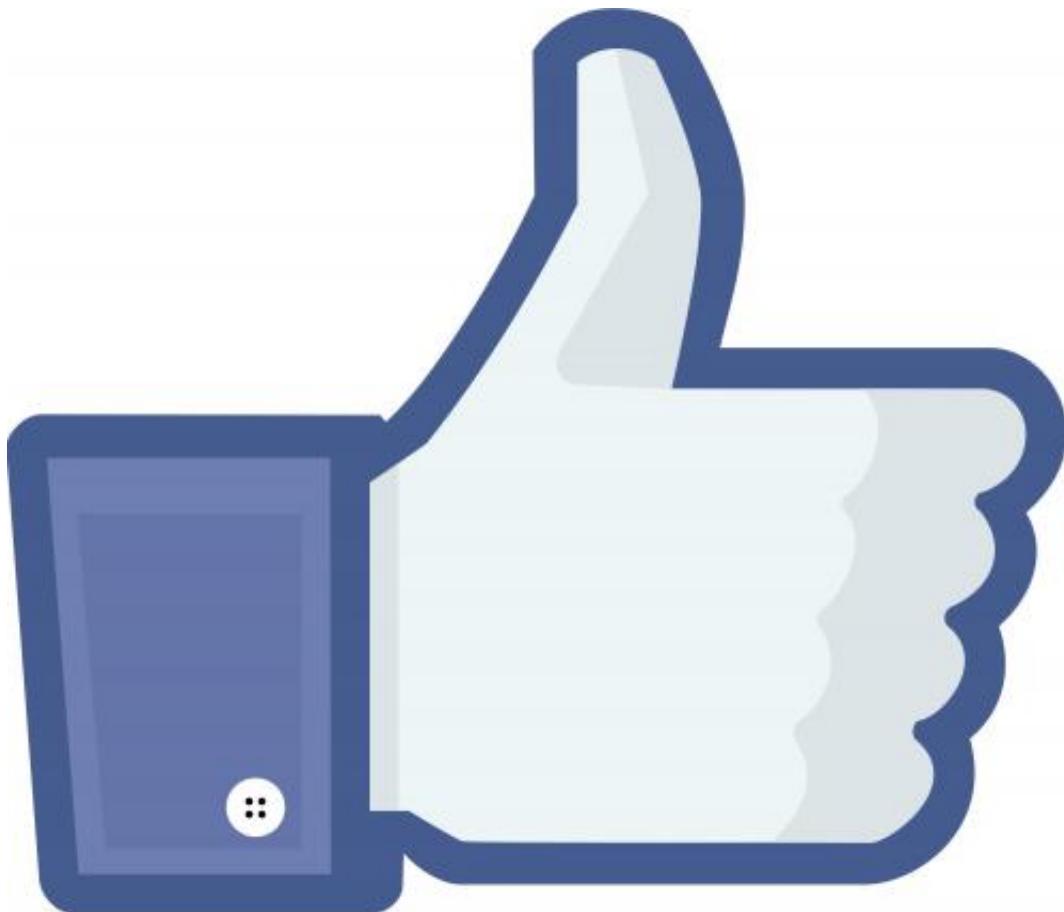


If Facebook use causes envy, depression could follow

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Browsing Facebook has become a daily activity for hundreds of millions of people. Because so many people engage with the website daily,

researchers are interested in how emotionally involved Facebook users can be with the social networking site and how regular use can affect their mental health. Now, researchers at the University of Missouri have found that Facebook use can lead to symptoms of depression if the social networking site triggers feelings of envy among its users. Margaret Duffy, a professor and chair of strategic communication at the MU School of Journalism, says that how Facebook users use the site makes a difference in how they respond to it.

"Facebook can be a fun and healthy activity if users take advantage of the site to stay connected with family and old friends and to share interesting and important aspects of their lives," Duffy said. "However, if Facebook is used to see how well an acquaintance is doing financially or how happy an old friend is in his relationship—things that cause [envy](#) among users—use of the site can lead to feelings of depression."

For their study, Duffy and Edson Tandoc, a former doctoral student at MU and now an assistant professor at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, surveyed young Facebook users and found that some of those who engage in "surveillance use" of Facebook also experience symptoms of depression while those who use the site simply to stay connected do not suffer negative effects. Surveillance use of Facebook occurs when users browse the website to see how their friends are doing compared with their own lives. The researchers found that Facebook postings about things such as expensive vacations, new houses or cars, or happy relationships can evoke feelings of envy among surveillance users. They say that these feelings of envy can then lead to Facebook users experiencing symptoms of depression.

"We found that if Facebook users experience envy of the activities and lifestyles of their friends on Facebook, they are much more likely to report feelings of [depression](#)," Duffy said. "Facebook can be a very positive resource for many people, but if it is used as a way to size up

one's own accomplishments against others, it can have a negative effect. It is important for Facebook users to be aware of these risks so they can avoid this kind of behavior when using Facebook."

"Social media literacy is important," Tandoc said. "Based on our study, as well as on what others have previously found, using Facebook can exert positive effects on well-being. But when it triggers envy among users, that's a different story. Users should be self-aware that positive self-presentation is an important motivation in using social media, so it is to be expected that many users would only post positive things about themselves. This self-awareness, hopefully, can lessen feelings of envy."

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

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