Seismo

Text on Instagram as emerging genre: A framework for analyzing discursive communication on a visual platform

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of Instagram's transforming platform culture, this contribution proposes a framework for analyzing text posts as form of discursive communication. Text posts on the formerly mainly visual platform are understood as both a new social media genre and an emerging social practice. First, the genre is contextualized and grounded by recent evidence of a modal expansion, as well as through the reconstruction of transforming platform affordances. Secondly, based on long-term online ethnographic involvement and data collection, recurring categories and properties are identified within the emerging genre and differentiated in four discursive dimensions: text types, forms of (re)mediation, stance, and tonality. Variations within the dimensions are further distinguished and illustrated and their relevance scrutinized. These discursive dimensions are designed to be used as heuristics and / or analytical categories in combination with various methodological approaches from in-depth qualitative explorations to large-scale automated analyses. Finally, possible broader sociocultural implications of the emerging genre are discussed.

1   Introduction

Contemporary media spheres have been called image-centric in academic discourses for about ten years (Faulkner, Vis, & D'Orazio, 2017; Gómez-Cruz & Lehmuskallio, 2016; Hand, 2012; Stöckl, Caple, & Pflaeging, 2020), and Instagram has been widely perceived as an essential promoter of this image centricity (Leaver, Highfield, & Abidin, 2020; Zappavigna, 2016). However, text-heavy content is recently becoming more frequent and popular on Instagram, and this modal expansion seems to go hand in hand with changing content: moving from visual, aesthetic communication about beaches, bodies, and boudoirs to discursive, argumentative communication about racism, feminism, and mental health.

In recent research, text posts on Instagram surface as an important new type of digital artifact and social media genre. Methodologically, these objects can be grasped as both material artifacts and traces of practices and have to be analyzed as such. Building on existing schemes, this contribution proposes a framework of criteria as a tool to systemati-

cally categorize text posts in both small-scale and large-scale (automated) research.

Apart from a recent study focusing on the specific subgenre of slideshow activism (Dumitrica & Hokin-Boyers, 2022), text posts as Instagram phenomena have not yet garnered much academic interest, but they have gained quite some journalistic attention – however, also mainly referring to activist content: *The Washington Post* noted, "Selfies and sunsets be gone: The latest Instagram trend is PowerPoint-style presentations" (Ables, 2020), and *The Cut* and *Vox* called these posts "social justice slideshows" (Mercado, 2021; Nguyen, 2020). In July 2018, *The Atlantic* had already found that "Teens Are Debating the News on Instagram" through so-called flop accounts (Lorenz, 2018) that are text-heavy and devoted to discussing current political issues. A personal yet extensive and insightful account of "The Evolution of 'Influencers' and Activism on Instagram" also mentions the "production of text slides sometimes accompanied by illustrative graphics" (Martinelli, 2021) as an important activist strategy on Instagram. These contributions all identify

increasing political interest and related content production on a platform that has been widely perceived as polished and glamorous but without substance, a curation of aesthetically pleasing slices of life. The easy-to-share textual content, condensed and still visually beautiful, is sometimes labeled *pop feminism* or *virtue signaling*. Its offline impact remains unclear as research is scant.

Instagram's platform culture is definitely transforming, which implies, among other dynamics (Abidin, 2021a), new modes of posting. So, what does a rise of text-heavy posts on a formerly mainly visual platform indicate? This article introduces text posts as both a new genre and an emerging social practice within Instagram's specific platform ecology. The genre has become a recurring type of content in recent Instagram research, which is why this contribution offers a first classification of genre-specific discursive dimensions and properties.

Genre can be a helpful concept or category to systematically analyze structures and patterns in both small and large multimodal data sets. Text posts are understood as an Instagram-specific genre among others that are usually visual, such as selfies, food pictures, or outfit-of-the-day posts. In contrast to other, functional or rhetorical, definitions of genre (Lomborg, 2014; Swales, 1991), text posts are therefore not primarily defined through their shared communicative purpose, but rather through their joint formal characteristic of being texts on a visual platform. However, if genre is understood as "social action that accomplishes certain communicative purposes and functions for the communicators" (Lomborg, 2014, p. 23), text posts seem to share the meta-communicative purpose of expressing something that cannot be expressed visually.

2   Data collection and method

Initially, the phenomenon of text posts emerged as a relevant type or category in my own research on other issues. To further investigate this peculiar genre, my approach was threefold and iterative, building on both inductive and deductive approaches:

Throughout 2021 and 2022, I engaged with the *accumulated text post data* (n = 231) collected in three earlier Instagram studies:

› Forty-three text posts of 300 posts with #strokesurvivor, collected between October 2019 and July 2020 (Schreiber, 2023).
› Eighty-three text posts of 400 posts with local variations of Black Lives Matter hashtags, collected from June to July 2020 (Drüeke, Peil, & Schreiber, 2022). These posts included all kinds of textual expressions, from short slogans to longer essays taking up to 10 slides. Thematically, most of them provided information about the movement or gave practical tips for becoming allies. The related accounts belonged to younger users and local activists, and some belonged to political parties or organizations.
› One hundred and five text posts of 277 posts of a selected sample of science communicators, collected in January 2022 (Huber, Schreiber, & Schöppl, 2023). We found that text posts or combinations of text and graphic elements, usually presented in preexisting design templates, represent about 36 % of the content shared by academics and science communicators.

I did what Hall (1975, p. 15) proposes as "long preliminary soak, a submission by the analyst to the mass of his material" (see also Fürsich, 2013; Steiner, 2016), followed by an initial identification of recurring patterns.

› The categories' content, form, and stance from Shifman's (2013) "social media-native" scheme on memes served as a *deductive basis* and were further refined building on Herring's classification scheme for computer-mediated discourse (Herring, 2007, 2013) to theoretically ground first versions of the framework.
› A focused *digital ethnography* from June 2021 to February 2022 *and text post collection* (n = 90) enabled me to gauge the deductive categories and inductively build and elaborate their variations. The ethnographic approach served as an immersive strategy of data collection (Hine, 2015; Pink et al., 2016) that focuses on practices and artifacts as outcomes of practices. It

supported the reconstruction and differentiation of the text type and stance categories. Moreover, the platform affordances (Bucher & Helmond, 2017) were taken into account as constitutive elements – which was particularly elucidating regarding the specification of the form category. The examples used here stem from this last collection phase.

Other recent studies using automated analyses of large data sets from Instagram confirmed the quantitative relevance of text posts: A Korean study of anti-vaccination posts (Kim, Song, & Lee, 2020, p. 15) shows that posts categorized as text represented the largest share of the studied sample (52 % of 96 302 photos). Another study focusing on memes and #fakenews found that posts including text and posts combining text and portraits were among the most popular in its sample (Al-Rawi, 2021, p. 280). Furthermore, research on different issues on Instagram clearly indicates a transformed platform culture that heavily relies on text posts and informative or argumentative modes of communication: Vázquez-Herrero, Direito-Rebollal, and López-García (2019), for example, studied the rise of professional journalistic content production for Instagram stories; Childs (2022) and Peterson-Salahuddin (2022) identified Instagram as an important discursive space for black female activism and Olson and Lechner (2022, p. 312) find Instagram to be one of the spaces for controversies of feminisms, in which quotes in "pastel-colored Instagram post[s]" play an important role. Salzano (2021) discusses the circulation of Instagram slideshows in the context of Black Lives Matter and in a dataset on #depressed, memes and text quotes are found to be "common" forms (McCosker & Gerrard, 2021, p. 1906).

Building on my own and others' research, this article conceptualizes text posts as a genre and meta-phenomenon and the proposed framework focuses on reconstructing the emerging genre's formal, modal, and discursive characteristics independently of the featured topics or content. I offer a basic systematization and starting point for indepth explorations of specific contexts, topics, or field- and community-specific subgenres, practices, and customs.

3 Situating text posts on Instagram

This section situates text posts on Instagram as a platform-specific genre that emerged within a particular media ecology and time: I argue that the rise of text posts is also related to the transforming relevance of social media for news consumption and to the increasing communication of sociopolitical issues in the early 2020s.

3.1 Instagram: Transforming affordances and cultures

Instagram currently has one billion monthly active users and 500 million daily active users and is most popular in India, the United States, Brazil, and Indonesia. About 60 % of its users are aged 18–34 years, in other words those labeled millennials / Generation Y and Generation Z (Statista, 2023). Pew Research found that among these young adults, women and Hispanic Americans are among the most likely to say they use Instagram in the U. S. (Schaeffer, 2021).

Facebook and Twitter have always been reliant on text posts, related comments, and emerging conversations. These platforms are thus perceived and used as the primary arenas for discursive communication (Burke & Goodman, 2012; Robertson, Vatrapu, & Medina, 2010) and related problems like hate speech, trolling, and conspiracy theories (Farkas, Schou, & Neumayer, 2018; Nurik, 2019). In contrast to these text-heavy platforms, Instagram was initially designed as an app for creating and sharing visual – specifically photographic – content. While in 2017 the interface featured a camera symbol in the top left corner, clearly symbolizing photography as the main content production mode, the interface and button have recently been changed to a simple "plus" symbol, implying that all kinds of content can be uploaded to the feed, as stories, reels, or live streams.

When Instagram's built-in functions were no longer sufficient for fulfilling the users' content creation needs, "a shadow economy of practices [...] emerged to subvert the limitations of the platform" (Leaver et al., 2020,

p. 98). Increasingly, content design apps like Canva were used to generate visual and text posts for Instagram. With the introduction of the *stories* feature in 2016, user-created content became increasingly multimodal and longer forms of text, especially, have recently become popular in both feed posts and stories. However, it remains impossible to create text posts for the feed in the app's current, August 2023, version, which means that most of the feed content discussed in this article has been generated by third-party apps.

Regarding communicative and discursive interactions, Instagram introduced comment liking and comment stream-filtering functions in 2016. Threaded comments were introduced in August 2017, visibly positioning replies in relation to specific comments. Before this, users had to tag each other with "@username" in a chronological, unstructured stream of comments. Similarly, the internal reposting of Instagram content was not supported by the platform; users had to work around this with manual screenshots and cumbersome repost apps for years. Carousels featuring up to 10 slides in a feed post were introduced in 2017 and in-app sharing of public posts and personal feed posts in stories (but not in the feed itself) became possible in May 2018. Furthermore, feed and story posts can now be forwarded to other users by direct message (DM) if the content is public or the recipient follows the account.

Problematic dynamics like misinformation, hate speech, or trolling are also spilling over to Instagram (Cotter, DeCook, & Kanthawala, 2022). However, these issues have not yet been under as much academic scrutiny on Instagram as on other platforms (Kargar & Rauchfleisch, 2019; Mena, Barbe, & Chan-Olmsted, 2020). Instagram's own recognition of these dynamics as problematic led to refined community guidelines (Cotter et al., 2022; Instagram, 2021a, 2021b). Overall, these transformations created a more complex, differentiated, and refracted platform culture than the superficial happy place as which Instagram had long been perceived (Chang, Richardson, & Ferrara, 2022; Sanchez Florenin & Wied, 2021). Al-Rawi (2021, p. 276) has even gone so far as to describe Instagram as a "weaponized platform despite its reputation in popular culture as a cool space for young people to post their selfies, food, and travel pictures."

3.2 Ancestral genres and the rise of text posts

This section looks at various predecessors of text posts in this "cool space" and their rise throughout 2020, as the development of a genre "always rests on and refers to already established genre conventions and expectations" (Lomborg, 2014, p. 22).

While it is impossible to pinpoint whether the emerging Instagram genre originated from a particular user or post, an especially successful and genre-pioneering account building content solely on text was @SoYouWantToTalkAbout, meanwhile changed to @so.informed (Mercado, 2021; Nguyen, 2020). Text posts as genre gained traction with the rising presence of information and sociopolitical issues on Instagram during the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related lockdowns that coincided with the Black Lives Matter movement (Nguyen, 2020). People worldwide turned to social media to kill time, stay connected, and inform and educate themselves (Van Aelst et al., 2021). However, social media's increasing relevance as a source of information, especially for young people, had already been observed before the pandemic (Arceneaux & Dinu, 2018; Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, & Nielsen, 2019; Russmann & Hess, 2020). This also led to an intensified presence and further professionalization of other text-heavy actors on Instagram: organizational and marketing communication and the influencer industry (Faßmann & Moss, 2016; Levin, 2020).

While social media has always provided space for political expression (Highfield, 2016; Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019), this was mainly visible in the domains of Facebook and Twitter. Although politicians have been self-promoting on Instagram for a while (Liebhart & Bernhardt, 2017; Parmelee & Roman, 2019), the everyday engagement with social justice issues only recently became more relevant through local and global protest movements (Chang et al., 2022; Neumayer & Rossi, 2018).[1] In the summer of 2020, grassroots ac-

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1   Maybe even through the interplay with TikTok,

tivism became more visible on Instagram than ever before through the worldwide Black Lives Matter movement, and text-heavy slide shows played an important role in it (Nguyen, 2020; Salzano, 2021). In their analysis of one of the most popular slideshow activist accounts, Dumitrica and Hockin-Boyers (2022, pp. 12–14) find that the account "condenses and editorializes topics into accessible and succinct 'cheat sheets' allowing readers to stay up to date with political developments (primarily in the US) and social justice causes", addressing and thereby constructing a specific caring and self-aware citizen.

Visually, these "social justice slideshows" bear resemblance to commercial and branded content as they are "co-opting popular design aesthetics from brands" (Nguyen, 2020). The dynamics, formats, and modes of how various issues, statements, and positions are shared and debated entertain a certain commercial logic that dominates Instagram's platform culture in general. As German feminist influencer @fraupassmann stated in her story in May 2021, "[political] opinion and statements are sometimes treated like products on Instagram." Fighting issues like racial and sexual discrimination or raising awareness for mental illness or vaccines often relies on the same dynamics that have been introduced and established by commercial influencers (Abidin, 2016). Therefore, marketing techniques and vocabulary are sometimes employed by those who are actually critical of these practices (Bernard, 2019). Ables (2020) labels these content creators as "infographic influencers" who

> have become the leaders of this exercise in DIY education, repurposing tools from marketing or human resources jobs and drawing on their own personal experiences to explain [...] ideas to a growing audience more concerned with substantive ideas than carefully chosen filters.

This entanglement of lived personal experience and broader social issues seems to make "infographic influencers" particularly attractive and relatable, as the "element of personhood behind the message is what also

where social justice content has been more common (Abidin & Jin, 2022).

makes it more compelling than reading a sixty-year-old text or an academic paper" (Martinelli, 2021).

Taking a closer look at preceding social media genres, this "element of personhood" is also central to the formal ancestors of one of the subtypes of text posts in the framework: Status updates and other personal narrative forms of (micro-)blogging are established text genres on platforms like Facebook or Twitter (Rettberg, 2017) and precursors of the framework's subtype of self-expression (see section 4.1.1). Early popular posts of this type even made 2019 "the Year of the Celebrity Notes App Statement" (Ruiz, 2019).

Discussion forums and other threaded forms of conversation are another enduring web text genre that appears on Instagram as the text type of debate and discussion (see section 4.1.3). Other popular social media genres that rely heavily on text are memes, proverbs, poetry, or (inspirational) quotes – these forms have already been showing on Instagram for a while. The text type of education / information (see section 4.1.2), however, is quite new on the platform and actually re-mediates (Bolter, 2016) offline text genres such as slideshows or similar e-learning material. Some Instagram texts even copy print-media design styles, such as information folders, school books, posters, and flyers.

4 Discursive dimensions of text posts: A framework

This article aims at a taxonomic classification of the new genre that can serve as an analytical framework or tool for future studies (Table 1). It does not attempt to empirically reconstruct a concrete community, bubble, or hashtag public and its dynamics, but offers a helpful baseline for further research. The following paragraphs outline the new genre's main characteristics. They should be understood as analytical concepts that can be applied to specific thematic contexts, communities, and multiple kinds of content. The four layers of analysis are building on Shifman's (2013) and Herring's (2007, 2013) schemes and various genre concepts (Lomborg, 2014; Lüders, Prøitz, & Rasmussen, 2010; Swales, 1991).

Table 1:   Discursive dimensions of text posts on Instagram

Discursive dimension	Variations	Social function
Text type	– Text types of self-expression – Educational and informational text types – Debate and discussion text types	Type of communicative activity and purpose
Form of (re-)mediation	– Original content – Built-in repost – Screenshot repost	Mode of participation in discourse
Stance / position	– Validation / affirmation – Critique / disalignment	Positioning in discourse
Design regarding language, typography, and color	– Keying – the tone and style of communication – Choice of words	Tone and key of communicative activity

The first dimension, *text type,* concerns the type or purpose of the communicative activity that presents itself through the text post. It therefore asks what kind of social practice and communicative situation is established through the text. Three prominent text types (or subgenres) have been identified: self-expression, education, and debate.

The second dimension assesses the *form of (re-)mediation*, investigating the text post's authorship and origin and whether the person posting is the content creator or if they are using existing content and in what form. This layer can shed light on an account's[2] participatory intensity (Jenkins & Carpentier, 2013) in a discourse and help investigate questions of authorship and authorization. The third dimension of analysis focuses on how exactly an account *positions itself* within a discourse, more precisely the position and stance of the re-sharing user toward the content someone else has created. Here, we can differentiate between affirmative and critical positions toward the re-shared text posts.

Another dimension that can be included comprises *the tone of voice and visual design* of the text post, e. g., its typography and color, which support the post's intended communicative function and convey important indicators of tonality and positioning.

4.1 Text types
Text posts appear to fulfill a variety of communicative functions that take shape as three main types: self-expression text types, edu-

cational and informational text types, and debate and discussion text types. These types become relevant in a range of social situations and should be understood as analytical ideal types, meaning that in practice they are often entangled and messy.

4.1.1 Self-expression / statement
The self-expression text type is native to and well established on Instagram, mostly as captions related to specific pictures. However, captions have also become longer than they were in Instagram's early days and can now contain up to 20 000 characters. Therefore, captions are also used for short essays, diary-like reflections, remediating forms of (micro)blogging, and even texts resembling opinion pieces or (press) statements. If the author wishes to increase a textual contribution's visibility and shareability, they might post the text as a picture and not as a caption; this way, it immediately shows up in full when users scroll through their feeds, and it can easily be shared. Tennis player Naomi Osaka for example used this text type to announce her withdrawal from the Paris tournament due to mental health issues (Figure 1).

Lengthy written self-expressions also appear in stories, using built-in text functions in the story menu or as slides in the feed that have been prepared in another app. Education / information and self-expression text types are often entangled, especially on the accounts of influencers who provide activist content.

4.1.2 Education / information
The education / information text type usually manifests as condensed knowledge bits regarding specific topics. It became especially

2   "Account" is deliberately used instead of "user" here, as many accounts, especially in activist and commercial contexts, are managed by teams of users.

Figure 1:   Screenshot of @naomiosaka's statement on 31 May 2021, https://www.instagram.com/p/CPi9kJHJfxO/
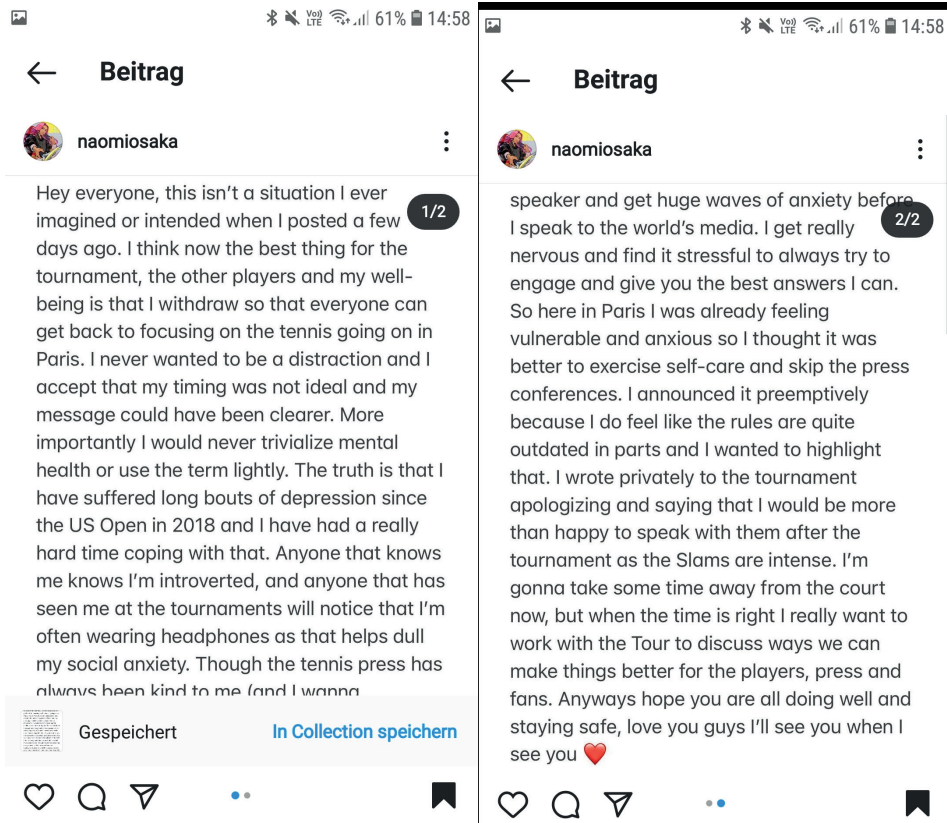
popular as a "social justice slideshow" during the 2020 global anti-racism movement (Mercado, 2021). A coding frame for this specific political-activist subgenre was developed by Dumitricia & Hockin-Boyers (2022, p. 7), which further differentiates topic-specific information elements. Often appearing in the form of text-slide carousels, these contributions are usually professionally designed (in third-party apps) and present content in simple language across a maximum of ten slides. An especially successful and genre-pioneering account exemplary for the education / information type was @SoYouWantTo-TalkAbout, since changed to @so.informed, which aims at "breaking down political + social issues."[3]

Instagram has become a popular platform for strategic activism and awareness communication (Neumayer & Rossi, 2018). While offline venues, e. g., events, workshops, or rallies, require more infrastructure and funding, digital forms of campaigning are cheaper and more easily accessible. These forms of communication have become essential during the pandemic. Not only is Instagram used by established organizations, it also offers small initiatives the opportunity to come into being and then grow. Many organizations were even developed on and for Instagram, generating a new type of sociopolitical content creator at the intersection of activism, PR, and influencing. A typical example for such activities would be @queerlexikon's post about using inclusive German[4] gender terms

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3   Text in bio on https://www.instagram.com/so.informed/ (23 June 2023).

4   As the actual content and meaning of the text

Figure 2:   Screenshots of two of @ninatame's story highlights, showing her reactions to comments via text (left) and video screenshot 3 September 2021
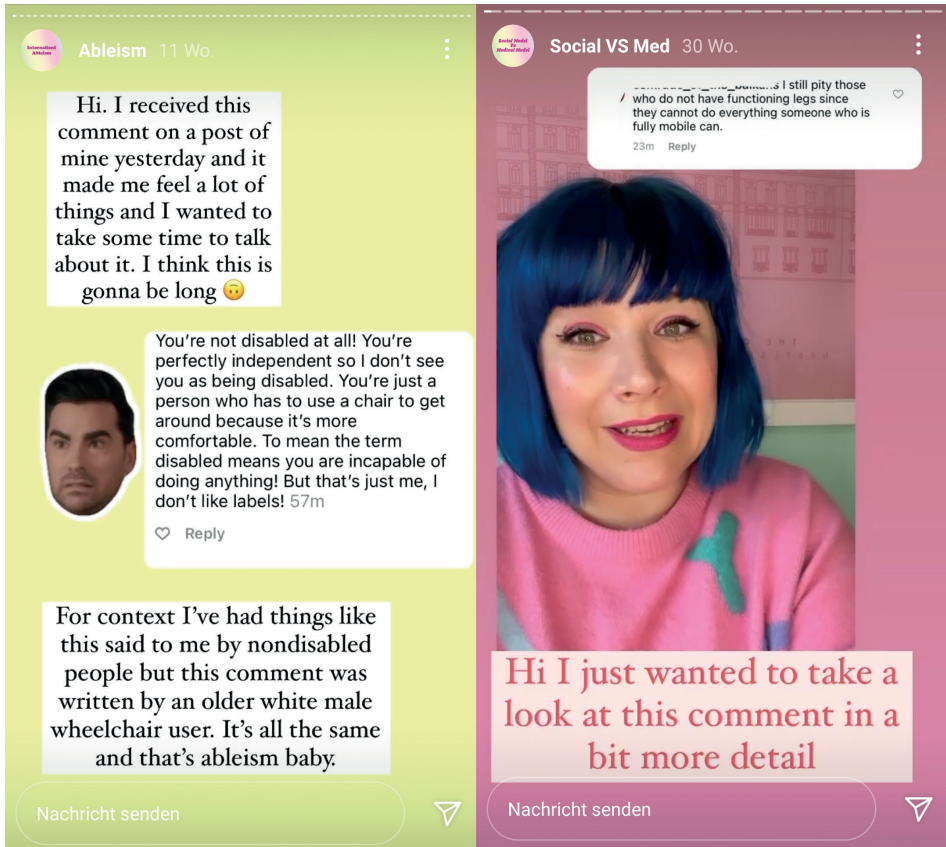
Note: All content creators have given their consent for the use of their stories in this publication.

(https://www.instagram.com/p/CLFSQu-VHaHN/). The post is provided by a small organization that explicitly aims at education and awareness-building, which is also emphasized by the word "lexikon" in the account's name.

4.1.3   Debate / discussion

Debate / discussion is probably the most surprising or unusual Instagram text type, as it takes some effort to use this platform infrastructure for debates. Usually, there are at least two parties participating in a debate and, typically, this text type entails a thread of (at least two) opinions or arguments re-

ferring to one another. The easiest and most visible way of replying to or critiquing content is to comment below a post in the feed. Commenting has always been possible on Instagram, but directly replying to comments has only been an option since 2017.

However, the debate text type can also take the shape of hate speech, with public (non-cis-male) personae with large followings being preferred victims of abusive language (Hoffmann & Velten, 2020; Veletsianos, Houlden, Hodson, & Gosse, 2018).

A newer form of debate / discussion is sharing others' content in one's own story and then commenting on it on the same or the next slide. Screenshot content includes either Instagram and other web content (e. g., tweets, Facebook text posts, blogs, news arti-

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posts is of no direct analytical relevance for this article, I abstained from a full translation of the German contributions but summarized the main message.

cles, etc.) or non-published content from the user's phone (notes, DMs, etc.).

Disability activist and influencer Nina Tame (Figure 2) regularly replies at length to comments in her stories, usually not as a direct reply to the commenting person but, rather, as a way of educating and promoting awareness of topics like ableism.

Another interesting example of the text type of debate / discussion is the account @thecancerpatient. While the feed is a meme page, they regularly ask their nearly 90 000 followers about their experiences and everyday struggles in the stories, screenshot the answers they receive, and post them in their stories, sometimes commenting on them and sometimes not.[5] This practice translates a mode of communication to Instagram that actually resembles forum threads in a very labor-intensive way.

4.2 Form of (re)mediation

While the previous section focused on the types of textual content in relation to their communicative functions, the second layer of analysis focuses on possible forms of text posts in terms of how these types of content are (re)mediated. A remediation on Instagram is usually hypermediated, meaning that "the producer acknowledges and even celebrates the process of mediation" (Bolter, 2016, p. 4). In the Instagram ecology, original content is as frequent and popular as re-shared posts. Moreover, resharing activities become important data points for the algorithm and related visibilities. Yet, the three forms of remediation have different algorithmic impacts. Understanding whether a text post is original content created by a specific account or re-posted, either through the platform itself or via screenshot, is helpful to investigate questions of authorship, authorization, and remix.

4.2.1 Original content

Most Instagram text posts, especially those appearing in the feed, are created not in the app itself but through third-party apps or desktop graphic design programs, depending on the creator's abilities and resources. Many accounts use recurring fonts and colors or even templates in their text posts to create a visual brand identity. The endometriosis activist @endobabee (https://www.instagram.com/endobabee/), for example, uses pastel colors ranging from light pink to orange for all text posts, along with similar fonts. Similarly, the astronomer @astrodicticum (https://www.instagram.com/astrodicticum/) always uses the same layout and combination of pictures and text shapes.

For many content creators, it is crucial to make their authorship and (often unpaid) labor clearly visible through a recognizable visual identity. While many professional organizations or institutions (e.g., museums) might also provide text content, many of the most popular text posts are created by individuals, mostly influencers and activists. Commercial influencers especially are dependent on the sharing of their content, as this positively affects their algorithmic visibility and opportunities for monetization (Duffy, Pinch, Sannon, & Sawey, 2021).

4.2.2 Built-in repost

The most popular way of using others' Instagram content on one's own account is to share a feed post in one's own stories by clicking on the paper airplane symbol below the post. In the story, the original source of the post is indicated with the account name in small white letters below the post or through a white frame. Built-in reposting is usually done as an expression of affirmation of the content, but stories also make it possible to critically comment or express one's opinion on the content (textually or visually, sometimes only with a GIF). In Figure 3, an Austrian influencer comments on Naomi Osaka's post (Figure 1), calling her a heroine.

Moreover, others' stories can be re-posted and commented upon, which is easy when one's own account is tagged in the story. If one's account is not tagged in a story, the picture has to be screenshotted to be shared in one's own story; the other option is to send the story via DM. Through its story-sharing functions, the platform enables existing connections to become closer and tighter. Its feed-sharing functions seem to be used mainly for sharing public text posts from big and popular accounts, endorsing the content

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5 See numerous examples in the highlights of the account @thecancerpatient. Thanks to A. for pointing me toward this account.

Figure 3: @iamchristlclear reposting @naomi-osaka's statement and commenting on it in her story, screenshot 1 June 2021
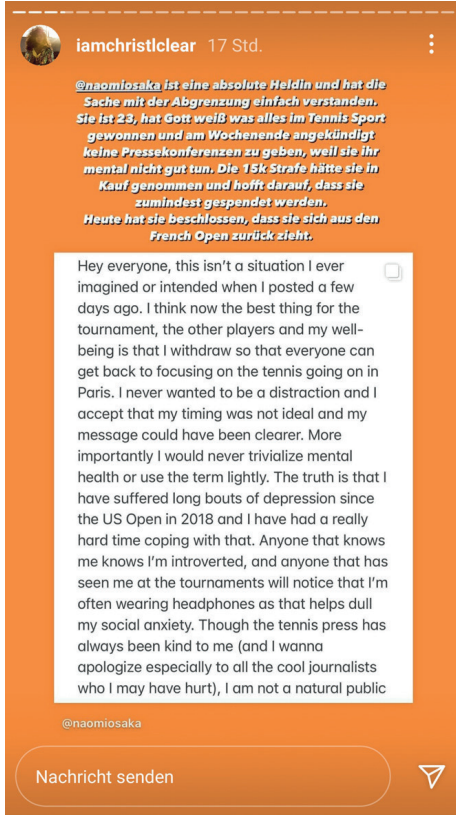
through showing support for and agreement with the specific post.

4.2.3 Repost via screenshot

Instagram content is also remediated using screenshots, either of stories, DM conversations, or other web content that users decide to recontextualize. Whether or not a private messenger has agreed to the publicizing of their conversation is usually not fully transparent.

From a theoretical perspective, screenshots have indexical quality and "are believed to serve as untainted evidence of what has transpired on screen" (Švelch, 2021, p. 557). While a screenshot's authorship is not directly visible, the depicted on-screen situation, such as a DM conversation, can still

be unique to the author's interaction with the screen. Sharing screenshots of intimate conversations with third parties (for example sharing a flirtatious chat with a potential partner with one's best friends) has been an established practice since the emergence of the Internet (Kofoed & Larsen, 2016; Thelwall et al., 2016), but even more so since the advent of smartphones.

However, reposting via screenshot on Instagram has a different, more public quality: Users aim to share funny and helpful but also critical and annoying comments they have received (privately or not) with all their followers. The relevance of the user's positioning toward the content (whether it is endorsed or criticized) is discussed in section 4.3.

In Figure 4, @iamchristlclear posted a private conversation she had with a follower about house cleaning, referring to a speci-

Figure 4: @iamchristlclear using a screenshot of a private conversation in her story, screenshot 1 June 2021

fic message she sent about how much she hates cleaning. In the story, she marked the relevant passage with an arrow, commented that this was her current mood, and added a shout-out to all "people who lead a grown-up life with clean apartments." In both Figure 2 and 4, screenshots of comments and conversations are used as inspiration, occasion, and source to produce public content through remixing and annotating.

Screenshots and text posts from sources outside of Instagram are also re-posted, very often from Twitter, sometimes from Facebook, sometimes from different kinds of news media. These texts often serve to participate in a debate or to share a viewpoint or stance in a discussion. Twitter posts with catchy quotes or condensed opinions about sociopolitical issues are particularly popular shareables and are immediately recognizable by their layout.

4.3 Stance

This analytical layer takes a closer look at the types of re-shared posts that are discussed in 4.2, and particularly focuses on the position and stance of the re-sharing user toward the content someone else has created. Two major types of (re-)framing have been identified, representing different ways of positioning oneself in a discourse: validation / affirmation and critique / callout.

4.3.1 Validation / affirmation

In an example discussed in section 4.2 (Figure 3), @iamchristlclear clearly positions herself in favor of @naomiosaka's statement, calling her a "heroine who has understood setting boundaries." Often, re-shared posts are not commented upon at all, which can be read as approval of the content itself.

On a meta-level, users position and express themselves through content that others have created. However, this practice of uncommented re-posting has been criticized as virtue signaling and slacktivism[6] (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2014). Judging the truthfulness or authenticity of this form of

positioning is beyond the scope of this article and requires more data beyond the post itself.

4.3.2 Critique / callout

The term *outcalling* refers to the practice of making someone's disruptive or intrusive behavior visible on social media, for example through a screenshot – anonymized or not. Accounts that focus exclusively on outcalling, for example by exposing misogynistic messages from dating apps, have recently been quite popular. In general, callout cultures can be understood as "weapons of the weak, where people from marginalized backgrounds can rely on the snowballed network of discourse online to feel heard and seek reparations despite the status quo being against them" (Abidin, 2021b, p. 7). Influencers, too, are sharing DMs they receive from people who criticize their work or demand private counseling. Their aim is to expose how followers overstep boundaries and to avoid further such interactions.

In Figure 5, @wastarasagt re-posts a story by @datingrealtalk, who gives "advice" about how to treat women ("Women are like small children, they don't know what is best for them [...] They are not able to think rationally [...]"). @wastarasagt adds, "Is this even legal" to the slide and comments in more detail on the account's blatant misogyny on the following slide. Sometimes users not only criticize content but also ask their followers to report questionable content and accounts to Instagram.

Callout culture, or cancel culture, is particularly popular in the sociopolitical context of racism and sexism. Screenshots of private dating and marketplace app conversations have even become their own subgenre of content (Hess & Flores, 2018), with dedicated accounts collecting and posting just those (e. g., @tinderhorrorstories, @tindernightmares, @misogynistsoftinder, @kleinanzeigenfails, @ebay.kleinanzeigen.fails).

4.4 Typography and design

Text posts can range from white block letters on black backgrounds to fonts simulating handwriting on pastel backgrounds and many other styles. Typographic design is closely related to intended communicative function and conveys important indicators of

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6　"[A] willingness to perform a relatively costless, token display of support for a social cause, with an accompanying lack of willingness to devote significant effort to enact meaningful change" (Kristofferson, White, & Peloza, 2014, p. 1149).

Figure 5:   @wastarasagt reposting a screenshot of @datingrealtalk's story in her own story, screenshot 9 February 2022
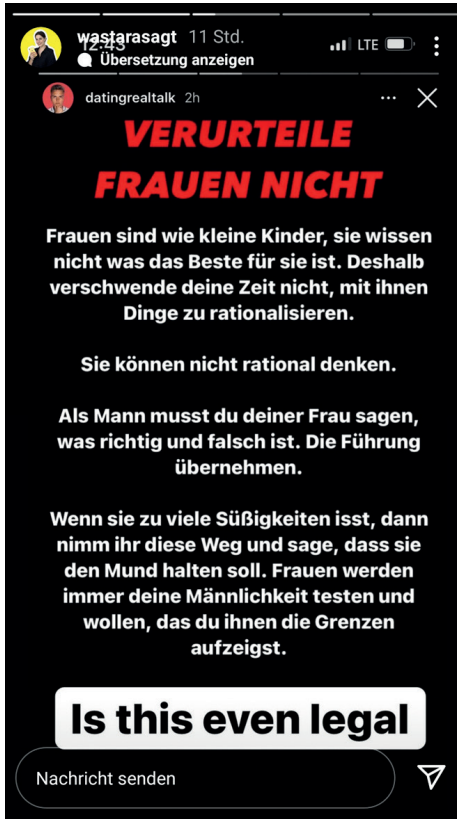
tonality and positioning to the reader. Therefore, this layer of design can be understood as a semiotic mode in its own right (Kress, 2010). However, the range of possible designs is too broad to be differentiated in specific manifestations in this paper. Researchers should pay attention to choices of layout, typography, and color, recurring use of specific templates or symbols, and memetic use of style and design for specific content types in specific communities and discourses.

5   Discussion and conclusion

The developed framework is meant to be a helpful heuristic for researching Instagram content and should be adapted to field-specific needs and platform-specific changes. The discursive dimensions that have been elaborated can serve as systematic categories in various methodological contexts: as *layers of interpretation* in in-depth qualitative explorations, as *codes and variables* in large-scale content analyses, or as an *additional sorting* of automatically identified text posts.

The proposed framework is based on the analysis of text posts as genre and meta-phenomenon and not on research on a distinct group of users or a specific issue. Therefore, the contribution did not attempt to provide empirical insights about a concrete topic or community but offers a reconstruction of an ongoing modal expansion of Instagram and a taxonomic classification of the new genre of text posts.

This modal expansion also seems to indicate a platform-cultural shift as "ideological changes affect what [and how] a society chooses to codify" (Swales, 1991, p. 36), or to put it simply: why so much text? Some informed guesses, that should be further empirically grounded, conclude this contribution:

While pictures are thought to "say a thousand words," they often remain polysemous and vague. Text, on the other hand, is explicit, and is thus also distinct as a mode of discursive positioning or factual education. The choice to use the modal qualities of text rather than visuality can, therefore, be understood as a discursive move in itself. What is the overall "objectified social need" that functions as a rhetorical motive (Miller, 1984, p. 157) for text posts? The exigence of text posts, the rhetorical motive and social need for this genre on Instagram, might be characterized as a need or *call for explicit positioning*. In times of uncertainty, it seems insufficient simply to just exhibit one's lifeworld; rather, one must position oneself narratively or even in favor of or against certain issues. But which issues?

Overall, the modal expansion of Instagram and the increasing presence of text posts indicate the platform's transformation from a private and performative space to a more public, discursive one. The text posts discussed in this article feature content about *contested domains of knowledge* such as (mental) health, LGBTQ matters, sexism, ableism, etc. which, as elaborated earlier, became topics on Instagram only recently. Social media

in general provides an ideal breeding ground for emerging countercultures (Castells, 2012) and refracted publics (Abidin, 2021a). This has been researched for Facebook and Twitter, whereas Instagram initially seemed to be an apolitical space focusing on aesthetic and commercial content. Through the circumstances described in section 3.2, Instagram became a space for minorities and marginalized, subaltern publics to share their political positions, build communities, and collectively express themselves as part of an imagined audience by using shared symbolic resources (Highfield, 2016; Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019; Peterson-Salahuddin, 2022; Savolainen, Uitermark, & Boy, 2020).[7] The increasing presence of alternative publics and their issues on Instagram has most likely amplified the spread of text posts as genre; vice versa, text posts have established and sustained these entities by enabling their communicative practices of knowledge transfer and debates.

Moreover, as pointed out above, text-heavy posts utilize established marketing and design logics and are therefore also *excellent shareables*. They are often shared as a form of impression management, to gain a reputation as someone who cares about the message at hand (Figure 3) or calls it out (Figure 5). Text posts are thus also used as social currency and identity markers, representing the status and (political) position of the user who shares them. This corresponds to a growing convergence of political engagement and self-presentation (Bernard, 2019) whereby users employ "engagement with politics as an expression of personal hopes, lifestyles, and grievances" (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 743). Assessing whether a user integrates their online claims in their everyday offline practices remains complicated as most followers never meet the account owners they follow. This seems to be another important difference between Instagram and Facebook, where "friendships" are usually reciprocal and based on offline relations.

Easily accessible, consumable, and simplified content should not be underestimated as an informational or educational resource for those who would otherwise not pay attention to the content at hand. This is even more relevant in the present era of increasing complexity and decreasing reliability and trust (Grech, 2021). However, the quality and reliability of the sources of information or even their bare existence are rarely acknowledged or made transparent in text posts. Moreover, the inevitable *reduction of complexity* in text posts can be problematic, as they rarely allow for nuance or ambivalence. Whether the gains outweigh these pains should be subject of future research.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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7   Then again, if a user is not interested in these issues at all and does not interact with related content, following the algorithmic logic, they may not get to see a lot of such text posts.

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