

Is Facebook RUINING your friendships?

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Is Facebook RUINING your friendships? Sara Cox investigates how social media really affects relationships - and finds going online can be as addictive as Class A drugs

- Radio 2 DJ Sara Cox has deliberately avoided being on [Facebook](#) for years
- New documentary delves into how social media affects relationships
- Psychotherapist Simon Jacobs says using social media can be addictive
- Experts want people shouldn't mistake online friendship for the real deal
- Cox admits experiment did see her enjoying some aspects of Facebook

By [Lucy Waterlow for MailOnline](#)

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She has thousands of followers on her Twitter and Instagram accounts where she shares details of her career but, until recently, Radio 2 DJ Sara Cox was not on [Facebook](#).

The 41-year-old mother-of-three admitted she didn't see the point of interacting with close friends online.

However, while filming a new social media documentary for UKTV channel W, Cox decided to delve into the world of Facebook, with experts following her interactions.



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Face-to-face: Sara Cox, pictured second from right with her closest friends, said she would rather chat with them in person than be friends with them on Facebook



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Sara had her brain scanned by neuroscientist Dr Joanne Powell, left, who found she 'lit up' when she saw pictures of her friends. Sara said people could get a 'hit' like this by seeing pictures of friends on Facebook

Cox says she was keen to find out why so many have embraced social media friendships and questions whether it is actually enhancing their relationships.

She said: 'I do Twitter and use Instagram for fun but I am not on Facebook. That's because I think friendship should be face-to-face, laughter, contact and fun.'

'I am happy with the friends I have got and have no reason to collect anymore online.'

But with more than one billion people around the world with Facebook accounts, a quarter of whom have more than 500 friends, Sara appears to be in the minority.

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At Liverpool University, she agreed to try a 'friendship test', which involved having an MRI scan to find out what happens to her brain when she sees pictures of her nearest and dearest.

While her brain is being scanned, Cox is shown 60 black and white photos including some of her friends and some of total strangers.



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Sara met up with friends she went to school with during the documentary and said keeping in touch with them was one benefit of joining Facebook after she has spent years avoiding it. Neuroscientist Dr Joanne Powell analysed the results and told Sarah there was a distinct reaction in Sarah's brain when she saw her friends.

She told her: 'What is unique is what happens in the brain when you are processing your closest friends, you activated parts of the brain that process emotion and long term memory in the cerebral cortex. It shows your friends really are lighting up your brain.'

Sara said she felt 'touched that my brain lights up on seeing my best friends' and wondered whether this was why social media was so popular.

She said: 'You go on Facebook and look at your friends and feel happier that you have seen them.'

But she learnt getting a 'hit' in this way can be detrimental as it can lead to addiction.



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Sara interviewed psychotherapist Simon Jacobs who treats people for addicted to Facebook



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Simon said the feeling people can get from using Facebook is similar to the hit from Class A drugs but they need to remember they are not connecting with friends in a truly meaningful way

During the show, teenager Mary Stringer admits that she became addicted to Facebook when she started a new secondary school and didn't have anyone to talk to during her lunch hour.

As she felt isolated, she went online instead and soon couldn't stop constantly uploading her Facebook newsfeed to check on her online friends.

She explained her addiction: 'I define an addict as anyone who is dependent on something. I would be compulsively checking Facebook and if I couldn't I would feel quite stressed.

'I would deactivate my account but then a few days later activate it again.'

While Mary has admitted she has a problem and now sought help, she is far from unique in feeling glued to her phone.

Teenagers are the biggest users of mobile phones in the UK but on average Brits check their phones 35 times a day.



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Sara said: 'I guess what I have learnt is social media can play a part in friendships. But there is nothing better than being in the same room as your friends to make you feel whole'

Mary has been having therapy with psychotherapist Simon Jacobs who treats people for clinical addiction to social media.

He told Sara excessive use of social media is detrimental if people rely on it too much to found their friendships - particularly if they favour it over interaction in the real world.

He said: 'There is a real problem with using Facebook and not actually having interaction with people.

'We need to see a person and have that consequential feedback and how we are impacting on them.'

He added that liking messages and sharing pictures 'creates a virtual world where you believe you are getting that interaction but you are not, you are not getting what it is like to be in the room with someone.'

He said people can become addicted to social media in the same way that they can become dependent on Class A drugs.

'With a Facebook addiction, you are doing something that in your estimation is going to make you feel part of the group, and like you belong and are valued, so you get a little hit from that,' he explained.

'It is the same sort of hit you get from a Class A drug, it may not be as extreme but the same process is happening, the same dopamine release.'

Dopamine is a hormone that helps control pleasure and Sara was alarmed to hear using social media can affect the level of it in the brain in a similar way to banned substances.

She said: 'It is interesting that something so socially acceptable is potentially so dangerous.'

To test how addicted some young people are, Sara challenged a group of 17-year-olds to see if they could cope without their mobile phones for a week.

Before the challenge, they admitted they were never bored thanks to their phones and would waste hours watching videos and scrolling through pictures.

Daisy told Sara: 'I can't deal with thinking my own thoughts, I check online what other people are doing, so you can't be bored anymore as you are so easily entertained.'

Daisy also confessed that she was guilty of creating an online persona that wasn't entirely accurate.

She said: 'My Instagram person isn't really me, she is more polished and a lot cooler than I am.'



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Professor Michael Boulton said online friendships can be 'good for the soul' but are no substitute for interaction in the real world when it comes to feeling satisfied



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Omnipotent: There are more than one billion people around the world with Facebook accounts, a quarter of whom have more than 500 friends

After a week without their mobiles, the teens admitted they found the experience 'stressful' and 'isolating'. They found it difficult knowing how to meet one another and struggled trying to get in touch with friends via landlines and without having their numbers in their mobile address book.

They said they also couldn't shake the feeling that they were 'missing out' because they couldn't check what their friends were up to online.

However, on the plus side, they said being without their mobiles meant they had more time to be creative and to exercise.

The teens said they enjoyed communicating with their friends online and it never made them feel alone, something Sara acknowledged could be a benefit to social networking.

The Bolton-born model was also impressed by how she could catch up with old school friends via Facebook after opening her account and admitted it can make people more connected with their past.

She concluded: 'I guess what I have learnt is social media can play a part in friendships. But there is nothing better than being in the same room as your friends to make you feel whole.'

Professor Michael Boulton, a child psychologist at Chester University researching friendship in young children, agreed that online friendships have their uses but are no substitute for real human interaction.

He said: 'Like real world friendships, online friendships can be good for the soul. Any kind of friendship is potentially very satisfying for us and as it helps us develop our different points of view and ability to cooperate.'

'But if we gave children the opportunity to only operate online they wouldn't be happy, their lives would be less rich and satisfying.'

Sara Cox On Friendship is on W Monday 15 February at 9pm

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[Patrick Bishop](#), Florida, United States, 8 minutes ago

Anyone of voting age who uses Facebook is foolish and unaware they're feeding hardcore leftist liberals who sell out your privacy to the highest bidder, who analyze your behavior seeking ways to control your reaction to subjects 'they' are concerned with. Did you know collections agencies and the IRS use Facebook? Anyone who loves their liberty, and what's left of our Constitutional protections, are advised to run away as fast as you can!

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[nomotime](#), hazelwood, United States, 9 minutes ago

social media will be responsible for the creation of 20 new ' diseases' which will need treatment.....like everything else america does, go way too far..

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[countryhasgonemad](#), ch
ester, United Kingdom, 22 minutes ago

Just think it is a total waste of time. Don't get it at all.

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[Churchilled](#), Stoke On Trent, United Kingdom, 41 minutes ago

I've seen Facebook get ppl in trouble at work and it annoys me how everybody talks like you not on Facebook? Like I'm not normal or something. Got shut of the last relationship I was in because she was constantly glued to her phone uploading pictures of me to the world, which I felt were private. Checking in everywhere telling the world where we are. I'd love meet a new woman that isn't on Facebook but in the day and age. I think it's impossible.

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[MoreOfTheSame](#), Los Matadores, United States, 49 minutes ago

FaceBook = Lazy Perpetuation of Narcissism. Lookie Me, Lookie Loo! But, I have 1, 245,000,000,000 Friends = Right! I have a London Bridge in Lake Havasu I'll sell you!

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[jacknichols5](#), sacramento, 10 minutes ago

How much for the bridge?

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[Erin](#), Woodland Hills, United States, 52 minutes ago

FAKEBOOK! Get of of it!! RUN!!!!

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[JeepmanJR](#), Southwest, United States, 53 minutes ago

Social media is the scourge of the Internet.

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[Jackstraw](#), Wpb, 1 hour ago

Proud of myself for never falling into the "social media" trap. Never had fb, Twitter, Instagram,, or whatever non social sites out there.

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[Naturally Natasha](#), Nottingham, United Kingdom, 1 hour ago

Everything on FB is an illusion. Deleted it 7 years ago after seeing it for what it was.

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[Margo](#), Tyne And Wear, 1 hour ago

Never a truer word said..

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