The pros and cons of *dreamscrolling*

Can aspirational content help us turn dreams into reality, or is this another hidden comparison trap ready to ensnare us?

Writing | **Victoria Stokes**

Social media is often a source of sorrow. Sometimes we go online and feel almost immediately downbeat, thanks to the content we've consumed. Maybe it's a harrowing news story, or even a celebratory post from a friend that sparks feelings of insecurity and comparison. It's not all doom and gloom though – social media can be a force for good. In particular, it can show us what's possible, and encourage us to dream big.

Enter 'dreamscrolling': the habit of consuming aspirational content online, be it once-in-a-lifetime vacations, dream careers, or investment purchases.

It's easy to feel ashamed about your screentime stats, but according to new research by financial planning company Empower, 71% of people say dreamscrolling is time well spent, because it encourages them to achieve their goals.

What's more, we're spending around two and a half hours every day doing it. Thanks to the habit, 56% of people find it easier to be smart with their money, and 30% avoid unplanned purchases or going into debt. Overall, 69% feel like the act of aspirational searches and scrolling is an investment in themselves.

Dreamscrolling and your mental health

"Dreams and aspirations are hugely important for our mental health and wellbeing," says counsellor Georgina Sturmer. "They can anchor us, and remind us that we are working towards a goal, even when things around us are tough."

What's more, dreams and aspirations can offer perspective. Georgina notes that this kind of content can lift your mood when you're feeling bogged down, and lessen overwhelm by transporting you away from your surroundings.

Sometimes aspirational content simply serves as a reminder of what's possible. It's hard to dispute that your goals and intentions are attainable when there's physical proof of them right there on your screen.

Dreamscrolling is closely related to the concept of manifestation, too – the idea that we can make our goals a reality through the power of intention.

"Dreamscrolling can be beneficial, because looking at aspirational content feeds our reticular activating system (RAS), which is our brain's filter," explains Ted Lawlor, co-founder of The Manifestation App. "This means that your brain will begin to look out for the aspirational items in the real world. For example, if you've been looking at dream cars on Instagram, your brain will scan your environment for those cars."

Ted says dreamscrolling may positively impact another part of >>>

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your brain, your motor cortex, which is connected to the brain's reward system. He says when you visualise a better future, and the actions required to get there — as you would when dreamscrolling — your brain sees these tasks as challenges that it wants to achieve and be rewarded for.

"Just the anticipation of achieving these goals alone can activate reward pathways in the brain, helping you to sustain your efforts in pursuing your goals," Ted explains.

Screentime shame

Dreamscrolling has another added benefit. It can take away some of the stigma associated with spending too much time on our phones.

"The reality is that devices and screens are ingrained in our culture and everyday life. And, for many of us, it's inevitable that we will be spending downtime on our devices," Georgina points out. "Often it offers a sense of relaxation, or serves as a distraction from what's going on around us."

Georgina believes dreamscrolling can be a more mindful and intentional way to use social media. "This can help us feel more in control of how we are using our time," she notes. "If you are picking up your device, and getting a dopamine hit while looking at this kind of content, it will certainly be a more positive experience."

Building in boundaries

As with most digital habits, however, you do need to set some boundaries with dreamscrolling. "There can be a fine line between the content that motivates us, and the content that undermines us. And the exact location of this line will typically depend on how we feel about ourselves, and how attainable our dreams are," Georgina surmises.

If our dreams feel unrealistic or unattainable, then Georgina says dreamscrolling can lead to a sense of dissatisfaction. "If our dreams feel entirely out of reach, then dreamscrolling can leave us feeling sad, hopeless, or insecure," she points out.

What's more, dreamscrolling can be a little materialistic. Georgina says if the habit is too focused on wealth, status, and materialism, we can fall into the trap of equating happiness with over-consumption.

Just how robust your self-esteem is will also play a part in how well you react to dreamscrolling. "If you're feeling secure and confident, then thinking about your dreams can inspire you, but if you're struggling with self-esteem or lacking in confidence at the time, thinking about your dreams might cause you to compare yourself with others in an unfavourable way," Georgina explains.

The specific boundaries that you need will depend on your relationship with social media and with your devices. Setting a timer for social media use, or using an app that restricts your usage, can be helpful in striking the right balance.

As with most habits and actions, tuning-in to your emotions is key. Georgina advises looking at how you are emotionally responding to this kind of content. "Ask yourself: how do I feel when I'm dreamscrolling? Am I feeling uplifted and motivated? Or is disappointment or dissatisfaction creeping in? If it's the latter, then this is a signal that's worth tuning into," she advises.

Dreamscrolling can be a fun and inspiring way to pass the time, but if consuming aspirational content ever feels too much, it's important to remind yourself of all the reasons that you – and your life – are already enough.



Georgina Sturmer is an integrative counsellor helping clients create a more confident life. Find her profile on the ***Counselling Directory.***