



## **STAYING SOCIAL OVER THE HOLIDAY SEASON**

Social media can be a good way to stay in contact with family and friends over the holiday season, but it can have some negative effects.

“Almost four out of five Australians used some form of social media during 2018, and Christmas is a popular time to use social media,” AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today.

“Over the Christmas period, Facebook posts and photos increase significantly, and many shoppers use social media as inspiration for Christmas gifts and decorations.

“Photos of friends travelling, celebrating at Christmas and New Year parties, and spending time with their families are everywhere.

“Social media has brought many benefits – making it easier to stay in touch with distant family members, facilitating social connections for less mobile people, and providing new ways to share experiences and messages with friends.

“Research has even shown that older users of social media have a 30 per cent reduction in depressive symptoms, compared with their offline peers.

“Social media provides an easy way to catch up with family members who we might not be able to be with in person – from grandparents overseas, to cousins interstate. It’s also a good way to check on friends who might be feeling more isolated over Christmas.

“However, despite these positives, social media can also have many negative impacts on mental health. Among younger people, frequent use of social media platforms can lead to increased feelings of social isolation, as well as lowered self-esteem and more exposure to cyber bullying.

“Seeing negative posts and having negative interactions on social media has been shown to influence users’ future posts – indicating that this might influence their mood as well.

“Encouragingly, researchers from the University of California have found that happier posts had a stronger influence on future activity than negative ones.

“These holidays, try to use social media positively, to share festive messages and contact friends and family. Importantly, don’t let social media get in the way of spending quality time with those around you.”

### AMA Tips for a Social Christmas

- Keep an eye out for cyber bullying and report it whenever you see it. Make sure that kids are aware of what cyber-bullying is and how it can affect others.
- Avoid checking social media before you go to bed – using your phone late into the night can affect your sleep.
- Use social media to connect with friends, family and people who might need extra support over Christmas.

- Avoid long Facebook rants and futile keyboard warrior-ing – it'll put you (and your friends) in a bad mood.

## Background

- Three billion people around the world use online social media.
  - We spend an average of two hours every day on these platforms, equating to 500,000 tweets and Snapchat photos shared every minute, the BBC reported this year.
  - In general, social media use in Australia is on the rise. According to the Yellow Social Media Report 2018, 79 per cent of all Australians used social media this year – a 10 per cent increase from 2017.
  - Researchers from the University of California assessed the emotional content of more than one billion status updates from more than 100 million Facebook users between 2009 and 2012. They found that bad weather increased the number of negative posts by 1 per cent, and one negative post by someone in a rainy city influenced a further 1.3 negative posts by friends living in dry cities. One happy post inspired 1.75 more happy posts.
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