

Facebook: The new self-help

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Dr Theresa Sauter's study finds social media can be a form of self-therapy.

(Medical Xpress)—Writing on Facebook isn't merely the act of a narcissist - in fact, it's based on an age-old practice that helps people understand and improve themselves, a QUT media researcher said.

A new study by Dr Theresa Sauter of the ARC Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation (CCI) at QUT shows [social networking sites](#) can be a form of self-therapy.

"Social networking sites invite people constantly to share their thoughts and actions with others, confess their wrongdoings and highlight their achievements," Dr Sauter said.

"This turns these sites into tools for self-reflection.

"It's like keeping a diary, but it's more public, frequent and up-to-date. For users, it can become a therapeutic tool that helps them to discover how they feel and how they can improve themselves."

By posting about achievements, from cooking a good meal to being successful at work, users show that they're doing well in their day-to-day lives, Dr Sauter's study reveals.

Conversely, when they publicly admit their mistakes through Facebook posts, they show an awareness that they've digressed from what is good, normal and ethical behaviour.

In doing so, users share their own reflections as well as inviting feedback from their friends and connections.

"However, this is not necessarily a conscious practice: it is a by-product of using Facebook regularly. While public self-writing was previously limited to an intellectual elite, social media technology now makes it accessible for everyone," she said.

"Such practices have their precedents in history, going back to ancient Greece and early Christianity, when people wrote to reflect on life or to confess sins and ask for forgiveness."

Today, social media have become an everyday confessional.

"For instance, users might post about not doing their tax returns or buying unhealthy food, and ask their friends if they were bad. They're confessing that they haven't lived up to the norms and standards they set for themselves."

Dr Sauter said posting more could encourage people to reflect more frequently on their own behaviour, even though they were unaware of it.

"Throughout their day, when people think about how they can portray an event on Facebook or Twitter, they're reflecting on what they've done and how that aligns with what is expected of them," she said.

"So writing on social networking sites is more than an outlet for narcissistic bravado or a way to express oneself and communicate with others.

"People can use these sites to work on themselves. It doesn't mean they create new personalities on Facebook, but rather that they understand and keep reshaping their own identity through self-writing."

The study 'What's on your mind?' Writing on Facebook as a tool for self-formation has been published in the journal *New Media & Society*.

More information: Theresa Sauter. "'What's on your mind?' Writing on Facebook as a tool for self-formation." *New Media & Society* 1461444813495160, first published on July 8, 2013 [DOI: 10.1177/1461444813495160](https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444813495160)

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