

Scheduling leisure activities makes them less fun: study

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Credit: Robert Kraft/public domain

Nothing ruins a potentially fun event like putting it on your calendar. In a series of studies, researchers found that scheduling a leisure activity like seeing a movie or taking a coffee break led people to anticipate less enjoyment and actually enjoy the event less than if the same activities were unplanned.

That doesn't mean you can't plan at all: The research showed that roughly planning an event (but not giving a specific time) led to similar levels of enjoyment as unplanned events.

"People associate schedules with work. We want our [leisure time](#) to be free-flowing," said Selin Malkoc, co-author of the study and assistant professor of marketing at The Ohio State University's Fisher College of Business.

"Time is supposed to fly when you're having fun. Anything that limits and constrains our leisure chips away at the enjoyment."

Malkoc conducted the study with Gabriela Tonietto, a doctoral student at Washington University in St. Louis. Their results are published in the *Journal of Marketing Research*.

In the paper, they report on 13 separate studies that looked at how scheduling [leisure activities](#) affects the way we think about and experience them.

In one study, college students were given a calendar filled with classes and extracurricular activities and asked to imagine that this was their actual schedule for the week.

Half of the participants were then asked to make plans to get frozen yogurt with a friend two days in advance and add the activity to their calendar. The other half imagined running into a friend and deciding to get frozen yogurt immediately.

Results showed that those who scheduled getting frozen yogurt with their friend rated the activity as feeling more like a "commitment" and "chore" than those who imagined the impromptu get-together.

"Scheduling our fun activities leads them to take on qualities of work," Malkoc said.

The effect is not just for hypothetical activities.

In an online study, the researchers had people select an entertaining YouTube video to watch. The catch was that some got to watch their chosen video immediately. Others chose a specific date and time to watch the video and put in on their calendar.

Results showed that those who watched the scheduled video enjoyed it less than those who watched it immediately.

While people seem to get less enjoyment out of precisely scheduled activities, they don't seem to mind if they are more roughly scheduled.

In another study, the researchers set up a stand on a college campus where they gave out free coffee and cookies for students studying for finals.

Before setting up the stand, they handed out tickets for students to pick up their coffee and cookies either at a specific time or during a two-hour window. As they were enjoying their treat, the students filled out a short survey.

The results showed that those who had a specifically scheduled break enjoyed their time off less than did those who only roughly scheduled the break.

"If you schedule leisure activities only roughly, the negative effects of scheduling disappear," Malkoc said. Aim to meet a friend "this afternoon" rather than exactly at 1 p.m.

One study showed that even just setting a starting time for a fun activity is enough to make it less enjoyable.

"People don't want to put time restrictions of any kind on otherwise free-flowing leisure activities," she said.

Malkoc said these findings apply to short leisure activities that last a few hours or less.

The results also have implications for leisure companies that provide experiences for their customers, Malkoc said. For example, some amusement parks offer tickets for their most popular rides that allow people to avoid long lines. But this research suggests that people will enjoy these rides less if the tickets are set for a particular time. Instead, the parks should give people a window of time to board the ride, which would be the equivalent of rough scheduling in this study.

Provided by The Ohio State University

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