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Hanks: Live life now — don't waste it taking pictures

Anna Hanks, Local Contributor



Karly Domb Sadof/ASSOCIATED PRESS

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You've heard the one about how a picture says a thousand words?

This week's \$1 billion acquisition of the mobile phone picture-sharing service Instagram by social media giant Facebook says even more.

It tells me that what's left of civilized public behavior is in desperate danger of being destroyed.

Since the Bruce Springsteen show at the South by Southwest Music Conference and Festival, I've been fuming about the unfortunately dominant role of digital devices in our lives, and the way that these digital devices often interfere with real life.

Hanging out on the floor of the ACL Live theater, our group was maybe a dozen feet from Springsteen.

The only things between me and Bruce Springsteen's head were six identical iPhones taking six identical pictures of the man. Anytime Springsteen hit a moment of emotional intensity, people would whip out those camera phones.

I'm short, so it was hard to avoid looking at anything but those pixels waved in front of my eyes.

While cameras had been specifically banned from the event — even ones that were tagged with the restricted green SXSW press tags — so many people had camera phones that the camera ban seemed pointless.

That evening was a watershed moment for me. I decided that I'd had enough with "life tourism."

With a nod to Wendy Fonarow, the "Indie Professor" of the Guardian newspaper in England (where I first encountered the term), I see life tourism as when we spend time behaving like tourists in our own lives — sometimes broadcasting a play-by-play of events — rather than living them to the fullest.

I might sound a bit jaded, but sometimes it seems like we are only going places and doing things for the purpose of cultivating our online identities, rather than for the goal of truly enjoying the experience.

Since I first started going to concerts in the 1980s, dancing has fallen out of fashion as the hip thing to do at shows. Instead, many of us choose to take pictures, often on our camera phones.

The Springsteen camera phone explosion wasn't an isolated incident.

At the Spin party during SXSW, I saw a dishearteningly familiar sight: an iPad in the front row being used as a camera.

The following week, when the New Zealand indie rock band the Naked and Famous played a sold-out show at Stubb's, my husband counted more than 50 digital devices held aloft, recording the moment when the band played its biggest song.

To paraphrase an insightful comic I saw at John Oliver's New York Stand-Up Show at SXSW 2011, often when you videotape something, you are just telling yourself that you'll enjoy the event later. And smaller.

It seems a lot of people on my social networks — and maybe yours — must spend all of their time at events updating their online selves.

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By overusing these services, what we are really doing is cheating ourselves of these pivotal moments in life. If you aren't going to give your full attention to something, why be there?

Examples of this issue include texting during class, being on Facebook during a lecture, or consistently being on your phone during lunch.

I've even heard of people texting during a wedding.

Considering that my father's cellphone rang while I was standing at the altar, I know that if people had been texting during my wedding, I would have backhanded these bores with my bridal bouquet.

This is my manifesto: It's time to put ourselves on a digital diet. A pixel purge.

It's time for us to more fully start enjoying the moments we are living, and worry less about sharing them via our social networks. This manifesto has a real-world impact, as well.

Recent data indicate that one-third of American adults are obese. Experts tell us that it only takes a few minutes of physical activity a day to do magnificent things for our blood pressure and waistlines.

Thus bursting into a boogie or slipping into a slide during a show might be just the thing to make us a healthier, happier, country.

Bruce Springsteen is 62, and he had the stamina to deliver a killer SXSW keynote address, followed by a 2.5 hour show the same day.

You don't get that kind of stamina from standing still, taking pictures of other people.

Less Twitter, more twist.

Hanks is an Austin resident.

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