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Don't be a grazer. Facebook was found to make people sadder, but only if they didn't actively participate in the site.

Will Facebook Make You Sad? Depends How You Use It

By [John Bohannon \(/author/john-bohannon/\)](/author/john-bohannon/) | Friday, May 30, 2014 - 12:15pm

Using Facebook makes people sadder, at least according to some research. But just what is it about the social network that takes a hit on our mood? A study of the different ways of interacting with the site now offers an answer: Grazing on the content of other people's idealized lives may make reality painful.

Scientists have long debated Facebook's impact on users' in-the-moment mood as well as their deeper satisfaction with life. Some studies have found that the site makes us happier; others, sadder.

One of the problems is that most studies were cross-sectional, taking a snapshot of people at one point of time. But that makes it difficult to separate our use of Facebook from the many other factors known to affect well-being, from overwork to romantic meltdowns. An August 2013 study led by Ethan Kross, a psychologist at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, sidestepped this problem by studying people's use of Facebook over time, surveying them about their well-being five times per day for 2 weeks. The conclusion was that [the more you use Facebook, the sadder you get.](#)

[\(http://news.sciencemag.org/brain-behavior/2013/08/scienceshot-facebook-making-you-sad\)](http://news.sciencemag.org/brain-behavior/2013/08/scienceshot-facebook-making-you-sad)

That study generated an enormous amount of attention—and bad press for Facebook—becoming one of the most [cited, blogged, and tweeted papers of 2013](#) (<http://www.altmetric.com/top100>). But the results offered no clue to what it is about the social network, or how people are using it, that might have this negative effect.

Since then, a collaboration of labs including Kross's has tried to tease apart the mechanisms. Rather than just studying people's well-being and their use of Facebook over time, the researchers performed an “intervention,” having subjects repeatedly visit a lab in Ann Arbor and use their personal Facebook accounts in specific ways. After all, interaction with Facebook consists of a whole set of activities, from browsing photos and “liking” websites to directly interacting with others through messages and comments.

Last week at the [annual meeting of the Association for Psychological Science](#) (http://www.psychologicalscience.org/convention/program_2014/) in San Francisco, California, Kross shared a sneak preview of his team's results. Their findings suggest that there is no effect on well-being if one “actively” uses Facebook. When subjects directly interacted with the social network by posting status updates, sharing content, and messaging others, their mood stayed the same over the course of a day. But the negative impact on well-being that Kross discovered in his 2013 study reappeared for individuals who were made to “passively” use the site—just browsing through photographs of other people's happy moments, reading people's conversations, and not contributing anything.

“Using Facebook is not bad for well-being per se,” Kross concluded, but “grazing” its content is. Possible reasons for this were bounced around by the

audience of psychologists. For example, one theory holds that people post idealized versions of themselves on Facebook, and comparing those to your own real-world life is toxic if you don't take part in the online theater. As for the longer term effect on life satisfaction, "the jury is still out," he said. (The study is now under review at a journal, Kross says.)

"This kind of intervention study is exactly what we need more of," says Megan Moreno, a clinical psychologist at Seattle Children's Hospital in Washington who uses Facebook data to study adolescent health and well-being. "What I want to know next is how this negative impact maps to some of the signs of depression we've been tracking." If improving people's well-being is as easy as encouraging active online interactions and discouraging passive browsing, "that would be amazing."

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**Forceton Banfodder** · 6 days ago

I'm more curious about the effects of Social Network Anxiety Disorder as I seem to be seeing more and more cases of it through friends or friends of friends.

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**Hadia Pasha** · 6 days ago

I am not very sure of this finding. First of all, there is a difference in an experimental situation and real life, and this difference is of choice. Not having the freedom to share posts although you might want to will lead to frustration and subsequent negative affect. I think this study needs to be conducted in a naturalistic setting with a longitudinal design to see if inactivity on facebook correlates with or causes depression.

Personally, when I am very busy, I might not post a single thing for weeks, but go for a few minutes on my wall and enjoy the posts of my family and friends. It makes you feel connected and is a good diversion from your hectic schedule. The most I would do is like a certain post or posts. It actually made me feel good. You see your nephews and nieces growing, see what your friends and family are up to, read motivational quotes, jokes and other stuff. For me, being inactive on Facebook but having it with me kept me going.

^ | ▾ · Reply · Share ›

**Helen Gross** · 7 days ago



I so disagree. It seems there might be some bias. When my husband was diagnosed with a bleed and cancer, he was given 2 weeks maybe, we received numerous calls.

My poor husband didn't want to go over it again and again or listen to me do it. We gave updates on facebook to keep our time together, TOGETHER! :) It was somewhat generic with a little insight here and there. We were fortunate we had 170 great days together. He had no pain and wasn't taking pain meds. Facebook for us was a blessing, we reached our friends without having to talk hours on the phone rehashing medical terms, updates, answering the same questions many times over.

After wards when I couldn't sleep, or had a happy or sad moment I shared. I want to help others. I want them to know even through all this Chaly and I thought life to be good! That you can make it through even the worse heart ache.

I love when our friends share their good fortune, I am happy for them. They are happy, I am happy! When they are sad, I feel for them and let them know it!

Besides at least on facebook you can type as you cry, try maintaining a phone conversation while doing that! Yes when used properly facebook is an excellent tool! :)

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Edim · 7 days ago

I disagree. In my experience FB has never made me feel envious of other's lives, nor have I felt like that about anyone my whole life! I think that type of thinking is reserved for those who are generally envious, jealous and competitive types. Plus, everyone can choose what they see and don't see on FB. I get the majority of my news on there and very little personal 'stuff' from my 'friends'. If someone's annoying, I just stop 'following' them which means their 'stuff' stops showing up on my page. And then I can add or 'like' as many other pages of interests I have to fill it up with more interesting things that I genuinely care about. Problem solved. I encourage you to do the same.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Kear → **Edim** · 7 days ago

Edim, I think you missed the point - the article makes no reference to envy, jealousy or competitiveness as a cause of the negative effects of FB on well-being. Being a passive FB has negative side effects, which has been scientifically proven - the reasons why are still being investigated. I suggest you inform yourself better on the subject before making such naive assertions..

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Edward Boss · 10 days ago

One way around Facebook is to keep one account for research and talking to strangers about topics of interest and the other account for socializing. Even though you will get more negative vibes from the very close friends who do not follow you or not find what you've found as interesting as you believe it to be. It tends to tell you who finds you interesting and who is actually annoyed with you and the two do not have to match. It turns people into exhibitionist and voyeurs in their arenas of choice. So you fish for the good feelings but may feel overwhelmed with the negative aspects. Also I think people

good feelings but may feel overwhelmed with the negative aspects. Also I think people become possessive of their accounts and what is presented about them to the huge audience they imagine or actually have. It is alright but most psychiatrist do not advise patients with mental depression to use.

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