
From a Diary to an iPhone: The Extension of Journaling to Digital Forms

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Logging In...

Frantically rummaging through my bedside table drawers, nine-year-old me finally finds the mini bronze key that unlocks the Tinker Bell diary I bought at the Scholastic book fair. I unlock the diary and flip through the colorfully inked pages until I find a fresh sheet. My childhood crush had sat next to me in art class that day. I start to write, "Dear Diary, today in Mrs. Berry's class, Gavin sat down right next to me when we watched the announcements!!! He is so cute..." Fast-forward nine years: after frantically rummaging through my purse, eighteen-year-old me finally finds my iPhone 7+ and enters the six-digit passcode. With a few touches of the button, I quickly open Instagram, switch from my regular page to my Finstagram, and snap a photo of the New Smyrna Beach day pass on my car's dashboard. I had just made it home from a first date at the beach. I start to type, "hey spammers...update!! so today me and you know who went to the beach!!! *happy face emoji* it actually went super well...#thats #bae." As a millennial, I have grown up alongside technology that has transformed even the most mundane aspects of daily experience. From writing about a crush in my diary as a child to typing about a date as a young adult, my desire to record moments and express feelings has not changed, even though the medium used to do so has.

Checking the Feed: What Has Been Posted

Literacy researchers have not only extensively analyzed the benefits and motivations behind traditional journaling but have also deeply considered the effects on rhetoric prompted by including technology-based writing within this scope. Journaling provides a writer with an entirely private outlet for recording personal accounts, feelings, emotions, thoughts and more. The benefits of journaling manifest in both academic and personal settings in terms of "personal growth, synthesis, and reflection" (Hiemstra 20) and continue to show as journaling extends from traditional to digital. In research articles dating prior to the emergence of technology as a widespread tool, the notion of composing personal texts online was thought of as detached, impersonal, and not private (Desser). The intimacy of externalizing one's personal and private moments through physically handwriting them on paper was lost once extended to digital forms (Desser). But, as technology continued to develop and advance, the scholarship and perception surrounding online writing did as well.

Websites specifically designed for online journaling such as Open Diary, Live Journal, and Dead Journal have been a focal point for researchers interested in the sociocultural perspective of

literacy as both a personal and social practice (Guzzeti and Gamboa). Extensive research has also been conducted on a wide range of social media platforms that are not typically perceived as a form of journaling, including—but not limited to—Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (Wolff; Buck; Coad; Ibrahim). Researchers have conducted individual case studies for both online journaling sites and social media platforms, thus providing insight into the ways writers consider the “constraints of a medium, goals of a message, composition of a message, audience, and used technologies” while developing personal texts (Wolff). Researchers like James E. Porter have aimed to develop a theoretical framework that enables easy navigation through “the rhetorical complexities” engendered by the Internet. By recognizing a technology user’s knowledge of a specific platform, researchers have been able to analyze the way identity, distribution, accessibility, and interaction with other online users impact the way writers make compositional choices (Porter; Coad).

With particular attention focused on Instagram, researchers have most noted the popular trend of image capture and share. Young people have begun to lean away from sites such as Facebook and more towards apps like Instagram and Snapchat for their photo-sharing qualities (Ibrahim). In combination with the rhetorical devices of digital literacy, image capture and distribution via Instagram works to document daily life in a way that is personal, yet telling. Because these apps provide an audience and certain level of community, it’s important to understand that while writers might prioritize their own styles while crafting Instagram posts, there is also consideration of the perceived audience and how they might interpret different components (Dadurka and Pigg; Porter).

Check Profile: My Approach

I considered the social media platform Instagram for my analysis; however, I will be focusing on an abstract approach to this app most commonly known as “Finstagram,” a combination of the words “fake” and “Instagram.” Typically, Instagram pages consist of photos of significant moments or events to represent the key moments of a user’s life. For example, my page includes photos from my high school graduation, summer vacations, weekend activities, and other important events. A Finstagram, however, provides an entirely different vantage point into a user’s daily life by recording the trivial, insignificant, and mundane. While still utilizing the same smartphone application, a user establishes his or her Finstagram by creating a secondary, private profile that includes posts ranging from photos of inanimate objects, random snapshots, screenshots, to even selfies. Because the app in its regular form fosters the notion of Finstagramming, the existing scholarship surrounding the rhetorical devices employed by Instagram users remains relevant for the analysis of Finstagram. For example, researchers have specifically focused on the unique stylistic features that social media platforms allow for including hashtags, emojis, and photos to show how these devices impact the meaning of a specific text (Ibrahim; Wolff; Buck).

To further the scholarly conversations surrounding digital literacies and rhetorical devices employed in online environments, I aim to thoroughly analyze the aspects of intertextuality, multimodality, and perceived audiences as well as different stylistic elements within my own posts that I feel best exemplify the motives, benefits, and values related to Finstagram usage. Using an autoethnographic approach, I will provide the contextual information necessary for completely understanding the crafting of specific Finstagram posts as well as richly detailed explanations of why I chose to compose each message in the way that I did. Through a comprehensive self-reflection of multiple personal texts and their accompanying photos, I hope to solidify the use of Finstagram as both a valuable method of self-expression and extension of traditional journaling.

As I scrolled through my plethora of Finstagram photos—789 posts to be exact—I was particularly drawn to the ones that employ rhetorical devices such as hashtags and emojis within their captions, as well as those that exhibit the different image features provided by the Instagram

app. For example, the app provides photo editing software with tools that include filters, light adjustments (contrast, saturation, exposure, etc.) and highlight/shadow colors. Also, the app allows for the user to input a location for a post and tag other accounts onto a photo. While seemingly trivial, these features allow the user to make subtle decisions that can heavily impact the tone or attitude of a post. It's important to note that not every Finstagram post utilizes all of the app's features; however, I am choosing to include the posts I have crafted that do make use of at least one or two features in order to emphasize the potential engendered by Finstagram's multimodality. Each piece of primary data provided in this analysis will be a screenshot of one of my personal Finstagram posts that should clearly show my use of any particular app feature that involves the text and/or photo.

The Bio: My Relationship with Finstagram

Although I'm not a kid anymore and don't still update my Tinker Bell diary, I do value the process of externalizing my thoughts, opinions, and memories by recording them through some medium. In such a fast-paced life as that of a full-time college student, it can be difficult to find the time to sit down with a journal and write things down from recall. I don't always have a pen and notebook on me, but one thing I always have is my phone. The accessibility of smartphones makes it so easy to quickly record anything I'd like to save while on the go in a way that captures and preserves all the details that might have been lost if I waited until I could access a paper journal to write them down. If I ever feel the need to vent about my current situation, document a passing moment, express an opinion, or just post something funny, I can always do so just by using my Instagram app. Just as a physical journal would, my Finstagram can store anything I'd like it to and records the date and time for me.

Initially, I started using Finstagram my junior year of high school. A lot of my peers were starting to create their accounts, and it turned into a serious fad. Only my close friends were able to follow my account and vice versa, but most everybody knew that just about everybody had an account. My initial approach to Finstagram was more of a comical one, and I posted primarily parody fitness videos/photos. At the time of creating my Finstagram, a close friend and I were going to the gym every day, and we often made our workouts more enjoyable by creating these parody videos that imitated famous fitness Instagrammers. From this, my Finstagram developed into a more comprehensive form of expression where, at times, I chose to joke or sarcastically comment about things I saw on Twitter, in the news, real life, etc., or even just to vent and reflect on my thoughts and emotions from my daily experiences. It's so easy for me to forget not to compartmentalize everything I go through because of how busy life gets. Through the crafting of each of my Finstagram posts, I am able to express myself effectively and personally, and it truly does feel therapeutic. Without my Finstagram, I don't know where or how I would be able to express and record all the things I'd like to say in a convenient way.

I noticed, when I first made my account, this creation of a seemingly separate identity. While all Instagram pages include a profile photo and handle/profile name, Finstagram accounts

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differ in formality. On my regular account, the profile photo is a typical headshot photo of myself, and both my handle and profile name are my first and last name. In contrast, my alternate account photo is a cartoon version of myself adapted from an iPhone app called Bitmoji, and my handle and profile name are pseudonyms that I created to make my profile harder to find. This way, my Finstagram account is much harder to identify and therefore can only be found by those to whom I tell the name. I point this out to emphasize that while a Finstagram might feel like it's creating a new identity, it's actually more representative of who a person really is. On Instagram, we choose to post the ideal and the glorified, showing only the best versions of ourselves. While on my Finstagram, I know I choose to capture what happens behind the scenes: the mundane, the funny, the normal—the little moments of my life that make it what it is.

Make a Post: Details Behind Composition

The step-by-step procedure for making an Instagram post is as follows: select or take an image or video, compose the caption, and hit send. Behind each step is a series of subtle but thoughtful, personal decisions that blend together to form the desired message. These next few sections aim to outline my thought process within each step of crafting my Finstagram posts.

Choose Photo

Because Instagram is a multimedia platform, the inclusion of text is not the only effective component. With each post, I can include either a photo, series of photos, or a video. More often than not, the visual component I include correlates directly with the overall meaning of the post and is supplemented by the caption. Before analyzing the visual effects that I've placed on some of my pictures, it's important to look at the kinds of pictures that are chosen to be used in the first place. The best way to explain the kind of photos I upload is through example. In the following screenshots, I show multiple instances where I took pictures of the inanimate things around me and qualified them as part of my daily experience. In the first screenshot, I took a quick picture of the gas pump, specifically of the high price. In the second, I captured a photo of a traffic warning I received on the way home that day. In the third, I show my student I.D. from my local community college where they spelled my name incorrectly.



Figure 1



Figure 2

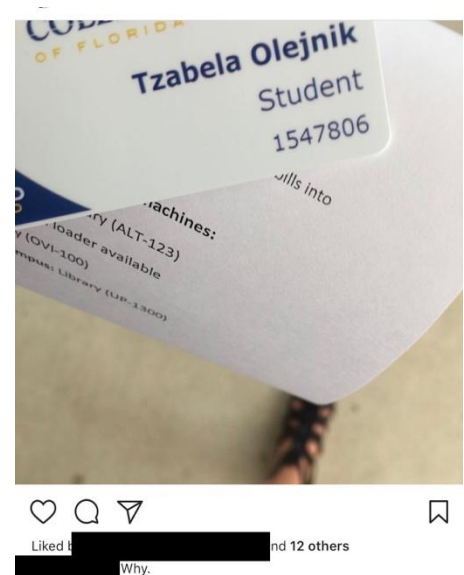


Figure 3

By cataloging each small activity that sparks some kind of thought or opinion within me, I am able to reflect upon and externalize the little things that make up my day, similar to how I would in a journal. The extension of my journaling to Finstagram allows me to provide deeper insight into what I record by including visual details. If I were to write a journal entry about rising gas prices like I did on my Finstagram, I would probably forget the exact price and then not include it. By taking a picture of my name spelled incorrectly on my student I.D. and of the traffic warning I was given by a police officer, I provide visual proof to illustrate and support the story I tell. Therefore, by including a supplementary photo for each of my posts, I am able to retain and incorporate the details that solidify and enrich each entry beyond what I might be able to do with a paper journal.



Figure 4



Figure 5

After looking at the kind of simple images that are included within my Finstagram posts, it's important to consider the multiple editing features afforded to me by the app that further develop the meaning. A tool I often use to edit my uploaded images is the shadow color. Essentially, this feature allows me to adjust the tone of my photo by adding a prominent color. I think it's safe to say that colors engender a certain connotation and feeling, or at least they do for me. So when I edit the color of my image, I do so to further convey my attitude towards the content.

In Figure 4, I show a beach parking pass in the dashboard of my car with a bright reddish-pink shadow on the entire photo. Before even acknowledging the caption, this color addition was meant to invoke feelings of a sweet and an even romantic attitude. Figure 5 is a photo I took in the mirror of our campus's Mathematical Sciences Building. The photo includes an obviously green hue that was meant to invoke eerie or sickly feelings. With that being said, both photo edits are subtly supplementary to the overall meaning of each entry. Because the picture is the first thing you see when viewing a post, its visual components are essential to crafting an effectively expressive post. After reading the captions, one can see that the reddish color on example one is supplementary to the story of a first date, while the greenish color exemplifies my distaste and dread towards attending my math class and simply being in the building. Other editing tools such as brightness and saturation allow me to toggle with the visual elements of each photo to highlight certain parts. For example, in Figure 4, I toggled with the brightness of the photo and turned it down to make the white and red of the beach pass stand out among my car's dark interior. I did so because the pass was the most significant element of the photo and I wanted it to catch the eye.

The student I.D, traffic warning, and beach parking pass all share another important aspect of the image component of Finstagram. Each item depicted in the image acts as a symbolic memento for my daily experiences. While mementos are typically kept for moments/events of high significance, it's important to consider how the entries of a Finstagram give significance to the mundane and trivial moments of life. By externalizing my feelings towards my incorrect student I.D. and almost-ticket through photos, I utilize the significance of these tangible items to contribute to the overall meaning of a post, similar to how one might glue or tape a small memento onto the page of a journal.

Write Caption

While a picture does speak a thousand words, a Finstagram post would not be complete without a properly articulated caption. The written text component of a post is referred to as the caption, and is crafted after hitting next once the photo component is finalized. The captions are not character limited and allow for basic keyboard functions provided by smartphones such as capital letters, symbols, and punctuation marks, as well as add-on keyboards available in the AppStore, such as an Emoji keyboard. Just as different colored writing utensils and doodles of smiley faces or hearts would alter the overall meaning of a paper journal entry, each keyboard function decision a writer makes alters the overall meaning of a post. My captions are usually stories or comments that express my thoughts, concerns, or feelings towards a moment in my life, and I use a variety of rhetorical devices to embellish each entry in a way that further emphasizes my tone and attitude. While the rhetorical devices employed on the digital form of Instagram differ from those one might use while handwriting in a paper journal, it's important to recognize how they serve the same purpose.

One rhetorical device I use often while crafting the captions of my posts is the emoji. Emojis offer a wide range of symbols for facial expressions, weather, animals, and more. When I wrote in journals as a kid, I would draw pictures, shapes, and facial expressions to emphasize my tone. As I type on Finstagram, I include emojis to accomplish the same idea. It can be very difficult for me to emulate exactly how I feel with just words. Emojis decrease this difficulty as they provide an illustration for my attitude towards the words that I write. A smiley face can emphasize my happiness, while a sad face can emphasize my discontent.

Another rhetorical device employed by the majority of my posts is the hashtag. Hashtags are symbols that have come a very long way as a rhetorical device and play a significant role across a variety of social media platforms. On Instagram, hashtags can be used to categorize posts and make them easier for users to find on the app's search page. However, hashtags are also powerful rhetorical devices that can either intensify or completely alter the meaning of a text. Typically, in my Finstagram posts, I use the hashtags for reinforcement of the message I'm trying to convey rather than to undercut or alter it. My hashtags usually consist of just a few words, if not one, that accurately sums up the overall attitude or message of the post.



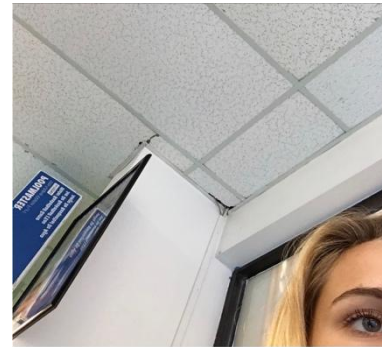
Liked by [redacted] and 25 others
 [redacted]ruh I made this like the first week of senior year
 🤔...now tmrw is the last day of high school ever and we're
 actually graduating! Can't wait to graduate with my diploma in one
 hand and SoundCloud battle ground in the other...it's gonna be
 kinda sad actually but still I'm excited 🤔 #2017isoutboiii
 View all 8 comments

Figure 6



Liked by [redacted] and 8 others
 🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔🤔never been happier in my life!
 mean yeah I'm totally afraid of this Irma girl! but #class #is
 #canceled and I'm VERY okay with that especially cause I was
 supposed to have a test on Friday hehe #PEACEOUT
 SEPTEMBER 8, 2017

Figure 7



Liked by [redacted] and 11 others
 th [redacted] alright everybody so I just found out there's a ghost
 in pinch a penny that my bosses NEGLECTED to mention 🤔🤔. I
 was standing in the back w/ my boss and all of a sudden we hear a
 bunch of jugs fall so I look back there thinking someone walked by
 and knocked them over and there's not a single SOUL bak there so
 then I pick up all the jugs and there were only 4 stacked so there's
 no way they could have fallen on their own so I jokingly say "haha
 there's a ghost" and my boss goes "ya there is" ??? 🤔 and I go
 "wait" "what" and she was like "yeah he's quiet most of the time but
 weird things happen here" ummm????? Who thought it was ok to
 not tell me this I just started tearing up #NOTOKAY

Figure 8

In Figure 6, I use two emojis—a shocked face and smiling face. The first sentence of this caption acknowledges the senior crown in the photo, a paper crown I made at the beginning of my last year of high school. By including the emoji at the end of this sentence, I emphasize my shock towards how quickly time had gone by. In Figure 7, I use six of the same emoji. This emoji is actually one of my personal favorites and is intended to be a distraught facial expression, but I use it in different ways. For instance, in this post I mention how I've never been happier to find out that class had been canceled due to the impending hurricane. The juxtaposition of this emoji followed by the meaning of these words is intentional but canceled out once you realize the sarcasm of the emojis. The emojis start off the caption because they're supposed to acknowledge the screenshot of the UCF alert and be a sarcastic initial reaction to the canceling of class, which is made obvious by the fact I overused it by including six rather than one distraught face. In the third example, I use this same emoji in its intended meaning as well as a sad, disappointed emoji. These emojis are supplementary to the story that I'm telling because they emphasize the emotions I was feeling when I found out about a potential ghost at my job. In all three of these captions, emojis are essential for amplifying the emotion that is expressed by the entire post. It's important to note that it can be difficult to interpret the meaning behind an emoji without its accompanying text and vice versa. However, when interpreted together, emojis and words effectively illustrate my attitude behind each Finstagram entry.

The three posts also show how I employ the hashtag. The hashtag included in Figure 6 says "#2017isoutboiii" to reinforce the fact that graduation was approaching. Figure 7 includes the hashtags, "#class #is #canceled" and "#PEACEOUT" which practically summarize the entire post in just five words. Figure 8 includes the hashtag, "#NOTOKAY," which supports the displeasure I have with my bosses that I explain in the post. All three posts demonstrate the reinforcing qualities of hashtags and how they serve as a reminder of the attitude or message of a post. Also notable is how the hashtags appear in a bright blue color, making them easily distinguishable among the other plain words. This detail continues to demonstrate the way hashtags are able to emphasize the meaning of a text through a concise summarization that stands out.

While emojis and hashtags are the devices I personally use the most, there is no limit to the syntactical elements I can include on a Finstagram caption. Capital letters, repetitive punctuation marks, slang words and more are all rhetorical devices that further develop and enhance the meaning of a post and can be seen throughout my Finstagram. Because I can't handwrite emojis and

I wouldn't add a hashtag at the end of a hand-written journal entry, these tools are uniquely characteristic of digital journaling. Despite the differing conventions, both handwritten and online journaling on Instagram are used as a method of self-expression and are done so effectively with rhetorical devices.

Hit Send

The key difference between online journaling and handwritten journaling is the aspect of an audience. Because paper journals are entirely private, the only person who needs to understand what is written and how it's written is myself. However, with the introduction of an audience on Finstagram, I as a writer have to be aware of how different rhetorical conventions are used and perceived. The presence of an audience doesn't take away from the benefits of journaling; it just means I have to consider how a reader might perceive the devices I include. Specifically, I know how my friends interpret the smiling or distraught emoji, my abundance of exclamation points, and the message as a whole. I know all of this because I am familiar with how they craft their posts, and we're able to exchange ideas and conventions.

Likes and comments are features of Instagram that allow my followers to engage with my posts and vice versa. The feedback received from my followers helps me understand whether or not my message is clearly conveyed, and I can take note of what works and what doesn't. To effectively engage with the writing community and style of rhetoric engendered by Instagram, it's crucial that I understand the power behind each digital literacy device.

Logging Out: Conclusions and Implications

In its entirety, Finstagram acts as a valuable form of journaling characterized by rhetorical devices that mirror or replace the devices that could be used on paper. The emoji replaces the drawn smiley face, the image replaces the doodle, the photo replaces the memento. In my own life, this method of expression has proven beneficial by its immediacy, availability, and functionality.

While students certainly may benefit from social media activities in academic settings, it would also be beneficial for teachers to engage in learning practices that would allow them to fully understand the caliber of how students navigate through digital writing communities.

Being able to write about an experience in a stream-of-consciousness and even include a photo in the moment while on the go is an effective way of retaining meaningful details and thoughts. The identity I've formed through my Finstagram page is an accurate representation of who I am on a day-to-day-basis rather than just my best and most significant days.

For literacy researchers particularly interested in the Instagram app, I think it's important to further distinguish between the roles of an Instagram versus a Finstagram. The identities engendered by both are fairly different in that one serves as a glorified, ideal representation of oneself while the other serves to express the average, daily, and realistic version

of oneself. Each form of Instagram usage engenders its own kind of online community and rhetoric, making it important to separate the way users would navigate through the crafting of their posts. This separation between the two identities and communities could further show a difference in perception of digital rhetorical devices when used on a real Instagram versus a Finstagram.

Although academic implications were not the primary focus or concern of my analysis, it's interesting to note the rhetorical awareness reinforced by maintaining a Finstagram. This reinforcement might prove valuable in academic environments if teachers can find a way to infuse

online platforms with writing practices. While cell phones and other technologies are typically taboo in the classroom, integrating these tools into composing practices may prove beneficial for a generation that is entirely accustomed to using their smart phones for widespread communication and expression. If students struggle with rhetorical conventions while composing academic writing but thrive while expressing ideas digitally, it could be useful to attempt to use these online platforms as a basis for academic prose and further adapt from there. A student who has mastered composing a piece of writing that effectively conveys a personal message for their own Finstagram page could try and use this same medium and rhetorical awareness to express academic ideas via online platforms. From there, a student could work towards refining and expanding upon their writing into a more formal piece of work.

Researchers like Elizabeth J. Clark and Elisabeth H. Buck have both looked into how academic settings can be impacted by the infusion of technologies such as social media. Both Clark and Buck highlight the importance of being able to recognize and understand students' expertise in rhetoric while on digital forms. So, while students certainly may benefit from social media activities in academic settings, it would also be beneficial for teachers to engage in learning practices that would allow them to fully understand the caliber of how students navigate through digital writing communities.

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