How to Lose Friends and Influence No One: The Documenting Penalty in Experiential Consumption

FREEMAN WU, GEOFFREY R. O. DURSO, AND KELLY L. HAWS

ABSTRACT People regularly document consumption experiences, taking photos and recording videos of jointly consumed live events. While prior work has shown that such behaviors can promote engagement, enjoyment, and positive memories of the experience, the current research identifies overlooked social costs that can accompany these personal benefits. We examine this *documenting penalty* across a series of studies, finding that documentation behavior produces an ironic discrepancy—whereas consumers feel more present and engaged when they document experiences, we show that they are nonetheless judged by others as less present in the moment. This asymmetry generates social consequences that undermine impressions and reduce others' interest in future interactions with the documenter. Thus, while documentation can induce personal benefits during an experience, it also carries important social costs, which can then negatively impact future consumption experiences. We provide specific solutions to preserve the benefits of documenting while mitigating its potential social detriments.

From concerts to fireworks shows to stand-up comedy routines, shared consumption experiences are a prevalent aspect of everyday life and consumer behavior. Due to the shared nature of these experiences, consumers are often exposed to the behaviors of other attendees. One increasingly salient behavior is the real-time documentation of experiences by taking photos and videos of the event (Taylor 2018). The live events industry, which draws billions of dollars in annual revenue and attracts millions of fans (Das and Deshmukh 2023), remains conflicted on consumers' documenting behaviors. Nearly half of attendees admit to taking photos and videos during live events (Gottfried 2018), despite broad support from event organizers and attendees alike for policies restricting such behaviors (Heyman 2019; Chin 2023). Indeed, entertainers have even interrupted their own performances to call out consumers' documenting, with widespread praise (Gelfand 2019; Paulson and Cooper 2019; Chung 2023). Lin-Manuel Miranda, of *Hamilton* fame, even improvised lyrics to rebuke a documenting attendee during one show: "*Lady filming in the fourth row, please stop it!*" (Romano 2019). The rise and subsequent pushback to consumer documenting is so strong that a startup, Yondr, has flourished into a multimillion-dollar business by creating lockable smartphone pouches explicitly designed to prevent this behavior (Le 2020).

This backlash presents a curious contrast to the ample evidence suggesting that documenting can enhance the documenter's own consumption experience (Zhang et al. 2014; Diehl, Zauberman, and Barasch 2016; Tonietto and Barasch 2021). The present research proposes and presents evidence for a *documenting penalty* while elucidating the role of perceived presence in shaping social judgments of documenters during experiential consumption, as well as the conditions under which some level of documentation is considered socially acceptable. Indeed, this sentiment was recently echoed by Diehl and Zauberman (2022), who called for research exploring the consequences of documentation beyond purely self-focused outcomes. Put simply, we highlight the pivotal role of observing consumers' behaviors in informing and influencing the social consequences of experiential consumption.

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CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Documentation Versus Other Technology-Mediated Behaviors

One way to enjoy an experience is to immerse oneself in the actual event. However, consumer immersion can take many different forms, including the use of smartphones to document the experience in real time. Extant literature on documentation, defined as the usage of technology to capture the event in real time through photo taking and videography, has primarily uncovered positive personal consequences for the individual engaging in documentation. Specifically, documentation can enhance enjoyment of the experience by promoting feelings of immersion, accelerating perceived time, and increasing the extent to which the person feels present in the moment (Diehl et al. 2016; Tonietto and Barasch 2021; Diehl and Zauberman 2022). Although situations exist where documentation can undermine enjoyment, particularly when the person intends to share photos with others (Barasch, Zauberman, and Diehl 2018; also see Nardini, Lutz, and LeBoeuf 2019), the act of documenting consumption experiences typically increases engagement and enhances personal enjoyment (Diehl and Zauberman 2022). Moreover, documenting can improve memory for the event (Barasch et al. 2017) and produce future benefits by allowing later "rediscoveries" that spark pleasant memories (Zhang et al. 2014).

Documentation is therefore distinct from other technology-mediated behaviors that are widely considered distracting, including "phubbing," defined as disengaging by using one's smartphone in the presence of others (e.g., by checking social media, sending text messages, playing games) rather than being socially engaged and seemingly present (David and Roberts 2017; Barrick, Barasch, and Tamir 2022). Whereas phubbing presumably occurs due to boredom with the present social interaction (Al-Saggaf and O'Donnell 2019), people are typically motivated to document experiences precisely because they find such moments interesting and worth documenting in the first place. Documenting is thus theoretically distinct from phubbing and other purportedly distracting behaviors because of their respective underlying motivations. In sum, documentation is associated with increased engagement and presence in real time, unlike other technology-mediated behaviors that reflect decreased presence in the moment.

Personal Versus Social Consequences of Documenting Experiences

Despite these potential personal benefits of documentation, due partly to the *heightened presence* personally experienced during the event, we contend that documenters will be socially judged by others in the same consumption experience as *less present* (Niles 2024), incurring interpersonal consequences and yielding a phenomenon we term the "documenting penalty." In other words, although documentation may increase the *personal experience* of presence, we suggest that it could ironically diminish *social perceptions* of presence during the focal consumption experience, defined as an inferred state of distraction characterized by the inability to immerse oneself in the focal experience. Specifically, we focus on the *social* consequences of photo taking and video recording for the documenter through the perspective of others participating in the same consumption experience, building on social psychological theory regarding self-other discrepancies in social judgment (Van Boven, Dunning, and Loewenstein 2000; Ross 2018).

Performers, organizers, and fellow consumers at live events alike have criticized documenting behaviors for diminishing the live event experience (Belle 2022; Richardson 2023). Accordingly, the observed use of smartphones and cameras for documenting seems, by most people, to convey a state of distraction from the experience and, in turn, a lack of presence (Kushlev and Dunn 2019), despite the well-defined benefits that documenters might personally enjoy from doing so. In essence, then, the documentation of experiences may signal lower engagement with the focal experience in the same way that playing Candy Crush or texting during the event would. Put another way, documentation, like many other technology-mediated behaviors, may be described as another prominent instantiation of the "present-absent paradox" (Mick and Fournier 1998), where people are physically present but perceived as mentally absent by remaining preoccupied with their devices or, in this case, experiencing the event through their devices' screens rather than with their own eyes.

Overall, despite evidence suggesting that documentation can enhance overall enjoyment for the documenter, little is known about how such behaviors affect how consumers are judged by others in a shared experiential consumption context. Indeed, a rich body of literature has underscored the differential attributions generated for one's own behaviors versus those of others (Scopelliti, Loewenstein, and Vosgerau 2015; Polman et al. 2022; Celiktutan, Klesse, and Tuk 2024) and, more broadly, the empathy gap (Van Boven et al. 2000), suggesting that it is possible that consumers will likewise be unable to recognize the personal benefits of documentation when observing others' behaviors. Given the ubiquity of documentation in everyday life across myriad

occasions, it is important to determine when and why this behavior can be more of a positive or negative force for all parties involved.

Research Overview

We report five studies to illuminate the proposed *documenting penalty* that can occur during shared experiential consumption, generating negative interpersonal outcomes despite potentially more positive personal experiences. Study 1 provides archival evidence for the documenting penalty through an analysis of reactions to a *New York Times* article on documentation behaviors in the real world. Study 2 offers causal support for this phenomenon, examines different levels of documentation, and assesses the proposed mediator of perceived presence at the event. Study 3 extends the generalizability of this effect with a different type of experiential consumption while testing our proposed process through moderation. Study 4 then examines whether the documenting penalty is specific to the documentation of live events or reflects the broader tendency to penalize inappropriate phone usage. Finally, study 5 shows that this phenomenon persists even when observers are unlikely to be distracted by the target's documenting behavior, thereby explicating the documenting penalty above and beyond any role of observer distraction (see table 1). Overall, we demonstrate that consumer documentation can evoke reduced perceptions of presence, in turn negatively shaping impressions of the documenter with important downstream social consequences, including reduced interest in affiliating with the documenter in future consumption experiences.

STUDY 1: ARCHIVAL EVIDENCE OF THE DOCUMENTING PENALTY

To provide initial insights into how documenting behavior might be judged by observers in an ecologically valid setting, we examined online comments on a popular press article regarding documentation behaviors at concerts, providing a real-world context to assess spontaneous observer reactions to the documentation of ticketed live events, as well as reactions to policies designed to discourage such behaviors (e.g., implementing Yondr pouches). Specifically, we retrieved comments, and the corresponding number of "recommends" each comment received, on a *New York Times* article, "Filming the Show: Pardon the Intrusion? Or Punish It?" (Paulson and Cooper 2019).

Following Garcia-Rada et al. (2022), we scraped comments that were the main comment (not replies), written in English, and contained analyzable text (i.e., not just emojis

Table 1. Study Overview

Study	Context	Data	Design	*N*	Key finding(s)
1	Live ticketed events	Archival	. . .	477	We establish the documenting penalty in real-world archival data while offering initial insights into the mechanism.
2	Concert	Experiment	3 (documentation: higher vs. lower vs. none)	213	Higher documentation generates worse impressions of the documenter than lower documentation, which in turn generates worse impressions than no documentation. These effects are driven by perceived presence.
3	Fireworks show	Experiment	3 (documentation: higher vs. lower vs. tripod)	218	The documenting penalty is attenuated when the behavior no longer ostensibly hampers the documenter's ability to remain present in the focal experience.
4	Concert	Experiment	2 (documentation: higher vs. lower) × 2 (recording device: phone vs. digital camera)	303	The documenting penalty emerges regardless of the recording device used, addressing the potential inference that documenters are using their phones for other purposes.
5	Concert	Experiment	2 (documentation: higher vs. lower) × 2 (physical proximity: closer vs. farther)	209	Documenting behavior need not be within close physical proximity of the observer or directly affect the observer's own experience (through distraction) to shape impressions of the documenter.

or names), which yielded 477 comments. Two coders, unaware of study hypotheses, coded these comments for the overall valence of the commenter's impression of documenting behaviors (0 = *negative impression of documentation*, 1 = *neutral impression*, 2 = *positive impression of documentation*; 82.18% initial coder agreement). Next, to provide initial insights into potential underlying mechanisms, the same coders rated whether comments referenced (*A*) the documenter's perceived distraction or lack of presence, (*B*) the belief that the documenter would be causing a distraction for other concertgoers, and (*C*) the belief that the documenter would be showing disrespect for the performer (all coded as 0 = *did not mention*, 1 = *mentioned*; 64.06%, 88.26%, and 88.47% initial coder agreement, respectively; see online appendix A for coding instructions). Disagreements were resolved via discussion prior to data analysis.

First, 78.20% of comments reflected negative judgments of documenting behavior, whereas only 18.45% and 3.35% of comments reflected neutral and positive judgments, respectively, indicating that most comments expressed negative attitudes toward this behavior. To establish further evidence for a documenting penalty, we next compared the number of recommends that comments received as a function of their overall impression of documenting behavior. We predicted that comments expressing negative judgments of this behavior would receive more recommends than comments that did not express such judgments.[1] A one-way ANOVA revealed, as predicted, that comments expressing negative judgments of documenting behavior received more recommends than comments that did not express such judgments ($M_{\text{neg}} = 43.44$, $SD = 117.31$ vs. $M_{\text{not neg}} = 7.88$, $SD = 10.21$; $F(1, 475) = 9.52$, $p = .0021$, $\eta^2 = .020$), providing preliminary evidence for the existence of a documenting penalty in a naturalistic setting. Of note, in a follow-up study (WA1), we offer additional correlational support for a negative relationship between shared experiential consumption with an actual documenting friend and subsequent relational outcomes (see online appendix B).

Interestingly, 37.74% of comments referenced the documenter's perceived distraction or lack of presence, 41.30% of comments referenced the belief that the documenter would be causing a distraction for other concertgoers, and 21.59% of comments referenced the belief that the documenter would be showing disrespect for the performer. Notably, the fact that observers do seem to be cognizant of the role of *perceived presence* when judging others' documenting behavior suggests support for our proposed mechanism, while revealing various other possible inputs informing this judgment. These various perspectives guided the design of our subsequent experiments, where we provide causal support for the documenting penalty, elucidate our proposed underlying process, and address alternative mechanisms.

1. Because of the limited number of comments expressing positive judgments of documenting behavior (only 16 comments), comments expressing neutral and positive judgments were collapsed in this analysis. Importantly, the overall pattern and significance of results hold when neutral and positive comments were treated as distinct categories.

STUDY 2: PROCESS VIA MEDIATION

Study 2 (preregistered; AsPredicted #59401) experimentally controls for pertinent factors in documenting experiential consumption while examining how observers react to varying amounts of documentation. Specifically, we introduce nuance to documenting behavior, as event organizers recognize that, short of banning access to recording devices altogether (e.g., implementing Yondr pouches; Le 2020), some level of documentation is to be expected (Cridlin 2016). As such, in addition to comparing observer reactions to a higher level of documentation as opposed to no documentation, we investigate how people might react to a lower level of documentation and predict that the documenting penalty will be significantly attenuated to the extent that this behavior hinders perceived presence to a lesser degree.

Method

A total of 213 CloudResearch panelists completed a three-cell (documentation: higher vs. lower vs. none) between-subjects study for payment (45% female, median age = 35, aged 20–69; three did not report age).

Participants first named their favorite musical artist before reading a passage about attending this artist's concert with their friend "Jeff" or "Jenny" (gender-matched to participants). Those in the higher documentation condition noticed that their friend was constantly using their phone to take photographs and videos of the entire event. Those in the lower documentation condition noticed that their friend used their phone to take a few photographs and to record part of a particularly good song but then put it away in their pocket and did not check it for the rest of the event. Finally, those in the no documentation condition noticed that their friend put their phone on silent mode, left it in their pocket, and did not check it during the event (see online appendix C for stimuli).

Next, participants rated their impressions of their friend using three items (1 = *very unfavorable/very unlikable/very*

negative, 7 = *very favorable/very likable/very positive*; α = .99; Daniels and Wu 2024). Subsequently, participants rated their friend's perceived presence by indicating to what extent they thought their friend was present and distracted (reverse-coded) during the concert (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much so*; r = .86).

Results and Discussion

A one-way ANOVA on impressions revealed a significant effect of documentation ($F(2, 210) = 65.18$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .383$). Participants formed more negative impressions of their friend when this person had engaged in higher (vs. no) documentation ($M_{\text{higher}} = 3.93$, SD = 1.56 vs. $M_{\text{none}} = 6.25$, SD = 1.05; $F(1, 210) = 114.59$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .353$). However, the documenting penalty was attenuated for those who had engaged in lower levels of documentation, such that these individuals generated more positive impressions than those who engaged in higher levels of documentation ($M_{\text{lower}} = 5.82$, SD = 1.20; $F(1, 210) = 76.50$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .267$). While participants formed more negative impressions when their friend had engaged in lower as opposed to no documentation ($F(1, 210) = 3.93$, $p = .0487$, $\eta^2 = .018$), this difference was substantially smaller in magnitude.

The same analysis on perceived presence revealed a significant effect of documentation ($F(2, 210) = 117.69$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .529$). The friend was perceived as less present when this person had engaged in higher as opposed to no documentation ($M_{\text{higher}} = 3.38$, SD = 1.69 vs. $M_{\text{none}} = 6.56$, SD = 1.00; $F(1, 210) = 203.16$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .456$) or lower documentation ($M_{\text{lower}} = 6.04$, SD = 1.18; $F(1, 210) = 143.64$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .323$). Their friend was perceived as less present when this person had engaged in lower as opposed to no documentation ($F(1, 210) = 5.31$, $p = .0222$, $\eta^2 = .012$), although this difference was, again, smaller in magnitude.

Based on our conceptualization, the negative impressions of someone who engages in higher levels of documentation should be driven by perceived presence. A multicategorical mediation analysis (model 4; Hayes 2017) revealed that the indirect effect of documentation on impressions through perceived presence was significant for both the higher versus no documentation ($b = 2.05$; 95% CI: [1.5690, 2.6088]) and the higher versus lower documentation comparisons ($b = 1.72$; 95% CI: [1.2702, 2.2385]).

Study 2 provides causal support for the documenting penalty while demonstrating the underlying role of perceived presence. Of note, we conceptually replicate these findings in WA2 by testing how this behavior shapes subsequent interest in pursuing joint experiences with the documenter (see online appendix D). Importantly, the documenting penalty was significantly attenuated for individuals who engaged in lower levels of documentation, suggesting that less documentation could be tolerable and even enhance both personal and social benefits, although this condition does systematically investigate combinations of the frequency and consistency of documentation throughout the event. While it is beyond the scope of the present research to empirically disentangle the two, our methods reflect that documentation frequency and consistency often co-occur in reality. Moreover, given that some level of documentation is normative, if not expected, in today's digital age (Romano 2023), in our remaining studies, we compare higher versus lower levels of documentation for a more conservative test.

STUDY 3: PROCESS VIA MODERATION

In study 3, we shed additional insight into the mechanism by holding the documentation level constant and directly varying the degree of perceived presence, thereby elucidating the underlying process via moderation (Spencer, Zanna, and Fong 2005). Specifically, the documenting penalty should be attenuated if the behavior does not detract from the documenter's ability to be present in the focal event and experience the event with their own eyes rather than through the screen on their devices. Moreover, we expand the generalizability of this phenomenon by focusing on a fireworks show that does not center around a focal artist. In doing so, we also examine whether perceived disrespect for the performer is necessary for this effect to occur (Lebrecht 2024), given that such judgments spontaneously emerged in study 1.

Method

A total of 218 undergraduate students from a university in the southeastern United States completed a three-cell (documentation: higher vs. lower vs. tripod-outsourced) between-subjects study for partial course credit (45% female, median age = 20, aged 18–25).

Participants imagined they were attending a fireworks show with their friend Jeff or Jenny (gender-matched to participants' self-reported gender). Those in the higher and lower documentation conditions read a similar passage as study 2, whereas those in the tripod-outsourced condition noticed their friend had brought a camera tripod setup so that they could use their phone to record the entire event, but once the tripod was in place, their friend did not touch their phone again for the rest of the event. In

other words, while the level of documentation in the tripod condition was just as high as in the higher documentation condition, this behavior no longer ostensibly hampered the documenter's ability to remain present during the event, freeing them to enjoy the experience with their own eyes (see online appendix E for stimuli).

Next, participants completed the same impressions index as study 2 ($\alpha = .95$). We also sought to extend our focus to downstream social consequences by assessing how likely and how much they would want to attend future live events with this friend, which formed a future affiliation interest index ($r = .94$). Finally, participants rated their friend's perceived presence using the same items as study 2 ($r = .70$) before completing an additional exploratory measure (see online appendix E).

Results and Discussion

A one-way ANOVA on impressions revealed a significant effect of documentation ($F(1, 215) = 47.01$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .304$; fig. 1*A*). Participants formed more negative impressions of their friend when this person had engaged in higher as opposed to lower documentation ($M_{\text{higher}} = 3.58$, SD = 1.14 vs. $M_{\text{lower}} = 5.29$, SD = 1.04; $F(1, 215) = 90.79$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .297$) or documentation facilitated by a tripod ($M_{\text{tripod}} = 4.71$, SD = 1.07; $F(1, 215) = 39.20$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .154$), showing that the documenting penalty is attenuated when the behavior does not ostensibly reduce the documenter's presence during the experience. Notably, despite this significant attenuation, tripod usage still generated more negative impressions compared to lower documentation ($F(1, 215) = 10.17$, $p = .0016$, $\eta^2 = .045$).

The same analysis on future affiliation interest revealed a significant effect of documentation ($F(1, 215) = 73.20$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .405$; fig. 1*B*). Participants expressed lower interest in attending future live events with their friend when this person had engaged in higher versus lower documentation ($M_{\text{higher}} = 3.24$, SD = 1.28 vs. $M_{\text{lower}} = 5.71$, SD = 1.09; $F(1, 215) = 141.13$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .396$) or documentation facilitated by a tripod ($M_{\text{tripod}} = 4.88$, SD = 1.39; $F(1, 215) = 61.68$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .223$). Furthermore, participants expressed lower interest in attending future live events with their friend when this person had engaged in documentation using their tripod compared to lower documentation ($F(1, 215) = 15.44$, $p = .0001$, $\eta^2 = .067$).

The same analysis on perceived presence revealed a significant effect of documentation ($F(1, 215) = 80.31$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .428$; fig. 1*C*). The friend was perceived as less present when this person had engaged in higher as opposed to lower documentation ($M_{\text{higher}} = 3.10$, SD = 1.12 vs. $M_{\text{lower}} = 5.43$, SD = 1.11; $F(1, 215) = 140.95$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .396$) or documentation facilitated by a tripod ($M_{\text{tripod}} = 5.02$, SD = 1.34; $F(1, 215) = 94.33$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .305$). Furthermore, the friend was perceived as less present when this person had engaged in documentation using their tripod compared to lower documentation ($F(1, 215) = 4.28$, $p = .0397$, $\eta^2 = .020$).

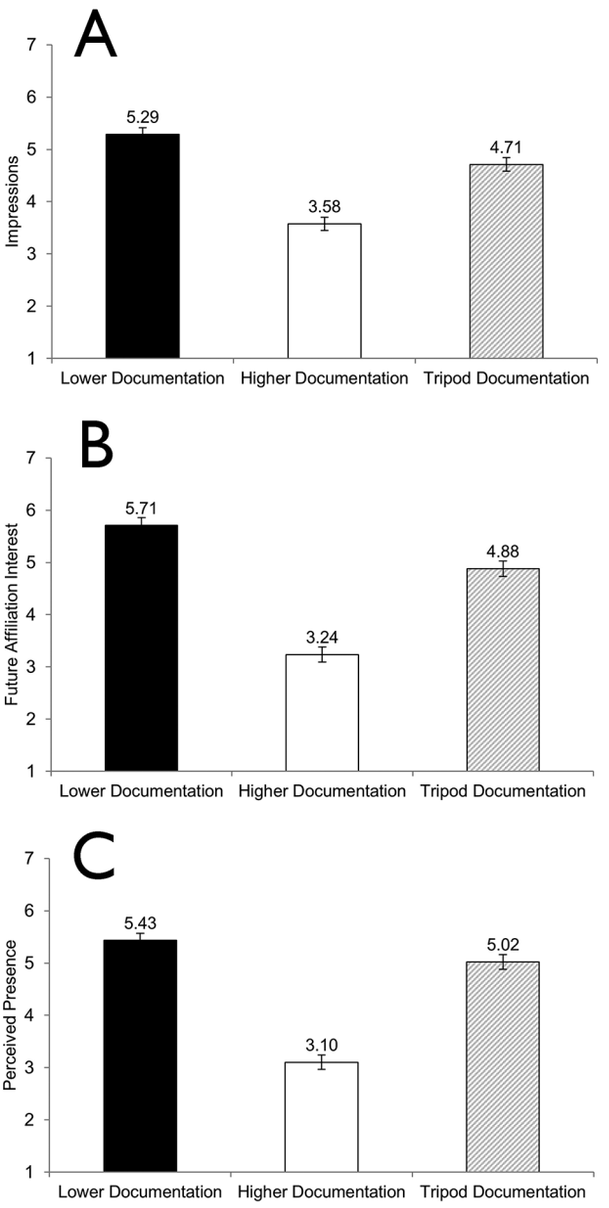

Figure 1. Study 3: The documenting penalty is attenuated when the behavior no longer ostensibly hampers the documenter's ability to remain present in the focal experience, like when documentation is facilitated by a tripod. Error bars = ±1 SE.

Finally, a multicategorical mediation analysis (model 4; Hayes 2017) revealed that the indirect effect of documentation on impressions through perceived presence was significant for both the higher versus lower documentation ($b = 1.05$; 95% CI: [.7331, 1.3874]) and the higher versus tripod documentation comparisons ($b = .86$; 95% CI: [.5680, 1.1914]). The pattern of mediation results for future affiliation interest was also significant in the same direction, such that the indirect effect through perceived presence was significant for both the higher versus lower documentation ($b = 1.64$; 95% CI: [1.2925, 2.0222]) and the higher versus tripod documentation comparisons ($b = 1.35$; 95% CI: [1.0097, 1.7280]).

Overall, study 3 provides additional evidence for our underlying process by directly manipulating perceived presence, showing that the documenting penalty is substantially attenuated when this behavior no longer ostensibly hampers the individual's ability to remain present in the experience. Furthermore, study 3 demonstrates that this phenomenon can carry downstream consequences for future affiliation interest with one's friends, while showing that judgments of disrespect for the focal artist is not necessary for this effect to emerge. Notably, tripod usage (i.e., outsourced documentation) still generated more negative reactions compared to lower documentation, possibly due to lower perceived presence, but possibly also due to the distraction that a tripod setup would have presumably caused for other attendees, an alternative explanation we revisit in our last study.

STUDY 4: PROBING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DOCUMENTATION AND PHUBBING

Prior research has identified the interpersonal consequences of phone usage during social experiences (Barrick et al. 2022). Accordingly, study 4 (preregistered; AsPredicted #198514) examines the relationship between documenting behavior and phubbing. That is, is the documenting penalty simply an instantiation of the broader negative judgments ascribed to people who engage in phone-based activities during a social event (e.g., texting, app usage, web browsing), or is it specific to documenting live experiences? To address this question, we investigate whether the documenting penalty emerges even among users of digital cameras, wherein the sole function is to document and record. This examination is not only theoretically driven but also substantively relevant, given the renewed popularity and proliferation of digital cameras among younger consumers at concerts and live events (Huang 2023; Chen 2024). If the documenting penalty reflects the broader tendency to punish phubbers who engage in inappropriate phone usage, we would expect people to be penalized only when using their phones, but not their digital cameras, to document experiences. However, in line with an account grounded in perceived presence, we expect this phenomenon to emerge regardless of the device used to engage in documentation.

Method

A total of 303 Connect by CloudResearch panelists completed a 2 (documentation: higher vs. lower) × 2 (recording device: smartphone vs. digital camera) between-subjects study for payment (46% female, median age = 36, aged 18–73).

Like study 2, participants first named their favorite musical artist before reading a passage about attending this artist's concert with their friend "Jeff," "Jenny," or "Avery" (gender-matched to participants), who engaged in either higher or lower documentation using either their phone or their digital camera. Specifically, those in the higher documentation condition noticed that their friend used their phone (digital camera) to take dozens of photographs and several lengthy videos at multiple points during the event, thus holding onto the device throughout the entire event. On the other hand, those in the lower documentation condition noticed that their friend used their phone (digital camera) to take a couple photographs and one brief video at the beginning of the event and then put the device away for the rest of the event (see online appendix F for stimuli).

Subsequently, participants rated their impressions of their friend ($\alpha = .97$) and their perceived presence ($r = .73$) using the same measures as prior studies.

Results and Discussion

A 2 (documentation) × 2 (recording device) ANOVA on impressions revealed a significant main effect of documentation ($M_{\text{higher}} = 4.77$, SD = 1.38 vs. $M_{\text{lower}} = 5.83$, SD = 1.24; $F(1, 299) = 49.09$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .141$), such that participants formed more negative impressions of their friend when this person had engaged in higher (vs. lower) documentation. Interestingly, there was also a marginally significant interaction ($F(1, 299) = 3.48$, $p = .0631$, $\eta^2 = .012$; fig. 2*A*), where participants formed negative impressions of their friend when this person had used their phone to engage in relatively higher documentation ($M_{\text{ph, higher}} = 4.57$, SD = 1.43 vs. $M_{\text{ph, lower}} = 5.90$, SD = 1.24; $F(1, 299) = 39.74$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .117$), an effect that also emerged when they had used their digital camera to engage in higher documentation,

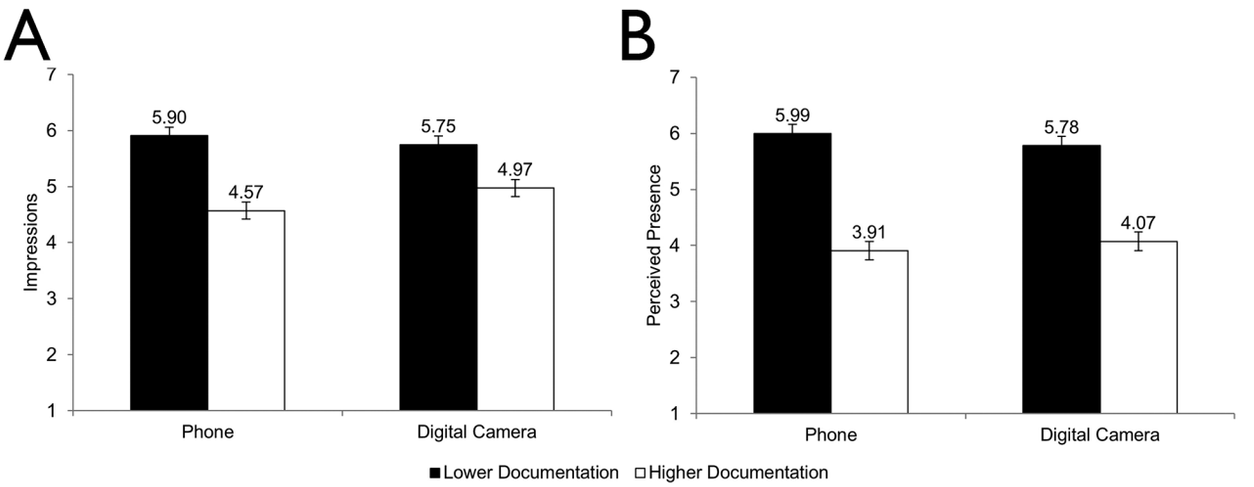

Figure 2. Study 4: The documenting penalty emerges regardless of the recording device used, addressing the potential inference that documenters are using their phones for other purposes. Error bars = ±1 SE.

albeit to a marginally lesser extent ($M_{\text{cam, higher}} = 4.97$, SD = 1.31 vs. $M_{\text{cam, lower}} = 5.75$, SD = 1.25; $F(1, 299) = 13.08$, $p = .0003$, $\eta^2 = .042$).

The same analysis on perceived presence revealed only a significant main effect of documentation, such that their friend was perceived as less present when this person had engaged in higher (vs. lower) documentation ($M_{\text{higher}} = 3.99$, SD = 1.60 vs. $M_{\text{lower}} = 5.89$, SD = 1.25; $F(1, 299) = 131.21$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .305$; fig. 2*B*). The interaction was not significant ($F(1, 299) = 1.31$, $p = .2533$), suggesting that higher documentation generated lower perceptions of presence regardless of the device used. Finally, because we did not detect significant interactions, we conducted a mediation analysis collapsing across device (model 4; Hayes 2017), which revealed a significant indirect effect of documentation on impressions through perceived presence ($b = -.97$; 95% CI: [−1.2372, −.7237]). Study 4 demonstrates that the documenting penalty occurs regardless of the device used, indicating that this phenomenon is specific to documenting and not simply another instantiation of the broader negative judgments ascribed to people who use their phones during social experiences (Barrick et al. 2022).

STUDY 5: EXAMINING THE DOCUMENTING PENALTY ABOVE AND BEYOND THE DISTRACTING NATURE OF OBSERVING DOCUMENTING

Recall that our investigation of the documenting penalty was partially inspired by the ironically presence-enhancing nature of this activity for the documenter from a personal perspective, which is distinct from other technology-mediated behaviors like texting and web browsing that are common sources of distraction. Accordingly, study 5 gauges observer reactions to documenters as a function of whether observers themselves could be personally distracted by the documenter's behavior during the shared experience. Although it is possible that documenting heavily during experiential consumption can disrupt other attendees' experiences and reduce their enjoyment, which is a sentiment alluded to in study 1's archival data and is particularly likely among those in the documenter's vicinity (Diehl and Zauberman 2022; Niles 2024), we suggest that the perceived lack of presence stemming from this behavior is enough to induce the documenting penalty. As such, in our final study, we examine whether this phenomenon emerges even when the documenter's behavior is unlikely to distract the observer, as when they are physically seated farther apart. In other words, we predict that social judgments of presence are sufficient to shape impressions of the documenter, without necessarily requiring that the documenting behavior be physically proximate and thus personally disruptive for observers.

Method

A total of 209 undergraduate students from a southeastern US university completed a 2 (documentation: higher vs. lower) × 2 (physical proximity: closer vs. farther) between-subjects study for partial course credit (45% female, median age = 20, aged 18–23).

Like study 2, participants first named their favorite musical artist before imagining attending this artist's concert

with their friend "Jeff," "Jenny," or "Avery" (gender-matched to participants), who engaged in either higher or lower documentation. In this study, we also manipulated the physical proximity between participants and their friend to operationalize the possibility for distraction. Specifically, participants in the physically closer condition learned that they were seated together, enabling them to witness their friend's documenting behavior firsthand. However, in the physically farther condition, participants learned that because they had purchased tickets last minute and could not be seated together, participants only learned about the extent of their friend's documenting behavior after the concert, making it unlikely that their friend's behavior interfered with their own concert experience (see online appendix G for stimuli). Subsequently, participants rated their impressions of their friend ($\alpha = .95$) and their perceived presence ($r = .78$) using the same measures as prior studies before completing additional exploratory measures (see online appendix G).

Results and Discussion

A 2 (documentation) × 2 (physical proximity) ANOVA on target impressions revealed a significant main effect of documentation, such that participants formed more negative impressions of their friend who had engaged in higher (vs. lower) documentation ($M_{\text{higher}} = 3.78$, SD = 1.20 vs. $M_{\text{lower}} = 5.51$, SD = 1.01; $F(1, 205) = 133.22$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .394$). This effect was qualified by an interaction ($F(1, 205) = 7.39$, $p = .0071$, $\eta^2 = .035$; fig. 3*A*). When seated more closely together, participants formed more negative impressions of their friend when this person had engaged in higher (vs. lower) documentation ($M_{\text{clo,high}} = 3.64$, SD = 1.19 vs. $M_{\text{clo,low}} = 5.79$, SD = 1.03; $F(1, 205) = 101.20$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .331$). However, this effect was attenuated, although still significant, when they were seated farther apart ($M_{\text{far,high}} = 3.92$, SD = 1.20 vs. $M_{\text{far,low}} = 5.25$, SD = .92; $F(1, 205) = 39.11$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .160$). Importantly, these results underscore how higher levels of documentation need not be personally witnessed or even directly affect the observer's own experience to shape impressions of the documenter, suggesting that the possibility of distraction for the observer during the experience does not fully explain the effect.

The same analysis on perceived presence revealed only a main effect of documentation, such that their friend was perceived as less present when they had engaged in higher (vs. lower) documentation ($M_{\text{higher}} = 3.00$, SD = 1.09 vs. $M_{\text{lower}} = 5.84$, SD = .97; $F(1, 205) = 396.47$, $p < .0001$, $\eta^2 = .659$; fig. 3*B*). No other effects were significant (all $p > .234$), suggesting that higher documentation is associated with lower perceived presence than lower documentation regardless of physical proximity, and, by extension, the potential to directly distract the observer.

Finally, moderated mediation analysis (model 8; Hayes 2017) revealed significant indirect effects through perceived presence in both the physically closer ($b = -1.53$; 95% CI: [−2.0395, −1.0682]) and farther conditions ($b = -1.36$; 95% CI: [−1.7769, −.9747]). The index of moderated mediation was not significant ($b = .17$; 95% CI: [−.1026, .4893]), consistent with our theorizing that the documenting penalty is driven by reduced perceptions of presence, regardless of physical proximity, and, by extension,

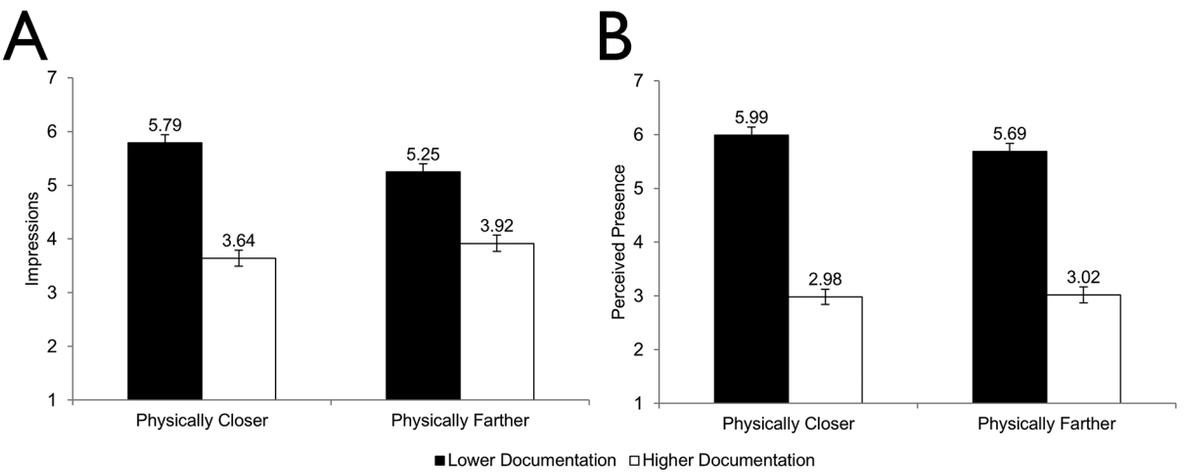

Figure 3. Study 5: Documenting behavior need not be within close physical proximity of the observer or directly affect the observer's own experience (through distraction) to shape impressions of the documenter. Error bars = ±1 SE.

the likelihood of distraction for observers. Study 5 reinforces that higher documentation consistently generates negative impressions via lowered perceptions of presence, regardless of whether this behavior was personally distracting for observers during the focal experience. These findings stand in contrast to an alternative account that implicates the personally distracting nature of observing documenting as necessary for generating this phenomenon, thereby further expanding its robustness and generalizability.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

We investigated the social consequences of documenting experiences and uncovered a *documenting penalty*, where people are penalized for documenting consumption experiences due to the social perception that they are less present in the focal event when doing so. These findings highlight an interesting asymmetry in documenting behaviors during experiential consumption—while prior work has identified the personal benefits of documentation for engagement, memory, and enjoyment (Zhang et al. 2014; Diehl et al. 2016; Barasch et al. 2017; Tonietto and Barasch 2021), observers nonetheless infer that the documenter is less mentally present in the consumption experience, in turn generating negative downstream consumer consequences. We find that lower levels of documentation, or taking only a few photos or recording a single short video, have a less negative effect on perceptions of presence and impressions. Importantly, the documenting penalty lowers interest in attending future experiences with the documenter, uncovering heretofore unappreciated social consequences of this ubiquitous behavior, and emerges regardless of the recording device used, and, by extension, the possibility for phubbing to occur. Finally, observers need not personally witness someone's documenting behavior to form negative judgments of this person—even when seated farther apart, observers perceive documenters as less present and thus deem them less likeable despite the lack of immediate distractibility as a plausible explanation.

The present research contributes to and bridges extant research on shared experiential consumption (Raghunathan and Corfman 2006; Bhargave, Montgomery, and Redden 2018) and the impact of technology usage during such consumption (Diehl et al. 2016; Tonietto and Barasch 2021; Barrick et al. 2022), highlighting previously unexplored social consequences. There are several aspects of the present work that could inspire additional future research. First, while our studies showed the robustness of our proposed mechanism and addressed alternative explanations like perceived disrespect for the performer and the presumed distraction caused to other attendees, the documenting penalty is likely multiply determined (e.g., inferred impression management motives; Barasch et al. 2018). Indeed, the spontaneous emergence of some of the abovementioned themes in study 1 points to additional complementary mechanisms that further research can unpack.

Second, given our reliance on controlled experiments, messier real-world scenarios may introduce additional factors that could further moderate the relation between documenting behaviors and social judgments in the marketplace. That said, the abundant media attention surrounding consumers' documenting behaviors suggests a robust phenomenon with widespread social and marketing consequences. Future research might focus on field work to examine consumer satisfaction at live events before versus after the introduction of phone restrictions during live events, for instance.

Third, while we have mostly focused on the documenting behavior of presumed friends who jointly attended the event, study 1 implies that the documenting penalty can extend to online influencers and even strangers, possibly thwarting the development of new social connections among attendees at live events (e.g., Hutchins 2016). Such negative judgments could have consequences for the overall fan experience, given that the social barriers created by documentation could disrupt the camaraderie that fans and patrons may have otherwise expected and shared. It is also intriguing to consider whether efforts to improve the live consumption experience, like antidocumentation policies (e.g., Yondr pouches), could bring about their own set of repercussions—implementation expense, logistical bottlenecks, trust erosion—that could instead undermine the original goal of improving the overall experience for attendees.

Indeed, future research could compare the relative efficacy of various strategies employed by event organizers to curtail documentation among attendees. For instance, performers might appreciate and even designate a "social media segment" where a minimal amount of documenting can be encouraged in a well-defined but limited segment, while barring such documentation during the rest of the show (Snapbar 2023). Such softer approaches to limit live-event documentation may ultimately generate better outcomes for all involved compared to more rigid approaches that prohibit recording devices altogether. More broadly, given that many photos and videos captured during live experiences are shared on social media (Chin 2023; Romano 2023), sometimes in real time, it would be interesting to examine when and how the documenting penalty emerges online,

such that people who share concert footage on social media are similarly denigrated by other users, not just by those physically present at the event. For instance, it seems plausible to consider whether banning documentation may impact influencers' and content creators' ability to cultivate consumer interest in attending live events, thus undermining important indirect pathways for marketing outreach and word-of-mouth to expand consumer interest and even achieve online virality.

Finally, this work suggests process-specific strategies to preserve the personal benefits of documenting (i.e., increased engagement) while mitigating its negative social consequences via reductions in perceived presence, to the maximum enjoyment of all parties involved. Future research could explore the thresholds at which documenting live events or shared experiences begins to carry negative social costs, which would enable us to build on our present emphasis on the social acceptability of lower versus higher levels of documentation and pinpoint exactly what constitutes "too much" documentation. However, for now, it appears that the personal benefits of this behavior may at least be partially offset by the negative social consequences. To conclude, while people often take photos and record videos during shared experiential consumption, our research suggests that this behavior represents an effective and reliable way to lose friends and influence no one.

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