

## **(Un) Social Media**

Social media has recently started to dominate our lives. Every age group seems to be represented in the usage statistics for Facebook, Twitter and the many other social media. At last count there were at least 50 major social media platforms available. That's an awful lot of sociability. It is getting to the stage that if you are not connected by social media there must be something wrong with you – mental incompetence or downright antisociability. In the future we may be arresting you for not complying with social media.

Of course, it is not all about being social and connecting with family and friends. Radicals, egomaniacs, bullies, ranters and ravers, marketers, news and opinion, the whole spectrum of human variability finds expression through this technology. And as with other human inventions, it has its good and bad sides. It helps people find human connection, stay in touch with what is happening to distant friends and learn new things from various postings. But it has a dark side. It can also be bad for your mental health if you are not careful in how you use it.

I did a little experiment to test this. For one week I took my tablet to work and during lunch breaks used it to check Facebook, read and reply to comments, post my own news and opinions. At home I did the same during spare moments. What I discovered was that I became more driven, tense, angry, tired, sometimes happy, mainly frustrated, and addicted to the next posting. My sleep was unsettled and my neck developed a crick. For the next week, I avoided the tablet and all social media. I took a book to work, read old fashioned print magazines. I settled down, was more calm and thoughtful, and my sleep less troubled.

Now an experiment of one sample (me) does not great science make. But there is evidence out there that what I experienced is happening to others. Parents struggling to get their kids off social media so they can study and even get some sleep. In a 2012 survey 51% of respondents said the social media had changed their behaviour for the worse and 66% had trouble sleeping or relaxing. There is something called Internet Addiction Disorder and social media is a big part of it – 27% admit to using Facebook in the toilet, just to keep in touch. Apparently our brain releases feel-good chemicals when we check a notification and responses. We repost, feeding the loop over and over again, like a rat in a cage getting its reward by pushing on a lever. Depressing to say the least.

If you want to check out some of the data go to Google and type in: infographic social media mental health, then look at the one from Contently.com as well as others.

Remember: Keep a sense of balance. Moderation is important. That reminds me – I better get onto Facebook and post this.