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COME 384A

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## **Digital Storytelling Project: Behind the Sunglasses**

### **Introduction**

Digital storytelling presents examples of how media texts can go viral and have a substantial impact on public discourse, while also providing multimodal communication to study and experience for social action (Gladwin, 2020). In other words, digital storytelling uses multimedia tools to bring narratives to life. Through our project, Behind the Sunglasses, we were able to execute our idea that was inspired by a TikTok trend while engaging an audience through the process of many successes and failures.

### **Description**

Our digital storytelling project was titled Behind the Sunglasses with an Instagram username of @the\_shadelife. In this project, we wanted to capture people in a natural environment. We would then ask them if they could put on sunglasses and if they said yes, we would take a picture of them. After taking a picture of them, we would ask them two questions; (1) What are three characteristics to describe yourself? (2) What makes you happy? The next step was to post a picture of them accompanying their name and answers on Instagram. Through this project, we accomplished the ability to execute an idea while creating new relationships. We honestly did not know if this idea was going to work the way we intended it to but in the end, we were successful. We were able to create some new relationships with people we did not know. The questions we asked were easy conversation starters. I believe the finished product is close to exactly how we envisioned the project to be. We wanted to keep it simple and I believe we executed that idea. We

could have created the Instagram page to have a theme or look aesthetically pleasing but I think it works better the way it is formatted with just the picture of the person wearing sunglasses and then the brief caption of their answers. It was generally successful.

### **Inspiration**

Behind the Sunglasses was based on a trend that started on TikTok a few years ago and is still present today. In this trend, it would start with one person wearing sunglasses with the words “put these on and pose.” It followed with more pictures of multiple other people wearing the sunglasses. To clarify, it was a video with a bunch of pictures of people wearing all the same sunglasses in different poses. These trends happened at parties, sports events, or just randomly to create content. We liked this idea but wanted to make it different from all the videos we saw.

This is where we added the personal element of asking them the two questions mentioned in the previous paragraph. This was crucial as it helped differentiate our project and stories from other similar videos/posts.

There are similar TikToks following this idea that join the trend but I do not believe I have seen any videos or projects out there that add a personal presence. We thought this would be successful as people like to hear about themselves and see themselves in a profile like our project but also like seeing other people’s profiles. Just by simply asking a basic question of what characteristics they would use to describe themselves, one can already get a hint of the type of person they are. It is interesting to see how people describe themselves and other people like to see that as well which is why we figured it would be successful. Our project tapped into a cultural phenomenon as this TikTok trend gained widespread popularity like many other TikTok trends tend to do.

## **Digital Storytelling**

Our project, Behind the Sunglasses, counts as digital storytelling because we took narratives and brought them to life through social media. We chose to use Instagram and TikTok for this project because as we know, “social media allows people to connect with others who share similar interests, passions, and beliefs” (Lutrell, 2022). Social media is a powerful tool to connect with people all over the world. Digital storytelling also has elements that help classify it. In our project, we utilized serial structure, personal presence, social framework, and multiple proscenia which further classified our project as digital storytelling. Five parts to digital storytelling include a compelling narration of a story, providing a meaningful context for understanding the story being told, the use of images to capture and/or expand upon emotions found in the narrative, the employment of music and sound effects to reinforce ideas, and the invite for thoughtful reflection from the audience (Alexander, 2011). Our project hit each one of these parts in different ways across the two platforms we used.

We incorporated serial structure by using the same/similar sunglasses for all photos and by asking the same questions to each individual. It created chronological order in our project. We incorporated personal presence by not only capturing pictures of individuals but also asking personal questions about their characteristics of themselves and what makes them happy. We then used a social framework to allow our audience to be able to share and comment on it. This was crucial in our project because we did not get as much engagement at first until people shared the posts on their Instagram stories. This allowed us to reach a wider audience. We also utilized multiple proscenia by putting it on multiple social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram. Yet at the same time, this was a platform affordance. Although we did use those two platforms, our format of the posts and projects would possibly change if we put it on other platforms. It

would look different if we put it on Snapchat for example. It would still have the same story behind it but it wouldn't exactly have the same look that we intended for on Instagram. I also feel like most people skip through Snapchat stories so we would have received lower audience engagement.

All of these elements together helped us in our project to create a story. We could have only taken pictures of the people in the sunglasses and posted those but it would not constitute it as digital storytelling. The picture is a story piece (Alexander, 2011) but more content is necessary to consider it as digital storytelling. Having individuals wear the same sunglasses and answer the same questions explains that we can all be connected in some way but have different backstories. It was a unique way to execute our idea.

### **Engaging Audiences**

Our project engaged the audience in multiple ways as well as allowed us to engage with the audience. People were able to share, like, and comment on posts. We had numerous people share not only their posts but other people's posts as well as their Instagram stories. Their press of a button or two sending it to their Instagram story helped make our platform reach an even bigger audience. Our project contained practical value content. In other words, we made it very easy for the audience to share our content. It took little to no effort to share the content. Another way we were able to engage the audience was through comments. Multiple people commented on their posts and other posts of their friends. One comment on a post even read, "We need you on the page." This exhibits how people liked this idea and wanted to further engage by getting other people on the page. It also allowed us to engage with multiple media platforms as we can use TikTok, Instagram, or even Facebook to promote these stories. Overall, it was fun to engage with the audience while creating the content as well as after posting the content.

## **Experiential Learning Addendum**

We had many learned skills already for this project, especially regarding social media platforms, but we did learn some new ones. One skill we further developed was the ability to meet new people. It can be scary to go up to someone, especially for a reason like our project. It can come off as very random until you explain the idea behind it. We also learned through some of our failures. One of our failures was not using the same pair of sunglasses as one of the pairs broke. There is not much of a difference between the two pairs but it was still a failure as we intended to keep the same pair of sunglasses for the overall project. Another failure was that we did not get the strong following on our account that we wanted. While we reached a wide audience with the help of our followers reposting their stories, we still wish we could have reached more people in order to fully promote this digital story.

We also learned that digital storytelling can be done in a multitude of ways. This also allowed us to learn a lot more about the people around us and what they think about themselves. We learned how to promote our story online and how to make it visually appealing to our audience. Learning how to use media platforms better such as TikTok to make a video version of our project was important as well. The skills and mistakes we learned will help us in the future for similar projects or just in general.

## **Conclusion**

Overall, Behind the Sunglasses was successful in many ways through the execution of the idea, along with the engagement of the audience. We failed at a few things but took the failures as learning opportunities. This project allowed us to take the material we learned in class and apply it to real life. We plan on continuing the Instagram page by posting every now and then. It would

be a fun way to continue meeting new people and sharing them through our page to continue the digital storytelling.

### References

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