

EDITORS JOURNAL

Why I Don't Regret Quitting Social Media

5 MINUTE READ



By Claudia Cole

Here are some small facts about me. It's been over a decade since I first joined Facebook and eight years since I downloaded the [Instagram](#) app. Yet, it's been almost three years since I've quit both. My Twitter account has cobwebs, and I have never used TikTok. That may sound mind-boggling coming from a 24-year-old, I know. Here's why I quit social media.

Back in the good ol' days, social media apps weren't as they are today. Facebook was your own space to connect and socialise. Twitter was a place for news updates and opinions. But in 2013, a new social media app had my peers captivated with their phones. Instagram. In just three years after its launch, the app took the world by storm. It quickly became another essential part of modern life in addition to the other social media apps.

At that time, Instagram wasn't filled with influencers, sponsored posts and distorted selfies. Instead, it was a time of innocence. From oversaturated pictures of sunsets to posting a random photo of a half-eaten jar of Nutella, there were no rules. We posted what we liked when we liked. In many ways, social media enriched our lives through the power of connection and inspiration.

However, the fun of it only made it harder to acknowledge its addicting nature. The more these



Just like my peers, I had unknowingly become reliant on these platforms throughout my teenage years. I couldn't see it then, but like everything in life, with excessive use come problems.

But how can something so seemingly harmless become an issue? Well, as some of you may remember, social media has changed a lot over the years. The thing is, so have we and the way we use it.

When The Fun Stopped

Fast forward to 2018, at the age of 21, my mental health took a turn for the worse.

I was already under tremendous stress, being a third-year student at university. However, in the midst of trying to finish my degree, my overall happiness came to an all-time low. I had developed severe anxiety, suffering from multiple panic attacks each day. Despite being on anti-depressants, I couldn't shake off the constant feeling of despair.

I distracted myself in the best way I knew how by indulging in social media. By that point, mindlessly scrolling through my feeds had indeed become a compulsive habit as it was for many others too.

It's been found that people in the UK now spend more time on their phone than they do asleep, with an average of eight hours a day. 50.1% of that time is spent using social media. Studies have shown a rapid increase in users over the last decade, with 63% of the world population using social media. That's a staggering 3.81 billion people.

Along with the rest of the nation, I'd reach for my phone first thing in the morning, and it would be the last thing I use at night. This fuelled my insomnia disorder as well as my low mood. The scrolling could last for hours, especially when I was at my lowest, constantly switching between apps.



PHOTO BY COTTONBRO

I found myself becoming increasingly distressed, crumbling beneath a great weight of hopelessness. My mind continually pondered over how I could better myself. I couldn't shift this sense of dissatisfaction, especially when moseying through Facebook or Instagram.

It was evident that social media was negatively affecting my mental health. Despite that, I couldn't stop

scrolling.

Why?

As therapist and author Hope Kelaher explains:

“The impact that social media has on our brain's reward system causes many people to fall into a vicious cycle of clicking and repeating.”

Social media interactions, such as notifications, excite the brain and produce a ‘feel-good’ chemical called dopamine. This is a chemical often experienced after exercise, intimacy, food and any other positive interactions. Therefore, we're tempted to repeat the activity so that we can experience the rewarding feeling.

“The consequence here is when there are no new likes on your post, you don't get that dopamine (the happy hormone hit), which makes you feel worse,” says Kelaher.

And that's exactly what happened. On the day of my 22nd birthday, I had a breakdown. I had been in the middle of logging into my Facebook account, noticing the lack of birthday wishes on my profile page that year. It had never mattered before, but I was instantly filled with rejection and came to the unsettling conclusion that I didn't matter. With that, I broke down crying.



PHOTO BY SORA SHIMAZAKI

For years, my self-worth had been gradually measured through my social media interactions. This left me in fear of not being good enough, of being judged. I couldn't deal with the pressure any longer.

So, I deleted the Facebook and Instagram apps. And in time, I abandoned my Twitter account too.

The Result

The first few weeks were hard. I felt a sense of loss, having been used to checking my phone every ten minutes. I also began experiencing ‘FOMO’, *otherwise known* as the fear of missing out.

It's no surprise that FOMO is among the biggest causes of social media addictions. Like many, I experienced the irrational belief that I was somehow missing out as if I was cut off from the entire world. I didn't realise how heavily invested I was in the lives of celebrities or my former classmates.

This level of interest made it easy to compare their lives to mine, often making me feel inferior.

Aside from the FOMO, my other fears were surprisingly beginning to subside. With the apps gone, I didn't have a reason to worry about what my fellow followers thought about me.

It was liberating!

I was freed from those unnecessary desires and the unrealistic expectations I had built based on the lives of others.

No longer overwhelmed, I was able to put everything into perspective. My Facebook friend's success is not my failure. Filtered Instagram pictures aren't a reflection of what I 'should' look like. Twitter opinions aren't always valid. Most importantly, social media made me unhappy. Since then, I haven't looked back.



So, What Has Leaving Social Media Taught Me?

Reality isn't overrated

Disconnecting from social media allowed me to reconnect with the ones I love in a more meaningful way. Social media is not our only way of staying connected. If anything, I became more connected to the present, not feeling pressured to broadcast every single aspect of my life. I wasn't missing out on anything as I had feared, far from it. I've done more than indulge in life's dose of joyful moments.

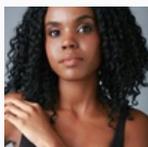
Ease Up On the Snaps

Using a camera lens isn't the only way to capture beautiful moments. Sometimes, just simply being present and embracing that moment can be just as rewarding. Taking a photo and sharing it on our platforms is merely a bonus. However, it's no longer my aim.

My Happiness Comes First

Social media has become an essential part of modern life, but that doesn't mean it has to continue being a part of mine, especially if it makes me unhappy. My soul deserves self-love.

But, who knows, maybe I'll return to those platforms in time. However, as of right now, I'm much more content without them.



Claudia Cole

Claudia is a lifestyle writer from London. While she's an enthusiast for books and all things screen related, she is passionate about sustainable living and mental health & wellbeing