

Social media use found to contribute to good mental health for many

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Social media is good for some users but bad for others. Credit: University of Melbourne

According to new research by academics from University of Melbourne and Monash University, using social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Myspace contributes to good mental health for many users.

Dr Peggy Kern from the University of Melbourne and Elizabeth Seabrook and Dr Nikki Rickard from Monash University reviewed 70 studies that looked at the relationship between [social networking](#) and depression, anxiety, and wellbeing. The research showed that social networks can be useful for connecting with others and receiving and providing social support.

It may even provide a unique source of [social support](#) for people with social anxieties who find face-to-face interaction difficult.

But it's not useful for everyone. People who often compared themselves to others, posted negative thoughts, or were addicted to [social media](#) were at greater risk of suffering from depression and anxiety.

The study also found that analysing social networks provides insights into how people use social media, in both beneficial and harmful ways.

Those with [social anxiety](#) were more likely to passively browse news feeds rather than directly engage with them. Individuals with more depressive symptoms were more likely to post their negative feelings.

"Social media provides not only a window into the thoughts and emotions that people choose to share, but also some of their behavioural patterns that may help or hinder [mental health](#)," Dr Kern said.

Ms Seabrook said these unique behavioural patterns might be able to identify and predict the presence of depression and social anxiety in the user.

"With continued research it may be a powerful tool for the early identification of mental health risk," she said.

Dr Kern said because social media is now a common part of life for many people, it provides a popular way to connect with others. But for those with depression or anxiety, it could make such conditions worse.

"By understanding links between social media and mental health, we can make better choices about how to best use social media, as well as use social media to promote good mental health."

More information: Social Networking Sites, Depression, and Anxiety: A Systematic Review. *JMIR Ment Health* 2016;3(4):e50. [DOI: 10.2196/mental.5842](https://doi.org/10.2196/mental.5842)

Provided by University of Melbourne

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