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**NAVIGATING THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF OBJECT(IVE)S: A USER-EXPERIENCE
APPROACH TO CULTURAL-HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY**

By

Madeline Bruegger

B.A. Benedictine College, 2020

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

(in English)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

May 2023

Advisory Committee:

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NAVIGATING THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF OBJECT(IVE)S: A USER-EXPERIENCE

APPROACH TO CULTURAL-HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY

By Madeline Bruegger

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Heather Falconer

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
(in English)
May 2023

Activity Theory, specifically third-generation activity theory also known as Cultural-Historical Activity Theory or CHAT (Engeström, 2001, 2015; Leontiev, 1978, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978) has largely been used as a framework for studying different networks of activity, encountered by subjects who utilize tools or mediating artifacts in order to divide their labor within particular communities. This theoretical and empirical project analyzes a transnational user's experiences performing their identity on Instagram by answering the research question: How does a user with transnational literacy experiences perform their identity and manage communities through the mediation of particular technologies on Instagram? Using mixed-methods from four data streams—1) semi-structured interviews, 2) rhetorical analysis of a participant's personal Instagram data (including images, captions, account biographies, and stories), 3) recordings of a participant using think-aloud protocol, and 4) analytical memos of the participant's Instagram activity—in this thesis project I aimed to accomplish three goals. First, to outline and historicize influential generations of Activity Theory. Second, to present a new approach to Cultural-Historical Activity Theory called the "User-Experience CHAT Model." Third, to apply the new model to a case study. The results of the study suggest that users on social media sites may communicate with particular communities, but also past, present, and future versions of themselves. As users engage in activities across time, they encounter a field of interpretation informed by contexts, which influence their present experiences as they produce an object. Thus, users' identities are constantly in a state of transformation and becoming as their object(ive)s in social media activities transform across time.

DEDICATION

*To my parents, for encouraging me to interview the Tooth Fairy
and to always believe in hope for a better world.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis project was produced largely in the back of cars, in airport bars, and on the notes section of my phone. Similar to my research question, my experiences writing this project were translocational and almost always mobile. I'm indebted to the spaces that have held me as I've written this project, the lands of the Penobscot, Wabanaki, Kansa, Osage, Kickapoo, Piscataway, Susquehannock, Lumbee, Tuscarora, Seminole, Tocobaga, Miccosukee, Mascogo, and Osage people. While I recognize a land acknowledgement is only the beginning of necessary decolonizing work, I hope as a nation and a discipline we can continue to work towards positive relationships with Indigenous communities.

To the tools that have mediated my experiences writing this project: The Instagram interface, my smartphone and laptop, the many treadmills and bikes, email, iMessage, sticky notes, whiteboards, pens, keyboards, language...without these mediating artifacts this project would not be possible (or maybe would be possible, but look very different).

To the community of people who made this project possible: The participants in this research project, thank you for allowing me to follow and discuss your activity on Instagram. Your thoughtful participation and experiences have made me a more reflective social media user. My students, who inspire me with their activism and cultivation of communities online and in the classroom; I learn so much from you. To my Thesis Committee: Dr. Heather Falconer, the most supportive mentor and Chair of this project. I am forever indebted to your encouragement and guidance. I hope to someday lead and mentor students with the same care and attention you do. To my other committee members: Dr. Ryan Dippre, for engaging so thoughtfully with the Theoretical Framework for this project and to Dr. Katie Swacha, for reading and providing feedback to make this project better. And to Dr. Dylan Dryer, who taught the course this project

first emerged from, thank you for teaching me the importance of asking, “how did you learn to do that?”

To my dear friends and colleagues: Dylan Morin, for discussing drafts of this project and providing me with wonder and possibility in his feedback, Jayson Heim and Gabriella Fryer, for being wonderful office mates and engaging with the progress of this project throughout the past year, and Katherine Mathews, for knowing when to knock and when to text me as I sat in front of my whiteboard thinking. I got pretty lucky when I was given these brilliant humans as colleagues, even luckier when they became my friends.

And lastly to my beautiful family: To Josh and Jenna, for reading with me and forcing me to play school *after* school growing up. Your passion for education taught me schools are pretty exciting places to be. And lastly, to my mom and dad, for teaching me how to leverage writing to create positive changes in our communities, who taught me we are nothing without our neighbors. I am me because of you.

Sitting at my desk writing this, I look at a picture from my childhood. In the picture, I’m holding an American flag and a trophy, with a slight snarl on my face that only really encompasses the grit of a young girl who unapologetically believes in herself. I’m glad she still exists today.

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INTRODUCTION

It began as most things do, by observation. I was scrolling through my personal Instagram account one day, switching between my feed and stories, when I noticed a green border appear around one of my friends' Instagram stories. I thought, *that's weird, they must have changed their profile image to have some obnoxiously lime green border*. Upon clicking on their profile photo, I noticed a green star icon in the upper right corner which when clicked read "Close Friends Only." It became apparent to me that this green border was not a profile picture after all, but a new feature of the interface which allows users to share photos with users they add to a list as *close* friends. At first, I genuinely felt honored to be included in their group! I was a close friend! Not a best friend, but a close one, to be sure. Yet, once I got over my flattery, I began to reflect on how this interface feature allows users to move between public and semi-private forums within their account. Further, the rhetorical choice in calling this semi-private feature 'close friends' demonstrates a particular manipulation of communities through the mediation of the interface enacted through a user's labor of creating the 'close friends' list.

Demonstrations or actions of closeness via the mediating features of a technology or tool are not new. Rather, we have been using mediating tools to manage communities for centuries. Even as I write this introduction, I'm staring at a kiosk selling flowers, chocolate, and cards. I'm sure when you read this, you have a particular image in your head as to what these signs must mean. If you guessed that it's my birthday, you're wrong. If you guessed that it is Valentine's Day, you're correct. So how can we deduce that it's Valentine's Day? Signs such as chocolate, cards, and flowers gain significance because they have been socially signified to represent something beyond their material function due to sociocultural and historical contexts. Mediating signs such as chocolate, cards, and flowers received on Valentine's Day signify something

beyond their material form – not just delicious chocolate, beautiful flowers, or a piece of paper like a card, – but rather, the mediating sign may be used as a tool to signify care and attention for loved ones within particular communities. Of course, there is a spatiotemporal element to these mediating tools as the encounter of a box of chocolates, flowers, or a card may carry a different signification in December versus in February. Further, the celebration of Valentine’s Day is also a cultural custom, in which the signs (i.e. chocolate, flowers, etc.) are signified due to cultural currency.

Yet, as tools and technologies advance by design, subjects’ mediation and the possible behaviors resulting by mediation also change. Returning to the example of the Close Friends list on Instagram, we can observe that users are able to more tactfully control their audiences for their stories through this new feature. Through a system of activity, users are able to divide their labor by manually creating a list via the tool of the interface design, thinking through which community they hope to communicate with through their newly composed “close friends” list.

These mediations are sophisticated, complex, and hybrid systems of activity encountered by human beings within sociocultural and cognitive contexts. As technologies change due to human activity, we should continue to study the affordances and effects of these changes in mediation, resulting in changes in human activity. Knowledge of how users mediate and are mediated by technologies in order to portray and perform their identities has great importance for those in several disciplines including Writing Studies, but also more broadly within Education, Computer Science, Information Science, Business, and Health (Nardi, 1996).

As we study digital users’ experiences within Writing Studies and beyond, I find it important to ask: Who or what are we studying within these complex systems of activity and, further, who or what *should* we be studying within these complex systems of activity? Recently

some scholars have called for more attention within activity theory on individuals, the subjects engaging in activity systems (Spinuzzi, 2021) While some scholars have called for greater attention to individuals, the existing and current activity theory model, better known as Cultural-Historical activity theory or CHAT (Engeström, 2001, 2015; Leontiev, 1978, 1981; Vygotsky, 1978), includes the subject (user) as a small piece in a larger network of activity. This positioning of the user raises the question: is the current model of CHAT perhaps not accounting for dialogic user experiences in digital spaces?

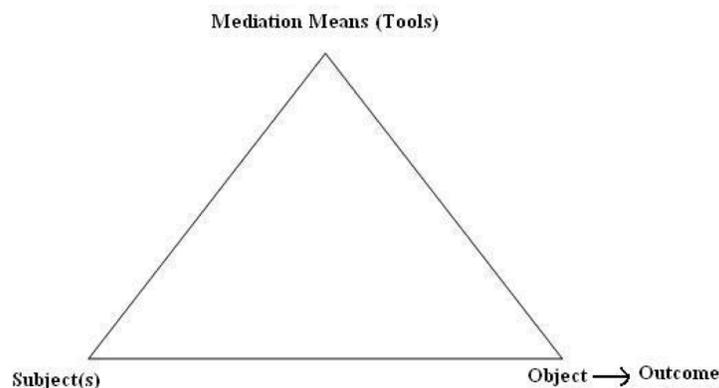
Activity Theory: Then and Now

In this project, I will be using a user-centered activity theory approach in order to understand the complex, sophisticated, and hybrid interplay between user, object, and mediating artifacts on social media sites, particularly Instagram. Using CHAT, I will propose a new model of visualizing users' digital compositional activities. Before detailing the User-Experience (UX) CHAT model, I will begin by exploring the history of CHAT that largely informed the model by focusing on the work of Russian-psychologists L.S. Vygotsky (1978) and Aleksei N. Leontiev (1978; 1981), as well as Yrjö Engeström's (2001, 2015) work in the Scandinavian school of activity theory thought.

First Generation Activity Theory (Vygotsky 1924-1936)

First generation activity theory largely focused on the role of “mediation” in which subject, object, and mediating artifact interact in a triadic relationship or “a complex, mediated act” (Figure 1 demonstrates this relationship). Vygotsky was concerned with human behavior and development, particularly within early childhood development and play. He studied how children first encounter signs as “qualitative transformations” which arise during infancy through the use of tools and human speech (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 46). For example, infants begin to make

meaning of the world through the use of tools, such as toys. However, the meaning made is relational to the tool as well as “humans personally influence their relations with the environment and through that environment personally change their behavior, subjugating it to their control” (pp. 51). In other words, as humans mediate tools, tools and technologies also then have the capacity to influence human behavior, thus resulting in a relationship between tools and subjects. While Vygotsky refers to the naming of signs (which can also mean a mediating artifact or tool) as “signalization,” within Saussure’s meaning-making model, signs are signified, meaning they are given meaning through interpretation by embodied humans (Witte, 1992). For example, when a child encounters a stuffed animal they may not know that toy is called a “teddy bear.” However, once a parent teaches them the stuffed animal is called a teddy bear, the sign becomes signified because it is given meaning through naming. As for Vygotsky, he calls upon Karl Marx’s attention to tools through the use of Hegel’s definition of reason to show how humans “use the mechanical, physical, and chemical properties of objects so as to make them act as forces that affect other objects in order to fulfill his personal goals” (Marx, 2018, pp. 199). Thus, signs are assigned to mediate some kind of action.



*Figure 1: Vygotsky's Activity Theory model (IGAT) (1978, pp. 54)
The model demonstrates the triadic relationship between subject—tool—object.*

However, Vygotsky draws a distinction between internalization and externalization, as he declares that tools are *externally*-oriented, while signs are *internally*-oriented (1978, pp. 55). In other words, in Vygotsky's view, tools exist socially and signs exist cognitively to subjects. Internalization develops as humans internally reconstruct external stimuli, which consist of a series of transformations. Vygotsky uses the example of a child pointing: an infant grasping may appear to just be grasping in the air. Yet, when the child's parent realizes the child is *gesturing* for something, the movement is no longer an object only to the child, but also to another person. The meaning of the gesture is established by both the child and the parent. The movement is transformed in meaning, thus the interpersonal becomes intrapersonal. Vygotsky makes it clear that "internalization of cultural forms of behavior involves the reconstruction of psychological activity on the basis of sign operations" (pp. 57). Thus, changes in behavior are influenced by signs and changes in signs influence behavior.

Second Generation Activity Theory (Leontiev 1931-1979)

In second generation Activity Theory (2GAT), Leontiev built from Vygotsky the idea of "a complex, mediated act" to an activity system in which, "the activity of the human individual represents a system included in the system of relationships of society" (1978, pp. 52). Moving slightly away from Vygotsky's work with the complex mediated act, Leontiev focuses on activity systems holistically:

Activity is a molar, not an additive unit of the life of the physical, material subject. In a narrower sense, that is, at the psychological level, it is a unit of life, mediated by psychic reflection, the real function of which is that it orients the subject in the objective world. In other words, activity is not a reaction and not a totality of reactions but a system that has structure, its own internal transitions and transformations, its own development. (pp. 50)

In Leontiev's view, individuals engaging in activities are not isolated from social relations and interactions. Thus, these complex activity systems create opportunities for transformations.

Leontiev attended to the "cultural forms of behavior," such as the cultural and historical, which influence the reconstruction of a subject's psychological activity and sense of consciousness:

Consciousness is co-knowing, but only in that sense that individual consciousness may exist only in the presence of social consciousness and of language that is its real substrate. In the process of material production, people also produce language, and this serves not only as a means of information but also as a carrier of the socially developed meanings fixed in it. (pp. 60)

Leontiev drew attention away from individuated acts, to collective acts of sociohistorical and cultural transformation. While Vygotsky drew on Marx and Hegel, Leontiev used Marx and drew on Engel to explore the role of labor within cultural-historical activities. According to Leontiev, activities cannot exist without a motive or particular desired outcome. In Leontiev's view, these motives, which become goals, are directly related to humans' relationships with society, and thus, labor. For example, a person who is hungry may become motivated to fill their hunger. Thus, the goal becomes obtaining food, which involves labor of going to the grocery store, cooking, or obtaining food through some other means. Likewise, Leontiev interrogates the lack of research in goal formation and calls for further research in activity theory to investigate goal formation in subjects and those participating in the activity. This project seeks to investigate that call through user experiences.

Third Generation Activity Theory (Engeström 1987-Present)

Taking up Leontiev's sociocultural approach, Engeström created a visual representation of Leontiev's activity system (illustrated in Figure 2). While Leontiev introduced sociocultural

elements to the model such as cultural customs and labor, Engeström added the role of rules and histories to the model. Through these additions and visual modeling, Engeström, along with Il'enkov (1977; 1982) emphasized the importance and role of contradictions or disruptions within activity systems. These contradictions exist between the outlined members of activity systems: subjects, rules, communities, divisions of labor, mediating artifacts, and objects. These sites of contradictions or disruptions provided transformative opportunities or what Engeström famously refers to as “expansive learning.” (1987; 2015).

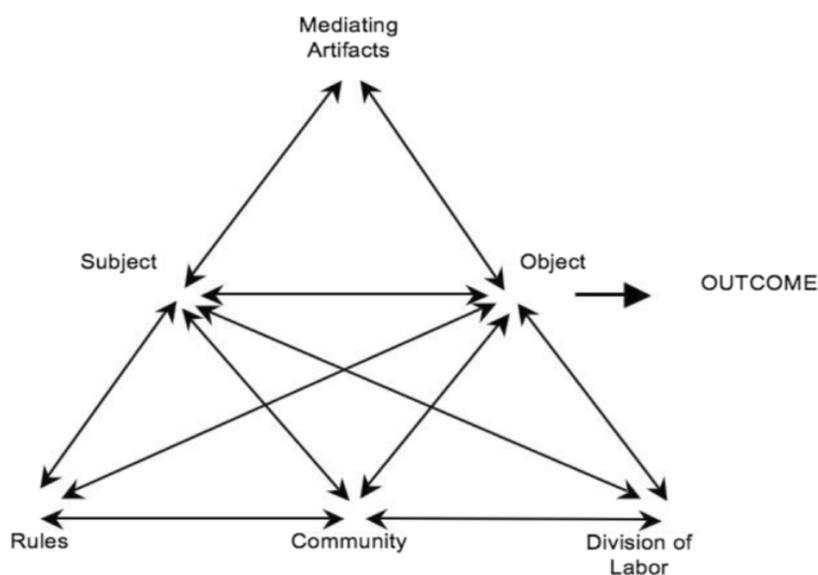


Figure 2: Engeström's illustration of an activity system, influenced by Leontiev (1999, pp. 31)

This model demonstrates an activity system with an object → outcome.

Engeström also expanded Leontiev's activity system from a system to a network in which multiple activities interact in a complex web of activity (1987, 2015). While this was an important development in 3GAT, this project will largely be using the visual model in Figure 2 to understand a user's activity system, rather than analyzing multiple networks of activity across multiple users.

Where is Activity Theory going?

Recently, Engeström has suggested that Fourth Generation Activity theory (4GAT) will focus on providing solutions for *runaway objects* (Engeström & Sannino, 2021) or objects which “transcend the boundaries between the history of a specific activity, the history of a singular society, and the history of humankind” (pp. 5). Examples of such runaway objects include world pandemics or climate change, in which larger systems of activity transcend national borders. Engeström and Sannino suggest 4GAT will need to be built around objects which cross boundaries and emphasis needs to largely be placed on time more so than space. Further, the emphasis on time allows insights into expansive learning “within and across the activities involved, their relatively independent dynamics, and their interdependency” (pp.15).

As researchers encounter an exciting time in activity theory, particularly as activity theory possibly moves from its third generation to fourth generation, the question remains: How will 3GAT continue to be transformed in its fourth generation? Spinuzzi’s chapter: “What’s Wrong with 3GAT” (2021) and Karanosios et al. (2021) complicate the usability of 3GAT in today’s digital networked society. As Spinuzzi suggests, activity theory’s attention has largely been placed on the ‘socio’ in sociocognitive and less on the cognitive, that is, the role of individuals (subjects) within activities. Somewhat in agreement with Engeström (though they differ on the main challenge of 4GAT), Spinuzzi suggests more research should be done on the multiplicity of objects as a means for making sense of the dialogic representations in 3GAT. Karanosios et al. call for new perspectives on 3GAT given advances in technologies and the possibility of technologies themselves acting as objects, noting: “While activity theory can account for the interaction between community and tools (Engeström, 2008), few studies have explored how social media systems are a kind of hybrid of tool-community, or perhaps a hybrid

of subject–tool–community” (18). Karanosios et al. seems to suggest that studies need to seek to better understand the complicated and hybrid interactions that occur on social media sites that involve subjects operating within particular communities and utilizing multiple navigational tools such as technologies, interfaces, and language.

Further, as Karanosios et al. note, the interpretation of what is the object, more specifically that there is a singular object, may complicate the study of activity systems on social media sites. I suggest that the current 3GAT model perpetuates the idea that an object is singular to a subject and occurs in an isolated activity. For example, when encountering an Instagram account, the objects may appear to be the profile itself or the individual posts which, when compiled, compose a profile. Yet, these representations of objects may only account for socialized products, which may not account for the users’ sociocognitive activity when making choices about what to post or how to curate their profile in order to perform certain parts of their identity. Thus, my project seeks to better understand users’ sociocognitive negotiations they make while engaging with social media sites such as Instagram. I propose that in order to understand these complex and hybrid sites of activity, we may need to rethink the role of subjects (users) as they engage in online digital spaces through the mediation of tools/technologies within particular communities.

In this thesis project I aim to accomplish three goals: 1) Outline and historicize influential generations of activity theory, 2) present a new approach to Cultural-Historical Activity Theory called the “User-Experience CHAT Model,” 3) use and apply the new model to a case study. This theoretical and empirical project describes a case study of a transnational user’s experiences performing their identity on Instagram by answering the research question: How do users with transnational literacy experiences perform their identity and manage communities through the

mediation of particular technologies on Instagram? The results of the study suggest that users on social media sites may communicate with particular communities, but also past, present, and future versions of themselves. As users engage in activities across time, they encounter a field of interpretation, also known as context, which informs their present experiences as they produce an object. Thus, users' identities are constantly in a state of transformation and becoming as their object(ive)s in social media activities transform across time. This thesis project is structured as follows: I will begin by analyzing how scholarship in CHAT influenced this study's proposed UX CHAT model. Next, I will present the UX CHAT model. Then, I will introduce and present the findings from the Case Study. Finally, I will discuss the findings from the Case Study utilizing the UX CHAT model.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, I will begin by illustrating and accounting for the proposed UX CHAT model, paying particular attention to the generations of activity theory which influenced the model. Then, I will define key terms within the model, accounting for the user-experience design choices incorporated. Lastly, I will analyze how transnational digital literacy experiences may be applied to the model with attention to the role of subject (user)—mediating artifacts—communities.

User-Experience CHAT Model

In this model, I aim to utilize 3GAT Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), but extend it from a two-dimensional model of networked activity to a three-dimensional model, in which the subject (user) is centered within the model (see Figure 3). This choice in centering the subject by design contrasts the 2GAT and 3GAT models which only include the subject as a small category within a larger system or network of activity. While this model is still a work-in-

progress and is two-dimensional due to the alphanumeric nature of this thesis project, the model can be envisioned as a kaleidoscope in which the three listed categories (rules, customs, and histories; communities; and lastly, divisions of labor) assemble each side of the interior mirrored structure. As users look into the kaleidoscope they peer through the three sides. These sides of the interior mirrors compose the field of interpretation for the user through contexts.

Additionally, mediating artifacts also inform the field of interpretation. By turning the lens of the kaleidoscope, through the mediation of artifacts, users transform their object(ive)s. Similar to Engeström and Sannino's (2021) and Spinuzzi's (2020) calls for 4GAT, these object(ive)s are multiple, hybrid, and complex and interpreted through a subject's field of interpretation.

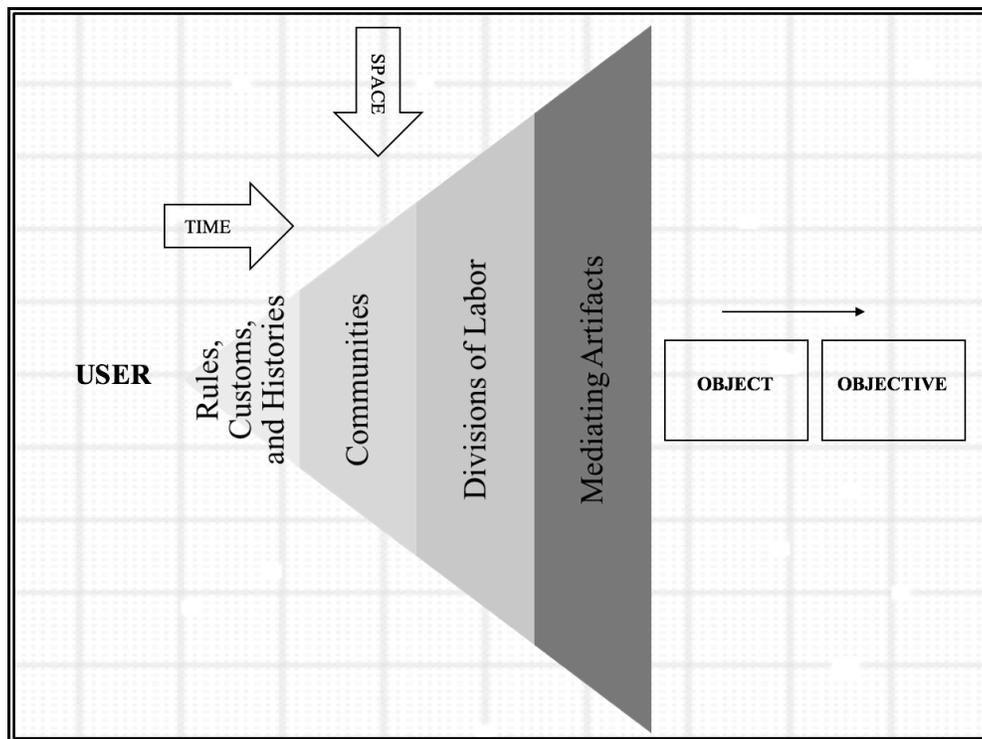


Figure 3: Proposed UX CHAT model

The proposed UX CHAT model draws on 3GAT, but inverts the model to center the user.

A user's plane of interpretation when encountering an activity, as we know from CHAT, involves the negotiation of multiple categories including: rules, customs, and histories; communities; divisions of labor; and lastly, mediating artifacts. In this model, each of these four categories are plural because when interacting in any activity, these categories provide context as to how a subject may respond or act in the situation. Drawing on Engeström's 3GAT and American Pragmatism, particularly Charles Peirce's triadic semiotic model in which signs become objects through interpretation using available interpretants (Witte, 1992), my model illustrates how an individuated actor may encounter or interpret a particular sign into an object through a field of interpretation informed by contexts: 1) rules, customs, and histories, 2) communities, 3) divisions of labor and 4) mediating artifacts. These four categories form contexts for activities and are defined as:

1. Rules, Customs, and Histories: Global, cultural, national, local, and individual rules, traditions, histories, and laws which inform interpretations of object(ive)s.
2. Communities: Groups of people including the subject (user) who inform interpretations of object(ive)s.
3. Divisions of Labor: Informed by experiences/histories and used with mediation of artifacts, divisions of labor are the means through which a subject (user) divides work in order to produce object(ive)s.
4. Mediating Artifacts: Technology devices, interface designs, and linguistic choices which a subject (user) mediates in order to produce object(ive)s.

The UX model proposes a way of looking at object(ive)s as an outcome accomplished across (Prior & Smith, 2020) contexts by a user, sometimes referred to on social media sites as 'curation,' in which users' contexts are almost always multiple and laminated (Prior & Shipka,

2003). This is to say: contexts in social media activity systems are not isolated to the observable activity system. Rather, contexts exist both socially and cognitively to users (subjects) when interpreting an object: “contexts are activity systems. The subsystem associated with the subject-mediator-object relationship exists as such only in relationship to the other elements of the system. This is a thoroughly relational view of context” (Cole, 1996, pp. 141). As we consider how users interpret object(ive)s through a plane of interpretation informed by contexts, we can also observe that the plane of interpretation is not unilateral, rather it is bilateral. That is, users can influence contexts and contexts influence users. In other words, in order to understand the user—mediating artifact—object relationship, there needs to also be an understanding of the contexts which informed mediation.

The object of online activity can become complicated because, while an object may appear to be singular to a particular user socially, the object can actually be multiple cognitively to the user via object(ive)s. On social media site, these multiple object(ive)s are largely influenced by communities. For example, a user on Instagram may appear to have the object to post a particular image to Instagram. Socially, this object is demonstrated to users through the act of posting. Yet, the same user can also hold the objective of posting a particular image to Instagram in order to receive attention or validation via the Interface (like or comment) from another user through the same object. Through this example, we can see that objects may socially appear to be singular within activity systems, yet cognitively, observable object(ive)s may actually be multiple to a user via their field of interpretation informed by contexts. My model seeks to analyze a user’s object(ive)s to better understand how a user mediates technologies in order to communicate across communities.

In the model, time is demonstrated horizontally and space is illustrated vertically. However, it is important to note that space/time are not separated, as they are visually illustrated through the grid that runs through the model. Time in digital spaces, particularly social media sites, is subjective to the user's experience as they situate themselves digitally in their own spaces (Pigg, 2014; Pihlaja, 2020). Time moves across the model as contexts inform past, present, and future activities. These activity systems located in space/time may be actively chosen by the user, but also depend on mediation of tools/technologies. Put another way, users do mediate space/time, but space/time can also be mediated by technology. The mediation by technology is evident in cognitive and social science research which has found that certain interface designs, such as the push-notification, can prompt users to perform particular activities (Wheatley & Ferrer-Conill, 2021). Thus, time works across the activity system's mediation rather than from the top down.

As scholars within Activity Theory encounter a possible fourth generation, my proposed UX CHAT model could assist in thinking through this fourth generation more effectively. What I'm proposing through the model is perhaps twofold: 1) By design, this approach visualizes the complexities, multiplicities, and hybridity of digital writing activities with multiple contexts (Dippre & Phillips, 2020), rather than the 3GAT model which seems to still encourage contexts as isolated to particular activities and 2) This model centers the user (subject) as the actant of the activity. In other models of activity theory, the subject is a part of the activity but is not visually displayed as an actant who interprets the activity. This model seeks to invert the 3GAT model by placing the user and the user's object(ive)s at the center of the networked activity. While on the former two-dimensional model of CHAT these four parts are situated on the triangle with the subject and object, I might contend along with Spinuzzi (2021) that with user-centered design

and in studying social media, we should turn our attention to the role of the individual user, particularly their role within activity systems such as social media sites.

The Individuated User

The inversion of the CHAT model takes inspiration from user-centered design, where users are placed at the center of experiences, as they are the subjects engaging and interpreting particular objects or outcomes within networked activity (Kim et al., 2008; Salvo, 2001). The choice in centering the user in the activity system was influenced by Jones (2016) and Rose (2016) who advocate for human-centered design as advocacy. As Rose suggests, human-centered design “should look more broadly and provide a way to consider how design can support or constrain the needs of people whose lives are impacted by both the systems and policies that are created by a more digitized world” (428). I suggest by centering the user in the UX CHAT model, we may be better positioned to observe the needs of users whose lives are impacted by the social media activity systems they are members of. In many ways, by centering the user in the model, we return slightly to Vygotsky’s model of the “complex, mediated act” which focuses on individual acts. However, as discovered in 2GAT and 3GAT, individual acts cannot exist in a cognitive silo for a subject, rather individual acts are never quite individual, even when a subject appears to be engaging in an activity individually. Further, social media apps may encourage linguistic ideologies of an individual user such as the “personal profile” or the posting of a “selfie.” However, individual acts are dialogic (Bakhtin, 1961, pp. 293-294). Thus, actors (users) are not individual, rather they are *individuated*. By centering the user as the interpreter of the activity, I hope that I will be able to better understand the user’s cognitive experience within the online community, and thus, the negotiations individual users make within these online communities through the use of particular tools/technologies. Further, through talk-aloud

protocol methods and subjects' co-construction of data, this study aims to further understand how subjects make these negotiations of online identity performances and engagement with particular communities in real time, as they engage in the activity itself.

The role of the researcher also comes into play with the interpretation of *what is an activity system*. Many activity systems in other studies have been determined through the role of the researcher as observer (Potts, 2014). While activity systems can be observational, in digital spaces, activity systems are more complex and should not be analyzed only by observational methods. Rather, in the UX CHAT model, researchers uncover users' observable Textual objects and determined Contextual objectives created through contexts in order to understand the full picture of the activity system. In my view, the UX CHAT model also demonstrates values by the design of the model itself. By centering the user as the interpreter of activity systems, we can hopefully better understand the complex negotiations users make on social media sites, in all their limitations and affordances.

Transnational Users' Identity Management of Lifeworlds

As we consider how users interpret objects through a plane of interpretation (contexts), we can also observe that the plane of interpretation is not unilateral, rather it is bilateral. That is, subjects can influence contexts and contexts influence individuals. As mentioned earlier, contexts are almost always multiple, meaning they are laminated across space/time and inform current instances of interpretation. As these multiple contexts accrue, I'm interested in how these experiences of interpreting object(ive)s reconstruct a user's perceived identity over time, as the (re)construction of identity is both a cognitive and social spatiotemporal process.

It could be argued that users on social media apps are almost always mobile and thus, translocational, as they engage with the app in different spaces. A step further, one could also

propose the argument that as we experience Web3, users are always *transnational* as we engage in activity on the worldwide web as global citizens. Moreover, this study seeks to analyze transnational users' digital literacy experiences and identity performances as they navigate living in a country different from their home country. The choice in studying transnational users stems directly from the complex and often nuanced digital landscape transnational users encounter as they perform identity across multiple communities through technologies.

Likewise, followers on the app represent the accrual and maintenance of mediating and communicating with multiple communities who are not necessarily operating in a unified space or time. For example, on Instagram, I may interact with a post uploaded twelve hours ago by my sister. While she posted it twelve hours ago in Kansas City, I am seeing it several hours later in the space of my own home in Maine. Through this example, space/time works across a system of activity which is individuated to my experiences as a user. Further, interface algorithms and designs (represented on the model as mediating artifacts) can also affect mediation of space/time, as the algorithm filters content to each individual user which may affect behaviors (Gallagher et al., 2020; Novotny & Hutchinson, 2019). While one could suggest that the mediating artifact or technology might influence space/time for users, I might suggest we can see this as a conjecture point, rather than a contradiction. By conjecture, I mean that technologies and mediating artifacts are mediated *because* of users.

The complexities of how users portray and perform their identities on social media sites are still not completely understood, particularly as conversations about social media and larger algorithmic structures move farther away from users and closer to discussions of technologies. For example, recent discussions within Writing Studies (see CCCC 2023 session "ChatGPT, Magical Thinking and the Discourse of Crisis") have been concerned with the construction of

ChatGPT, a large language chatbot model developed by OpenAI and launched in November 2022. While the public discussion of ChatGPT has largely remained on the model itself such as the *CNBC* article entitled “I asked ChatGPT to help me plan a vacation. Here’s what happened next” or the *New Yorker’s* “It’s Not Possible for Me to Feel or Be Creepy’: An Interview with ChatGPT” we know that the model itself, ChatGPT, is not performing the activity. Rather, the user interacting with the model’s code and algorithmic structure is producing a desired object. Yet, the discussion largely remains on ChatGPT, rather than how users are interacting with the large-language model. This raises the question, is the code for ChatGPT merely the mediating tool/technology? Or is the code, then, also an object? Similarly, on Instagram, users interact and mediate the interface of the app. As users perform activities within the app, the interface serves as a mediating tool/technology, but can also serve as an object itself. Returning to the initial example of the ‘close friends’ list, we can observe how the mediating tool/technology of the interface (the ability to create a close friends list), also becomes an object itself as users interact with the interface and produce the desired close friends list. This activity would not be possible without the algorithmic structure of the interface (mediating artifact) which also produced the object (close friends list). Returning to Vygotsky’s model, if the tool and object *can* both be the interface of Instagram, then my question becomes: where does that leave the user (subject) in this bidirectional relationship of subject $\leftarrow \rightarrow$ Tool/Object? While the algorithm may affect when users see content, the interaction of content occurs in the first place because users are engaging with the app.

If we think about the curation of an Instagram post as an encountered compositional activity, through which users interpret signs (images) which become objects through the animation of multimodal features such as captioning, adding a filter, location, tags, etc. then as

they are posting, users make a series of negotiations based upon their own lifeworld experiences (Roozen, 2021; Rounsaville, 2017) or what I refer to in the model as the field of interpretation informed by contexts. For users with transnational literacy practices, these lifeworlds may be heightened as they consider the various ‘worlds’ to whom they are communicating based upon various available interpretable signs. Thus, while the object of posting may seem like the same activity protocol each time a user encounters it, users negotiate how the sign may be interpreted within different lifeworlds. As users accrue these various activities and curated objects (posts already posted to Instagram), they construct a users’ identity over time. We can think of identity as the management of lifeworlds at particular moments in space and time, which then become stacked upon each other and instruct meaning making in various instances of interpretation. As Rounsaville suggests, the management of lifeworlds “indicates how elements of genre knowledge develop iteratively, through everyday moments across lifeworlds, both in and out of school, as uptakes bend toward perceptive schemata that frame the interpretation, valuation, and enactment of written genres” (2017, pp. 4).

While activity theory accounts for one event, such as the interpretation of a particular sign becoming an object, the object is never isolated to the activity loop offered by the activity alone. As we can observe, lifeworlds impact the way users take up genres, particularly as they communicate across lifeworlds to audiences within their followings. As users navigate what Rounsaville calls the “moveable, porous, and malleable” (pp. 2) experiences of writing activities, they construct a network of activity on their profile. Thinking through how these networks form a web, each activity then informs another activity (see also Engeström’s 3GAT). Thus, the triangle model of activity theory (Figure 2) can also be thought of as a kaleidoscope (Figure 3), in which users continue to stack former activities in their field of interpretation until a user either

deletes their profile or reaches a threshold in which they no longer post. As these encounters with activity become informed by the laminated contexts represented in the kaleidoscope model as the internal mirror structure, the uptake of the Instagram post (object) as a genre becomes residual or what Dryer (2016) refers to as the “accretion and sedimentation of memory that conditions uptake” (73). Yet, a user’s objectives –particularly when considering multiple communities – inform the transformations of object into hybrid and sometimes experimental textual forms.

Through negotiations made across time located within particular spaces, users curate and perform to various communities across various cultures and customs through the mediation and division of labor of particular mediating tools in order to produce Textual Objects and Contextual Objectives. In this study, I will be utilizing a case study of a transnational user’s experiences on Instagram to explore how users with transnational literacy practices manage distinct lifeworlds. My research question seeks to understand: How do users with transnational literacy experiences perform their identity and manage communities through the mediation of particular technologies on Instagram?

METHODS

In this chapter, I will begin by providing some contextual background to the chosen methods of analysis. Then, I will provide details about the data collection timeline. Lastly, I will provide the frameworks for the data analysis. As this research aims to answer the question, ‘How do Instagram users with transnational experiences perform their identity and manage communities through the mediation of particular technologies?’ multiple methods were used in order to address the research question concerning users’ cognitive and social experiences. This study is a mixed method case study consisting of data collection from four streams: 1) semi-structured interviews, 2) rhetorical analysis of a participant’s personal Instagram data (including

images, captions, account biographies, and stories), 3) recordings of a participant using think-aloud protocol, and 4) analytical memos of a participant's Instagram activity.

These methods were chosen because they are both observational and introspective. The choice to use mixed methods derived from Vygotsky's (1978) original attention to internalization and externalization, operating under the assumption that inscriptive data is not just the result of a textual product. Rather, inscriptive data begins cognitively, *inside* the user (Sanchez, 2017) when users move through a field of interpretation in order to produce an object. In his well-read article, "The Method Section as Conceptual Epicenter in Constructing Social Science Research Reports," Peter Smagorinsky (2008) argues for a move towards particularity rather than generalizability as he says:

The "social turn" in literacy studies in the past two decades (see the contributors to Smagorinsky, 2006) suggests that people from different backgrounds (e.g., from different cultural groups, genders, socioeconomic classes, races, ethnicities, religions, and other categories) will not necessarily act in the same way under the same conditions. (pp. 394)

As this study aimed to analyze transnational literacy practices on Instagram, the methods needed to account for variance in systems of activity by remaining broad enough for gathering data within a social networking site, while also allowing space for users to contextualize their own personal data, given their own histories and experiences. Thus, the decision to mix methods was made. The methods were chosen in order to understand the textual and contextual object(ive)s produced by users as they create, curate, and compose their Instagram activities. For example, the rhetorical analysis of personal Instagram data and the use of memos attends to the textual objects a user may produce while engaging in Instagram activities. Likewise, semi-structured

interviews and talk-aloud protocol recordings allow a better insight into the contextual objectives a user may hold as they produce textual objects. The combination of textual and contextual data intends to compose a more comprehensive account of user experiences while on Instagram.

Once approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to begin collecting data, I started by using snowball sampling (Kirchherr and Charles, 2018) to recruit participants. Snowball sampling was chosen given the expedited nature of the project and the year-long timeline I was operating within. To begin sampling, I sent a message about the study to colleagues and asked them to circulate information about the study to people they know (See Appendix A for Initial Outreach Message). At the end of the message was my email address where possible participants were encouraged to email me to participate in the study. Once possible participants emailed me, I responded via email (See Appendix B for Initial Interview Email) to set up a time to meet to discuss the Consent to Participate form (See Appendix C for Consent to Participate form). Possible participants were told they could meet via Zoom or in-person. If the participant chose to meet in person, they were asked where they would like to meet. If the participant agreed to participate at this meeting, the initial interview began. The initial and follow-up interviews lasted 30 to 50 minutes. Prior to agreeing to the Consent to Participate form, participants were made aware of the study's timeline, which is outlined in Table 1: Participant Timeline below. Participants were told data collection would span six weeks, with the initial and follow-up interviews occurring on Week 1 and Week 6, respectively. The total time participants were expected to participate in the study did not exceed three hours over a six-week period of time.

Table 1: Participant Timeline

Week Number	Time Commitment	Tasks
1	30-50 minutes	Consent to Participate, Initial Interview
2	1-2 minutes	Talk-Aloud session
3	1-2 minutes	Talk-Aloud session
4	1-2 minutes	Talk-Aloud session
5	1-2 minutes	Talk-Aloud session
6	30-50 minutes	Data presented, Follow-Up Interview

Participants

There were four total participants who participated in the entire data collection period. Since the research question sought to understand transnational literacy experiences, the mediation of technologies, and the management of particular communities, in this thesis project, I chose to analyze the data from one participant in order to analyze user experiences using the UX CHAT model. Anya was chosen primarily because of her frequent activity on Instagram during the data collection period. While this project only describes and analyzes Anya's experiences, I plan to analyze the other participants' data and apply it to the UX CHAT model in the future. Below is a brief biography about Anya:

Anya was born in 2001. She uses she/her pronouns. Anya grew up in St. Petersburg, Russia. She speaks Russian and English. In 2020, Anya studied abroad in the United

States and in 2021, she moved to Maine to begin Graduate school. She downloaded and began using Instagram when she was in eighth-ninth grade.

Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews

Prior to the initial interview, participants were made aware of and signed the Consent to Participate form (See Appendix C for Consent to Participate form). Participants were given the option of having an in person (location of their choosing) or virtual (Zoom) interview. The in-person interviews were recorded with a small handheld audio recording device. Participants were asked if they could be recorded prior to the beginning of the recording. Detailed notes were also kept during the interview. Zoom interviews were recorded via the recording function on Zoom. Similar to the in-person interviews, I took detailed notes during the virtual interviews.

In this study, participants participated in two interviews: an initial interview and a follow-up interview. Once participants agreed to participate in the study, they participated in an initial interview, which lasted 30-50 minutes. The semi-structured initial interviews (occurring on Weeks 1 of the study) asked participants familiarizing questions about their relationship with the Instagram app (See Appendix D for Initial Interview Questions). Examples of these kinds of questions include:

1. How did you first hear about Instagram?
2. What do you like/dislike about Instagram?
3. What kinds of accounts do you typically follow on Instagram?
4. Do you use Instagram on your phone or another device?
5. What tone do you hope to portray to your followers by the kinds of posts you post?

6. Do you ever think about your identity that you are presenting when you post?

These questions were chosen to begin familiarizing myself with the user's experience on Instagram, while also gaining initial impressions or representations users have about the app's affordances and limitations, especially when considering the user's identity performance on the app. The initial interview lasted around 30-50 minutes for each participant. At the end of the interview, participants were asked if they could be followed on Instagram by a researcher account I made in order to follow their Instagram activity. By agreeing to the Consent to Participate form, participants agreed to being followed on Instagram. For the sake of participant privacy, in the reporting of this data, all participants were given pseudonyms and photos of participants will be described, but will not be visually represented in order to protect participant identity, especially participants who may be from countries where Instagram is outlawed (e.g., Russia).

Following the six-week data collection and Instagram activity tracking, participants were contacted to schedule a follow-up interview (See Appendix E for Follow-Up Interview email). Similar to the initial interview, participants were given the option to have the interview in-person or via Zoom. Participants were told the follow-up interview would take 30-50 minutes. The second and final interview included a presentation of the individual's data corpus (see Instagram Data section) and a discussion of initial findings or trends noticed in the collection process. During the second interview participants were asked to member-reflect on the findings and offer alternative explanations and interpretations of the data. I use the term "member-reflect" rather than member check because member reflection invites multivocality in the findings by "providing opportunities for questions, critique, feedback, affirmation, and even collaboration" (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Examples of member-reflecting interview questions may include:

1. When you posted this image on your feed/story, what were you hoping to portray to your audience (following)?
2. What kind of tone did you hope to convey through this post?
3. Were you thinking about your identity when posting this? If so, in what way?

Finally, participants were also presented with particular posts that may not have been contextualized in the Talk-Aloud protocol, but were coded with importance. These posts were printed off and presented to participants, as they were asked to provide contextual information, similar to the Talk-Aloud protocol, for those posts.

Instagram Data

Instagram data (posts to profile and stories) were collected over a six-week period of time. However, given the archival nature of the app, where a follower has access to posts from many years prior to their act of following an account, I had access to years of posts from each participant. Instagram stories, however, only last for 24 hours, unless the stories posts are highlighted on a user's profile under a topic. The archival feature of the app provided several affordances for analyzing user identity performance over space and time. Likewise, the archival feature of the app also allows users to revise profiles by archiving posts from the past. This means access to textual data is ever changing in a particular space and time, as users may choose to (un)archive a post.

Caption Data

In order to collect a data corpus of multimodal textual objects from user's profiles, I began by making a corpus of their posts' captions. By creating a textual corpus, I was able to examine language features often used by the user in the captioning space. Since the research question aimed to understand translocational user experiences, I was interested to see if the

linguistic data in the captioning space could offer particular trends in managing multiple communities. As three out of four participants considered themselves to be multilingual, the captioning space provided a contact zone, where users utilized translanguaging linguistic practices to communicate across their global communities. In trying to better understand this phenomenon of language-in-use, I decided to code the captions for the user's choices in language performance in the caption space. Table 2 represents the codes, definitions, and an example of the established codes. For example, with Anya's linguistic captioning data, I established five codes: English, Russian, Codemesh, No-Caption, and Other. The English and Russian codes represent captions entirely written in those languages, but may feature emoji use. The Codemesh code represents captions that are written in both English and Russian or possibly feature another language in conjunction with the two (A. S. Canagarajah, 2013; Young & Martinez, 2011).

Canagarajah (2011) distinguishes codemeshing from codeswitching:

Whereas codeswitching treats language alternation as involving bilingual competence and switches between two different systems, codemeshing treats the languages as part of a single integrated system. Unlike translanguaging, codemeshing also accommodates the possibility of mixing communicative modes and diverse symbol systems (other than language). (403)

In this project's data, I expanded the "diverse symbol systems" to include emoji use in conjunction with the morphological data. The No-Caption code represents images posted without captions. Lastly, the Other code represents images posted with exclusively emoji captions, tagging of another account, or numeric captions. Examples of each code are represented below in Table 2. The examples were taken from Anya's professional Instagram account.

Table 2: Caption Code Examples

Code	No-Caption	Russian	English	Codemesh	Other
Example	N/A	Сегодня смотрели на ковбоев	Kettle Cove state park, Eastern Promenade, Portland Museum of Art and a funny dog in a Renoir painting in the end.	Вуе, Philadelphia! Хожу туда-сюда, а в конце смотрю на тюремную камеру Аль Капоне	*pink heart emoji

The choice in using these codes primarily was to directly investigate the use of code-meshing and how users may make the decision to code-mesh or not with particular kinds of images on posts. Likewise, the Contextual Objectives data contextualizes the linguistic data by providing insights into why a user may have decided to not caption a post due to rules, customs, or histories they may have encountered. This is to say that the linguistic data gains relevance through the contextual data, but the linguistic data is important to begin with as we examine Textual Objects users produce.

Visual Data

Similar to the linguistic captioning data, I began to code image type for each user which gave me some quantitative data I could use to contextualize the images with the participant in the Talk-Aloud protocol and semi-structured interviews. Table 3 represents the code definitions for each image type. These image type codes emerged by rhetorical observation and were checked by my thesis chair, Heather Falconer. Given initial interviews with participants, I decided to create two overarching codes (Stand-alone photo and Photo Dump) to see if certain kinds of

photos may show up in particular kinds of posts. For the purposes of this coding scheme, a stand-alone photo is a photo posted by itself, with or without a caption, without any other photos. A photo dump is defined as a post which features multiple images. When approaching the question of identity performance, coding for image type may allow me to see possibilities users see or imagine for themselves through visual representations on the app through occurrence of image type. For example, if a selfie occurs more often in a photo dump than as a stand-alone photo, what kind of contextualization may a participant provide for this choice? What affordance or limitation to their desired identity performance may this choice have? How could this choice be influenced by contexts such as communities, rules, customs, and histories, and divisions of labor?

Table 3: Image Type Codes

Image Type	Definition
Selfie	Photo of the self that the user appears to have taken
Self-Photo	photo taken by a viewer not the user, in which the user is the only subject in the photo
Human Subject(s)	photo of human subject with or without user such as family and/or friends
Landscape	photo of a scene without any human subjects
Object	photo of an object without a human subject such as a book, food item, or piece of art

Story Data

Finally, the last textual feature of the app collected was Instagram story posts by each user. As users posted to their Instagram story, I screenshot and archived their posts. This brought about interesting reflections for me as a researcher observing their Instagram story activity as a follower because I saw the story not on the user's timeline, but my own, as a follower and observer. However, this also means that I could have missed a story that was uploaded by a user, if they deleted it before I could see it on my own time.

Talk-Aloud Protocol

During the six weeks of tracking the user's engagement on Instagram, the participants were asked to share with me a short video or voice memo recording of them conducting a talk-aloud protocol following a post (see Appendix F for Think-Aloud message protocol). Each participant was provided access to a restricted, private Dropbox folder created by me. Participants were invited to upload their short video or voice memo to the Dropbox for me to access. All recordings were destroyed once I downloaded them from the Dropbox folder. Participants were asked to complete the protocol a maximum of once a week, meaning they submitted one talk-aloud recording a week. If a participant did not post a picture to their feed in a particular week, they did not need to upload a talk-aloud recording. Each recording was around 1-2 minutes. The rationale for the talk aloud protocol was to better understand the participants' motivations and insights (internalization) into posting content in real time. The talk-aloud protocol also allowed participants the choice to re-record in their own space and time, if they desired.

Analytical Memos

In addition to the data streams noted above, I kept detailed notes and analytical memos about my observations of participants' activity on the app for six weeks. As I took notes about the participants' user activity, I formulated questions to pose in a follow-up interview. These choices gave me a clearer picture of how user identity performances and literacy practices can be used and leveraged through the curation of the visual image and captioning space on Instagram.

Data Analysis

Using Wertsch (1985) and Vygotsky's (1987) sociocultural approaches, the three overarching codes (Tool, Setting, and Goals) derive from Smagorinsky's codes which represent "goal-directed, tool-mediated action in social context" (2008, pp. 399). Adding to Smagorinsky's codes using my theoretical framing with the UX CHAT model, I modified the overarching codes to better represent the UX CHAT model: Tool→Mediating Artifacts, Setting→Contexts, and Goals→Object(s). Table 4 demonstrates the overarching codes, their definitions, and additional sub-codes from each overarching code. Definitions for the overarching codes were quoted from Smagorinsky (pp. 399). Table 4 also demonstrates the User-Experience Model Coding Scheme, which I utilized to organize and initially code the collected data from all four data streams. For example, data coded under Tools was collected from all four data-streams. Whereas, the Settings code was mostly determined by information the participants shared in the semi-structured interviews and Talk-aloud protocol. Under Goals or Object(ives) Textual Objects were collected and organized based on the collection of a user's Instagram data. However, similar to Settings, Contextual Objectives were largely understood through the Talk-Aloud protocol and the semi-structured interviews. By having the textual data in conjunction with the qualitative data, I am able to better understand a user's activity system in relation to their experience of that activity

system, both in process and practice. Table 4 represents the overall coding structure for the data analysis, data which was collected through the four data streams previously mentioned: 1) semi-structured interviews, 2) collection of Instagram profile data, 3) talk-aloud participant protocol, and 4) analytical memos describing the user’s Instagram activity. These codes were developed as I followed the participant’s Instagram activity and engaged in interviews. For example, the division of textual objects and contextual objectives emerged as I began to co-construct meaning of particular posts with my participants.

Table 4: User Experience Model Coding Scheme

Code	Definition	Sub-Codes
Tools (Mediating Artifacts)	“[tools] that mediate thinking”	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Technology Device 2. Interface Design 3. Language
Settings (Contexts)	“[setting] in which tools gain currency or sanction”	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communities 2. Rules, Customs and Histories 3. Divisions of Labor
Goals (Object(ives))	“[goals] toward which people put them to use”	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Textual Object <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Captions 2. Images 3. Stories 2. Contextual Objectives

The three overarching codes represent how a user may encounter a field of interpretation via tools, settings, and finally, the produced goals or desired objects. Yet within these codes, there are multiple sub-codes that could be possible within the context of social media use, particularly the use of Instagram. For example, under tools or mediating artifacts, I found three sub-codes or kinds of tools that could inform mediation: Technology Device, Interface Design, and lastly, Language. Table 5 illustrates the Tool or mediating artifacts' sub-codes, definitions, and examples.

Table 5: Tool (Mediating Artifacts) Sub-Codes

Tool (Mediating Artifacts)	Definition	Example
Technology Device	Physical object which allows user to interact with Instagram app	Smartphone, laptop
Interface Design	Infrastructure created by app's designers which may encourage particular actions or behaviors in users by design	Instagram stories, 'Close friends' list, users' home feeds, search profile option, Discover page, new post button, Reels, user's personal profile page, Archives, language translation feature of app etc.
Language	How a user negotiates language-in-use on the app	Textual (captions) and visual (images)

With technology devices, users choose a particular physical tool which allows them to access the app. Interface design is a bit more complicated, as the design of Instagram is constantly being updated with new versions; when I'm writing this portion of the project, Instagram is on Version 272.0. However, evident in my guiding research question, this study is not so much interested in analyzing the Interface by rhetorical design; rather, this study focuses on how users may mediate certain elements of the interface design as a tool in order to accomplish a particular goal or object(ive)s. The mediation of interface design leads into the final Mediating Artifact sub-code, Language. Since this project was exploring how transnational users perform identity and manage lifeworlds through mediation, language was important as almost all of the participants in the study were multilingual. Furthermore, as the theoretical framework explored, perhaps within social media sites we need to expand what we perceive to be language-in-use, meaning language in digital spaces with international audiences may transcend speech or written communication. Rather, language may also account for multimodal choices made such as image selection on the app. Language can be seen as a tool, which when mediated, allows a user to produce a desired object.

Moving to the second overarching code, Setting, or what I'm referring to as Contexts, three sub-codes emerge: Communities; Rules, Customs, and Histories; and Divisions of Labor. Table 6 demonstrates these subcodes. It's important to note that Setting codes are not separate from Tools or Goals. Rather, the three overarching codes work together within an activity system. However, in my UX CHAT model, Setting or Contexts are negotiated within the field of interpretation, where the Contexts are always multiple and laminated. Thus, the Setting subcodes are almost always present, multiple, and laminated when a user mediates a tool, which is given currency or sanction due to contexts. These contexts may account for why users make the

choices they do when mediating a particular tool and producing an object. It is important to mention that as these Setting (Contexts) codes emerged and developed with the data from the participant, the UX CHAT model was revised. For example, time and space were added to the model after listening back to the Talk-Aloud protocol data. Thus, the participant data greatly impacted the construction of the UX CHAT model.

Table 6: Setting (Contexts) Sub-Codes

Setting (Contexts)	Definition	Example
Communities	groups of people who inform or influence the object of an activity	Family, friends, school or work colleagues, acquaintances, followers, etc.
Rules, Customs, and Histories	cultural customs, laws, beliefs, or histories which inform or influence the object of an activity	User influenced by a family's former rule such as not posting a picture of one's face
Divisions of Labor	negotiations user makes through the use of tools in order to accomplish object	How a user chooses to capture, edit, and post photos, following or unfollowing accounts, etc.

When producing a coding scheme, the Goals or Objects sub-codes were particularly difficult to define. As discussed in the theoretical framing, as a researcher observing an activity system, the object may appear to be a textual product. Yet, objects can also be multiple and remain a representation in a user's head as they produce a particular post. Thus, the sub-codes for

Goals and Objects needed to represent both the social and cognitive objects users may perceive when enacting interpretation and thus, curation.

With attention to the sociocognitive nature of a user's objects, two sub-codes emerged: Textual and Contextual objects. Textual objects may be considered to be externalized objects which can be observable by another. Conversely, Contextual objects are internalized by a user (though the theoretical framing notes that internalization occurs due to externalization) and may not necessarily be observable by another follower on Instagram. Contextual objects tend to focus largely on the sociocultural and historical experiences of users, as the Context serves as a field of interpretation a user must navigate in order to produce an object. Table 7 demonstrates an example of how these two sub-codes are distinct. The Goals or what I call Object(ive)s are meant to demonstrate how users might use tools and settings for their uses.

Table 7: Goals (Object(ive)s) Sub-Codes

Goals (Object(ive)s)	Definition	Example
Textual Objects	Externalized product of an activity system which can be observed socially	Post on Instagram or a Story
Contextual Objectives	Internalized product of an activity system which user holds as a representation	Seeking validation from another user or attempting to check in with particular communities

For this project, I used collaborative coding, in which I established preliminary codes and then reconstructed the codes by analyzing the data with a collaborator, my thesis chair, Dr. Heather Falconer. In the following chapters, through the case study, I will share the results of the four streams of data and then discuss the data using the UX CHAT model coding scheme and theoretical model.

LIMITATIONS

Several of the limitations in this study relate directly to disjointed experiences of temporality: user's experiences of time and my experiences of time as a researcher. Some qualitative limitations to this study included the time period for the actual data collection spanning over Winter break. Since many of the initial group of participants were members of the University community, this created some disruptions in scheduling interviews. Additionally, and more broadly, coordinating schedules and locations for interviews was oftentimes difficult, as three out of four participants were Graduate students with busy schedules. Efforts were made to conduct the interviews in neutral settings on the University campus, for convenience for the participants and myself, a Graduate student. Participants were also given the option for Zoom interviews. While this thesis project only presents data from one participant, since data was collected from four total participants, coordinating schedules and scheduling interviews was at times dubious, especially since I was collecting and tracking activity from each participant in a relatively overlapping timespan. Future research of similar design may opt for longer data collection periods, especially when tracking user activity on the app.

Accounting now directly to the collection of Instagram data, the Instagram app itself is highly archivable by design, meaning users can archive and unarchive posts on their own experiences of time. As a researcher, checking textual object codes over a period of time (i.e.

data collection→writing up results) was sometimes interrupted by a post which was archived or unarchived by the user, which made me have to re-evaluate the quantitative data. Likewise, captions can also be edited after they are posted. As a researcher tracking user's activities, I encountered their activity on my own time. For example, a user could post a photo and I would see it two hours later. In this span of time, the user could archive or edit the post, which is an interesting feature and activity of study, in and of itself. Future research may directly investigate this phenomenon as users compose and revise their holistic profiles and individual posts after producing the textual object.

Lastly, and something I will certainly continue to reflect upon, is confronting the coding system of the textual objects. As explored in the methods section, images (posts) and texts (captions) were coded separately. While this choice in separation produced some fascinating findings for each modality, the separation of image and text might possibly lose the animation and transformations a user encounters as they compose a post consisting of a combination of image and text. Future research may explore how an image and caption can become a unified unit of data, particularly when analyzing a large data set. In my future research, I hope to explore this phenomenon of animation and transformation with images←→captions through the use of corpus analysis, or at least, the composing of a large data corpus of Instagram captions.

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I will present the findings from Anya's case study. Utilizing the UX CHAT Model and Table 2: User Experience Model Coding Scheme, within presenting the results I will begin by reporting the **Textual Objects** observed on Anya's profile. After reporting her profile data, I will utilize the semi-structured interviews to contextualize and co-construct produced **Contextual Objectives** indicated by Anya in the interview data, as we made meaning

of the data together. The results from data collection will be presented in chronological order (Instagram Data, Talk-Aloud Protocol Data, and Semi-Structured Interviews) due to the user's member reflection upon being presented with the Instagram data in the follow-up interview. Through the reporting of both Textual Objects and Contextual Objectives, in the discussion section I will then utilize the UX CHAT model to discuss the data.

Introducing Anya

Anya was born in 2001. She uses she/her pronouns. She grew up in St. Petersburg, Russia and is multilingual, primarily speaking Russian and English. In 2020, Anya studied abroad in the United States and in 2021, she moved to Maine to begin Graduate school. During the time that Anya participated in this project, Russia was (and continues to be) at war with Ukraine. Anya and I's conversations almost always had an undercurrent of awareness toward her histories and communities back home in Russia. Anya is relatively public about her anti-war stance on her Instagram, oftentimes sharing posts to her account from groups such as the "Feminists Antiwar Resistance" and other volunteer organizations supporting Ukrainian refugees. However, according to a *BBC* article published on March 11, 2022, Instagram has been banned by Russia's communications regulator, Roskomnadzor, after a Court in Moscow labelled Meta (owner of Instagram) as "extremist" due to a change in the hate speech policy. The Court also declared it would not prosecute Russian individuals who still access the app. Since Anya has been in the United States since this occurred, she is still able to access the Instagram app.

In the initial interview, Anya and I began by discussing her relationship and history with Instagram. She began using the app in eighth or ninth grade. Anya revealed that she actually maintains two Instagram accounts she actively uses. The first account she calls her "professional" account. The second account she calls her "personal" account. Anya allowed me

to follow both accounts throughout the duration of data collection. Without giving away too much personal information regarding Anya's accounts in order to protect her identity, I will begin by descriptively accounting for some of the profiles' overall features.

Textual Objects

On Anya's professional account, her personal name does not appear on her profile. Rather, she has a red heart emoji in place of her name with her pronouns displayed next to the emoji as "she/her." Her Instagram bio reads "The Scared is scared of all the things you like (c)". Additionally, Anya's profile picture is not a picture of herself; Rather, her profile picture appears to be an image of the moon. Anya has 273 followers and follows 304 accounts. Conversely, on Anya's personal account, in place of her name, Anya wrote: "Chronically Online since 2009." Her bio reads "Daydreaming my way through life" with fairy emojis at the beginning and end of the bio. Additionally, Anya included a link to a website (Woordhunt.ru), which when clicked on appears to be a Russian website. When users visit the link, they are brought to a page with Russian and translated English definitions for the word, "irksome." On her personal account, Anya has 15 followers and 386 accounts she follows. Anya's profile picture portrays a statue of what appears to be a female-presenting figure with her hair in a bun and her arm resting under her chin. Again, neither Anya's profile name nor picture contain any personal identifying information about her. I will now present data from her self-identified professional account and her personal account beginning with visual post data and ending with captioning data.

Visual Post Data

When it came to her posts, Anya had posted 177 total posts on her Professional Instagram account. Table 8 represents image type typicality for her Professional account. When breaking down the kinds of posts into two overall categories, there were 106 stand-alone photo posts and

66 photo dump posts. 3 posts were ‘reels’ or Instagram video montages in which users can edit and combine multiple videos and images to music or audio. Additionally, since photo dumps allow users to post multiple images in one post, the total number of images posted within the photo dump category was 309 images.

Table 8: Professional Profile Image Type Typicality

Profile 1	Stand-Alone (106 total posts)	Photo Dump (66 total posts)
Selfie	0 (0%)	2 (.006%)
Self-Photo	4 (3.8%)	19 (6.1%)
Human Subjects	5 (4.7%)	51 (16.5%)
Landscape	87 (82%)	194 (62.8%)
Object	10 (9.4%)	44 (14.2%)

In the stand-alone image posts, 2 out of the 4 self-photos posted were images where Anya’s back was turned away from the camera, so you cannot see her face. Interestingly, there were no stand-alone selfie images posted, but there were 2 selfies posted in the photo dump category. However, these selfies were not images, they were selfie videos in which viewers could see Anya taking a video through a rear-view mirror. Likewise, while there are almost twice the number of self-photos in photo dumps as there are in stand-alone posts, Anya will post a photo dump where the last image of the dump is a photo of herself, oftentimes with her back turned away from the camera or the image taken from a distance, so her face is almost

unrecognizable. Figure 4 represents one of these compositions in which the beginning photos do not feature Anya, yet the final image does. The image with Anya has been edited so you are unable to identify her face.



Figure 4: Photo Dump from Professional account posted on November 21, 2022

This photo dump illustrates a landscape, object image of a horse, and self-photo of Anya.

The image type typicality for her Professional account, illustrated in Table 8, demonstrates that Anya rarely posts selfies or self-photos as stand-alone posts. She is more than four times more likely to post a self-photo in a photo dump post. Anya typically posts landscape photos the most often as both stand-alone posts and photo-dumps.

On Anya's "personal" account, she posted 89 total posts. There were 62 photo dump posts, 26 stand-alone posts, and one reel. Table 9 represents image type typicality for Profile 2. Frequencies are represented by percentages of total images, not post totals. For example, on photo dump posts, Anya posted multiple images, which totaled 283 images overall. Within photo dump posts, Anya also included videos in the posts: there were 9 landscape videos, 2 human

subject videos, and 1 self-photo video. On stand-alone posts one of the six landscape posts was a video.

Table 9: Personal Profile Image Type Typicality

Profile 2	Stand-Alone (26 total posts)	Photo Dump (62 total posts)
Selfie	0 (0%)	6 (2.1%)
Self-Photo	1 (3.8%)	19 (6.7%)
Human Subjects	2 (7.7%)	42 (14.8%)
Landscape	6 (23%)	64 (22.6%)
Object	17 (65.4%)	152 (53.7%)

Similar to the Professional Profile Typicality, Anya is more likely to post self-photos in a photo dump than as a stand-alone post. Conversely, the object image type was the most occurring category on the Personal profile. This may be due to Anya's relationship with the two profiles, which will be explored further in the discussion.

Captioning Data

Initially when analyzing the captioning data, I created a corpus of captions from both accounts. As mentioned earlier, Anya is multilingual with her primary languages being English and Russian. On her profiles, not only does Anya codemesh across her posts, writing in English and Russian, she will oftentimes codemesh within a singular captioning space itself.

Additionally, Anya tends to occasionally utilize emojis in her captioning space. Therefore, I decided to manually code the captioning data myself with the following codes: English, Russian,

Codemeshing, No Caption, and Other. Posts coded in English and Russian were entirely written in those languages. The Codemesh code indicates moments in a singular captioning space where Anya writes in both English and Russian. No Caption indicates that Anya chose not to caption a post, and lastly, Other indicates either a single letter in the captioning space such as a caption of Anya’s which read: “Яяяя” or the choice to only caption an image with an emoji such as the example leading photo dump image in Figure 5 with a crying face, a tear-face, and a skull emoji.

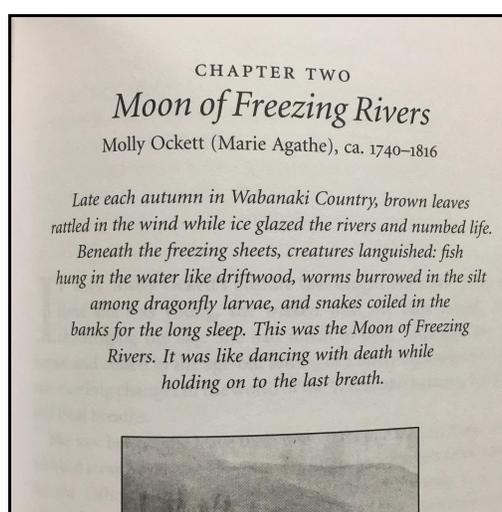


Figure 5: First image of a photo dump posted to Anya’s Personal account

This image features a description of Wabanaki land and was captioned: (crying face, tear-face, and skull emoji)

Table 10 and Table 11 represent Anya’s captioning tendencies across posts. Table 10 represents coded captions from a total of 178 posts. Table 11 represents captions from a total of 89 posts.

Within these total numbers of posts, on Profile 1 there were 20 (11.2%) occurrences of emoji use and on Profile 2 there were 12 (13.5%) occurrences of emojis.

Table 10: Professional Profile Captioning Codes Typicality

Code	No-Caption	Russian	English	Codemesh	Other
Typicality	73 (41%)	50 (28%)	30 (16.9%)	19 (10.7%)	6 (3.4%)

Table 11: Personal Profile Captioning Codes Typicality

Code	No-Caption	Russian	English	Codemesh	Other
Typicality	18 (20.2%)	24 (27%)	27 (30.3%)	18 (20.2%)	2 (2.2%)

Further, the data demonstrates her codemeshing. On her professional account, Anya codemeshed in the captioning space on 19/178 posts which accounts for 10.7% of her total posts. Likewise, on her personal account, Anya code-meshed 18/89 posts or 20% of her total posts. Thus, she codemeshes twice as often on her personal account.

Story Data

Anya uses two kinds of story data on both her accounts: current stories and highlights. Current stories appear on a user's profile for 24 hours before they are deleted. However, users also have the option of highlighting stories by adding them to their user profile page. These highlighted stories can be sorted into various categories, as Anya does, for example, by categorizing her exchange year on her Professional account. Similar to Anya's captioning practices, her highlighted stories are codemeshed with some highlights appearing in English and others written in Russian.

For her Professional account, Anya primarily uses the story feature to post updates about events on campus, share images of places she visits, or feature moments that happen in her

classes. On her Personal account stories, Anya shared memes, photos of herself with music added to the image, and sometimes videos of herself talking to her followers. For example, in one video posted to her personal account stories on November 2, 2022, Anya said:

“Okay, it’s time we have a serious talk. It’s going to be in Russian so I apologize for all my English speaking besties that follow me here...It’s now week ten of the semester of my Master’s in the U.S. and my brain still hasn’t processed the fact that I am in f*cking United States of America to get my degree. I’m still speaking English? Okay, I’ll be doing this in English, then, sorry my Russian speaking friends. How can I convince my brain like this is real life, this is not just like a simulation...what you are doing right now will eventually have consequences, serious consequences on your life. And like I have so many aspirations and dreams and big ideas but I don’t have plans on how to make these dreams true...because my brain still does not comprehend that I am away from home for some time to build a little bit of my life here.”

Anya concluded the video by thanking her followers for listening to her “rant about not feeling present in her own life.” Anya added that she hoped viewers who were feeling similar ways would find comfort in what she said. Continuing with Anya’s attention on navigating her early twenties as a young professional, on her Professional account stories, Anya shared a reel (November 23, 2023) and a TikTok (November 29, 2023) where both videos featured users discussing navigating their early twenties. Of course, these were speakers other than Anya, which Anya then shared to her account via the story feature. Anya even added these Reel and TikTok videos to a highlight on her Professional Profile called “20-Something,” but later deleted it. I asked Anya in the follow-up interview why she decided to create this highlight and she responded:

“As of now, I am thinking about what I’m going to do after I get my degree and that also translates to my internal dialogue and dialogues with my friends about what is going on in our twenties and what the hell are we supposed to do and it’s completely different when I’m talking to my Russian friends in their twenties because right now it’s chaos in Russia, so I was like...ok maybe if it’s like a major event or a series of events in my life I need to do a highlight and structure it around that stuff.”

While Anya deleted this story highlight on her profile, she told me that she might add it back once she finds more related videos as long as “it’s not too personal.”

Contextual Objectives

Once the textual objects were observed and collected, I was interested in discussing and co-constructing Anya’s perceived Contextual Objectives, meaning her goals or objectives in producing the textual objects explored above. As mentioned in the Theoretical Framework for this project, studying both the Textual Object and the Contextual Objectives allows those interested in UX to better understand the holistic experiences of a user’s activity, particularly on social media sites. I will begin by presenting a holistic view at the Semi-Structured interview data and conclude by discussing the Talk-Aloud Protocol Data, which offered rich and thick description of Anya’s interpretive compositional activity while posting.

Semi-Structured Interview Data

The semi-structured interview data consisted of two interviews: the first occurring on October 28, 2022 and the second occurring on December 5, 2022. These interviews were conducted before and after a six-week data collection period. As stated in the beginning of the Case Study, early on in the initial interview, Anya made me aware that she actually uses two Instagram accounts: her professional or what she sometimes refers to as her “face” account and

her personal account. In this chapter, I will account for the discussions of the two accounts separately.

Professional Account

According to Anya on her Professional or “Face” account, her followers include family, friends, and people who might be getting to know her. Anya noted the goal of this account is to provide updates to followers, but clarifies the kinds of updates: “not like updates like what struggles I have or what was difficult, but like, she was there and then she did this, and she was also there, and here’s a pretty picture of a flower. Wow it’s warm outside!” As Anya further explains, she attempts to portray “only the good part of what I’m doing.”

When asked to describe her overall persona on this account, Anya described it as “collected, calm, happy, sometimes successful, but not too successful to be jealous about.” In our interviews, Anya provided several examples of attempts to “not make others jealous” on her Professional account. For example, in undergrad Anya attended a birthday party for her friend. One of her mutual friends was not invited to the party. Since Anya was trying “not to offend them” or “make them jealous” she did not post anything from the party. Similarly, Anya described announcing her admission to Graduate school on her Instagram stories: “When I got accepted to this school, I posted it on my main account, but on my Close Friends [list], I was like: I need to know 100% that people who did not get into their schools, they will not see it.” Anya added that if she doesn’t want someone to see her Close Friends story, such as her announcement for Graduate school, she will unadd them from the list of followers approved to view her story: “I didn’t want my certain friends from Russia to see it so I removed them from my Close Friends. I posted the story and then people who I didn’t want to see it, I deleted them and then added them back.” Anya said she unadded them from the Close Friends list because she

was afraid they might get jealous or possibly didn't get admitted into Graduate school programs they wanted to attend. Anya also added that she uses the Close Friends stories list on her personal account "usually just to hide something from my mom."

When discussing the content Anya posts on her Professional or "Face" account, Anya also discussed her compositional patterns. Anya noted that when she posts pictures with her friends, she asks for their approval before posting. In addition to this practice, Anya very rarely posts images of her own face. For example, Anya will sometimes post a photo dump with images of landscapes and the final image in the photo dump will feature of picture of herself. Anya said, "I don't want people to immediately see me and my face and what I'm doing and with who, so I first post a very neutral picture." According to Anya, these neutral images (such as landscapes) do not convey "any controversial or sensitive or disturbing information." Anya attributes the practice of not posting pictures of her face to her parents, as they told her to avoid posting identifying information on the internet such as where you are, what you are doing, who you are with, or what you look like. According to Anya, as time has passed she has become more comfortable posting pictures with other people and herself, but she still makes sure "there's some layers of privacy" to it, such as posting a photo dump like the one illustrated in Figure 4. The layers of privacy oftentimes include neutral photos such as landscapes followed by more personal photos in which Anya may or may not portray her face.

Personal Account

Anya decided to create the second account, her "personal" account, when she was a freshman in undergrad. According to Anya, she began to make new friends at her university and "wasn't entirely sure if I wanted to trust them that much," so she decided to make two separate accounts. Anya also added: "I felt like what I was portraying in my first account was very

different from what was actually happening in my brain, what I thinking about, what I was feeling about and I didn't want to post it to this huge account.” Subsequently, Anya's personal account is followed by close friends, who she calls her “super friends” or people who “have the privilege of knowing what I like actually feel and think...maybe? But the main account was for people who were trying to get to know me and people who wanted to stay updated.” Anya also noted that unlike her Professional account, on her personal account she does not use the Close Friends feature on her story, since the account is “already very personal.”

When asked to describe her persona on the personal account, Anya described it as “more vulnerable, expressive, and less filtered.” In the follow-up interview, Anya walked me through her thought process behind some of her posts on her account in order to better understand her Contextual Objectives. On March 29, 2022 Anya posted a photo dump of five images (Figure 6 below).

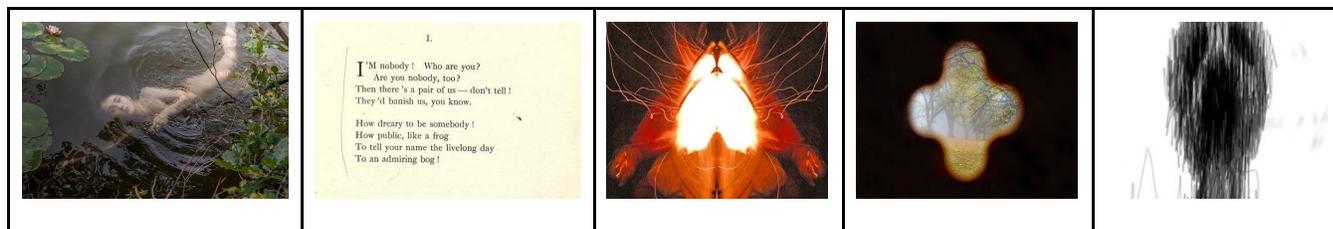


Figure 6: Photo dump posted to Personal account on March 29, 2022

This photo dump features an image of a woman swimming, a poem, a graphic of a brain, a window, and a drawing of a screaming face.

In the interview, Anya told me that she posted this photo dump a month after the war officially began in Ukraine:

“I was not accepting it whatsoever. I was feeling like whatever is happening is not real so here the girl is kind of like under the water, so she is overwhelmed and not engaging with the real world. She's a mermaid. That was me because I didn't or couldn't comprehend

what was going on. The second part is just a little poem about who am I and where is my stance in this situation and what can I do? I understand I'm very helpless because I cannot stop the war in Ukraine ... also at the time I was applying to different opportunities abroad, including this program so I was trying to figure out what kind of programs do I need to apply, what do I want to get from them, how is this going to contribute to me being a professional further or how is this going to contribute to my life experience in general? So I thought of myself as a blank canvas, but at the same time, a person who is super lost and is not engaging in anything."

When asked what she was trying to portray through the images, she described the third and fourth images as her anger about the war and the fourth image as "looking at my life behind some sort of screen." As Anya uses her Personal account to process and reflect upon her emotions, she said: "My personal account is not really about communicating with someone, specifically, more just like putting it out there, putting it out of my system." In some of my analytical memos, I made notes about how Anya's compositions on her personal account seemed to be "reflective," "artistic," and "intentional." In the follow-up interview, I asked Anya if she considered herself to be an artist. She responded, "No? I don't know...I just post it for myself to process stuff. I don't think of myself as producing art because all of that is just stuff that I found on the Internet and I just put it together."

Talk-Aloud Protocol Data

Anya submitted two videos for the talk-aloud protocol: one from her public account and one from her private account. The first talk-aloud video was submitted to Dropbox on November 6, 2022 and the second talk-aloud video was posted on November 16, 2022.

Talk-Aloud Video #1

In the first video, Anya uses the talk-aloud protocol to speak through a photo dump post posted on her professional account on November 6, 2022. Anya recorded the video the same day as posting the photo dump. The post contains four images: a landscape image, a human subject photo, and two other landscape images. The images are displayed below in Figure 7.

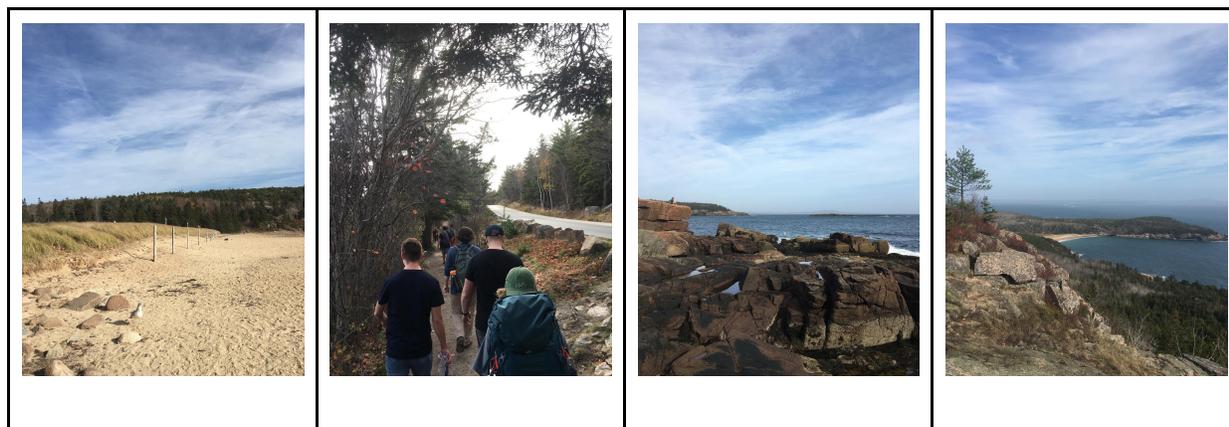


Figure 7: Images from photo dump posted to her professional account on November 6, 2022

These images illustrate a landscape photo of the beach, an image of people walking, and two final images of the bluffs of the ocean.

The first image on the far left illustrates a long stretch of sand. There are trees in the background and a seagull sitting in the foreground. The second image illustrates a group of people walking on a trail. The third image portrays bluffs overlooking the ocean. The fourth image demonstrates an aerial view of the shoreline from what appears to be a mountain. There are trees in the foreground. Anya describes her thought process for choosing these photos, as she says:

“I just took the highlights of my trip to Acadia today, which is my picture of the beach, and then our group walking up the mountain, and then some views from the mountain...just the highlights of the trip and I put them all together in my post because that’s what I usually do with pictures. I feel like it’s logical so people can see the storyline of the day. I didn’t edit it much, I just fixed all of the horizons...were

horizontal. I didn't...I think...didn't put a caption? Yeah, I did put a caption. It was just like what I liked about the trip and like thank you everyone or something like that.”

When describing this process, in the video, Anya utilizes many gestures with her hands as she is speaking. For example, when she discusses choosing the images, “put them all together” she clenches her fingers together and moves her hand in a circle. As she continues to explain her process, she flips her finger as if she is scrolling right as she says “so people can see the storyline of the day.” Her gestures demonstrate both her experiences curating the post as she “put them all together,” but also demonstrate her awareness of the audience, as she mimics their gestures swiping through the images in the photo dump.

Anya captioned the post with a code-meshed caption utilizing both Russian and English: “Ещё один хайк в Акадии + Thunderhole + снова помочила ноги в Атлантическом океане + снова Bar Harbor!! И в потрясающей компании) which when translated into English reads: “Another hike at Acadia + Thunderhole + got my feet wet in the Atlantic Ocean again + Bar Harbor again!! And in amazing company :)” When describing her audience for this post, Anya noted that it would usually just be her followers or “most broadly like my friends in general or not like people who are the closest to me, but like friends of friends that follow me, maybe? I don't know. It's just...it wasn't anything too personal in the content today.” Anya added that she posted this immediately when she got back to her dorm room after the trip, so the pictures “would not be wasted just in my phone gallery because I usually clean it after time, like I delete all of the pictures, so yeah I just posted them so they would be immediately there and I won't forget about them.” When prompted to describe the tone she was hoping to portray through this content, Anya responded, “My whole account is usually just pictures of nature or hikes of just

nice views from somewhere, and I just kept the same tone. Hiking, relaxed, calm, nature.” This response concluded Talk-Aloud video #1.

Talk-Aloud Video #2

In the second talk-aloud video, Anya talked through a photo dump post she posted to her personal account on November 9, 2022. Anya recorded and uploaded the talk-aloud video a week after posting the initial photo dump. The post contains four images: a self-photo, two objects, and a landscape photo. The images are illustrated in Figure 8.



Figure 8: Images from photo dump posted to personal account on November 9, 2022

These images illustrate a self-photo of Anya overlooking the ocean, a pan of burnt food, a drawing of a drooping face, and a tree that looks like a human body.

The first image on the far left portrays a mountain overlooking the ocean. On the left side, Anya (from the back) stands overlooking the view. The second photo portrays a pan of burnt food. The third image illustrates a drawing of a droopy human face. The fourth and final image illustrates trees that look like human forms. Anya described her thought process and motivations as she posted these images:

“Capturing my mood because this is the account where I do that and just for me to get things out of my system. Lately, I have been feeling like I am behind, I haven’t done much, so I posted a photo of me on a mountain that someone took from the back, then

some food burned on a pan, then melting face, and then person who is growing into a tree because I wanted to just hide from all of my responsibilities.”

Anya captioned the photo dump as “Will I grow from this?” When prompted to describe how she decided to caption the post in this way, Anya noted, “It’s something I heard from a friend or I just overheard it somewhere and I thought it was relevant to the week I was having and if I’m missing out on any opportunities here.” When asked to discuss her audience for this post, she responded that this post was “just for me and this account... maybe like for some of my really close friends.” Anya added that she decided to post this photo dump when she did because it captured her mood perfectly “at that moment.” As Anya describes the overall tone for these images, she said: “Overall mood was fear of missing out, being slow, and I don’t know if I can capture this correctly, but the time felt like it’s sticky like around me and I put it like I tried to capture this mood and put it in the post.”

In the talk-aloud protocol video, Anya utilizes gestures as she speaks through her curation process for this post. For example, when describing her desired tone she tried to portray with this post, Anya motions with both arms around her as she says “it’s sticky around me,” but she stops and clenches both fists when she says capture, as she says, “I put it, like I tried to **capture** this mood” and then releases her hands motioning to something on the table (assuming to be her phone) as she says “put it in the post.” This final gesture concluded her talk-aloud video #2.

DISCUSSION

By utilizing two Instagram accounts, one “professional” and the other “personal” Anya demonstrates distribution of her identity *across* the interface. Anya utilizes the tool (Interface design) to interpret the object of identity distribution, thus resulting in two accounts. Through this example, the interface is both tool and object(ive), as Anya utilizes the interface to

accomplish her objective of distributing her identity between “professional” and “personal” accounts, resulting in the objects of the accounts. Furthermore, Anya is able to interpret the objects of the two accounts through a field of interpretation composed of multiple laminated contexts: rules, customs, and histories; communities; divisions of labor; and lastly, mediating artifacts. Figure 9 represents an annotated version of the UX CHAT model which accounts for some of the multiple contexts which may be influencing Anya as she produces object(ive)s within her Instagram activity.

These categories within contexts are almost always in negotiation with each other. For example, Anya utilizes mediating artifacts (interface) to divide her labor across two accounts. These negotiations in labor are informed by Anya’s rules, customs, and histories, particularly as she reflects upon her role within different communities. Thus, Anya’s contexts inform her interpretation of the need for two accounts, rather than maintaining one account. For example, Anya’s family history, particularly experiences with Russian culture and her family’s rule to not share too much private information about one’s self, may be why Anya distributed her identity across two accounts. The quantitative visual data also demonstrates this in the produced textual objects, as Anya was more likely to post landscapes than any other kinds of images on her professional account. As Anya described, her “personal” account is more “emo” and “dramatic” which may suggest that she does not feel she can express those emotions on her professional account, so she distributes them to her personal account.

Of course, these rhetorical moves of audience awareness and community impact how Anya divides her labor across the app as she navigates both her accounts’ ever-changing and transforming Contextual Objectives given her relationship between self and community. For example, Anya code-meshes on some captions in order to communicate with both her Russian

and English speaking friends. In this way, Anya divides her labor linguistically in order to account for the multiple communities she is a member of.

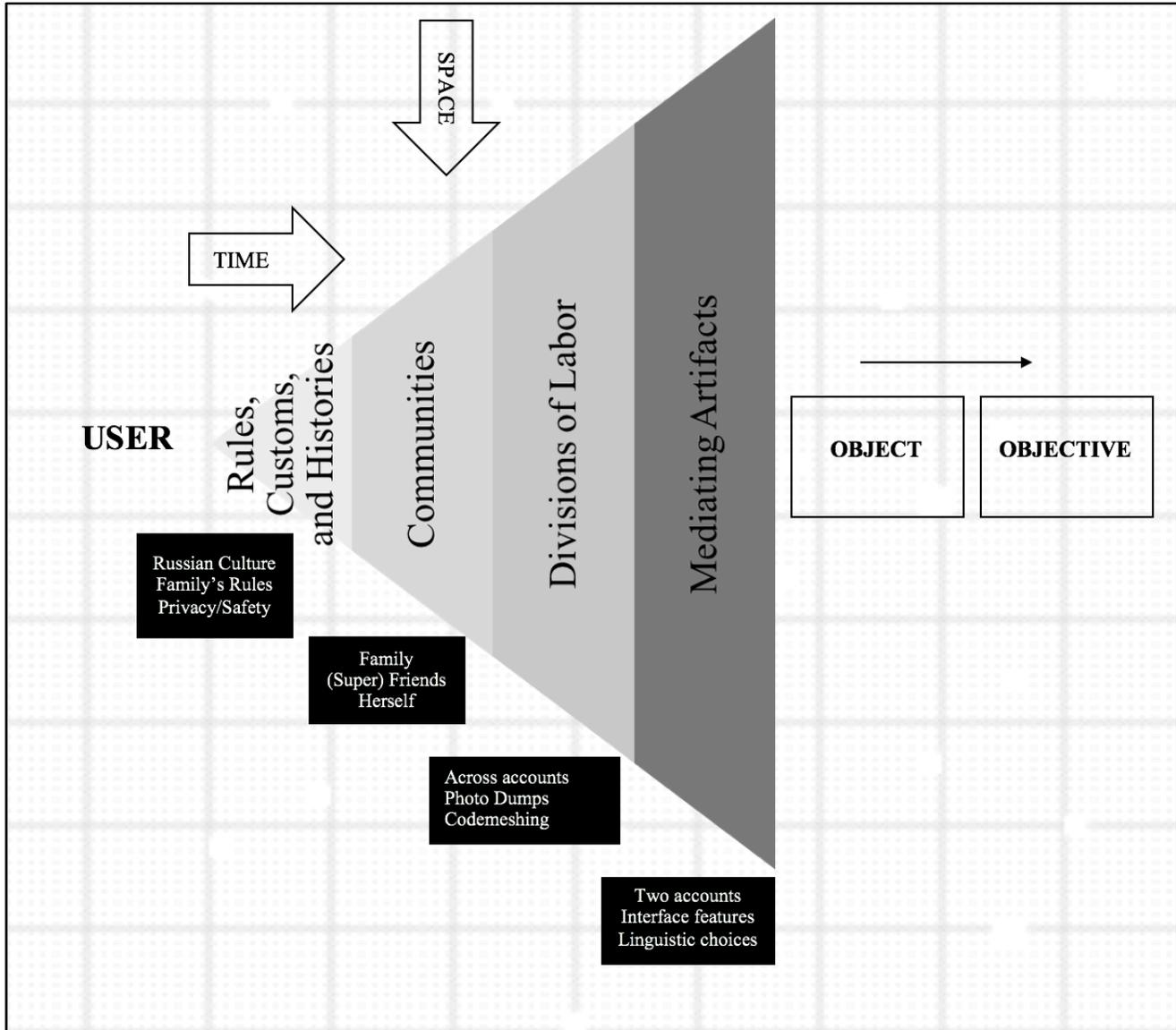


Figure 9: Annotated UX CHAT model with Anya's contexts

This annotated UX CHAT model demonstrates some of the multiple contexts Anya encounters during her field of interpretation when curating object(ive)s.

Positioning the Self through Talk-Aloud Protocol

When moving through the UX CHAT model with Talk-Aloud Video #1, Anya was faced with a field of interpretation or contexts which informed her experiences posting these particular photo dumps. The talk-aloud protocol captured Anya's cognitive experiences as she made decisions and navigated posting, but the talk-aloud videos also captured part of Anya's embodied experiences of the activity system of posting. To begin with her own rules, customs, and histories on the app, through her gestural responses, Anya demonstrated her history and experiences navigating the Instagram interface as an embodied activity located in a particular space and time. These embodied experiences are demonstrated through the numerous gestures Anya utilizes throughout the recording of the video.

For example, in **Talk-Aloud Protocol Video #1**, below is an annotated copy of Anya's verbal and gestural responses as she describes her curatorial process:

“I just took the highlights [shakes hand] of my trip [points to self] to Acadia today, which is my picture of [presses both hands up in the air, showing all ten fingers] the beach, and then our group walking [swipes finger to the right] up the mountain, and then some views from the mountain [flicks fingers]...just the highlights of the trip [creates square with hand and motions four times] and I put them all together [moves hand in circle] in my post [clenches fingers together] because that's what I usually do with pictures [motions hand out]. I feel like it's logical so people can see the storyline [swipes to the left with finger] of the day. I didn't edit it much, I just fixed all of the horizons... [creates box with hands and arms and tilts to the left] were horizontal [tilts arms back to center]. I didn't...I think...didn't put a caption? Yeah, I did put a caption. It was just like what I liked about

the trip [flicks fingers] and like thank you everyone [waves hand and raises voice] or something like that.”

This annotated copy of Anya’s curatorial process demonstrates how Anya situates her body during her activity of posting. These bodily gestures demonstrate a rich history of a user’s experiences moving across the interface as a user and consumer of visual and textual information. This awareness of experience is evident when Anya notes, “I feel like it’s logical so people can see the storyline of the day” as she gestures by swiping her fingers to the left, Anya demonstrates a viewer’s experiences encountering a post, which informs her experiences as she makes choices about her own content. Anya also alludes to her own customs on her professional account, as she noted that “The whole account is usually just pictures of nature or hikes or just nice views from somewhere...” Anya’s attention to “the whole account” demonstrates that she has a particular tone or custom she normally tries to maintain on this account. In my view, “the whole account” can also be read as Anya’s established objective formation for this account, meaning that she has a particular vision and goal for communication, as she said “I just kept the same tone. Hiking, relaxed, calm, nature.” As demonstrated through this example, a user’s past ‘customs’ in their field of interpretation (e.g. “this whole account is *usually*”) can influence their ultimate objective formation when engaging in a new activity, such as posting a new post. These customs may be formulated by habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), cemented through embodied positionality demonstrated through Anya’s gestures describing her activity of posting. Thus, strengthening her ultimate perception of the Contextual Objective: a relaxed and calm tone, at least on her professional account.

Anya is very attentive to communities, both in her followers and those who were present with her during this post’s illustrated experiences. As Anya noted, she utilizes this post to create

a storyline which followers could view by swiping left through the images (see Figure 6). However, Anya adds that she wasn't posting "anything too personal in the content today." This choice may be due to Anya's custom of this particular profile being "professional" and thus, more distanced from what she might determine as "personal." Anya also mentions community when she adds that she tried to use the captioning space to convey "thank you everyone" to those who traveled on the trip with her.

Anya's division of labor across the interface is demonstrated as she describes her process of curating and managing rules, customs, and histories and communities. As she creates a "storyline" through this post, Anya divides her labor between image selection and caption. Anya decided to post this photo dump to her profile immediately after the trip so the photos "would not be wasted just in my phone gallery because I usually clean it after time." The choice to immediately divide and manage her labor across her technology device from the photo app to Instagram demonstrates Anya dividing her labor across apps in order to archive her experiences. Of course, this division of labor across and through apps would not be possible without the various mediating artifacts Anya encounters.

Anya is able to navigate and manage her rules, customs, and histories, communities, and division of labor through the mediation of her technology device, the Instagram interface, and her linguistic practices. As noted earlier, Anya primarily uses her phone to navigate the Instagram app. By using her phone, Anya is able to toggle between her photos saved to her camera roll and the Instagram app. The Instagram interface allows Anya to access her photos saved in her camera roll in order to post them to her desired account. "Desired" account is key here, as noted earlier, Anya divides her labor between two accounts on the interface: her professional and personal. The Instagram interface allows Anya to move across these two

accounts, as she composes and posts content to each account. Anya also utilizes linguistic choices, particularly her choices to write in Russian, English, and/or a combination of both in the captioning space. In talk-aloud video #1, Anya codemeshes the caption, but primarily writes in Russian. The words which are written in English are unique to Maine's geographic location, such as "Thunderhole" and "Bar Harbor." However, linguistic choices and interface interact and collide, as Instagram offers the "translation" feature, allowing viewers to translate the caption from the poster's language to the viewer's chosen language, which is managed in their account settings. Thus, the interface may provide opportunities for followers to divide their labor as they are viewing content by translating captions into a language they speak. This translation feature of the interface also allows Anya to communicate with multiple communities through one post, as her followers can translate her caption if they cannot read Russian, and likewise on posts she writes in English, followers can translate the content to their chosen language.

As Anya navigates rules, customs, and histories, communities, and divides her labor through mediating artifacts, this field of interpretation (contexts) and activity results in the production of object(ive)s. Through the example above, the textual object (the photo dump) performs a storyline about Anya's day, yet Anya maintains the contextual objectives or motivations to portray what she liked about the trip and thank everyone for traveling with her. These object(ive)s were produced through a field of interpretation: Anya's histories and customs when engaging with the interface, the communities Anya was communicating to (friends who traveled with her and her followers), how Anya decided to divide her labor across and through the interface, and lastly, the mediating artifacts which allow her to navigate these contexts (her cellphone, the Instagram interface, and linguistic choices such as captions and images). While

the produced object may not necessarily holistically capture or portray Anya's objectives in posting to her followers, her objectives informed the produced object.

Similarly, in **Talk-Aloud Video #2**, Anya's objectives of creating a "mood" board and processing her feelings informed the produced object of the photo dump posted on her personal account. Of course, this field of interpretation and contexts informing this object looked very different on her personal account than it does on her public account. For example, Anya has established the custom to capture her mood "because this is the account where I do that." When describing her audience, Anya mentions "just for me and this account...maybe like for some of my really close friends." By noting herself as the audience for this post, Anya reveals an interesting phenomenon involving communities and identity performance, particularly that a post can be created for a community of *themselves*, in the past, present, and future. In the UX CHAT model, contexts are multiple and laminated and always informed by prior activities users have engaged with or in. Thus, as users engage with seemingly new activity systems, they almost always will reflect on past activity systems. On social media sites, particularly sites which archive objects such as posts, prior activity systems can be represented through various posts on a profile, and thus, can be revisited by users. By Anya noting herself as an audience member, Anya possibly alludes to the phenomenon that activity systems can easily be revisited and recalled on Instagram through objects (posts). Likewise, activity systems can also serve as learning and processing sites, where users might hold the objective to reflect on their experiences or feelings through the production of an object. As Anya alludes to her feelings and experiences of time: "Overall mood was fear of missing out, being slow, and I don't know if I can capture this correctly, but the time felt like it's sticky like around me and I put it like I tried to capture this mood and put it in the post."

Through this description of her choice in images for this post, Anya accounts for her own experiences of time as a feeling of “missing out,” “being slow,” and “sticky.” In the UX CHAT model, time moves horizontally across the model as space is oriented vertically to each activity system. Thus, time moves across the field of interpretation *with* the user as they encounter the field of interpretation and create object(ive)s. Temporality functioning across an activity system is evident as Anya tries to produce an object (photo dump) that captures her experiences of temporality through the objectives of a mood board and processing her emotions. Producing this object also orients Anya to a particular space, which she acknowledges gesturally when she clenches her fists as she says “capture this mood,” releases her hands by motioning to something on the table (assuming to be her phone), and adds “put it in the post.” This final gesture demonstrates Anya oriented herself spatially to the mediating artifact (cellphone) which assisted her in producing the object of the post. The talk-aloud protocols were an important aspect of the data collection because the talk-aloud protocols most directly capture users’ experiences of temporality and spatiality when engaging in social media activities such as producing a post to one’s Instagram account.

Contradictions between Self and Community

The contextual objective for the personal account seems to have transformed in Anya’s goal formation from an account created to let her close friends know how she is feeling to an account that she describes as “mostly for myself.” It seems that over time, the personal account has become a site where Anya is able to process her emotions and experiences through the curation of posts, like the one pictured in Figure 6. As I got to know Anya and follow her activity on her personal account, in my analytical memos I made notes about themes of artistry and selection. As described in her curatorial process for each post, Anya intentionally seeks out

images on Pinterest and combines them with texts from songs or books in order to remember her feelings and experiences from that particular point in time. Rather than using images solely from her camera roll, Anya moves across multiple mediating artifacts, such as the Pinterest app and her camera roll, dividing her labor in order to accomplish these goals of mood and emotion portrayal.

When using the UX model to contextualize these choices, Anya utilizes several mediating artifacts such as the Pinterest app, books, and music to produce the Textual Object of the resulting photo dump post, thus producing the Contextual Objective of chronicling her mood in a particular space (the post), across time. Anya makes these choices in her activity, she communicates across a field of interpretation to a community of close friends and her past/future/present self, as her personal account serves as an archive of moods and feelings. As Anya said, “It’s also nice to preserve, like it’s a capsule of memories so I can go back in my account and look at how I felt and analyze that.”

Yet, Anya experiences contradictions as she communicates with close friends and her past/future/present self. These contradictions between self and community on both accounts are displayed in Table 12. On her Professional account, Anya is afraid to post her face because of her family’s rules and cultural customs in Russia. Likewise, possibly due to increased awareness in privacy, Anya distrusts her followers on her Professional account with “personal information.” This may be why Anya feels more comfortable sharing videos of other users’ TikToks explaining their concerns about being a twenty-something. Anya feels more comfortable sharing other users’ faces, emotions, and vulnerabilities than her own because of her oftentimes private and thus, less “personal” rules, customs, and histories which inform and negotiate how she communicates with her following community.

Table 12: Examples of Contradictions between Self and Community

Professional Account	Personal Account
<p>“I was afraid to post my face because my family has very strict policy when it comes to privacy on the Internet, so I was just posting nature pictures.”</p>	<p>“I don’t need your comment here, I know how I’m feeling.”</p>
<p>“I extended my friend group to people in my undergrad, and I wasn’t entirely sure if I wanted to trust them that much, so I was like okay, let’s do two separate accounts.”</p>	<p>“I’m trying to be as cryptic as possible because I don’t want my friends to get worried about me, but at the same time I want to have like a...a little memory of how I felt during that period.”</p>
<p>“I feel like Tik Toks normally portray like universal experiences of people in their twenties so it’s not as personal and I’m feeling safe having this distance.”</p>	<p>“I know that these ten people that follow me on there are my close friends and if we’ve been distant lately, I delete them from the account. What’s weird, actually, is that my boyfriend is not on that account cause it’s just not for him.”</p>

Subsequently, on her personal account, Anya turned off the comment feature. I believe Anya made this choice in order to avoid interactions with the community of close friends who follow the account. Thus, Anya filters the mediating artifact (interface) for others on her account by turning off the comment feature, making the possible stream of communication unidirectional. Anya essentially changes the activity system of viewing and interacting with her

posts by controlling this feature. Likewise, if Anya feels “distant” from her close friends who follow the account, she manipulates the interface by deleting them as followers. In the captions Anya tries to “be as cryptic as possible” because she doesn’t want her friends to be worried about the emotions she may be portraying. Thus, Anya filters her own linguistic choices in her order to portray a “cryptic” message. Even though Anya has the object(ive)s that her account is for herself to process and display her emotions, it seems she still feels the need to perform to her community, her group of “super” friends.

These contradictions are of course produced through a field of interpretation informed by contexts which includes a user’s representation of rules, customs, and histories, but also their construction of these representations within their communities. Rules, customs, and histories interact with communities, as Anya describes her family’s rules and customs of privacy growing up, which impacted how she communicated with her community on Instagram by avoiding images of her face. While Anya notes that she started to post photos of herself recently, the rule of hiding her face remains, as she will “hide” herself as the last image in a photo dump. As she said, “I feel like I’m hiding myself from people who are just looking through their feed, so people who go until the end of this post are people who are genuinely interested to see what’s going on.” Similarly, Anya utilizes the interface itself to “hide” as she separates her accounts as professional and personal. As Anya said the professional account “is more me distancing people from my personal stuff and just putting out there what I want them to see.” Yet, it seems the personal account, to a certain extent, also distances her community through the mediation of the social features of the interface (commenting).

When considering Anya’s Contextual Objectives for the personal account, she may be distancing herself from the *social* in social media in order to reflect upon herself as a member of

multiple communities: her identities as a Russian citizen, a twenty-something young professional, a Graduate student, a friend, a partner, a daughter, and I might add, an artist. Mediating artifacts such as the interface and linguistic performances allows Anya to reflect upon these roles through complex activity systems involving the negotiation of her labor across and within accounts. As Anya produces Textual Objects on her personal account through the field of interpretation informed by contexts, she reflects upon her own identity within different spatiotemporal domains. As Anya noted, “Reflections are hard with me in words, that’s why I prefer pictures.” Anya utilizes the personal account to reflect and process her emotions, but she also uses the account as a tool for releasing her emotions. By posting about her emotions, they are no longer really *hers* (though I would argue they never really were *hers*) as her community of super friends observe her posts. The multimodal use of images and texts through the production of posts allows Anya to “express more of my identity and I express it more freely and it’s just for me to see so I can experiment with different stuff such as lyrics or visuals or my pictures.” It is through this experimentation that I observe Anya as not only a user, but an artist, a composer, and a writer.

CONCLUSION

As the findings and discussion in this project suggest, users on social media sites engage in complex negotiations and interpretations of laminated and multiple contexts as they produce Textual Objects and transform Contextual Objectives. These negotiations and interpretations involve complex histories and customs as users engage with communities across time through the mediation of particular artifacts such as technology devices, interface designs, and more broadly, linguistic choices. When users are engaging with their individuated experiences and activities as they curate and compose their profile to reflect their desired identity performances to

their communities, users also serve as members of their communities through representations of their past, present, and future selves. Thus, as users (subjects) create and compose objects toward their communities, they are also encountering activity systems which are creating them.

The concept of writing online to a future self may become more relevant in our current digital culture as Anya remembers, “Basically my parents said that if you put it on the Internet, it stays there forever.” While this may be a cultural custom informed by Anya’s experiences growing up in Russia, this custom also recognizes the unboundedness of social media, where communities can be people physically close by, but also can be users across the world. Of course, this custom may also inform complex activity systems in which users manipulate the mediating artifact in order to create boundedness or privacy within smaller communities in a digital landscape, like Anya did with her Close Friends list or super friends on her personal account. As users imagine and write toward their communities, users are also reflecting on the impact of their identity performances within communities in future situations. In my view, the data demonstrates deep reflection with the relationships between a user and community. Likewise, users utilize mediating artifacts in order to control and filter online communities. As demonstrated through Anya’s Contextual Objectives, it seems that users engage in reflection primarily when reflecting upon themselves as members of a particular community and the impact their chosen identity performance may have on those community members. Future research may attend more closely to how viewers portray the self more directly in posts as they interact with technology in an embodied position, such as scrolling. Textual objects such as posts *do* things because they gain “currency” socially. But textual objects also *do things to us*, as they also gain currency individually via representations, laminated and archived in the field of interpretation. As these contexts accrue over time, the field of interpretation affects how a user can imagine

producing and composing an object via the mediation of artifacts. Thus, transforming the Contextual Objective they have when acting in an activity system such as updating friends, processing emotions, or reflecting on their identity.

As I conclude, I want to address a question that I have been considering as I analyzed Anya's experiences through the model: *What did the UX CHAT model allow me to do that 3GAT does not?* The UX CHAT model allowed me to zoom in on the user (subject) in a way that 3GAT does not, particularly when looking at a system of activity. Rather, the UX CHAT model zooms in on users and recognizes that contexts – rules, customs, and histories; communities; divisions of labor; and lastly, mediating artifacts – are not isolated to singular or even networked activity systems. Rather, these contexts are laminated and multiple to users' experiences when engaging in digital writing activities such as social media use. These contexts inform a user's field of interpretation when producing objects such as posts and objectives such as communicating to a particular community or processing emotions. Thus, contexts are almost always in a state of negotiation between past, present, and future activities users have encountered, are encountering, or anticipate encountering. The model demonstrates this as time moves across the field of interpretation and is relative to the user's experiences of temporality, particularly as they locate themselves within a space. Consequently, space is demonstrated vertically as users engage in digital writing practices in hybrid and oftentimes mobile encounters. A user's experience of space intersects with contexts, as users negotiate their own encounters of space, but also their own embodiment within particular contexts. I believe the UX CHAT model can be used when attempting to analyze individuated digital writing experiences, such as social media use, in order to analyze not just produced objects of activities, but user's objectives which

are contextualized across a field of interpretation and located within particular spaces, times, and bodies.

Finally, I want to end with a story I recently experienced while having conferences with my College Composition students. As I was meeting with one of my students who is a Computer Science major, he began to ask me why Computer Science majors have to take College Composition. Now, I'm not unfamiliar with this question, as I've gotten it before from previous students. However, as I was conducting this research project at the time, I began to explain to him how users in the future will interact with the code he produces, which will impact the activities and outcomes possible for users based on how he composes the code. We ended up having a fruitful conversation about being reflective designers of code, particularly as we create and implement interfaces and infrastructures which will impact produced objects of activity. My student and I concluded that in this way, users are much like readers of writing. In our writing classrooms, we are teaching future designers of these technologies, whose designs will mediate much of the activity we see in the future. As this project explored, these designs affect the portrayal of identity, but even more specifically, they embody the lives of users. As we continue to teach future designers, engineers, and researchers of these technologies in our classrooms, we can teach relationships between readers and writers of academic writing as extending beyond traditional alphanumeric texts to relationships between designers/followers and users engaging in multimodal compositional activities such as constructing an Instagram post. Moving forward with the tradition of CHAT, I recognize the importance of socio-cultural and historical foundations of the theory. However, as technologies become designed ever more quickly by human beings, I believe we should also be reflective practitioners of our own designs and models

we use in the field, by asking ourselves: *Why not center by design the user's experiences too?*

Our bodies and identities rely on it.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consent to Participate Form

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Maddie Bruegger, an M.A. candidate in English at the University of Maine. The faculty sponsor for this project is Heather Falconer, Assistant Professor of Technical Writing at the University of Maine. The purpose of the research is to examine curation practices on Instagram, meaning how users decide to design and post to their accounts. To participate, you must have a personal Instagram account and be at least 18 years of age.

What Will You Be Asked to Do?

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to:

- **Participate in two recorded interviews:** an initial interview and a follow-up interview. The follow-up interview will take place six weeks after the initial interview. Interviews will take place at a time and location of your choosing. A zoom meeting is an option as well. The interviews should both take between 30-45 minutes. If you choose not to be recorded, the researcher will only take notes during the interview. Some questions you may be asked include what do you like and/or not like about Instagram, what kinds of accounts do you typically follow, and what tone do you hope to portray to your audience in regards to your online identity?
- **Allow the researcher to follow your personal Instagram account** for a duration of six weeks. The researcher will be using an account made specifically for this study. At the end of the study, the researcher will unfollow you.
- **Record talk-aloud protocol video(s)** when you decide to post a photo on your Instagram profile, which should take no more than a few minutes explaining how you decided to post a particular photo. Recordings should be done on your phone using either video or voice recording and will be uploaded immediately following recording to a Dropbox link the researcher provides to you. You will be asked to record a maximum of once per week during the six weeks of data collection.
- The duration of this study will last six weeks from the initial interview to the follow up interview. The initial interview will occur during Week 1. Over the course of six weeks, the researcher will be tracking and taking notes about your Instagram activity. In Week 6, there will be a follow-up interview discussing your Instagram activity. The total time commitment for this study should not exceed three hours over a six week period.

Risks

Potential risks may include time and inconvenience, as well as privacy concerns by following your personal Instagram account. You will be provided a pseudonym at the start of the study and I will take every measure to protect your identity through the use of privacy settings.

Benefits

My hope for this study is to better understand the multimodal curatorial process on Instagram, as well as identifying possible generational differences in use(s) of the app. There are no direct benefits to you.

Confidentiality

- Your name will not be on any of the data. You will be given a pseudonym immediately at the initial interview using a key. The key will be stored electronically on a password protected computer with software that provides additional security and the key will be destroyed in May 2023. Your name or other identifying information will not be reported in any publications.
- The interviews will be recorded with a handheld recorder (if you consent) or via Zoom (if you agree to virtual participation). Recordings will be transcribed and recordings will be destroyed in May 2023. Zoom recordings will be deleted off Zoom in May 2023. Transcriptions will be destroyed in December 2023. Transcripts will be stored electronically on the researcher's password protected computer. If you choose not to be recorded during the interview, the researcher will only take handwritten notes.
- As the researcher digitizes the handwritten notes from the interviews, the handwritten notes will be destroyed in May 2023. Electronic notes will be destroyed in December 2023.
 - Talk-aloud recordings will be deleted from the Dropbox by May 2023.
 - If you choose to withdraw your consent from participating in the study by January 2023, your pseudonym will be removed and your data destroyed.

Voluntary

Participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

Contact Information

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me by email at madeline.bruegger@maine.edu. You may also reach the faculty advisor on this study, Heather Falconer, by email at heather.falconer@maine.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Office of Research Compliance, University of Maine, 207-581-2657 (or e-mail umric@maine.edu).

Appendix B: Initial Interview Questions Script

The following questions are the kinds of questions I will ask in the initial interview:

M: Hi [Insert participant name], thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. Before we begin, I want to make you aware of the Consent form in front of you. [Will go over consent form with participant.] As a reminder, you can choose not to answer any question and we can stop at any time. Do you consent to participate?

Questions:

Can you remember when you started using Instagram?

How did you first hear about Instagram?

What do you like about Instagram?

What do you not like about Instagram?

What kinds of accounts do you typically follow on Instagram?

How often do you get on Instagram in a day?

When do you find yourself most often getting on Instagram?

Do you use Instagram on your phone or another device?

What tone do you hope to portray to your followers by the kinds of posts you post?

Do you use the Instagram story feature? If so, what kinds of posts do you put on the story feature?

Conversely, what kinds of posts do you post on your profile?

Do you ever archive any photos you have posted and if so, why?

Do you ever think about the identity that you are presenting when you post?

Appendix C: Talk Aloud Protocol Information

I will give a paper copy of the following protocol to my participants at the end of the initial interview. I will also send them a reminder via direct message when I notice they post to their feed via Instagram activity. Participants should record on their personal device using either video/audio software. Immediately following recording, participants will upload their recording to the individual Dropbox link I provide to them:

As you post an image or images to your Instagram feed, please record a short (1-2 minute) video or voice memo (feel free to use your phone) answering the following questions:

1. What was your thought process as you were editing this picture(s), writing the caption, and posting the content?
2. Do you have a particular audience in mind when posting this content, more specifically than just your followers?
3. Why did you choose to post this when you did?
4. What tone are you hoping to portray in posting this content?

Immediately following recording your video or voice memo, please upload your recording to the Dropbox link I have provided. If you have any questions, please email madeline.bruegger@maine.edu

Appendix D: Follow-Up Interview (Semi-Structured) Script

The following text will be the script I use in the final interview with participants. Obviously, some of these questions will vary depending on data provided by participants, but in general these are the kinds of questions I am planning to ask:

M: Hi [Insert Participant name], thank you for allowing me to follow your Instagram activity over the last couple of weeks. Today, we are just going to look at a few moments I observed and I'm thinking you can talk me through what you were thinking as you posted or engaged on Instagram in these particular ways. Sound good?

Participant: Yes or No.

M: I also want to make you aware of the Consent form, which you consented to in our initial interview. As a reminder, you can choose not to answer any question and we can stop at any time.

Questions:

When you posted this image on your feed/story, what were you hoping to portray to your audience (following)?

What kind of tone do you hope to accomplish with this post?

Appendix E: Follow-Up Interview Email

Hi [Insert name of participant],

Thank you for allowing me to follow your Instagram activity over the past several weeks. I'm now emailing you to set up a final interview to discuss some findings and questions I have for you. This final interview should only take 30-45 minutes. Is there a time this week that works best for you to meet? I can meet with you in person or virtually via Zoom, whichever works best for you and your schedule. Please let me know what time works best for you and we can set up a time to chat. Thank you so much for your participation and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Warmly,
Maddie Bruegger

Appendix F: Initial Outreach Message

The following message will be circulated to possible participants who can recruit other participants for the study:

Hi [Insert Name of possible participant recruiter], I hope you are doing well as we enter Fall! I wanted to reach out today because as you may know, I am getting my MA degree at the University of Maine. Part of my MA degree includes completing a research thesis, which I am beginning to gather research participants for! I'm reaching out today to see if you could circulate the following information to some of your friends who you think might be interested in participating in my research study (preferably people I may not know personally). The research study should involve two brief interviews (30-45 minutes each), which can take place in a location of your choosing or via Zoom. The study will also involve me following them on Instagram for a duration of about six weeks. Obviously, I will go over more specifics with them if they are interested, but if you can circulate the following message to a circle of friends, I would really appreciate it! Here is the information:

Hello, my name is Maddie Bruegger and I am a Graduate Teaching Assistant in the English department at the University of Maine. This year, I am completing my MA thesis where I am researching Instagram curation, meaning how users design and post to their profiles. In my study, I am investigating the process of writing and crafting a profile and how that relates to individuals' identity performances online. My study will involve two interviews, six weeks apart which should each take 30-45 minutes. This study is important as researchers seek to better understand digital writing practices and identity performances online, particularly across different generations of Instagram users. If you are interested in participating, please email me at madeline.bruegger@maine.edu. Please note that even though you have expressed interest in the study, you may not be selected to participate. Thank you for reading my message and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Appendix G: Initial Interview Set-Up Email

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research study!

As you may know, this year I am completing my MA thesis where I am researching Instagram curation. In my study, I am studying the multimodal process of writing, crafting, and curating an Instagram profile. My study will involve two interviews, six weeks apart which should each take 30-45 minutes. The study also involves me (the researcher) following your Instagram account activity for a duration of six weeks. During the six weeks, you will be asked to record talk-aloud recordings (maximum of one per week), in which you take 1-2 minutes to describe your thought process in publishing a post to your account. This study is important as researchers seek to better understand digital writing practices and identity performances online, particularly across different generations of Instagram users.

I'm emailing you today to set up an initial interview, where we will go over more specifics of the study and begin with some initial interview questions (should take 30-45 minutes). This interview may be in person (University of Maine, Neville Hall, Writer's Block Room 303) or via Zoom. Are there any available times you could meet within the next week?

For more information about this study, please see the attached Consent form. Thank you again for your interest in the study and I look forward to hearing from you soon!

Warmly,
Maddie Bruegger

BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR

Madeline (Maddie) Bruegger was born and raised in Overland Park, Kansas and attended high school in Lenexa, Kansas. In 2020, she received her B.A. degrees in English and Journalism and Mass Communications from Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas. Maddie plans to attend The University of Texas at Austin in the Fall of 2023 to obtain her Doctorate degree in Rhetoric and Writing. They are a candidate for the Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Maine in May 2023.