

Is social media stressing you out?



By Eve Menezes Cunningham

I adore social media – initially Twitter, eventually Facebook, now Instagram and YouTube. I post for work and for my personal life. Some IRL (in real life) loved ones laugh at me for spending so much time online but Facebook helped me begin to make friends before I moved from Essex in the UK to Westport on the west coast of the Republic of Ireland. Thanks to the internet and social media, I've had a much easier arrival than I would have done. Connections I made on Facebook helped me find somewhere to rent when I only had nine days to organise everything.

When I went vegan, social media helped me identify delicious accidentally vegan foods and connect with other people. Being a part of online groups for my journalism, yoga, therapy and supervision

work helps me stay informed and find sources for features. Other groups like wild swimming and wildlife gardening appeal but I've not yet maximised being a part of them.

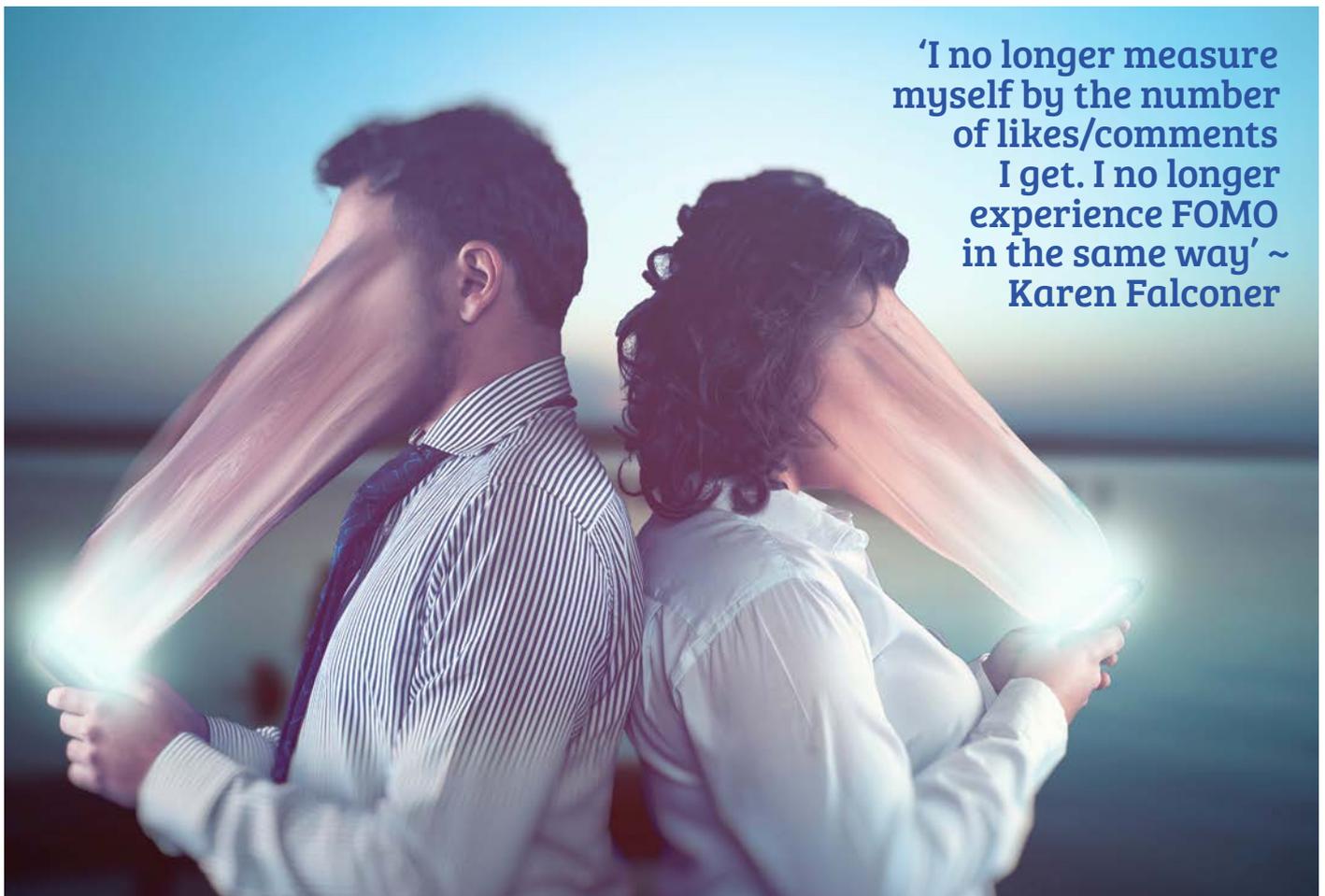
The Messenger app and WhatsApp are essential for staying in touch with loved ones from the UK (and elsewhere) as well as beginning to make new friends here.

Not everyone loves social media as much as I do. Some people use it purely for work. 'I use social media to engage with like-minded people and to inspire others,' says Puja K. McClymont, a mindset coach at Frankly Coaching (www.franklycoaching.com). 'I post a range of videos on common topics, and share quotes and ideas to improve living and mindset. My favourite platforms

are Instagram and YouTube. I only use it for work purposes therefore I only look at it when I need to. I do not have notifications on my phone for social media so I have to choose to click on and see what's happening.'

'I've stopped using social media altogether!' says ANLP's Karen Falconer. 'My blog posts weekly, and the ANLP team post member updates using my profile, but apart from that I don't go on social media anymore.'

'I sometimes feel like I'm missing out because with some things, like choir, a lot of management is done online now via the FB group. I can get to a rehearsal completely oblivious to the fact that there has been a poll for a new song or that an extra rehearsal has been arranged.'



'I no longer measure myself by the number of likes/comments I get. I no longer experience FOMO in the same way' ~ Karen Falconer

But Karen says the benefits outweigh the disadvantages by far. 'I have more time to do things that are important to me. I read more. I don't have to spend hours getting to grips with the latest software updates and privacy settings. I feel I have more choice over how I spend my time and I'm no longer ruled by algorithms and what FB decides I need to know about today.'

Karen's new social media strategy has enhanced her self-esteem, too. 'I'm no longer comparing my life to others (and coming off worse!). I no longer measure myself by the number of likes/comments I get. I no longer experience FOMO in the same way.

'I have better connections with close friends because I now meet up with them in person or on Skype or WhatsApp. I feel I am living my life for me rather than via the voyeuristic goldfish bowl of my online image/profile. I enjoy events more now because I am there, in the moment, rather than spending time notifying the online world that I have arrived, tagging friends

'I enjoy events more now because I am there, in the moment, rather than spending time notifying the online world that I have arrived, tagging friends and posting updates'
~ Karen Falconer

(whom I'm standing next to) and posting updates.

'I gave up social media at the start of the year and to start with, I missed it and felt disconnected. I no longer have an online history/story of what I was doing when and with whom. Some people were a bit upset that I no longer knew what was happening in their lives because I wasn't reading all their updates. I sometimes think, "Oh, I've had my sabbatical, I should get back on there now." And when I think that, I notice a physical response that is less than encouraging. So I'm going with my instincts for now and staying away as I think the benefits are currently outweighing the downsides.' ■



Tailor your own social media strategy

Choose when to switch your devices on and off

The days I start with my meditation, yoga and EFT practices before switching my phones on are almost always better than the (rare) days which I make even more hectic by switching them on immediately. It's lovely to spend that gentle 'first thing in the morning' time connecting with my body and breath and inner wisdom rather than immediately being distracted by external influences.

Have a break

You might find a digital curfew helpful so you don't scroll after a certain time each night, to prepare for sleep. Every year, I have at least one mini digital detox/home silent retreat for 24 hours. These quiet times, even within the first 4 hours, are noticeably nourishing. *And* I love getting back online when my self-imposed 24-hour break is over. As Karen says, pay attention to *your* energy levels around usage.

Use social media consciously

Make it life- and work-enhancing rather than a drain. I'm temporarily telly-less so I watch YouTube interviews with people I find inspirational as I wash up or do admin. What do you *enjoy* using and watching? What makes you despair for humanity? We get to choose where we put our attention.

Choose what you want to share

I share a lot and while this was fine in London and Essex, moving to a small town in Ireland has helped me adapt. When I first moved, I was asked by several people if I was the person 'on

Facebook with the cat/moving to...,' etc. I realised they knew loads about me and I knew absolutely nothing about them. I'm learning to dial it back. A little.

Use your platform – however large or small – to amplify minority voices

It's all very well bemoaning algorithms but we all have the power to share what lifts people up, to educate, inform, heal and inspire. We can be mindful of what we focus on and use these global platforms hopefully to improve the world for everyone.

Choose when to speak out or ignore

Disinhibition is a sometimes negative element of social media and online work in general. Generally, I scroll past any nastiness but I'll often speak up when I worry that others might be hurt by what's being thoughtlessly (or deliberately) said. Even so, this is very rare in my experience. I have met so many delightful souls online and many have become friends; even in terms of reconnecting with old school and uni friends or people from various trainings – I met up with one who was on holiday here last week.

What do you WANT to grab your attention?

We don't need to keep all our notifications on, being distracted every few seconds sometimes. We can stay close to our phones AND keep them on silent (or at least the apps that are more distracting than useful). As with anything, it's about our intention.

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