

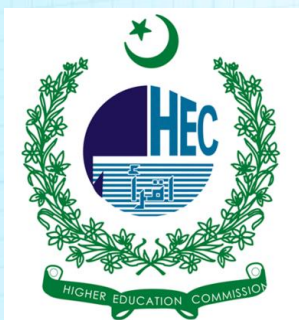
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**Instagram Stories as Literature: Narrative, Audience, and Form
in Social Media Storytelling**



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Abstract

In this paper, we will discuss Instagram Stories as a specific style of digital storytelling with its narrative patterns, interactions with the audience, and differences with other social media networks, along with the standard models of short narrative that are flash fiction and diaries. The paper utilises a qualitative content analysis method to analyse Instagram Storeys shared between March and May 2023 as a form of analysis of the essential elements of narrative, thus including plot, character, and interactivity of the audience. The overall result indicates that Instagram Stories are distinguished by their fusion of brevity, multimodality, and interactivity, creating a dynamic, participatory narrative experience flow. Contrary to sites such as TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter/X, the presence of multimedia and interactive tools in Instagram enables more complex and flexible storytelling. Furthermore, the work demonstrates how Instagram Stories have additional features that are standard to traditional communicative narratives as they focus on conciseness and self-expression. Finally, this study reveals how Instagram stories redesigned digital storytelling, which explains how social media is changing the purpose of narration building.

Keywords: Instagram Stories, Online Storytelling, Analysis of Narratives, Social Media Networks, User Engagement, Flash Fiction, Diaries, Multimodality, Interactivity, Comparative Analysis.

1. Introduction

The era of the Internet has radically reshaped the consumption and production of stories due to the emergence of social media discussion. Instagram is an immensely popular platform; in 2016, the company launched a new feature called Stories, enabling members to communicate temporary multimedia content (Ameer et al., 2025). The fact that you lose it within 24 hours is a plus, and it provides a very special terrain on which to recount some stories, a collection of text messages, photos, videos, and interactive gadgets, including questionnaires and polls. Instagram stories have become a significant part of daily communication, leaving an enormous mark on how individuals view content and communicate with each other (Schroeder and Zwick, 2020).

More than the constitutional digital mode of storytelling, Instagram Story has many similarities with the old modes of storytelling. According to Marshall, modern digital stories are composed in brief, interactive, and multimodal and the same applies to other digital and printed formats such as flash fiction, blogs (Marshall, 2020). Unlike the conventional storytelling process, which usually consumes time and effort, Instagram Stories make the best use of immediacy and interactivity, whereby the storytelling process flows fast and attractively. Actually, recent research indicates that the shortness of Instagram Stories is a factor that makes them more appealing by providing a rapid yet entertaining way of storytelling (Cook, 2020).

The use of Instagram Stories also does not share the narrative structure and audience engagement similar to the other social media platforms, such as TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter/X. An example would be TikTok, which is predominantly video-oriented and is usually driven by highly scripted content. It employs trends and challenges to formulate a narrative (Van Dijck, 2020). Despite the similarities between Snapchat and Instagram Stories in the ephemeral nature of their content, it cannot be presupposed with the same steepness of integration of non-story posts and multimedia tools as seen on Instagram (Mejias and Vazquez, 2017). Instead, Twitter/X is more oriented around text-based content and does not allow as much storytelling potential as Instagram Stories do due to multimedia capabilities (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). According to the views provided by Alper and Kara (2020), Instagram can promote a more fluid and high-visual narrative through its visual tools of image, video, text, and interactivity with the audience.

Unlike these other platforms, Instagram Stories occupy a special place in the digital storytelling hierarchy because they are permanent and temporary content embedded in them. Instagram lets users organise their posts to create a seamless story over time, Highlights to save their choice alone Stories so that they can make more enduring stories (Richter, 2015). Instagram stories have this time-sensitive trait, which sets them apart as social media content, giving a feeling of urgency and proximity to the narrated stories (Sullivan and McCarthy, 2020).

Additionally, one can analyse the Instagram stories using the classical models of short narratives, such as flash fiction or journal posts. Flash fiction is a form of writing that

emphasises a small but effective narrative, and it resembles the spirit of Instagram Stories, where word length and timeliness are valued the most (Kuzmicova, 2019). Instagram stories are similar to diary entries, namely, when the readers expose themselves and rediscover the elements of thought or experience through snippets, yet non-monologic form. Instagram Stories as an interactive solution where users can engage with the content by using polls, questions, and a direct one provides some form of participation and contribution to the audience and complements the process of storytelling (Fuchs, 2017).

In this paper, I hope to provide a discussion of Instagram Stories as a literature and discuss their narrative structure, the interest in the story and their relation to the digital storytelling environment. This study will help to provide information about how Instagram Stories has transformed the art of storytelling in the digital era by comparing it with other socio-cultural technologies such as TikTok, Snapchat and Twitter/X insofar as any similarities to traditional forms of short narratives are concerned.

1.1. Research Questions

- i. How does storytelling through Instagram Stories differ from other social media platforms such as TikTok, Snapchat, Twitter/X?
- ii. What similarities and differences exist between traditional short narrative forms (flash fiction, diary entries) and Instagram Stories?

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Process of Social Media Storytelling

Social media platforms have reinvented the age-old landscape of storytelling and provide users with various new ways to produce and release their narratives. In particular, Instagram Stories have become a dominant storytelling tool with their short life span and integration of media events. According to Johnson and Masters (2019), the changes taking place as social media storytelling evolves include a greater brevity and the fusion of multiple media forms such as images, video, and text writing. Unlike traditional media that often rely on a long-form approach for storytelling, platforms such as Instagram have adopted a more fragmented and immediate approach to storytelling. These shifts are consistent with what Nahon and Hemsley

(2021) call "snackable content," in which users view short and digestible pieces of information, one after the other, in quick succession.

Instagram Stories play on children's love of the ephemeral, and foster a sense of urgency and intimacy. Content creators, brands and their everyday users alike use these features to share personal stories, announcements and marketing campaigns (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). This time element sets the Instagram Stories apart from other social platforms, as their 24-hour lifetime makes them a limited time to interact with. In contrast to this, other platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook, although they provide updates that are temporary, provide a different emphasis on temporality than Instagram Stories (Bucher & Helmond, 2018).

2.2. Instagram Stories vs. Other Social Media Platforms

Instagram Stories, while included in the much broader ephemeral social media content trend, are differentiated from other such platforms, such as TikTok, Snapchat and Twitter/X, in a number of key ways. The main contrast is that there is multimedia integration. TikTok, for example, is primarily focused on short-form video content, and it often comes with music and sound effects. This is different from Instagram Stories, which tend to encourage users to combine these elements into a single post, such as a more flexible and layered narrative structure with images, text, video, and interactive elements (Liu & Zhao, 2021). Another thing that TikTok's algorithm tends to push is trending, meaning that while stories are personalised, they can rely more heavily on viral trends than Instagram (Rees & Sweeney, 2020) does.

Snapchat, another of the platforms with ephemeral experiences, has a similar 24-hour turnaround of content, but Snapchat uses augmented reality (AR) features and filters, drawing on Instagram Stories, which makes it different (Elliot & Urry, 2019). While Snapchat offers great focus on coloured, personalised content, Instagram Stories offer a smoother and worldly speaking story-playing area, especially to influencers and brands (Zhao, 2020). These twitter/X however, remain quite text-based and people apparently leave very short updates or comments; therefore, it does not lend itself to intricate visual pearls of intelligence (Vaughan, 2021). The use of the platform in the creation of various storytelling methods is unique in Instagram since it can use multiple forms of media, which makes it unique.

2.3. Instagram Stories and More Traditional Forms Of Storey

Some of the most striking similarities to be found when comparing Instagram Stories and other types of narratives are involved in the format of the stories is brief and concise. Via flash fiction, this is a genre of storytelling that is characterised by conciseness, with each word mattering to bring a strong story with just a restricted number of words. Instagram Stories are no exception: they encourage the conveyance of short messages, which are typically sharp and to the point and allow condensing narrative or storytelling into brief bursts (Atkins and Cheong, 2021). This structure, being discussed by Long & Short (2019), can be viewed as an evolution of the short story form, misleading for the digital age, where the attention spans of the audience are often short.

Not only that, the personal and reflective nature of Instagram Stories has common ground with the diary entry genre. According to Cheong and Lim 2020, diary writing is often at times fragmented, apart from focusing on the temporal moment in daily life as personal. Likewise, the Instagram stories provide a person with an opportunity to capture their part of the day in a casual and rather unplanned manner, which is fairly close to diary writing, which is unplanned and very unreserved. This may be piled with the freedom to include personal forms of showcasing stories by setting captions, stickers, and interactive features (polls and questions, etc.) (Sullivan, 2020). Therefore, Instagram Stories allow the writing of a diary in a more contemporary and digitally enhanced manner, adding an interactive element to the tactics of doing it, which is optimal in two aspects the audience involvement.

2.4. Audience Engagement and Interactivity For Instagram Stories

The interactive nature of Instagram Stories is a distinguishing factor against which a lot has been said regarding audience engagement in view of this reality. Liu et al. (2020) state that multimedia content integrated with interactive content, such as polls and quizzes, and reaction buttons can turn the passive aspect of watching content into an active buying process and an educational experience. It is this interaction that contributes to the story being more of a narrative interaction, as the audience is part of the history of the story development since they are there in real-time (Gillespie &

McCullough, 2019). Indeed, in this regard, Instagram Stories are a vehicle of creators to narrate a story, but also a vehicle of viewers, who will co-create and shape the narrative.

The two-sided communication through Instagram Stories is particularly relevant to content creators and influencers because it enables them to establish a feeling of closeness and face-to-face communication with their followers. The study by Lee and Leung (2021) highlights the importance of immediacy and interactivity it offers, which is offered by Instagram Story in creating the illusion of a community between the recipient and the sender. This level of engagement means Instagram Stories are a unique platform because the story is not just being dictated by the creator; they are being shaped by the feedback and interaction from the audience, and even more lines are being blurred between being the producer or consumer of content.

2.5. The Short-Lived Life of Instagram Stories

The ephemerality of Instagram Stories -- disappearing after 24 hours -- brings its own uniqueness to the storytelling process. As reported in Jansen and Rees (2020) as stated, this time constraint makes users feel a sense of urgency and forces them to consume the content quickly, engaging with it instantly. The concept of temporary narrating stories has its roots in the oral tradition, which is when people told stories and transmitted them without a common record to take with them. In the modern day, Instagram Stories is taking this concept back, but in a contemporary, technological-based manner (Nahon & Hemsley, 2021). The temporality of Instagram Stories also adds to their appeal, by which point users know that the content will be available for only a short time, as towards the end, making them more likely to engage with the content before it expires.

This ephemerality is in contrast to traditional forms of digital media, in which the content can be revisited and re-purposed at will. The lack of persistence with Instagram Stories represents a shift in the consumption of narratives, concentrated on the now instead of the later. According to Zeng (2020), this is a temporary quality, and it has psychological implications, as it creates FOMO (fear of missing out) and a sense of urgency, which leads people to be more likely to interact with content in real time.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This research is developed under a qualitative research design, employing a content analysis method which it focuses on the narrative structures of Instagram Stories, the distinction from some other social media platforms, and further the comparison with the traditional forms of short narratives such as flash fiction and diary entries. Content analysis is particularly appropriate to this study because it is possible to examine digital media content with a focus on patterns, themes, and structural elements in a narrative (Neuendorf, 2017). As Instagram stories are also visual and interactive, content analysis can be used as an opportunity to create a blueprint of how a story can take different multimodal forms, i.e. images, text, videos, etc. (Brenn, 2013).

3.2. Data Collection

Data in this research were collected in Instagram stories (which are publicly available) by a wide variety of individuals, including influencers, brands, and the general population. The data collection duration would be between March 2023 and May 2023, as it guarantees a diverse and recent sample of information on the accounts that other users post on the platform. In so doing, they are guaranteed diversification of various styles and content of the stories. To focus on the research questions, the study selects those Instagram Stories, which means complete narratives, instead of fragments or promotions. As well, Stories from other platforms -officially TikTok, Snapchat and Twitter/X-are included, so that the narrative structure and the way of asking users to interact can be compared across different platforms. The process of drawing the sample spreads out over a period of two months to account for a thorough collection of content (Wimmer & Dominick, 2014).

Each Instagram Story is analysed for narrative elements, such as whether there is a clear beginning, a middle, an end, the use of multimedia and audience interactivity. Similarly, the structures of narrative on TikTok, Snapchat and Twitter/X are analysed in terms of content delivery, engagement features and storytelling techniques, and similarities and differences are revealed. A comparative analysis schema is used to examine how the stories are organised in each of the platforms and how these compare to or differ from traditional short narrative stories.

3.3. Analytical Framework

This study of Instagram stories, along with other types of social media content, falls within the scope of the analysis of the narrative texts, focusing on the elements of plot, interaction between characters and the audience. According to Abbott (2008), narrative analysis examines the way narratives are organised, and the purpose of the role of characters in driving the plot and the mechanisms of Puritanism and Incident used to attract the audience. This strategy is particularly applicable to Instagram stories that tend to engage the audience with the help of such functions as questions and direct messages, and polls. The process of interaction between the creator and the audience is regarded as an important part of the narrative process, and the way of its development and its perception.

The similarity in structure is used in making a comparison between Instagram stories and other traditional ways of short story text, like flash fiction, and the elements of the diary. It is the short stories (specifically flash fiction) that are under reflection in an attempt to find the answer as to whether or not Instagram Stories is as concise as it is narrative-laden (Flash Fiction Studies, 2021). One of their fears, as indicated by Cheong and Lim (2020), was that the "Diary entries, which are usually personal and fragmented, are analysed in the sense that the Instagram Stories are personal storytelling as the spontaneous and real-time updates.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

The information obtained from Instagram Stories and other social media platforms will be used in a thematic analysis. It will involve the retrieval of common themes, symbols, and narrative formats of Instagram Stories, TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter/X, and the coding of the material in NVivo software will be conducted in search of meaning and patterns regarding how each of the platforms organises the narration. The focus is especially on such multimedia features as image, videos and text, and the interactive opportunities, such as polls and responses of the viewers.

A comparison of short forms of narratives as narrative forms, which are utilised in the traditional narrative forms, also occurs in the thematic analysis. The study looks at brevity and narrativeness of the Instagram stories, such as flash fiction and how it maintains a personal, fragmented form, as in the case of the diary entries.

The data is sorted according to the specific platform and compared based on the threads and prevalent themes - issues that entail immediacy, the interest of the audiences, and narration. The process of coding is used in such a way that no dimensions of the narrative are missed, and that relevant patterns in the data are fully developed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. Instagram Stories Structure (Narrative Structure)

Instagram Stories as a storytelling medium makes use of a combination of text, images, video and interactive elements to build stories. The analysis of the selected Instagram Stories spanning the period of March until May 2023 will predominantly show the Stories in a 3-part narrative form: starting point, middle, and ending. This structure is absolutely critical in attempting to give coherence to the narrative arc, despite 24 hours ' brevity (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

The beginning usually acts as an introduction, as the beginning is used to set the context or introduce the characters. For example, you can see lots of Instagram Stories beginning with a caption or a short video to introduce the subject matter with a personal insight or as part of a promotion of the brand. This approach has been consistent with the traditional forms of narrative where the beginning frees up the necessary character development (transferring shifts Atkins & Cheong, 2021). The middle section is often a conflict or the main message, whether it's a personal story, or call to action, or an announcement. The end is favourable with a resolution or conclusion which typically comes in the form of a closing statement, a thank-you to the audience or a call to audience engagement such as polls or direct responses (Bucher & Helmond, 2018). The structural approach resembles the structural approaches that emphasise traditional narrative approaches, as seen in traditional storytelling, such as flash fiction, in which brevity is paramount (Sullivan, 2020).

The use of multimedia--especially video and images--adds a visual element to the narrative, making the emotional and informational content of the story even stronger. This is a major subtlety between traditional storytelling forms and family storytelling, in which text is often the sole form used for communicating a whole story. According to Liu and Zhao (2021), the multimodal nature of Instagram Stories is

important in constructing a more immersive narrative experience that captures the viewer not only intellectually, but also through visual storytelling; they are deeply engaged with the narratives on emotional levels.

4.2. Audience Participation & Interaction

Audience interaction in Instagram Stories is very important when it comes to shaping the story. Unlike traditional storytelling formats, where the audience is a passive consumer, with Instagram Stories, there is an active involvement from the audience through various activities such as polls, quizzes, and direct messages. The analysis demonstrates that a lot of Instagram Stories invite audience interaction in their content, either directly with explicit calls-to-action (e.g., "Swipe up to learn more") or indirectly by directly engaging the audience in the storytelling process (Gillespie & McCullough, 2019).

As an example, there are numerous situations in which the influencers and brands analysed took advantage of the interactive option and developed the story together with the people who follow them. Such an active collaboration is not very often regarded when it comes to the classic manifestations of narrative, where flash fiction or a diary entry separates the audience and the creative aspect (Alper and Kara, 2020). Interactivity in the Instagram stories removes the distinction between the reader and the storyteller and permits a less static and more interactive mode of narration. The participatory aspect is supported by the concept of the co-creation principle in digital media, where the audience is a joint partner in the production of the receiver relating to the media content (Zhao, 2020).

Also, the immediate nature of the interaction in Instagram Stories, when a viewer can follow the narrative in real-time, provides a level of proximity between the producer and the followers. Lee and Leung (2021) explain that this form of real-time interaction contributes to a community, risking the feeling of connectedness of the audience with the narrative performer and their lives. This is unlike the one-way communication that has mostly been heard in the traditional forms of literature, where the input of the audience to the text only means interpretation, and not reshaping the direction of the narrative.

4.3. The Instagram Stories have a temporal and ephemeral nature.

One of the most unique characteristics of the Instagram Stories media is the time component, which has a duration of 24 hours. The researchers concluded that this ephemerality has the effect of making the content appear urgent and exclusive and filling the viewer with the desire to engage with the content as fast as possible before it disappears. Particularly, brand storytelling has been in focus, since it takes the form of a limited-time offer or limited-time event, which the community can react to in response (Richter, 2015). The time-limited nature of the content also reflects the urgency often present in traditional forms of storytelling, such as live performances or spoken word, where the content is fleeting and cannot be revisited in the same way once it is over (Nahon & Hemsley, 2021).

This temporality is not solely about the content disappearing; it also affects the way stories are consumed and engaged with. According to Jansen and Rees (2020), this time constraint results in a viewer who wants to consume the content quickly, whereas an especially deeper engagement in the short window of accessibility often results. There is no option of revisiting or repurposing the content in the traditional media, but in the case of Instagram, it generates more lasting impressions during the time it exists in the storeys.

Also, the use of the transient content has been consistent with the oral traditions of storytelling, where the tales also had a tendency to be told orally, and there were no recordings available. All the short duration and its impermanence, Instagram Storeys brings back this form of ancient storytelling in which the story is last heard in the current moment, and when it passes, it is gone. Instagram Stories, in their brevity and temporalities, call to mind this ancient method of telling stories - one that the story encounters in the present moment, and then it passes by out of being (Sullivan & McCarthy, 2020).

4.4. Comparison to the Traditional Short Narrative Forms

When comparing Instagram Stories to other short narrative forms in traditional media, such as flash fiction and diary entries, there are a number of parallels and differences. Instagram Stories, like flash fiction, are usually concise and often deal with a single moment, an idea or an action. Both forms focus on brevity and impact and can require

the creator to convey a whole narrative in a limited format - in a short amount of time or space (Kuzmicova, 2019). However, whereas flash fiction is built on the text-economy and often leaves much to the imagination, Instagram Stories use a combination of text with visuals and audio to get meaning across more directly. This multimodal aspect allows Instagram Stories to be more explicit in their messaging as opposed to the implicit messaging nature of the traditional flash fiction (Cheong & Lim, 2020).

Instagram Stories are similar to, in their personal, ephemeral, and fragmented nature. Both forms often include spontaneous and unscripted content reflecting the everyday experiences of the creator. However, while a diary entry is a private and internal account, Instagram Stories are public and extremely curated, commonly constructed with an audience in mind. This shift from private to public storytelling makes Instagram Stories performative in a way where the creator knows there is an audience and crafts the narrative in ways that are explicitly known to the creator (Richter, 2015).

4.5. Platform-Specific Strategies for Using Narrative

The difference in strategies for narration in Instagram Stories versus other platforms, such as TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter/X, is made evident through their comparative analysis. That is, while the video-based format of TikTok enables longer and more scripted storytelling, Instagram Stories, with their focus on visual and text-based stories, develop faster-paced stories oriented towards impact (Van Dijck, 2020). Snapchat's AR features provide a fun way to interactively construct a narrative in a limited way, yet Instagram's more seamless integration of multimedia shows that a narrative can be constructed in a much more fluid manner (Elliot & Urry, 2019). Twitter/X being based primarily on more textual communication restricts the inherent complexity of narrative, as opposed to Instagram Storeys, which, due to the implementation of various media types, has the capacity to create a more comprehensive totality of the narrative, composed of various media types (Vaughn, 2021).

All the platforms use the specific features they possess to tackle the diverse kinds of narratives. The presence of the interactive and multimedia capabilities of Instagram

supports such a complex narration, and such media are prioritised by the characteristics of TTRS of a short message, as the real-time on Twitter/X would be a good example. This variation is used to illustrate the degree to which the platform is able to affect the nature and quality of storeys being recounted, and it also brings various storytelling experiences that rest on the medium at which the storytelling occurs (Rees and Sweeney, 2020).

5. Conclusion

In its specific way, this study has interacted with Instagram Storeys as a kind of digital storytelling, analysing the structure of narrative of storeys, interactions with their audience, and comparing them to other social media formats as well as the traditional short narrative forms. The results indicate that the combination of brevity, multimodality, and interactivity in Instagram storeys created an engaging and interactive narrative experience unlike any other social media application, including TikTok, Snapchat, and Twitter/X. Instagram Stories exploits a wider array of definitions through text, image and video because, unlike TikTok, its products operate based almost exclusively on video, thereby rendering it a more versatile and multi-layered storytelling platform. Snapchat, despite being similar to it in ephemeral content, its activity lacks the inclusion of posts and multimedia that are not ephemeral, as in Instagram, which narrates another story to the user. Comparatively, Twitter/X is highly textual in shape and thus cannot support rich and visual narratives.

The research also mentioned that Instagram stories had a number of similarities with the traditional narrative structures of flash fiction and diaries. Instagram Storeys, similar to flash fiction, require to be told in a short and impactful form; no word or graphic should be left without a reason. Moreover, Instagram stories form can be seen as, in many instances, concerned with the horror and thrill of journaling in a highly personal, discontinuous fashion, which provides appropriators with an outlet to document moments which are always rather spontaneous and personal. Nevertheless, whereas conservative versions of short forms were commonly personal or confined to text on a page or screen, Instagram Stories are social, edited and fueled with interactivity to status update the audience to be engaged. This aspect of participation is one of the biggest shifts from traditional forms of allowing passive

consumption of audiences, and can facilitate this effect of connection and cooperation between creator and audience.

The temporal and ephemeral condition of Instagram Storeys in society makes them even more different in relation to the traditional ways of storytelling. The time constraint of a 24-hour time span of Stories generates an urge, exclusivity to make viewers engage with the content in real-time. This immediacy also aids in engagement as well as mimicking the transient nature of oral forms of storytelling traditions, whereby the stories are rendered and consumed immediately.

To sum up, Instagram Stories have become an influential form of storytelling, which has offered new sets of storytelling techniques in a manner more customised to the digital world. Through connecting the peculiarities of Instagram Storeys to other platforms and seeing how they relate to the more conventional way of telling storeys, this study enables us to acknowledge the new dimension of social media as a storey only in its changing aspect. Influence of Instagram storey, along with those of the other social media storeys, on the perception of the audience, and consumption of the digital content, could also be researched in the future. The potential of Instagram Stories to affect the next generation of digital literature and digital storytelling is vast, and the necessity of grounding knowledge of such dynamics in media scholars, content creators, and marketers should be noted.

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