



How Tech Can Make You Happier, Fitter and More Popular

Three rules to optimise the influence of your smartphone on your well-being.

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In 1999, the first camera-enabled mobile phone was **launched** in Japan. It could store up to 20 images. Now 350 million photos are uploaded every day on Facebook alone. The average person uses about **30 apps** every month. For better or for worse, tech is fully embedded in our lives. These everyday technologies, namely our phone apps, are reshaping consumers' well-being.

This has led many people to argue that we need to put our phones down, especially when we are in the midst of an experience, say a concert or a gathering. But I have conducted significant research into the role of photo taking on our enjoyment of experiences. My research has found that generating content about an experience can help us enjoy it more, through making us feel **more immersed in it**, not less.

Heightening our senses

Compared to leaving our phone (or camera) aside, taking photos during an experience forces us to search the environment for items or aspects to capture. As we pay attention to more details, it increases our sense of engagement. The net result: Time flies by. And if you're not into taking photos, the same benefit applies to taking notes or sending

text messages.

This is different to what most people expect. I've found in my research that about 40 percent of people expect that photo taking would reduce their enjoyment of an experience. Another 20 percent or so said it would not have any impact. Many of us are subject to such anticipatory errors. Even if we have a lot of experience with something, we're not good at predicting how that will affect us in the future.

There is one caveat though. In other research, I've found that the immersive benefits of photo taking are not as clear when **the main purpose is to share** the photos on social media – as opposed to taking them for memories' sake. In this case, it depends on the intended audience. If we take photos to share them with our loved ones, it allows us to connect with other people in similar ways to the slideshow nights that older generations would put on to host their neighbours, family and friends.

But nowadays, when we share our photos on social media, our audience is much broader. It is easier to worry about being judged or evaluated based on those pictures – what academics call "self-presentational concern". The same goes if we are too focused on capturing the perfect image or thinking about how many likes or comments we're going to get. It can take us out of the experience, reducing our immersion and thus our enjoyment.

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Posed photos vs. candid photos

Also out of concern about our image, most of us prefer to post posed pictures of ourselves on social media. Posed pictures are those where we look straight at the camera, in a static pose – one that we obviously think will make us look our best. We assume that showing this polished, curated version of ourselves will boost our likeability. But as my **research** has shown, candid shots are the way to go if our goal is to make observers feel more connected to us.

In candid shots, it's not clear if the person in the photo realises their image is being captured. Maybe they do, but the viewer can't be sure. In experiments, participants shown both types of photos were more likely to want to date, be friends with or generally interact with the people seen in candid photos. This was for a simple reason – candid shots made the person seem more authentic.

Of course, reading the context is important. While we may want to use more candid shots on our dating profiles and other social media, it is advisable to keep to our posed head shots on a professional platform like LinkedIn where the goal isn't likability.

Streaks as goals in and of themselves

One more way technology influences our well-being is through its ability to reinforce healthful behaviours. For instance, apps can draw our attention to “streaks”, which is when we have repeated a behaviour, such as going to the gym, at least three times in a row. Being notified about a streak increases the odds of continuing the behaviour.

My upcoming research shows that, in fact, streaks become goals in and of themselves. We do a lot to maintain our streaks when it doesn't necessarily matter that we miss a day here or there. The upshot for app developers is that their users may be willing to watch ads or even pay money to “buy a freebie day” in advance or to repair a streak.

But apps that also highlight our lapses can have a disproportionately demotivating effect. Notifications about streaks can be a double-edged sword in that sense. Companies could consider notifying users about their streaks, but keep mum when a streak is broken, as users may just abandon ship.

Three tips on using social media to your best advantage

1. *Wait 24 hours before sharing photos of an experience.* This will allow you to reap the benefits of photo taking as a tool for deeper immersion, while limiting any associated anxiety. As you're

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going through the experience, you want to avoid feeling concerned about your appearance or how many likes and comments your post will garner.

2. *Delete social media apps from your phone.* This practical tip is to help you implement the first one above. Only post content on social media from your laptop.

3. *Keep a close audience.* Many social media platforms allow consumers to divide up their followers into different groups. The more you share content with mere acquaintances and even strangers, the more it may raise self-presentational concerns.

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