Social Media's Affect on Self Image and Daily Life

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During my research process, I had a group of respondents who agreed to give up social media for a month. Below are the hiatus group’s responses to a series of questions after they completed their month. These responses gave me tremendous insight to the way society is impacted by social media usage, as well as how a break from the world of social media can be enlightening and refreshing.

Response 1

1. Did you last the full month?
Yes, I lasted 4 weeks.

2. Did you enjoy your time off social media? Why/Why not?
I truly did enjoy my time off of social media. When I was constantly checking it out of habit, it didn't feel like anything to check it every hour. But when I was removed from that habit, the thought of checking it seemed to feel more like a task. So it felt like a job that I had been working at constantly and now had a vacation from. I think I slept better as well, I'm guessing just from less screen time especially before bed.

3. Did you miss social media, if so what aspects?
I did miss social media, but not in the way I thought I would. I thought I would miss it as a time-killer, like during my daily commute or while in the waiting room at the dentist, etc. I actually was way more productive during this time, and got ahead on paying bills, responding to emails, reading articles etc. I didn't miss the random filler of social media at all. I did miss the social connection, though. I didn't realize how much I use Instagram in particular to check in with my close friends on a daily basis, since we use that platform way more than texting. Of course I didn't miss anything important because I would talk to them personally, but I missed getting silly memes and messages from them daily. I also felt out of touch with my outer circle, things like high school friends or work friends getting engaged or pregnant, moving, buying a house or getting a new job etc, that I didn't realize happened even if I saw them in person because it didn't always come up, but they had posted about it and I just missed it.

4. Did this make you reconsider how reliant you were on social media/ how much of your
day it consumed?
Yes, I definitely felt the void, especially in the beginning. I was begging people to tell me what they were looking at or what was going on. That feeling began to fade in the first two weeks, and was totally gone at the end of four weeks. I realized if something is on Instagram but I don't hear about it personally, it probably isn't necessary that I know or important that I know anyways.

5. Tell me about your experience, what you realized, what you liked/disliked, how you felt during hiatus?
I felt a lot more responsibility to make my life interesting. When I'm scrolling social media and I see someone else doing something interesting, it almost feels like I shared that experience. This is totally great in small doses, and allows you to have experiences that might not otherwise be possible for me at this juncture (idk like yacht week or bungee jumping for example). However when I didn't have that constant feed of people doing things, I realized it's up to me to be doing things, to make plans, to have fun, to experience life for myself. So I definitely said yes to going out more, and I felt more free and more alive by making my own experiences rather than living through other people's experiences. I think that was the best part of this experience. And the time it freed up was definitely the second best part.

6. Lastly do you think society would be better off without social media? Please elaborate.
That's a tough question! I immediately redownloaded Instagram because I think, especially at my age, my friends are doing such exciting amazing things and it's so thrilling to watch them succeed in their life! I wouldn't give up Instagram for that reason. I think being able to share your day-to-day and your successes, and to be able to relate to the people around you is so important. I didn't redownload Snapchat though because I realized I wasn't getting anything positive out of it. So I feel better off without it. I don't think society would be better off without these platforms, but I do feel like society would be better off if everyone took the time to reevaluate their relationship with each platform they engage on and reflect what it means to them, and be able to modify its impact if necessary. I think society could benefit from more mindful and thoughtful use of our technology. I know personally as I dip back into these platforms I'm going to use the
time-limit feature on my iphone to make sure I'm not spending too much time mindlessly scrolling, living through other people's experiences, and spend more time enjoying my life.

**Response 2**

1. **Did you last the full month?**
   Yes I did last the full month without social media.

2. **Did you enjoy your time off social media? Why/Why not?**
   I very much so did enjoy my time off from social media. I was able to enjoy more time with the people around me instead of wasting time looking at pictures of people that I wasn’t with. I was living more in the moment and this helped me appreciate my surrounding more.

3. **Did you miss social media, if so what aspects?**
   At first I did miss social media. After about a week or so I didn’t have an itch to go on my phone and scroll but I did miss certain things about social media. One in particular was when I wanted to show someone a person or search a person up, i wasn’t able to and at times that was frustrating.

4. **Did this make you reconsider how reliant you were on social media/ how much of your day it consumed?**
   Yes, I went from being on my phone for hours just scrolling through pictures to not using my phone all that often and it was a complete eye opener! I am no long reliant on social media as I was one month ago.

5. **Tell me about your experience, what you realized, what you liked/disliked, how you felt during hiatus?**
I am currently abroad in Barcelona and disconnecting myself from social media has helped me with my experiences and memories abroad. I have been able to be more present in conversation, I have met friends that I don’t think I would have due to social media, and I have enjoyed my time this past month more so than the first month I spent abroad WITH social media. That being said, I will use social media much less and I will not download the apps on my phone rather use them on my computer so it lowers my time scrolling on social media.

6. **Lastly do you think society would be better off without social media? Please elaborate.**
I think Social media is a great platform for creators and businesses but I do think that society would be better off without social media. People think that just because they are behind a screen they are able to say or do whatever they want and they are not their true selves. Also, social media is, in my mind, a drug. It is addicting and this affects a lot of people that I know.

**Response 3**

1. **Did you last the full month?**
Yes I lasted the full month.

2. **Did you enjoy your time off social media? Why/why not?**
I did enjoy my time off. It was one less distraction to have and I felt that I was not on my phone as much when I was out. I didn't feel the need to post everything I was doing so I felt that I was in the moment more.

3. **Did you miss social media, if so what aspects?**
I missed keeping in touch with my friends through social media. I felt that I was missing out on some of what they were doing.

4. **Did this make you reconsider how reliant you were on social media/ how much of your
day it consumed?
It did make me want to place a limit on the amount of social media I use each day. I have been
not looking at my phone while I am out since I have returned.

5. Tell me about your experience, what you realized, what you liked/disliked, how you felt
during hiatus?
I realized that I post more stuff then I need to while on social media and that I end up scrolling
through social media for way longer than I need to. I liked not being on my phone as much. The
first few days were weird without it but then I adjusted and then I did not feel like I missed it at
All.

6. Lastly do you think society would be better off without social media? Please elaborate.
I think people would be in the moment more and not care what other people thought. I don't
particularly care about likes but I know some people do so I think a time limit would be great for
people.

Response 4

1. Did you last the full month?
Technically no, I looked at Instagram on my friends phones.

2. Did you enjoy your time off social media? Why/why not?
Yes, I plan on not re-downloading Instagram. I realized how much time I wasted on Instagram,
really unhealthy.

3. Did you miss social media, if so what aspects?
I missed connecting with some friends. Ex: sending post via DM and getting a good laugh
4. Did this make you reconsider how reliant you were on social media/ how much of your day it consumed?
Yes, like I said above, Instagram truly consumed most of my free time. I feel as though whenever I was on my phone I was on Instagram.

5. Tell me about your experience, what you realized, what you liked/disliked, how you felt during hiatus?
I realized I waste so much time on social media. I think this made me realize I was addicted to social media (Instagram)

6. Lastly do you think society would be better off without social media? Please elaborate.
100%. People don't realize how much time they waste on social media. Instagram, is a fake world that people get sucked into. I realize social media generates a massive revenue stream and "influencers" make a good living but the successful influencers are a very small percentage. I don't think kids should grow up being inspired by influencers on Instagram. Everyone on Instagram is trying to impress people that don't matter or care about them. People should pick their heads up and enjoy what is real in life.

Response 5

1. Did you last the full month?
Yes, I did last the full month.

2. Did you enjoy your time off social media? Why/why not?
I did enjoy my time off social media, and knowing that I could stop using it whenever I wanted to was an empowering feeling.

3. Did you miss social media, if so what aspects?
I missed social media in the sense of being a time killer. I mostly use Instagram and other social media platforms out of boredom, and to fill gaps where I have nothing
else going on.

4. Did this make you reconsider how reliant you were on social media/ how much of your day it consumed?
It definitely made me realize how much of my day it consumed, as my screen time was down a significant amount, but I was never really too tempted to go back on, so I do not believe I am too reliant on it.

5. Tell me about your experience, what you realized, what you liked/disliked, how you felt during hiatus?
Overall I had a good experience. Whenever it was brought up in conversation with other people I felt good knowing that I could be off of it, because they themselves said they do not think they could do it. I enjoyed finding out that I do not rely on it, nor need social media as much as I anticipated I would prior to the month absence. What I did dislike though was the moments when I would normally use social media, such as sitting watching TV bored, I had nothing to fill the commercial time with.

6. Lastly do you think society would be better off without social media?
Yes, and no. I believe when used correctly, social media can be an excellent way to network, meet new people, and share events from your life with people you care about. On the other hand, though, in this day and age, those aspects are not what drives people to use social media. I believe it has become a popularity contest, that can either have people feeling a sense of entitlement if they are well received on social media, or I believe it can be extremely harmful to those who may not be as well received. Social media allows people to hide behind the phone and judge and bully people with little to no repercussions. All in all, social media can be a helpful tool, but also very dangerous and self-harming if not used correctly.
Response 6

1. Did you last the full month?
Yes.

2. Did you enjoy your time off social media? Why/why not?
Yes. Before deleting my social media apps, I constantly found myself opening them up on my phone and mindlessly scrolling through pages out of boredom or habit. After the first few days off of social media, not only did I find I was spending less time looking at news feeds on my phone, but I was using the device much less altogether. Becoming less dependent on my phone and checking continues to make me feel great and like I am more aware of the things happening in front of me instead of on a screen.

3. Did you miss social media, if so what aspects?
No. Overall, I did not miss social media and plan to stay off of it for longer than just a month. There were certain moments that I would have liked to share things with my social media network, as I am connected with many friends and family that I don’t see or talk to on a regular basis. One example of this is that my family got a new puppy within the past month, and sharing her with the world via social media is something I would have liked to have done. I could not, though, because social media platforms were not available to me at the time that we got her.

4. Did this make you reconsider how reliant you were on social media/ how much of your day it consumed?
Yes. My screen time dropped dramatically once I stopped using social media on my phone. I was shocked to learn that I spent hours on social media apps, and am happy that I now have gotten some of that time back during my days.

5. Tell me about your experience, what you realized, what you liked/disliked, how you felt
during hiatus?
To summarize the details already provided in responses to earlier questions, my time off of social media was a highly pleasurable experience. I felt little to no anxiety or fear of being out of the loop by being detached from the social media world. There were a few instances where I thought it would have been nice to have it, but overall I am happier without it as an Individual.

6. Lastly do you think society would be better off without social media? Please elaborate.
No and yes. At its base, I think social media serves its purpose of bringing people around the world together despite physical distance. The social media universe is full of great communities and educational materials that help people with similar interests, passions and backgrounds connect with one another. Secondarily, social media has blossomed into a powerful tool for many entrepreneurs and businesses, allowing them to reach new markets and demographics that previous methods may not have allowed them to.
Both of those things kept in mind, many individual users allow themselves to obsess over social media and portraying certain versions of themselves that are not accurate to who they really are to their followers. The dependency on verification from external sources as opposed to internal sources, such as someone basing their worth on how many Instagram likes they get instead of how they feel about themselves, could be highly volatile.

Response 7

1. Did you last the full month?
Yes

2. Did you enjoy your time off social media? Why/why not?
Yes. I personally enjoyed not feeling the need to check social media and see what was
happening around me/ what everyone was posting and talking about.

3. Did you miss social media, if so what aspects?
Nope

4. Did this make you reconsider how reliant you were on social media/ how much of your day it consumed?
Yes, I never was super active posting on all platforms of social media however I did use them as a distraction to just “scroll” and procrastinate work or keep myself busy. I think it definitely showed me how often I would go on social media and how much of my day it consumed, especially when it was like second nature for me to open my phone and click where the Instagram app would be during this experiment, even though nothing was there.

5. Tell me about your experience, what you realized, what you liked/disliked, how your felt during hiatus?
Overall I really enjoyed being off social media. It really allowed me to focus more on myself and not compare myself to other people which was something I would always do. Although I found myself still on my phone perhaps just as much or slightly less, I was doing more productive things such as expanding my LinkedIn networking, applying for jobs, and watching videos or reading articles about hobbies of mine. In terms of what I disliked, there really wasn’t much! Other than missing people’s birthdays or events from Facebook’s reminders, there really isn’t anything major that I missed or particularly wasn’t a fan of.

6. Lastly do you think society would be better off without social media? Please elaborate.
I definitely think society would be better off without social media. We as humans are on our mobile devices constantly always looking for the newest trend or most recent post. We crave attention and approval from others for who we are, before we even approve of ourselves. We get so lost in social media and posting about who we aren’t or what we don’t have, that we
almost forget who we actually are. It has led to people becoming socially anxious or uncomfortable and is a true source to our overall unhappiness with ourselves that we don’t even notice.