

OUR ANXIETY REGARDING SOCIAL MEDIA NOTIFICATIONS

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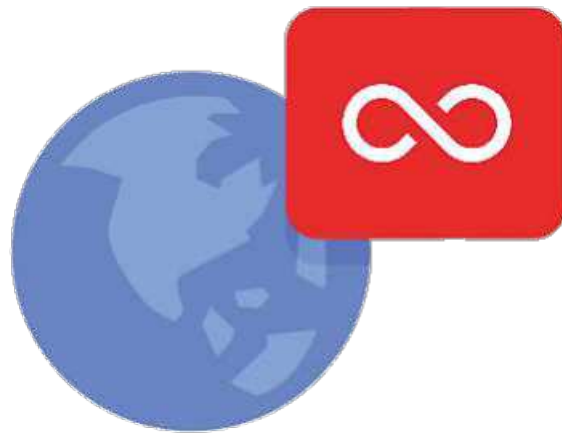
"It's been 15 minutes since I changed my profile picture," my friend complained with a sad face. "Still zero reactions!"

"So what? Zero reactions do not imply people dislike you," I replied with a straight face.

"I know but it's making me feel uncomfortable. Why don't you log in and give my picture a like?" he insisted. And I did as I was told.

This "uncomfortable" feeling, and this measure of sense of worth based on the number of reactions, shares and notifications is common among social media users. Studies suggest that anxiety is induced due to a higher level of screen time in social media platforms because everyone else's life looks perfect in the virtual world, except ours.

Several researches linked anxiety to the use of social media and researchers have identified several forms of anxiety induced among the users. When scrolling through aesthetically perfect photos, posts of achievements and successful careers in social media, we inadvertently begin comparing ourselves to others and start harbouring feelings of self-doubt which is bound to take its toll on our mental health (Boers et al., 2019; Barr, 2019). The pressure we feel because others are doing better than us and the news of their successes in our social media feeds may make us feel unhappy and left out (Bono, 2018). Other studies found that anxious and insecure people tend to use social media more to alleviate stress and escape from worries as they find it easier to express their opinion via social media than face-to-face and in doing so, they feel more insecure and unhappy as they become susceptible to



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social comparisons (Bonnette et al., 2019).

So, what change of behaviour and shift in perspective is necessary for healthy use of social media that do not knock off our self-esteem?

The first step is conscious use of social media—controlling the amount of time spent through scrolling the news feed or texting others. This will save time and boost self-confidence as well as help in maintaining sound communication with others in social media.

Instead of quitting social media for good and missing out important information regarding education, career and life, devoting the time saved through conscious use for self-improvement is the better choice.

Following self-imposed rules such as no social media

during study and before bed and adjusting day-to-day routine accordingly to combat distraction will greatly improve mental health.

Rather than directing our attention towards stories of strangers and getting worked up, if we focus on ourselves and on people we care about the most, we will be much more satisfied with our lives.

When we measure our sense of worth based on our performance with respect to others, we place our happiness in a parameter that is well beyond our control. So, having a practical outlook on life instead of making comparisons in social media will relieve us of unnecessary stress and anxiety.

References

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2. Barr, S. (2019, October 10). *Six Ways Social Media Affects Your Mental Health*.
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4. Bonnette A, Robinson A, Dailey S, et al. (2019). *Upward social comparisons and posting under the influence: Investigating social media behaviors of US adults with generalized anxiety disorder*.

H. Rainak Khan Real has found the potion that can slow down the time. Send him clues about how to use it at rainak-khanreal@gmail.com

Playing with Memories

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Nostalgia has always fascinated me. Not only the memories that induce it, but its very nature. When I look back on my own halcyon days, I sometimes wonder whether I would feel the same wistfulness if I "edited" those happy recollections. In most cases, nostalgia has three factors: time, place and people. One of these—time that has passed—is a constant in all nostalgic memories.

What if I fooled around with the other two factors?

To test this, I go back to my childhood. I'm playing with friends in my school's playground. It's a memory that always makes me smile. What if I strip away all the running children and the supervising teachers from that place, leaving the equipment behind? Does the memory still elicit the same response? To some extent, because there's sentiment attached to the swings and slides. However, I feel that the essence is missing, only to be filled by the people whom I vanished.

What if I transported the people to another place and have them play games there? That's what I do, picturing them at a vast green field. This version of the memory feels dream-like, because I've never run around with my friends in a field like that. Although it paints a pretty picture, it never happened, so this is more like an imaginary scenario than a memory.

Wait, what if this event never happened? What if I only had the happy feeling it left

behind? Let's say I'm plugged to a machine which induces the pleasure from my childhood memory without ever living through it. It might feel good at first, but eventually I'll feel empty. To those familiar with *The Matrix* franchise, this idea might ring a bell. It originates from a well-known thought experiment called "experience machine", proposed by philosopher Robert Nozick, who hypothesised that most people would choose to experience the events over connecting to the machine. Later studies have shown that the choice depends on the nature of the scenario, with a tendency to connect to the machine for painful ones and experience those which are pleasurable.

All this mental gymnastics later, I return to the memory in its original, untainted form. The contentment I've been missing during these thought experiments comes back in full force. I decide that I prefer the original over the rest, because it reflects what I considered was the best of both worlds—favourite people and place—in my childhood. Perhaps, it's because when recalling precious memories, we try to remember every single detail. And isn't nostalgia about cherishing memories to the fullest?

Reference

Psychology Today (Mar 13, 2019). *Pleasure or Reality? The Experience Machine Debate*

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