Facebook May Be Making You Sad

The More You Use Facebook, the More Unhappy You are Likely to Be, Says Study

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Sure, Facebook can make you feel as if you've got all the friends in the world, but some days it can also make you feel as if the world is out to get you. Or at least that's what a new study seems to suggest.

According to the study from researchers at the University of Michigan, which was just published in the Public Library of Science, the more you use Facebook, the more unhappy you are likely to be.

"Everyday Facebook use leads to declines in subjective well-being, both how happy you feel moment to moment and how satisfied you feel with your life," says Ethan Kross, an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Michigan and a co-author of the study, told ABC News.

Kross and the other researchers analyzed the moods and habits of 82 young adults -- active Facebook users with mobile phones whose average age was 20 -- over the course of two weeks. They texted each participant five times a day, at random intervals, and got feedback about their feelings, worries, loneliness, Facebook usage and real-life interactions with other people.

They found that Facebook users were more connected with their friends and acquaintances than those not on Facebook, but the more frequently people used Facebook, the worse they felt immediately afterward. Additionally, the more they used Facebook over the course of two weeks, the less satisfied and happy they were with their lives as a whole.

Interestingly, the so-called "Facebook effect" that Kross describes is not related to baseline mood or loneliness. "It's not the case that people use Facebook more when they feel bad," he says. "It is something unique about Facebook use that is making people feel worse."

While the study had only 82 participants out of Facebook's more than a billion users, relies only on anecdotal reports and was done via text messaging, the finding isn't exactly new. Other independent studies by researchers at Utah Valley University, Western Illinois University, Gothenburg University in Sweden, and others have found similar results: People look at the overcurated digital lives of all their other friends, compare themselves to what they see and then feel a decrease in self-esteem.

"When you're browsing Facebook, you see people depict glowingly positive stuff. There is a social comparison process at play," Kross said.

Other experts not affiliated with the research shared similar thoughts.

"People feel left out," said Dr. Sudeepa Varma, a clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at New York University and a private practice psychiatrist in Manhattan, told ABC News. "There is this imagination or fantasy that other people's lives are better. Facebook keeps people in the know about what other people are
"doing," she says, "but also about what they themselves are not doing."

People also spend time on Facebook looking at "exes, frenemies, people they don't necessarily like, and people they can't be with in real life," Varma said. And it is easy to imagine that they have "more friends, more money and a more exciting life." On the flip side of the new study, the University of Wisconsin-Madison released a study in June that showed that prolonged exposure to ones' personal Facebook page can increase self-esteem. The findings follow a similar logic, though. When you look at your own Facebook profile you look at all the positive and exciting events in your own life without dwelling on the lives of others.

Still, the lesson in most of these studies seems to be that Facebook users should come to the social network slightly forewarned.

"People should be aware that Facebook can have these effects on you," Oscar Ybarra, one of the additional authors of the University of Michigan study, told ABC News. "Awareness is important, and it's also important to remember that Facebook is a public place where you get a very biased version of people's lives."

When contacted by ABC News, Facebook said it had no comment.

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