

Why we waste our time on Facebook

By Evelyn Lewin

The 32-year-old from Victoria checks it when she wakes up, before going to bed, and throughout the day whenever she wants to "procrastinate".

She usually sets time frames for herself, allowing herself around 10 minutes to scroll away. But she always extends those limits, telling herself she'll just spend "another five minutes, then another, and so on".

After each Facebook "binge", Daphne berates herself. "I always feel bad about the time I wasted, [when I] should have been doing work, exercise or talking to my husband."



New research offers a further explanation as to why we waste so much time on social media.

Published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* on January 25 this year, it shows that our perception of time is altered when online.

The study involved monitoring the responses of 44 people who were shown 20 images for varying amounts of time. Five of those images were associated with Facebook, five with the Internet in general, and 10 were neutral.

The participants then had to say whether they'd looked at the image for a short or long time.

People underestimated how long they'd looked at both the general internet and Facebook images, with Facebook causing a greater distortion of time.

Health and community psychologist Marny Lishman isn't surprised by these findings. She says spending time on Facebook stimulates our brain and releases the feel-good hormone, dopamine.

Our brains then get used to that amount of "checking", so we need to indulge in more of the same behaviour to reach that level of arousal.

"So the more we do it, the more we end up doing it."

What happens then is that we lose track of time.

"We might sit down for what seems like a few minutes and then realise hours have gone by."

Wasting time online is not only a widespread issue, it's also under-recognised, says Dr Lishman.

"It has become so normal, I don't think many people think it is a problem."

But, she warns, it is a real issue with negative repercussions.

Firstly, Facebook fosters an environment of comparison, which we don't find enjoyable. Comparing our whole lives (the good, the bad and the ugly) to the stylised "best bits" reel of other people's lives can contribute to low self-esteem.

Plus, when we while away time on social media, other activities such as exercise, socialising and relaxation, fall by the wayside.

Though you may protest that scrolling through Facebook is your way of unwinding, it's not actually relaxing, warns Dr Lishman.

She says being online causes a constant flood of sensory information that your brain then needs to process, leading to myriad thoughts and feelings.

"It's robbing us of important chill-out time that our minds and bodies [need] to unwind."

If all this seems too familiar, Dr Lishman recommends cutting back on your social media use.

Allocate yourself a set amount of time to use social media – using a timer, if needed – then stick to it. Or, only check social media at the end of the day as a "reward" for completing other activities.

When you feel like zoning out, opt for another activity.

If the desire to hop online is overpowering, train yourself to hold off.

"See if you can resist the urge to check what's going on online. See how long it can last, and stretch it out longer each day."

Even better, give yourself a complete break from social media for a few days.

"We survived without social media not that long ago, you can survive now without it for a day or two."

Source: <http://www.theage.com.au/lifestyle/health-and-wellbeing/wellbeing/why-we-waste-our-time-on-facebook-20170214-gucgix.html>