Timeless Archives on the Preservation of Memories and Culture

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ABSTRACT

The introduction of social media in recent years has prompted increased digital photography and communication through various applications, though the extent to which these social media platforms encourage the preservation of documented media remains obscure. Previous research has established that digital social media archives can store memories that people have captured and allows for convenient reminiscence. Additionally, the ease of communication brought about through social media is believed to further enhance the preservation of memories as it is shared and engrained in people. However, digitization has resulted in less time spent making physical memories due to isolation and anxiety induced by excessive social media use. Furthermore, the aforementioned assumptions fail to account for better methods of preservation, notably physical objects. The physical properties of tangible artifacts such as framed photos, as per empirical evidence, are proven to enhance memory formation and familiarity. However, considering that physical artifacts have fallen out of favor as digitization reduces their usage, incorporating the semi-permanence of tangible objects into digital archives, which are favored by most, would promote the positives of both in preserving memories accurately and indelibly.

Introduction

The world has seen massive amounts of digitization since the beginning of the 21st century, with increasing numbers of people who rely on it for daily life (Ruzgar, 2005). Furthermore, international communication, a type of many-to-many communication, has seen greater prevalence, which includes social media and the connections it provides to people across the globe (Kessler, 2013). However, as social media continues to facilitate global communication and dialogue, many questions arise regarding the ethicality of the Internet as it damages its users' lifestyles and identities. Although social media acts as a medium to connect people, "ironically, social media is in effect turning us into one of the most antisocial generations yet" (Amedie, 2015, p. 3). An increasing number of people report social disorders directly correlated with an increase in Internet usage. With an overall decrease in social activity, many memories and aspects of cultural heritage that people cherish diminish.

However, upon acknowledging social media's "rapid growth in the last few decades," although people spend increasing amounts of time on social media, this media "plays a key role in facilitating the exchange of cultural information, cross-cultural understanding, and cultural heritage preservation efforts" (Wibowo, 2023, p. 373). With the importance of preserving and remembering precious cultural heritages and personal memories, the ongoing debate regarding social media's influence culminates in the necessity of addressing the following question: To what extent has social media affected the preservation of memories and culture in the 21st century?

Ultimately, social media imposes great detrimental effects on the preservation of both culture and memories, leading to addiction and isolation, alteration, and loss of tangible objects. With such negative implications for society, it becomes imperative to consider a method to address these effects. "With a careful approach and strong collaboration, social media can be a powerful tool in promoting better cultural understanding

around the world," expressing the necessity of a multifaceted approach that encourages user participation (Wibowo, 2023, p. 373). The implementation of timeless archives, which remain relevant and useful in contrast to the transient nature of modern social media, would address the growing issue of Internet use and be incorporated in a convenient manner that encourages use and interaction.

Direct Impacts Through Addiction and Isolation

Digitization and social media have continuously been attributed to the current generation's rapid decrease in social activity and increasing online activity and prevalence. As digitization improves the quality of life and convenience, more people have begun favoring texting, online chatting, or other convenient communication platforms over their in-person counterparts, increasingly demonstrated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Amedie, 2015). However, Amedie fails to consider the implications of increased social media use, which are addressed by Omar Shdaifat, a researcher at The Hashemite University, stating although the use of social media and other digital technologies can also foster communication and ensure convenience when used in controlled quantities, the overuse of these platforms has resulted in a generation that cannot survive without constantly checking for new notifications. This increase in social media use often results in the development of antisocial behavior and disorders, including internet addiction disorder and social anxiety disorder (Shdaifat, 2021). Excessive amounts of time spent on digital technologies such as social media, as a result of such disorders, have been demonstrated to essentially destroy people's social lives, inhibiting the collection and storage of memories and culture through the loss of interaction.

Further, it is important to consider the implications of excessive social media use on cognition, analyzing its direct effects on people's neural functions. When given time to use social media after learning new information, people scored worse on tests regarding this new information than people allotted rest time (Martini et al., 2020). Martini and his colleagues analyzed and scrutinized the results of the experiment, ultimately determining that social media imposed detrimental effects on people's memories, in conjunction with Shdaifat's perspective. The introduction of external stimuli, which encourages brain activity, has been demonstrated to impact the remembrance of information learned prior. Additionally, for most of the current generation, when experiencing a memorable moment live, people's first instinct is to take a picture with their phones, believing that photographs will allow for a better recollection of these events. However, across multiple studies conducted by Princeton University researchers, participants who did not use social media to document their experiences "consistently remembered their experience more precisely than participants who used media" (Tamir et al., 2018). Although social media is largely considered a distraction to preserving culture and memories, it is crucial to recognize that social media only serves as a distraction from these unless said culture and memories are carefully woven into the media and stimulate memories about them after these events are documented.

However, it is necessary to recognize and address the positive potential of social media on remembrance, as long as the events in question are consistently introduced to users and prompt thoughts about them (Wang et al., 2016). If social media is actively used to incorporate the events more deeply into its users' lives, it would greatly bolster reminiscence. Therefore, when devising a solution to this issue, it is important to consider the necessity of repeated stimulation to assist in the recollection of these memories and cultures. Implementing timeless archives directly into social media platforms would occasionally prompt the user to re-explore and experience past memories, prompting reminiscence and assisting in preserving these precious, unique traits.

Alteration of Memories and Culture

The Mandela effect refers to the collective, inaccurate memories that people share, commonly influenced by others, and is a relatively common conspiracy around the globe. Although these effects are not fully explainable,

it is important to acknowledge the ease at which memories can be modified due to outside influence. Marta Dyczok, a professor at Western University who specializes in mass media and politics, details such a phenomenon where "61.4 percent of respondents" in the survey they conducted answered that media and films have the largest influence on their memories of history (Dyczok, 2015, p. 432). Dyczok additionally details how "the media, especially television, are powerful agents in shaping memory," emphasizing the media's impact on people's recollections (Dyczok, 2015, p. 431). Especially during war, the media can have a massive influence on the collective memory of certain events.

Furthermore, Sarah Elwood and Katharyne Mitchell, who both research social impacts and implications, detail that media can "alter perceptions and experiences of time by de-linking events and conditions represented in virtual spaces from their real-time contexts," even detailing a form of "augmented reality" (Elwood & Mitchell, 2015). Elwood and Mitchell elucidate how the media disconnects virtual events from real context, which introduces augmented reality as the cause for inaccurate recollections of wartime incidents. In addition to collective memories, media can influence individuals by introducing outside information perforating and altering people's unique memories and culture. Andrada Ungureanu, a researcher at The New School of New York, who specializes in psychology and social research, explores social media's implications on individual, autobiographical memories, detailing the impacts on cognitive processes and explains how online activity exposure can alter people's personal narratives (Ungureanu, 2023). As a result of increasing addiction, an indirect effect on the preservation of memories is how people are "eager to get more likes on social media," which subsequently results in the evolution of selfies "from casual snapshots to carefully curated and edited photos designed more to project a desired image than to accurately reflect reality" (Chown & Nascimento, 2023, p. 192). When seeking attention on social media, the true extent of events is often distorted to attract people, which undoubtedly affects the accuracy of the event portrayed. Further, succeeding digitization is the increase in internet use and addiction, which in addition to affecting remembrance also influences and alters people's perception of their own memories and culture.

As previously established, social media acts as a platform for building identities, and fosters global communication among anonymous people, which can initially be perceived as positive, with harmless interactions amongst people of different cultures having no detrimental effects to people's personal identity (Baltezarevic et al., 2019). However, after collecting data from a study of 400 respondents, they concluded that "the adoption of others' cultural values diminished the bond with the local community" (Baltezarevic et al., 2019, p. 7). Baltezarevic and his colleagues explain that although social media facilitates intercontinental connections, through outside influences, people may lose their own cultural identities. In conjunction with the demonstrated implications on personal memories as well as culture, it can be concluded that social media alters and affects people's identities through outside influences. Thus, the direct incorporation of timeless archives remains viable as it would assist in maintaining accurate preservation of archived events, striving to limit outside influence on the recollection and remembrance of memories and culture.

Loss of Tangible Objects

An additional implication that has risen from increased digitization and social media, apart from social anxiety, isolation, and the alteration of memories and culture, is the increased shift toward digital objects as a whole. With the increase in digital objects, including photographs, there is less use of physical, tangible objects such as books. The implications of this reduced use of tangible objects are demonstrated by Jacqueline Snow and her colleagues. Snow and her colleagues, who are professors in psychology and neuroscience, conducted their own experiment, testing recollection with 3-dimensional objects and digital photographs. After analyzing the data, Snow and her colleagues concluded that "real objects are more memorable than pictorial stimuli" (Snow et al.,

2014, para. 1). Snow and her colleagues detail how when viewing real objects, our eyes receive different information and allows the brain to "produce a unitary sense of depth" that pictures are unable to replicate (Snow et al., 2014, para. 3).

In addition to professional research, the common person often favors tangible objects over digital recollections of precious cultural memories, which is furthered by the psychological research conducted by Snow and her colleagues. Richard Blanco, an esteemed poet, details his desire to search for The Gulf Motel, searching for a physical object that he can use to reminisce about his past experiences (Blanco, 2012). Although Blanco is not a professional researcher or professor, he still demonstrates the natural desire to reminisce about his memories with the physical building rather than digital images. Furthermore, a study conducted by Guangheng Dong, a professor at Zhejiang Normal University with a Ph.D. in psychology, and his colleague Marc Potenza, a professor at Yale University with a Ph.D. in psychiatry, in which they examined Internet and non-Internet-based learning, details how "Internet searching was associated with lower accuracy in recalling information as compared with traditional book searching" (Dong & Potenza, 2015, para. 1). As demonstrated in Dong and Potenza's study, as well as Blanco's perspective, tangible objects have greater impact on the remembrance of memories and culture compared to digital objects, furthered by Snow and her colleagues' empirical findings regarding the psychology of human memory and the sense of depth produced by these objects, in contrast to digital preservation.

However, Cokorda Pramartha and her colleagues, researchers at the University of Sydney with expertise in information systems elucidate that digitization can create new methods of sharing cultural information and traditions, although UNESCO identifies digital preservation as fragile and easily forgotten in comparison to tangible objects. Therefore, it is important to consider the implications of digitization, such as its ephemeral nature compared to physical objects, when devising a solution to the issue of the preservation of memories and culture.

Conclusions

In consideration of digitization's implications and adverse effects on preserving identity, it becomes important to address potential solutions for conserving precious memories in the face of growing Internet influence. Taking into account the multifaceted nature of this matter as well as the issue of limited user participation and increasing Internet usage, the solution of timeless archives is proposed. Through timeless archives, instead of combating the ever-growing trend of digitization, it is possible to adjust and incorporate these into the platforms of the Internet. Timeless archives would be able to store personal memories and cultural heritage in a place that is not evanescent and ensures little to no outside interference with the remembrance of these precious memories, addressing the issues of ephemerality and alteration, and would be incorporated into social media to encourage convenient user participation by taking advantage of the increasing prevalence of Internet addiction. Although digitization is ineffective compared to tangible objects when ensuring preservation, timeless archives provide the best solution in the face of this protean issue, considering each aspect and issue of social media's effects and formulating a resolution that addresses each facet on multiple levels of analysis.

Acknowledgments

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