

Study finds LinkedIn can trigger feelings of imposter syndrome

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The use of professional social networking sites such as LinkedIn can stir up feelings of self-doubt, research suggests.

A survey of LinkedIn users showed that interacting with the popular site was linked with experiences of imposter syndrome—a feeling of inadequacy despite evidence of success.

People felt a lack of professional confidence both when they browsed others people's posts and when they posted about their personal achievements.

Imposter syndrome—and the accompanying fear of being "found out"—can be associated with feeling anxious and having depressive thoughts, researchers say.

The study, believed to be the first to confirm the link between social media and imposter syndrome, found that thoughts of [self-doubt](#) drove many users to directly address the issue by paying for competency skills courses. The research is [published](#) in *Psychology and Marketing*.

Browsing posts

Researchers from the Business School assessed the effects of using LinkedIn among 506 people. All respondents were educated to at least Bachelor's degree level and had an average age of 36.

The researchers tested the effects of using LinkedIn in two ways—one to assess the effects of browsing others' posts and one to gauge how they felt after posting their own successes.

In an online experiment, researchers found that reading other people's posts had a small but still significant association with experiencing imposter syndrome, compared to not reading other people's posts.

Triggering self-doubt

Posting on LinkedIn had a significant association with imposter syndrome, even after controlling for other possible influences, the study found.

Professional social network sites such as LinkedIn and Xing have gained widespread adoption. LinkedIn boasts more than 930 million users worldwide.

While the sites offer career advancement opportunities, professional connections, and industry-related knowledge and resources, researchers say the findings show an unwelcome side effect of the social media channels.

Confirmation that imposter [syndrome](#) is common among professionals could assist in supporting staff development schemes. Employees knowing that others share similar experiences may reduce the [negative emotions](#), the researchers say.

"Just browsing the newsfeed or even posting an achievement on LinkedIn can trigger a reflection on your professional identity that can ignite imposter thoughts, which is associated with a fear of being found out as an imposter. Our findings show the negative well-being effects of [social media](#) are not only because we compare ourselves to others, but because we believe others think more highly of us than we think of ourselves," says Dr. Ben Marder.

More information: Ben Marder et al, Does LinkedIn cause imposter syndrome? An empirical examination of well-being and consumption-related effects, *Psychology & Marketing* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/mar.21926](https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21926)

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