

'FOMO' a vicious circle for social media users

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'FOMO' could be having a negative impact on social media users self-esteem.
Credit: Nottingham Trent University

The 'fear of missing out' (FOMO) phenomenon – a feeling that friends and connections are leading more interesting lives – is having a negative impact on the psychological wellbeing of social media users, a new study suggests.

Psychologists at Nottingham Trent University found that 'FOMO' was driving users to take more risks in terms of their own [social media](#) behaviour, leaving them open to critical or hurtful comments, gossip and harassment.

This in turn was having a [negative impact](#) upon their self-esteem, the

researchers found.

Writing in the journal *Computers in Human Behaviour*, the psychologists report how FOMO was prompting users to 'friend' more people, post more regularly, and disclose more information and images about themselves and their activities.

As they become targets for negative comments, users then unwittingly enter a cycle of detrimental behaviour by using social media to mitigate their feelings of [low self-esteem](#) and make themselves feel better – with the sequence starting all over again.

Those who used social media most regularly and those with larger networks were particularly at risk of FOMO and its consequences, say the researchers, who are based in the University's School of Social Sciences.

More than 500 Facebook users aged 13-77 took part in an online questionnaire, which measured factors such as the amount of time spent online, network size, 'fear or missing out', levels of online disclosure, prior exposure to online vulnerability, and self-esteem.

"While looking at a stream of posts about births, weddings and nights out may seem harmless, our study examined the potentially darker implications of being ever-connected to social media sites and the possible effect on wellbeing," said psychologist Sarah Buglass.

"In the past someone may not have realised their best friend had gone to the cinema or a party without them – but now it's unlikely to go unnoticed. People spend an increasing amount of time on social media and frequent exposure to these posts has the potential to lead them to believe their connections are leading happier and more desirable lives than their own.

"FOMO then drives more online friending and more disclosure of information to try to compensate for feelings of social inadequacy. In doing so, people leave themselves wide open to criticism, gossip and hurtful comments from 'friends' and other users.

"They then find themselves entering a negative cycle of behaviour in which they try to use social media to reduce the detrimental impact of FOMO, by using sites more and more in a bid to make themselves feel more popular and more socially interesting.

"Our findings could be applied to the majority of [social networking sites](#) – and serve as a warning to users not to be swept up in constant comparisons to people online."

More information: Sarah L. Buglass et al. Motivators of online vulnerability: The impact of social network site use and FOMO, *Computers in Human Behavior* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chb.2016.09.055](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.09.055)

Provided by Nottingham Trent University

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