AI tool created to help identify certain kinds of substance abuse based on a homeless youth's Facebook posts could provide homeless shelters with vital information to incorporate into each individual's case management plan. Credit: CC0 Public Domain

If you're materialistic, you're likely to use Facebook more frequently and

intensely. A new paper in *Heliyon* reveals that materialistic people see and treat their Facebook friends as "digital objects," and have significantly more friends than people who are less interested in possessions. It also shows that materialists have a greater need to compare themselves with others on Facebook.

The study reveals that [materialistic people](#) use Facebook to both achieve their goals and feel good. The authors of the paper, from the Ruhr-University Bochum in Germany, have developed a new theory to explain this: The Social Online Self-Regulation Theory.

"Materialistic people use Facebook more frequently because they tend to objectify their Facebook friends - they acquire Facebook friends to increase their possession," said lead author Phillip Ozimek. "Facebook provides the perfect platform for social comparisons, with millions of profiles and information about people. And it's free - materialists love tools that do not cost money!"

The researchers first conducted an online questionnaire with 242 Facebook users. The questionnaire asked participants to rate their agreement with statements in order to calculate their Facebook activity (such as "I'm posting photographs"), social comparison orientation ("I often compare how I am doing socially"), materialism ("My life would be better if I owned certain things I don't have"), objectification of Facebook friends ("Having many Facebook friends contributes more success in my personal and professional life") and instrumentalization of Facebook friends ("To what extent do you think Facebook friends are useful in order to attain your goals?").

The results suggested that the link between materialism and Facebook activity can be partly explained by materialists displaying a stronger social comparison orientation, having more Facebook friends, and objectifying and instrumentalizing their friends more intensely.

The authors replicated the approach with a separate sample of 289 Facebook users, containing fewer students and more males than the first sample, and they reached the same conclusions. The Social Online Self-Regulation Theory they developed extends this further, saying that social media is a tool for achieving important goals in life. For materialists, Facebook is a tool to learn how far away they are from their [goal](#) to become wealthy.

The researchers emphasize that their results should not cast social media in a negative light; instead, they assume people use platforms like Facebook to feel good, have fun and achieve their goals.

"Social media platforms are not that different from other activities in life - they are functional tools for people who want to attain goals in [life](#), and some might have negative consequences for them or society," Ozimek explained. "We found that materialists instrumentalize their friends, but they also attain their goal to compare themselves to others. It seems to us that Facebook is like a knife: it can be used for preparing yummy food or it can be used for hurting a person. In a way, our model provides a more neutral perspective on [social media](#)."

More information: "Materialists on Facebook: The Self-Regulatory Role of Social Comparisons and the Objectification of Facebook friends" by Phillip Ozimek et al. *Heliyon*, [DOI: 10.1016/j.heliyon.2017.e00449](#)

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