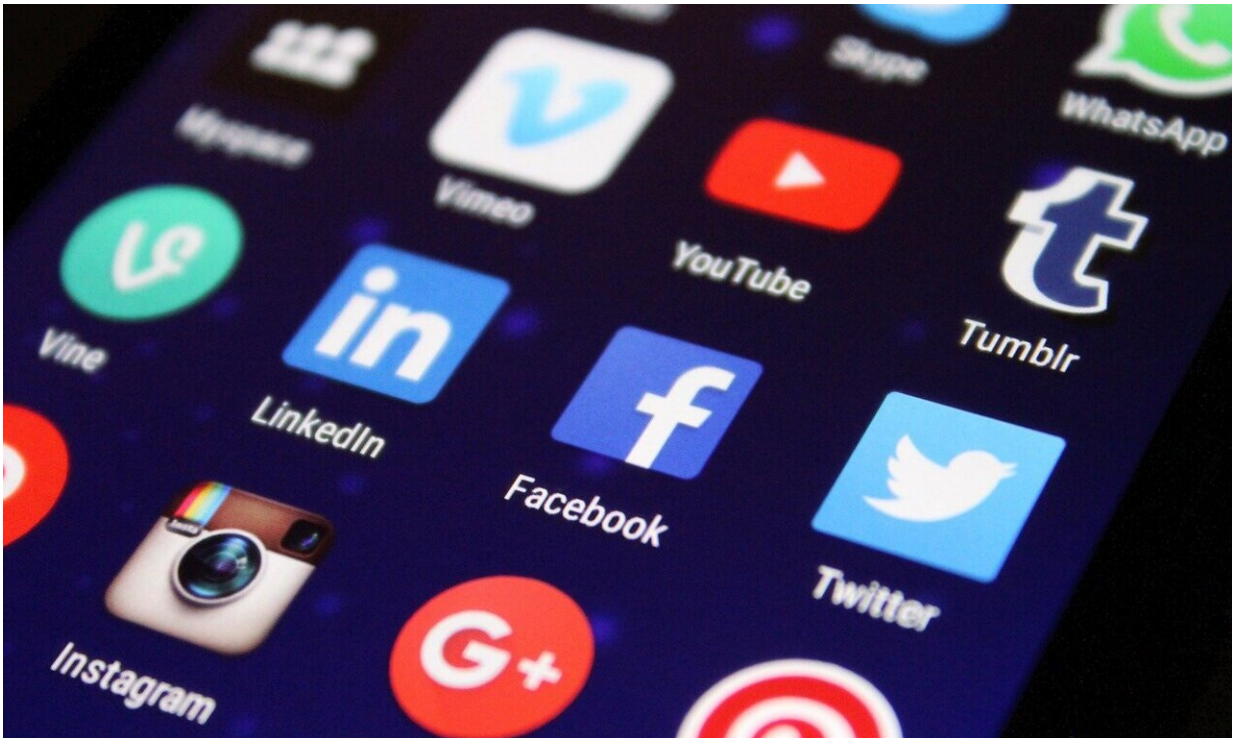


# Social media damages appearance satisfaction

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New research has discovered that social media engagement is associated with lower appearance satisfaction, and engaging with posts by friends and family is more damaging than engaging with content posted by celebrities.

Published in the journal *Body Image*, the study is the first to use an experience sampling method (ESM) to examine how people compare themselves to others, both known and unknown, when using [social media](#).

Led by academics from Karl Landsteiner University of Health Sciences in Austria and Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) in the UK, the study involved 50 adults, with an average age of 23, who provided feedback throughout the day over a two-week period.

Social media use is increasingly associated with negative body image but most academic research to date has involved [laboratory tests](#) or surveys, rather than measuring people's social media experiences as they occur.

To record the real-time impact of social media activity, the new study asked participants to use a wrist-worn wearable device to report their appearance satisfaction each time they engaged with social media content over the two-week period.

The study found that any social media engagement was significantly associated with lower appearance satisfaction. Additionally, it discovered that engaging with content posted by people the participants knew was more than twice as damaging as looking at content posted by strangers, such as influencers or celebrities.

On average, the participants used social media actively (for example creating Facebook posts, writing Tweets, sending WhatsApp messages) for 73 minutes per day, and passively (watching YouTube videos, reading Facebook posts, viewing Snapchat pictures) for 90 minutes per day.

[Viren Swami](#), Professor of Social Psychology at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) and the senior author of the study, said: "Image-

focused [social media platforms](#) provide limitless opportunities for users to make negative comparisons and internalise appearance ideals, which in turn leads to more negative body image outcomes.

"Our study found that engaging with social media reduces appearance satisfaction regardless of who is posting the content and, most interestingly, looking at content posted by friends and family had a significantly stronger negative impact on appearance satisfaction compared to content posted by the likes of celebrities and influencers.

"One possible explanation is that people may perceive a post depicting appearance as being much more attainable if it comes from someone they know, adding a layer of expectation or pressure on the person engaging in the post. At the same time, people may be more critically engaged with posts by the likes of models and celebrities, and therefore perceive the images they share to be more unrealistic."

Stefan Stieger, Professor of Psychology at Karl Landsteiner University of Health Sciences and the lead author of the study, said: "Social media has become an integral part of everyone's lives and our results have shown that day-to-day social media use leads to more [negative body image](#) outcomes.

"Given these findings, practitioners should consider the extent of [social media use](#) when working to improve body [satisfaction](#) in individuals and wider populations. This could involve suggesting changes to the profiles and pages that someone follows, and reducing the time spent online. Additionally, there may be value in promoting social media content that encourages positive body image."

**More information:** Stefan Stieger et al, Engagement with social media content results in lower appearance satisfaction: An experience sampling study using a wrist-worn wearable and a physical analogue scale, *Body*

*Image* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.bodyim.2022.09.009](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bodyim.2022.09.009)

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