

WHY YOU SHOULD DELETE YOUR INSTAGRAM

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I recently stumbled upon an extremely thought-provoking talk by Jaron Lanier, describing social media as a '[Behavior Modification Empire](#)'. This is precisely why it is a good idea for you to #DeleteInstagram -- in order for you to not allow Facebook/Instagram/social media to modify your behavior as a photographer, artist, and creative.

Behavior Modification

To be honest, there are a lot of good things about Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Messenger, and other social media apps. They have made it much easier for us to connect to other human beings, and has made (some) of day-to-day living easier, more streamlined, and with less friction/frustration.

In 2010, I created/taught a course at UCLA titled: "[Sociology of Facebook and Online Social Networks](#)" (PDF Syllabus) and was curious with the question:

Is social media bring us closer together, or driving us further apart?

I think as of right now (2018), my answer is this:

Social media is connecting us with other humans, but on a more superficial level. Not only that, but social media is fucking up our psyche and modifying our behavior in subtle, negative ways.

Subtle ways in which Instagram modified my behavior as a photographer-artist in negative ways

Let me explain some of my thinking.

First of all, Instagram is a good way to share photos easily, and connect with photographers/creatives from all around the world. Downside is that our self-worth as photographers/artists is belittled/quantified into a superficial measure (likes). We believe (wrongly) if we get more likes on a photo, the better the photo is, and the better we are as artist/photographers.

Secondly, the problem with likes on Instagram/social media is that it trains us to behave differently as photographers. It changes how we shoot, what we shoot, and which photos we decide to share. Because of course, it is in our best interest to maximize our likes and follower numbers. Therefore based on the quick and rapid feedback of Instagram (we upload a photo, and then gauge how many likes it gets us), we start to subtly change our behavior/what we decide to photograph to maximize our likes on a photo. Certain ways our behavior is modified as photographers:

- **We try to optimize how many photos we upload a day, and try to optimize for a certain time to upload.** For example, I have found in the past for myself, uploading precisely 1 photo (only 1 photo) a day, at around noon (pacific time) was ideal for maximizing my likes per photograph. The downside is that the algorithm for Instagram/Facebook discourages you sharing multiple photos in quick succession. Consequence: An over-emphasis on the single image, and less focus on story-telling in photography with multiple images, sets, and series.
- **We see which of our photos get a lot of likes, and therefore we start to try to shoot more of those types of photos.** This means we are trying to focus on pleasing our audience with tried and true/cliche photos, which generally please everyone (like IKEA art). For example, photos that don't "offend" and photos that everyone (including your mom) will like. This includes black and white minimalist photos, photos that have good symmetry, and food, cat, and sunset photos.
- **Innovation is stifled:** Photos that are innovative will generally NOT get a lot of likes on Instagram/social media. Why? Most people won't "get it". Not only that, but once we have built up a following on social media, our audience expects us to *continue* making/uploading/sharing a certain style/"look"/aesthetic of photos, and might unfollow (or not like your new innovative photos). For example, ERIC KIM is known as a street photographer, but if he suddenly starts uploading landscape photos or personal photos to his Instagram, people will think: "WTF? I thought ERIC KIM was a street photographer!" (and might

unfollow me). And therefore ERIC KIM might be afraid to innovate in his photography, by *only* shooting street photography, to continue to please his followers.

Why I'm happier/more creative after deleting my Instagram

On May 16th 2017, I deleted my Instagram and as a result, have been happier ever since. To be honest, there are still moments I get "FOMO" (fear of missing out), because I see all these young people/photographers in general using Instagram more than ever, and I feel like I might have become weaker/less relevant that I no longer have an Instagram. Sometimes I wonder, "Did I make the right decision?" Sometimes I wonder, "Did my personal income/business take a negative hit because I deleted my Instagram?"

But after meditating and reflecting on my decision to delete Instagram, I realized: deleting my Instagram was probably one of the best decisions I have ever made in my photography, and as an artist.

Why?

1. **Ever since deleting my Instagram, I have been able to better listen to my own inner-voice as a photographer-artist, and started to re-spark my initial enthusiasm/passion for photography.** When I started photography when I was 18 years old (2006), social media didn't really exist. There was no "like" button yet on Facebook, and there wasn't any real way to gauge how much people liked your photo, besides seeing page views on your website/photo blog, or seeing the number of comments you got. Therefore when I started as a beginner photographer, I had a lot more fun just making photos for myself, documenting my own life, and treating photography like fun experimentation/visual art creation.
2. **Instagram favors the single image.** Since deleting Instagram, I have innovated new ways of sharing. For example, I have allowed myself to start creating more photo-diaries, photo-essays, and photography slideshows on my YouTube. I have also been less distracted by Instagram, and have used that mental energy to invest in myself and my own platform (this blog).

3. **I have been more motivated/inspired to shoot NEW photos!** I care less about staying consistent with a certain style/aesthetic/subject matter to please my followers. Therefore, I have returned to my "beginner's mind" in photography, by shooting random photos of urban landscapes, textures, colors, my food, my loved ones, and other random stuff I discover in the store. This has helped me realize the truth that photography isn't about making the world's best photos, photography isn't about getting the most followers/more likes on your photos. Photography is about living your life to the fullest, finding more appreciation in your everyday life, living life more adventurously, partaking in new experiences, connecting with new people (either other photographers, or strangers you photograph in street photography) and creating visual art which brings delight and joy to your soul.

Don't listen to me; Follow Your Own Gut

The purpose of this essay is to give you certain reasons why I'm glad I deleted my Instagram, the new creative energy no longer having Instagram has afforded me, and to also give you the confidence that yes -- you can delete your Instagram. Not only that, but after deleting your Instagram, you might be more innovative, more joyful, and "happier" as a photographer as a result.

Of course there are downsides. By NOT having an Instagram, other photographers on Instagram will have more difficulty following you and your work. By not being on Instagram, you will "miss out" on new features/ways of sharing your work. By not being on Instagram, you might have fewer opportunities to work with brands/companies.

But to me, if I think about my death and thinking backwards, I will not be 90 years old and on my deathbed wishing that I had more likes/followers on my Instagram. I will care more about whether I was able to stay inspired, creative, innovative, and fulfilled in my photography during my brief stint on planet Earth. I will care more about the few meaningful photos that I shot of my loved ones, family, and of society. I will care more about having the control/flexibility of dictating how I want to share/publish my photos (the benefit of owning your own photography website/blog/platform).

What are the alternatives to Instagram?

My suggestion: don't build your kingdom on quicksand. The simplest suggestion to empower yourself as a photographer-artist-creative is to own your own website/blog. Easiest way to do that is to just signup via bluehost.com, and make a wordpress.org website/blog. Choose a theme you like (I like Genesis theme) and publish your photos that way. If you want to share your photos with friends and family, just email them a link to your website, tell them in person, or hand out business cards with your email/website address (the old-school way). Print out your photos, share prints, print your own books (blurb.com is a great option) or make a "zine" (magazine of your photographs, which you can also do on Blurb via 'Magcloud').

If you want feedback on your photos, signup for arsbeta.com where you can upload your photos and get honest/anonymous feedback from other photographers, via a 'fair' algorithm that you don't need to game. My friend Kevin built the platform, and [Cindy has been the visionary for the company](#).

But remember at the end of the day, your artistic vision is the most important as a photographer. Always follow your own gut, your intuition, and never let your own inner-voice be drowned out by the opinions of others. And certainly don't let the number of likes on Facebook/Instagram dictate which photos you decide to take/share/publish.

Stay true to yourself, and always shoot faithfully for yourself.

BE BOLD, ERIC