

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Society's New Addiction: Getting a "Like" over Having a Life

New research shows obsession with posting photos, checking phones corresponds with lower enjoyment.

A mother of a 3-year old writes: "I disciplined my son and he threw a tantrum that I thought was so funny that I disciplined him again just so I could video it. After uploading it on Instagram I thought, 'What did I just do?'"

A new study by Joseph Grenny and David Maxfield, co-authors of four New York Times bestsellers, reveals that more and more of us are losing connection with our lives in order to earn "likes" and social media praise. We have, in a sense, turned into social media "trophy hunters." According to the study, 58 percent of respondents say posting that perfect picture has prevented them from enjoying life experiences—and has sometimes even caused them to behave in bizarre or immoral ways. One in four have even allowed their smartphone to distract during "intimate" moments.

What's more, the online survey of 1,623 people revealed that this obsession with social media interactions and trophy hunting isn't just distracting—it's dictating lives. Consider:

Nearly 3 out of 4 people admit to being rude or disconnected from others because they're more focused on their phone than on the other person

91 percent have seen a tourist miss enjoyment in the moment trying to get it on social media—and many acknowledge doing the same thing themselves.

79 percent have seen a parent undermine their own experience in a child's life in an effort to capture the perfect post

14 percent have risked their own safety to try and get a good posting

Many cited increased unhappiness due to:

Not spending time listening to or being present with people they cared about: "Trying to capture and post my daughter's dance event, I completely missed it. She asked me, 'did you see me?' and I really didn't. It was awful."

Reckless behavior while driving: "I was severely disappointed in myself every time I couldn't ignore the urge to pick up the phone in the car. Thank goodness nothing bad happened."

Embarrassing moments taking 'selfies': "I've seen people dodging cars, tourists and pedestrians to get a quick selfie in the midst of busy Hollywood Blvd. — only to yell out "Noooo" on the curb when they realized it didn't turn out."

Posting something online they otherwise normally wouldn't have said.

"The key to what we've found is that we enjoy these moments less when we're focused on capturing rather than experiencing," said Joseph Grenny, co-author of the study. "'Likes' are a low-effort way of producing a feeling of social well-being that takes more effort to get in the real world. This study is a warning that we are beginning to take the easy over the real."

David Maxfield adds, "If our attention is on an invisible audience rather than the present moment, we become understandably disconnected from the moment. This study is a caution that our devices are beginning to control our attention in ways we may not even realize."

Grenny and Maxfield offer some tips for helping work through social media addictions:

Look at yourself. Before you go to great effort to take a picture, stop and ask, "What would a reasonable third party think of me if they saw what I was doing?" It's easy to do risky or inappropriate things when caught up in the heat of the moment. Reflecting from an outsider's perspective can help you stay morally centered.

Limit your postings. The best way to overcome unconscious intrusion into life is to become conscious of it. Keep track of—and limit—how many things you post. If you're posting more than once a day, you've probably got a problem. Most people appreciate your postings more if they come once or twice a week rather than daily—or more. If you cut off the demand you'll naturally reduce the supply you create.

Snap, look and listen. Watch others in inspiring places and you'll see that far too often once they've snapped the picture, they turn and leave. Don't do that. Go ahead and take the picture. But then fight the impulse to "call it good." Slow down. Breathe. Look around. Listen — engage your senses and enjoy the experience not just the trophy.

Take a vacation from your device. Spend a day, an evening, or even an hour with some physical distance from your devices. If it makes you feel anxious, you'll know you're on the right track. If you fight through

the initial discomfort, you'll learn to be present and connected to your immediate environment in a way that will produce a bump in happiness and enjoyment.

Stories and Confessions from “Social Media Trophy Hunters”:

- I know a woman who while becoming intimate with her partner stopped to check a message she was expecting. She looked at her smartphone, then took the call. The man was so upset that their love life took a tumble. The relationship has not recovered.
- My friend is depressed and unhappy with his living situation – but posts on Twitter and Facebook all of these amazing photos and status updates. People say he has such an amazing life but I know he doesn't feel that way at all.
- While at a fancy restaurant with my adult son, to my dismay he was playing with his phone under the table instead of visiting with me. I asked him many times to leave his phone alone but that didn't stop him. While he was distracted, I got out my phone and under the table texted him: “STOP PLAYING WITH YOUR PHONE!” We had a nice dinner after that.
- I took my sister to a boy band concert. We got so close to the stage I was able to take some great pictures of the band. Afterwards my sister said one of the band members had come up to her and said “hi,” and I had completely missed it!
- While my 2-year old nephew was having a grand time tearing off wrapping paper to play with each of his new toy cars, his parents made him move to the next one “so we can post it for the family.” My nephew got so frustrated he left the room crying. His parents blamed each other for his “difficult behavior.” It was CRAZY!!!
- When I propped my 3-month-old son up on our dog to capture a cute photo, the dog moved and my son banged his head on the ground and cried. I felt horrible.
- While on maternity leave I used my smartphone to look at Facebook while nursing my newborn son. I wish I'd have paid more attention to him during those moments, because I know he was looking at me while I was looking at my phone.
- A guy ran in front of a tornado in order to get a selfie.
- My out-of-state son came home for a funeral. He had taken a picture with his best friend and shared it with me, and I posted it on Facebook. Immediately he called, upset because he had to use a sick day for the funeral and didn't want anyone to know he was home for an extended weekend. I quickly had to go on Facebook and delete the picture.
- I stay up too late—have to keep looking to “stay connected.” Lately I have been bothered by the false sense of connection when a real conversation is what I really want.

- Missed a grandchild's first steps while trying to get to the social media page.
- Absorbed in what was happening on Facebook and not being there in the moment with an elderly parent who has since passed away.
- While raising my son I checked email and texts during family time. I lost him last year and wish for even those few minutes I could have had with him.
- Got attacked by a rooster when I was trying to get a close-up photo of his head.
- This is kind of gross—one time I almost forgot to wipe after using the restroom.
- I know that to gain followers a time or two, I have tried to be edgy. It doesn't work and it strains relationships.

Study Methodology:

VitalSmarts conducted an online survey in February 2015 of 1,623 people.

The main dependent variable of the survey was the Subjective Happiness Scale (<http://sonjalyubomirsky.com/subjective-happiness-scale-shs/>).

The survey was designed to find out if the way people use social media—and especially whether they are social media trophy hunters—was related to their subjective happiness. It is!

The research team created scales for Subjective Happiness, Being a Social Media Trophy Hunter, Number of Social Media Friends, Frequency of Checking Social Media, and Seeing Other Social Media Trophy Hunters. Each of these scales has an acceptable Cronbach's alpha reliability score.

Results:

Social Media Trophy Hunters:

- Have More Friends $r = .274$
- Check their Social Media More Often $r = .396$
- More likely to see other Social Media Trophy Hunters $r = .283$
- But Are Less Happy $r = -.155$ (a small but significant correlation).

Happier People:

- Check their Social Media Less Often $r = -.064$ (a small, but significant correlation).
- Are Less Likely to be Social Media Trophy Hunters $r = -.155$ (a small but significant correlation).

About VitalSmarts. Named one of the Top 20 Leadership Training Companies, VitalSmarts is home to the award-winning Crucial Conversations, Crucial Accountability, Influencer, and Change Anything Training and *New York Times* bestselling books of the same titles. When used in combination, these courses enable organizations to achieve new levels of performance by changing employee behavior. VitalSmarts has consulted with more than 300 of the Fortune 500 companies and trained more