Do consumers enjoy events more when commenting on them?

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The research team systematically examined the effect of generating content on people's feelings of immersion in their experiences and discovered that this common behavior can actually improve experiences. Across a series of nine studies, results indicate that when people create content about unfolding experiences, they ultimately enjoy the experience more, because creating content increases engagement and makes time feel like it is "flying." Tonietto explains that, "In contrast to popular press advice, this research uncovers an important benefit of technology's role in our daily lives ... by generating content relevant to ongoing experiences, people can use technology in a way that complements, rather than interferes with, their experiences."

The researchers tested the potential benefits of generating content across a variety of experiences including the Super Bowl halftime show, holiday celebrations, a dance performance, virtual safaris and bus tours, and a horror film. During all these experiences, which differed in their pleasantness and duration (from a few minutes to multiple hours), they consistently found that generating content led people to feel more immersed in their experiences and to feel as though time was passing more quickly. Interestingly, this occurred whether people tended to say positive or negative things about the experience. Moreover, generating content generating content increased people's enjoyment of positive experiences, though this effect did not occur for negative experiences.

Importantly, just because a consumer is on her phone does not mean that she's distracted or unable to become absorbed in her experience. Barasch says "We found that when people choose to generate content, they tend to do so in a constructive way. On average, people create content that is directly relevant to their current experience, with positive effects on their evaluations of the experience. However, when people use their technology to generate irrelevant..."
content, this behavior is no longer beneficial. That is, only when people communicate about the unfolding experience itself does content creation increase immersion and enjoyment.

Interestingly, marketers often encourage consumers to communicate about their events and experiences. For example, companies may use branded hashtags, offer discounts and rewards tied to posting on social media, or use sharing platforms customized for individual events. The study tested two potential strategies for firms to encourage content creation: 1) an incentive (i.e., reward) for generating content; and 2) a norm nudge, where consumers are informed of how common this behavior is among other consumers. As expected, both strategies effectively increased content creation. Even more importantly, consumers who were incentivized or motivated by social norms to generate content reaped the same experiential benefits as those who created content organically. That is, content generation in response to a firm’s encouragement can still lead consumers to feel more immersed in the experience and to enjoy it more. These findings illustrate how leveraging consumer content creation can mutually benefit marketers and consumers alike by improving experiences.

So, the next time you’re advised to put down your phone in order to truly live "in the moment," remember that this depends on how you’re using your phone. If you’re posting about the last movie you saw while ignoring the person across the dinner table from you, then this could potentially detract from your current experience. But if you’re using your device to comment, joke, or even complain about your current experience, then this research indicates you may be more engaged and enjoy that experience more than if you kept your phone in your pocket.
