Are 'Likes' dominating your life?

A study, facilitated by VitalSmarts, shows that an increasing amount of people are losing connection with their lives in order to earn 'Likes' and social media praise.

Social media increasingly infiltrates all aspects of our lives, says Helene Vermaak, Director at The Human Edge. She says that society's obsession with posting photos and status updates corresponds with a marked decrease in enjoyment of life experiences. The Human Edge is an authority on the various impacts on the organisational culture and the African partner of training company VitalSmarts.

Image via 123RF

"In a sense, we have turned into social media 'trophy hunters' and as a result we're allowing real life to pass us by."

In the study, 58% 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 inappropriate ways. The online survey of 1,623 people reveals that an obsession with social media interactions and trophy hunting is not just distracting, it is dictating much of their lives.

Other findings

- Nearly three out of four people admit to being rude or disconnected from others because they are more focussed on their phone
- 79% have seen a parent undermine their own experience in a child's life in an effort to capture the perfect post

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

The study also showed that many respondents cited increased unhappiness and guilt due to:

• Not spending time listening to or being present with people they cared about
• Reckless behaviour while driving
• Embarrassing moments taking 'selfies'

• Posting a comment online they otherwise normally wouldn't have said

Vermaak says that the sad reality is that research has found that we enjoy important life moments less when we are focussed on capturing them rather than experiencing them. "It takes minimal effort to produce a 'Like' and this creates a fake feeling of social well-being that would be more difficult to achieve in the real world."

Working through social media addiction

• **Look at yourself**. Before going 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 is easy to do risky or inappropriate things when caught up in the moment. Reflecting from an outsider's perspective can help you stay more true to yourself.
• **Limit your updates**. The best way to stop unconsciously intruding in your life is to become conscious of it. Keep track of-and limit-how many things you post. If you post more than once a day, you probably have a problem. Most people appreciate your updates more if they come once or twice a week rather than daily-or more.
• **Snap, look and listen**. Far too often, once we snap a picture in an inspiring place, we turn and leave. Engage your senses and enjoy the experience not just the trophy.

• **Take a break from your device**. Spend a day, evening, or even an hour with some physical distance from your devices. If you feel anxious, you are on the right track. Once you fight through the initial discomfort, you will learn to be present and connected to your immediate environment in a way that will produce genuine happiness and enjoyment.

"The overarching revelation in this study is that we are beginning to value virtual hits over authentic happiness. We are disconnected from our real lives and our emotions and attention are controlled by our devices, in ways that we don't even realise," concludes Vermaak.

Download the full report here and view the infographic here.