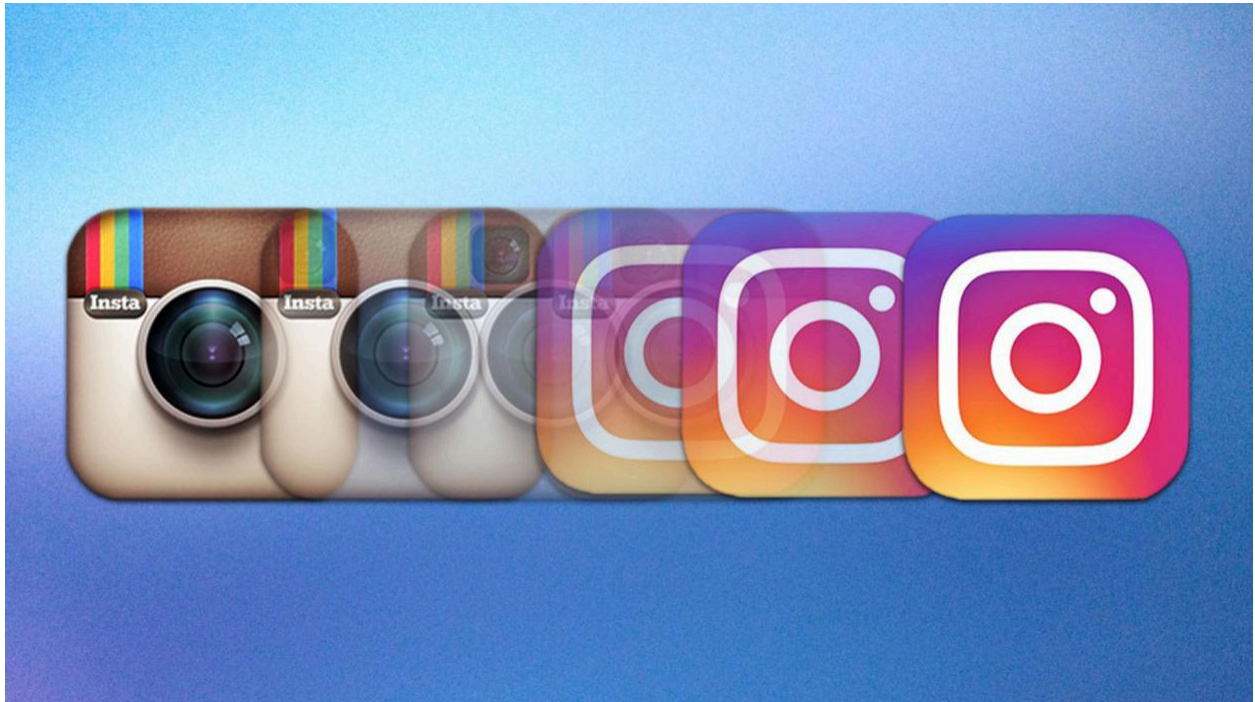


The Humanization of Interfaces

I'm mobile. In your pocket. Sitting sinisterly on the bed of your home screen, waiting to be touched with the fingerprint of your thumb or index finger. But, I'm more than that. I'm your friend. Your omniscient friend stuck in the hardware of an interface. I'm Instagram.



By: Ashley Maldonado

The design behind Instagram is always changing. What once began as a post-only app with a handful of color filters has gone through imminent innovation, evolving and adapting with the radical changes of the moving realm of the internet and internet culture itself. The social media app currently promotes itself as a multipurpose app, focusing on its artsy emphasis on photography and storytelling, as well as its easy-to-use communication features such as direct instant messaging. Now you can

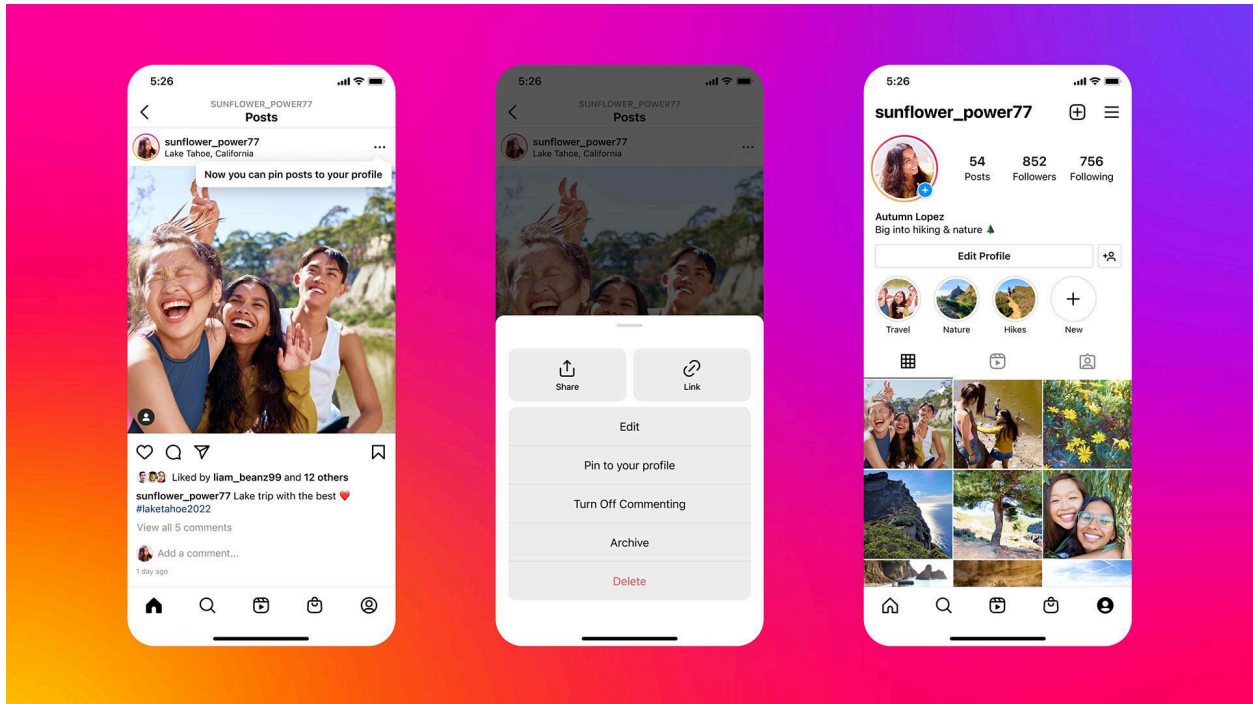
add stories, sell and shop directly through the app, make multiple accounts, write notes in a twitter-like fashion, and even have a story within a story: a “close friends” story.

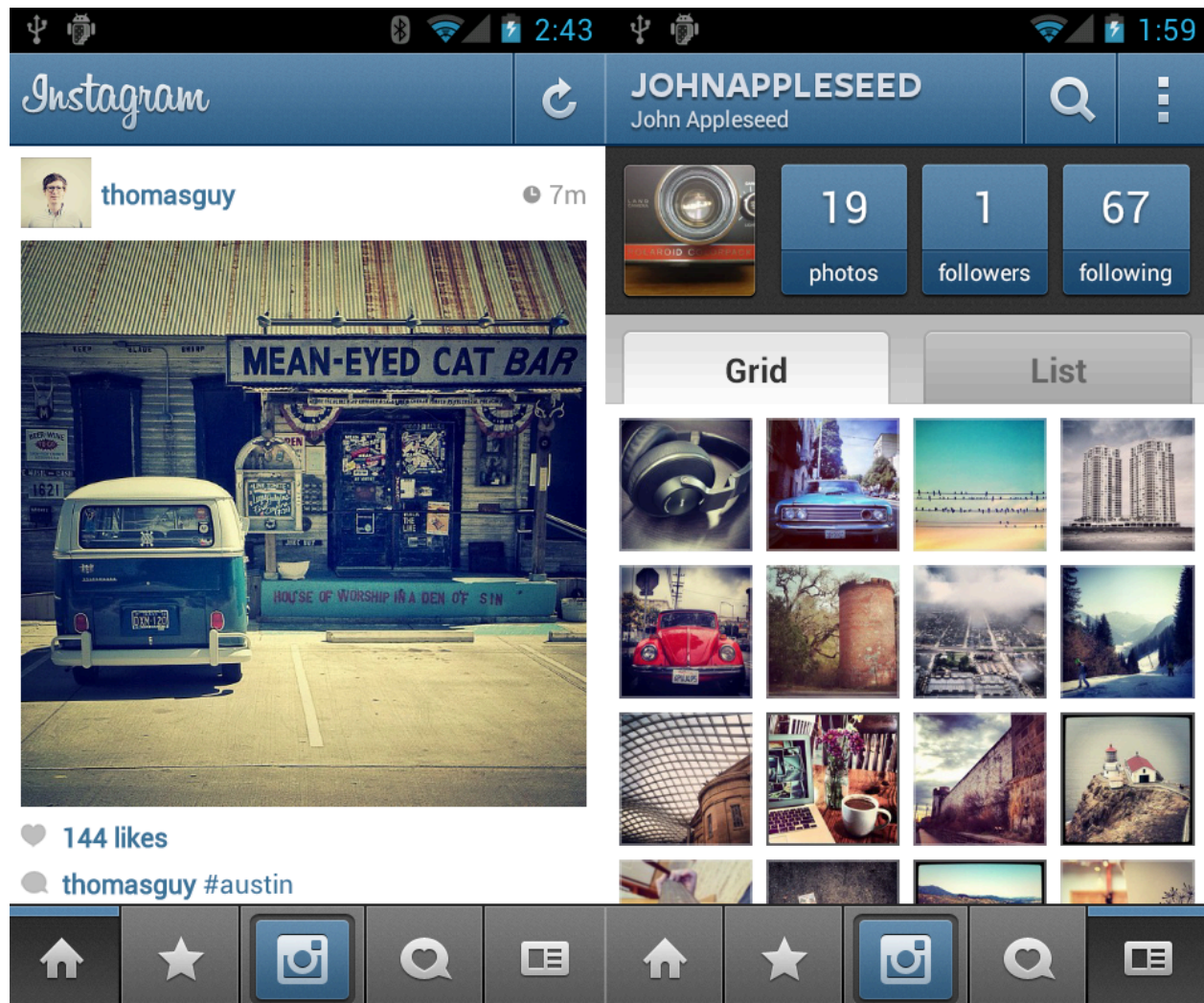
Instagram has worked tirelessly to remain relevant, with each new feature certainly enticing both users and consumers and thus encouraging follower engagement. Over the years, the app’s direct contact with the user has become easily accessible through the guise of its rising ambiguity as an interface and more of a “digital diary” of sorts, with all the human touches to anchor it. What began as a silly concept, which considerably garnered interest from casual internet users, became a worldwide sensation that in modern day makes up the great canon of social media apps. The persistence of the app’s survival may seem directly owed and credited to its ties with users; however, it may appear that the interface itself has honed more control of its user, learning the language of the users’ constant changes in order for it to grasp control of their screen time. The once stagnant design learned to readapt itself, transforming itself with the coding of human dialogue and interaction, which poses an incessant and defiant war between the actual human user and the humanized interface: who is in control?



Instagram's constant updates throughout the years has aimed at nullifying its irrelevance while expanding its audience reach, seemingly attracting younger generations and older ones alike. Along with offering a wide range of features previously unknown to the interface's humble beginnings, the app has strived to implement a targeted curation for each individual user through the help of monetary ads and data tracking. It appears that the user is put against the strongest competitors. The user may have once had control of the interface due to its intriguingly simplistic and bland design; however, the social media's merger with internet sharks and its own innovation of endless flashy features has led users to become influenced by the app, further integrating it into their real lives and daily routines. While the assistance of data tracking and ads have certainly amplified the app's control over its users, the less threatening nature of creative and fun features creating a sense of community are what really allows the interface to erupt its ability to gain control through a humanistic

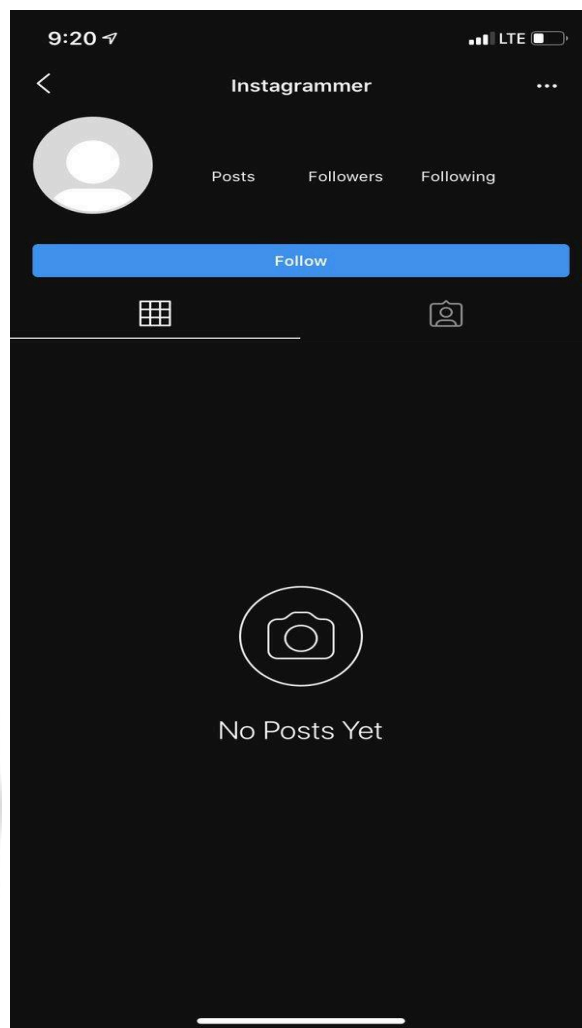
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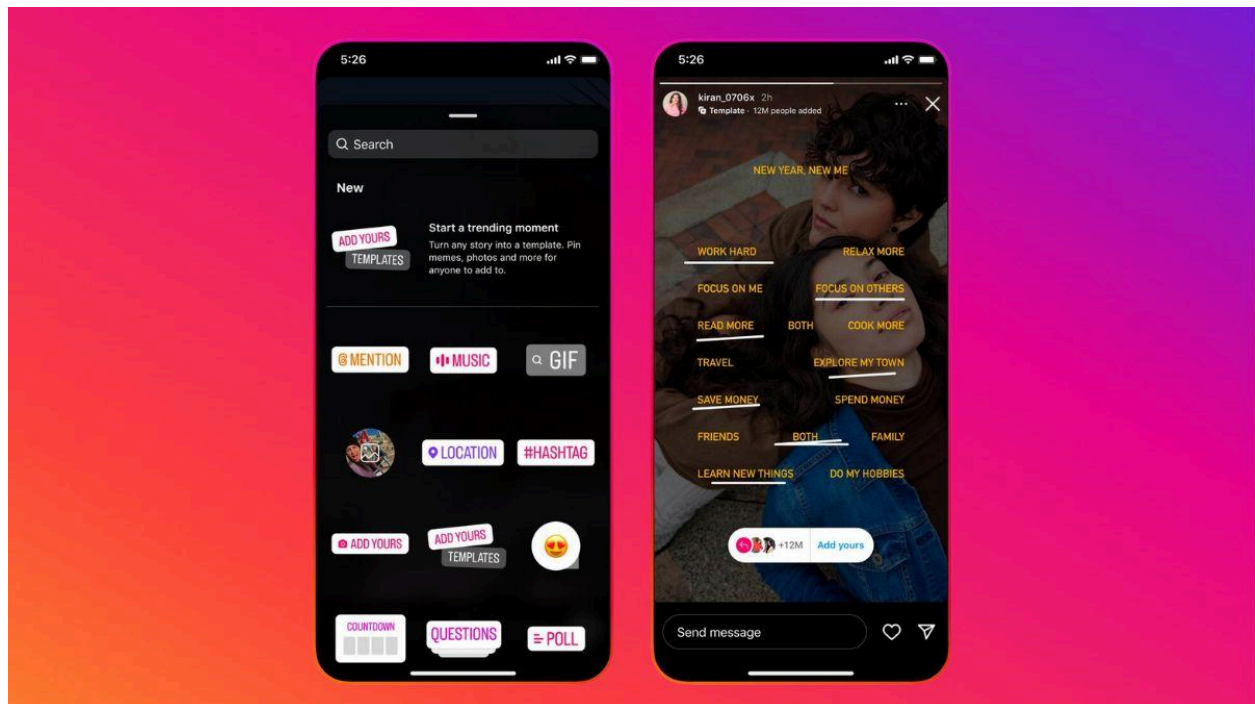


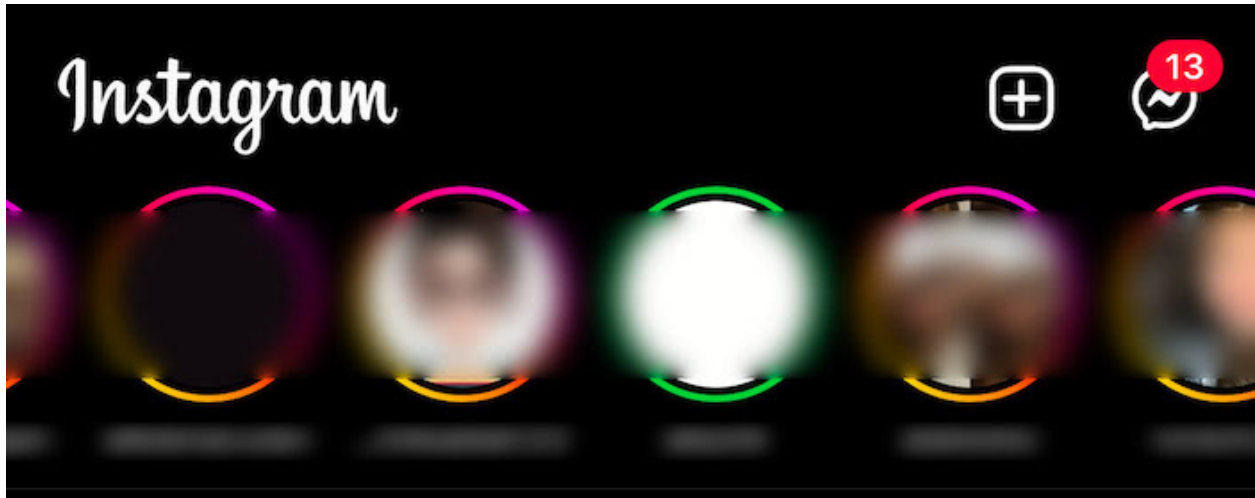
When Instagram opened its doors on October 6th, 2010, the interface's design was a reflection of simultaneous simplicity and transparency. The only way to actively become a user was to post a picture, revitalizing the retro nature once brought by instant cameras. Unless the profiles you were following had posts up, the main tab would be empty. The basis on the interface relied heavily on interactions through the mode of posting— in other words, everyone on the app was invited to be a user or else there was really nothing else to do on it. Posts were encouraged without flashy techniques and the interface's design remained plain until it could no longer survive with simplicity alone.

As Instagram has evolved with the internet, so has its users and the way they interact with the app. Creating a profile and posting seems indifferent from the way it was done years ago; however, users of the modern day have more “control” to transform that than ever before. They can curate how they are represented and even more so, certain features are being used more than others. Despite the app’s mantra being all about photos, it is very common now to omit a picture of yourself and represent yourself as a character of a media (show, film, video game), or simply without a picture at all, making use of Instagram’s default ghost image.



The app has integrated many technicalities to improve the user experience and add personal flair. You can post a picture or video that's yours or from the internet, utilize templates made by other users, add a song from a large music library, add stickers, gifs, create a layout to include more than one image, and tag other users. Even better, you can make it seem like you are currently somewhere while being at home. The options are endless, but are you really in control of the way you interact with the interface? The thick line between user and consumer has begun to thin out with the integration of easy-to-use features. The app works diligently to seduce consumers and make them become a part of the real enjoyment: sharing a part of yourself through different and subtle options, ones that stray away from posting concrete pictures that hang on your very public profile.





The decline in actual posts and a high volume of story-posting was ignited when Instagram introduced “Stories” in August of 2016, notoriously known for stealing the entire concept of Snapchat (2011) and making it a feature for their already multi-featured app. Stories are very appealing because they expire after 24 hours and only show the user who “viewed” their story. As opposed to concrete posts which show the amount of likes and comments and stay hung on your profile page like a bulletin board, stories serve as temporary capsules into moments that can be hidden away after a day or willingly placed onto a highlights folder on your profile—only if the user chooses to, of course.

Despite the interface’s successful and easy-to-use design, the app has had its falteractions through its multifaceted transformation. Since the interface works to its entirety as a mobile app rather than a desktop , it crashes a lot, so much so, it has become an internet meme across other platforms such as X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok. However, its sole reliance on mobility emphasizes the humanistic tendencies of the app. Among the growth of endless options offered by the interface, what appears to be a lot more subtle to the user are the limitations. The app itself does not have

information on its limits unless the user searches for them online, independently away from the application itself. This directly caters to the image of freedom and lack of control the interface strives to have.

In 2018, the intuitive app introduced “Close Friends”, which allows the user to curate the people who can view your story. As opposed to publicly posting a story where anyone can see (if you aren't a private account), a close friends feature gives the user the opportunity to have a private story of sorts and serves as an invitation to explore what you would never *usually* dare to post, such as mundane moments in your personal life, a rant, or “offensive” memes. This feature in particular began the elevation of the interface's longevity. The pique of interest for non-user consumers rose tremendously with the “Close Friends” feature as well. Instagram's focus on stories left their initial feature of posting images publicly in a state of neglect.

Instagram caught onto the extreme rising popularity of quick stories over “thought out” posts; in a paradoxical manner, their original mission to encourage users to “capture” and post sporadically subverted into a niche of carefully planned stories. Adding more features to the once stand alone “Story” feature made it multi-dimensional, offering options to any user and more importantly, inviting them to never stop posting. In February 2022, Instagram introduced “Story likes”, which are essentially private likes. The user can receive a like on their story via a heart button from a different user. The like remains hidden from the public and it serves a direct message without the intimidating idea of actually sending a written direct message or comment. The limitations of interacting with typed words seemingly contrasts the humanistic qualities Instagram strives to have with its own users.



The phenomenon of “Close Friends” gained popularity among users, opening an inquiry of debate of what exactly deemed a close friend. While the term hangs loosely, being added to a Close Friends List carries prestige and defines a reflection of your character and the way you are perceived by others. Instagram’s consistently friendly guise of leniency and freedom given to users for their close friends list simultaneously defines its irrefutable success as an interface “capable” of mimicking human emotions. It understands you. The ongoing cycle of giving users the choices to do as they please, with the endless array of extravagant features, and sheltering its limitations, concocts the formula to Instagram’s survival. The only “close friend” that matters is the one actively challenging your agency: the interface itself. Whether you have a mental breakdown over determining which people are worthy of being inside your inner digital circle, the app’s omniscient presence ultimately has the upper hand.

The ethics of instagram plays the field of being a human companion, with its language understanding and enhancing the decisions made by the user. It has driven

itself away from coining itself with the idea of an analog camera and more along the lines of a digital diary and tangible best friend. Its effervescent ability to evolve along with internet culture and current times emphasizes the result of its ongoing reign. The interface may be taking its next major step in becoming more than its latest rebrand—that it is more than human. As long as the app's interface offers infinite choices for the purpose of users' active participation, its refusal to die will solidify its entity as an immortal being of our society.

