



Does social media influence our memory?

Author: Christina Sexton

Like it or not, social media is a driving force in our culture. And it's getting more personal every day. With this in mind, Dr Diane Charleson from [ACU's National School of Arts](#) is researching how we visualise memories for ourselves – and how social media is getting in on the action.

We've all been there. Scrolling through our feed and there it is – a reminder that on this day one, two, five years ago we shared an event on Facebook.

"I'm very interested in Facebook's 'On this day' feature," Dr Charleson said. "It's when one of your own photos pops up on your newsfeed reminding you of a particular day or event. So, really it's Facebook handing you a memory whether you want it or not."



"A feature like this is giving Facebook the authority to become the minder and editor of your own story. If this is harmful is yet to be understood. But I think how we want to perceive ourselves is important – and we should be fully in charge of that."

Curated memory

Despite the growing suspicion, if not resentment, towards social media features controlling our memories, Dr Charleson suggests times haven't really changed all that much.

"When we all used to have photo albums, it didn't mean you'd look through them to get an accurate depiction of your life. Most of those photos were posed and carefully chosen by family members," she said.

"You'd rarely include photos of a bad day. It was still all about displaying social and special occasions. So, how is that more real than what Facebook is doing?"



Careful curation of how we present our lived experience is nothing new, Dr Charleson said.

"In my grandmother's day, she'd have very posed glamour shots in her albums, where everybody dressed up and used their antiquated version of a filter that we now have on our smartphones. Everyone wanted to look as beautiful as possible, and you very rarely had a candid shot taken in her time."

Retro returns

Regardless of how we pick and choose our memories, Dr Charleson still believes the disappearing photo album is worth mourning.

"Losing printed photos and albums could explain why features like 'On this day' and 'Yearbook' are so popular on Facebook," she said.

While traditional albums have all but vanished, a resurgence in vintage and retro relics from the past, such as Polaroid photos, have been making a comeback.



"I think people are moving back to printing in some way, and Polaroids have become cool again," said Dr Charleson. "Everyone has so many images stored on their phones but we don't really have a way to share all of them."

"Retro picture filters have become popular too. The original home movie look and feel once inspired awe, and people are trying to recreate that sense of nostalgia with modern technology, like apps and smartphone filters."

Past caring

While our instinct may be to deride or even mock this type of behavior, Dr Charleson doesn't believe it's an insignificant or passing trend. "I don't think it's ridiculous of us at all," she said. "People usually associate the past with good memories, and sharing modern images dressed up in nostalgia can help us recall those good times. So, really this is just our way of making the present resemble the past."

Dr Diane Charleson is a filmmaker and lecturer in the [Faculty of Education and Arts](#).

Category [Lifestyle](#)

Tags [Arts](#) [Digital](#) [Media](#) [Research](#)