

How nostalgia and memories find expression in social media

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As possibilities have changed and technology has advanced, memories and nostalgia are now a significant part of our use of social media. This is shown in a [study](#) from the University of Gothenburg and University

West, published in *Social Media + Society*.

Researchers at the University of Gothenburg and University West have been following a group of 11 active [social media](#) users for 10 years, allowing them to describe and reflect on how they use the platforms to document and share their lives. The study provides insight into the role of technology in creating experiences and reliving meaningful moments.

"These types of studies help us look back and understand the culture as it was in the 2010s and 2020s when social media was a central part of it," says Beata Jungselius, senior lecturer of informatics at University West and one of the researchers behind the study.

Social media users engage in what researchers define as "social media nostalgizing," meaning they actively seek out content that evokes feelings of nostalgia.

Alexandra Weilenmann, professor of interaction design at the University of Gothenburg, explains that participants in the study have described it as "treating themselves" to a nostalgia trip now and then.

"Going back and remembering what has happened earlier in life becomes a bigger part of it over time than posting new content," she says, and explains that in later interviews, it becomes clear that the platforms often serve as diary-like tools that allow memories to be relived.

Social media platforms are introducing increasingly advanced features to help users interact with older content. Personal, music-infused photo albums generated for us or reminders of pictures we posted on the same date one, three, or 10 years ago allow for nostalgic experiences, which are often seen as positive.

The study describes how these features can lead to users reconnecting with old friends by "tagging" them in a shared memory. Alexandra Weilenmann and Beata Jungselius believe this could be a deliberate move by [social media platforms](#) to encourage users to stay active since the publication of new content has decreased.

The researchers have noted that it's not just the content itself that evokes feelings of [nostalgia](#) but also memories of the actual usage of social media play a significant role. For example, one of the interviewees reminisces about how rewarding the intense communication in forums was and how it often led to real-life meetings and interactions.

"It's only now that we've lived with social [media](#) long enough to make and draw conclusions from a study like this. Through our method of studying the same users over ten years, we've been able to follow how their usage and attitudes toward the platforms have changed as they have evolved," says Beata Jungselius.

More information: Beata Jungselius et al, Keeping Memories Alive: A Decennial Study of Social Media Reminiscing, Memories, and Nostalgia, *Social Media + Society* (2023). [DOI: 10.1177/20563051231207850](https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231207850)

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