



Is Facebook

Why are so many users turning off the world's largest social network?



For two years – the first thing in the morning and the last thing at night – Kristen, 22, logged on to Facebook. “I was an addict,” she admits. With 300 Facebook friends, “it became never-ending. You keep checking and checking, and you waste hours. You’ve done nothing else all day – you’re just looking at what other people on Facebook are doing.”

Kristen is – or *was* – one of too many Facebook addicts. Launched in 2004 by a Harvard University dropout, it’s now the world’s largest social networking site – with 250 million users. And many fans love the fun of scoring friends and sharing personal stories and photos. But last spring Kristen abandoned the site – or in Facebook lingo* ‘committed suicide’¹. “I was so distracted I couldn’t study for my university exams. I felt I’d lost all privacy.”

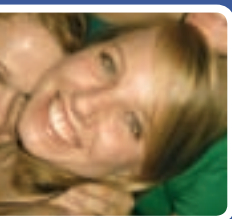
Again, Kristen is not alone. As more new users log on to Facebook each day, more users are turning off: “My girlfriend dumped me on

Facebook while we were travelling in Central America,” says Oli, 25. “The most personal event in my life was suddenly broadcast to everyone I know. I decided right then to ‘fall off the face’ of Facebook.”

Being dumped in public, rivalry over how many friends you can make, even seeing your parents online – these are some of the reasons why many who fell in love with Facebook at first sight have walked away. “Social networking is becoming more popular with older age groups,” says a new report this year. “And the use of these sites by young adults has peaked. They are starting to flee.”

So read on for more about Kristen and Oli’s views, and why millions of young people now view Facebook as ‘Fake-book’.

“I was an addict ...”





'Fake-book'?

Are you a fan?

- Are you on Facebook? Why or why not?
- Do you think online social networks are a good way to make real friends?
- Do people present their true selves on these sites – or do they seem fake?



Kristen: "There's real competition to have the most friends."



In April 2007, a friend of mine told me, 'Oh Facebook is so great, it's better than any other networking site.' So I decided, 'Yeah, why not join?' I got hooked quickly. I was an addict. I *had* to check it after I just woke up and had breakfast. I had friends from all over the world in different time zones, so I knew there was activity all night. I used it to poke friends or write on each other's walls.

"It took up too much time, and I wasted hours on it."

I would just accept anyone I knew who asked me to be a friend. In the beginning it's fun to add more and more friends, because you start out with 10 and the more you add the more interesting it gets. I was active on Facebook and always positive about it.

But there's real competition to have the most friends – and that got to be boring. And some people share all their private feelings – I never did that.

"Even though I felt a loss of control, I couldn't stop logging on."

I also didn't want people tagging me on photos all the time. I'd remove the ones I didn't think looked that good. It bothers me that once you're not on Facebook anymore, your photos are still there for anyone to see. Even though I felt a loss of control, I couldn't stop logging on. It took up too much time, and I wasted hours on it.

Last spring I quit Facebook. I was too distracted to study for my exams. I needed peace. Now I love my privacy. I wouldn't go back on Facebook – it's so much better not to be on it.



facebook

How it works

- You create your own page: you can write a profile and post photos or videos – you can 'update your status' by changing your profile and saying what you are doing
- You 'request' or 'accept' others to be 'friends'
- You use applications – like 'poking' and 'throwing a sheep' – to contact people
- You quit by sending Facebook friends a goodbye message, deleting your 'friends' list, and all photos and groups





Oli: “Everyone is trying to look so cool in their photos – it’s so fake.”

“ Last year I went travelling with my girlfriend. She dumped me in Costa Rica and the whole world knew about it. Why? Because I was on Facebook. She put the ‘broken heart’ icon next to my name and the words ‘Oli Mills’ relationship is over.’ The most personal event in my life had suddenly been broadcast to everyone I know. I decided to leave Facebook.

“Facebook has taken the mystery out of life!”

When I got back home I saw my friend Gemma. She was just married, but I already knew that through Facebook. I should have been thrilled to hear the news, but I wasn’t. There was no surprise. I want to bump into old friends and not have a clue what they’ve been doing. I want to genuinely

congratulate them on finishing university, or be excited to hear about their new job. Facebook has taken the mystery out of life. It lets you snoop into people’s lives through personal profiles and photos. Everyone is trying to look so cool in their photos – and it’s so fake. Everyone wants you to think they’re having a great time and are so happy. Ridiculous.

Many ‘friends’ on Facebook aren’t really friends: they’re people I’ve met through other people for five minutes at a party. I walked past one of them in the street the other day and he ignored me. By having them as ‘friends’, I’ve given them access to my life, my photos, my feelings and my thoughts, my ups and my downs. No one forced me to join Facebook. I created this monster so I did the only thing left to do. I killed it.



facebook

Freak outs & fantasies



Alex Hill

■ British student Alex Hill, 21, was fined for bad behaviour at Oxford University: the staff saw her Facebook photos in which classmates covered her with shaving cream after exams – a tradition called ‘trashings’. “It’s truly bizarre that they’re paying university staff to go through Facebook,” she says.

■ American Kelly Hildebrandt, 20, from Florida, came across a male Kelly Hildebrandt, 24, from Texas – she had searched her name on Facebook out of curiosity. She contacted him on the site and soon they were in touch every day. They’ve since met and are getting married!

■ British teen office worker Kimberly Swann, 16, was sacked from her job at a marketing firm: she said the job was ‘boring’ on Facebook. “They were so nosy,” Swann says. “It was just a silly comment after a day at work.”

facebook in numbers

- 250 million active users
- 120 million log on at least once every day
- 120 friends – a user’s average number
- 5 billion minutes worldwide spent on the site every day
- 1 billion pieces of content (weblinks, news stories, blog posts, notes, photos, etc.) shared every week

Facebook Talk

Facebook has created a language all of its own. Can you match the terms (red bullets in the article) with their correct meaning?

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1 Update your status | a) place to write messages to friend |
| 2 Tag in a photo | b) change news of what you’re doing |
| 3 Write on a wall | c) link a name to a picture |
| 4 Poke | d) close your account |
| 5 Commit suicide | e) contact a friend |

Answers → Page 23

* WORDWISE

lingo (n): informal language
 to snoop (v): to spy on someone
 access (n): a way in to something
 freak outs (phr, informal): events that are very upsetting



Now go to page 22 for a language activity

