

Un-Filtered: Assessing Authenticity in the Online Social Media Landscape

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1 Introduction

With the increasing popularity of social media, the question of authenticity on platforms has been raised countless times. Authenticity online can be defined as presenting oneself on social media platforms the same as how one presents themselves in day-to-day life. In this report, we will examine three relevant platforms: **Instagram, Snapchat, and BeReal**.

2 Motivation

From previous studies, we have found that expectation for authentic performance might increase pressure on users [1]. Online authenticity is considered highly subjective and seen as a social construct [3]. Understanding the perspective of authenticity desired by a diverse set of population and descending into an era where it is perceived as paramount in the social world is crucial. We focus on the photo and video-based memories sharing sites BeReal, Snapchat, and Instagram. BeReal[4] enables users to capture a photo using their front and rear camera to depict their lives without filters, likes, and other social pressures on Instagram and Snapchat. With no prior literature focusing on the impact of the application, our study tries to understand how users perceive authenticity on BeReal compared to Instagram and Snapchat. While one aspect of our study shall focus on understanding factors which drive authenticity, we also try to understand what drives engagement on a platform. We intend to conceptualize all the best practices of social media platforms to find what promotes the highest authenticity.

3 Research Design and Methods

Our research revolves around the reasons that allow users to be authentic. So we aim to take a quantitative root by conducting feature-centric interviews and design planning workshops to pin down the factors that Instagram, Snapchat, and BeReal use to create an environment for users to be their real selves and what elements make them addictive. And we plan to study the results qualitatively by analyzing the data categorized on distinct parameters to compare the three apps in consideration, thereby comprehending the users' requirements for promoting more authenticity. After assimilating all of our findings, we propose to find common ground on the triangulated features in these social platforms that intersect with the needs of everyday

users to harbor authentication on social media.

We divide the study into distinct and significant components. We took the approach of conducting interviews and design workshops to best answer our questions. We gathered a small pool of interviewees and participants who had used at least two of the three platforms. The majority of our interviewees were adults in their twenties who had a background in computer science:

1. Feature-Centric interviews: We aim to employ feature-centric questions to get answers to two Research Questions:
RQ1: Do users feel the burden of maintaining a specific image or persona on social media?
RQ2: What features on social media platforms influence authenticity?
RQ3: What changes to these features might increase the amenability sense of authenticity?
2. Asynchronous Design Workshop: For the next part of our study, we conduct asynchronous design thinking workshops to allow the participants to propose a new platform that includes/enhances the best existing features of these platforms. To make the workshop more engaging and less mundane, we had a set of exercises and questionnaires as precursors to allow the participants to get some warm-up and better define their idea of authenticity.

4 Results

4.1 Interviews

We studied the interviewee responses and captured 6 key dimensions which govern authenticity on these platforms: *Ephemerality, Real-time, Consistency, Chat features, Close friends and Gamification*. Our study indicated the following - 1) Ephemerality + Reduced audience \propto Authenticity. 2) Gamification helps in Consistency. 3) Chat interfaces $>$ comments. 4) Reduced timeframe to post content and the ability to archive posts/stories fosters authenticity.

4.2 Design Workshops

We conducted 3 asynchronous design workshops, each focused on creating a new social media platform with unique features. The first platform is a vlogging platform that randomly prompts users to record short

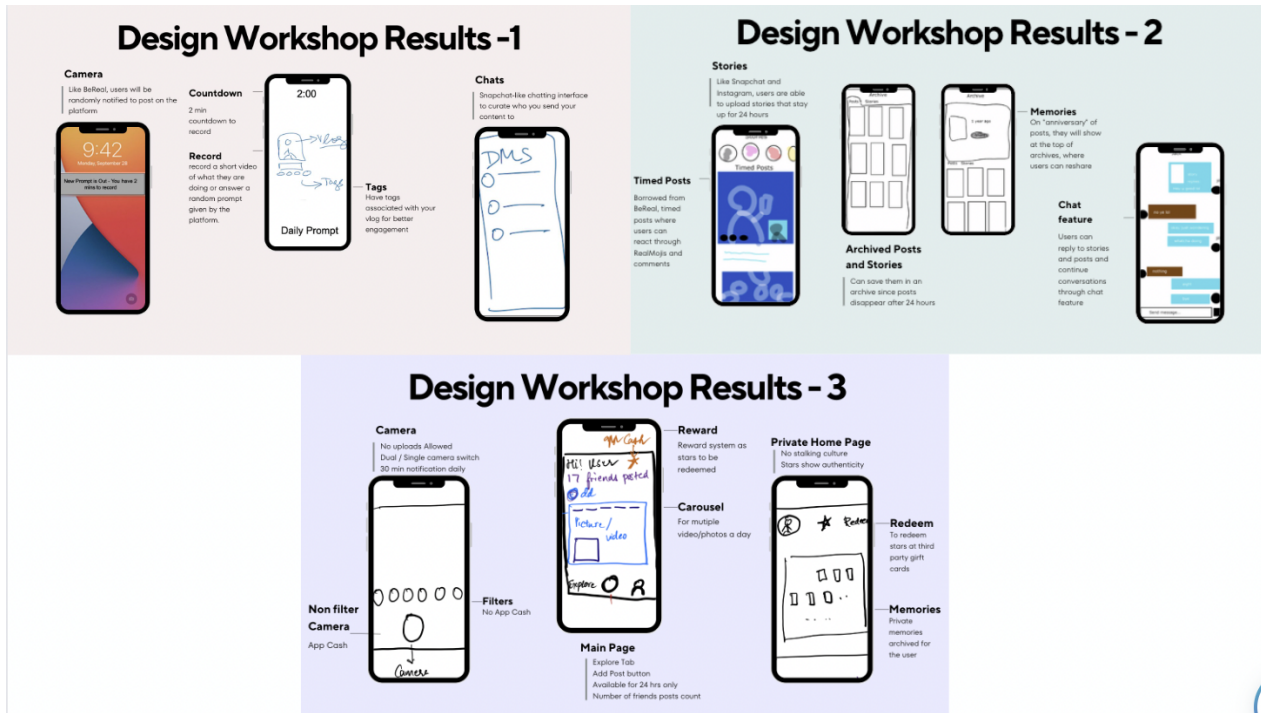


Figure 1: Design Workshop Results - Vlogging Platform, Combination Platform and Reward Points Platform

videos, promoting personal and opinion-based engagement. The second platform combines the best features of BeReal, Snapchat, and Instagram, allowing users to upload stories that stay up for 24 hours and include real-emojis and dual camera posts. The third platform is a reward points platform, incentivizing users to post unfiltered content with stars to be redeemed. All three platforms prioritize authenticity and aim to provide a more genuine and personal experience for users. These workshops provided insights into how various design elements can be combined to create new, innovative social media platforms.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, designing features that cater to authenticity on social media platforms has become increasingly important. Our design workshops highlighted the importance of ephemerality, gamification, chat-based interfaces, private archiving, reduced audience, and reduced time-frame to encourage authenticity in user interactions. Focusing on these feature-centric aspects can lead to more genuine and personal experiences for users, while also incentivizing consistent and authentic posting behavior. Further research and development in this area can continue to improve the overall authenticity of social media platforms.

References

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