How taking and revisiting photos affects enjoyment of and memory for experiences

Abstract

Experiences are vital to the lives and well-being of people. Over the course of their lives, people build up a portfolio of experiences that come to make up who they are. People derive enjoyment and value both from the initial experience as well as from the memories of the experience. Taking photos during these experiences has become a central and critical aspect of experiences and photo-taking can affect both enjoyment from the experience itself as well as the memories people have of the experience. Our research finds that, in general, taking photos during the experience increases engagement with and enjoyment of positive experiences. Further, we find that taking photos heightens peoples’ memories for visual aspects of the experience, but can decrease memory for non-visual aspects (e.g., auditory).

Apart from these immediate effects of photo taking on enjoyment and memory, photos also serve as tangible reminders of experiences. In fact people take photos mainly to have access to such tangible reminders in the future, which they hope allow them to relive the experience at a later point. Our research explores whether people correctly anticipate which photos will help them relive the experience better and whether they actually take photos that serve as good reminders in the future. We also examine how actually revisiting photos after the experience affects people’s memories for the experience.