

# Using X (formerly Twitter) has a negative impact on well-being, study confirms

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Researchers at the University of Toronto have confirmed what many have long suspected: Using X (formerly known as Twitter) takes a toll on our well-being—although the social media platform itself isn't entirely to blame.

[Published](#) in the journal *Communications Psychology*, the study found

that while logging onto X led to a greater sense of belonging for some users, it was associated with an immediate drop in [positive emotions](#) such as joy and a surge in outrage, [political polarization](#) and boredom.

The study also suggested that a person's reason for opening X in the first place—to check the news or out of boredom—plays a significant role in determining whether they'll tweet, retweet, like, scroll or otherwise use the platform's features, which are also tied to emotional impacts.

"We couldn't find any positive effects on well-being," says Victória Oldemburgo de Mello, a Ph.D. student at U of T Scarborough who is one of the study's co-authors. "Even when some of the things people did made them feel like they belonged more, that didn't translate into increased positive emotions."

As part of the study, researchers tracked the emotions of 252 users in the United States to determine when X was having an impact on them. While the study's participants were demographically diverse, the researchers' findings were consistent regardless of age, political allegiance, ethnicity or other factors.

Those who reported using the site as a way to escape their problems scored lower for well-being both after using X and overall, and were angrier and unhappier people. Frequent X users were, on average, more bored and lonelier. In addition, they felt more bored immediately after using X, although not any lonelier.

"I can relate to those findings in the sense that I tend to open social media if I'm momentarily frustrated," says Oldemburgo de Mello. "When I'm approaching it with this escapism mindset, it's going to be worse overall because I already have a problem."

People who were more politically polarized, meanwhile, tended to

retweet a lot. And the study called it "puzzling" that users felt increasingly polarized when they used X for entertainment, which usually means scrolling through your feed. Users often closed X with a spike in their anger levels. They also became angrier when they used X to find information, though this wasn't tied to any specific action.

When people went on X seeking social interaction, they tended to reply to tweets and visit profiles—and felt a boost in their sense of belonging. Researchers said the same was true when people checked trending topics.

Extensive research has quantified how much interacting with another person boosts well-being, including positive emotions such as joy. X, on the other hand, appears to be dragging users down.

"Imagine the magnitude of how you feel when you meet someone and you talk to them for a while, you get a little bit of a mood boost," says Oldemburgo de Mello. "Two-thirds of that magnitude is how bad you feel when you use X."

The action on X most associated with a lowered state of well-being was scrolling the feed, which is the most frequent activity on X, consuming 74% of the time participants spent on the platform. (Eighty percent of the content on X is created by 10% of users.)

Researchers found some surprises, too. For example, there was no apparent impact on anxiety and interacting with people who had different political views didn't increase a user's polarization—perhaps, researchers said, because of the effect of "echo chambers" that cause users to lean further into a political opinion.

The study's data was collected in 2021 before tech mogul Elon Musk purchased Twitter and set in motion several changes that resulted in

advertisers pulling back from the platform amid concerns about a rise in extremism and hate speech. However, Oldemburgo de Mello says the findings on passive use and the fact that social media's impact is connected to motive and behavior are broadly applicable.

"I would expect people to come to social media with maybe a different motivation and different patterns of behaviors," she says. "Maybe we all should be more intentional with our [social media use](#), avoiding it when we're bored or frustrated."

**More information:** Victoria Oldemburgo de Mello et al, Twitter (X) use predicts substantial changes in well-being, polarization, sense of belonging, and outrage, *Communications Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s44271-024-00062-z](#)

Provided by University of Toronto

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