We’re familiar with the argument that social media, and particularly Facebook, helps people feel more connected with a larger network of “friends.” Yet the picture is not so rosy for frequent Facebook users. Many Facebook users spend considerable time and energy collecting hundreds of virtual friends, and posting updates with the intention of increasing positive relationships, raising their self-esteem or living a happier life. At the same time, several studies have shown there can be negative impacts on users including increased stress and anxiety, and narcissism.

The most recent research emphasizing the less desirable outcomes of Facebook activity was conducted by Scottish scientist at Edinburgh Napier University, by lead researcher Dr. Kathy Charles. Her research, concluded among other things, that the Facebook users in her study reported feeling frequently anxious about having to do updates.

Now a new study out by Ethan Kross and his colleagues at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research, and published in the journal *Plos One*, examined the first known piece of research focusing on the link between Facebook use and happiness and well-being.

The researchers used eight-two young adults for their study who were all Facebook and smart phone users. The participants reported their emotional experience by texting the researchers at random five times a day for two weeks.

"On the surface, Facebook provides an invaluable resource for fulfilling the basic human need for social connection," said University of Michigan social psychologist Ethan Kross, lead author of the article and a faculty associate at the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research. "But rather than enhance well-being, we found that Facebook use predicts the opposite result—it undermines it." The researchers concluded as a result of their study, that the more participants used Facebook over the two-week study period, the more their life satisfaction levels declined over time.

In comparison, with respect to smartphones, the researchers found no evidence that interacting directly with other people via phone or face-to-face negatively influenced well-being. Instead, they found that direct interactions via these methods with other people led people to feel better over time.

They also found no evidence for a possible other explanation—that they...
used Facebook when they felt bad or lonely. "Thus, it was not the case that Facebook use served as a proxy for feeling bad or lonely," Kross said.

Co-authors of the study are Philippe Verdunyn of the University of Leuven in Belgium and University of Michigan researchers Emre Demiralp, Jiyoung Park, David Seungjae Lee, Natalie Lin, Holly Shablack, John Jonides and Oscar Ybarra.
When Virtue Becomes Vice

The nature of a virtue is that a vice is almost always hidden inside.