

Is Social Media Driving People Away From Real Interaction?

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How many times have you asked a friend to "hang out" and they reply with something along the lines of "Na, I'll just message you on Facebook".

Or how many times have you been in a social gathering and 80% or more of the those in the room have their heads down at their cellphones, tablets or other mobile devices.

You might have thought to yourself, what has become of society?

The purpose of social media was intended to help people share important information and do business much faster (among other reasons) -- we are faced with a very "connected" world. But that virtual connectedness is very shy, confused and often lonely.

Forbes [published an article](#) that got many bloggers and publications buzzing about the potential harmful effects of a constantly-connected generation and the individuals that permeate it.

While evidence for Social Media Anxiety Disorder is largely anecdotal at present, a UK study from the fall found that over 50% of social media users evaluated their participation in social networking as having an overall negative effect on their lives. Specifically, they singled out the blow to their self-esteem that comes from comparing themselves to peers on Facebook and Twitter as the biggest downfall. It seems trite, but you can't feel anxious about the achievements of your old college roommate or your MIT fellow cousin if you don't know about them in the first place. And forget about social media stalking your ex; it's as unhealthy as you'd guess.

It seems that not only are we using these devices to hide from social gatherings, but the use of social media on a lone basis (in other words, those who rely on social media for their social and cultural stimulation) find it increasingly difficult to not only socialize in situations where it is called for, but they are generally more depressed and anxious in actual social situations.

This is the main cause for "trolling," some experts believe. As someone typing something, anything back in response to the troll's message is considered "feeding the troll," that is their only purpose for trolling in the first place. It's a social response for instant gratification, much like the prankster at school with poor grades.

Another [interesting article](#), from *The Economist*, is regarding Facebook specifically, A study just published by the Public Library of Science, conducted by Ethan Kross of the University of

Michigan and Philippe Verduyn of Leuven University in Belgium, has shown that the more someone uses Facebook, the less satisfied he is with life.

Their study does not tease out why socializing on Facebook has a different effect from socializing in person. But an earlier investigation, conducted by social scientists at Humboldt University and Darmstadt's Technical University, both in Germany, may have found the root cause. These researchers, who presented their findings at a conference in Leipzig in February, surveyed 584 users of Facebook aged mostly in their 20s. They found that the most common emotion aroused by using Facebook is envy. Endlessly comparing themselves with peers who have doctored their photographs, amplified their achievements and plagiarized their 'bons-mots' can leave Facebook's users more than a little green-eyed. Real-life encounters, by contrast, are more WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get).

This all seems to relate to not only how we perceive information, but how we share it with each other. The process of relaying information is so detrimental to how we all conduct business, stay in touch and relate to one another.

But when does being social in person -- and online -- become so overwhelming that it begins to affect us negatively, and begins to impact our lives in ways we could never have imagined before.

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