

OFFLINE



In a time where almost everyone is sharing everything online, from their avocado toast to their emotional breakdowns, use this month's Screen-Free Week to discover the beauty of keeping life to yourself

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If you don't post about it, did it even happen?" Most of us will have heard this phrase. In an increasingly digital world, it's often said that if you don't capture every banal moment on camera to share with your social media followers then you may as well have not bothered at all. This attitude has led to our Facebook timelines being suffused with posts about meals, workouts, the weather and the milestones of people three degrees removed from us.

Yet as MySpace warped into Facebook, then Instagram, then when Snapchat and TikTok came on the scene, we all had our guilty moments of uploading one too many avocado toasts to our stories. Or of snapping every single moment of our ironically get-away-from-it-all holidays, publishing as we went. We might be having the best time ever — at least that's what we assure our followers in the caption — but by making almost every aspect of our lives public, what damage are we doing? Social media certainly has benefits like creating job opportunities, money and raising awareness on important issues, but these apps also have a dark side, often with negative effects on our mental health.

"One of the benefits of social media is that it allows us to connect with others, whether we are consuming their content or sharing our own," Dr Sarah Rasmi, licensed psychologist and founder of Dubai's Thrive Wellbeing Centre tells *MOJEH*. "Some people are more comfortable sharing intimate details of their lives than others and there are many reasons for this. It might be because they are genuinely excited about their ideas, beliefs and experiences and want to share them with their network, but it might also be because they feel under pressure, or need reassurance. Unfortunately this often doesn't work."

A need for validation or an obsession with numbers of likes can ultimately be both draining and damaging, with many users admitting it has affected their mental health to the point of sadness if a post failed to attract the level of attention they projected it would garner. That's why last year Instagram offered its users the option to hide the number of likes they received on their posts — the aim is to "depressurize people's experience" on the platform, the social media giant said.

A LIFE

"I don't think I've met someone who hasn't been negatively affected by social media and the role it plays in mental health," agrees ex Facebook and Dropbox employee-turned mental health advocate Kelli Steckler, whose soon-to-launch platform The Well Well helps individuals find and connect with holistic healing practitioners. "What's most damaging is that our level of feeling accepted is often determined by likes, retweets, comments and other vanity metrics that keep the poster wanting more. People feel the need to share everything on social media to be 'approved of', when ultimately that comes from within."

Indeed, the negative effects of social media have been well documented, with a 2018 British study tying social media to decreased, disrupted and delayed sleep, all linked with depression, memory loss and poor academic performance.

Social media can affect users' physical health even more directly, with experts citing the connection between the mind and the gut, which can turn anxiety and depression into nausea, headaches, muscle tension and tremors. Even Jack Dorsey, the former CEO of Twitter, spent weeks at a time at glamorous meditation retreats practicing total silence to escape the noisy, unregulated online world he oversaw. After all, as the popular saying goes, 'a private life is a happy life', and there's most certainly some truth behind it.

"One of the major drawbacks of oversharing is that we lose our sense of control while opening ourselves up to negative and harsh responses," adds Dr Rasmi. "If someone is sharing something deeply personal to gain reassurance, for example, it will likely backfire if they receive negative comments from their online community, making them feel even worse in the long run."

Aside from the mental health improvements, there are several other notable benefits of living more of our lives offline. In particular, being more present in the moment can work wonders for both ourselves and our relationships.

"Mindfulness — being aware of and attuned to our experiences and surroundings — is one of the main pillars of wellbeing," adds Dr Rasmi. "Sometimes the pressure to share what we do detracts from our experience and enjoyment of the moment."

Someone who takes time to mindfully savour the look, smell and feel of their gelato will probably enjoy it more than someone who takes a picture of it for Instagram and then eats it mindlessly, for example.

"Similarly, someone who is present when they are engaging in charitable work will be more likely to notice the impact on both themselves and others rather than someone who is documenting the experience from behind a lens," adds Dr Rasmi.

Dutch expat Natalie Masseur, who has lived in Dubai for the past 15 years, is the perfect example of this. She spent six years setting up lodges and a network of national parks in Gabon, West Africa before moving to the UAE. Masseur dedicates much of her time to different philanthropic ventures in Africa, which she continues today through her tailor-made safari company Real Safaris.

"I come across a lot of people who live in very difficult situations or meet people who have just not had the same opportunities as us," she tells *MOJEH*. "We visit projects, institutions and people who really need our help."

One such project is an orphanage in Nairobi to which, among other things, she has donated hundreds of football

boots and sports kits donated by people whose children have outgrown them. You will rarely find her posting about it on social media, though, as Masseur is one of a growing number of people in tune to the fact that giving back can be just as, if not even more, rewarding when it's kept to yourself.

"The reason I don't post online about everything that I do is because I don't get the reward from the likes and comments of other people," she explains. "I do it because I genuinely want to do something for others regardless of what people think of that. Giving is addictive and it's the best feeling in the world if you can help people. Yes, we all want to be seen and heard, but giving is so much deeper than that."

Masseur's next project involves buying containers that will be transformed into libraries for remote areas and the African lodges she works with.

"Travellers can bring their unwanted or preloved books and leave them in the makeshift bush library," she explains. "We fund the container and over time tourists can donate books and toys that will help enrich children's lives."

It's important to note that social media is not all bad. It can help us stay in touch with loved ones, meet and connect with people who share similar interests, expose us to people with different views and help us share our ideas, knowledge and expertise. It's also a useful tool for educating others on different topics and ideas that can be beneficial to humanity in the long run. Sharing our charitable work may also inspire others to do the same, and if that translates to more giving behaviour then it is ultimately better for society.

Before you post that next picture, though, start by asking yourself what inner desire you are fulfilling. Does the post benefit anyone, or can it actually add value to someone's life?

"We live in a society where our lives have become largely performative, meaning we do things to be externally validated, whether through friends, family, strangers or on the internet," concludes Steckler. "But the question then becomes, what is the intention behind wanting to share something online? Is it to truly connect, or update your circle on a big life moment? Or is it the ego, wanting validation that we then equate to feeling like we are enough?"

Examining our relationship with social media and being honest about our approach is vital to ensure we aren't simply posting for all the wrong, and ultimately damaging, reasons.

5 THINGS TO NEVER SHARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Oversharing on social media doesn't just pose mental health risks — there are personal risks too. Here's why these five posts are best kept private

The exact details of your holiday Nothing says "please break into my house" more than a post detailing the dates it will be empty.

Your friend's pregnancy announcement Your friend's big news is just that — your friend's. Be sure they are happy for you to share it before you do.

Work complaints Your profile might be private but that won't necessarily stop a co-worker from screenshotting your post to share with your boss.

Your address Identity fraud is a growing problem in today's digital world, so avoid sharing any information that can make life easier for hackers. This includes your birthday and bank details.

Selfies in sacred places There are certain places that call for respectful behaviour, so making them about your smiling face could result in a barrage of negative comments. (U)