

Posting your vacation online may make you forget it

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(HealthDay)—Over the past decade, smartphones and social media have

blanketed the planet like a technological tsunami.

The result is that nearly 70 million new photos and 5 billion new posts are uploaded to Instagram and Facebook every day, respectively.

But a new study suggests that constantly sharing the moments of your life online may undermine your ability to remember the very events you want to preserve.

"We didn't find it surprising that using media impaired [memory](#)," said study co-author Emma Templeton. "After all, multitasking in general can be a source of distraction, shown to interfere with memory."

Still, she added, "just recognizing that pulling out our phones might change the way we experience events in our lives is worth keeping in mind."

Templeton is a graduate student in the department of psychological and brain sciences at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire.

In the first of three experiments, Templeton and her colleagues enlisted nearly 400 people to watch one of two short video lectures. Some simply watched, while others made notes that they thought were either for their eyes only or to be shared with others later. A "distracted" group was told to make note of their surroundings, rather than the lecture.

Follow-up surveys revealed that those who recorded their thoughts—whether for themselves or for others—appeared to have distanced themselves from the experience. And their memory of the lecture suffered as a result.

Two additional experiments involved a half-hour church tour. First, about 130 people did a self-guided tour alone; then a second group of

240 did the same tour in pairs. Some took photos only for themselves; some took photos to post to Facebook; and others took no images at all.

Tests completed immediately after the tour and again a week or two later showed that those who took no photos when touring solo retained the best memory of the event. In the paired tour, the no-photo group also tested better than the Facebook-sharing group, though no better than those who took photos for private use.

Participants were not given a chance to review their photos or notes before testing. "It is possible that looking at photos might help jog our memory of an experience," Templeton acknowledged, though she stressed that photos cannot capture key memory triggers, such as smells and sounds.

Her team's conclusion? The process of digitizing your life likely impairs your memory.

Nevertheless, Templeton stressed that she "would hesitate to say that the 'case is closed' on exactly when and how media use impacts memory." For example, she noted that some research has found that photography can actually enhance recall by encouraging people to "zoom in" and pay better attention to detail.

But Joe Bayer, Ohio State University assistant professor of communications, thinks the study "provides strong evidence that sharing content detracts from your memory of real-world experiences" in distinctive ways.

"In other words, there could be different pros [and] cons in the short-term and long-term," said Bayer. "Hence, someone could remember an event worse with some of their attention pulled away from the live experience, but later on enjoy and consolidate that memory better than

individuals without any records."

Arshya Vahabzadeh, chief medical officer of Brain Power Innovation at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, had a similar take on the results.

"When we multitask, our attention becomes scattered across multiple different objectives, and this appears to apply to the taking of photographs, as well as to the use of [social media](#)," he said.

But Vahabzadeh cautioned that social media is typically much more distracting than photo-taking alone.

Why? "The latest social [media](#) platforms involve far more than just sharing an experience," he observed, coaxing users to immediately devote [brain power](#) to a whole host of distracting tasks, such as hash-tagging, image-filtering and live feeds.

"Whether people then go back to the digital copies of such [experiences](#) to help develop their memory is a completely different question," he added.

The findings were reported recently in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*.

More information: Emma Templeton, graduate student, department of psychological and brain sciences, Dartmouth College, Hanover, N.H.; Arshya Vahabzadeh, M.D., chief medical officer, Brain Power Innovation, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston; Joe Bayer, assistant professor, school of communication, Ohio State University, Columbus; Feb. 22, 2018, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, online

There's more on experience and memory at [National Public Radio](#).

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