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## From Archive to Anarchive: How BeReal Challenges Traditional Archival Concepts and Transforms Social Media Archival Practices

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# From Archive to Anarchive: How BeReal Challenges Traditional Archival Concepts and Transforms Social Media Archival Practices

## Cover Page Footnote

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## FROM ARCHIVE TO ANARCHIVE: HOW BEREAL CHALLENGES TRADITIONAL ARCHIVAL CONCEPTS AND TRANSFORMS SOCIAL MEDIA ARCHIVAL PRACTICES

### Introduction

BeReal's Google Play Store description pitches itself as "life, real life, and this life is without filters."<sup>1</sup> This rebellious slogan reflects the social media fatigue that has long been baked into our digital society. Perhaps for the first time in social media history, Gen Z users, who "have been socialized in the art of strategic self-presentation from as far back as they can remember," can break free from the toxic culture of performativity and present their authentic selves.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, BeReal affords users opportunities to capture random, unfiltered moments of their day in two-minute countdowns. The montage of a selfie and a foreground picture allows users to record their portraits and their surroundings at the same time.

The study of social media is a rapidly growing field, but there is a significant gap that needs to be filled. Most of the existing research focuses on users' self-presentation strategies, leaving little attention to analyzing social media platforms as archival sites.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, while Abigail De Kosnik's book *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* acknowledges the value of social media archiving, social media is seen as an ephemeral medium that prioritizes the present, rather than long-term preservation.<sup>4</sup> Such a disparaging attitude is particularly evident in the case of BeReal, which is an understudied archive that some critics have discredited as a mere distraction from important societal issues.<sup>5</sup> However, this reductionist view ignores that BeReal is a cultural expression of the digital era and that its user base is rapidly growing. Moreover, the platform itself describes its "memories" section as an archive, highlighting its potential value as a long-term heritage site.

Additionally, while scholars such as Trevor Boffone and Brooke Erin Duffy have recognized the academic value of BeReal, most of their research focuses on the authenticity of self-presentation on the platform, rather than its archival potential.<sup>6</sup> Thus, there is a crucial need to fill this gap in media studies by exploring BeReal's archival value.

Researching BeReal as an archival site has significant implications not only for the field of archival studies but also for society as a whole. Social media platforms have become a fundamental part of modern communication, and their role in shaping cultural practices and expressions cannot be ignored. By reapproaching social media platforms as long-term heritage sites rather than short-term corporations, we can gain a deeper understanding of how they shape and influence our culture.

Lastly, most studies analyze social media archives from an outsider's perspective, and few scholars actually put themselves in the shoes of the user. As social media is playful and practical rather than purely theoretical, the technical walkthrough method I employed for this article

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<sup>1</sup> BeReal, "Details."

<sup>2</sup> Duffy, "BeReal and the Doomed Quest for Online Authenticity."

<sup>3</sup> Acker and Brubaker, "Death, Memorialization, and Social Media," 11.

<sup>4</sup> De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives*.

<sup>5</sup> Bonyhady, "BeReal Will Not Save Us."

<sup>6</sup> Boffone, "Do You Want to Make a TikTok?"; Duffy, "BeReal and the Doomed Quest for Online Authenticity."

thus has a methodological value in bridging the gap between the world of academia and the world of media reality.

This article explores BeReal's role as an archival site by addressing two fundamental questions: How does BeReal enable and constrain users' archiving practices? And how do these practices challenge conventional archival concepts, leading to transformations in social media archival practices? Employing a technical walkthrough methodology and literature analysis, this study argues that BeReal, while inheriting some features of classical archives, challenges traditional archival concepts with its individualized micro-narratives and algorithmic authority. Additionally, BeReal's unique characteristics, such as the one-second, one-post limitation and prioritization of personal memories over influencer marketing, create a more meaningful and authentic social media archival experience that emphasizes genuine human emotions and experiences over commercialization.

### Theoretical Framework

Before defining archives in the context of digital technology, it is important to examine how the concept of "archive" has evolved throughout history. In her article "Archives in Context and as Context," Kate Theimer provides a hegemonic, orthodox definition of archives: "[archives are] materials using the principles of provenance, original order, and collective control."<sup>7</sup> This definition reflects the position of positivism represented by Hilary Jenkinson. More specifically, Jenkinson considers archivists as passive, unbiased keepers of records who reflect one objective reality.<sup>8</sup>

However, postmodernism challenges this longstanding positivism by defining archives with three characteristics. First, archives are made up of many micro-narratives rather than one single metanarrative. Second, "there are various contextualities which are relevant to archival work." Third, "the archivist actively shapes the archive."<sup>9</sup> This shift away from the Jenkinsonian tradition is further expanded as a result of the prevalence of information and communication technologies. For example, the advent of web 2.0 inspired Kjetil Jacobsen to propose the notion of "anarchive." Considering the internet as an archive, Jacobsen asserts that anarchives consist of "multiple, fleeting and ad hoc" narratives while lacking a centralized, hegemonic power.<sup>10</sup> Another example is the "personal archives" concept that has evolved from the context of social media. Amelia Acker and Jed R. Brubaker suggest that on social media platforms, "any individual with an archival impulse to document his or her life" is an archivist of their own personal archive.<sup>11</sup> Building on these neo-Jenkinsonian frameworks, this paper defines BeReal as a postmodernist anarchive that affords diverse storytellers chances to provide multiple, fleeting narratives.

Next, it is worth noting that even though the designers of BeReal might not have intended to create the platform as an archive, and its users may be unaware of archival theories, both the platform and users are practicing archival concepts subconsciously. To illustrate, Jacques Derrida used the term "archive fever" to refer to the "general storage mania" that is entrenched in today's digital culture. Eivind Røssaak further substantiates this mania: "It seems as if we use social websites and our cell phones to construct and share all kinds of archives or fragments

<sup>7</sup> Theimer, "Archives in Context and as Context."

<sup>8</sup> Lane and Hill, "Where Do We Come From?" 8.

<sup>9</sup> Lane and Hill, "Where Do We Come From?" 8–11.

<sup>10</sup> Kjetil Jacobsen, "Anarchival Society," in Røssaak, *The Archive in Motion*, 127.

<sup>11</sup> Acker and Brubaker, "Death, Memorialization, and Social Media," 3.

thereof.”<sup>12</sup> In addition, F. C. J. Ketelaar argues that historically, homo sapiens are born with an “archival consciousness,” an awareness that allows them to record and preserve things.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, it is legitimate to analyze BeReal and the activities of its users from an archival perspective.

Finally, to better understand how BeReal enables and constrains certain archival practices, it is necessary to understand the notion of “affordances.” In general, affordances refer to “what material artifacts such as media technologies allow people to do.” In the context of social media platforms, this paper adopts the “communicative affordances” proposed by Ian Hutchby, who defines affordances as “possibilities for action that emerge from . . . given technological forms.” The advantage of adopting Hutchby’s theory is that it rejects the reductionism of technological determinism and social constructivism. In other words, it investigates the interplay between technologies and (non)human agencies. Moreover, communicative affordances imply that technology can either “enable or constrain social action.”<sup>14</sup> Building on this concept, this paper critically analyzes two things: (1) the interplay between BeReal’s affordances, or limitations, and users’ archival activities, and (2) the implications of BeReal’s archival features on the archival society.

## Methodology

This research draws from the technical walkthrough method that is commonly used in software studies. Grounded in science and technology studies and cultural studies, the technical walkthrough is a method that requires researchers to mimic users’ routine practices with an interface while critically analyzing their “technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes their experiences.” General practices of this method include screenshots of apps’ features and video recordings of users’ online activities.<sup>15</sup> The former is used in this paper, where screenshots of BeReal’s archival features are analyzed to shed light on its implications for traditional archival concepts.

This focus on the technicality of archives is supported by Alexander Galloway’s anti-hermeneutic principle in his paper “What You See Is What You Get?” Galloway argues that as the internet, the twenty-first-century archive, is based on computational logic, it cannot be studied by “the old humanistic principles of interpretation and hermeneutics.”<sup>16</sup> Richard Rogers also discusses the exigency of employing “the methods of the medium,” which uses media technologies themselves as tools to study the entanglement between media and society.<sup>17</sup>

However, as a result of the personalized interfaces, the technical walkthrough method is limited by researchers’ subjectivity.<sup>18</sup> To address this limitation, I supplement the research with a literature analysis. In particular, I analyze two types of literature: authoritative journals in archival studies and articles concerning the “environment of expected use” of BeReal, such as its terms of use and vision statement. These articles help provide insights into the link between BeReal and archival notions.

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<sup>12</sup> Eivind Røssaak, “The Archive in Motion: An Introduction,” in Røssaak, *The Archive in Motion*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Ketelaar, *Archiving People*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> Bucher and Helmond, *The Affordances of Social Media Platforms*, 3, 10; Hutchby, *Conversation and Technology*, 30.

<sup>15</sup> Light, Burgess, and Duguay, “The Walkthrough Method,” 882, 891.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Galloway, “What You See Is What You Get?” in Røssaak, *The Archive in Motion*, 155.

<sup>17</sup> Rogers, *Digital Methods*, 1–18.

<sup>18</sup> Light, Burgess, and Duguay, “The Walkthrough Method,” 896.

This research operationalizes the methods described above in two steps. First, for the section “Findings,” I perform a technical walkthrough of BeReal’s interface to investigate its archival affordances and limitations. Regarding ethical concerns of this research, all the people in the figures have agreed to show their faces for academic publications. Second, building on complementary literature, the section “Discussion” consists of a critical analysis of how these affordances and limitations impact traditional archival concepts.

### **Findings: BeReal’s Archival Affordances and Limitations**

This section walks through two archives of BeReal that are demarcated by temporality: (1) the anarchive of the present, the interface of “My Friends,” and (2) the archive of the past, the interface of “My Memories.” This demarcation is based on Xuan Zhao and colleagues’ finding that temporality renders social media platforms an archive of public performance as well as an archive of personal exhibition. More specifically, while the most recent social media contents form a real-time archive attracting public attention, the “expired” contents “transition into a personal space where it is mostly seen as an archive of meaningful memories.”<sup>19</sup>

#### **“My Friends”: An anarchive of real time.**

The first point of contact for archival features is the interface “My Friends” (fig. 1), the discovery page that allows users to explore their friends’ activities. On this page, the algorithms randomly select a time every day and spur users to capture their activities. Because this page consists of “multiple, fleeting and ad hoc” narratives posted by decentralized users, I frame it as a postmodernist anarchive characterized by two affordances.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Zhao et al., “The Many Faces of Facebook.”

<sup>20</sup> Røssaak, “The Archive in Motion,” 24.



Figure 1: The interface of the “My Friends” page. While features such as “4h late” and unfiltered, low-quality cameras demonstrate BeReal’s real-time affordance, RealMojis and comments make “My Friends” a postmodernist anarchive containing multiple contextualities.

First, by displaying time, location, and a two-image montage, BeReal affords users the ability to create a real-time anarchive that captures the ephemeral. The real-time feature is illustrated by “4h late” in figure 1, which prompts users to post on time. This conveys a sense of immediacy, suggesting the urgency of posting real-time content. Moreover, the fact that posts older than twenty-four hours become “expired” implies the superiority of recent content to older content. This temporal hierarchy is substantiated by Zhao and colleagues: “Recent content [provides] a more accurate representation of self, reflecting who they are right now and what they’re up to.”<sup>21</sup>

Another example is the unfiltered, low-quality nature of BeReal pictures (illustrated by fig. 1), which creates an illusion that the information received by the camera is processed by BeReal almost immediately. In other words, BeReal pictures are not a memorial of the past but a mirror of the present. This real-time affordance of BeReal is in line with Lev Manovich’s theory of “software performances.” Manovich argues that the twenty-first-century records are not “pre-defined static documents but dynamic outputs of a real-time computation happening on our device.”<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Zhao et al., “The Many Faces of Facebook.”

<sup>22</sup> Manovich, *Software Takes Command*, 33.

Second, the interactive features allows users to add multiple contexts to the same record. To illustrate, the context of a post is not limited by the author. Rather, RealMojis, the personalized emojis represented by the faces of the user's friends, add additional contexts to a post. Comments also add another layer of social meaning. Therefore, the anarchic of BeReal can be categorized as a "networked interpersonal archive," which "[depends] upon networked relationships in online and distributed platforms."<sup>23</sup> Importantly, this affordance makes BeReal a postmodernist anarchic that contains various contextualities.

However, the "My Friends" page suffers from an archival limitation characterized by selective forgetting. Indeed, it pushes users to remember one second of their day while forgetting the other 86,399 seconds that constitute reality. This partial view is in agreement with Verne Harris's theory of "archival sliver," the fact that a record only reflects an infinitesimal side of an event.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, another drawback is the tyranny of the visual form. Despite the provision of textual features like captions, the interface overwhelmingly prioritizes pictures, indicating BeReal's preference for visual effects over other sensory experiences. This excessive focus on the visual element causes blindness to sound, texture, smell, and other vital perceptions that collectively shape our understanding.

### **"My Memories": An archive of the past.**

As argued above, BeReal prioritizes the present by featuring real-time content in order "to support goals such as awareness of friends and to draw repeat visitors with fresh content."<sup>25</sup> Yet, the past is not buried as illustrated by BeReal's "My Memories" section.

"My Memories" allows users to review their posts in chronological order. That is to say, it is only possible for users to reminisce about the past but impossible for them to celebrate the present. Indeed, the calendar-like interface brings a nostalgic sense of time by emphasizing temporal dates over visual photographs. For instance, both the quality and the size of pictures are reduced while temporal numbers such as "1," "2," and "3" are imprinted above the pictures (fig. 2). And yet, the specific time at which the picture was taken (e.g., "18:53:12" in fig. 1), which was salient on the "My Friends" page, disappears in "My Memories" section (e.g., only "November 27, 2022," is visible in fig. 3). A plausible explanation is that the designers intended to erase the fact that each post is only a sliver of a day. This concealment creates an illusion that the snapshots on BeReal represent reality, as substantiated by its self-description on the Google Play store: "BeReal is life, Real life, and this life is without filters."<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Acker and Brubaker, "Death, Memorialization, and Social Media," 11.

<sup>24</sup> Harris, "The Archival Sliver," 64.

<sup>25</sup> Zhao et al., "The Many Faces of Facebook."

<sup>26</sup> BeReal, "Details."



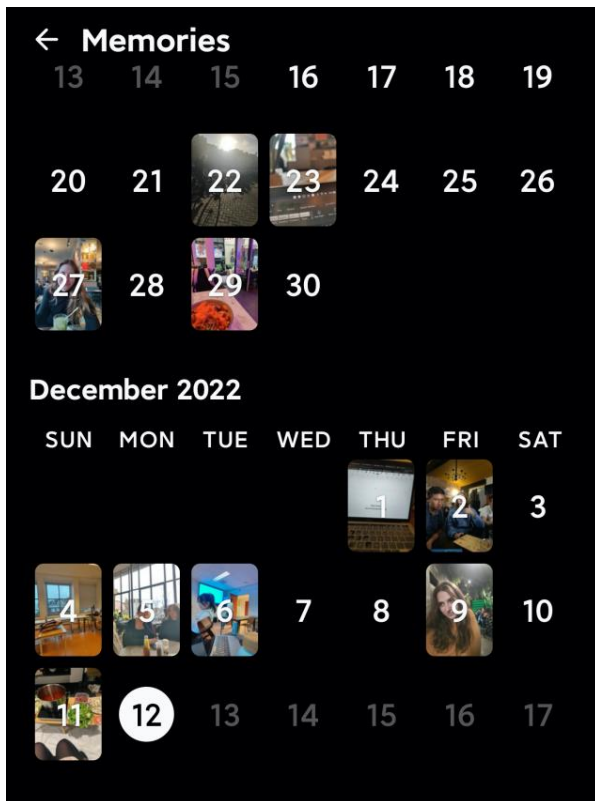


Figure 2: The home page of “My Memories.” The oversized temporal numbers contrast sharply with the undersized posts, forming a nostalgic archive of the past.



Figure 3: An “expired” post in “My Memories” section that is “only visible to you.” This emphasis on privacy renders “My Memories” a personal archive.

Moreover, “My Memories” functions as a personal archive that is detached from the original context of social interaction. The prompt “Only visible to you” (fig. 3) indicates that the only audience of this archive is the self; this is a safe space without the pressure of strategically presenting one’s best digital self to other audiences. This social comparison fatigue is further reflected in BeReal’s user guideline: “BeReal won’t make you famous. If you want to become an influencer you can stay on Tik Tok and Instagram.”<sup>27</sup> Therefore, “My Memories” resembles more private journals than social media. It is a “personal archive” that replaces conventional objects for self-documentation, “such as journals or scrapbooks.”<sup>28</sup> As Zhao and colleagues explain, social media platforms operate as “an invisible curator” who stores users’ personal content without showing it off to others, thus affording users the chance to find their identities from the past.<sup>29</sup>

However, one limitation is that interactive features prevalent on the “My Friends” page, such as RealMojis and comments, are deleted from “My Memories.” This loss of context limits users from recovering the social side of reality. For example, the reality of one BeReal moment is

<sup>27</sup> BeReal, “Details.”

<sup>28</sup> Cannelli and Musso, “Social Media as Part of Personal Digital Archives,” 260.

<sup>29</sup> Zhao et al., “The Many Faces of Facebook.”

not just made up by a visual photograph but also by friends' reactions to the photograph. Amelia Acker and Jed R. Brubaker refer to this as "context collapse," a phenomenon that social media platforms demolish the networked relationships on which online individuals depend.<sup>30</sup>

This walkthrough analysis from the perspective of users provides a fractional view on BeReal's archival features. The following section complements this user angle with a historical perspective on archives to investigate BeReal's implications for traditional archival concepts.

## Discussion

### **It stays the same: How BeReal copies the pillars of classical archives.**

There is no archival revolution, only archival evolution. Indeed, even born-digital platforms such as BeReal are shadows of traditional archives. Røssaak points out the four pillars of classical archives: "storage, preservation, classification and access."<sup>31</sup> Some of these pillars are perfectly pasted into BeReal's archival features.

First, the fact that the "My Memories" page restricts any form of editing or updates resembles the traditional positivist preservation strategy. Positivism considers archival records as "a stable, fixed, uncontested" document.<sup>32</sup> In other words, archivists should not add contexts to a record after it is created. Similarly, BeReal users are not allowed to edit the original context, such as captions, after twenty-four hours from its creation. Moreover, "My Memories" archives only preserve authorial contexts while deleting interactive traces such as friends' comments and RealMojis. This hegemony of authorial context thus resembles positivism, making "My Memories" a traditional Jenkinsonian archive.

In addition, the uniqueness of BeReal is its ability to capture one ephemeral second of a day and transform it into a frozen memory. This commercial originality is strikingly similar to how nineteenth-century archivists treated records as "frozen sections of past time." Importantly, the stasis of BeReal is in stark contrast to its digital counterparts, which are archives "in motion."<sup>33</sup> For example, whereas Google Maps users can update metadata of a specific location, BeReal's "My Memories" page only allows users to view expired posts without giving access to any editing functions.

### **It changes: From archiving a national macro-narrative to personal micro-narratives.**

Despite the aforementioned traditional elements, BeReal challenges conventional archival concepts in several ways. To begin with, BeReal transforms the record subjects from famous nobles into ordinary citizens. As Stefan Berger explains, the archives of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were used to underpin empires' power, which was achieved by constructing an overarching metanarrative. More importantly, this metanarrative worked in favor of the hegemonic group of society, in this case aristocrats.<sup>34</sup> For example, traditional American archives consist of many legendary stories of one of its founders, George Washington, while selectively neglecting the narratives of common people such as his enslaved workers. As a result, national

<sup>30</sup> Acker and Brubaker, "Death, Memorialization, and Social Media," 11.

<sup>31</sup> Røssaak, "The Archive in Motion," 11.

<sup>32</sup> Lane and Hill, "Where Do We Come From?" 5.

<sup>33</sup> Røssaak, "The Archive in Motion," 12.

<sup>34</sup> Berger, "The Role of National Archives in Constructing National Master Narratives in Europe," 13, 3.

archives produced a halo effect for the elite protagonists, helping nation-states establish positive, consistent images.

In contrast, BeReal affords ordinary users the opportunity to archive multiple micro-narratives. On this egalitarian platform, there are no narcissistic aristocrats but only authentic commoners. In fact, even compared to its digital counterpart Instagram, which ranks users by a hierarchy of popularity, BeReal values every micro-narrative as equally important. As BeReal's slogan illustrates, "BeReal doesn't care if you have millions of followers or if you're verified."<sup>35</sup> Therefore, BeReal is an anarchic. In Røssaak's words, it is an "anarchival" society that allows multiple storytellers to tell micro-narratives without "a single hegemonic nodal point."<sup>36</sup>

Essentially, this anarchic revolution marks an archival shift from nationalist collectivity to self-centered individuality. This shift is in line with Beatrice Cannelli and Marta Musso's finding: there is a pattern in which social media users "ascribe a distinctive personal value" to their online content.<sup>37</sup> Zhao and colleagues further substantiate this individuality shift by arguing that social media platforms are "an identity platform for the self."<sup>38</sup> This change can be seen as a result of democracy's victory over nationalism. To illustrate, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, nationalism (e.g., in Nazi Germany) was the prevalent ideology, which promoted a collective effort to serve the country. Thus, archives became a propaganda tool for "patriotic education."<sup>39</sup> However, democracy, a regime that values humanism and individuality, wins in the twenty-first century. This individual spirit is baked into online anarchives, consequently challenging the traditional archival purpose of nationalist propaganda.

Lastly, BeReal's decentralized power structure challenges the state-centered nature of traditional archives. J. S. Milligan beautifully illustrates the centralization of traditional archives: "The question of the Archives nationales became a question of control over the memory of the state's exercise of power over citizens; and of who had the power to mobilize or intervene in this memory to shape the body politic, to make as well as to write history."<sup>40</sup> This centralization was realized through strict limits on access. For instance, nineteenth-century archives were only accessible to people who swore oaths of loyalty to the government.<sup>41</sup> In comparison, BeReal is decentralized and accessible to anyone regardless of political stance, ethnicity, or nationality. Moreover, rather than restricting archivists to certain dominant groups, every user is an archivist on BeReal. This almost unlimited accessibility shatters the central authority of states, ushering in an anarchic age of decentralization. However, as the following section shows, this decentralization is not absolute.

### **The shifting authority from archivists to algorithms.**

Historian Yuval N. Harari has warned that the shifting authority from humanism to dataism is already taking place: "Only in the last few centuries did the source of authority shift from celestial deities to flesh-and-blood humans. Soon authority might shift again—from humans to algorithms."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, as algorithms mediate every aspect of our life (e.g., they decide who we

<sup>35</sup> BeReal. "Details."

<sup>36</sup> Røssaak, "The Archive in Motion," 24.

<sup>37</sup> Cannelli and Musso, "Social Media as Part of Personal Digital Archives," 264.

<sup>38</sup> Zhao et al., "The Many Faces of Facebook."

<sup>39</sup> Berger, "The Role of National Archives in Constructing National Master Narratives in Europe," 15.

<sup>40</sup> Milligan, "What Is an Archive?" 160.

<sup>41</sup> Berger, "The Role of National Archives in Constructing National Master Narratives in Europe," 7.

<sup>42</sup> Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, 60.

should date or marry), humanism, the belief that humans are superior to other animals and thus able to make optimal decisions, is losing relevance in the twenty-first century. Neither has the archival profession escape this fate.

The key to the post-Jenkinsonian notion of “appraisal” is that archivists have the central authority to evaluate whether an object is valuable enough to be collected.<sup>43</sup> In this case, archivists are considered as intelligent, rational beings, thus having the power to make rational archival decisions. In contrast, BeReal denies this human authority altogether. In particular, it is the BeReal algorithm, rather than its CEO, that dictates which moment of a day will be archived and therefore will count as users’ memories. Here, the algorithms have the agency to reconstruct the past despite their lack of consciousness.

Moreover, the algorithmic decision of which second should be remembered is totally random. This randomness not only shatters the traditional appraisal ideal that prioritizes keeping the most valuable objects but also challenges the positivist ideal that archives reflect reality. For example, F. C. J. Ketelaar asserts that the archive reflects the archivists’ perceptions of realities.<sup>44</sup> However, the BeReal anarchive reflects realities as perceived by algorithms. Ironically, while the arrogant homo sapiens think they have full control of their memories, their “meaningful” recollections on BeReal are actually a random product of machines. In short, BeReal creates realities as much as it records them.

### **Transforming social media archives: The unique contributions of BeReal’s memory-making anarchive in contrast to influencer-marketing platforms.**

The preceding discussion suggests that every user is an archivist who creates their own micro-narratives on BeReal. However, a question arises: isn’t everyone on public social media apps an archivist? What is it that makes BeReal special? This section examines the distinctive qualities of BeReal as a social media platform, specifically its impact on archival practices. By comparing BeReal to other platforms such as Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram, this discussion highlights two key ways in which BeReal changes social media as archival practice.

First, whereas Twitter grants users full autonomy in selecting the timeframe of records and the number of posts each day, BeReal limits the number of records (photos) that users can collect to only one second, one post a day. This limitation ensures that each post is unique and special, unlike on platforms such as Twitter, where multiple posts from the same user can quickly become lost in the noise. This limitation also ensures that each post is given the attention it deserves and is remembered for a longer period, thus making BeReal’s archive more meaningful. Thus, BeReal’s one-second, one-post limitation transforms the social media archive from a messy repository in which a large number of records become irrelevant or invisible over time into a minimalist archive that is organized by temporal dates. Importantly, such a quantitative transformation might make the preservation of social media data easier. For instance, the U.S. Library of Congress, which attempted to archive every public tweet since 2010, failed seven years later. This failure was correlated with the fact that each user can tweet an unlimited number of tweets each day: “Capturing a stream of content that increases by the thousands each minute is a technical nightmare.”<sup>45</sup> Hence, limiting the quantity of posts can be helpful for archiving BeReal content, which is important for both personal and historical impact.

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<sup>43</sup> Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 133.

<sup>44</sup> Ketelaar, *Archiving People*, 133.

<sup>45</sup> Hoover, “Want to Archive Twitter?”

Second, while TikTok and Instagram increasingly focus on influencer marketing, BeReal positions itself as a memory-making anarchiver. Indeed, by not allowing users to tag a location or embed a link to a product, BeReal offers a more authentic self-archiving experience. This focus on personal memories, rather than on the promotion of products or influencers, emphasizes the importance of genuine human experiences and emotions over commercialization. This sets BeReal apart from other platforms. In his book *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin argued that commodification deprives art of its “aura,” the unique, authentic existence of an artwork.<sup>46</sup> If we see social media content as artworks, the commodification and monetization of digital life deprives personal memories of their “aura,” the authentic, unique self that existed in a particular time and space. Fortunately, BeReal renews the aura of social media records by combating performativity and commercialization.

## Conclusion

This research contributes to the understanding of the archival role of social media through investigating how BeReal’s affordances and limitations impact traditional archival notions. By writing this article I want to emphasize that some archival concepts, originally created for dusty papers, are outdated in the algorithmic age. And we desperately need a new archival framework to adapt to the digital environment.

Although some traditional archival elements can be found on BeReal, its individualized micro-narratives and the shifting authority from archivists to algorithms challenge the conventional archival society. Moreover, BeReal’s unique qualities as a social media platform, including its one-second, one-post limitation and focus on personal memories rather than influencer marketing, transform the social media archive into a more meaningful and authentic experience, emphasizing the importance of genuine human experiences and emotions over commercialization.

The findings are based on a technical walkthrough analysis of “My Friends” and “My Memories” pages, as well as a critical analysis of their archival implications. The study shows that while the interface of “My Friends” allows users to build a real-time anarchiver with multiple layers of contexts, its randomized algorithm and dominant visual form limit the scope of the archivable. Meanwhile, “My Memories” functions as a personal archive but restricts users from recovering the social context of a record.

Finally, BeReal’s archival techniques offer two valuable lessons for professional archivists. First, the growing influence of algorithms in shaping human decisions requires us to acknowledge the limitation of granting human archivists sole authority during the appraisal process. By integrating the use of machines, a collaborative approach between humans and algorithms can enhance efficiency and potentially mitigate biases (provided diverse training data is utilized) in the appraisal practice. Second, with the postmodernist ideal of promoting diverse micro-narratives, archivists need to consider the technical challenges of preserving the vast amount of social media micro-narratives. Failure to archive all social media data could result in issues of determining what content is worth preserving and which groups may be excluded. Future research might explore the concept of social media platforms as anarchivers and investigate the role of algorithms in the archival profession. I encourage archivists to develop new archival concepts tailored to the algorithmic era to ensure the preservation of diverse and authentic digital records.

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<sup>46</sup> Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

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