

HOW TO BE A HEALTHY USER OF SOCIAL MEDIA





PEGGY KERN: POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGIST

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

PEGGY KERN is an associate professor at the Centre for Positive Psychology within the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education. SHE received a BA in Psychology from Arizona State University, with minors in Spanish and Communication, a Masters and PhD in social/ personality psychology from the University of California, Riverside, and received additional postdoctoral training at the University of Pennsylvania. HER research draws on multiple fields of inquiry, including health, positive, social, personality, and developmental psychology, and public health to address the question of thriving across the lifespan.



HOW TO BE A HEALTHY USER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

We can learn a lot about through how they use social media. For example, Twitter language can be used to predict the risk of dying from heart disease. Analyses of Facebook updates show women tend to be warmer than men, but just as assertive, and people in extraversion tend to express positive emotions, whereas those with neurotic tendencies are more likely to write about being lonely and depressed.

How to be a Healthy User of Social Media

Concerns exist about the negative effects social media can have on mental health, especially for young people. The incidents of cyberbullying, sexting and victimization have risen. People manage their profiles, presenting an image of perfect life, while hiding real struggles they might have. Despite having thousands of friends, some people still feel completely alone. The potential for social media to be used to detect signs of mental illness is reflected in Facebook's implementation of a suicide watch program.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN YOUR USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Is there a way to tell if your use of social media is healthy or reflective of underlying mental health conditions?

With my colleagues, PhD student Liz Seabrook and Dr. Nikki Rickard, we recently conducted a systematic review of 70 different studies that linked social media use to depression, anxiety and mental well-being. Turns out, social media is not all good, nor all bad. It's more about how you use it. If you are concerned about your own social media use or that of a family member, here are some aspects to look for.

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

*According to research from California State University:
Excessive use of social networking may be connected to the
following psychiatric problems*



Attention Deficit
Hyperactivity Disorder



Depression



Obsessive-Compulsive
Disorder



Narcissistic Personality
Disorder



Hypochondriasis



Schizoaffective and
Schizotypal Disorders



Body Dysmorphia



Voyeurism



Addiction

1. CONTENT AND TONE

One of the main things that distinguished users who reported high well being versus those with depression or anxiety was what they wrote about and how they wrote it. Depressed people used a lot more negative language, reflecting on things that were going wrong or complaining about life or other people. They posted angry thoughts and emotions.

After writing a post, take a moment to read through it. What is the tone? Consider ways you can focus on some of the good things that happen in your life, not just the negative. Social media users with depression behave differently online than those with good mental health.

2. QUALITY

After a conversation with a friend, sometimes I feel really good about the conversation. Other times I don't. Similarly, we found the quality of interactions on social media made a big difference. Depression related to negative interactions with other people, being more critical, cutting others down or feeling criticized by others and hostility. In contrast, by supporting and encouraging others and feeling supported by them, it can help you feel good.

3. TIME ONLINE

A recent Australian survey found adults spend over two hours a day using social media. It also found more than 50% of young people are heavy social media users, with one quarter reporting being constantly connected. In our review, some studies found depressed users spent more time online while other studies were inconclusive. Notably, no study found spending more time online was a good thing. This is something to keep on the radar as people spend more and more time connected to their devices. Many young people have a fear of missing out (FOMO), and thus stay constantly connected. Indeed, in our review we found feeling addicted to social media was associated with higher level of depression. We see growing evidence that simplifying life, including spending time offline has health and well-being benefits. If you feel concerned about how much time passes by while you are online, consider stepping away from social media for a few days.



YouTube



4. PASSIVE VERSUS ACTIVE USE

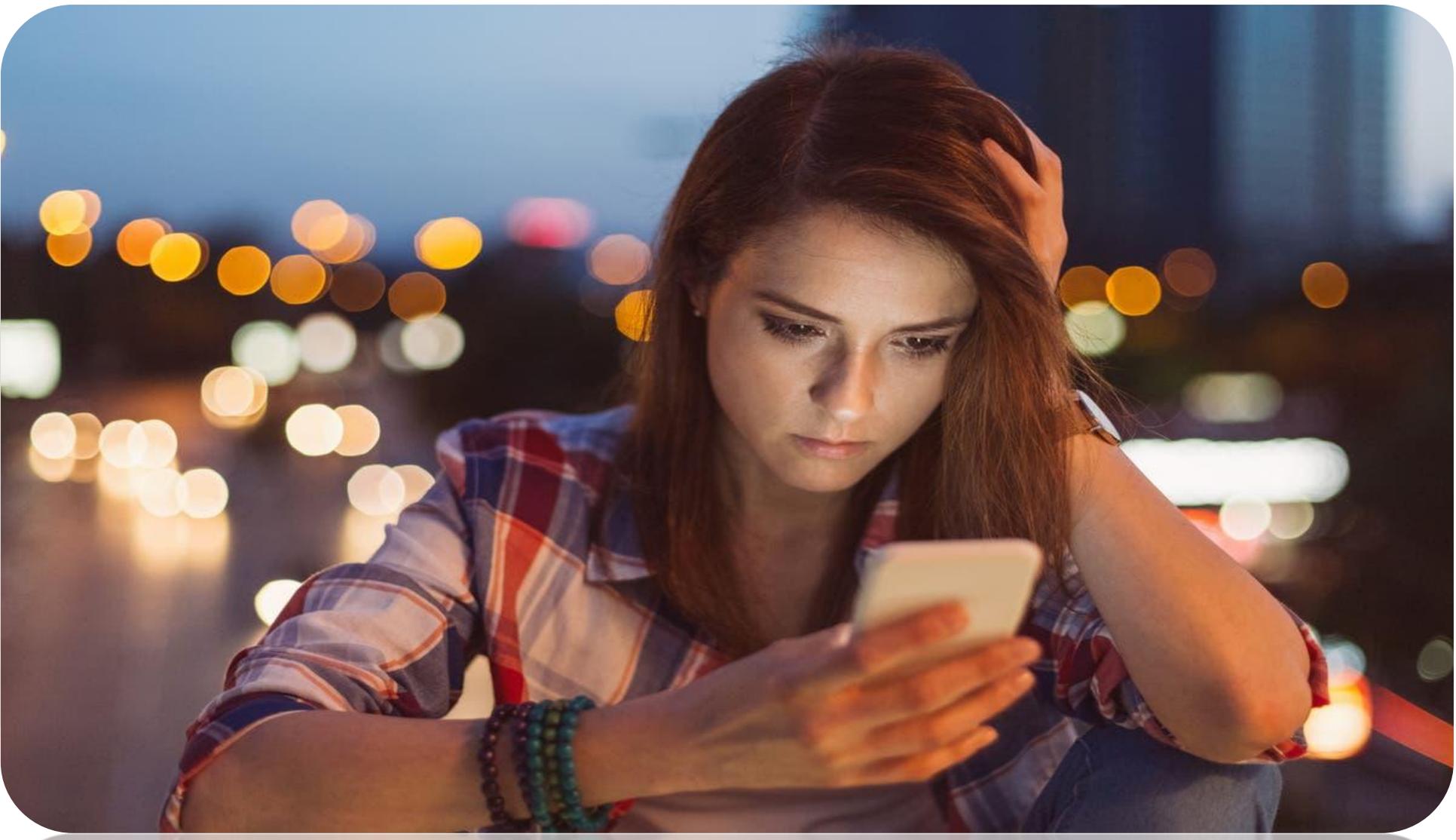
Some people post many updates, providing blow by blow descriptions of their lives. Others read through news feeds, liking posts and passing interesting tidbits on to others. In our review, simply reading posts and browsing news feeds did not positively or negatively impact well-being. The difference was for active users: those who posted their thoughts and feelings and responded to others. People who were depressed posted a lot of negative content. Those who were happy actively engaged with other users, sharing their lives.



5. SOCIAL COMPARISONS

Social media provides opportunities to compare ourselves with others, for better or for worse. Social media can provide support groups that can help spur you on towards reaching a specific goal. For example, the Strengths Challenge used social networks to encourage people to look for good things about themselves and their co-workers, resulting in higher levels of well-being. But comparing yourselves with others can also be quite destructive. Depressed individuals were more likely to see others as better than them. Envy plays a particularly destructive role. If you find yourself jealous of friends and others in your network, it might be a good time to disconnect and find other sources to build up your self-esteem.

STOP COMPARING YOURSELF ON SOCIAL MEDIA



6. MOTIVATION

Why do you use social media? People who used social media to connect with friends felt it contributed to their well-being. In contrast, those who were depressed sought out social support on social media, but felt like their friends were letting them down. If you are feeling lonely and trying to fill a void through social media, it could be doing more harm than good.

Take a Good Look at Yourself

Social media is here to stay. It offers a great way to connect with others, but can also exacerbate social anxieties that exist in the offline world.

So how do you best use social media? Take a few minutes to think about how social media makes you or your family and friends feel. Is it a positive addition to your life, or does it make you feel bad, consuming time and energy you could use in other ways? By taking stock of your social media habits, it can help you choose ways- and encourage others-to use it in a manner that keeps you healthy.

Benefits of Social Media

Community Management

Outreach

Reputation Management

Customer Service

Sales

Cost-efficient

Build Brand Loyalty

Research

Quick Communication

Direct Communication

Advertising

New Customers

Insights

Business Personality

Reputation Management