Design Influencing: A Formulaic Approach to an Alternative Career Path

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Design Influencing:

A Formulaic Approach to an Alternative Career Path

Jayna Hadwiger

University of Central Oklahoma

Abstract:

The rising popularity of social media over the past two decades has resulted in many changes to the marketing world. Not only have companies turned to these social platforms for their own marketing efforts, but the surge has given rise to an entirely new industry, Influencing. Influencers can be found in any genre, opening up entirely new avenues of income for many professionals. Professional influencers are those influencers that are able to garner a monetary value large enough to sustain their way of life based on their social media following. For designers and illustrators, this avenue has resulted in the potential to market oneself in an entirely new way. Design influencers, as this research will refer to them, are no longer marketing themselves in a B2B format, they have created entirely customizable careers based on their social media presence that allows them to market themselves in a manner more similar to B2C practices, they have become the brand and their audience is the consumer. This research will examine the patterns and circumstances that have allowed these designers to build careers in this manner and determine whether or not it can be replicated in a consistent manner that would validate its acknowledgment as a viable career path, rooted in strategy, that can be prepared for in post-secondary institutions.

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           1. Brief explanation of topic

           2. Defining the patterns that appear in design influencing that may be used to recreate the necessary circumstances to forge this type of career.

           1. Many professionals are already doing this, just without formal research or strategy. The biggest pain point for professional creatives is lack of creative freedom due to client or employer constraints.

           2. To help designers position their work as a product, not a service or tool.

           1. Description of who would benefit from the study/purpose of the study

                a) Designers that have a personal style/identity that they would like to turn into a career.

                b) Designers looking for a more definitive approach to personal branding and social presence

                c) Aspiring design entrepreneurs

                d) The researcher

D. **Research Question**: How can designers create a strategy, leverage existing

principles of brand and social media strategy, and create favorable circumstances

needed to develop a successful, scalable, and tailored career based on their

personal brand on social media, particularly Instagram?

E. **Thesis statement:** There are certain patterns rooted in the principles of branding

and social media strategies that can be used to inform a more tailored approach

which will generate a scalable, customizable career based on a substantially

positive response to the designer's personal brand on social media, specifically

Instagram.

1. This literature review will look at the definition and history of personal

branding, social media strategy, and how those two practices can be

combined to create a career path for designers that allows for more control

over their body of work.

a) Current review of literature concerning the history/origin of

branding, branding research, strategy, and principles

a) Current review of literature concerning brand strategy and

principles

5. Quantitative/Qualitative Method

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        a) Display Name

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        d) Value

        e) Key Takeaways

        a) Graphic designers can use social media, specifically the image-sharing app, Instagram, along with modified traditional branding practices to build a personal brand that will ultimately define and drive the type of work they want to do, forging a career path.

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Introduction

Summary

"Ideas, products, messages, and behaviors spread like viruses," is what Malcolm Gladwell stated, amongst other references, to the virality of trends in his book, *The Tipping Point*, published in 2000 (Gladwell, 2000). In his book, Gladwell refers to levels of influence certain individuals have based on certain qualities or the amount of visibility they have. "Contagiousness is an unexpected property," Gladwell writes, "driven by the efforts of exceptional people" (Gladwell, 2000). Today, terms like viral are not foreign to daily jargon but not of illness. Shortly after Gladwell published *The Tipping Point*, a major development in communication technology, social media, would greatly affect the way trends emerge and evolve would prove much of what Gladwell said to be even more true than anyone could have realized.

In the early 2000s, the first forms of social media as we know it today began to emerge and dramatically shift, not only the way humans interact, but also the way businesses market themselves (Edosomwan, et al. 2011). With social media, the "extraordinary people," or simply, people that possess qualities that are out of the ordinary, suddenly had much more visibility. Influence would no longer be limited by geographic location; Instead, individuals would have access to a growing network of individuals with seemingly limitless interests. This, along with the rise in accessibility to talent and consumers' growing adversity to traditional marketing efforts, gave rise to an entirely new career path based solely on an individual's influence. Due to

its popularity, visual nature, and mobility, Instagram quickly became the platform for brands and

business to consumer (B2C) marketing. It also launched an entirely new industry that is now

estimated to be a $5 to $10 billion dollar industry, employing an immeasurable amount of people

in a variety of industries based on their social media following (Sanders, et al. 2019). As

Gladwell stated in his book, these influential people were those deemed exceptional, or out of the

ordinary, based on their sociability, energy, knowledge, enthusiasm, or personas. For designers,

these individuals were those that were extremely talented, informative, inspiring, relatable, or

provided some sort of shock factor or uniqueness (Gladwell, 2000). While many designers

established influence prior to social media, such as Stefan Sagmeister, April Greiman, and David

Carson, alongside other historically influential designers, social media opened a door for

additional exceptional creatives to establish their personal brand in a way only a very few select

designers had been able to before. Social media has allowed design influencers, those whose

primary source of income is related to their social media presence, to develop their personal

brands in a manner that shifts their income from a client base to a consumer base. These

individuals no longer have to offer a variety of services and styles that fit the client, such as a

traditional business to business (B2B) relationship, but rather they have become the brand,

offering products under an overarching umbrella, where their client base more closely resembles

a consumer base or a B2C relationship. There is an infinite amount of niche possibilities within

this design influencing space, ranging from thought leadership to logo design or illustration

(Johnson, 2017). Within those niches, income comes from an even larger variety of sources such

as prints, partnerships, speaking engagements, and publications (Sanders, Sastry & McCall,

2019). The validity of this type of career is no longer in question as many designers now have

social media to thank for their primary source of income. It does, however, remain in question exactly how a designer should pursue this type of career without relying on luck and happenstance. This study's purpose is to examine certain patterns that can be replicated and customized to give a designer the best possible chance of becoming a design influencer in a manner that is completely tailored to their skillset and brand.

Purpose of the Study

Many design professionals already have successful influencing careers and are becoming thought leaders in the design community. Design influencing has allowed creatives to market in a B2C manner as opposed to the previous and more common B2B (business to business) manner that occurs with freelance, agency, studio, and other traditional design career avenues. This shift to a B2C structure removes many common pain points that designers experience within the B2B structure such as a lack of creative freedom as well as freedom over their own time. In a B2B structure, the designer's success is dependent upon the client's satisfaction leading to concessions in design choices, timelines, and other variables. In a B2C structure, the designer's success is dependent upon the audience's reaction to a product, or the designer's specific style and/or offering. This research will help designers and illustrators create strategic plans that will allow them to position their work as a product rather than a service or tool to be utilized at the client's discretion.

Audience

Designers and illustrators who are hoping to regain creative freedom over their work and lifestyle by positioning themselves as a personal brand. This will ultimately eliminate the client base in favor of a consumer base, who guides but does not control the designer's decisions as a client often does.

Research Questions

How can designers create a strategy, leverage existing principles of brand and social media strategy, and create favorable circumstances needed to develop a successful, scalable, and tailored career based on their personal brand on social media, particularly Instagram?

Thesis Statement

There are certain patterns rooted in the principles of branding and social media strategies that can be used to inform a more tailored approach which will generate a scalable, customizable career based on a substantially positive response to the designer's personal brand on social media, specifically Instagram

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review will discuss existing practices as they pertain to design influencing as a career path. By addressing personal branding practices as they relate to established brand and social media strategy, this literature review grounds the methodology in existing research. The resulting conclusions will address how designers can leverage these strategies to develop a more tailored career path. This study is necessary as thought and culture leaders in the design space are increasingly connected to this career path. Additionally, this is an increasingly popular avenue as designers such as Benny Gold, Steven Harrington, Timothy Goodman, and countless others have already established successful design careers on the basis of their social media presence (Social Media for Creatives, 2018). This research is intended to help define an approach based on common patterns that can be implemented in various arrangements that are conducive to achieving a certain level of personal brand awareness in a more concrete, replicable manner. By examining existing social media strategy and branding and personal branding principles, this literature review will discuss the existing evident patterns in the design influencing space. The primary goal of this study is to determine additional patterns and establish best practices for the implementation of any patterns that can be correlated to a successful design influencing career. These best practices can inform a custom strategy that allows creatives to forge a career founded on the relationship between their personal brand and social media presence. The optimum outcome of the study is a strategy or set of guidelines that allows

designers to positions themselves and their work as a product, rather than a service or tool, by building a personal brand, aided by the expanse of Instagram, that will ultimately define and drive the type of work they want to do while developing a 'client base' that more closely resembles a consumer base.

Section I: Branding

Chapter 1: History and Origin

Branding in the traditional sense refers to the act of promoting products and services (Branding, 2020). However, the origins of this practice can be traced back to the branding of livestock that began almost 4,000 years ago in the Indus Valley. The term 'branding' itself is derivative of the Old Norse word *brandr* or "to burn," a practice that included branding livestock with a hot iron in the shape of a symbol that represented a farm or family. This was to show possession of a product as well as superiority (Bastos, Wilson & Levy, Sidney, 2012). Today, the same core principle is still in practice and is evident through the logo emphasis exhibited by large brands such as Nike, CocaCola, Apple, etc.

Branding is commonly defined as "the promotion of a particular product or company by means of advertising and distinctive design" (Oxford, 2019). That is exactly what companies and cattlemen have been doing for centuries, branding items to mark ownership and superiority in order to promote the sale and reputation of their products or businesses. The American Marketing Association further defines branding as,"A brand is a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers" (Branding, 2020).

The practice of modern branding arose around the mid 20th century as a result of the standardization of quality goods(Bastos, Wilson & Levy, Sidney, 2012). While quality goods had previously been enough to excel on their own, the industrialization of products forced distributors to shift their focus from the product to the brand. As quality has become less of a differentiator, companies were forced to adopt other methods in order to differentiate from their competitors. In the 1950s, when consumer competition was growing more and more competitive, companies like Procter and Gamble, General Foods, and Unilever began developing and implementing the practice of brand management, or what would evolve into modern marketing. These companies began bringing in brand managers or experts responsible for determining a brand strategy that would differentiate products from others of equal quality. This brand strategy, or proposition, required an in-depth understanding of the target audience in order to offer consumers not only a functional value but also an emotional one. This shift marked the start of modern-day marketing as it pertains to consumerism. For companies, this means a market where product success is directly correlated to branding success, or, how well a company understands its consumers (Arons, 2011).

A brand is a promise to its consumers; A brand is not merely a logo. It is the price of a product, the packaging, the advertising, and most importantly, the tone and voice, or promise, that is communicated to consumers through all of these outlets (Kotler & Keller, 2015). "As Wieden & Kennedy, puts it another way: Brands are verbs. Nike exhorts. IBM solves. Sony dreams" (Arons, 2011). If a consumer believes a brand is in breach of their "contract," the consumer has enough options to easily find another brand of equal quality. That is why today companies must value their marketing department more than ever before because they are one of

the last product differentiators. "Today brands are everything, and all kinds of products and services — from accounting firms to sneaker makers to restaurants — are figuring out how to transcend the narrow boundaries of their categories and become a brand surrounded by a Tommy Hilfiger-like buzz" (Peters, 1997).

Chapter 2: Branding Principles

While brand-strategy is, in relative terms, a moderately new field of research, it is an increasingly important one. Marketing is not an exact science but grounds itself in psychological truth. Therefore, there are many interpretations, constantly evolving brand strategies, and philosophies to consider. For the purpose of this study, research collected will refer to five predetermined principles of branding. These five principles that will be developed further are research and auditing, definition, positioning, awareness, and measurement (Miller, 2017).

Research and Auditing

The research and auditing phase requires that, before building a brand, strategists must first analyze the competition. This means examining other brands' mission and vision statements, value propositions, business and marketing plans, annual reports, marketing materials, social media accounts, websites, and any other existing research possible. The purpose is to gain an idea of what exists as well as what is successful or unsuccessful in relevance to the brand that is being built. This not only provides a historical review of successful and unsuccessful methods but delivers valuable knowledge pertaining to where gaps in consumer needs may lie and how the brand may differentiate from existing brands in the same space. It is

important to note consumer preferences regarding brand details such as tone of voice in order to gain an understanding of brand equity while searching for new opportunities (Miller, 2017).

Defining the Brand

After assessing the existing market and determining where the brand can potentially be positioned, the next step requires definition. The brand definition is the non-visual aspects of the brand. They are the aspects that drive the visuals just as an individual's personality may be reflected in their clothing choices. Before beginning this process, it may be helpful to first define the brand drivers. Brand drivers include but are not limited to functional drivers, emotional drivers, economic drivers, and self-expressive drivers (Berry, 2018). While defining the brand drivers is not a technical principle of building a brand strategy, it is a helpful practice to utilize an invaluable reference that can guide the brand principles. The functional drivers are the basic tool the brand satisfies for the audience. This can be any hole within the market niche that needs to be filled. The emotional drivers are how the brand makes its audience feel, it is what compels consumers to remain loyal. The economic drivers are how the brand saves the audience time or money. It is what tangible value the brand holds for the audience. Self-expressive drivers include how the brand makes the audience feel, how does the brand help the audience contribute to their own identities (Miller, 2017).

With the utilization of the 'brand drivers' exercise, defining the brand should become more efficient. Defining the brand may begin with the establishment of the brand architecture. While this may change as the brand grows, it is important to consider the desired outcome for the brand. The goal for the brand may be to become a house of brands, like Proctor and Gamble, or a

branded house, like Virgin, or a single entity. Whatever the current architecture is, it is important

to keep in mind the desired outcome and to structure the brand accordingly(Miller, 2017).

Defining the architecture initially allows for a clear plan of progression for both the brand's

founders as well as the audience (Berry, 2018).

      After the initial establishment of the architecture, brand definition entails defining the

brand's values, mission, vision, story, and essence. Furthermore, each of these components of the

brand definition phase contains their own strategic nuances. The brand values are typically a

short paragraph stating what the brand stands for. While there are so many pressing issues that

require attention, it can be difficult to choose just one. However, a brand cannot stand for

everything otherwise it runs the risk of standing for nothing. Thus, it is important to discern

which values will resonate with the desired audience. The mission, on the other hand, should be

a short sentence that speaks to the goals of the brand from a business-oriented standpoint. It

should answer the question of what needs the brand aims to satisfy. This also may change as the

brand evolves, but it is always important to update this as it provides clear guidelines for the

brand to refer back to. Unlike the mission statement, the vision statement may be less fluid and

communicate the long-term impact of the brand. The vision statement should communicate an

ideal outcome for the brand's influence. After those three components are established, the brand

story should begin to develop. Perhaps the most emotionally compelling component of the brand

strategy, the brand story is designed to start conversations and create an emotional investment in

the audience. While some brands may have similar mission and vision statements, the story

should be authentic and utterly unique, detailing how and why the brand started and where it

intends to go. After the brand story is established, the final component of the brand definition

phase is defining the brand's essence or singular, large idea, it's purpose. While this may seem repetitive, the brand's essence differs from the aforementioned components in that it must contain enough ambiguity to allow for growth, but also be specific and unique enough to garner an emotional reaction from the audience. The brand essence should serve as the tagline or call to action, it should be a memorable rallying phrase that compels the audience to believe in the necessity of the product (Miller, 2017).

WHO WE ARE

THE COCA-COLA COMPANY

PURPOSE

TO REFRESH THE WORLD.
MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

VISION

LOVED BRANDS, DONE SUSTAINABLY,
FOR A BETTER SHARED FUTURE.

Our vision is to craft the brands and choice
of drinks that people love, to refresh them in
body and spirit. And done in ways that create
a more sustainable business and better shared
future that makes a difference in people's lives,
communities and our planet.

HOW WE DO IT

LOVED BRANDS

- Passion for people and their lives
- Cutting-edge excellence in ingredients,
  innovation, design and marketing
- Investment for leadership across categories
  in purposeful brands that consumers love
- Act globally and locally
- Powerful partnerships with our bottling
  system to bring brands to life in the market

DONE SUSTAINABLY

- Start with facts, based in science
- Grow our business while reducing our sugar
- Make packaging a circular economy, with a
  focus on getting 100% collection to enable
  reuse for World Without Waste
- Be water balanced, improving water security
  where needed most
- Reduce our carbon footprint
- Source more sustainably and ethically

FOR A BETTER SHARED FUTURE

- Invest in employees' personal growth and talent
- Empower people's access to equal
  opportunities, build inclusion
- Create value for customers—big and the
  many small
- Support our local communities, both to achieve
  more and in times of need
- Deliver returns to our investors

BEHAVIORS WE FOCUS ON

WE NURTURE A CULTURE WITH A PASSION TO REFRESH THE WORLD. WE MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

We act with a growth mindset, take an expansive approach to what's possible, and believe in continuous learning to improve our business
and ourselves. We value how we work as much as what we achieve. The behaviors we focus on every day are being:

CURIOUS

- Always seek, never settle
- Ask why or why not, or what if,
  or I wonder...

EMPOWERED

- Own it, take accountability
- Each one of us can make a
  big difference

INCLUSIVE

- Leverage our broad diversity
  of people, global network and
  learnings
- Two brains are better than one
  (most often)

AGILE

- Learn by doing, use version
  1.0, 2.0, 3.0
- Act with a sense of urgency

THE CONSCIENCE WE FOLLOW

DO THE RIGHT THING

- Our values shape the conscience we follow
- Use our global scale for leadership and for good, for progress
- And when we make mistakes, own them, put them right, learn from them, and grow

© 2019 The Coca-Cola Company

Figure 1.Purpose & Company Vision: The Coca-Cola Company. (2019). Retrieved from

https://www.coca-colacompany.com/company/purpose-and-vision

Positioning

This third principle step, known as positioning, is what comes to mind for most when the

term branding is mentioned. This step includes the logo, tagline, color palette, voice and tone,

and key messaging. The positioning phase contains the major components that are typical in a brand standards manual but should take into account all of the previous research and definitions. The first two components can be thought of as the foundation; However, the positioning is the structure or what is presented externally. Neither is significant without the other. The positioning is the more visceral portion of the brand strategy and allows the audience to make visual correlations that signal to them what to expect when they engage with the product (Wheeler, 2018).

The name and tagline are perhaps the most important portion of a brand. A name can make or break a brand. There are individuals who specialize in naming and taglines. In fact, there are many theories and strategies revolving around this one component. However, if a name strategist is not employed and is simply out of budget, some general factors to keep in mind are length, pronunciation, and authenticity. A good name and tagline should be intriguing but not too complicated, otherwise, the audience will have a difficult time remembering it. It should also be reflective of the brand's values. The most important thing to consider, however, is the audience. A brand cannot appeal to everyone and, while many brands try to, that is ultimately their downfall. A name and tagline can be criticized from every angle, where the most important aspect is its perceived resonance within the desired niche. It's important to remember that, without a solid name, the brand rest of the positioning process is subject to fragility (Beasley, 2019).

The logo is also a crucial component, but cannot be developed without the name and the rest of the branding principles to back it up. A logo founded on an unsound brand strategy will only convey a message of instability and unreliability (Wheeler, 2018). A well-designed logo

should be reflective of all of the aforementioned elements of the brand strategy. Just as with naming strategies, brands often employ logo specialists to oversee this portion of the strategy. There are branding and logo design experts that, in an ideal scenario, would be employed. The brand strategy is a highly nuanced plan that is most effective when all components have been thoroughly explored (Wheeler, 2018).

After the logo is established and fully vetted, the rest of the brand standards, the color palette, typography, as well as tone and voice must be discerned. Color palette and typography have the most emotional visceral impact on the audience. Color and typography can change the entire perception of a brand. For instance, a rounded sans serif may not convey the type of elegance a high-contrast serif, such as Didot, might for brands like Vogue and Gucci. Similarly, while a logo should work in a single color format, the colors a brand utilizes do impact a perception as well. For instance, if McDonald's was completely remodeled in muted colors, it would have a completely different feel (Wheeler, 2018).

Figure 2.1. Everything You Need to Know About Picking Brand Fonts. Nediger, M. (2020, June 14). Retrieved August 30, 2020, from https://venngage.com/blog/brand-fonts/

Black Serif
Timeless
Classic
Ellegant

VOGUE

**Bright
Sans Serif**
Open
Friendly
Accessible

Spotify®

Figure 2.2. Everything You Need to Know About Picking Brand Fonts. Nediger, M. (2020, June

14). Retrieved August 30, 2020, from https://venngage.com/blog/brand-fonts/

Red
Bold, courageous, energetic. passionate, active, Creates Sense of urgency. Stimulates pituitary gland. Increases heart rate.

Orange
Joy, friendly, confident, warmth, extrovert, Determination. Impuslive.

Yellow
Intellect, positivity, optimism, joy, energetic.

Black
Power, prestige, timelessness, formality, elegance, value.

Green
Balance, harmony, health, growth, fertility, ambition

Blue
Stability, trustworthy, wisdom, confidence, secure, knowledge, loyalty.

Purple
Creative, royalty, calm, luxury, nostalgia, wealth, ambition.

White
Purity, simplicity, goodness, spacious, sophistication, freshness.

Figure 3. Examples of color psychology in use: The Path Forward (2006) Retrieved from

https://thepathforward.io/how-pick-colour-palette-your-branding/

After the aesthetics have been solidified, the voice, tone, and key messaging are next in the brand strategy progression. Together, the voice and tone define how a brand communicates with its audience. The voice expresses the brand's personality and perspective, while the tone determines how that is said or with what inflection. Tone adds character to what is being said. If

possible, it is most effective to narrow these down to 3 to5 descriptors that serve as guidelines for what the brand sounds like. For instance, Nike's tone and voice are urgent, motivational, and encouraging (Miller, 2017).

With the tone and voice established, the final component of the positioning phase should establish the brand's key messaging. The key messaging should determine what the brand says and to whom, while employing tone and voice to determine how the brand properly speaks. This requires defining each subset of the brand's audience and creating personas for those to serve as a representation and sounding board for messaging. Each personal and coordinating message should contain 3 to5 supporting points to validate the messaging choices. This will likely require the collection of data to determine what messaging will resonate with the audience. Some key questions to ask might be what they care about, including what their pain points are, what their favorite features are, and what matters most to them. Key messaging is not to be confused with taglines, but oftentimes can be the same or similar (Pfautz, 2019).

Table 1.

Examples of key messages from household brands

Nike	**Salesforce**	**Subway**	**Adidas**	**Walmart**	**Levis**
Just do it.	No Software.	Eat Fresh.	Impossible is nothing.	Save money. Live better.	Quality never goes out of style.

Note. Data for key messages from household brands: SalesForce Pardot (2015) Retrieved from

https://www.pardot.com/blog/how-to-create-brand-messaging-that-really-resonates/.

Awareness

In some form or another, the fourth principle of a solid brand strategy typically revolves around brand awareness. Additional Efforts would be a wash if the proper audience isn't being targeted or hasn't developed a perception of the brand. At this stage of the process, previously established branding strategy components should be combined into a comprehensive document to serve as guidelines for any future brand manager or conduit. The brand is ready to exist in the world and all implementations of said brand must adhere to these guidelines for the sake of consistency. This brand consistency is what raises awareness as the audience is exposed to the brand over time. These guidelines are often referred to as brand guides, brand manuals, or more formally, brand standards. These guidelines should be available for any partner or third-party to utilize in order to ensure brand continuity in instances when the brand manager or marketing team cannot have total oversight. The brand standards ensure consistency, both internally and externally, as well as reinforce the brand's values as they are being presented to consumers. After the development of this document and any relating collateral has started, as it pertains to brand strategy, the brand should be ready for its public-facing debut. In order to execute a successful brand launch and generate brand awareness, a campaign may need to be developed and implemented. Brand launches are typically highly strategic plans that consist of several branded collateral pieces that may include but are not limited to: business cards, social media graphics, branded stationery, ads, and promotional videos. The content the brand pushes to potential consumers will be the reinforcement factor that forges a brand or consumer relationship before

any point of sale has even been breached (Wheeler, 2018) (Pfautz, 2019).
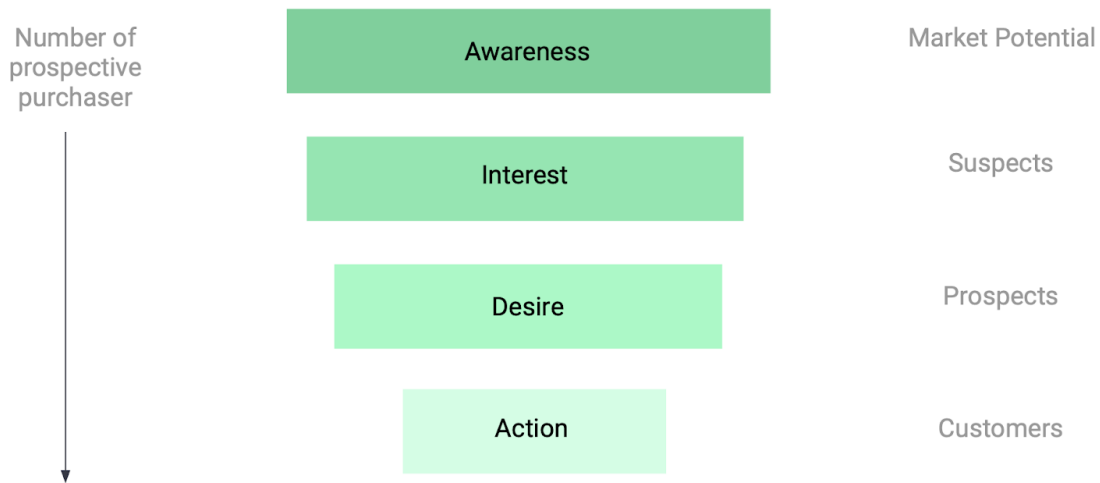
Figure 4. Purchase Funnel: Berry, Matt (2018) Retrieved from

https://www.hallaminternet.com/brand-awareness-strategies-for-small-businesses/

Measurement

      The final component of brand strategy is measurement, which is considered the most

fluid. . Building a sound brand strategy includes large amounts of time, research, and resources.

However, the brand strategy doesn't end with the development and implementation of brand

standards (Wheeler, 2018). A brand needs to be measured and monitored on a continual basis.

Brand measurement must always be an ongoing process as they fight for specifically targeted

audiences and must uphold their end of the brand or consumer relationships. The only way to

continuously ensure the brand is upholding its end of the agreement is through measurement.

If the brand is underperforming, then it is suggested that the audience's values have shifted and elements of the brand will need to be reworked. Measuring a brand's success rate includes maintaining a connection with any brand's employees as well as the audience. Good questions to ask internally include whether or not the brand's internal agents understand the brand's audience, vision, mission, and specific drivers. External questions to ask include whether or not the audience recognizes the brand logo, understands the brand's values, and if brand loyalty is presented. This may include the implementation of surveys, social ads, email marketing, and forms of direct contact. A large level of evaluation can be garnered from a brand's social media account since this is where the brand's audience can engage the most candidly, with the fewest barriers. Social media, especially Instagram and Facebook, provide easily collectible audience-related data that can be accessed with a business account. Many brands also monitor online conversations and use social listening tools. If the brand is selling a specific product, the success rate will be related to profit margins. Email marketing tools and website monitoring data can be used to measure reach, bounce rate, and other key events on the user's journey with the brand's online presence (Pfautz, 2019).

When done correctly, a solid brand strategy that is sound in every facet, especially measurement, not only serves as a market differentiator but be the main difference between a failed and successful product. For example, Victoria's Secret is a company with very good brand recognition. They successfully positioned themselves as the sexy, female empowerment lingerie company of the 1970s. Up until the 2010s, Victoria's Secret remained the reigning company for everything feminine and sexy. From, undergarments to lingerie, loungewear, and swimwear, the company exuded sex appeal from the very beginning. However, as the 2010s began a new

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decade of female empowerment, body positivity, and diversity and inclusion, the brand struggled

to adapt. After pressure from their audience to diversify their products and models, Victoria's

Secret's parent company, L Brands, released a statement that implied the brand had little interest

in adapting, adding that Victoria's Secret was meant to be a "fantasy" (Gassam, 2018). This

failure to properly assess brand measurement and reconnect with their audience has since caused

the closing of over 1,143 worldwide and the cease of its annual fashion show boasting some of

the world's highest-paid supermodels (Gassam, 2018).

Chapter 3: Tools

A brand strategy is highly nuanced, varies between brands, and is constantly evolving.

While following these common principles provides a very solid foundation, there is not a certain

formula for creating a successful brand. As stated in the previous sections, branding practices are

not an exact science but tangentially based on psychological sciences. They are calculated and

rooted in marketing research and practices that are based on consumer psychology. Since it's

earliest modern implementations, much research and literature regarding branding have since

been established. Therefore, many strategies and tools exist to assist in the branding process and

the development of the aforementioned principles. For example, the brand drivers exercise,

referenced in Chapter 2 of this section, does not fall into one of the main branding strategy

principle components, but the utilization of the tool can begin to guide, reinforce, and streamline

the process. It is a way to ensure the consistency and correct development of the brand values.

Additional tools exist to aid in the branding process as well and the list is ever-growing.

However, there are three main tools that will be covered and discussed further in this research

chosen for their common use and flexibility within the branding process. These tools are established in the field of branding and are relatively easy to comprehend and implement.

The most widely-used and versatile tool is the SWOT analysis. The SWOT analysis is a staple tool many branding experts use to determine a brand's strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O), and threats (T). This tool is most often utilized in the beginning phases of brand strategy development. Similar to the brand drivers exercise, this tool helps determine where the brand stands within the perceived market and what changes or precautions may be necessary or beneficial to the brand's future market trajectory (Teoli D, 2019).

Another brand-definition tool or exercise are the use of archetypes. The archetypes exercise can and should only be applied after the brand has been clearly defined. Used by branding experts to confirm or uncover issues with the brand definition, archetypes assign a personality to the brand that is being defined. This not only aids in the creation of visual assets but can also either reinforce the items divulged in the brand definition process or uncover ambiguities or inconsistencies within the brand. The archetypes are derivative of Carl Jung's 1954 character archetypes as well as Jennifer Aaker's 1997 brand (Bechter, et al., 2016). personality framework that separates brand personality into five facets: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness, based on their primary promise. These two individuals have guided the research of Clemens Bechter, Giorgio Farinelli, Rolf-Dieter Daniel, and Michael Frey, among others, who have converted these principles into 12 common archetypes.

The twelve generalized personality types that help personify the brand before it is refined into a unique entity. The specificities of the 12 types tend to vary based on source, however a

general consensus, in essence, is shared. For the purpose of this research, the twelve types will be referred to as the Innocent, the Sage, the Explorer, the Outlaw, the Magician, the Hero, the Lover, the Jester, the Everyman, or Regular Guy, the Caregiver, the Ruler, and the Creator. These types can be categorized into four sectors based on core purpose or promise, but they can also be further refined into specific subtypes or 'characters'. In terms of brand definition, granularity is best. The more defined a brand personality is, the better it can serve the brand and the brand decision-makers (Bechter, et al. 2016).

The third and most complex tool that will be referenced throughout the research is commonly referred to as the Corporate Brand Identity Matrix. While many different interpretations of this matrix exist, the one utilized for the purpose of this research and the most applicable to traditional brand strategy practices is designed to help ensure a brand's identity, tone, voice, mission, and vision are aligned. Similar to the archetype exercise, this matrix is most effective after the original cultivation of the brand definition is implemented.

These branding exercises are relatively established practices to ensure the branding process is as effective as possible. They are designed to supplement and aid in the creation of a thorough and vetted brand strategy. Each exercise has been chosen for this research for its specific flexibility in terms of how and to what it can be applied. The exercises and tools chosen are established practices based on research and consensus in the branding and design community. However, they can be easily understood, manipulated, and adapted to serve a brand in its most effective, personalized form as each brand is unique and presents a unique set of circumstances (Urde, 2013). Further ideas regarding these tools and their applications will be outlined more thoroughly in Chapter 6 of Section II.

Conclusion

A brand is a relationship that is established with an audience. If the brand is not meeting the audience's expectations on a continued basis, then the trust that the brand or consumer relationship is built upon may be broken; A broken brand relationship will become detrimental to the brand's identity overall.. If the relationship with the brand isn't fulfilling the audience's perceived expectations of the brand, or if the audience feels unheard by the brand, today's consumer industry is such that the audience likely has more than enough means to fulfill their needs elsewhere with a brand that will value and honor the consumer or brand relationship. Put in relational terms, it is easy to see how the brand or consumer relationship can resemble intrapersonal relationships. A brand must be attentive to its audience at all times, where a brand strategy is not meant to be developed and left alone; In turn, it must constantly evolve with the audience or risk irrelevance. "Broadly, a product is anything that can be offered to a market to satisfy a want or need, including physical goods, services, experiences, events, persons, places, properties, organizations, information, and ideas" (Kotler & Keller, 2015). When an individual thinks of a brand strategy they usually associate it with corporate brands or companies that sell products to a large audience or consumer base. However, the remainder of this research will focus on how and why these corporate brand strategy principles and tools can and should apply to an entirely different type of brand, a personal brand.

Section II: Personal Branding

Chapter 1: History and Origin

Just as the 1950s saw the standardization of quality products, the start of the 21st century, along with the rise of social media, has contributed to an influx of talent that has resulted in a similar phenomenon. While in the 20th century, extremely talented individuals were a relatively rare commodity, the globalization of the 21st century, aided by the rise of social media has seen an increase in the talent pool (Cater, 2016). Celebrities are no longer confined to cinematic screens; This has been proven through the popularity of competition reality shows such as "American Idol," "Iron Chef America," "American Ninja Warrior," and countless others that have given rise to a surplus of talented individuals in a never-ending variety of fields. Social media, particularly Instagram, has also contributed to this surplus of talent with the development of a completely different form of celebrity. While actors, models, and sports stars, as expected, still have a huge social media following, the platform has also given rise to its own kind of celebrity, including Influencers. General consensus deems that an influencer is an individual or group that has developed credibility in a certain industry. These individuals provide their audience with expertise in a certain area and gain traction with users via their talent and authenticity. In many circumstances, these individuals make their capital by partnering with companies to promote their products (Sanders, Sastry & McCall, 2019). The accessibility of talent and quality goods has burgeoned in the 21st century and created a key factor in this now-necessary partnership between both brands and individuals. In this age of accessible talent, technology, goods, and services, both for the individual and the company, have become so

dispensable to consumers that they both must subject themselves to the same practice to differentiate, branding (Carter, 2018).

The practice of personal branding can not only be very beneficial to creatives specifically but also may serve to satisfy some of the more common pain points creative professionals feel as they enter an industry where the product of their creativity has been at the mercy of the opinions of others. Gal Shir, a successful content creator, and illustrator said, "Being creative always comes with a feeling of dissatisfaction….part of this endless criticism is our constant search for our "own" style" (Shir, 2019). Despite this innate feeling many creatives experience, personal branding has historically been an underutilized practice. The central idea of personal branding is as old as humanity and can be traced back to the simplest forms of highlighting one's strengths and attributes. However, it was not formally introduced to society until Napoleon Hill's *Think and Grow Rich* published in 1937. In chapter 6 of his book, Napoleon wrote, "It should be encouraging to know that practically all the great fortunes began in the form of compensation for personal services, or from the sale of Ideas" (Hill, 1960). Later, in 1981 authors of *The Battle for Your Mind* Al Ries, Jack Trout, wrote, "You can benefit by using positioning strategy to advance your own career. Key principle: Don't try to do everything yourself. Find a horse to ride" (Ries, Trout, 2010)." This same key principle remains true today for corporate and individual brands alike.

Though "branding" has existed since the burning of marks onto cattle 4,000 years ago, it wasn't until the 1950s that companies realized much more than an empty mark was needed if they truly wanted to differentiate themselves from the surplus of other brands entering the market, they needed a brand strategy. The same can be said for the early writings on the topic of

personal branding (Zarkada, 2012). Though authors like Hill, Ries, and Trout touched on the

topic in essence, it wasn't until the late 1990s that personal branding began to receive attention

once again. In 1997, a *Fast Company* article, written by American business management expert

and CEO of Me Inc., Tom Peters, was released titled "A Brand Called You." The article begins

with an impactful statement from Peters "It's time for me — and you — to take a lesson from the

big brands, a lesson that's true for anyone who's interested in what it takes to stand out and

prosper in the new world of work." In the article, Peters argues that employees can no longer

differentiate themselves simply by the suits they wear and the laptops they carry. He preaches the

importance of determining what exactly " a brand called you" can provide that is of unique

value:

> What is it that my product or service does that makes it different? Give yourself the
>
> traditional 15-words-or-less contest challenge. Take the time to write down your answer.
>
> And then take the time to read it. Several times...If your answer wouldn't light up the
>
> eyes of a prospective client or command a vote of confidence from a satisfied past client,
>
> or — worst of all — if it doesn't grab you, then you've got a big problem (Peters, 1997).

He advocates for the use of traditional branding practices like mission and vision statements, but

mostly the article is an enthusiastic excerpt about personal improvement and discovery:

> As of this moment, you're going to think of yourself differently!... You don't 'belong to'
>
> any company for life, and your chief affiliation isn't to any particular 'function.' You're
>
> not defined by your job title and you're not confined by your job description. Starting
>
> today, you are a brand (Peters, 1997).

While full of big ideas, the article doesn't reflect the same strategic approach to personal branding that has gained more traction today (Peters, 1997).

Though Peters's article did not detail personal branding as the practice exists today, the foundational ideas remain relatively unchanged. At its time of debut, while some readers praised the author with their own testimonials of personal branding success, the article was originally met with a substantial amount of controversy and negative criticisms. At the time, the majority of *Fast Company* readers believed Peters was preaching fundamentally narcissistic practices. One anonymous critic of the article wrote, "The first time I see an office wall adorned with a glossy headshot and a personal 'mission statement,' I will lose my enthusiasm for your magazine" (Lidsky, 2005). Others kept more moderate opinions, endorsing the practice in theory but questioning the feasibility and tact of relentless self-promotion (Lidsky, 2005).

Even years later, Peters's article was met with controversy. Another *Fast Company* article, released 8 years later, in 2005, for the *10 Years In Review* series brought the article back to the spotlight. The consensus of the early 2000s remained much the same, if not worse, than before:

> But for everyone else, Me Inc.'s brand hasn't aged well. It's the Bromo Seltzer of personal-development concepts. 'The personal-branding revolution didn't happen,' laments personal-branding consultant and author Peter Montoya. 'Branding is too abstract, and it's not part of people's everyday thinking' (Lidsky, 2005).

However, while Peters's theories arguably lacked the research and substance necessary to carry out a valid argument for the legitimacy of personal branding, some of his values would eventually resonate, however not until years after the first publication of the article with the rise

of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. The development of social media in the 2010s spurred the normalization of personal branding in practice. Its rapid rise to popularity, even without conscious acknowledgment by those utilizing it, has made personal branding practices impossible to ignore and increasingly essential to define (Johnson, 2017).

Chapter 2: Personal Branding and Social media

Despite the controversy that ensued from Peters's article today, the same concepts Peters advocated for are now known everywhere, thanks to the development of social media. The growth of the internet and the subsequent development of these communication platforms have been instrumental in the rise of personal branding (Zarkada, 2012). Today, not only do many individual offices undoubtedly house personal headshots and mission statements in some form or another, but individuals have been given a platform on which to do just that and more. With social media, individuals can share their values, visuals, and expertise with a much larger audience than even Peters likely could have imagined. With the help of social media, personal branding has been met by a much more receptive audience than it was 20 years ago (Edosomwan, et al. 2011).

Beginning in the 1970s, early forms of social media began to emerge. During this time, the University of Illinois developed an operating system, PLATO, that offered some early forms of social media including Talkomatic, which is a program many consider to be the first chat room. While Talkomatic never reached the popularity levels associated with today's household platforms, it set the stage for the development seen in the latter part of the century.

After PLATO was established in the 1980s and 1990s, operating systems like Microsoft Windows and Mac OS came forth with graphic interfaces that created an environment for social media to thrive. However, it was not until the early 2000s that the first social media platforms as we know them today came to fruition with programs like Myspace and Facebook. Blogging also began to gain popularity, as did instant messaging programs like AOL Instant Messenger and Windows Live Messenger. In the 2010s the programs that survived the early 2000s began to thrive. The introduction of new platforms began to revolutionize the scene. Programs like Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and instant messaging services gained more popularity with technological developments like smartphones and mobile applications (APPS). Today, there is a social media platform for every facet of life, most of which have their own APPS to go along with them. Connecting with social communities on a global scale is constantly accessible and at the tip of every user's fingers (Edosomwan, et al. 2011).

Just as the accessibility of quality products created the demand for strategic corporate, social media has done the same for individuals. Professional talent pools are now much larger than an individual's geographical location. Employers and peers alike now have access to markets and opportunities on a global scale. For example, potential employees in Dubai can apply for jobs in New York City. Long-distance friendships, relationships, and professional connections are possible through advanced methods of communication that have developed alongside internet accessibility (Sanders, et al. 2019). The primary source for these advanced methods of communication has been social media platforms (Edosomwan, et al. 2011).

Prior to the development of social media and the internet, competition was generally limited to geographical regions, both professionally and personally. With the introduction and

growing popularity of social media platforms from the 2010s to the present day, competition in every facet has reached global scales. Individuals are now met with the same circumstances as many of the major corporations of the 50s and have begun to rely on branding as well in order to provide not only their peers and potential employers, but also themselves and with a more prominent and memorable identity (Sanders, et al. 2019).

MySpace was one of the first programs known to have given users control over what would be considered branding functionality. When it emerged in 2003, the first of its caliber, the network provided users with, not only a community of peers but also with forms of self-expression outside of the standard username (Edosomwan, et al. 2011). On Myspace, users could personalize their name, profile, background image, top friends, music, and more to fully individualize their space. The variety and an array of customization options allowed users to control the identity they wanted to project to their audience, in essence, they gave people control over their brand (Sanders, et al. 2019).

Figure 5; Kim Kardashian Myspace Profile: Business Insider (2015) Retrieved from

https://www.businessinsider.com/kim-kardashians-old-myspace-2015-6 Copyright 2019.

While MySpace was the most widely-used social media platform from 2005 to 2008, It

quickly saw its downfall when another platform began climbing the popularity ranks amongst

users. Founded in 2004, Facebook rapidly became and now continues to hold the title of world's

most popular social media network. In 2009, it surpassed MySpace as the world's favorite social

media platform. Facebook's interactive timeline posting structure allows users to like, endorse,

and share posts (Sanders, et al. 2019). These actions, amongst others available on Facebook,

have created and fed a need for external approval that users have not been able to shake as this

online form of affirmation has grown in popularity. The reward system that this interaction

created has formed an addiction-like impulse that continues to draw in users. Facebook remains one of the most popular platforms by reaching and surpassing 1 billion active users since 2012 (Edosomwan, et al. 2011). However, other corporate brands have not ceased to gain a foothold in the social media space. Internet users now have an average of seven total social media accounts, up from three in 2012. Platforms such as Snapchat, LinkedIn, Pinterest, TikTok, and Instagram have gained a solid grip on their target audiences and respective niches. However, none have propelled the personal branding phenomenon to the degree that Instagram has (Gary, 2019).

Chapter 3: Instagram

Instagram is a primarily mobile-based image and video sharing platform that allows users to edit and share content rapidly and in many different fashions. The network first emerged in 2010 at the peak of social media's popularity ascension. By December of 2010, Instagram had already garnered over 1 million users. The platform quickly gained enough popularity to rival the reigning social media lead, Facebook, so much so that Facebook chose to acquire it in 2012 for $1 billion. The billion-dollar platform has not slowed. Today, it remains one of the most widely-used social media platforms, reaching over 1 billion active users in 2018. While social media had already begun to establish itself as an industry by the time Instagram was released, Instagram's unique interface allows users to view content in an even more easily digestible and fast-paced manner; This established the platform as a social media staple. With minimal effort, users can upload photos and videos with the addition of filters or effects. Users still can like, comment on, and share posts, which recreates a positive reinforcement factor present with Facebook. However, Instagram was made to share images predominantly and relies on the fact

that users desire quick, dynamic content, comprehensible in 8 seconds or less. Instagram was also the first aesthetic-based application of its kind. Instagram provides users with a comprehensive photographic view of their projected aesthetic in chronological order, known as their grid (Edosomwan, et al. 2011). Instagram was also at the forefront of the mobile-first platforms, designed to be used primarily on mobile devices. Additionally, Instagram was originally free, as many social media platforms first are, of the marketing nuances social media users were already growing tired of. These factors are what formed a quick, visual, mobile, simple, and enjoyable into a power-house social media platform that quickly grew to breed its own kind of celebrity along with an entirely new industry (Sanders, et al. 2019).

Half of all Instagram users fall between the ages of 18 and 29. The app is currently one of the top two social platforms used by U.S. teens, beating out Facebook and Twitter; However, Snapchat continues to trail behind. Globally, 41% of Instagram users are aged 24 or younger, or those categorized as Generation-z. Generation Z, also known as centennials, are individuals born approximately between 1996 and 2010, varying slightly depending on the source. What defines this generation of individuals is their internet affluence. Generation Z is the first generation to live a life parallel to the internet since they have not known a time without it. What's more interesting is Generation Z stands to hold the largest amount of buying power of any generation to date, amounting to $143 billion in the U.S. alone. According to research done by Forbes, 75% of Generation Z spends more than half of the money available to them each month. In 2020, Generation Z members will make up 40% of all consumers (Villanti, et al. 2017)(Fromm, 2018). Due to the app's high amounts of marketing potential, visual nature, and engagement rate, corporations and brands soon began to flood the platform. As of 2018, brands began posting an

average of .7 posts a day. Today, the platform has evolved to include an insurmountable amount

of marketing features including page promotions, integrated pricing, and shopping, swipe up

links, profile statistics, audience insight, actions, and more. One of the most important marketing

outlets companies have acquired from this platform, however, is the use of Instagram influencers

to promote their products (Gary, 2019).

Which social media platforms Gen Z checks on a daily basis

Platform	Percentage
Instagram	65%
YouTube	62%
Snap	51%
Facebook	34%
Twitter	23%
Facebook Messenger	22%
Pinterest	14%
TikTok	11%
Discord	10%
Tumblr	8%
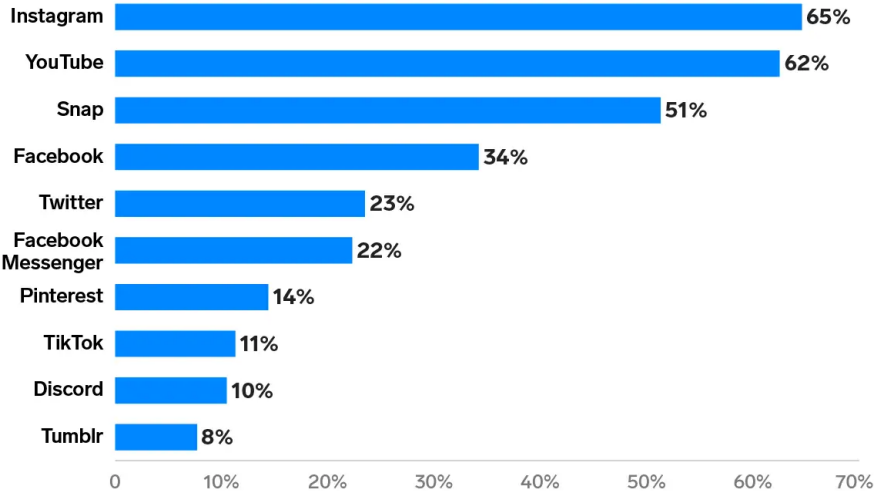
Source: Business Insider survey

BUSINESS INSIDER

Figure 6. Which social media platforms Gen Z checks on a daily basis. Business Insider (2015)

Retrieved from

https://www.businessinsider.com/gen-z-loves-snapchat-instagram-and-youtube-social-media-201

9-6 Copyright 2019.

Chapter 4: Influencers

Despite the early success of traditional marketing efforts, corporate brands and the

marketing industry began to experience distrust from consumers stemming from overexposure.

Due to years of exposure to branding and marketing tactics, consumers began to become

resistant to the strategies and tactics of corporate brands and advertising agencies deployed on

them throughout the latter part of the 20th century. A study commissioned by the American

Association of Advertising Agencies in 2019 found that just 4% of consumers believe advertisers

and marketers practice integrity (Steiner, 2019). The growing distrust amongst consumers,

combined with the rising popularity of social media, created perfect conditions for a brand new

marketing platform where users could rely on word of mouth from influencers people felt a

connection to. This new form of marketing serves as a heightened form of social proofing. To

clarify, people trust people more than they trust brands. Rather than relying solely on what

advertisements they've consumed, users force brands to begin building social equity through

social media, measured through user reactions such as likes, shares, and other engagement

methods, which they can garner through partnerships with influencers (Gary, 2019).

As social media platforms grew to the heightened state in which they are currently in,

they began to develop their own set of rules and conventions. Users, reluctant to the intrusive

nature of traditional advertising methods, were determined to create their own communities

based on connection and trust. Previously, these communities consisted of families, friends, and

occasionally idolized public figures. However, as the number of users grew, so did their social

affluence within the space. These users went on to become what is referred to commonly as

content creators, or influencers. These individuals aren't corporations or celebrities in the

traditional sense, but simply individuals who are particularly extraordinary at providing some

value to their audience, in the form of humor, talent, expertise, or vulnerability, (Sanders, et al.

2019). Influencers are not just sharing their personal achievements with acquaintances, but they

create unique, compelling content for specific platforms to share their content on. The engaging

content that is presented on these platforms is what subsequently draws them a substantial and

loyal following. In a sense, they become the product or brand (Sanders, et al. 2019). What's

more, the values these individuals provide to their audiences, humor, expertise, vulnerability,

etc., are derivative of the same values Don Norman preaches in his book, *Emotional Design*, in

which he describes the factors that compel consumers to purchase. According to Norman,

successful products need to appeal to an individual on behavioral, visceral, and/or reflective

levels. That is they need to be aesthetically pleasing, useful, and/or emotionally compelling. The

same theory applies to influencers (Norman, 2007).

Social media influencers exist on nearly every platform, including Facebook, Youtube,

Instagram, and Snapchat; However, none have propelled the influencer phenomenon as far as

Instagram. This fact quickly caught the attention of large brands and corporations including the

likes of Nike, IBM, and others. Today, the once ancillary market has grown into a $5 to 10

billion dollar industry (Gary, 2019). Author and influencer expert, Brittany Hennessy, defines an

influencer as "a person with the ability to influence potential buyers of a product or service by promoting or recommending the items on social media" (Hennessy, 2018).

Up until 2019 the term 'influencer' as a marketing term remained defined only by consensus (Hennessy, 2018). The original definition of influencer defined by Webster's dictionary prior to social media was simply, "one who exerts influence: a person who inspires or guides the actions of others." However, by 2019, google inquiries containing the word influencer had risen an exorbitant amount and Webster added the definition for influencer as it is most commonly utilized today, "often, specifically: a person who is able to generate interest in something (such as a consumer product) by posting about it on social media" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).
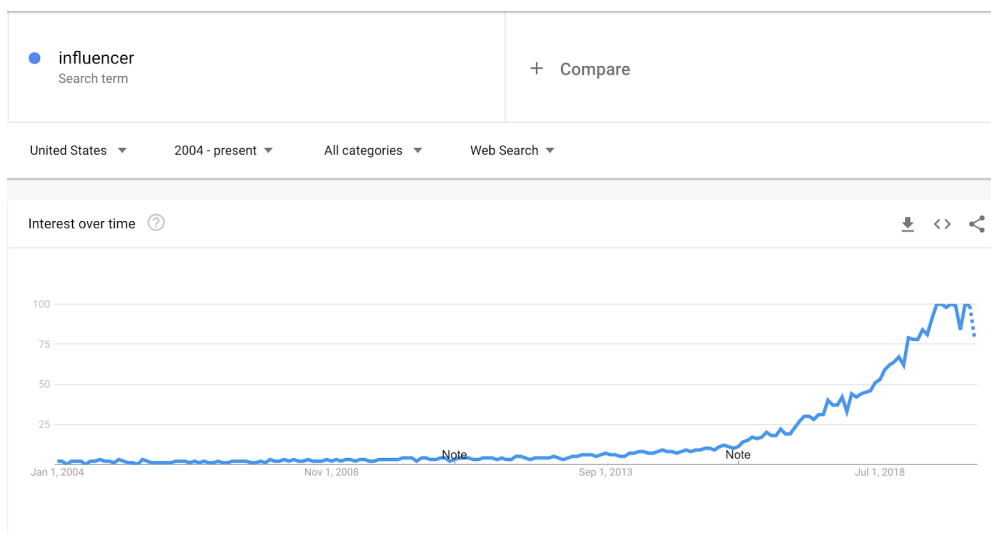
Figure 7. Influencer search popularity over time. Google Trends (2020) Retrieved from https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=all&geo=US&q=influencer Copyright 2019.

Prior to the rise of the influencing industry, celebrities were frequently utilized to sell products, which resulted in sponsorships, campaigns, and additional sources of income for the already wealthy subset of individuals. The marketing theory behind utilizing celebrities is the same theory behind the influencing industry. Consumers want to feel a personal connection to the products they buy. Additionally, consumers also want to feel a connection or commonality between themselves and those they idolize. For example, the Wheaties' 'Breakfast of Champions' campaign is known for promoting themselves as the fuel behind many famed Olympians. Therefore, by eating Wheaties, the consumer is one step closer to having the athletic superiority of these world-class athletes (Beer, 2020). However, as generations become increasingly averse to traditional marketing tactics, Generation Z being the most averse to-date, brands have had to shift tactics. The influencing industry allows the consumer to feel as though products are being promoted to them by people they admire and by people they have formed some sort of connection with. No tactic is more trusted by consumers than word-of-mouth marketing. Influencing has not replaced but has supplemented those tactics (Carter, 2016). If an influencer has a large enough following within their niche, companies will send these social media users products and compensate the user for posting, sharing, and reviewing the product. Not only does the influencer receive payment in the form of goods, but many also receive $300-$800 per sponsored post on the low end (Hennessy, 2018). Experts estimate that influencers can expect to make $1,000 per 100,000 followers per post. However, the amount of goods, travel, collaboration, and other exposure-related opportunities that are often presented as a result of these individuals' social media standing allow a majority of them to influence and create content on a full-time basis (Hennessy, 2018).

While the assumed driving factor in influencer success includes particular affinity in a certain niche such as beauty, fitness, cooking, painting, and design. What rivals talent, in the influencing industry, is actually relatability. While particularly extraordinary individuals may more easily find success in the influencing market, as the platform was built to serve aesthetic purposes, the driving factor behind most influencers' success, especially those seeking a more sustainable path, is their ability to provide their followers with valuable content that checks the behavioral, visceral, and reflective boxes. Much like a corporate brand, they have forged a contract with their audiences by allowing them insight into their life, values, process, personality, and skill sets (Carter, 2016).

Influencers are part of a stigma, where the stereotype that has developed alongside the industry includes non-working, wealthy, and or extremely physically attractive individuals. However, this research focuses on talent influencers, specifically in the field of graphic design and related subjects. Talent influencers specialize in a particular skill set or industry. These individuals collect followers by producing content that is noteworthy in their respective fields to some degree. Design influencers are noteworthy in the field of design, where they are part of the larger umbrella that would be termed 'creative influencers.' However, talent influencers are able to exist in any industry. Just as Donald Norman detailed in his book, *Emotional Design,* products entice a user viscerally, behaviorally, or reflectively. That is they incite an initial aesthetical excitement, they satisfy a need, or they cause a profound emotion. Usually, they are reflective of some quality the audience wishes to possess (Norman, 2007). Influencers, or content creators, are subject to the same laws of attraction. Content produced by these individuals shows an

extreme display of talent, incites a visceral reaction, shares information or resources, inspires, shocks, or shows relatability through advice, humor, and/or candor (Hennessy, 2018).

For instance, an exploration of two established design influencers, such as Mark Conlan and Adam J. Kurtz, show profound differences in perceived consumer value. Conlan is a renowned illustrator whose "unexpected discoveries" collaboration in 2016 saw his quick rise to fame on social media. He is known for his whimsical characters and use of foliage by creating an atmospheric sense of wonder. Conlan's Instagram consists of thousands of posts varying in completed works, works in progress, and process videos. While he does few paid promotions, his influencer status has resulted in partnerships and collaborations with large companies such as Airbnb, Adobe, IDEO, and more. It has also allowed him to turn his illustrations into a successful print and product online shop (Conlan, n.d.).
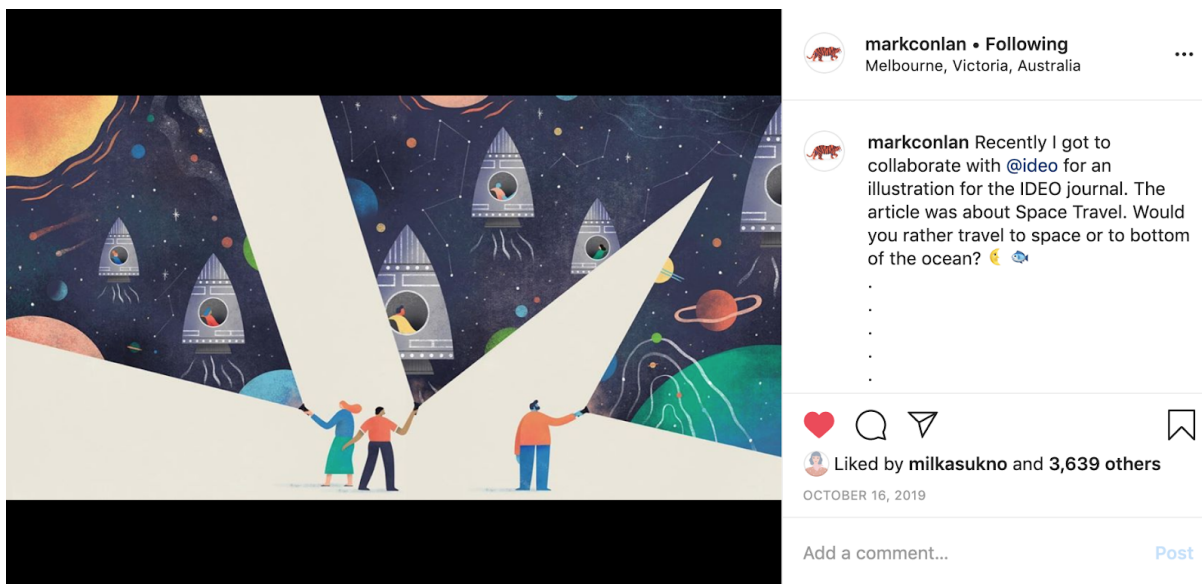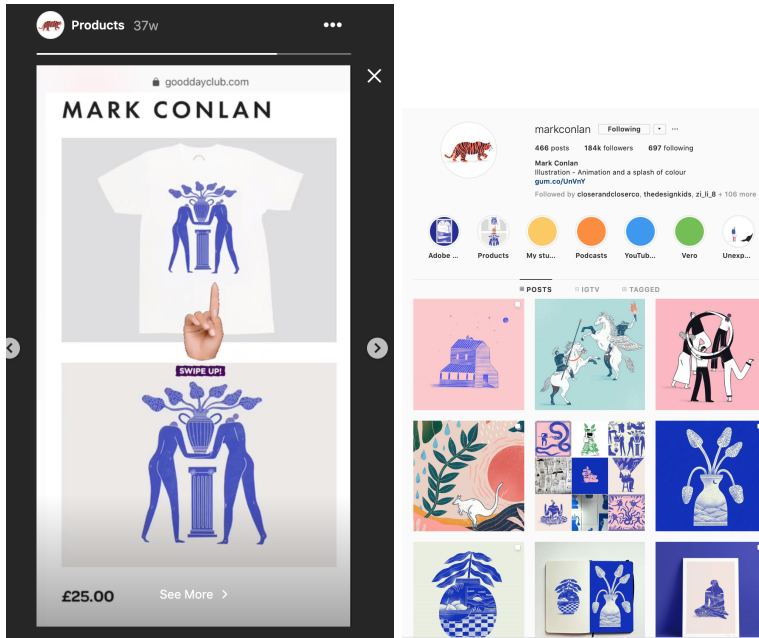
Figures 8.1-8.3. Conlan ,Mark. [@markconlan]. (n.d.). Posts [Instagram Profile]. Retrieved

from https://www.instagram.com/markconlan/

On the other hand, Adam J. Kurtz Is a design influencer who is known primarily for his

relatability and wit, rather than skill level. Kurts created his design style and attracted a

following based on his designs that highlight the relateable pessimism and imperfections that plague everyday life. "Adam J. Kurtz wants you to feel better. About yourself. About the world. About the creative process" (Nudd, 2017). His brand is imperfection, which is relatable to a variety of individuals. Through his vulnerability on social media, Kurtz has built an impressive portfolio of clients, drawing income from a variety of means that include, a partnership with Instagram, public speaking events for Adobe, as well as an online shop featuring his sarcastic designs. He has even authored two books, *Things Are What You Make of Them: Life Advice for Creatives* and *1 Page at a Time: A Daily Creative Companion*. While Kurtz's style of illustration and lettering may not seem traditionally skillful, he has found a niche that is full of sarcasm and imperfection; It is a humorous, relatable design. Specializing in wit has allowed Kurtz to see success in areas that others with his particular skill set may not have thought possible. During his speech at Adobe Max 2019, Kurtz describes his particular philosophy:

So failure's amazing. And perfection's a myth. You guys, should we be bad? Because that's…Is that what…Again, failure is great, perfect is a myth. Should we be bad? This is what my work looks like. It's how can I say this generously—simple, illustrative work. And most of the time it is all about what I'm saying. What I'm saying is the focus. The message is the focus, the execution takes about three fucking seconds. And for some reason, this is the foundation of a sustainable, creative career. So, I made this journal called One Page At A Time. It's been translated into 17 languages and I sort of stumbled onto this deeply, human, common thing (Kurtz, n.d.).
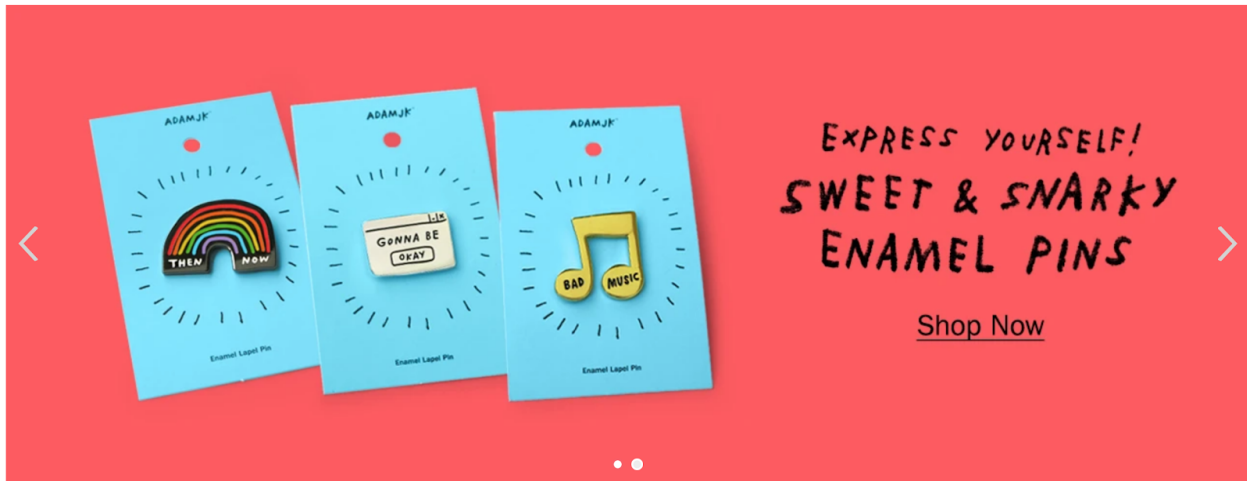
Honest, funny, slightly too-real gifts that say exactly what you mean...

ADAMJK® is art and gifts by Adam J. Kurtz, author of *1 Page at a Time* and other books.

Figure 9. Sweet & Snarky enamel pins. Product image. ADAMJK. (n.d.). Retrieved February, 2020, from https://shop.adamjk.com/

While Kurtz and Conlan both found social media success, boasting approximately 300K and 200K followers respectively, both have very different skill sets as well as diverse and different personal brands. While Conlan is recognized for his unique and whimsical style, it is Kurtz's relatability and humor that have won over his community of followers. Both of these designers have paved their own career path by specializing in their strengths, merging them with their passions, and creating strategic content at the apex of those. These two former agency workers are now both full-time creative influencers. In a field where there are relatively few lucrative avenues, social media has provided designers with a unique opportunity (Kurtz,

n.d.)(Conlan, n.d.). These two designers are far from the only designers to substantiate a career on social media, but they do provide an example of how a variety of individuals with any number of specialties can do the same. For professional designers, there is no longer a funnel directly into an agency, in-house, or freelance work. Social media has opened up an entirely new career path. Talent influencing and content creation are extremely customizable since it is about creating value for the audience based on a designer's unique strengths. While the diversity of talent is inarguable, one constant to social media success remains. Finding a niche, and establishing a personal brand are the primary constants in social media success (Hennessy, 2018).

Chapter 5: Research & Definition (Finding a Niche)

Cultivating a personal brand requires more strategic effort than one might think. A personal brand is more than the development of a specific aesthetic style. Though a distinct style is certainly a component of a personal brand, especially for designers and artists, it is not the only factor (Johnson, 2017). Just as a corporate brand's visuals would be meaningless without its personality, values, and principles behind it, so is a personal brand. There must be a driving force behind the aesthetics of a personal brand. In order for it to be successful and relevant, there must be a demand. For this reason, the process of building a personal brand can and should be very similar to the principles followed to create a corporate brand strategy, beginning with research (Zarkada, 2012).

To determine where demand or an unfulfilled niche may exist on social media, one has to first be present on social media. The simplest way to begin research is to follow accounts that

exemplify desired results and cultivate a feed that inspires and informs. This process is the same as the auditing phase of a corporate branding strategy. Following designers or creatives that have successfully created personal brands not only provides insight as to what the personal brand's differentiators may be, but also allows the designer to see what gaps in the market overlap with their personal strengths. By following a variety of accounts, the designer can observe what commonly engages certain audiences and whether or not there is an opportunity to employ those tactics within their own niche. During this research and auditing phase, it is important to assess the competition to ascertain how and why other design influencers have been successful, as well as discovering why they have not. This can help assess and identify certain gaps. Gaps in the market dictate what makes the personal brand unique and what it can offer the audience that they are currently missing (Shir, 2019). For Kurtz, this was authenticity and imperfection. For Conlan, this was positivity and whimsy, his truly unique style. The personal brand can be as unique as the individual; However, it has to be able to provide audience members with something in the behavioral, visceral, or reflective spheres in order to garner a sizable audience, or following.

After assessing existing personal brands within and potentially outside of the desired space, possibly determining the desired audience and identifying differentiators, the personal brand begins to take shape (Zarkada, 2012). Following traditional corporate brand strategy practices, the next logical step would be to define the brand. Referencing Chapter II of Section I, which includes the brand's values, mission, vision, story, and essence. Since personal brands do not operate exactly like corporations, the brand strategy principles can become informal and tailored to the personal brand, or individual themself. However, some principles and tools that are traditionally part of a corporate brand strategy can be modified to aid in the definition of the

personal brand which will ultimately help audiences gain clarity regarding the personal brand, what it stands for, and whether or not they want to buy into it. No one will buy into a brand's promise if it's not clear what they're buying into (Pfautz, 2019). Since individual competition levels are even higher than corporate brand competition based on sheer volume, which is significantly more important to refine and define the personal brand's niche. This is why utilizing some of the aforementioned corporate branding tools might become helpful with personal branding. These tools can be manipulated and converted into a personal branding tool that will help drive the difficult process and ensure it remains objective (Johnson, 2017).

Section III: Measurement & Tools

Chapter 1: Utilizing tools

Due to the very new acceptance and utilization of personal branding, it is still shrouded by much ambiguity. However, the primary principle remains that personal branding is still promotional in nature through advertising and design, but the product or company morphs into a person, skillset, or ideas (Zarkada, 2012). While the action remains the same between corporate and personal branding, the direct object shifts to an individual, which can often complicate the process simply because individuals generally find it difficult to see themselves from an objective perspective. However, this can remain true even for many companies, which is why tools such as the SWOT analysis, archetypes, and branding matrices have been developed to help brand strategists determine an objective and logical approach, a concept that can also be applied to the individual (Zarkada, 2012).

SWOT Analysis

The goal of a branding strategy is to position the brand in a manner that the consumer desires and expects based on their previous interactions and experiences. To create a desirable and consistent brand, the strategy has to be realistic. Therefore, in terms of a personal brand, an individual must be self-aware in order to properly form a realistic strategy. Just as with traditional branding practices, personal branding can benefit from the knowledge of one's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; This is otherwise known as a 'SWOT Analysis'. Conceived out of a Stanford study on why corporate businesses failed, the SWOT analysis was first developed by researcher Albert Humphrey and has become a standard branding tool since. If a brand can objectively see themselves and address these factors, they have a much higher potential to succeed than brands that are delusional in these aspects (Freisner, 2011). The same can be said for the individual. In order to find a niche in which a personal brand can succeed, the brand's competitors must be assessed in order to determine where the holes in the market are as well as where the brand could naturally excel. SWOT analyses help the brand assess where the demand overlaps with their strengths.
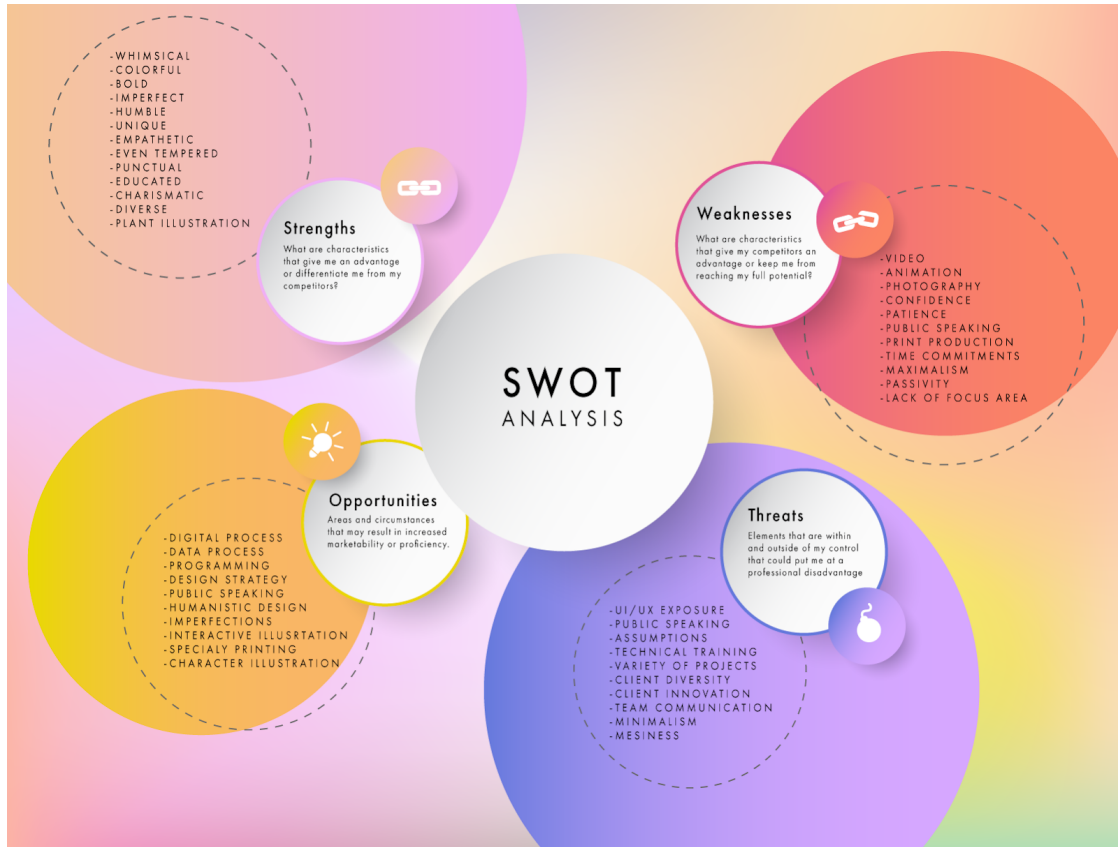
Figure 10. SWOT analysis. Jayna Hadwiger (2019) Data from Freisner, Tim (2011). Retrieved

from https://www.jaynahadwiger.com/swot-analysis-case-study Copyright 2019.

The SWOT Analysis is just one of the many traditional tools that can be applied to

personal branding. Traditional corporate branding, unlike this newer subdivision, is a

well-researched field with many standardized best practices that provide designers, marketers,

and strategists with the necessary framework for building sound brands. Some of these best

practices include more simple tasks such as crafting a mission and a vision statement. Others,

like the SWOT analysis, involve a more candid, objective perspective that is often difficult to

ascertain on a more personal level. The other common branding tools are those that are easily

applicable to personal branding, first referenced in Section I Chapter 3, brand archetypes and the corporate brand identity matrix.

Brand Archetyping

Brand archetyping is a personality identification system that personifies brands by assigning them a personality based on stereotypical traits that are typically associated with people. The 12 types for the purpose of this study are the Innocent, the Everyman, the Hero, the Outlaw, the Explorer, the Creator, the Ruler, the Magician, the Lover, the Caregiver, the Jester, and the Sage. Each archetype has specific attributes that allow strategists to more easily discern what core values a brand represents. The Innocent invokes feelings of safety, wonder, purity, and trust; A well-known brand associated with this archetype would be CocaCola. The Everyman is relatable, respectful, and fair. One would associate companies like Home Depot or Lowes with this archetype. The Hero is known for courage, strength, and mastery, such as Nike. The Outlaw stands for liberation and nonconformity and includes the likes of Harley Davidson and Virgin subsidiaries. The Explorer is a brave, self-sufficient type bringing to mind the essence of Indiana Jones. The Creator is imaginative, nonlinear, and innovative. A prime example of this archetype would be Lego. A successful Ruler type would be IBM, bringing to mind structure, control, and confidence. The Magician is intuitive, charismatic, and powerful, where the best example would be Disney.. The Lover, on the other hand, is passionate, enticing, and is often exemplified through car companies like Ferrari. The Caregiver, often associated with health and hospitality companies like Marriott, is all about service. These types are altruistic, compassionate, and patient. The Jester, is humorous, original, and self-aware, much like everyone's favorite

insurance company, Geico. Finally, The Sage, or wise man, is successful for their understanding, intelligence, and clarity, much like BBC and other reliable sources of information. Additionally, the archetypes can be divided into four groups based on their driving factors or core essence. For Caregivers, Rulers, and Creators, this is typically providing structure. For Innocents, Sages, and Explorers, this is seeking paradise or wonder. For Outlaws, Magicians, and Heros it is creating a legacy or leaving a mark. For the Everymen, Jesters, and Lovers, the main goal is building connections and relationships (Bechter, et al. 2016).

12 Brand Archetypes
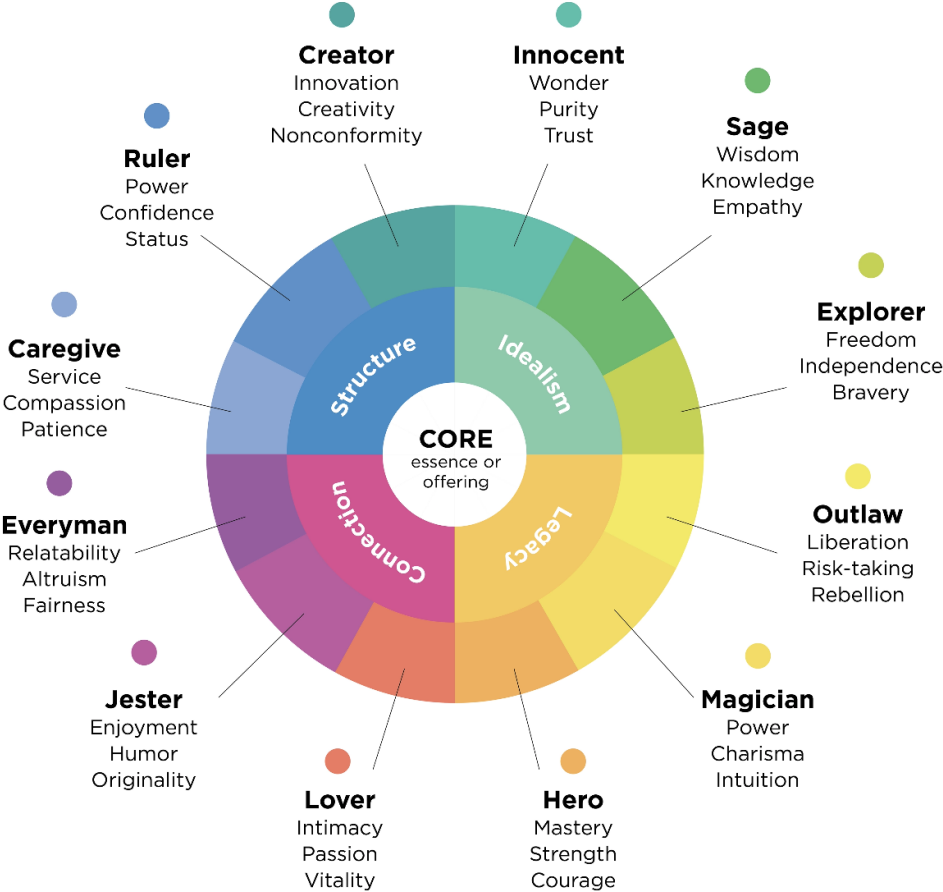
Creator
Innovation
Creativity
Nonconformity

Innocent
Wonder
Purity
Trust

Sage
Wisdom
Knowledge
Empathy

Ruler
Power
Confidence
Status

Explorer
Freedom
Independence
Bravery

Caregive
Service
Compassion
Patience

Outlaw
Liberation
Risk-taking
Rebellion

Everyman
Relatability
Altruism
Fairness

Magician
Power
Charisma
Intuition

Jester
Enjoyment
Humor
Originality

Lover
Intimacy
Passion
Vitality

Hero
Mastery
Strength
Courage

Structure

Idealism

Legacy

Connection

CORE
essence or
offering

A brand can usually identify with one of these archetypes based on information

ascertained from preliminary exercises such as the SWOT analysis and definition of values. The

specificities of the archetypes may vary based on sources, but the core values and concepts

remain consistent. The archetype exercise provides the brand with a starting point for positioning

practices like creating a logo or cohesive aesthetic, determining tone and voice, and creating

consistent content. It can be difficult to have an objective perspective of the personal brand's

archetype, especially if the acting brand strategist, as is the case with many personal brands, is

the person on which the personal brand is being based. The process of assigning a personal brand

an archetype may closely resemble a personality test. Many internet sources even offer questions

that prompt quiz-like results for brand archetypes. However seemingly accurate they may be,

there is no certain science behind the majority of these generators. The best way to determine

which archetype the personal brand should be categorized as is to figure out which quadrant the

brand's mission and vision best align with, and then determine which of the four in that quadrant

best represent the remaining brand values. Utilizing the brand archetype tool can help streamline

the positioning or aesthetic processes (Douglass, 2019).

Brand Matrices

Another tool that can be used to ensure the brand's values are aligned is the corporate brand matrix. Many different matrices exist and serve as useful tools in the personal branding realm. There are matrices that help guide decision making in terms of which products might be profitable, there are design decision-making matrices, and additional matrices designed to help weigh the pros and cons of almost any brand decision. The specific brand matrix discussed in this study will be referred to as the corporate brand identity matrix. This particular matrix is designed to help ensure a brand's identity, tone, voice, mission, and vision are all in alignment. The particular framework in reference is referred to by the *Journal of Brand Management* as "The corporate brand identity matrix" (Urde, 2013).

This particular matrix takes into consideration the brand's core values and can be used as a tool to check that the value proposition, relationships, mission and vision, culture, competence, personality, and position all align to support the core. For the purpose of the brand matrix exercise, the value proposition refers to the key offerings and their appeal to customers, stakeholders, or investors. Relationships refer to the intended market position or perception in the minds of customers and influential persons. Personality is the combination of human characteristics or qualities a brand takes on. The expression refers to communication and recognizability. Mission refers to goals or what markers a brand is trying to achieve. Vision is more progressive and future thinking that is geared toward the societal outcome the brand is hoping for. Culture is everything from work patterns and behavior to office atmosphere, policies, and political stances. Competences are straightforward, what a brand is objectively good at, and

they are what sets them apart. All of these should theoretically align to support the core of a

brand, what they promise, and what they stand for. Essentially, the core should serve as a brand's

thesis statement while the other elements are the supporting paragraphs. They should all align to

form a cohesive, compelling story (Urde, 2013).
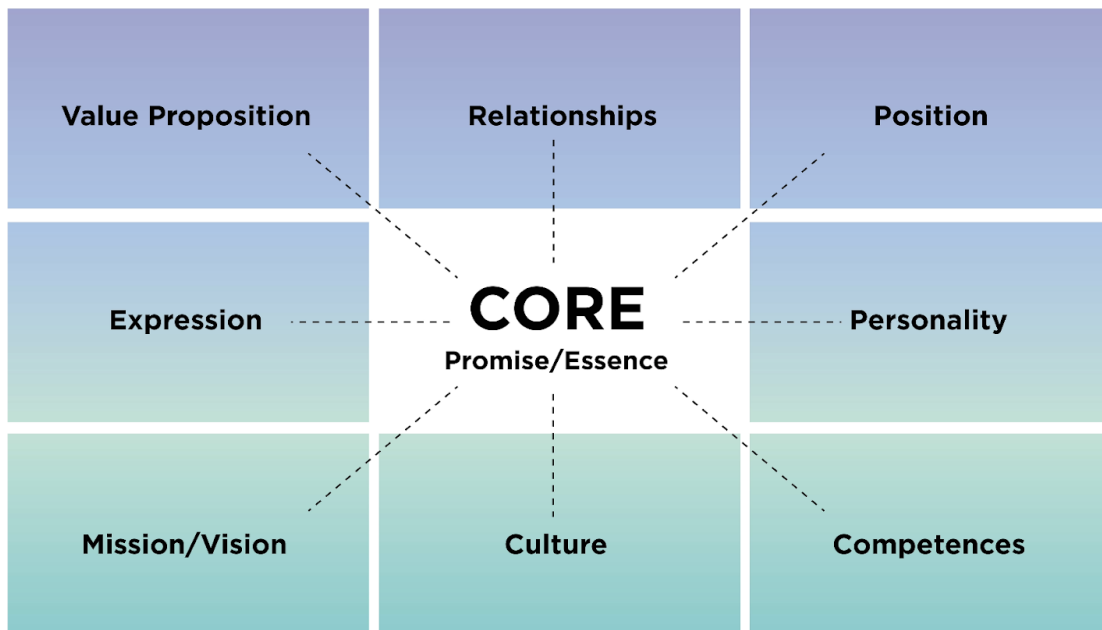
Figure 12. The Corporate Brand Identity Matrix. Urde, Mats. (2013). Retrieved from

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263039456_The_corporate_brand_identity_matrix
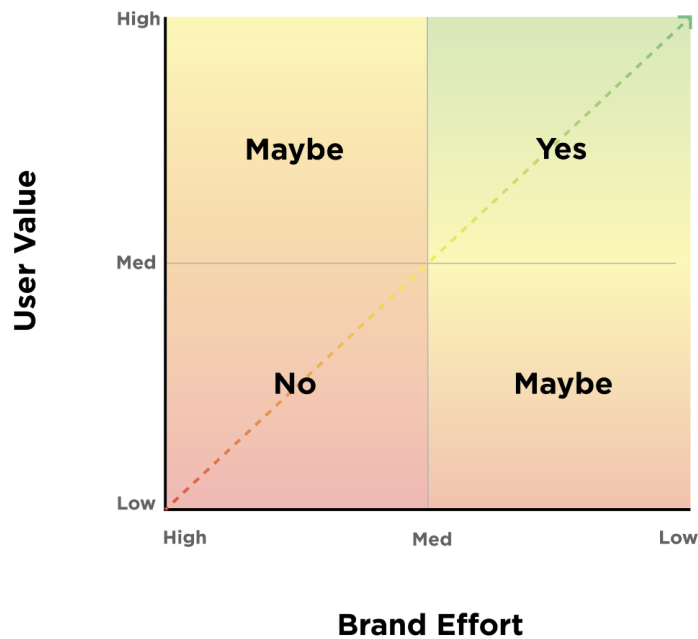
Figure 13; Brand Prioritization Matrix. Gibbons, Sarah. (2018). Retrieved from

https://www.nngroup.com/articles/prioritization-matrices/

While all of these tools may seem geared toward corporations, they can also be

manipulated to better serve the purposes of a personal brand. For example, the core of a personal

brand should refer to a personal artistic or design philosophy (Zarkada, 2012). Relationships still

refer to consumer perceptions but can involve more pointed interactions. As a personal brand,

every interaction with a potential customer is a contribution to the brand. A brand's mission and

vision should be how the individual ultimately wants to impact the world through their work.

Competences are what the individual is best at and what their differentiators are. Personality,

instead of personifying an inanimate brand, can have additional outlets such as choice of

clothing. It is how the personal brand presents itself to its audience. The brand's expression can be difficult to achieve but entails the development of a recognizable style of work. It should be the thing that signifies the work is from a certain individual. Culture can be anything from political preferences and stances to the language used to address peers and consumers alike. All of the elements of the brand matrixes have consumer satisfaction as the end goal and are, therefore, easily adaptable to fit personal brand checkpoints as opposed to a less than personal corporate identity (Pfautz, 2019).

Just as the success of a corporate brand is dependent upon many factors, so is the success of personal branding. However, utilizing these rules ensures the personal brand will be built on a framework grounded in consistency (Zarkada, 2012). Even without entrepreneurial aspirations, these tools can assist designers or any creatives with a framework in which to ground their careers and goal-setting. While it is perhaps unnecessary or unrealistic to expect personal brands to follow these guidelines as rigidly as a corporate brand, these tools still serve as a very beneficial guide to any creative aspirations. The desired outcome of utilizing these tools is to help create a personal brand strategy that can guide the type of work and content the designer creates and shares as they build their social media community(Zarkada, 2012).

Chapter 2: Personal Style

After researching, auditing, and defining the personal brand, according to corporate brand strategy, the next logical phase is positioning. In corporate brand practices, this includes the visual identity and all of the collateral that reinforces the brand's identity (Pfautz, 2019). For personal brands, this can be less commercial but just as intricate. While a corporation relies on

customer service communication, office culture, website experience, billboards, commercials, and a variety of other propaganda, personal brands are heavily reliant on self-promotion. The person tied to the personal brand serves as a living embodiment of what that brand stands for. They are the singular spokesperson. For creatives, this can include what they wear, how they talk, what they believe, where they live, who they hang out with, what their hobbies are, and, most importantly, how they work, where they work, and what they make (Johnson, 2017).

"Most of the time, we don't feel happy with what we create and think we should do better. Part of this endless criticism is our constant search for our "own" style." This quote from content creator and designer, Gal Shir, is one vocalization of a phenomenon many artists or creative types experience (Shir, 2019). The need to develop a personal style or brand as an artist is much the same as it is for any individual trying to develop their identity through outlets of self-expression. Humans feel an innate need to define who they are, and this is magnified for creatives who feel especially tied to their work. This same desire is what drives people to dress a certain way, decorate, or partake in personality tests. Individuals seek validation and expression for the things they feel are an integral part of their identity. They also often seek affiliation with others that seem to fall into their same fields of interest. People need other people to both to validate their identity and also to bear witness to it. They desire self-expression (Barbot, 2018). As communication technology continuously decreases the barriers individuals must cross to find those like-minded individuals, people are both inundated with visual proof of their lack of individuality and validated in their choices. Thanks to social media, it is almost impossible to feel truly unique and particular concern for creatives who, in order to arrive at the elusive and

desired personal style, must work even harder to define their style and niche. They must work even harder to stand out (Carter, 2016).

While identifying a niche and style is essential for artists, designers, and related fields, that has historically not been the case. While many designers, especially historically significant ones, do in fact have a certain style associated with their work, this is mostly due in part to the particular designer favoring or being extremely proficient at a particular style and, therefore spearheading its popularization (Munsterberg, 2009). For instance, just as Claude Monet is associated with Impressionism, David Carson is considered the father of Grunge for his experimental typography and work at *Raygun*. Both creatives became extremely successful in their fields of expertise, however, neither experienced the influx of creative competition that social media has fueled. Both their style and proficiency in their respective fields are undeniable. For this reason, they were able to experience success in a smaller world where proficiency was less standardized and more highly regarded (Munsterberg, 2009). Prior to the standardization and expansion of the talent pool, proficiency and style were enough to set the select few of the pre-social media world apart. That is not the case for creative types today, especially those wishing to pursue social media entrepreneurism. Designers can pursue freelancing or agency work and never have to discover their niche or even specialize (Heller & Talarico, 2011). These are the previous career avenues that post-secondary schools have prepared design students for. Though personal branding is encouraged, it does not carry the same meaning and applies to creatives whose brand is their career. With the induction of social media, the talent pool is extremely large. However, career opportunities for creatives are now endless. With endless opportunities and competition, success on social media relies on being able to define what the

personal creative brand stands for, what it aims to do, and what needs it can fulfill. Just as corporate brands cannot target everyone, neither can personal brands. The larger the potential, the more important it is to create a precise trajectory (Johnson, 2017).

While personal style is not necessarily synonymous with a personal brand, it is a key component of the personal brand formula, especially for creative professionals. The concept of a personal artistic style in Western traditions dates all the way back to the Greek Classical Era. In this sense, personal style is limited to the production of one artist. It is in the details that let the viewers know this work was done by a particular historical individual. There are many ways to signify this and most are not signified by one specific characteristic, but by a unique combination of many nuances. For example, Claud Monet's works have been characterized by his use of light and color, but also by their perceived improvisation. Furthermore, this type of improvisation characterized his personal style into a greater genre known as impressionist paintings. These works were defined by their medium and brushstroke usage, but few individuals succeeded in cultivating an even more personally recognizable body of work around it (Munsterberg, 2009). This type of authorship is perhaps one of the first, most definitive examples of personal branding

Another notable example of personal style that perhaps relates more closely to other aspects of personal branding can be observed in the work and persona of the late Andy Warhol. Not only did Warhol's work have a specific style, he also worked to cultivate a personal brand for himself that aligned and ultimately popularized the style of his work. Warhol was not only a recognizable artist and printmaker but also a recognizable public figure. While few people may recall what Claud Monet or David Carson looked like, most individuals have some frame of reference for Warhol's physical appearance and certainly for his work. Warhol used his wardrobe

and any media outlet he could to cultivate this portion of his personal brand. As a pioneer of the pop art movement Warhol positioned himself as a highly elusive, superficial figure who had little to no regard for anything. However, this type of positioning only served to compliment his oversaturated work, creating demand not only for his work but for the type of mystique and arrogance the Warhol brand promised. In this instance, Warhol utilized traditional branding principles, tone, voice, aesthetics, and positioning to cultivate a branded persona that ultimately contributed to the popularity of his work (Grudin, 2010).

While individuality is an innate desire, so is the opposing desire to conform and fit in. This conundrum can be especially difficult for creative types to overcome as they feel a particularly strong emotional connection to their work. Another proposed answer is that creative professionals value individuality more so than other career fields. The importance creatives place on this aspect of their work is enough to make it nearly impossible to achieve perceived success. Creatives also place a higher level of commitment on personal style, after all, brands like Gucci, Chanel, and Versace have signature pieces that are constant staples and brand signifiers in the fashion world. However, just as these brands have timeless markers, the clothes they produce differ greatly from when the brands were conceived (Grudin, 2010). "Finding your own style is not a one-time event -it's an endless process. Even Van Gogh had periods where he changed his style (Shir, 2019)." Nonetheless, personal style takes time to develop, it isn't created overnight and it takes a considerable amount of iteration.

There are many approaches to finding and cultivating a personal style. As a creative that has successfully established and cultivated a social media career, illustrator Gal Shir shares many recommendations on the matter in his book, *View Insights*. His recommendations involve

cultivating an Instagram feed of creatives that provoke ideas. After consuming content, he recommends attempting to combine styles that have sparked an interest. Lastly, his primary strategy for developing a personal style involves limiting oneself in a specific area and keeping that as the independent variable. "I believe that 'style' is nothing more than a limit. While a personal style takes years to develop, it is always rooted in the restriction of elements (Shir, 2019)." For example, creating anything one desires but limiting the color palette to blue and orange. Some artists may only use specific brushes, other designers may specialize in black and white logos. Whatever the restriction is, it will create a cohesive, consistent character to the designs and therefore begin to form the visuals of the brand. Whatever restrictions are chosen, and the type of work that is produced, it is important to make sure the body of work supports the core values and caters to the artists' strengths and weaknesses. However, the most important thing to consider while cultivating a personal style is that it is a never-ending process. Personal style takes time to cultivate, it takes creating for the sake of creating without getting paid. It requires passion and patience to cultivate a body of work that is unique, authentic, and flexible enough to propel an entire career (Shir, 2019).

Section IV: Social Media Strategy

Social media as it exists today is not merely a place to keep up with casual acquaintances, but a platform that many are turning to grow their brands. At its conception, it was merely a social tool. Today, social media is the number one marketing tool used by brands around the world. Many companies undervalue social media strategy, just as they may undervalue brand strategy. Similar to brand strategy, social media strategy may not seem essential. However, they

both provide an uncontended amount of opportunity for brand engagement and awareness. As mentioned previously throughout this research, consumers are becoming increasingly impervious to more traditional marketing methods. For this reason, consumers turn to their trusted "friends" or influencers that have gained their trust in a respected area. While content creators have excelled on certain other platforms, it was Instagram's aesthetic nature that created the perfect circumstances needed to jumpstart the influencing industry and launch its own form of celebrity (Johnson, 2017). The standardization of quality leads to a need for new marketing tactics which eventually results in an audience tolerance which then causes brands to once again shift their offerings and marketing.

Figure 14. Business to Consumer Marketing Visualization. Hadwiger, Jayna (2020).

Thus, not only is Instagram a great tool for visualization and brand positioning, but influencing has created a word of mouth system that has proved to be a symbiotic relationship for both the company and individual influencers. For design influencers, this relationship may consist of promoting a certain software, design tool, or service. The benefit may be in the form of free design tools or even collaborations with large brands such as Airbnb or Nike. While some of these influencers undoubtedly became the power-house entrepreneurs they are today by pure talent and happenstance, there is a specific science to leveraging social media to build brand awareness. The implementation of a social media strategy doesn't guarantee overnight success, it does, however, provide proven strategies to assist in gradual growth. A social media strategy can help brands discover their online niche, develop relationships with their audience, and determine what content performs best and garners the most engagement, and each social media platform is a unique ecosystem that abides by its own set of rules (Gary, 2019). However, due to Instagram's visual nature and marketing capabilities, especially for personal brands, this research will primarily focus on the utilization of this platform as the primary source for propelling a personal creative brand and launching a career.

Chapter 1: Metrics

Social media success can be determined in a few ways. The objective of social media is not just to gain followers, but to target an audience and turn them into loyal customers or brand advocates. To determine these metrics for a personal brand, the designer needs to first consider

the business objectives of their social media endeavors, including growing brand awareness, developing a loyal audience, establishing a rapport, and driving leads to increase sales. These business goals can't then be translated into social media goals that directly correlate with tangible success metrics. For example, growing brand awareness directly correlates to followers, likes, shares, and anything that implies more people are seeing the brand, this is the reach. Developing a loyal audience translates to engagement, which can be measured by likes, comments, mentions, and anything that displays a connection to the brand. Establishing a rapport can be measured by the brand's social community, these may be testimonials, sentiment, or anything that signifies a sense of familiarity and trust between the brand and audience. Finally, driving leads and sales is directly related to conversion rates, these may be website clicks, email signups, or anything that shows the audience has further interest in maintaining their relationship with the brand. Just as with many of these tools, the examples provided are only a general framework using common goals to illustrate the concept and functionality. These goals and their corresponding metrics can be tailored to align with the goals of the personal brand and the desired career path (Newberry & LaPage, 2019).

Business Objectives	Social Media Goal	Metrics
Growth/Positioning	**Awareness** Illuminates current/potential audience	Followers, shares, features, etc..
Customer Advocates	**Engagement** indicative of audience perception/loyalty	Comments, likes, mentions, etc..
Generate Revenue	**Conversion** measures effectiveness of social efforts	Website/link clicks, email signups, point of sale, etc..
Customer Retention	**Loyalty** reflects how customers perceive the brand	Testimonials, sentiment, promotions, etc..

Figure 15; Metrics Table. Newberry, C., & LaPage, E. (2019, November 27). Retrieved from

https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-to-create-a-social-media-marketing-plan/

Metrics are an essential part of social media strategies. They are there to ensure

measurable progress is being made and that the brand's messaging, positioning, and content is

aligning with the target audience. To experience success on social media, a brand has to set

realistic goals. To ensure that realistic metrics have been put in place, social media strategists

check the goals against the "S.M.A.R.T." rule. The S.M.A.R.T. rule is a tool that was developed

to help ensure goals are *specific* enough, *measurable, attainable*, *relevant*, and *time-bound*. That

is the goals should be specific enough to define a central desired outcome and focused enough to

attain measurable outcomes. They should be challenging, yet realistic enough to exist in the

realm of possibilities. The goals should always be relevant to the brand's core values, mission,

vision, and drivers, and they should be time-sensitive to ensure the personal brand is meeting the

desired benchmarks. Determining which goals are the most important for the brand's end goal will dictate whether or not the metrics should be reach-or-action-based. If the goal is reach-based, it may be tempting to base success metrics solely on the number of followers. This is a bad idea for many reasons, the most blatant being that many accounts offer followers for purchase. In fact, social media experts refer to follower counts as "vanity metrics" because they provide no real value. It will not matter how many followers a brand has if they're not receiving a proportional amount of engagement. Engagement is a surefire way to assess how people respond to different content and personal brands. Additionally, if the goal is sales-based, then measuring clicks or actions taken is a good indication of what drives the audience to purchase (Newberry & LaPage, 2019). For these very reasons, an influencer does not need hundreds of thousands of followers to experience the personal brand success they desire, they only need a certain quantity of loyal followers.

Establishing goals will serve as the foundation of the social media business model. From there, the brand can refer to the goals as a guideline for the target audience and the type of content to produce. Whatever the brand's end goal is will determine who the desired audience is and drive the type of content being created and shared.

Chapter 2: Audience

Establishing a target audience is a significant component of the social media strategy. Whether the goal of the business is to generate direct income or to grow a following base, the audience is the driving factor behind the personal brand's success. Determining the target

audience requires the development of audience personas. Personas are hypothetical customers, or potential customers, based on insights taken from the desired audience. In order to cultivate effective personas, it is important to ask questions about the target audience and to make sure the answers correlate with the outlined metrics. Standard target audience descriptors might include age, gender, geographical location, and field of interest. Personas, however, are more in-depth and assist in working through scenarios for hypothetical audience members. Questions to ask might include how old they are, what they do for a living, how much purchasing power they have, where they live, what type of media they consume, and where they spend their time on the internet. For artists and designers, the primary audience for this research, the most effective social media platforms are the most visual ones, Instagram, and Pinterest. However, if the personal brand revolves around verbal content, such as design research or consulting service, the target audience will also likely be an older demographic and a more professional, text-based platform like Linkedin or Facebook might be more appropriate. Regardless of the area of expertise, however, the strategy will need to be executed on the target audience's preferred network, which is likely Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter, and then expand and employ other networks. After determining where the most effective place to post content, there still remains the question of what type of content is most effective on the selected platform(s) and for the target audience (Newberry & LaPage, 2019).

Table 2.

Example of an Audience Persona Template

Who are they?	(E.g. job title, age, gender, salary, location, etc.)
What are they interested in that you can provide?	(E.g. entertainment, educational content, case studies, new products, etc.)
Where do they usually hang out online?	(E.g. Facebook, Instagram, etc. or niche platforms)
When do they look for the type of content you can provide?	(E.g. weekends, during their daily commute, etc.)
Why do they consume the content?	(E.g. to get better at their job, to become healthy, to stay up to date with something, etc.)
How do they consume the content?	(E.g. read blogs, listen to podcasts, watch videos, etc.)

Note. Data for Audience Persona Template Taken from: Hootsuite (2019) Retrieved from

https://blog.hootsuite.com/buyer-persona/; Copyright 2018.

Use of different online platforms by demographic groups

Use of different online platforms by demographic groups

% of U.S. adults who say they ever use the following online platforms or messaging apps

	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram	Pinterest	LinkedIn	Snapchat	Twitter	WhatsApp	Reddit
U.S. adults	73%	69%	37%	28%	27%	24%	22%	20%	11%
Men	78	63	31	15	29	24	24	21	15
Women	68	75	43	42	24	24	21	19	8
White	71	70	33	33	28	22	21	13	12
Black	77	70	40	27	24	28	24	24	4
Hispanic	78	69	51	22	16	29	25	42	14
Ages 18-29	91	79	67	34	28	62	38	23	22
18-24	90	76	75	38	17	73	44	20	21
25-29	93	84	57	28	44	47	31	28	23
30-49	87	79	47	35	37	25	26	31	14
50-64	70	68	23	27	24	9	17	16	6
65+	38	46	8	15	11	3	7	3	1
<$30,000	68	69	35	18	10	27	20	19	9
$30,000-$74,999	75	72	39	27	26	26	20	16	10
$75,000+	83	74	42	41	49	22	31	25	15
High school or less	64	61	33	19	9	22	13	18	6
Some college	79	75	37	32	26	29	24	14	14
College+	80	74	43	38	51	20	32	28	15
Urban	77	73	46	30	33	29	26	24	11
Suburban	74	69	35	30	30	20	22	19	13
Rural	64	66	21	26	10	20	13	10	8

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 8-Feb. 7, 2019.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Figure 16; Use of different online platforms by demographic groups. Taken from: PEW

Research Center (2019) Retrieved from

https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-includ

ing-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/ft_19-04-10_socialmedia2019_useofdifferent/;

Determining what type of content to post is not only reliant on personal style but also on the audience and platform. The designer's personal style is more dependent on the designer, but the subject matter and medium are variables that should depend on the target audience, including where they spend their time, what they engage with, and what the chosen success metrics are.

Table 3.

Content Creation Decision-Making Table Example

Personal Style	Is it something I'm good at that is unique to me?
Audience	Does it provide some value to my audience or potential audience?
Platform	Is it compatible with the platform on which I am planning on posting it?
Niche	Does it fit into the shared values of my online community?
Metrics	Does it potentially propel me towards my business or social media goals?
Medium	Is it suitable for quickly-consumed content or does it need to be modified for social purposes?
Brand	Am I using a voice that will resonate with my audience?

Note. Data for Content Creation Decision-Making Example Template: Shir, Gal. (2019). *View Insights: how to become a creator on social media*. Gal Shir. Retrieved from

https://galshir.com/viewinsights

Personal style should be present in anything the designer creates, it is the way they create it, not what they create, though sometimes this can be difficult to differentiate. Content relies more heavily on the audience and the value they expect to receive from following the designer . If the goal is to gain engagement and create a community where the personal brand can grow, then creating content that appeals to the target audience on a visceral level is a good place to start. Find out what the target audience enjoys consuming and cater to that. One way to do this is by looking at competitors with similar audiences and determining where they are lacking, this is one of the aforementioned "opportunities" that may appear in the SWOT analysis. Finding out what the audience cares about and what appeals to them, whether from a visceral or an educational standpoint, can help determine what the content is that the personal style may be applied to (Social Media for Creatives, 2018). For instance, @thecosmicfeminist is an account run by an Illustrator named Zulfa. Zulfa's personal style consists of a celestial color palette, intricate line work, and astrological elements, while her content focuses on feminist values. Since narrowing her niche and subject matter, Zulfa discovered a community that grew her following from 2,000 to over 28K followers in 4 months. This organic growth has led to high engagement, where the reach has allowed her unique prints and products to be met with a substantial amount of demand and given her a platform to discuss issues she's passionate about with a community that desires that content. She now sells prints, clothing, and other products as well as produces a podcast and newsletter for her online community. Her chosen medium is mostly static images of her work or styled carousels and gifs of her products. While there are always opportunities to grow, Zulfa's ability to find a niche that fits her personal style and

business objectives, as well as meets the needs of her audience, has allowed her to create a career that enforces very little compromises on her desires as an illustrator.

On the other hand, content creator and writer, Gal Shir, does not sell products and illustrations in the way that Zulfa does; Instead, he has made a name for himself in the ability to educate his audience on his personal process and skill set. Shir's style is clean and geometric by using a very specific style of shading. However, it is his mesmerizing process videos that caught the attention of his audience, which now boasts a staggering 719,000 members. While Shir's subject matter is very diverse, more so than Zulfa's, where his technique and medium remain the same. Shir's ability to illustrate almost anything in a uniquely simple manner allows him to create quality tutorials and process videos for an audience that follows him for entertainment and knowledge, they want to know how he does what he does. This has allowed him to not only earn sponsorships and collaborations from gear and software companies but also to produce and sell customized brushes and even a highly popular ebook. While Shir may sell wallpapers, stickers, brushes, and other small offerings, it is his influence and expertise that has allowed him to become a thought leader in the design influencer space (Shir, 2019).
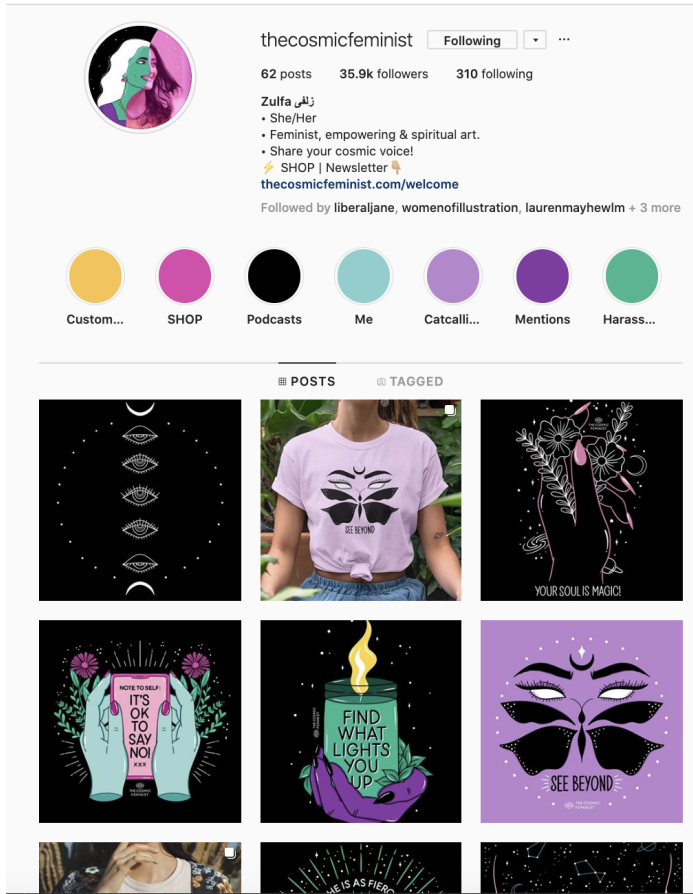
Figure 17. Zulfa. [@thecosmicfeminist]. (n.d). Posts [Instagram Profile]. Retrieved from

https://www.instagram.com/thecosmicfeminist/?hl=en
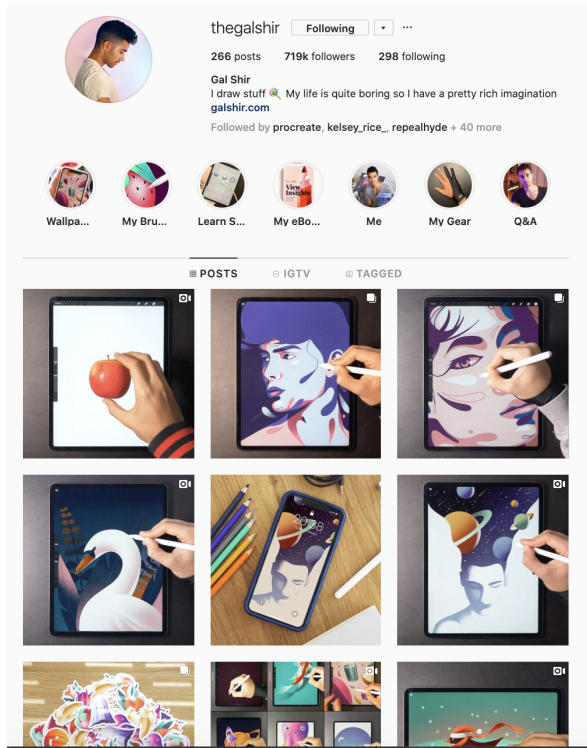
Figure 18. Shir, Gal. [@thegalshir]. (n.d). Posts [Instagram Profile]. Retrieved from

https://www.instagram.com/thegalshir/?hl=en

Content relies not only on what the individual desires to create but also what the audience

craves, when they crave it, and through what medium it is presented on. Before creating and

posting content, it is important to take note of what days of the week and times of day the target

audience consumes the most content and also whether they respond best to videos, static

graphics, photography, or something else. After determining what, when, and how content will

be posted, it's important to take the time and consideration to set up profiles diligently and

thoroughly to increase discoverability and launch efficiency (Social Media for Creatives, 2018).

Chapter 4: SEO

Groundwork and research that goes into a personal brand and social media strategy is completely worthless if the content isn't being seen by the right people, specifically the target audience. In order to ensure organic growth on the chosen platforms, the personal brand needs to consider searchability, which is search engine optimization (SEO). While social media was designed for users to follow their friends, colleagues, and tertiary acquaintances' lives, it has developed into a place where people not only stay up to date, they discover. Social media networks show users new content based on what they search for and who they already follow, usually this is displayed as some sort of featured content labeled discover, or, in Instagram's case, explore. According to a recent study done by social media content management company, Hootsuite, more than half of Instagram venture into exploring content at least once a month (Tran, 2019). What's more, 20% of all Instagram monthly users visit at least one business profile a day (Forbes Agency Council, 2019). In order to become one of those businesses that users discover, brands have to optimize their bios, hashtags, links, and website content, and anything else that may be tied back to the brand for discoverability. In order to start a community that will grow and sustain itself, the brand has to make sure the users can find it amongst the sea of other brands. With the vast amount of users on Instagram, one of the only ways to stand out as an individual or a brand is to become more discoverable (Johnson, 2017).

The issue with discoverability is that the more engagement posts receive, the more they are shown to other users with similar interests. In other words, you have to have reach in order to get reach. The initial engagement levels will be relatively low. However, there are some small,

but effective, SEO tactics that can be implemented to make the initial posting as efficient as possible.

   The first step is to ensure that, if the chosen platform is Instagram, the brand is being promoted on a business profile and that it's public. A business profile provides brands with irreplaceable consumer data, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. Ensuring the profile is public allows users to discover and follow the brand with ease and allows for optimum reach since no followers will be turned away or forgotten about as requests pile up. One of the first prompts that will be asked when creating a profile for the brand is the username and bio. The username and display name should contain a keyword related to the content that is being created. For instance, if a designer wants to promote their personal brand that revolves around character animation, it will increase discoverability within the app if their display name or user name contains one or both of their descriptors. However, with brands, this isn't always possible, especially considering the name of the personal brand should remain the most recognizable thing. In instances where fitting a descriptor into the username isn't possible, the bio still needs to display information that let's other users know what type of content to expect to see (Berry, 2018). Luckily, most platforms provide some sort of bio section that allows for details that do not work in the user or display name. Bios should be informative and fun by highlighting personality while adding in a couple of primary and or secondary keywords. Secondary keywords are helpful in instances where the user may be searching for something closely related to the personal brand, but not directly enough to be searching for the primary keywords. The bio should also contain a link to whatever action the brand wants its followers to take. Mostly this should be a personal website, written pieces, events, downloads, or any other piece of information that the users need

to have easily accessible. That's not to say that when launching a personal brand profile that everything has to be solidified and is immovable, but defining these elements will not only aid in discoverability but will keep the brand on track and serve to set expectations with both the audience and brand curator (Pope, 2019).

Figure 19. Profile With Keywords. Pope, Lauren. (2019). Retrieved from

https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/instagram-seo

It can be difficult to convey all of the differentiators, values, and personality of the personal brand in just the username and bio, this is what the content is for. Each post has the potential to tell the audience a little more about the brand, which is the storytelling aspect of building a brand. This feature makes another great case for using Instagram as the main brand-building platform. Instagram, like Facebook, keeps a running timeline of the brand's story but houses it in a much more visually that's easily accessible for users to return to or catch up on if they happen to be new followers. Not to mention, unlike Twitter, Instagram captions can be as long as the curator needs them to be, however, due to the shortened attention span of typical users, it's best to keep these as short and engaging as possible. It's also a good idea to sprinkle in a few primary and secondary keywords whenever possible (Pope, 2019).

Another feature Instagram has or has tailored more efficiently towards brands is the use of hashtags. Instagram houses its own search engine and hashtags serve as another way users can search content. For instance, if a user likes a post with the hashtag #plantlady, they might click on that hashtag which would then take them to an entire feed of posts tagged similarly. For this reason, it's best to use hashtags strategically. Posts should use hashtags that are relevant to the brand and content, but using hashtags that already contain a huge amount of posts will lessen the likelihood of a user seeing the post and subsequently seeing the brand. Referring back to the growing resistance to traditional marketing tactics, even if users discover the brand's post, they likely won't interact with it if it looks too overly marketed or insincere (Pope, 2019).

Aside from hashtags and captions, alt-text is another feature that can be utilized for SEO purposes when posting content. A relatively new feature, alt-text was originally implemented to enhance the experience for the visually impaired when using the app. Not only does it assist with

accessibility, but it also can contribute to SEO performance. Alt captions allow Instagramers to write their captions for their photos however, when not utilized Instagram automatically populates this field. Since this is a newer feature that fewer users use, it's in the user's best interest to fill this out by keeping keywords in mind (Pope, 2019).

While the use of keywords and hashtags is not necessarily a novel tactic, if done well, with proper research as to what keywords the target audience might be searching for, it can be extremely effective, but none of that will matter if the content isn't valuable to the audience once they discover it. Seo for social media is most certainly a long-game strategy (Pope, 2019). It can be difficult to remain motivated if the brands are not seeing substantial growth very quickly.n. Instagram, and almost all other social media platforms for that matter, have reached levels of oversaturation which can make it extremely difficult to get discovered and stand out, but it also sets expectations high for brands that are just starting out. For this reason, many fall prey to what Instagram has deemed "black hat marketing tactics" that is tactics users implement in order to gain a following more quickly. These tactics include but are not limited to the use of bots, stealing content, buying followers, generating fake comments or reviews, duplicating content on multiple platforms, and overusing keywords and hashtags. Not only do these tactics result in false engagement and absolutely no return on investment (ROI). Instagram enforces its standards by implementing a shadowban on such brands. "Shadowbanning is the act of blocking a user's content on social media sites, in such a way that the user doesn't know it's happening. If you're shadowbanned on Instagram, your content won't appear on anyone's feed unless they already follow you" (Pope, 2019). Using SEO best practices, however, puts the audience first and results in the type of organic growth and reach that converts to sales. While it may seem that these

tactics are slow to come to fruition, analytic tools can help visualize the success metrics and give

data-driven results that can inform future tactics and result in an even ROI and audience

engagement (Pope, 2019).

Chapter 5: Analytics

At the end of the day, search engine optimization is a long play based on educated

guesses as well as trial and error. The only way to determine whether or not these efforts are

paying off is by tracking them through analytics. In order to work efficiently, a strategy needs to

be informed by data. Tracking performance to numerical values isn't necessary for more casual

users, in order to continue to refine the strategy and content, brands should pay close attention to

what the data is telling them (Pope, 2019). These metrics not only provide comparisons

regarding content performance, but also help narrow down what keywords are working, what

media is working when the audience is most likely to see the content, and whether or not the

target audience is on par with the actual audience, or if the brand needs to adjust its tactics.

Amongst several of the aforementioned benefits of choosing Instagram as the primary

marketing platform, is the fact that Instagram houses its own analytics for those who choose to

have a business profile. This in-app feature is free to use and is increasingly informative,

however, it has a time constraint (Berry, 2018). Instagram analytics, or "insights" as the app

refers to them, only allows the user to pull data from a certain date range. Once the window to

pull from those dates closes, the data is lost and replaced. While that might be fine for the casual

user, brands that operate on more of a long-term basis will need records of the data to inform

future brands and posting decisions. Thus, social media tools like Hootsuite, Sprinklr, or Sprout

Social have been created to offer brands a way to store important data along with more robust analytic tracking services, automated reports, and additional features (Pope, 2019). While Instagram's in-app analytics offers a great, free place to start tracking data, these programs allow brands to keep tabs on long-term goals and analyze the performance of posts and campaigns to optimize content for future posting. However, while third-party services can definitely enhance a data-driven social media strategy, the aforementioned tools do come with a price point. Hootsuite, Sprinklr, and Sprout Social are all monthly services that cost between $30-$600 a month (Hennesey, 2018). While these are all very valuable tools, as a personal brand, not a corporation, it may be difficult to justify those costs, especially initially. However, despite its shortcomings, Instagram's Insights provides a pretty substantial suite for beginning analytics.

Insights are one of the many marketing advantages Instagram takes over other social media platforms. Accessing insights is extremely simple and completely free. However, the account does have to be converted to a business or creator account, also referred to as a professional account, in order to view insights. Any user can convert their profile to a business or creator profile, the only criteria are that the account has to be connected to a Facebook business page, which is also very attainable (Tran, 2019). The development of insights alone proves the legitimacy of the influencing industry. The development of professional and creator accounts is a milestone that displays how autonomously influencers have been able to build their careers. The very presence of this profile demarcation indicates that at least some social strategy elements are being considered by the influencer. The demand was so high for this data that Instagram developed an in-app feature that can be implemented with ease.

All initial Instagram accounts default to personal accounts, these are accounts typically used by the general public or user's who do not need insights or do not care to be strategic about their social media presence. However, for influencers or aspiring influencers, this in-app capability is vital to the strategic creation of content. To create or switch to one of these accounts, the user has to connect to a Facebook business page, likely because Instagram is now owned by Facebook. To convert to a business profile, the user is required to open the profile settings. On their own profile page, this will be either an ellipsis or a gear depending on the operating system. Within the menu is a "Switch to business profile" call to action. This selection will prompt the user through the process of connecting a Facebook page, setting the page to "public," and giving Instagram permission to manage the account's Facebook pages. The user will also be prompted to select what type of business umbrella the brand falls under from an ever-growing selection. After completing the process of switching to a professional account, the obvious profile changes will need to be made. Keeping keywords in mind, it's best to leave a short, casual description of what the brand does in the bio, followed by any links or call-to-actions for followers to continue their relationship with the brand. The brand's logo or primary face should serve as the profile image. Whether it's a mark or an individual, this image needs to be clear and recognizable across all platforms on which the brand may appear (Tan, 2019).

This addition to Instagram's interface not only enables any user to track success metrics and audience demographics. The development of professional profiles has legitimized the influencing industry. It acknowledges the professional needs these users have as design

influencers and provides them with tools and data, asserting that this is a field built on strategy and talent as opposed to randomized fame.

Creator vs Business

Once the profile is complete, the account holder will have access to a slew of marketing tools and analytics including page promotions and insights. This is true for both the business and creator account While business accounts emerged in 2016, creator accounts have only been around since 2018. Creator accounts were designed for niche creators, providing day to day insights as opposed to the weekly reports that might be more beneficial for larger brands (Tran, 2019).

> "Creator profiles can access daily data on audience growth, and the specific content that was connected to either the spike or dip in followers. Business accounts currently only give users access to weekly data, and it doesn't include the functionality to connect it to the content that was posted in that timeframe (Tran, 2019)."

Ultimately, creator profiles were integrated in order to let businesses differentiate from influencers or aspiring influencers. Instagram itself describes creator accounts as "Best for public figures, content producers, artists, and influencers." And business accounts as "Best for retailers, local businesses, organizations, and service providers" (Tran, 2019).
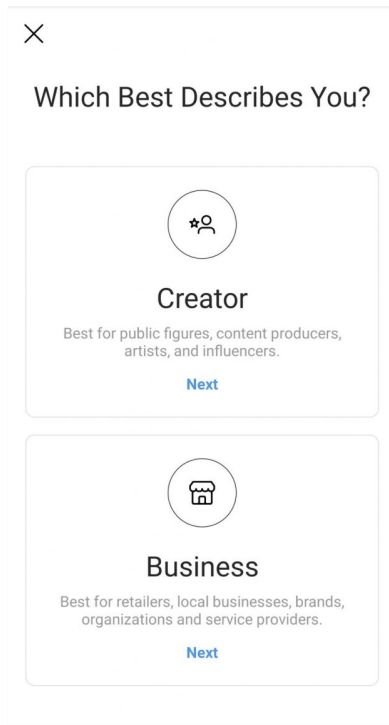
Figure 20; Professional Profile Prompt. Hadwiger, Jayna. [@jayna_hadwiger]. Settings

[Instagram Profile]. (2019). Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/jayna_hadwiger/

Since many personal brands may identify with a few of these, it can be difficult to discern

which to choose. Ultimately, the choice should be whichever makes the most sense for the brand.

However, when attempting to cultivate an online community, it's better to collect more data than

not enough. Business profiles and creator profiles have many of the same features with a few key

differences. Creator insights include more detailed audience data including daily amounts of

follows and unfollows. Creator profiles also come with a creator studio that houses content

management, audience insights, and messages all in one place. The messaging function also

differs slightly with a creator profile. Instead of all messages being housed in one folder, creator

profiles come with the ability to organize messages into primary; messages that the user wants to

be notified about, general; messages the user doesn't want to receive notifications for, and requests; messages from accounts the user doesn't follow. This function was created in order to help accounts that receive a lot of messages prioritize their responses. Creator accounts also let the user define their niche in their account category more so than a business profile. With a business profile, the account will have the same business descriptor as the linked Facebook page. With a creator account, the brand descriptors are limitless, allowing the brand to identify with the most niche version of their offerings. Creator accounts also allow users to turn off some of the contact functionality that is standard with a business profile, allowing for more privacy. It is important to note that these functions are ever-changing and that, at the moment, creator profiles cater to accounts with a large number of followers. That's not to say the functions won't benefit users trying to amass a larger following, it just means that the user has the ultimate decision as to what profile works best for their brand's needs and success metrics. Aside from the aforementioned nuances, creator and business accounts still offer many similar insights that provide valuable data to any creative looking for more insight into their target audience and online performance (Tran, 2019).

Insights

Regardless of the chosen profile type, Instagram's insights remain relatively similar. Insight, currently accessible from the accounts profile screen, contains three tabs, Content, Activity, and Audience. The self-explanatory tabs provide insights into post performance, reach, and audience tendencies respectively (Tran, 2019).

Content is divided into an overview, a review of the past year's post performance, stories, and promotions. The overview provides a simple, numerical summary as to how many posts and

stories the account has published in the past week and how that compares to the prior week. This can be useful in assessing how much content the audience wants to see from the account per week. The posts section ranks the accounts post from most to least amount of actions taken. The available filters for posts include calls, comments, emails, engagement, follows, get directions, impressions, profile visits, reach, saves, shares, texts, and website clicks. The user can choose to refine this ranking further by narrowing down the type of post; photo, video, carousel, or shopping, and/or by the timeline; a week, a month, three months, six months, a year, or two years (Tran, 2019). This can help the user determine which content is most effective for the brand/audience relationship.

Stories are also a part of the content assessment. Stories typically have higher engagement and, since they are only available for 24 hours, are a great way to increase interaction and post more casual content. Stories are also ranked according to interactions but the interactions differ slightly from that of posts. A user can choose to filter story ranking by back clicks, calls, emails, exits, follows, forward clicks, get directions, impressions, link clicks, next story, profile visits, reach, replies, shares, texts, and website clicks, all comparable within a 24hr, week, or two-week timeframe. This insight can help brands determine what fast content resonates with the audience best and what they might want to see more of (Tran, 2019).

The last category under the content tab is promotions. Under promotions, users can choose to create new promotions or manage past promotions, all through Facebook ad integration. Promotions cost anywhere from $1 - $1,000 and can run from 1 day to an entire month. The user can also choose to automate the targeted audience or to tailor the ad to target an audience manually by location, interests, age, and gender. The user can also choose what action

they would like to promote, including sending the audience to the brand's profile, website, or direct messages. When creating a post, Instagram automatically prompts the user to promote their highest performing content, meaning the most recent post with the most engagement (Tran, 2019).

The activity tab offers more numerical data displayed in graphs. The activity tab only contains two sections, discovery and interactions. Discovery provides a comprehensive look at accounts reached and impressions made within the previous week. It also shows which day of the week the most interaction occurred on. Interactions, on the other hand, show how many actions were taken on the brand's account within that same week. Interactions display which actions were taken, the most common being profile visits or website clicks, on which days those actions occurred the most, and how all of this information compares to the previous week.

The last insight tab, the audience tab, is where most of the discrepancies between the two profile types occur. Both creator and business profiles are able to access important audience demographics and tendencies. Users can view their audience's primary locations, city or country, age ranges, gender, and time and most popular times of day and days of the week for audience interaction. The one function that only creative profiles offer is called growth. The growth function allows the brand to assess how their community is growing and aligning with the content they're posting. It not only shows the user how many followers they have compared to the previous week, but also on which days they gained or lost followers and where that puts their overall growth (Tran, 2019).
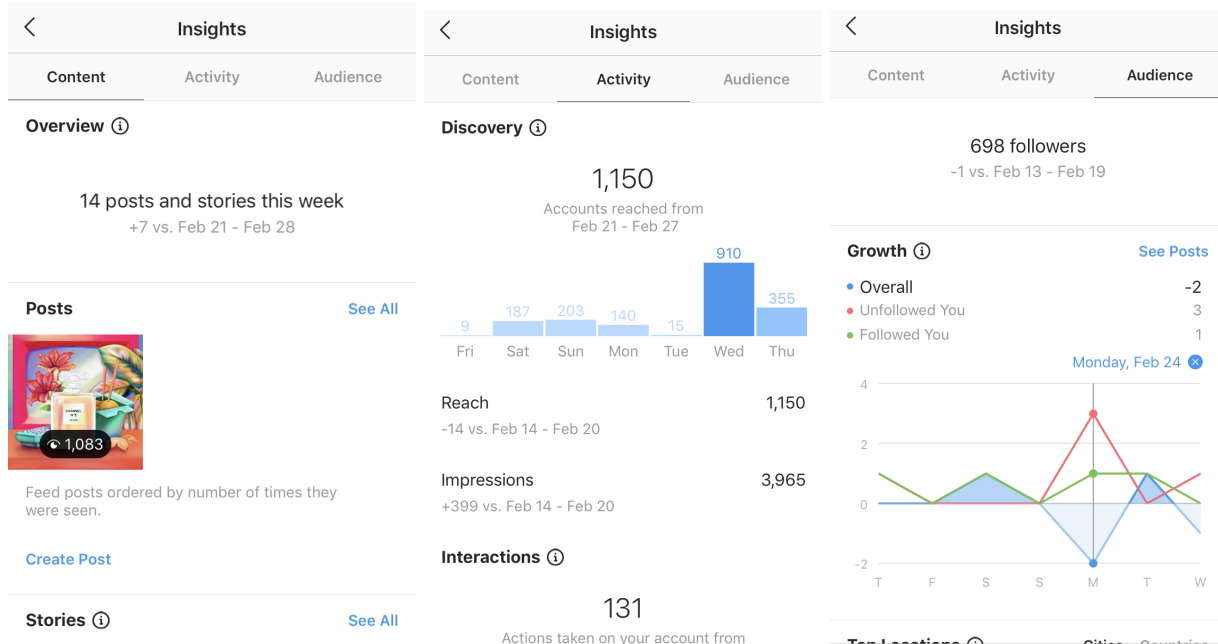
Figures 21.1-21.3. Hadwiger, Jayna. [@jayna_hadwiger]. Insights [Instagram Profile]. (2019).

Retrieved from https://www.instagram.com/jayna_hadwiger/

While it is absolutely possible to utilize strategy and experience growth without these insights, numerical data and visual comparisons can help streamline and expedite the process of growing an online community. Without knowing if the account is actually reaching the target audience in terms of content and timing, refining the social media strategy would be much more of a guessing game than hypothesized experiments based on facts. The most important factor for creatives trying to grow a brand is that they understand the audience and what motivates them to take action. The only way to understand this without trial and error is to assess the data and continue posting based on the information gained. Additionally, the accessibility of this data

leaves creatives no excuse not to take advantage of this platform's functionality (Social Media

for Creatives, 2018).

Chapter 6: Algorithms

Perhaps the largest hurdle brands face on social media today is navigating the

ever-changing algorithms social platforms use to prioritize the content users are exposed to. This

is especially true for brands that primarily use Facebook and/or Instagram. Algorithms can

change at any given time and typically without much warning to users. In 2018 Facebook made

changes to their algorithm that saw many brands scrambling to change their strategies in order to

bolster their organic reach. Similar changes from Instagram have resulted in the same response

(Barnhart, 2019).

Originally, platforms tended to show users content based on the famed "timeline"

approach. That is users saw posts on their feed in chronological order of the accounts they

follow. However, 2018 saw a major shift as platforms began altering their algorithms to

accommodate the influx of posts users were inundated with. This shift was made by platforms in

an attempt to show users the content that is most relevant to them based on their defined

signifiers (Barnhart, 2019). The shift was also pushback to the amount of branded content users

were inundated with. In a candid moment, Mark Zuckerberg himself addressed the issue:

> One of our big focus areas for 2018 is making sure the time we all spend on Facebook is
>
> time well spent….We built Facebook to help people stay connected and bring us closer
>
> together with the people that matter to us. That's why we've always put friends and family
>
> at the core of the experience. Research shows that strengthening our relationships
>
> improves our well-being and happiness (Barnhart, 2019).

However, the efforts made to keep platforms more personal have not seen brands go quietly. Instead, brands have evolved with the ever-changing algorithms that reward only the most authentic, personable brands. However, certain strategies can be implemented to ensure brands are getting as much visibility on Facebook as possible (Barnhart, 2019).

Content calendars are at the apex of these strategies. Content calendars not only help organize posts to ensure versatility, but also to ensure brands are posting at optimum times for visibility. Facebook also rewards users that post video content. This is because videos have proven value to users and result in higher engagement. This has been encouraged by the implementation of Facebook live which, not only notifies followers of this activity but encourages authentic content by creating real-time interactions between accounts and their followers. Adding to their quest for authenticity, Facebook also now punishes posts that outright ask for likes by giving them lower visibility scores. Facebook wants users that drive conversations instead of spamming users. Brands that prompt users with a question, however, are rewarded and often experience higher engagement rates (Barnhart, 2019). Getting content pushed through non-brand users also adds to visibility as users are 16x more likely to read a post from a friend rather than a brand. Facebook also wants to keep users on their platform so brands that overuse external links receive less placement. Instead, promoting unique, native content with authentic captions will result in much more traction. Other tactics included participating in groups, narrowing the audience based on geographic location and interests, and investing in paid promotions. Just as with Instagram, the most authentic, targeted posts receive the highest visibility. Nonetheless, both Facebook and Instagram rely on ads to generate profit. Therefore both platforms have robust advertising capabilities integrated into their professional account

functionality. The key to advertising is playing by each platform's rules and creating authentic, valuable content that users can engage with (Barnhart, 2020).
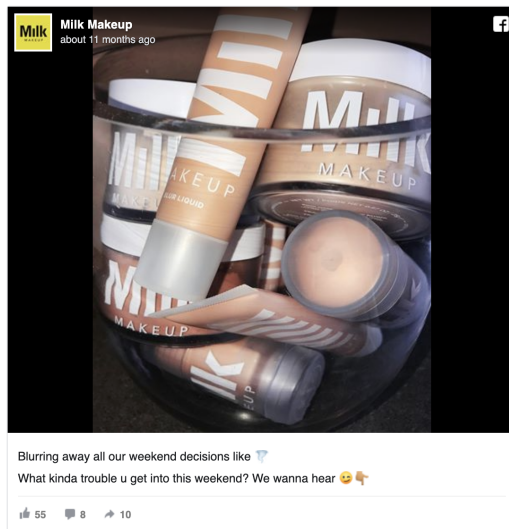
Figure 22. Milk Makeup Facebook Ad. Barnhart, Brent. (2020). Retrieved from https://sproutsocial.com/insights/facebook-algorithm/; Copyright 2019.

While Instagram and Facebook are the top two platforms for B2C interaction, they are also both now owned by Facebook. The Instagram and Facebook algorithms have both created large hurdles for brands that over-market. While both Facebook and Instagram algorithms reward similar user behavior and have similar goals, Instagram's algorithm is arguably more talked about and more easily understood (Barnhart, 2020). Instagram has 3 ranking qualifiers, relationship, interest, and timeliness. Prioritizing relationships means that Instagram shows users content from the accounts they interact with the most. Interactions include comments, tags, and even direct messages. This shift has allowed users to see 90% of posts from friends and family

(Barnhart, 2020). That is, the more brands have genuine interactions with their audience, the more they will be seen. Instagram also prioritizes posts based on users' previous behavior or interest. That is Instagram tracks what type of content users typically look or search for and shows them more of that content by using image recognition technology to assess the content of a photo. Thus the more a brand falls into a certain niche, the more likely members and fans of that niche will see the content. Lastly, all platforms continue to emphasize timeliness. Brands have to understand when their target audience is most likely to be active on the platform as brands continue to show the most relevant content as well as the most recent content (Barnhart, 2019).

While much of social media is not an exact science, the algorithms are. Understanding the different algorithms platforms use is essential in getting content seen by the right users. While social media algorithms are constantly changing, the reason for the shift these platforms made is unlikely to change in the near future. While the aforementioned tactics are suited for the current algorithms, understanding the platform's values is essential for ensuring social media success regardless of the nuances of the algorithms. The most important evergreen strategy for brands is to ensure they are operating from a place of authenticity, interaction, and providing valuable content to the right people (Barnhart, 2020).

Chapter 7: Why Instagram

In addition to housing some powerful in-app marketing tools, Instagram is the most conducive platform for design influencer success. Instagram is not only one of the most popular social media platforms, but it is also responsible for propelling the influencing industry to the

levels it has reached today. Instagrams visual nature and compatibility with marketing have made

it the birthplace and number one primary platform for creative influencer development (Carter,

2016).

Influencers were born out of a mix of societal change, convenience, and visibility. Not

only was Instagram one of the first mobile-first social media platforms, it's discoverability

features and quick content appealed to the shortened attention span and high mobility observed

in today's society. Instagram has created the perfect storm that has propelled it to one of the top

marketing tools for brands (Carter, 2016). Though other platforms like Youtube and Tik Tok

have influencers of their own, in addition to having high visibility, integrated marketing tools,

and accessibility, the visual nature of Instagram makes it the most conducive for designers to

grow their own personal brands. Instagram has become an ideal platform on which design

entrepreneurs can thrive. Whether it serves as a portfolio, store, or forum, it provides a quick,

inexpensive way to gauge the consumers' interest (Sanders, et al., 2019).

Having a large Instagram audience is now not only lucrative but also highly respected in

the design community. Instagram is a place where the most talented and thought-provoking

designers can share their insights and advice, and it has not gone unnoticed. Design influencers

are not only successful in their own right, they are being noticed as thought leaders and top talent

by some of the largest and most prestigious governing bodies in the design community (Social

Media for Creatives, 2018).

The 2019 Adobe Max summit boasted an impressive lineup of creatives with appearances

from such established designers as Paula Scher, partner at Pentagram, one of the world's largest

independently-owned design studios, and Stefan Sagmeister, one of the design communities most

polarizing figures. Both Scher and Sagmeister established their influence in the design community prior to the development of social media, however, the summit also showcased several designers whose success has been founded on Instagram. Of the twelve creatives showcased as "Shining Stars" on the Adobe Max website, 6 of them fall into the design influencer category. These 6 individuals included both illustrators and designers alike, with a combined following of nearly 2 million followers. These 7 individuals all have a consistent, unique aesthetic, a discernible voice, a distinct personality, a following of at least 10k, and a primary income founded on this following. However, those aspects are about the only thing those 7 individuals had in common regarding their careers as design influencers. Each of them has identified a niche so personal to them that their profiles, sources of income, and styles vary greatly. Their careers are as unique as their personalities and they're not the only ones (Adobe Max, 2019).

As the design influencing community grows, more designers are getting partnerships, selling products, writing books, and partaking in speaking events. The 2019 Adobe Max Summit was merely an example of how thought leadership in the design space is shifting to make room for this new breed of creative. As one of the most highly regarded design conferences, the Adobe Max Summit along with other distinguishing benchmarks, continue to see design-influencers serving as thought-leaders in the design community alongside their more historically established counterparts.

Section V: Social Considerations

The introduction of social media has undoubtedly opened doors for designers who were previously unimaginable. Many historically significant designers such as Paula Scher, Stefan Sagemeister, and Milton Glaser are not household names, yet famous in the design community. Today, modern design celebrities are those that have large Instagram followings, and this list of individuals is likely much larger than any naming popular designers of the 20th century (Social Media for Creatives, 2018). However, social media comes with its own set of considerations for creatives and society as a whole.

For instance, many creatives struggle with self-promotion. In fact, creativity and introversion have been linked to insecurity in a number of studies according to the Harvard Business Review. Though nothing concrete has resulted, the vulnerability creatives feel when sharing their work is undeniable. This inhibition and personal connection to work that many creatives experience often prevents them from taking full advantage of social media. This could be a result of the perfectionist standards that social media perpetuates. A phenomenon that the digital age has created is the idea of "imposter syndrome". Imposter Syndrome is defined by the Harvard Business Review as, "a collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist despite evident success" (Corkindale, 2008). It is something that many struggle with in the digital age due to the over-saturation of content and, as a result, constant comparisons that can be drawn. This is especially true for designers or those in passion-centric fields who tend to associate self-worth more closely with their careers. Social media can be an intimidating place for many creatives as they are forced to compare their work of more established artists. However, what many don't realize is that social media is a curated image and even the more established artists were once

less polished. It takes posting and creating consistently to see improvement and establish a brand, yet many don't try for fear of failure. This is important to remember as the social media world is still relatively new and changing rapidly, it is difficult to discern what the long term psychological effects may be. The effects of imposter syndrome and social media related anxiety have been so great that Instagram has initiated the removal of visible likes in some countries. This means that users can still give and receive likes but only the account owner will know how many likes a given post receives. The goal of this shift was to minimize the negative mental health impacts of Instagram while allowing users to focus on the content and not the superficiality of the app. While this has yet to be implemented globally, the new initiative raises many questions for the future of influencing (Tran, 2019).

Another consideration is the accessibility of design propelled by social media. Social media has propelled a personal branding renaissance that has elevated the visibility of design and designers and made design and design tools more accessible. If individuals are taking it upon themselves to brand themselves, they are inherently designing some aspects of that brand perpetuating the thought that design is for everyone (Gerritzen, 2010). "The design-your-life-mind-set is part of a wider cultural and economic phenomenon that I call *prosumers*-simultaneous production and consumption." (Armstrong, 2009). Consumers inherently want to customize and nothing has been historically more customizable than an individual's social media presence. An individual's social media presence now rivals reality in many ways, not only is a social media persona editable, but it can be the best version of self that is portrayed to the entire world. Tools have been developed to help non-designers cultivate their ideal aesthetic. Therefore, in a world with more design-centric and aware than ever, the practice

is simultaneously gaining awareness and being marginalized. While social media contributes to do-it-yourself attitudes makes stealing creative work easier and less prosecutable than ever, designers have to adapt to stay relevant in a world where everyone thinks they can and should be a designer, design influencing is only one of many ways designers are doing this (Gerritzen, 2010). "The more that our economy runs on people doing it themselves, the more people will demand opportunities to do so, and the more graphic designers will have to adapt their methods" (Armstrong, 2009). Individuals crave uniqueness more than ever. They want everything they touch to be a reflection of themselves. Not only is this a common pain point in client work, but it has escalated to the point of threatening design as a profession and reducing it to merely a practice (Gerritzen, 2010).

Conclusion

While design influencing is a relatively new field, developed only in the past decade, not much research exists to validate the profession. However, the profession has not gone without recognition from the design community. Not only are design influencers continuously recognized as leaders of the design community, but have also paved the path for others to follow so more designers might be able to build successful careers around the niche in which they thrive. These careers are fully tailored to the designer and vary in scalability, but are nonetheless founded on well-researched strategies. This indicates that this career path can be pursued and grounded in strategy and design principles collectively tailored and geared toward a unique goal. Personal branding that is grounded in elements of corporate branding practices, combined with social

media strategies, is the foundation of design influencing careers. While the technical qualifications may not be as stringent as those in other professional design fields, design influencers have to meet qualifications determined by their respective audiences. Their work is judged by millions of people that serve not only as consumers but as validation for their practice. These design influencers come from a variety of different backgrounds and education levels but have a personal brand that has been successfully promoted to their Instagram community. Every interaction they have on social media is a testament to their brand and an opportunity to expand their consumer base. While a solid social strategy and personal brand are the founding elements of such careers, the individual elements of these strategies allow each design influencer to build their ideal career. Through this research, more patterns, large and small, will be identified. These patterns can be used to create a systemized approach to design influencing that can be manipulated for each designer's unique purposes.

Methodology

Introduction

Designers are no strangers to social media. Designer-centric social platforms, like Behance and Dribble, were founded in the early days of social media, in 2004 and 2009 respectively, compared to more broadly used platforms that didn't come to fruition until the 2010s. While design-centric platforms provided a network on which designers could easily share work and find jobs, it was the development of Instagram and with it the influencing industry that gave rise to an entirely new type of designer, design influencers (Social Media for Creatives, 2018).

The bureau of labor statistics lists graphic design jobs as graphic designers, art directors, and multimedia designers and animators ("Art and Design", 2020). Today, professional titles for designers are as diverse as the field itself and span more than three categories deep. While the development of social media and the digital world certainly expanded the professional possibilities for designers, particularly in the User Experience division, designers have never fit neatly into professional titles (Social Media for Creatives, 2018). Famed designer, David Carson is described as an art director, graphic designer, and surfer. Saul Bass was a graphic designer and Oscar-winning filmmaker. Paula Scher is a graphic designer, painter, educator, and principal at one of the most well-known design agencies in the US, Pentagram. These are just a few of the most historically influential designers, but the one thing they have in common is that they were breaking the boundaries of what it means to be a graphic designer in the professional world and

forging their individualized career paths. These influential designers were following design influencing career paths before a platform or term even existed (Armstrong, 2009).

Today, with the aid of social media and personal branding practices, the number of designers that find success outside of professional norms is undeniable. Today's influential designers are design influencers in every sense. In other words, they have enormous social followings and a consistent and identifiable brand that has allowed them to create a career that is entirely their own. They are illustrators, letterers, muralists, animators, art-directors, logo designers, UX designers, agency owners, freelancers, type designers, photographers, authors, educators, advocates, podcast hosts, textile designers, merchandise creators, and, quite frankly, whatever they want to be. The most successful of these design influencers likely fall into two or more of these categories (Social Media for Creatives, 2018). The amount of reach these individuals have not only allows for a wide consumer base and increased discoverability for products and collaborations, and therefore a more lucrative and personalized career. However, an increased audience means increased competition. The standardization of incredible talent is an unforeseen side effect of a digitalized world that has consequently made it difficult for talent alone to reach design influencer levels of success. Design influencers, or any type of talent influencer, has to provide another form of gratification to their audience to reach a level of autonomous success (Hennesey, 2018).

The most successful and influential designers have never fallen neatly into professional categories even before social media. The one thing influential designers of the past and present have in common is that they are all extraordinary individuals, that is they do not rely on talent alone. They are out of the ordinary, unique, have a diverse set of skills and an intangible or undefinable factor for users to utilize. Their work and careers are entirely personalized.

This study will examine the work of such individuals as it pertains to their presence on Instagram in order to formulate and make assessments regarding the ability to reproduce the circumstances necessary to pursue this type of personalized career. As much of this information is based on perceptions, this study was formulated based on early observations made by the researcher. The work and criteria observed and document as well as the subsequent results are subject to the researcher's perceptions and potential biases.

Explanation and Justification of Methods

The following methodology will examine three separate groups of design influencers over the course of three months to determine intangible and undefinable factors so that others can develop a business model of sorts to create their own customized career path. By tracking aspects of these designers' social media performance, strategy, and personal brand, this methodology will help identify common denominators in design influencer success. The findings will help inform a pattern language or interchangeable set of guidelines that can be used to create a tailored career path for designers of all fields.

Population/subjects:

The study will sample a group consisting of graphic designers, letterers, illustrators, and animators on Instagram with a following in the ranges of 5 to10k, 10 to25K, and more than 25K. Each tier will consist of a group of 30 composed of a randomized assortment of designers from the aforementioned four sub-categories.

Sample:

Public accounts of graphic designers, letterers, illustrators, and animators on Instagram with an identifiable style or persona that are in the process of or have established their primary income based on their Instagram followings.

Justification for Population:

As the preliminary literature review details, Instagram is the chosen platform for many

reasons. It is visual in nature, making it the ideal platform for designers, but also was

instrumental in the development of the influencing industry. The platform also has over 1 billion

users and has become one of the top marketing platforms for brands (Hennessey, 2018).

Instagram has also incorporated many marketing tools for these brands such as available

performance and audience insights, shoppable posts, contact features, paid promotions, and

external links. Also noted in the aforementioned literature review is the fact that Adobe Max, one

of the nation's largest creative summits, featured 12 creatives, half of which would fall into the

category of design influencers as defined by this research (Adobe Max, 2019). The follower

brackets included those that are on the cusp, often considered micro or nano influencers with 1 to

10k followers, those that currently fall into the macro influencing category with 10 to 25k

followers, and those that have an established influencing career, or mega influencers, with 25k or

more followers (Hennesey, 2018). These have been broken down based on preliminary research

and markers that are recognized by Instagram. Those with 1 to 10k followers tend to be on their

way to a career in design influencing but typically have not established the necessary following

to result in enough social media-based income to qualify as influencers. Moreso, Instagram does

not even unlock certain marketing features for those with less than 10k followers including

swipe-up actions in stories and other actionable items. Those individuals with 10 to 25k

followers are more difficult to define as it is unclear whether or not some of these individuals are

able to rely solely on their Instagram presence and related opportunities for their income.

However, It can be broadly assumed that at 25k followers, an individual can draw enough

income based on their social media presence to be defined as a design influencer. Having an identifiable style is important in order to conclude that the design work is the primary reason for the account's popularity as opposed to personal or alternative reasons. The identifiable style will be defined by and discerned as a consistent way of presenting and creating content usually by a combination of factors including aesthetics, tonality, or method of delivery. Finally, only those designers with public Instagram accounts, that is those accounts that don't require requests to view, will be used to ensure the utmost provisions have been taken in determining what data is viable for the use of the study.

Sampling method:

Non-probability purposive: Instagram is a public database that allows access to a surplus of public accounts, from which 90 accounts that meet the aforementioned requirements and best serve the study will be selected. However, since there is no list or documentation of all accounts, the selections will be randomized; The accounts presented will depend on Instagram's algorithmic response to the previous content the researcher's account has been linked to. Thus, the sampling method will be non-probable. The sample will be purposive in that of the accounts presented to the researcher, the subjects selected will fall into predetermined criteria so that the follower counts and professions may best serve this study. It should also be noted that the creation of an unbiased (new) Instagram account was not used due to the hurdles it would have presented as there is no library of design influencers to reference as a starting point and any new account would simply be privy to the same algorithmic biases, if not more than an existing one as Instagram shows users new accounts based on the type of accounts they already follow.

Quantitative/Qualitative Method:

The method employed will most closely resemble a pattern analysis. The methodology of the study

will follow the same framework laid by architect Christopher Alexander, which involves determining

the large and small patterns that can be observed by examining the defined population sample and

their social media interactions. These patterns will help define such things as what these individuals

provide to their followers, how they convert these followers to primary and secondary sources of

income, and additional factors that play a role in the success of a design influencer.

Instruments and Procedures:

The instruments for this procedure will include the use of google sheets to profile the designers and

track the following categories. In order to maintain the integrity of the study and protect the privacy

of the subjects, the data obtained in this study may only be ascertained from readily available

information on Instagram or on a platform the subject has made publicly available via Instagram.

Additionally, the data obtained and the types of data obtained were determined by initial observations

made by the researcher and therefore subjective. This research and the data obtained are meant to

serve as an early, initial foundation for this research to be expanded and improved upon, especially in

the areas of subjectivity regarding certain criteria that was assessed.

The following types of data will be collected in an attempt to discern patterns amongst the various

categories:

Biographical - User information readily available from the user's Instagram profile page. This will provide demographic insight as well as information regarding the use of social strategy practices:

1. Type of Design (Illustration, Lettering, Graphic Design (catchall), and Animation)

    a. Type of design has been divided into these groups to determine if design influencing is more suitable to some subcategories of design than others, as well as to determine if and how design influencing varies based on specialty.

2. The Subject's Name (if discernable)

    a. The subjects' names will be tracked for simple identification purposes as some subjects may have more than one account.

3. The Subject's Display Name

    a. The subjects' display names may be different from their legal names as they may have more than one account or choose to utilize SEO keywords or descriptors in this field to enhance discoverability.

4. Social Media Handle

    a. The subjects' social media handles will be tracked to determine if the use of SEO practices is present and distinguished when the subject has more than one account.

5. Use of professional profile

    a. The use of a professional profile will be tracked in order to determine if the subject is taking advantage of in-app analytics and therefore utilizing some form of social media strategy.

6. Verification

   a. Account verification will be tracked to determine existing brand awareness. Only well-known accounts may be verified, thus these markers serve as a status symbol for both brands and users.

7. Biographical Information or Additional Profiles

   a. Any additional biographical information along with the mention of other profiles will be tracked to discern the separation of personal, professional, or any other distinction the user may have chosen to make.

8. Geographic Location (if discernable)

   a. The subject's geographic location will be used to track the concentration of design influencers in communities with populations in the following tiers:

   b. Indiscernible

   c. less than 250,000

   d. 250,000-500,000

   e. 500,000-1,000,000

   f. 1,000,000+

Expertise - This information help discern a correlation, if one exists, between design influencers and certain distinguishing career attributes:

9. Types of income (primary, secondary, and tertiary sources, if discernable

     a. Types of income will be tracked to determine whether or not full-time design influencer status has been reached. It will also help to either discredit or reinforce the statements regarding hybridity.

10. Work Experience (if discernable)

     a. Any notable work experience will be tracked to determine whether or not design influencers maintain validity and stature outside of social media.

11. Education Level (if discernable)

     a. Education type and level will be tracked in order to discern the importance of and correlation between institutionalized learning and design influencing.

Personal Brand - This information will help validify the focus on personal branding practices and reinforce the larger idea that design influencing has shifted designers into a B2C space:

12. Personal Site

     a. The use of a personal site will be tracked to determine the level of career independence and autonomy as well as the presence of a personal brand.

13. E-commerce

     a. The type and use of e-commerce will be tracked in order to determine the level of career independence and autonomy as well as the presence of a personal brand. It will also identify common third-party platforms design influencers use to support their independent careers.

14. Style & Niche (Type and Consistency)

a. Style consistency level will be tracked in order to make correlations between style and success.

b. Niche descriptors as perceived by the researcher will be tracked in order to determine which common niches are conducive to experiencing the most growth.

15. Brand Archetype

a. Brand archetypes as perceived by the researcher will be tracked in order to determine if there are more popular archetypes amongst the subcategories and whether or not certain archetypes resonate more with a social audience.

16. Value - The value the subjects provide to their audiences will be tracked in order to determine common value combinations as well as which values the audiences prioritize.

a. The Values have been determined based on what a design influencer may provide to their audience and will be documented as perceived by the researcher:

   i. Aesthetic Appeal - defined by particular affinity or talent

   ii. Informative - defined by the sharing of valuable information

   iii. Relatable - defined by perceived accessibility or particular charisma

   iv. Inspiring - defined by the ability to motivate

   v. Shock Value - defined by the ability to surprise

   vi. Sentimentality - defined by the ability to elicit an emotional reaction based on some form of symbolism

b. These will be tracked in order to determine which values the Instagram audience prioritizes.

Social Media Strategy - This information will help validify the focus on social media strategy and help establish design influencing as a career path with many different, legitimate factors at play.

17. Other Platforms

    a. The use of other platforms will be tracked in order to discern which additional social media platforms are most conducive for designers wishing to continue their personal brand awareness across multiple platforms.

18. Highlights

    a. The use of highlights will be tracked to discern how useful this tool may be in providing additional content outlets for design influencers.

19. Instagram Engagement

    a. Likes and Comments to Followers %

        i. The average number of likes to followers within a given time frame will be helpful in discerning which design influencers receive the most engagement from their followers and whether or not that impacts growth and success.

    b. Comments to Likes Ratio

        i. The average number of comments to followers within a given time frame will be helpful in discerning which design influencers receive the most engagement from their followers and whether or not that impacts growth and success.

20. Posting Frequency

a. The average amount of design-influencer posts per week will be tracked to determine if a correlation between posting frequency and growth can be ascertained.

21. Post Type

a. The type of posts (static, carousel, video, etc.) will be tracked in order to determine if a certain type of content consistently garners more engagement than others.

22. Hashtags/Gimmicks

a. The use of hashtags and or gimmicks such as giveaways will be tracked to determine if SEO is being utilized and if these result in higher engagement rates.

Growth - This information will serve as the primary success metric for all subjects and additional variables. Since income and other success metrics may not be discernable, growth will be the main factor in determining the presumed success of a design influence.

Followers/Growth

b. Follower count and growth will be tracked to serve as a baseline success metric for any other factor that is being tracked.

c. Additionally, it will help determine which subcategories of design experience more social media success as well as which subjects may move tiers based on their following account at the beginning and end of the study.

The aforementioned attributes will be tracked for each individual subject, 90 total, which is divided into the subcategories of micro influencers (<10,000 followers), macro influencers (10,000-25,000 followers), and mega influencers (>25,000 followers). The subcategories will then be divided by broad specialty, Illustration, Lettering, Design, and Animation. The subjects' social media accounts will then be tracked over the course of three months, or 90 days. While certain information will only need to be documented once, other data, such as follower count and growth, will be collected exactly once a month on the same day to maintain integrity as follower counts can be quite volatile.

Results

The findings and patterns discussed in this research are meant to inform a personalized strategy. That is, the patterns are not intended to create a strict, formulaic approach to design influencing, but rather to provide flexible guidelines so that any designer may pursue this career path with the intent of personalization. Design influencing is a customizable career path at its core and should be treated as such, its novelty lies in its ambiguity. This research is intended to provide structure to an otherwise unstructured field that may provide more creative fulfillment, control, and opportunities to those in the professional design community. As mentioned previously, all information obtained in the study was public information shared by the subjects. The results of this study are meant to serve as a pattern analysis that may serve to inform a strategic approach to a design influencing career path. The individual components may be utilized in a combination of ways to ensure that the strategy best serves the individual designer. Each section will break down the findings within each group, micro, macro, and mega, or within each career subcategory, illustration, lettering, design, and animation, before closing the section with a conclusion and any recommendations for implementation.

Biographical

Biographical information is information that can be discerned directly from the influencer's profile page. This information is displayed at the top of the Instagram profile page, beside a profile photo of some sort. Biographical information can be used to discern demographic information the user has chosen to make available, such as chosen pronouns, geographic location, and design specialty, but it can also be used to identify patterns regarding

social media strategies such as SEO, cross-platform brand positioning, and whether or not these users choose to separate their "brand" account from their personal or other account(s).

<div align="center">Display Name</div>

The first biographical information to be tracked is the subject's name. The display name is easily discernible from either the subject's Instagram handle or display name. However, it is important to distinguish the subject's actual name so that any qualifiers or keywords that are utilized can be identified. It is also important to note the subject's name in order to track brand continuity in an effort to support the idea that these designers themselves are the brand. Their names carry recognition. Of the 90 designers sampled, only 3 (3.33%) had no reference of their first or last name in their Instagram handles. Additionally, only 2 of the 90 subjects (2.22%) had no reference to their or last name in either their display name or handle. These two did, however, choose to utilize keywords and in addition to another recognizable alias instead. Both of these designers fell into the illustration subgenre, one being a part of the micro sample, the other a part of the macro sample. All subjects in the mega sample utilized some form of their name in both the display name and handle. While this exhibits stronger personal brand recognition within the mega sample, there seemed to be no direct correlation between growth and the use of first and last names within their Instagram handles and display names. However, both subjects that had no reference to their legal names in either their display name or handle experienced enough growth over the course of the study that they both moved up one follower count bracket and would now be considered macro and mega influencers.

For these reasons, it can be inferred that the best course of action for establishing a display name and handle is to consider what the personal brand may embody and how closely that should be related to the individual person. If the user desires to have a recognizable name that their followers will associate with their work, they may need to consider whether or not that name should be their legal name or not. Inevitably, the display name or handle will become what followers latch on to. Whether or not the designer wants their personal brand to be associated with their legal name or with an alias is a personal decision. However, regardless of which decision is made, the "brand name" will be most effective if it is memorable, reflective of the brand values, and catchy or easy to pronounce. For example, one subject, Lisa Fagegaltier, has a lengthy, last name that may be difficult for some to pronounce. Lisa in itself is not a differentiator. Therefore, the subject chose Asyle as the Instagram display name, the handle being asyleart. Not only is Asyle, short, memorable, and unique, it is reiterated within the handle along with a keyword for what type of content followers might expect to see. For this reason, the personal brand will now be associated with the name Asyle instead of Lisa. Since Lisa saw a substantial amount of growth under this alias, it can be assumed that brand recognition for Asyle has gone up and any future reference to the name Lisa Fagegaltier. Fagegaltier and the other subject who successfully developed a personal brand separate from their legal identities are proof that this method works if done well. Neither user of legal name or alias is preferred over the other even though the former seems to be the vastly preferred method amongst design influencers. The only instance in which the use of an alias may be recommended is when the designer either desires to separate themselves from the brand for personal or professional reasons, or when the designer's legal name is not easily memorable, discernable, or unique.

The remainder of the samples, the other 98% did, in fact, have some form of their legal name as part of the display name as well as the handle. For the remaining 98%, only 8%, or 8/98 subjects, included words other than their legal names as the display name. These words were largely primary and keywords that serve SEO purposes. Similar to the use of an alias, the majority of the subjects that used keywords within the display name in addition to their legal names belonged primarily to the macro group. Common keywords used amongst these individuals included; art, design, illustration, lettering, and UX/UI. 5 out of the 8 individuals using keywords in their display names experienced high amounts of growth across all three months. 2 of the 8 experienced growth in the first two months that tapered off in the last while only 1 of the 8 experienced negative growth in 2 of the 3 months, however, that subject still exhibited overall growth for all 3 months. It should also be noted that 5 of the 8 users were categorized by their primary expertise as illustrators.

Since all 8 of the subjects utilizing keywords in the display name experienced cumulative growth over the course of the study, it can be inferred that the use of primary keywords within the display name has a positive correlation with follower count. The recommended approach to implementation is to choose short, concise, and accurate keywords to use in addition to a legal name or alias that the user will associate with the brand. The resulting name/keyword combination should still be memorable, descriptive, and concise. Keywords should only be used to enhance discoverability and to provide context as to what type of content followers can expect to see.

Handle

The user's Instagram handle is yet another area that can house keywords and reinforce brand recognition. Similar to the display name, most of the subjects used this area for either SEO or further brand recognition. That is, most of the observed handles consisted of some reference to the subject's name and what they specialize in. However, since this area has to be entirely unique for each user, that is no two users may have the same handle, this is a common place to find underscores, numbers, and other characters. While this is a common practice amongst basic Instagram users, all but one of the subject's avoided this practice. Various forms of punctuation, underscores, and dashes were found in other subject's handles, but only one subject used numbers in conjunction with a seemingly random word or group of characters that were not associated with their practice or legal name. That being said, the other 89 subjects utilized some form of their name or alias along with keywords to compose their entirely unique handle. While the handle was a more popular area for subjects to incorporate some SEO, still only 35 (less than 40%) of the 90 subjects utilized keywords or descriptors to any degree. The remaining 55 subjects only used letters tied directly to their legal names. Of the 35 using keywords within their handles, only 6 were amongst the mega sample group. The keywords utilized were roughly the same as the keywords utilized in the display names; illustration, studio, create, made, design, etc… However, unlike the display names, some subjects (15 of the 25) chose to implement brand descriptors or secondary keywords here. Examples of descriptors utilized included, friends, wonder, feminist, etc… all describing some aspect of that subject's work.

No real correlation between the use of keywords within the Instagram handles and overall growth was found. However, it should be noted that the use of keywords or descriptors tapered off drastically within the mega sample. This trend can be presumably linked to a decreasing need to tell audiences what type of content to expect, reinforcing the idea that at the mega stage, the personal brand should be more established and the need for discoverability practices like SEO has decreased. It should also be noted that a lack of additional words adds to brand recognition as the handle will be associated inseparably with the account and, depending on the memorability, may end up serving as the primary recognizable name for the brand. If an instagram handle follows the same, short, memorable, and unique principles, followers may very well latch onto that more so than the display name. Instagram handles are also how users become associated with content that others share or tag them in. Thus, it will be far less confusing for audiences if the handle and display name are relatively similar. While the use of descriptors and keywords may help an aspiring design influencer establish their brand, they don't seem to be of any use and may hinder the recognition of already established personal brands.

Professional Profiles and verification

The use of a professional profile is much more straightforward and easily discernible than other aspects to be tracked. While there is no demarcation to indicate whether that profile is a creator or business account, it can be inferred by the type of account. Typically business accounts are represented by a type of business, ie artist, graphic designer, etc… whereas a creator account would be delineated by the type of content ie art, design, etc… Since this data can only be inferred, however, the tracked data will only include the use of a professional profile and the

common types. This information will still indicate how many of the subjects are taking

advantage of the in-app insights and therefore at the very least taking brand and social strategies

into some level of consideration.

Since this is one of the more easily tracked factors, it is also one of the most easily

quantified. The use of a professional profile was tracked within each sample as well as within

each specialty.

Table 4.

Subjects Utilizing a Professional Profile

Micro Influencers	Yes	No
Illustration	8	3
Lettering	4	3
design	7	4
Animation	1	0
Total	20	10

Macro Influencers	Yes	No
Illustration	2	2
Lettering	8	3
design	12	2
Animation	1	0
Total	23	7

Mega Influencers	Yes	No
Illustration	14	3
Lettering	4	2
Design (traditional)	4	2
Animation	0	1
Total	22	8

Overall Totals	65 - Yes	25 - No

The study determined that the majority of all subjects, 72%, utilized some form of a professional profile. Tracking the usage within the specialty groups, however, could not be analyzed as clearly because a consistent number of each was not able to be obtained. However, a consistent amount of subjects who utilized a professional profile was found within each sample group, indicating a steady trend. According to the data obtained in the study, roughly 1 out of every 3 design influencers doesn't take advantage of this feature. This could be either from a lack of need, as some extraordinary users may experience organic growth without much effort, or because some users may not be approaching design influencing with as much intent as others. However, this also implies that 2 out of every 3 design influencers do approach their audience with some form of strategy, validating the legitimacy of this career path. Not only does the use of a professional profile allow the user to monitor their audience, it also enforces brand awareness by signaling to potential followers what type of content they should expect to consume. For this reason, picking the most accurate profile type would be in the designer's best interest. Common profile types that were utilized by subjects included artist, art, designer, graphic designer, and visual arts.

While no direct correlation between growth rate and professional profile usage was obtained, it should be noted that 17 of the top 20 subjects with the highest growth utilized professional profiles. Based on this data it can be inferred that monitoring audience reactions is undoubtedly tied to growth as it allows for the designer to collect real data against their

consumer base, which is one of the most valuable tools in any B2C dynamic. Use of an accurately defined professional profile not only allows the designer to gauge their content against target audience reactions, it also enhances brand awareness.

<div align="center">Sector/Specialty</div>

Perhaps the most important aspect of design influencing, is specialty. Picking a specialty is the first step in establishing a personal brand. It allows the user to create consistent content for followers to consume. Instead of treating Instagram like a portfolio, with a vast array of design projects, narrowing the profile to encompass only a sector of design is the first step in establishing a B2C relationship with a consumer base. Treating Instagram like a portfolio not only confuses audiences with a lack of consistency, it also firmly establishes the designer as a tool to be utilized, a B2B relationship. It shows followers that the user is creating a body of work for employers, not for them. That being said, picking a specialty does not have to be a regimented process. The specialty can be as unique as the designer and may very well cross multiple sectors of design, there should, however, be a consistent theme. For example, if a designer wanted to base their brand off of their lettering and illustration skills, that is a totally legitimate theme. Lettering and illustration often go together and can be unified in a singular style. However, adding a third element. Design sectors do not have to be mutually exclusive, however, it should be apparent in the type of content produced what the primary interest is. In the case of illustration and lettering, most likely the illustration would be used to support the lettering, making that the primary specialty. Since many users do utilize some combination of design sectors in their content, the subjects were tracked according to their primary specialty. To

simplify the tracking process and to allow for quantifiable results, the primary specialties tracked were limited to Illustration, Lettering, Animation, and Graphic Design as a catchall for additional specialties such as logos, badges, layout, UX etc…

While obtaining a diverse sample group was one of the primary objectives of the sampling method, some specialty types proved to be much rarer, or presented more rarely than the others. Illustrators were the largest specialty group, making up 32 of the 90 subjects. The presence of illustrators was particularly strong in the micro and mega group, with 11 and 17 respectively. While this may seem to indicate a sink or swim phenomenon for illustrators, in reality, it indicates that illustrators may be better suited for Instagram success as they tend to surpass mid-range tier. This also may be particularly influenced by Instagram's algorithmic approach to showing users new content. The account used for research may have had a bias toward a particular specialty group. However, the lack of mid-range Illustrator's remains indicative of a growth pattern.

The second most dominant group, unsurprisingly, was the graphic design group with 31 out of the 90 subjects falling into this category. Since this was the catchall group, it was anticipated to have more members. The graphic design sector had 11, 14, and 6 subjects in the micro, macro, and mega sample groups respectively. This drop off in the mega group was found in nearly every specialty sector besides illustration. This further reinforces the idea that while Illustrators surpass the mid-range group more often than not, the other sectors may be getting stuck in the macro phase of growth, never reaching or taking longer to reach mega influencer status.

Letterers behaved very similarly to the graphic design group with 7, 11, and 6 subjects in the micro, macro, and mega groups respectively. Given that lettering shares a lot of overlap with illustration in it's highly visual and often static nature, the lack of lettering subjects was somewhat of a surprise. However, the total number of Illustrators, Letterers, and Graphic Designers remained relatively even with 32, 24, and 31 total subjects respectively.

The largest disjunction was the lack of animators within the sample group. Only one animator could be found for each sample group. This is perhaps due to Instagram's lack of video capabilities. While video certainly has a growing presence on Instagram, the app was originally made for static designs and even now short videos are more common on the platform. Oftentimes, Instagram users scroll and consume content quickly. Thus, for an animation to grab their attention for any length of time, it has to be extraordinary. Users are not on Instagram to consume great animation because platforms like Vimeo have a stronger hold on video content. Animators are fully capable of developing an audience on Instagram and creating that niche, it just isn't there yet. Another hurdle for animators trying to develop a personal brand on this platform is a lack of commodification capabilities. Letterers, illustrators, and even some graphic designers can easily sell goods and resources associated with their brand. However, sectors like animation, and UX/UI for instance, struggle on Instagram because their products rely on a consumer base of their peers. Those that consume this content likely have knowledge and appreciation of the field or they are simply mesmerized by the quality of work. Either way, the only commodification that exists for a design specialty of this manner is knowledge. Their brand can only gain income from collaborations with larger brands (B2B) or by selling their knowledge or resources (B2C).

The main issue with results regarding design specialty or sector is that they may have been compromised by a previous interest or lack of interest in certain types of content. However, since diverse populations were actively searched for, much of these results were backed by universal trends that can be traced to logic. That is Illustrators, Letterers, and general Graphic Designers were relatively easier to find. Nonetheless, Illustrators made up nearly two-thirds of the sample group with the most followers. From the observed trends, it can be determined that some sectors of design are better suited for Design Influencing. Illustration is well-suited because it can be easily commodified. Illustrators can associate an indeterminable amount of products related to their brand. These products can range from tools, knowledge, classes, and books, to the illustration itself, merchandise, and even usage rights. Fields that are less commodifiable, however, are more difficult to build a personal brand around because there are less possible sources of income, they are naturally inclined to a B2B relationship. That's not to say that these sectors of design influencing cannot be established, it's that they simply aren't yet. Designers in these specialty groups may experience plenty of growth but it is less tied to income which is ultimately what does or does not qualify a designer as a career influencer. Knowing that the key to a career in content creation is reliant on the commodification of the personal brand will allow any sector to accomplish this, it simply requires less ingenuity to accomplish this in fields that do not rely solely on other businesses to consume the product.

Additional profiles

Aside from the aforementioned components of the subjects' Instagram profiles, many also include a short description or links to personal websites, contact information, or additional

profiles that may be linked to the personal brand. While the use of personal websites and links to additional information will be discussed later in the Social Strategy section, the use of additional Instagram profiles can indicate other branches of the brand or additional sources of income. While no correlation between growth rate and additional profiles was found, common patterns could still be identified.

The use of additional profiles was not overtly common, with only 23 of the 90 subjects linking to these profiles in their bios. However, the number of subjects who did so grew steadily from each sample group to the next with 5, 8, and 10 in the micro, macro, and mega groups respectively. While the numbers grew steadily, the purpose of these additional profiles also varied. Within the micro group, 2 of the individuals used this additional bio for additional projects such as studio art and photography, 2 linked to their merchandise account, and 1 chose to link to the design studio at which they were employed. Within the macro group, 6 of the 8 subjects linking to an additional profile linked to their studio or place of employment, while only 1 linked to a merchandise account and the other linked to their business partner's profile. Within the mega-group, however, these patterns more closely resembled the micro group with 6 of the 10 linking to side projects. These side projects did however differ in nature as the emergence of cultural and philanthropic projects was observed with 5 of these 6 individuals. 3 of the 10 individuals linked to their own studio's profile, while the other 1 subject linked to their representative's platform.

This shift to additional projects observed in the micro and mega groups reinforces the idea that those in the macro group have not fully shifted to a B2C structure. The use of additional profiles to link to side projects is evidence of brand growth, especially within the mega group

where these side projects involve cultural or philanthropic causes, indicating brand growth and awareness that much resembles how B2C brands typically function. It also indicates a level of influence within the mega group that further establishes these individuals as not only brands but as influential brands in the design space. While there is no correct or incorrect way to incorporate the use of additional profiles, It should be advised that whatever the designer's primary profile is linked to becomes linked to their personal brand. Linking to a studio that is not an independent studio or that the designer has not co-founded indicates a lack of personal brand establishment reinforcing other indicators that suggest the macro group is an intermediary group that has stalled in the creation of an actual personal brand and remains in a primarily B2B structure.

<center>Geographic Location</center>

Most demographic information such as age and gender was not readily available based on the parameters set for acquiring viable information. Geographic location, however, was one component that many subjects chose to disclose in some form either by geotagging posts or via their bio or personal website. Design influencing presents a unique opportunity for designers to work while they travel or split their time between cities. Nonetheless, many did identify a home base. This home base information not only indicates what types of cities design influencers may prosper in, but it also presents the question of whether or not success in a virtual space is tied to a physical space.

The subjects' geographic locations were tracked using information that was either readily available on their profile or linked to directly from their profile. Based on a preliminary assessment of city populations, the results were categorized into four tiers; those taking primary

residence in cities of 1,000,000 or more, cities with 500,000 - 1,000,000, cities with 250,000 -

500,000, and geographic locations of less than 250,000 or an indiscernible location due to lack of

information.

Table 5.

Subjects Living in Cities Based on Population Size

Micro Influencers	Cities of 1,000,000 +	Cities of 500,000 +	Cities of 250,000 +	Cities of <250,000	N/A
Illustration	1	2	3	2	3
Lettering	4	1	1	0	1
Design	2	4	0	3	2
Animation	1	0	0	0	0
Total	8	7	4	5	6

Macro Influencers	Cities of 1,000,000 +	Cities of 500,000 +	Cities of 250,000 +	Cities of <250,000	N/A
Illustration	0	0	2	1	1
Lettering	2	3	3	1	2
Design	4	2	3	3	2
Animation	1	0	0	0	0
Total	7	5	8	5	5

Mega Influencers	Cities of 1,000,000 +	Cities of 500,000 +	Cities of 250,000 +	Cities of <250,000	N/A
Illustration	9	4	0	3	1

Lettering	3	1	1	0	1
Design	1	3	1	1	0
Animation	1	0	0	0	0
Total	14	8	2	4	2

Collective Totals	29	20	14	14	13

Note: Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

As the table above exhibits, at least one-third of the subjects in the smaller follower-count groups resided in locations that had populations less than 250,000, or they did not provide enough information to determine what city they primarily reside in. The other three tiers remained relatively similar across both groups with no huge disparity between population tiers. This trend however, shifts dramatically when examining the locations of those in the mega group. Not only did the lesser-populated cities lose popularity in this group, but so did a lack of information. These bottom two population tiers accounted for the geographic locations of less than a third of the mega subjects whereas the popularity of major cities, those with 1,000,000 or more people skyrocketed to account for nearly 50% of this entire group. This shift suggests that geographic location may, in fact, play a role in the growth-rate for design influencers despite the field's virtual nature. This may be due in part to the geotagging feature that shows users content from selected areas, more populated geotags result in more views. This also may be attributed simply to the fact that individuals living in larger cities tend to have larger networks at their

disposal. Physical word of mouth plays some part in the virtual world and that can only go so far in smaller cities.

Despite this dramatic shift in the larger following tier, the overall disparity between city sizes remained relatively low. The most popular locations were those with populations of 1,000,000 or more, followed closely by those with 500,000 or more, the least popular places of residence being cities with 250,000-500,000 people or cities with less than 250,000 residences. Approximately 7% of the subjects did not disclose this information to their followers. While this trend may seem to exhibit a lack of designers in mid-sized cities, this emphasis on the largest and smallest, or indeterminate, may in-fact indicate that these individuals who chose not to pinpoint their primary location to a city but rather to a region or state, do in fact reside in those larger cities as well.

One of the most unique attributes to a career in design influencing is a lack of regimented schedule and location. Design influencers can create content whenever and wherever they choose. Many of them, especially those involved in murals or other installation works, complete jobs on locations that require them to travel a substantial amount. For this reason, design influencing can be a nomadic career, but, depending on specialty. It doesn't have to be. Design influencers residing in smaller cities may experience success rates they never thought possible because the online community has allowed for it. However, it appears that digital trends have not evolved so much as to break from traditional creative career trends which places the most influential creatives in the most influential cities, with the largest audience.

1. **Display Name** - Whether or not the display name is synonymous with the designer's legal name is an individual choice that should be made considering the pros and cons of having a brand and a personal identity that are synonymous. Other factors to consider include brand naming principles such as clarity, catchiness, and authenticity.

2. **Handle -** Instagram handles are secondary brand identifiers and should be treated as another opportunity to employ brand continuity. Too much separation between the display name and handle can create confusion and hinder brand awareness. Keywords related to the content followers can expect to see may contribute to SEO, however, the need for this decreases as brand awareness is established.

3. **Professional Profiles -** While the use of a professional profile is not concretely linked to brand growth, the in-app features that accompany this type of profile along with the increased SEO allow design influencers to track growth and content performance more purposefully. Circumstantial success can occur without this form of intent, however, this circumstantial success is much less common, indicating that approaching this field with intent based on data increases success probability.

4. **Sector -** While any sector of design can theoretically experience success as a personal brand on Instagram, some sectors are better suited for the factors that contribute to this success. Fields that are more dispositioned to static and commodifiable content, such as illustration and lettering are more populous and experience higher success rates than their more complex counterparts. Instagram content consumption is still trending towards

snackable, more static content. Features like stories and IGTV are changing this, but fields like animation and ux are still reliant on B2B relationships.

5. **Additional Profiles** - When a designer chooses to feature additional profiles in their biographical information, they are linking that separate entity to their personal brand. This separate entity may be a studio the designer has founded or works for, a nonprofit, aide project, or another child of some sort to the parent brand. Profiles that have no link to the personal brand however should be avoided unless done so on a temporary or circumstantial basis. While the use of additional profiles would be considered uncommon based on the study, it did become more common with one-third of the more established subjects using these additional profiles, primarily for philanthropic child projects**.**

6. **Geographic Location -** Historically, trends and influential people tend to emerge from larger cities. This is especially true for the field of design. Though the development of social media means that theoretically, trends and creative classes have less physical bounds, the study found that the majority of design influencers, especially in the more established group, tend to reside in these larger cities of 1,000,000 or more. Though these individuals claim larger cities as their primary residence, content creation enables designers to work from wherever, whenever. It also allows them to take on more diverse projects than they normally would be able to while trying to support a typical 9-5 job. These projects also may require designers to work on location, enabling a sort of nomadic lifestyle. While many design influencer's to still choose to reside in larger cities, the limits of geographical location are now much less restrictive.

Expertise

Historically, influential designers have been associated with a certain level of expertise. Milton Glaser studied at the Cooper Union Art Institute as a Fulbright scholar as well as one of the most recognizable art institutes in Italy before founding one of the most renowned studios in the US, Push Pin Studios. Paula Scher attended the Tyler School of Art and Architecture before becoming the first female principal of Pentagram. David Carson is one notable influential designer who earned his degree from Sandiego State University but pursued a degree in Sociology instead of a design-related field. While Carson did obtain a degree, the majority of his design education occurred unconventionally (Armstrong, 2009). While this was uncommon for influential designers of the 21st century, influential designers of today fit a slightly different bill. Modern influential designers are well-known, they own studios, hold prestigious positions, work with international brands, and create highly visible content of their own for their own audience, their followers. Modern influential designers share many distinctions with their predecessors, however, they also have additional opportunities at the tips of their fingers thanks to their insurmountable online following with which they can share any piece of content they choose. Social media has not only opened additional career paths for designers, it has changed what it means to be influential.

Education Level

Since design has always towed the line between profession and practice, institutionalized learned has played an important role in the legitimization of the career. This legitimization is

important for many reasons, perhaps the most important being pay. Institutionalized learning gives the designers a coveted professional title that often evades creative crafts. With the paper to back it up, design can be held to standards such as any other profession. While there are many successful designers with nontraditional backgrounds, such as renowned designer David Carson, the idea that a profession has to be obtained through a set of regimented curriculum is what often gives it value, that and demand. Though the demand for design is greater than ever, so is the accessibility of it. Tools and exposure to aesthetics have created a world in which design feels like it can be for anyone. The implications of what this means for the craft as a whole can be ascertained by looking at what it means for the field's most influential members. Whether or not these highly regarded designers self-taught or classically trained will indicate trends for the field as a whole. If education level is of no concern to these individuals, it may be a difficult task to make it a concern to anyone else.

To discern the importance of formal education in Instagram success, subjects in the micro, macro, and mega group were examined in order to ascertain any trends regarding education level. Since this information is typically not readily available on the profile page, this was typically found on a personal website or a website that was linked to by the user. However, this is optional information for users, and therefore those that chose not to reveal any educational history had to be tracked as well. Those that did were classified into 4 categories, BA or (related postsecondary), Masters (related graduate-level degree), nontraditional (no formal education), and unrelated BA (formal education unrelated to design).

Table 6.

Subjects' Education Level

Micro Influencers	BA	Masters	Nontraditional	Unrelated BA	N/A
Illustration	3	1	1	0	6
Lettering	0	0	0	0	7
Design	0	0	0	1	10
Animation	0	0	0	0	1
Total	3	1	1	1	24

Macro Influencers	BA	Masters	Nontraditional	Unrelated BA	N/A
Illustration	1	1	0	0	2
Lettering	2	0	0	0	7
Design	3	0	1	0	9
Animation	0	1	0	0	0
Total	6	2	1	0	18

Mega Influencers	BA	Masters	Nontraditional	Unrelated BA	N/A
Illustration	2	1	0	1	13
lettering	2	0	0	0	4
Design	2	0	0	0	4
Animation	0	0	0	0	1
Total	6	1	0	1	22

Collective Totals	15	4	2	2	64

Note: Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

Overwhelmingly, in each category, most users chose not to divulge this information. That's not to say that all of these users had no formal education, but 72% of them did not think this education was relevant to their audience. The numbers for indiscernible education levels were consistently high with 24, 18, and 22 in the micro, macro, and mega groups deeming this information an unnecessary attribute of their personal brand. Unsurprisingly, the next most popular result, with only 17% of the subjects, was a Bachelor's degree in a related field. Subjects that proclaimed, either having a graduate-level degree, nontraditional methods, or having an unrelated bachelor's account for the small remainder of the subjects with only 4, 2, and 2 denoting as such respectively.

While only a small portion of the subjects chose to document their educational background, this does not mean it doesn't exist, it simply means it isn't an important factor in their personal brand. That is, it doesn't gain them clients, projects, or popularity. On a visual platform like Instagram, popularity is a form of reputation. Consumers are rating a designer's work every time they deem them worthy of a follow, therefore, the success of a design influencer is less dependent on formal stipulations and much more dependent on skill. Only four subjects claimed a graduate-level degree for a design-related field. The scarcity of this highest form of formal education indicates formal education may play a very minimal role if any in the success

of a design influencer. If these designers are the designers that make their own schedules, work with high profile clients, and dictate the type of work they want to do, what incentive does that leave for designers of the future to pursue a formal education, much less to the graduate level. Design influencing has made becoming a designer more accessible than ever. Instagram seems to be a platform on which the focus is always on the work. Unless a design influencer is pursuing an educational niche, education level carries little clout in this virtual realm.

<div align="center">Work Experience</div>

Work experience is often another indicator of expertise. This may mean prestigious titles, renowned agencies, or a boisterous list of clientele. Regardless of what this work experience may be, it can be assumed that most design influencers have had some form of work experience before transitioning fully to content creation. While prestigious titles, places of employment, and clients may not signify success to everyone, it is one way to gauge how design influencers stack up to other designers outside of Instagram. The purpose of tracking the work experience of design influencers is to, again, legitimize the career by determining how they measure up to standards that have already been established in other career paths such as agencies, studios, and freelance.

The subjects in each group were tracked according to whether or not they chose to reference their work experience in any form within the ascertainable information. If they did, it was then categorized as agency work, freelance or independent studio work, or work done under the name of a studio by an individual, in house, or other. Any notable clientele was also documented.

Table 7.

Subjects' Work Experience

Micro Influencers	Agency	Freelance/ independent	Other (Misc)	In house	N/A
Illustration	1	3	2 (fairs, children's books)	0	7
Lettering	2	1	0	0	5
Design	4	3	0	0	6
Animation	1	0	0	0	0
Total	8	7	2	0	18

Macro Influencers	Agency	Freelance/ independent	Other (Misc)	In house	N/A
Illustration	1	2	0	0	2
Lettering	3	9	3 (teaching, adjunct, author)	1	1
Design	4	5	0	1	6
Animation	0	1	0	0	0
Total	8	17	3	2	9

Mega Influencers	Agency	Freelance/ independent	Other (Misc)	In house	N/A
Illustration	3	2	1(studio owner)	0	13
lettering	1	2	0	0	4

design	2	0	1 (agency co-owner)	1	3
animation	0	0	0	0	1
Total	6	4	2	1	21

Collective Totals	22	28	7	3	48

Note: Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

The study found that, much like education, most subjects did not choose to divulge information regarding their previous work experience on the platform or via another outlet they had linked to. A little over half of the subjects did not consider this information important to their audience. Additionally, this overall trend remained true within two of the three divisions. While roughly two-thirds of both the micro and mega groups did not state this information, this amount shifted to less than one-third of the macro group choosing to not. Within the macro group, this shift occurred as two-thirds of the group recognized their professional experience as freelancers or independent studios. While this category reigned within the macro division, it fell to third within the micro and mega divisions after agency experience. Overall numbers still indicated that freelance/independent studio was the second most popular career choice prior to influencing, with agency work falling into third. Other forms of work experience that were documented included authorship, fairs and pop-ups, studio or agency owner, and teaching. Only three of the subjects documented having prior in-house experience.

Interestingly, work experience was the most undocumented in the mega group. This is likely due to the fact that these individuals are more established in their design influencing careers and are less likely to take freelance or other jobs that would require evidence of prior work experience. It also may be that these individuals are more well-known and do not need to validate their expertise as blatantly. On the other hand, half of the mega sample group did divulge a distinguished list of clients. While 15 of the mega sample and 13 of the macro sample boasted these lists, only 4 members of the micro sample did so. This indicates that follower count is directly related to reputation to some degree. These clients included the likes of Nike, the New York Times, Disney, Airbnb, Yeti, Conde Nast, and other international companies.

Despite the frequency of these impressive partnerships, only 32 of the 90 total subjects made these lists easily accessible to their Instagram audience. 50 chose not to relinquish this information, and 8 chose to mention awards and accolades. Additionally, when examining the subject with the most growth within each group, only the fastest-growing macro influencer was tied to one of these client lists. The fastest-growing micro and mega influencers were not tied to any client or accolade list, indicating that, while a distinguished client list certainly does not hurt the personal brand's reputation, it may not be essential to its growth. Furthermore, the infrequency of mediocre client lists or accolades indicates that a client list should only be featured if it contains clientele worth mentioning. The overall results indicate that, like education, work experience is less impactful on growth and is more like a trophy awarded to those who have an already-established brand or have worked with high-profile clients.

Types of Income

Types of income is a separate category from work experience because work experience merely covers any notable positions or clients from a designer's past or present. Types of income, on the other hand, determines how many types of income the subject has and whether or not they have fully cultivated their brand to result in a B2C structure. Since full-time content creation provides no means of income, unless the posts are sponsored, influencers often rely on income that is a direct result of that content. This may be in the form of cultivating customized resources for their audience, holding workshops, teaching online classes, writing books, selling products, or partnerships with other brands. For this reason, types of income may vary and, therefore, many design influencers often have more than one. Oftentimes, in the transitional period, these income sources may be in addition to a full-time job at an agency or as a freelancer. Determining types of income will not only validate the hypothesis that, generally speaking, those in the mega group (30,000 or more followers) have successfully established their brand while those in the transitional stages (micro and macro) are still reliant on a primary source of income other than their brand. It will indicate whether or not a certain level of hybridity must be reached for personal brand success. For this reason, the study included tracking the primary, secondary, and tertiary sources of income within each follower count tier. Since these were often determined based on what the subject was offering on their Instagram and related pages, it was primary income for those with a full-time job would be that and other sources of income were organized according to what the user placed importance on. Such as, if a user had a full-time job at an agency, posted about or advertised workshops often but also had a small link to their own

merchandise it would have been determined that their job was their primary income, workshops were secondary, and merchandise would have been a tertiary element.

Based on these standards for the procedure, it was determined that as the designer's personal brand grows, so do their sources of income related to that brand. In the mega group, only two designers were documented with no known primary income related to their brand. This does not confirm they do not have a primary income source, but that they left no documentation regarding what that may be or they have a full-time job that pushes their brand to a secondary status. The numbers progressed as expected with 5 of the macro group falling into one of these categories for their primary source of income, and 12 of the micro group. The hybridity of the subjects also increased with following groups, indicating a need to diversify income as a designer transitions into full-time content creation. The study found that only 5 of the mega group did not have a documented secondary source of income and only 6 did not have a tertiary. On the other hand, in the macro group, these numbers went up to 11 and 19, respectively. While in the micro group 18 had no secondary source of income and 24 had no tertiary.

This increase in income diversity as related to the personal brand solidifies the notion that the macro group primarily consists of those that have an established brand. These individuals have primary, secondary, and tertiary sources of income that are related to their brand because an established brand offers many products under the brand umbrella. This is not to be confused with a designer without a personal brand. The products underneath the established brand are under the same niche, voice, and style. They are segments of the whole and do not change the brand essence to fit customer needs. Perhaps, this is one of the most primary differences between those with an established brand and those in the transitional periods that are still reliant on a primary

source of income outside of their personal brand. As the tiers progressed we saw evidence of this as more designers in each tier had secondary and tertiary sources of income. A key part of profiting from design influencing is the product offerings. These offerings might range from public speaking to merchandise, to resources and teachings; However, they should all stem from the parent brand and primary offering.

Key Takeaways

1. **Education Level -** Design has long been a field that has struggled to establish itself as a profession versus a practice. It was not until the rise of consumerism in the early 1900s that formal design awareness and education started to take shape. As the world of communication evolves so does design. There are still many new aspects of design that have not been institutionalized fully yet, such as UX design. These new areas are difficult to institutionalize as they arise so quickly that they often place precedence on experience rather than education level. This, along with a growing accessibility to design and design tools, has allowed many designers to see success without a formal education or without placing importance on their education. Much like many artist fields, such as music, fine art, and fashion design, a lack of formal education will not hold the creator back if a certain skill level is evident regardless.

2. **Work Experience -** As a designer's career progresses, work experience tends to trump education level, as it does within many career fields. It is unrealistic to expect a designer to become influential at the beginning of their career. Furthermore, Instagram has been

around for fewer years than many companies. Additionally, the influencer industry has

been a reality for even fewer years. Thus, many of today's established design influencers

do have a work history outside of Instagram. Oftentimes the skills used to reach

influencer status were taught elsewhere. Additionally, the path to design influencing often

involves transitional periods that still require a primary source of income outside of

content creation, and the designer's personal brand. For these reasons, it is expected that

these individuals have additional work experience. However, the study found that this is

not necessarily important once a certain status has been reached. Potential brand

partnerships may be impressed by a boisterous client list, but other brand consumers are

less interested in where the designer learned their skills and are more interested in the

finished product or resources the brand can provide them.

3. **Types of Income -** Unlike a typical designer that likely has one main source of income

from freelance, in-house, studio, or agency work. An established design influencer has

many sources of income that stems from their personal brand. These offerings may be

designed products, resources, books, consultation, installations, or brand partnerships.

But they all are diverse and stem from the same brand values and aesthetic. They do not

differentiate style based on the client, the brand is the offering. With those in the

transitional groups, these income sources tended to be less diversified with many primary

sources of income being related to a job rather than the designer's personal brand.

Developing a design influencing career is reliant on the commodification of different

brand-related products to allow for a diversity of income and offerings.

Personal Brand

A personal brand is the primary component in a design influencer's career. It is what allows them to create and market their personal style for profit. It is what shifts the focus from creating work for clients who want their own aesthetic, to creating work for consumers who want the brand's aesthetic. This shift doesn't occur instantaneously. Much like the creation of any brand, it is an arduous process that must take the audience, market, and brand essence into account at all times. Following traditional brand-building practices and modifying them for the purpose of the individual results in a strategy that allows designers to create and market their own work as a product. Personal branding for designers is not just about creating a unique personal style, which can take years. It is the commodification of this style. A personal brand not only needs a style, it needs a niche. It has to consider what niches are already being filled and what niches don't even exist yet. It has to continue across platforms. Everything an individual does will be associated with their personal brand once it has solidified. Although Instagram is one outlet, users will expect brand continuity to occur across any platform that the brand is on; This includes a personal website. The brand has to consider what it will provide to its audience. Consumers need to feel like they are getting something out of the consumer or brand relationship. This may be knowledge and may also be perceived as an elevation in lifestyle; This may be that the brand feels authentic to them, they relate to it, or it may even be that the brand does the opposite. The brand has the ability to provide something to the consumer that is so unrelatable to them that they find it fascinating. In its simplest form, the brand has to be viscerally appealing, it has to grab users' attention. These values, based on traditional emotional design principles, are the reason consumers come to the brand, but there also has to be a reason

they stay. Consumers buy into a brand as an experience. They have to believe the things the brand believes. For this reason, personal brand archetypes are an invaluable tool, not just to design influencers but the study as well. Examining what needs the brands are fulfilling as well as what feelings they are evoking is the only way to assess what succeeds and does not succeed in the design influencing space.

For this reason, the study examined the use of personal websites and types of e-commerce to identify which subjects were successfully commodifying their brand and what correlation, if any, had to Instagram popularity. Personal style descriptors, niche, value, and brand archetypes were examined to provide a more in-depth look at what Instagram users identify with and consume. An Instagram audience may not always result in direct compensation.; However, in those instances, the visibility the designer has become invaluable to brands who choose to pursue partnerships with the influencer. Either way, it becomes important to understand what Instagram audiences identify with in order to produce content that will get recognized.

Personal Site and Ecommerce

Personal sites and ecommerce are lumped together in this section for the sole reason that these two are, oftentimes, one in the same. However, since this is not always the case due to third-party options or lack of one with the presence of the other, they were tracked separately. A personal site for a designer can be many things. Oftentimes, this site serves as a portfolio for the designer to house an easily accessible and more robust library of their work and processes.

Designers often use a personal website to house important information such as accolades, work history, and personal backstory or artist statement.

The use of a personal site was examined to determine the level of career independence and autonomy as well as assess the presence of a personal brand. It is not abnormal for designers to have a personal website to house their work. However, many designers choose to link to a portfolio platform, such as Behance or Dribble, instead. Having a personal website, separate from any third party platforms that contain integrated ecommerce, indicates a level of investment in the personal brand. It indicates that the designer has established themselves enough to justify a personal website where they are able to produce products that are directly related to their work. Less-established design influencers may have one or both of these and they may or may not be on separate platforms. For instance, a user with Behance and Etsy only has chosen a third party for both of these elements. Thus, tracking them separately will be helpful in determining third party platforms that are commonly used in more transitional cases.

Table 8.

Subjects Utilizing a Personal Website

Micro Influencers	yes	Third Party	n/a
Illustration	7	4	0
Lettering	3	0	4
Design	6	4	1
Animation	0	1	0
Total	16	9	5

Macro Influencers	yes	Third Party	n/a
Illustration	4	0	0
Lettering	9	0	2
Design	8	0	6
Animation	1	0	0
Total	22	0	8

Mega Influencers	Yes	Third Party	n/a
Illustration	13	0	4
lettering	5	0	1
Design	5	0	1
Animation	1	0	0
Total	24	0	6

Collective Totals	62	9	19

Note: Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From Tracking Tool.*

The study found that over two-thirds of all of the subjects had a personal website that they chose to display in some form on their Instagram profile. This means that roughly two out of every three design influencers aspiring or otherwise have a personal website they direct their

followers to. These are websites outside of third-party platforms such as Behance, Dribble, or Etsy. However, when examining each subgroup individually, this number unsurprisingly increases with follower count. 80% of the most established group, the mega group, had personal websites on their profile, whereas none of them used third-party sites, and only 6 of the 30 either had no personal website or chose not to link to it. These numbers shifted slightly when examining the macro group, with 22 having a personal site, none substituting a third party, and 8 were inconclusive or nonexistent. However, when examining the micro group, these numbers shifted significantly. Only slightly over half, at 16, of the micro group linked to their personal websites, only 5 were indeterminate, and 9, nearly one-third, substituted a third party, emphasizing that a personal website is inherent to an established personal brand. This lack of third-party usage within the more established, however, is not to say that these individuals do not have Behance, Dribble, or other third-party accounts as well, it simply means their personal website takes precedence over these third-parties. This deliberate showcasing of their personal website indicates that that is the important destination for consumers looking to form a relationship with the brand. For less-established brand's, however, the important destination may be a third-party website because they lack the consumer-base needed to justify a personal website; Therefore, they direct them to a profile on another platform they can take action on. For many of these designers, these actions involve ecommerce, or proof of demand, of some sort. For this reason, e-commerce was examined in correlation with a personal website. Those that utilized e-commerce within their personal sites were marked as yes, those that used third-parties were marked as such, and then there is the ever-present indeterminate or nonexistent column.

Table 9.

Subjects Utilizing Ecommerce

Micro Influencers	Yes	Third Party	N/A
Illustration	1	9	1
Lettering	0	2	5
Design	4	0	7
Animation	0	0	1
Total	5	11	14

Macro Influencers	Yes	Third Party	N/A
Illustration	3	0	1
Lettering	9	2	0
Design	4	0	10
Animation	0	0	1
Total	16	2	12

Mega Influencers	Yes	Third Party	N/A
Illustration	11	3	3
lettering	5	0	1
Design	4	0	2
Animation	0	0	1
Total	20	3	7

Collective Totals	41	16	33

Note: Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

While two-thirds of the subjects had a personal site, less than half maintained ecommerce capabilities on these sites, over one-third had no evidence of e commerce, and only 16 of the 90 subjects were found to have ecommerce on a third-party platform of some kind. The mega group was, unsurprisingly, ahead of the other two groups in terms of ecommerce with exactly two-thirds hosting e-commerce on their personal sites. A total of 7 subjects within this group had no evidence of ecommerce, and only three utilized third-party ecommerce. The numbers digressed as expected with 16, 2, and 12 of the macro group having e-commerce on a personal site, third-party, and none at all, respectively. In another drastic shift, only 5 of the 30 micro group subjects had e-commerce on their personal sites, while 11 used third-parties and 14 had none. This drastic drop in the micro group indicates, again, that this is indeed the less established group and that, as the personal brand grows, so does the need to capitalize on this growth.

A designer can have hundreds of thousands of followers, however, an audience is no good without a means of monetization. Some designers with large audiences may receive sponsored post requests, however, when that well runs dry or when the designer no longer wishes to be reliant on other brands for capital, the commodification of their personal brand becomes the most important aspect. Without commodification of some sort, influencing remains a hobby. A personal website, especially one with ecommerce integration, not only increases brand awareness

but directs Instagram followers to an actionable location where the designer can harness the expanse of social media for the benefit of their personal brand. Whether it is by selling merchandise, prints, resources, books, workshop tickets, or virtual classes, e-commerce provides an outlet for the average Instagram follower, one who may not be able to or have a need to commission the designer and further their relationship with the brand by purchasing a commodity of some sort. Additionally, these large audience numbers show other brands, the ones that can afford and have a need to collaborate with the designer, that their work is already in high demand and will result in a positive response. The portion of the audience that ecommerce is geared toward may provide additional sources of income but it also provides a testament to the designer's work, showing that it is already in-demand.

<center>Style and Niche</center>

It can take years to create a unique and personal style. A brand's 'style' typically consists of a logo, color guidelines, and any additional visual elements that can be combined. For a designer's personal brand, however, this comes down to the way they make things. It is whether or not the things they make look like they came from the same individual. There are many methods of developing this but there is no right or wrong way to reach the end goal. Since it is individualized and subjective, the only testament to whether or not a personal style is working is how well the audience responds to it. The purpose of tracking a consistent personal style is to not only illustrate the importance of creating and utilizing a consistent visual style but to also

determine some common descriptors of the personal styles with which designer influencers have

seen the most success.

Table 10.

Subjects With a Consistent Visual Style

Micro Influencers	Yes	Somewhat	No
Illustration	9	1	1
Lettering	6	1	0
Design	7	4	0
Animation	1	0	0
Total	23	6	1

Macro Influencers	Yes	Somewhat	No
Illustration	3	1	0
Lettering	9	2	0
Design	14	0	0
Animation	1	0	0
Total	27	3	0

Mega Influencers	Yes	Somewhat	No
Illustration	17	0	
lettering	6	0	
Design	6	0	

Animation	1	0	
Total	30	0	0

Collective Totals	80	9	1

Note:; Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

All 30 of the established design influencers were found to have an obvious, consistent personal style based on an observation of permanent grid posts. 27 of the macro group had this as well with only three having a 'somewhat' consistent personal style. Only 23 of the micro influencer group had a strong personal style while 6 had a somewhat consistent style; Only 1 had no consistent style. These numbers, though indicating a strong personal style presence in all groups, reinforce the need for a consistent style to establish a personal brand with an unprecedented 100% of the most established group having this aspect. While this validates the notion that strong personal style is an essential aspect of building a design influencing career, not all styles are widely accepted by the Instagram community. In order to create a successful personal style, the designer needs to fit into a niche.

A niche can be defined as a specific segment in a market (Berry, 2018). Within Instagram, there are an innumerable amount of niches in which a personal brand may fall into. In order to determine the target audience, a user may have to test and reiterate their personal style using the platform as a sort of focus-group setting. Once an audience takes interest, however, it can be assumed that a niche, containing audience members that respond well to a certain type of

content, has been found. There are many ways of assessing where a designer's niche should lie. One of which is by performing a personal SWOT analysis, mentioned previously in the literature review. The SWOT should be a personal assessment that, when done correctly, can tell a designer their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This should be a strong indicator of where to start when determining a niche. Another method is to look at hashtags and see what content is popular that lines up with the designer's strengths and interests, and whether or not they can add something unique to that space. In order to determine whether or not some niche's are more predisposed to social media success, keywords and descriptors of personal style and content type were tracked within each group.

When tracking descriptor frequency, the word 'flat' occurred 27 times. Given that there were 90 total subjects, this means that nearly one-third of them employed a flat type of style to whatever content was created. This not only indicates a trend in the design community but also indicates that audiences respond well to this particular style. Other frequent descriptors included lettering, vibrant or colorful, muted or neutral, whimsical, and vintage. The color combination of blue and pink occurred at least three times. When considering the specificity of using only those two colors in design work, that indicates a micro-trend within the community.

When examining the top three subjects with the highest growth rate, no consistency was found within their styles or niches indicating that there may be no singular niche conducive to growth. Perhaps what is most important is testing content on users and creating a consistent visual identity that a group of Instagram users can identify with and propel into popularity. Trends spread like wildfire after all and, by the time a trend can be identified, it is often too late to join. Thus, testing content and style on whatever audience members already exist may be a

strong indication of what will work once the brand has more visibility. The most important factor is to create a personal style that is authentic and resonates well with an existing Instagram community. Once this is established, growth will happen much more organically and rapidly.

Brand Archetype

Brand archetypes are another method of categorizing brands (Douglas, 2019). Though each brand is unique, there are traditionally 12 archetypes that the brand's values can place them in. These archetypes are created by common personifications brands represent based on what feelings and emotions they aim to evoke in customers. The 12 personifications can also be grouped into 4 quadrants based on what their overarching goal is. Typically this has been structure, connection, idealism, and legacies; However, for the purpose of personal branding, categories were found to be more appropriate as they relate to what the personal brand provides their followers. For the purpose of the study, these 4 divisions have been changed to providing sentiment, entertainment, inspiration, or relatability. The archetypes that fall under these categories have remained the same. The caregiver, sage, and innocent provide sentiment. The lover, jester, and magician provide entertainment. The ruler, hero, and creator provide inspiration, and the explorer, outlaw, and everyman provide relatability. In summary, design influencers gain their followings by providing something to followers, either they strike an emotion, dazzle and entertain, inspire and motivate, or are relatable enough for followers to feel as if they really know them. The brand archetypes of each of the subjects were determined by the type of content, the style of content, the context of the content each designer produces, as well as by the tone and voice, they chose to publish it with. All of these aspects are what make up a

brand archetype; However, there is much room for personalization between the gaps, a brand archetype is simply a generalization and a way to categorize how well certain brands perform. Each subject's brand archetype was assessed by the researcher and tracked in order to discern whether or not some particular archetypes are more valuable to Instagram audiences than others.

Table 11.

Subjects' Brand Archetypes

SENTIMENT			ENTERTAIN			STRENGTH/INSPIRE			RELATABILITY		
Caregiver	Sage	Innocent	lover	jester	Magician	Ruler	Hero	Creator	Explorer	outlaw	Everyman
2	2	3	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1
1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0
0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	1	2	3	2
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
3	3	3	0	0	3	3	1	4	3	4	3

SENTIMENT			ENTERTAIN			STRENGTH/INSPIRE			RELATABILITY		
Caregiver	Sage	Innocent	lover	jester	Magician	Ruler	Hero	Creator	Explorer	outlaw	Everyman
0	0	1	0	0	2	0	0	0	1	0	0
2	2	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	1	3
0	3	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	2	4	1
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	5	1	0	2	3	4	0	0	3	5	4

SENTIMENT			ENTERTAIN			STRENGTH/INSPIRE			RELATABILITY		
Caregiver	Sage	Innocent	lover	jester	Magician	Ruler	Hero	Creator	Explorer	outlaw	Everyman
3	1	2	2	2	1	1	0	3	1	0	1
1	0	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	0	0
1	0	0	0	0	2	2	0	0	0	2	0
0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5	1	2	2	4	4	5	0	3	1	2	1
11	9	6	2	6	10	12	1	7	7	11	8

Note:; Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

Overall, the numbers indicate that the most popular archetypes for design influencer archetypes fall in the sentiment and relatability sectors indicating that followers choose to follow designers most often because they receive some sense of self-reflection from the brand relationship. That is, they emotionally attach or self-identify with some portion of the content the

designers are producing. Though these two sectors accounted for 57% of the subjects, they were only slightly ahead of the other two considering if each sector were represented equally they would make up 25% of the subjects. While relatability and sentiment were both tied with 26 subjects each, the top-ranking archetype amongst the subjects was actually the ruler archetype, categorized by mastery and falling into the inspiration sector. This is unsurprising given that many influencers are masters of their craft. However, within each follower group tier, relatability was the most popular sector except for the mega group, the group with the most followers, in which relatability was last and entertainment took first. The most popular single archetype within each following tier varied every time and was only ahead by a marginal amount. All three follower tier groups had ties for the most popular archetypes. The micros' being creator and outlaw, the macros' being sage and outlaw. The mega groups' being caregivers and rulers. The designers with the highest growth rate in micro, macro, and mega groups fell into the caregiver, magician, and sage archetypes respectively, with the first and last of which are part of the sentimentality sector.

While trends showed that sentimentality and relatability one out overall, the study also found that the more established the personal brand is the more likely it is to provide entertainment instead. The difference in archetypes observed between the micro, macro, and mega groups indicate that sentimentality and relatability may be at the core of a quality audience, but not quantity. This not only reinforces the idea that these mega influencers are particularly masterful at their craft, but it also insinuates that, in order to draw large numbers of followers, a designer needs to wow and surprise people. Followers choose to follow people on Instagram not only for belonging but also to experience things outside of their norm. For instance, while

romantic comedies and family dramas are very popular movie genres, all of the top 10 box office grossing movies of all time, Star Wars, Jurassic Park, Avatar, etc... involve some surreal aspect (Hennessey, 2018). People want an intimate relationship with brands, they want to feel seen and heard, they want to relate to the content, but even moreso, they want to be excited. The most popular personal brands on Instagram provide an escape, however small, from the mundane.

<center>Value</center>

Similar to an archetype, tracking the value these designers provide to their subjects gives a more detailed look at what followers latch onto when they are looking at content. The six values and subjects that were tracked were determined by a preliminary examination of Instagram content. They are also closely aligned with Don Norman's emotional design model which states that joy is derived from a product when it provides visceral, behavioral, and reflective appeal. That is pleasing to look at, it functions well or provides some necessity, and provokes a sense of identity and pride. These 6 values were based on this model and fall under these 3 umbrellas. The values are as follows:

1. **Aesthetic Appeal** - defined by particular affinity or talent
2. **Informative** - defined by the sharing of valuable information
3. **Relatable** - defined by perceived accessibility or particular charisma
4. **Inspiring** - defined by the ability to motivate
5. **Shock Value** - defined by the ability to surprise or entertain

6. **Sentimentality** - defined by the ability to elicit an emotional reaction based on some form of symbolism

Aesthetic appeal and shock value both rely heavily on a visceral reaction. Inspiring or informative content serves as a function for the audience. Relatability and sentimentality are reflective of the audience's identities. Shock value may be determined by either content or skill that can be categorized as extraordinary, in that it is off-putting to the viewer. All of these values were tracked by denoting a number 1 to 6 as shown with their corresponding value. Ideally, content would provide at least 1 value from each set, creating the trifecta that results in consumer delight. While this is the ideal scenario, there will certainly be content that does not match these criteria. Thus, subjects were tracked based on the comprehensive examination of all of their content. Subjects may have as little as 1 or as many as all 6 of these values within their content. However, given that their popularity is based on one of these aspects, at the very least aesthetic appeal, in no scenario would a subject be providing none of these values to their audience.

Table 12.

Subjects' Perceived Value

Micro Influencers	1 (aesthetic)	2 (knowledge)	3 (relatability)	4 (inspiration)	5 (shock)	6 (sentiment)
Illustration	11	0	4	1	0	2
Lettering	7	0	0	2	0	0
Design	11	1	2	0	1	1
Animation	1	0	0	0	0	0

Total	30	1	6	3	1	3

Macro Influencers	1 (aesthetic)	2 (knowledge)	3 (relatability)	4 (inspiring)	5 (shock)	6 (sentiment)
Illustration	4	1	0	0	1	2
Lettering	11	4	6	7	2	0
Design	13	4	0	3	1	4
Animation	1	0	1	0	0	1
Total	29	9	7	10	4	7

Mega Influencers	1 (aesthetic)	2 (knowledge)	3 (relatability)	4 (inspiring)	5 (shock)	6 (sentiment)
Illustration	17	5	7	5	5	8
Lettering	6	4	3	4	2	2
Design	6	3	2	3	1	0
Animation	1	0	1	0	1	0
Total	30	12	13	12	9	10

Collective Totals	89	22	26	25	14	20

Note:; Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

Values were ascertained by the researcher using the aforementioned criteria for each value. In every single follower tier, aesthetic appeal was found to be the most consistent value provided by the subjects to their audience. This not only reinforces statements about the visual nature of the platform, but it also speaks to the visual nature of the type of content designers typically produce. 89 of the 90 subjects provided aesthetic appeal to their audiences. At their very core, this is what design influencers provide to their audience. However, brands typically need to provide more than this in order to form a more stable brand/consumer relationship, they need to offer some form of functionality and reflection as well. This very theory is reinforced by the value differences observed between the micro, macro, and mega tiers. Though all but one subject, within the macro group, provided aesthetic appeal, those within the mega group provided the largest diversity of values to their consumers. 40-45% of the Mega group subjects also provided knowledge, relatability, and inspiration to their audiences. Roughly 30-33% provided shock and sentiment. These numbers indicate that diversity of value is an essential factor in contributing to the eventual success of a design influencing career. Aesthetic appeal is simply the bare minimum. While only two of the mega subjects were found to have experienced this level of success solely based on aesthetic appeal, 6 of the macro subjects were found to rely on this alone, and 17, over half, of the micro group relied solely on this singular value. Diversity of value can be examined further by comparing the other 5 values across the groups. While nearly half of the mega group leveraged knowledge, relatability, and inspiration, only 23-33% of the macro group did so and 3-20% of the micro group did so. While roughly one-third of the mega group successfully employed shock value and sentimentality, 17-23% of the macro group did so and only 3-10% of the micro group did so. While aesthetic appeal was unanimously

applied across the board, the other values are separated as so because knowledge, relatability, and inspiration were used similarly as the next most popular values within each group, while shock value and relatability were consistently used the least. While the average among of use for the former three (knowledge, relatability, and inspiration) fell around 24, sentimentality ranked just below them with only 20 total instances. Shock value, however, fell even further with only 14 total occurrences, meaning only 15% of all of the subjects were providing this to their audiences, 9 of which were part of the mega group.

These numbers not only reemphasize Don Norman's emotional design theories, they also reinforce the notion that the most compelling of these values, shock, and excitement, are also some of the most difficult to employ. Malcolm Gladwell stated that trends are started by extraordinary individuals. Only extraordinary designers are capable of shocking and exciting their audiences either with their technical skills, individuality, wit, or other aspects of their work. The most established design influencers do more than follow trends, they create them by creating visually exciting and unique content, they create the trends. Just as some level of Instagram popularity can be gained by creating content that follows trends, some can be gained by employing the simplest of values, aesthetic appeal. However, the most consistent way to establish a successful personal brand is by diversifying what followers can gain from their relationship with the brand. Designers can catch the attention of potential followers by creating visually compelling content, however, they can maintain those followers by keeping them entertained through providing these other values to them. Audiences want to be wowed, they want to feel validated, they want to gain knowledge, and they want to feel that the personal brand contributes to their identity in some form. Creating content that checks all of these boxes is not

only difficult, it is likely unnecessary. However, employing 3 or more of these, especially if they check the visceral, behavioral, and reflection boxes was shown to produce the best chances for reaching the mega tier of 30,000 or more followers and a fully cultivated personal brand. Additionally, no one piece of content is expected to accomplish this. Instead, design influencers typically do this by diversifying the content they produce under the umbrella of their personal brand. Much like a corporate brand, a personal brand can be many things to many people but it rarely takes only one product to accomplish this. Instead, diversity in the right amounts that are in-line with the brand values can keep the audience retention rates high which is ultimately the only sustainable way to grow a brand.

Key Takeaways

1. **Personal Site and Ecommerce -** While more than two-thirds, 69% of the subjects had a personal website, less than half of them, 46% had e-commerce within that website. However, these overall statistics varied from the mega group's individual numbers which showed that two-thirds of the mega influencers had e-commerce on their personal websites. These statistics indicate that personal websites are not only a portfolio tool, but a place for established personal brands to house products, contact information, and other points of action for their audience. While some subjects used third-party platforms for their portfolios and commerce, the strongest indicator of brand establishment was the combination of ecommerce and personal sites within one singular domain that could be tied back to the Instagram profile. This not only promotes brand awareness but gives Instagram audiences a point of purchase so that the designers may begin to transition to

full-time influencing. It is the first indicator of a transition from B2B to B2C marketing on the designer's part.

2. **Style and Niche -** Personal style and niche are related concepts. Put simply, a designer's personal style should fit in a niche. While cultivating a personal style can take years, creating or finding a social niche can take additional time and testing as some niches may be oversaturated while the number of niches to be discovered is infinite. A strong personal style, identified by consistency and uniqueness were found to be key components in a successful personal brand as 100% of the mega influencers exhibited this. While determining popular niche descriptors showed that a wide variety of content may gain popularity, it also showed that attempting to piggyback off of an already-popular trend will result in limited, temporary success as a personal brand. The best method of establishing a visual identity is to cultivate a style based on the designer's strengths and weaknesses and then to specify those towards relevant content that is not oversaturated or is unique to the designer's personal experiences. Authenticity is always the best brand choice.

3. **Brand Archetype -** Brand archetypes are helpful in the categorization of different brands in order to determine which ones may be better suited for social media success. There are 12 total archetypes that can be categorized based on their foundational value or feeling they provide to their audiences. For the purpose of this study, these foundations were determined to be sentiment, entertainment, inspiration, and relatability. In general, those in the entertainment division were less popular except for within the mega group in which they took precedence. This indicates the importance of audience entertainment in

order to obtain a certain level of success. Overall, the ruler, part of the inspirational group, was the most popular archetype, signifying the importance of craft mastery for design influencers. These archetypes provide only a preliminary and generalized look at what brands provide to their audiences and what personas may be more compelling to follow that is further explored by examining value.

4. **Value** - Specific value potentials that design influencers may provide to their audiences were curated from a preliminary examination of the subjects as well as from Donald norman's emotional design principles that state consumer delight occurs when a product has visceral, behavioral, and reflective appeal to the audience. The resulting values were determined to be as follows. Each of which fall into one of Norman's three umbrellas

    7. **Aesthetic Appeal** - defined by particular affinity or talent

    8. **Informative** - defined by the sharing of valuable information

    9. **Relatable** - defined by perceived accessibility or particular charisma

    10. **Inspiring** - defined by the ability to motivate

    11. **Shock Value** - defined by the ability to surprise or entertain

    12. **Sentimentality** - defined by the ability to elicit an emotional reaction based on some form of symbolism

While aesthetic appeal was unsurprisingly the most frequently employed value, given the visual nature of both Instagram and the field of design, it was found that diversity of value, especially if hitting all three buckets, was the most telling factor in the eventual success of the designer's personal brand. While an audience may be drawn in by aesthetic appeal alone, it

generally takes additional value to create audience retention which is necessary for substantial growth.

Social Media Strategy

Social media has grown far beyond its initial purpose of connectivity. Instagram is no longer just a place to share personal photographs, but one of the most important marketing platforms for consumer brands. This marketing power Instagram holds has resulted in an entirely new industry known as influencing. With influencing, individuals with large social media audiences or followers, through a partnership with corporate brands and the commodification of unique offerings, are able to cultivate their own brands that are capable of sustaining levels of income that allow for a transition to full-time content creation. However, with this new industry importance of social media marketing, importance has also been placed on how to assess and create success within these spaces. Instagram has many in-app options to assist corporate and personal brands alike. But interpreting these metrics and adjusting strategies and content accordingly merits an entirely new form of strategy to be used in conjunction with brand strategy. This secondary strategy, known as social media strategy, is an equally important aspect in the pursuit of a design influencing career.

Other Platforms

While personal brands may thrive on Instagram, the platform is merely the breeding grounds for this type of career. Just as corporate branding wouldn't only exist on Instagram,

personal branding is expected to live outside of the virtual walls of Instagram as well. While a personal website is often a space personal brands send their social media audiences to in order to capitalize on their relationship. Having profiles for the brand on other social media platforms can often grow the audience to new heights while increasing brand awareness (Hennessey, 2018). That's not to say a brand needs to have a presence on every single social media platform possible, but choosing additional platforms strategically can increase discoverability and cross-platform awareness as many social media users are on different platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, as well. The increased point of contact, as long as each interaction with the audience is valuable in different ways, can serve to strengthen brand relationships. Spamming audiences repetitively with the same content can; However, result in consumer frustration and relationship abandonment.

The purpose of tracking which additional points of contact the subjects have established serves not only to illustrate this aspect of social media strategy but also to inform which additional platforms may best serve design influencers specifically. Different platforms are better suited for different types of content, this can inform which additional aspects of the designer's brand consumers are most typically interested in. In order to collect this data, only platforms linked to readily by the designer, either on their Instagram profile or on a website linked on their profile, was deemed admissible.

Table 13.

Subjects' Use of Additional Platforms

Micro	email	dribble	facebook	twitter	blog	behance	other	
Illustration	3	2	3	5	2	1	0	
lettering	1	1	1	1	0	1	3	(ello, the dots,
design	3	4	0	3	0	2	0	
animation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1(tmblr)
total	7	7	4	9	2	4	4	

Macro	email	dribble	facebook	twitter	blog	behance	other	
Illustration	1	1	2	3	1	0	1	(yt)
lettering	7	6	1	2	1	2	0	
design	3	9	2	7	0	5	0	
animation	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1 (tumblr)
total	11	16	5	13	2	7	2	

Mega	email	dribble	facebook	twitter	blog	behance	other	
Illustration	9	2	3	3	2	1	3	(etsy, tik tok,yt))
lettering	2	1	0	4	1	1	2	(address)
design	2	2	2	4	1	2	1	(venmo)
animation	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	
total	13	6	6	11	4	4	6	
	31	29	15	33	8	15	12	

Note; From tracking tool

   The study found that, despite the decidedly non-visual nature of Twitter, the popular platform was the most used by the subjects with 37% of the subjects connecting a profile on this platform to their personal brand. While Twitter, unlike Instagram, is a primarily text-based platform, it is still aimed at fast, snackable content and offers a designer's audience a more personal look into their thoughts and opinions outside of their more visual work. It is likely much different content than Instagram followers would get which creates a point of interest for potential new followers and adds value for existing followers. It allows the audience to feel like they know the person behind the brand.

The second most popular platform by the marginal amount of two subjects was discovered to be email. While not necessarily a form of social media, offering an email address is certainly a point of contact, likely one in which a point of purchase or partnership can be made. This is another particularly intimate form of contact and allows the abnormal followers, the brands and collaborators, a place to contact the brand for commissions and partnerships. Like e-commerce, it offers a form of commodification.

Falling behind email by only two subjects was Dribble. Dribble is an invite-only design-based platform that is typically reserved for those that are part of the design community (Social Media for Creatives, 2018). The popularity of this platform suggests its importance lies in creating a reputation in the design community by sharing work in a portfolio centric manner to other respected designers. Though visibility on Dribble may not be as high as on platforms like Twitter and Instagram, the quality of followers is derived from the fact that everyone on the app is held to a certain standard by other members of the design community. Popularity within design-centric platforms legitimizes the validity of these influencers as respected designers outside of the layman's' opinions.

After these top 3 points of contact, usage rates are cut nearly in half with Facebook and Behance only tallying 15. In fact, no additional points of contact ranked above these options with 17 total subjects showing no other form of social media or points of contact with their audiences. Vimeo, LinkedIn, and other miscellaneous platforms were used by only 12 of the 90 subjects. The least popular forms of contact were blogs, newsletters, and Pinterest, which offer the most regular and intimate forms of contact for a brand and its consumers.

This lack of importance on platforms, like Facebook, Behance, LinkedIn, and Pinterest, speaks volumes to the notion that choosing the right platforms for particular audiences is, indeed, and strategic and important decision. Platforms are chosen by users and brands for certain reasons. While design influencers place little importance on Facebook or blogs. Other types of personal brands, such as lifestyle or fashion-based personal brands might. The disparity observed in the use of Dribble versus Behance may indicate a particular need to establish oneself in the design community without oversaturating spaces with the same content. While both platforms serve a portfolio-like purpose and are populated by designers, the importance of Dribble is presumed to lie in the exclusivity of the platform. It establishes these designers as not only popular amongst the general public, but also amongst their peers. Each of the most popular additional platforms serves a different purpose to the audience as well as to the brand. While dribble validates the technical skills of the designer, the importance of Twitter is likely that it offers a more candid and personalized view of the designer behind the brand. It is a way for audiences to form a stronger bond and begin to associate and identify common values within themselves and the brands they have formed relationships with. Finally, email, though not a form of social media, offers a point of contact for those looking for a point of action. While design influencers may receive hundreds of Direct Messages (DMs) and questions from their followers in various forms, since email can be more easily filtered and is seen as a more formal point of contact, it is usually reserved for more serious inquiries. It is a gateway to a source of income for the designer and the first point of contact for those wishing to employ the brand's services.

Much like additional platforms, highlights can be an additional point for contact for the Instagram audience to strengthen their connection with the personal brand. A function within Instagram, highlights are temporary content that can be bookmarked on a user's profile for future viewing. Typically, this content is less aesthetically curated and oftentimes more candid, and conversation-forward than the content that reaches the grid. Since stories are temporary and are showcased above the grid and do not have as many algorithmic hurdles to overcome. This content often receives additional visibility and interaction. For this reason, many use highlights to tease new content they have recently posted on their grid. Bookmarked highlights can also provide an additional preview to potential new followers of what kind and quality they can expect to receive by choosing to partake in the relationship. For this reason, highlights have made their way into the standards of social media strategy as it pertains to Instagram. Additionally, since highlights are often used to show behind the scenes aspects such as process, personality, and personal-life centered content, tracking the use of this function amongst the subjects can tell us whether or not this more candid form of interaction is particularly valuable to design influencer, if this type of content strengthens the audience/designer relationship, or if efforts are better spent elsewhere. Due to the increased difficulty of tracking the temporary, non-bookmarked highlights, only bookmarked highlights, those that have yielded an ever present space on the subjects' profiles were able to be tracked. The use of bookmarked highlights is still a strong indication of additional relationship-forming content as well as social media strategy.

Table 14.

Subjects' Use of Instagram Highlights

Micro Influencers	Yes	No
Illustration	7	4
Lettering	7	0
Design	2	9
Animation	1	0
Total	17	13

Macro Influencers	Yes	No
Illustration	3	1
Lettering	10	1
Design	7	7
Animation	0	1
Total	20	10

Mega Influencers	Yes	No
Illustration	15	2
Lettering	6	0
Design	6	0
Animation	0	1
Total	27	3

Collective Totals	64	26

Note:; Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

Members of the Mega Group, the group with the largest audiences, overwhelmingly chose to employ this tactic. Roughly 90% of this group utilized bookmarked highlights as opposed to merely 3 of the mega subjects who chose not to. Not only was the choice to bookmark highlights unanimously popular within the established group, this popularity continued to decrease between each follower tier. Exactly two-thirds or 20 of the 30 macro group subjects chose to employ bookmarked highlights, while barely over half of the micro group chose to do so. Since these statistics were garnered with a simple yes or no, little room is needed for interpretation.

The descending popularity of utilizing bookmarked highlights in coordination with follower count descension indicates that not only are highlights a valued component of SEO, but they do also serve to strengthen the audience or brand relationship for designers in particular. While designers are particularly visual people and Instagram is a particularly visual application, design influencers may tend to have particularly curated grids. This type of profile may allow for little personality to seep through, which is precisely where stories can help. When discussing values in the previous section, it was determined that some level of personability or reflection is essential to a brand's success. That is users need to feel like they are a part of something or receiving something that stimulates them. They want to feel like they are more than voyeurs, they want to feel like they have formed a real relationship with the brand. This is part of the

brand or consumer contract. The consumer wants to feel like they know, share value with, and trust the brand. Highlights allow designers to accomplish exactly this without sacrificing their coveted grid aesthetic which also maintains the consistency of their personal style, which is another essential component. Highlights provide an essential outlet for holding onto both of these strategic factors without compromising one for the other.

<div align="center">Instagram Engagement</div>

In terms of social media, engagement can be described as any interaction taken by another user on a piece of content (Pope, 2019). Within social media strategy, this is a conventional success metric that can be monitored on any platform. These interactions generally include the number of likes, shares, comments, reposts, etc. However, each platform has interactions that may be unique to the interface or may be more indicative of growth than others. While engagement doesn't necessarily translate to sales, it remains a solid indicator of growth from the age-old quality versus quantity perspective. While follower count is generally the designated indicator of an influencer, it may not be the best for potential growth or sales. While a high follower count is an important aspect of influencing, the bigger the audience the more opportunity for sales and collaborations; It does not consider the quality of the audience. Within any social media application, fake accounts exist that users may buy or just receive as followers. This not only inflates follower count, but also decreases the quality of the audience. A quality audience is one that interacts with and deepens their relationship with the brand consistently (Pope, 2019). Following a user is free to do. When a user chooses to follow an account, they have made no commitment to that account at that moment. However, when followers comment,

purchase goods, partake in workshops or attend speaking events related to the designer's brand, they are contributing to that brand in a way that fake accounts cannot. While the points of sale and other forms of engagement were unable to be tracked, the study did examine the average number of likes to followers and comments to likes during the three-month period. Again, while this may not correlate to sales, it is a good indicator of an invested audience.

Likes and comments were tracked in tiers based on high to low levels of engagement. The amount required to be considered within a tier was adjusted based on the follower count and group performance within the subject groups. For example, a high amount of likes for the micro group was determined by a preliminary examination of the group's average likes on posts within a certain time frame. A particularly low amount of likes would be deemed by following the same procedure, and anything in-between would fall into the middle engagement tier being neither high nor low. These numbers would then be adjusted to account for the additional followers within the Macro group. However, since the Mega subject group had no cap, meaning there was no maximum number of followers as there was within the Micro and Macro groups, the tiers had to be adjusted to account for the disproportionately large amount of followers garnered by some within that group compared to the others.

Following this process, a high amount of likes for the Micro group was considered to be an average of 500 or more, while a high average number of comments was 25 or more. The middle tier for this group was 100-500 likes and 10-25 comments, and the lowest engagement tier was less than 100 for likes and less than 10 for comments. For the Macro group, a high number of likes was deemed to be an average of 800 or more, a high amount of comments being

50 or more. The mid-tier was 400-800 likes and 25-50 comments, and the low engagement tier was denoted by an average amount of likes less than 400 and an average number of comments less than 25. Whereas these numbers denoting the tiers roughly doubled between the first two subject groups, within the Mega group they were adjusted based on a preliminary examination of group norms to account for the disproportionately larger number of followers. For likes, the high engagement tier was set by an average of 5000 or more likes, for the mid-range this number was 1000-50000, and a subject within the Mega group was classified as low engagement with an average of less than 1000 likes on average. For comments, the engagement tiers were 100 or more, 50-100, or less than 50 for high, moderate, and low engagement, respectively. Due to the volatility of follower counts and the fact that some subjects moved follower tiers through the process of the study, to ensure the accuracy of the data, the average number of likes and comments was taken only from a subject's posts that fell within the first month of the study. If a subject had no posts within that month, they were denoted by a marking of 'n/a', since video posts on Instagram don't display likes, only views. If a subject had only video-based posts within the time-frame, their average comments could be counted, but likes could not, thus there is the possibility of having a subject with a 'n/a' denotation in likes and not in comments.

Table 15.

Subjects' Average Amount of Likes Per Post

Micro Influencers	Tier1 (500+)	Tier2 (100-500)	Tier3 (<100)	N/A
Illustration	9	2	0	00
Lettering	3	3	1	0

Design	4	5	0	2
Animation	0	0	0	1
Total	16	10	1	3

Macro Influencers	Tier1 (800+)	Tier2 (400-800)	Tier3 (<100)	N/A
Illustration	2	0	2	0
Lettering	7	3	1	0
Design	3	9	1	1
Animation	0	1	0	0
Total	12	13	4	1

Mega Influencers	Tier1 (5000+)	Tier2 (1000-5000)	Tier3 (<100)	N/A
Illustration	8	9	0	0
Lettering	4	1	0	1
Design	3	2	1	0
Animation	0	1	0	0
Total	15	13	1	1

Collective Totals	43	36	6	5

Note:; Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

Table 16.

Subjects' Average Amount of Comments Per Post

Micro Influencers	Tier1 (25+)	Tier 2 (10-25)	Tier 3 (<10)	N/A
Illustration	5	4	2	0
Lettering	2	3	2	0
Design	3	6	1	1
Animation	0	0	0	1
Total	10	13	5	2

Macro Influencers	Tier1 (50+)	Tier 2 (25-50)	Tier 3 (<25)	N/A
Illustration	3	0	1	0
Lettering	2	3	6	0
Design	4	3	7	0
Animation	0	0	0	1
Total	9	6	14	1

Mega Influencers	Tier 1 (100+)	Tier 2 (50-100)	Tier 3 (<50)	N/A
Illustration	6	3	8	0
Lettering	3	2	0	1
Design	3	1	2	0
Animation	0	1	0	0

Total		12		7		10		1
Collective Totals		31		26		29		4

Note:; Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

More than half, with 16 of the 30 Micro group members, experienced high levels of engagement as it pertains to likes, one-third of them experienced a moderate amount of likes and only 1 experienced a low amount of likes with 3 being indeterminable. The numbers were relatively similar for the Mega group with 15 of the 30 members experienced high amounts of likes, versus 13 who experienced a moderate amount, and only 1 who experienced a low amount and 1 whose data was not able to be collected. The numbers shifted slightly, however, within the macro group with 12 experiencing a high amount of likes, 13 experiencing a moderate amount, and 4 experiencing a low amount with 1 being indeterminable. This shift in engagement within the middle group perhaps hints at earlier observations that suggested the Macro group is the least conducive to growth.

What's more, this trend continued from like-based engagement rates to comments but at a larger disparity. Within the Micro group, Tier 2 (moderate engagement) took precedence over the highest engagement tier with 13 compared to the highest tier with only 10. The lowest engagement tier grew to include 5 subjects. Within the mega group high engagement remained first with 12 subjects. However, moderate engagement fell to third with only 7 subjects compared to the lowest tier having 10. While the volatility of the Mega group's engagement

levels may be explained by the larger variety of follower counts within the group, ranging from 31,500 followers to 725,000, the Macro group still experienced the lowest levels of engagement of the three follower-count groups. Nearly half, 14, of the 30 Macro group subjects experienced low engagement rates as it pertains to comments. Tiers 1 and 2 made up the other half with 9 and 6 respectively, while 1 remained inconclusive or not applicable. While the overall numbers for average likes showed that the vast majority of subjects experienced high or moderate levels of engagement in this aspect, with 43 and 36 of the 90 subjects, respectively, the overall numbers for comment engagement were much more equal across the board with 31, 26, and 29 in the high, moderate, and low categories, respectively.

These trends show that not only are comments much more difficult to garner than likes but also may be a better indication of an engagement for that very reason. Liking a photo takes less time than posting a comment. Therefore, it is a better indicator of an engaged audience which isn't always the most populous, as shown within the Macro and Mega group. Limitations of this study include the lack of a cap for the mega influencers which may very well have shifted the data to show a more engaged audience for that subject group. Nonetheless, the lack of engagement shown within the Macro group validates earlier trends that suggested the Macro group may serve as somewhat of a purgatory or stalling point for design influencers. While the study was unable to track sales or collect additional metrics, the fact that engagement rates between the micro and mega groups were relatively similar in both comments and likes indicates that engagement is not directly correlated to sales but is, in fact, related to growth or growth potential.

Posting Frequency

Posting frequency is another factor that has long been touted as a key component in social strategies. While posting frequency can be defined as the regularity with which a user posts any type of content. However, for the purpose of this study, due to the temporary nature of other post types, post frequency will only refer to the regularity with which a user posts to their grid. Social media strategies vary in theorizing the optimum posting frequency as social strategies are directly related to the brand's specific goals. However, a general rule of thumb is that users should post quality content as often and consistently as possible, with the optimal word being quality. Just as consumers have grown averse to traditional advertising due to overexposure, followers do not want to be inundated with meaningless content, they want content that contributes to the brand-consumer relationship. Contrarily, if a brand does not post frequently at all, they will lack the consistency necessary to develop an engaged consumer base. In order to inform a strategic approach to design influencing, the study examined the various frequencies with which the subjects posted to their grid within the first month of the study. Due to the possibility of subjects jumping to a different subject group based on growth throughout the study, as well as the possibility that subjects may delete older posts to maintain a grid aesthetic, this aspect had to be tracked before growth rates exceeded those that put certain subjects in their respective subject groups.

Similar to engagement rates, posting frequency was tracked based on a preliminary assessment of high, middle, and low ranges. However, unlike engagement, posting frequency is determined by the designer, not their audience, thus adjusting the tiers per follower group was

unnecessary. The averages were calculated by tallying the total number each subject posted during the given time frame. Since this time frame was approximately 31 days, the daily average had to be calculated and multiplied by 7 to ascertain the weekly average. A high amount of posting per week was determined to be 5 or more grid posts, a moderate amount being anywhere from 2-5 and a low amount being less than 2. While the 'n/a'' category was used to denote subjects that hadn't posted at all, this would also technically lump them in with the lowest tier.

Table 17.

Subjects' Average Posting Frequency Per Week

Micro Influencers	Tier 1 (5+)	Tier 2 (2-5)	Tier 3 (<2)	N/A
Illustration	5	4	1	1
lettering	2	4	1	0
design	0	5	5	1
animation	0	0	0	1
Total	7	13	7	3

Macro Influencers	Tier 1 (5+)	Tier 2 (2-5)	Tier 3 (<2)	N/A
Illustration	2	1	1	0
lettering	5	3	3	0
design	4	3	7	0
animation	0	1	0	0

	Tier1(5+)	Tier 2 (2-5)	Tier 3 (<2)	N/A
Total	11	8	11	0

Mega Influencers	Tier1(5+)	Tier 2 (2-5)	Tier 3 (<2)	N/A
Illustration	3	3	11	0
lettering	1	1	3	1
design	2	4	0	0
animation	0	0	1	0
Total	6	8	15	1

Collective Totals	24	29	33	4

Note:; Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

Contrary to what many social strategists advise, the Mega group, the group with the most established design influencers, actually posted the least frequently with 50% falling into the low frequency category with an additional 1 that had not posted at all in the given time frame of 31 days. Moreso, the moderate frequency tier was the second-most-popular with 8 of the 30 Mega subjects. The high frequency tier only accounted for approximately 20% of all of the mega subjects, meaning that 80% of the most established design influencers posted to their grid less than 5 times per week on average. The Macro group, on the other hand, saw equal numbers in both the high and low frequency tiers with 11 of the 30 subjects posting patterns falling into

either of these tiers. Only 8 of the 30 Macro subjects fell into the moderate frequency tier. The Micro group displayed another differentiating pattern with 13 or 43% of the subject's posting patterns falling into the moderate tier. Only 23% fell into the high frequency tier, and exactly one-third of the Micro subjects posted infrequently or not at all during the 31-day time period.

These varying results show that not only is posting as frequently and consistently as possible perhaps unnecessary, it also may be counterintuitive or simply infeasible. Producing 5 or more pieces of quality content per week, assuming they contain at least some amount of design work, is no small task. Whereas the Micro and Macro group may tend to post more because they are less established and, therefore, feel the need to reemphasize their presence more frequently, the study suggests that Mega influencers are more focused on taking their time to produce work their existing followers will find valuable. Posting between 1-2 times per week still allows for 4-8 quality pieces of content per month which should be enough to keep users engaged, but not overwhelmed. Posting more frequently than that may make followers feel like they are being spammed with irrelevant content because it is unreasonable. While other types of influencers may be able to produce quality content at moderate to high rates, a design influencer's content is directly related to their work and quality design work takes time. It is unreasonable to expect a designer to be capable of producing 20 or more quality pieces of design-related content on a monthly basis. Instead, designers should consider their grid's valuable real estate to themselves and their followers. If followers are viewing irrelevant or invaluable content more often than not, this alone may be reason enough to terminate the consumer or brand contract. However, if a user only sees a designer's content 1-2 times per week, every time providing a value of some sort, they are not only more likely to continue

following the designer. But these recurring positive interactions are what can strengthen the brand or consumer relationship to the point of reaching sales, also known as ROI (return on investment). For corporate brands, this return on investment may mean how much they spent promoting their product, perhaps via an influencer. For a designer, the investment is directly related to the time spent curating the experience and their relationship with their followers, their consumers. However, it should be noted that this study did not take into consideration or observe any common time-sensitive challenges, such as "Inktober" (a 30-day illustration challenge that occurs during the month of October) that prompt users to post certain content every day for a predetermined length of time, such as an entire month.

Post Type

Certain platforms are more conducive to different mediums of content. Twitter content is typically text-centric, Vimeo only allows users to post videos, has strict rules against plagiarism, and, therefore, has become a hotspot for animators. Instagram, as the name might suggest, was originally made for users to share static images alongside any necessary description, and most of them are best suited for short, digestible content. Social media is not a place users generally go to spend hours viewing one piece of content. The average time a user spent looking at an Instagram post in 2017 was less than 10 seconds and that number decreases every year with ever-shortening attention spans (Hennessy, 2018). When a designer only has a few seconds to capture an audience's attention, it's important to choose the right medium. Choosing the right medium, or combination of mediums could be the difference between a follower passing up a valuable piece of content, or becoming a loyal consumer. An influencer has less than 10 seconds to not only

stop a follower or potential follower from scrolling but to peak their interest enough to persuade them to press the follow button, follow the link, shop the post, or other actionable items that might convert to a sale. Choosing the correct medium, or packaging for each post, each piece of content is a very real differentiator between who gets noticed and who does not. While social strategies typically generalize this practice, leaving much of the interpretation up to the audience, this portion of the study aims to further examine what may be the best medium for not only Instagram but specifically for design influencers and the various subcategories of design.

Based on a preliminary assessment of the subjects' social content, 8 different common types of content were identified. These mediums and types of content were identified in order to inform not only what mediums are popular, but also what types of content resonate well with a designer's audience. These common categories were 'static', 'in the wild', 'real-life', 'videos', 'carousel', 'process', 'IGTV', and 'other'. These names were given to the types of content based on what they represent. Static was identified as purely aesthetic, static images of a designer's work in its original digital form, much like a stylized screenshot. In the wild, was used to denote those images in which the designer's design, merchandise, or other product was photographed in its final state. The term 'real-life' was used to denote posts with more personal content of family, friends, hobbies, or anything unrelated or peripheral to the designer's brand. Videos were identified as any designed, motion content. This could be animated graphics, character animation, animated 4-D graphics, or even UI prototypes. Carousels were used to denote content containing multiple images. This was typically used to show multiple views of static designs. This process was used to signify content that showed the process of creating such designs, such as time-lapse videos, sketches, or wireframes, as opposed to the final product. IGTV, unlike

standard video posts, which can only last up to 60 seconds, can last up to 10 minutes. Typically these videos are for highly-engaged audiences that are willing to invest in a designer's content more than the typical 10 seconds in-passing. They may go over a process in detail, discuss cultural issues, or focus on any content that may require a deeper examination than 60 seconds will allow. Finally, n/a or 'other' was used as a catchall for rare occasions in which the content did not fit the predetermined categories. Since subjects may use a variety of mediums, and one medium or content type may have been counted up to 30 times within each subject group. Assessments were made by which content types were used by subjects frequently within the past 3 months.

Table 18.

Subjects' Posty and Content Type

Micro Influencers	Static	In the Wild	Real Life	Videos	Carousel	Process	IGTV	Other
Illustration	10	3	3	1	3	0	0	0
Lettering	7	2	1	2	6	0	0	
Design	11	4	1	0	6	0	0	0
Animation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	28	9	5	3	15	0	0	1

Macro Influencers	Static	In the Wild	Real Life	Videos	Carousel	Process	IGTV	Other
Illustration	4	2	0	2	1	1	0	0
Lettering	11	3	2	3	10	0	2	1 (gifs)

	Static	In the Aild	Real Life	Videos	Carousel	Process	IGTV	Other
Design	13	2	2	2	13	0	0	2 (mockups/text)
Animation	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Total	29	7	4	8	25	1	2	3

Mega Influencers	Static	In the Aild	Real Life	Videos	Carousel	Process	IGTV	Other
Illustration	17	9	2	5	12	7	1	0
Lettering	4	2	1	4	5	1	2	0
Design	5	2	2	1	5	0	0	1 (mockups)
Animation	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0
Total	26	13	5	11	23	8	3	1

Collective Totals	83	29	14	21	63	9	5	5

Note:; Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

While the study shows that preferences varied from group to group, some trends remained a constant. Overall, 83 of all 90 subjects, equating to 92%, utilized static posts frequently. The second most utilized type, was carousels with 63 of all 90 subjects, 70%, implementing this content type. After carousels, the third and fourth most popular content types, used by 32% and 23% of the subjects respectively, were 'in the wild' posts and videos. Only

17% chose to share content about their personal lives. 10 % shared process-related content, and only 6% utilized IGTV or another, unaccounted for type of content.

These overall trends carried over into each subject group with static and carousel posts remaining the most popular within each group. However, while 'in the wild' and video posts were the third and fourth most popular overall, the Micro group actually had more 'real life' content than videos. Perhaps most interestingly, while only 10% of all of the subjects showed process-related content, 8 of these 9 total subjects were within the Mega group, meaning that nearly one-third of the Mega group frequently showed process-related content. 'Other' content types utilized included mockups and gifs.

Overall, the Mega group's content mediums were much more diversified than the other two less-established groups. The Mega group was the only subjects group that saw double digits in categories other than static or carousel. This diversity of content observed in the Mega group indicates a shift as the personal brands become more established. While it's important to establish a style and a niche, as brand awareness grows, it's important to continue to diversify in order to keep audiences intrigued and to keep providing new value to them. However, the strong inclinations towards static and carousel posts indicate that Instagram, especially for designers, is still best suited for static, snackable content. While diversity of content is the best course of action for providing value to consumers, the bulk of content posted to Instagram should still adhere to what the platform was originally intended for. The lack of IGTV content indicates that, while Instagram is shifting to accommodate lengthier video content, the platform's primary purpose remains related to static imagery. Additionally, the lack of real-life content, observed as steadily absent across each follower group, indicates that, for design influencers, Instagram

audiences respond much differently to content than they would for an influencer of a different kind or simply for the typical user. An audience is not following a designer to discover what they eat, cook, or wear. While personal content may be humanizing on occasion, oversaturation of this type of content should generally be avoided. For the typical follower, a design influencer plays a certain role in their timeline, that's their value. They provide design expertise in their particular niche. While relatability can certainly be one of these values, the value should always be related to design. Any oversaturation of personal content would only be valuable for the rare fanatic follower or for someone who knows the designer personally. For a well-established design influencer, the bulk of the audience is neither.

Hashtags and Gimmicks

Engagement was discussed earlier in the research as a primary indicator of growth potential. While the best, most sustainable way to garner engagement is by producing content quality content, there are other methods of increasing the potential for likes and comments by increasing discoverability and prompting followers to interact with content. While hashtags are a common practice included in many social strategies as a way to increase discoverability, how and when to use them is still surrounded by some ambiguity. Additionally, attempts to garner engagement through additional efforts such as giveaways and prompts remain largely unexamined and, for the purpose of this study, will be referred to as gimmicks. How and when design influencers choose to use hashtags and gimmicks not only tells us that these individuals are strategically posting it shows a level of effort put into self promotion. While hashtags have been evaluated and deemed relatively effective when used properly, the effectiveness of

gimmicks beyond gaining a few extra likes or comments remains to be seen. In order to evaluate the effectiveness of such practices as they pertain to design influencers, the study examined the usage of these practices by the 90 subjects over the course of 3 months. Tracking these can indicate whether or not methods of garnering engagement subsequently result in the ultimate goal, growth.

One particularly popular gimmick was found to be giveaways. Giveaways prompt users to interact with content by promising followers a chance at winning something of value based on comments, likes, and shares of the piece of content. Due to a lack of consistency with other forms of gimmicks hashtags and giveaways were identified as the two most trackable methods of garnering engagement. For this reason, the subjects were tracked according to whether or not they used hashtags and gimmicks as well as how often. Subjects who frequently used hashtags, in their comments counted toward those using hashtags, whereas those who used them sporadically were marked as 'somewhat.' Since giveaways are not a feasible tactic to employ on a daily basis, there was no need to distinguish different frequencies of use. Additionally, subjects that used neither hashtags nor giveaways under any circumstance were given an 'n/a.'

Table 19.

Subjects' Use of Hashtags and Promotional Gimmicks

Micro Influencers	Hashtags	Giveaways	Somewhat	N/A
Illustration	7	4	0	0
Lettering	5	0	1	1
Design	10	0	0	1

Animation	1	0	0	0
Total	23	4	1	2

Macro Influencers	Hashtags	Giveaways	Somewhat	N/A
Illustration	2	2	0	0
Lettering	6	2	1	1
Design	10	1	1	2
Animation	0	0	0	1
Total	18	5	2	4

Mega Influencers	Hashtags	Giveaways	Somewhat	N/A
Illustration	12	0	0	5
Lettering	5	0	0	1
Design	4	0	0	2
Animation	1	0	0	0
Total	22	0	0	8

Collective Totals	63	9	3	14

Note:; Hadwiger, J. (2020). *From tracking tool.*

A significant amount of the subjects favored frequent use of hashtags as opposed to the other options with 70% of all subjects using hashtags in their comments or captions on a regular basis. However, more subjects used neither of these methods than used gimmicks and sporadic hashtags combined. 14 of the total subjects, 16%, used neither method, only 3, or 3%, used hashtags sporadically, and only 9, 90%, employed giveaways. While 22 and 23 used hashtags consistently in the Mega and Micro groups respectively, this number fell to 18 within the Macro groups which saw an increase in the other three categories. Additionally, where the Micro group saw low numbers for giveaways and sporadic hashtags, the Mega had no users employing these, where all 8 of the Mega subjects not consistently using hashtags, used no method of garnering engagement instead.

The lack of engagement garnering methods observed within the Mega group reinforces the level of awareness for these more established personal brands but also indicates a lack of long-term effectiveness for the other two categories. A likely cause for a lack of sporadic hashtag use is that hashtags are a method of discoverability that works best when used consistently and tactfully. While it is important to find hashtags that are not oversaturated, undersaturated hashtags will not garner noticeable results. Similarly, while followers do not want to feel spammed by abrasive hashtag use, using hashtags infrequently or minimally will not result in substantial visibility increases either. Hashtags are a delicate balance that requires strategy in choice and usage. Additionally, giveaways can boost visibility by boosting interaction on a post which affects its presence on the discover page of a potential follower. Whereas giveaways can be relatively effective in this manner, an influencer must have a broad enough existing base for the number of interactions to be of any consequence. Another drawback of giveaways is that

they come at the expense of the designer and therefore cannot be employed feasibly on a regular basis. While self-promotional methods such as these may seem inconsequential, their effects can add up over time. It should also be noted that the fastest-growing subject in the individual subject groups each utilized hashtags consistently.

Key Takeaways

1. **Other Platforms -** The visual nature of Instagram combined with the potential for high visibility makes it the most conducive to design-related personal brand development. However, a large part of social media strategy is dependent upon cross-platform awareness. This brand awareness is dependent upon multiple relationship-building interactions with consumers that increase brand visibility and fulfill different facets of the brand or consumer relationship. In contrast to the visual nature of Instagram, Twitter was found to be the most popular secondary platform utilized by design influencers. This difference in platforms is an intentional action by designers to strengthen an aspect of the brand or consumer relationship that is not fulfilled by Instagram. In other words, cross-platform awareness is not merely spamming different platform audiences with the same content, it is creating additional touchpoints with existing audiences to strengthen that relationship. The most popular additional platforms were found to be those that offered audiences an entirely different experience than the one they were receiving on Instagram, through either more personal interactions, such as with the textual nature of Twitter or through professional validation on platforms consisting of design peers such as

Dribble. Regardless of which additional platforms are utilized, the decision should be a strategic one aimed at strengthening a particular area of the personal brand's consumer relationship or reputation as opposed to a random one geared towards spamming a larger group of people with the same content.

2. **Highlights -** Bookmarked highlights are an in-app feature within Instagram that provides an outlet for relationship-strengthening content. Much like additional platforms, Instagram highlights provide a more casual outlet for design influencers to provide their audience with more personal-life content. Highlights allow for a less-curated impermanent glimpse into the designer's daily routine, personality, process, and/or values. When utilized properly, they add another layer to the consumer or brand relationship without designers having to turn to additional apps. It's the most convenient way to strengthen those relationships that have already been formed. Moreso, the study found that the most frequent use of highlights occurred within the most established subject group, the Mega influencers, and decreased parallel to decreasing follower count. This not only indicates the effectiveness of these brand awareness tools but validates the importance of forming layered relationships with consumers. It is a typical case of quality over quantity. The more diverse, quality content designers are able to provide to their audience, the more their brand or consumer relationships will strengthen and grow.

3. **Instagram Engagement -** While follower count is generally the qualifying factor for becoming an influencer, it does not necessarily correlate with ROI especially if the influencer is a designer and not financially dependent on sponsored posts. When the volume of the audience isn't the only factor in determining income, the quality of the

audience becomes much more important. The only way to garner the quality of an

audience is to examine engagement rates, whereas engagement rates were adjusted to

account for the varying follower counts per tier, the study did find that engagement rates

were much more volatile and difficult to track within the Mega group which contained

the largest follower count diversity. Despite the limitations, the study examined the only

two trackable engagement indicators, such as likes and comments, and found that,

unsurprisingly, comments were not only harder to gain but also a better indicator of

growth potential than likes. While neither engagement rates nor follower count are direct

indicators of sales, for influencers operating off of a B2C model as opposed to a strictly

B2B model, with primarily sponsored posts, engagement rate is a much more valuable

success metric.

4. **Posting Frequency -** Posting frequency, the regularity with which an influencer posts to

their grid, has been a consistently present yet controversial topic within the social media

strategy realm. While many sources claim posting as frequently and consistently as

possible is the best course of action, for design or other talent influencers, the question

again becomes quantity. While theoretically posting as frequently as possible may yield

the best results, when content is reliant on design work it becomes unrealistic to expect

influencers to be able to create quality content that often. Moreso, the study found that

the optimal posting frequency was 1-2 times per week or 4-8 times per month. This

frequency was not only enough to keep followers interesting, but it was not so much that

followers were feeling inundated with invaluable content which may be reason for them

to terminate their brand or consumer contract, in other words unfollowing. This amount

was found to not only be sufficiently frequent for maintaining these relationships and their influencer's presence in their audiences' feed but also allows the designer sufficient time to produce this quality content which is synonymous with quality design work.

5. **Post Type -** Different platforms exist for different content types, which creates their own unique communities. Whereas Instagram was originally created as a visual platform to house static images accompanied by a short, text-based caption, the platform has now evolved to accommodate the growing influencer industry as well as the evolving preferences and attention spans of users. While Instagram's permanent posting capabilities now include not only static images, but also carousels (up to 10 static images), videos (video content under 60 seconds), and IGTV (video content up to 10 minutes) deciding which medium to utilize can be an overwhelming decision and may be determined by the audience or type of content being shared. What is more, for influencers, content-based decisions also include the content itself, not just the medium. While allowing the audience to see some personal continent may strengthen the brand/consumer relationship, this type of content was found to be used infrequently in a permanent, more curated setting such as the grid. What is more, the most popular content types and contexts were still found to be static images or carousels of designs. This indicates that, while mixing content and mediums may assist in the maintenance of user engagement, maintaining the majority of content in line with the platform's original purpose will allow for the most compatible and digestible content.

6. **Hashtags and Gimmicks -** While quality and diversity of content is the most consistent and sustainable method of cultivating an engaged audience, many influencers turn to the

use of hashtags and gimmicks to increase visibility and garner more engagement. While gimmicks, such as giveaways are a controversial method seen as disingenuous by some, others employ and promote these tactics as staples of self-promotion. While copious amounts of self-promotional content may turn users off, the study did find that an overwhelming amount of subjects, and notably the subjects with the most growth, used hashtags either in the comments or caption to increase a posts' visibility on a regular basis. Whereas giveaways were found to be very effective in provoking likes and comments, this was only effective and more prevalent with subjects who already had a substantial audience from which to garner engagement. These tactics and growth have a snowball effect. High engagement results in high visibility which results in growth. The higher the potential for engagement, the higher the potential for visibility and therefore growth.

Growth

In the influencing industry, the most valuable metric is growth. Growth, as it pertains to social media, is defined as the number of new followers an individual has gained on a specific social media platform over a set period of time (Hennessey, 2018). It is used unanimously by influencers as a KPI, or key performance indicator. Influencing success is highly dependent on growth. It is a measurable indicator of the potential purchasing power of a consumer base. Instagram promotes popular accounts. That is, growth breeds growth. The more users that see and interact with a post, the more that post is likely to be seen by potential new followers. Therefore the larger the audience, the larger the potential for profits, partnerships, collaborations,

sponsorships, etc. Growth is the singular success metric for which all of the other success metrics available to the study have been measured. Since sales, income, and website data was unable to be obtained, the success of every other aspect examined was based on whether or not it could be associated with the subject's growth.

Out of the 90 total subjects, the top 10 subjects with the highest growth rate over the 3 month period gained cumulative amounts of followers ranging from 18,000 to 52,200. The subject with the most growth over the 3 month period with 52,200 new followers over the 3 month period was, in fact, a member of the mega group, but began with only 46,000 followers compared to the 725,000 original followers belonging to the second-highest performing subject who gained 40,000 new followers over the period. Additionally, the subject who was last in the top 10, with 18,000 new followers over the 3 month period, participated as a member of the Mega group while the subject with the third-largest increase in follower count with approximately 39,000 new followers was originally a member of the Micro group. The new followers escalated this subject past the Macro group and steadily into the Mega. In fact, half of the top 10 subjects with the highest growth rates were originally members of the Micro group while the other half were members of the Mega group. More importantly, the subject with the most growth in the Macro group only saw 11,000 new followers over the 3 month period, 7,000 less than the bottom of the top 10 performers. The lack of high growth rates observed within the Macro group validates the emerging theory referenced at multiple points throughout the assessment of the individual metrics. This recurring theme that has carried over into the most important success metric observed by the study indicates that, instead of being an incremental step in the course of an influencer's career, becoming a macro influencer and remaining in that

group for any period of time may indicate that growth rate for that particular designer has been maximized. In fact, while 4 of the 30 micro influencers experienced enough growth to place them in the Macro group, an additional 3 Micro members experienced enough growth over the 3 month period to catapult them into the Mega group. Only 2 of the Macro group members experienced enough growth to tip them into the bottom of the Mega group, the highest tier. Despite the Macro group being initially positioned as an intermediary group, the study showed strong indications that stalling in the Macro group is, in fact, an indicator of decreased growth potential and may require a reevaluation of tactics including personal style or niche amongst the employment of any of the other metrics evaluated within the study. Instead of being the final benchmark on the ways to becoming a full-time design influencer with an established personal brand, being a Macro influencer may, in fact, be the final stop for many aspiring design influencers who have unwittingly reached their peak.

In addition to being entirely composed of Micro and Mega influencers, another large pattern emerged when examining the top 10 performing subjects. While only 33 of the 90 subjects, 37%, were Illustrators, this subcategory of design accounted for 90% of the 10 subjects with the highest growth rate raising the question of whether or not some sectors of design are more compatible with a design influencing career. Not only did Illustrators account for 9 of the top 10 performing subjects, but they also accounted for the top 9 of the top 10 performing subjects with the 10th being a designer specializing in branding. Additionally, the only subject within the Macro group to experience 5-figure growth was also an Illustrator. While only 11 subjects experienced a negative total of growth over the 3 month period, just 3 of these under-performing subjects were Illustrators.

Theoretically, this high performance rate observed by Illustrators can be attributed to the static nature of their work and the subsequent compatibility with the platform's intrinsic mediums such as static images, quick time lapses, or tutorials. Additionally, illustration is perhaps more conducive to creating and selling merchandise. Illustration designers have numerous commodifiable outlets such as patterns and textiles, editorial illustrations and commissions, as well as their own merchandise and tools, to promote like custom brushes and illustrated clothing or prints. Unlike logo designers or animators, illustrators can become true content creators in that the designs they create are solely for their personal brand and not work being shown that was originally for a client. For example, while a logo designer may experience high volumes of followers for their sketching and technical skills, the work being shown likely originated from clients unless the designer is skilled at creating their own prompts, the same can be said for UX designers or other sectors of design that are inherently geared towards B2B work. Whereas Illustrators may have merchandise like tools, prints, textiles, etc., a logo or UX designer may have a more difficult time commodifying their skill unless they turn to primarily providing knowledge to their audience which requires the establishment of a highly reputable skillset. True content creation occurs when the majority of the designer's work is being created for the sole purpose of providing value to their social media audiences. Inversely, influencers who are not content creators might share client work or passion projects. However, their primary source of income is still coming from clients and other businesses. While a career in content creation is entirely possible for any sector of design, the study shows that Illustrators may have an easier time achieving this sought out B2C relationship that eliminates the need for clients and replaces them with consumers and results in the creation of a true personal brand.

An additional factor illustrators may have is their symbiosis with the art world. Whereas design is a trade-specific field, that is influential designers are primarily considered influential or famous by other designers, their peers. Where truly influential designers have influence over much more than their peers, it may often go without any recognition from the laymen. Being an influential designer has typically outlined fame and glory limited to the design community and perhaps some peripheral fields. However, Instagram's huge community has given designers more visibility than ever before and Illustrators have been the first to experience this success because they are so peripheral to the design world. Logos, UX/UI, and layout designs are all fields that are traditionally underappreciated by those outside of the design community. That is, they require some knowledge of design principles in order to appreciate them. However. Illustration and even lettering share something in common with the art community which is you don't have to necessarily know anything about the way it was made to appreciate its appearance or content. Illustration and Lettering have the potential for higher volumes of growth and perhaps even higher maximum growth because they are easily commodifiable and may attract audience members outside of the design community.

Methodology Conclusion

Considering certain factors, such as income levels and point of sale systems, were not able to be examined in this study. The primary success metric that was used was growth as it pertains to follower count. Since growth is the basis for a lucrative influencing career, it can be assumed that the higher the follower count the more opportunities a designer will have. All

factors examined exhibited clear patterns that either positively correlated to growth, were neutral or indiscernible, or negatively correlated to growth.

Factors that were correlated to positive growth included the presence of multiple income sources, the use of a personally website, especially with ecommerce, the implementation of a very consistent and identifiable style that caters to a very specific niche, the use of an entertainment-based brand archetype, an offering of more than one of the potential 6 values discussed in the Personal Brand section of the methodology (aesthetic appeal, information, relatability, inspiration, shock value, and sentimentality), the strategic use of different social platforms, the use of Instagram's highlight feature, high engagement rates, an average posting frequency of 1-2 times per week, the diversification of posting mediums (carousel, static, video, etc..) frequent use of hashtags and occasional use of gimmicks such as giveaways or prompts to garner follower interaction, a distinct or memorable handle, the use of a professional profile, the branching of the brand or separation of personal and professional content, a primary residence in a city of 1,000,000 or more, and a design specialty that is easily digested by the general public such as illustration or lettering.

Factors that seemed to have no or an indiscernible correlation to either positive or negative growth were largely expertise-based. The study found no real correlation to design influencing success regarding education or work experience. In fact, the presence of this information was largely absent from the accessible information indicating its lack of significance to design influencing. A moderate amount of personal content sharing was also seen to have no correlation to growth whereas sharing high volumes of personal content was negatively associated with growth.

Of all of the factors examined, the primary hindrances to growth seemed to be a lack of a personal website or ecommerce, posting infrequently (less than 1-2 times per week) or too frequently (more than 1-2 times per week, the use of an inconsistent or inauthentic personal style, as well as the offering of only one value to the consumer base (most likely aesthetic appeal).

While it may seem that many factors are at play in the success rate of a design influencing career, the reality is that very few can negatively impact growth. However, this only serves to reinforce the fragility and volatility of a career based on social media. A designer does not need to have 100,000 followers to experience the levels of personal brand success they desire. However, the most efficient and consistent cultivation of an influencing career is the result of the proper combination of personal brand and social media strategy, both of which are subject to their own volatility. A successful design influencer can never get complacent because they have to continue to evolve and cater to their audience and to the platform they have chosen as their brand's primary place of establishment; In this case, Instagram.

Conclusion

Discussion of Findings

Based on the factors the study was able to examine, it is undeniable that design influencing is not only an increasingly popular and respectable career path but also one that

requires strategy within multiple facets. Therefore, there are in fact certain patterns rooted in existing principles that can be used to inform a more tailored approach which will generate a scalable, customizable career based on a substantially positive response to the designer's personal brand on social media, specifically Instagram

Not only does an aspiring design influencer have to consider their own skill and style, but also become a brand expert, a social media expert, as well as a business expert in order to thrive and achieve an influencer status that allows them to depart from the typical B2B model that most designers are forced to follow within other career paths available to them including agency, in-house, and freelance work. A design influencer has to think about their personal brand and how it fits into the existing market. They have to be able to identify what value they will be bringing to their audience and whether or not there is a large enough demand for the type of content they are able and willing to produce. While it is important to note that influencing success can occur organically, there are certain factors that enhance the chance of this happening. If the designer isn't bringing something truly unique to the table, then their technical skills have to be enough to allow them to stand out amongst global competition. Instagram's platform is large enough to allow for levels of success that enable this type of B2C relationship to occur, but also large enough to increase competition levels much more. Mediocrity in whatever form is not conducive to influencing in any field. For this reason, the designer has to provide some unique value to gain any amount of traction.

These values are only a surface-level examination of the requirements that fall under the personal brand which is only one piece of the influencing strategy. Skill, expertise, value, style, and positioning are a handful of the requirements a designer has to consider when attempting to

transition into this career path. Additionally, they have to consider the business side of the brand; They have to determine their forms of income; They have to make their personal brand commodifiable. Commodifying a personal brand entails much more than adhering a personal logo or style to a few products. If a designer's brand is UX and they cannot easily do this, they then must sell their expertise. Selling expertise is no easy feat. The designer first has to establish their expertise, and have to create a demand for it. Only then can they commodify it in the form of books, podcasts, workshops, speaking engagements, etc. Establishing a reputation to the degree of creating a demand for one's personal expertise takes a huge amount of time and effort and also likely requires prior professional experience. A logo designer might want to produce apparel or merchandise with their logos but in order to create a demand for their products, they also have to establish themselves as someone others aspire to be. They become a brand, such as Nike, and create a demand for their line much in the same way Nike does, by creating hype around their brand, by surrounding themselves with influential people, proving their technical skill, and convincing consumers that they want to be like the people that wear their brand. Creating a commodifiable personal brand takes skill, strategy, and patience. It takes an extraordinary designer to be able to create a brand based on their persona. Consumers do not buy things to be more like themselves, they buy things to become more like the people they admire, an influencer's job is to become someone that is admired, only then can they commodify to the level needed to support a fully B2C operation. They have to become a desirable brand and they have to have room for expansions. When brands experience success, they don't stagnate, they grow. A design influencer not only has to establish a demand for their initial offerings but they must constantly be improving, evolving, and expanding to maintain audience interest.

Even after a designer has ascertained all of the qualifications necessary for creating a successful personal brand that is unique, commodifiable, expandable, technically superior, and capable of providing some unfulfilled value to a potential audience, they have to consider aspects of social media strategy if they want to maximize their growth potential. A brand may have everything it needs to be successful but all of the initial work is worthless if the wrong people are seeing it. Establishing a target audience is not a new practice to designers but other aspects of social media strategy might be. Social media strategy is more than identifying an audience and hoping the right people see the brand's content and choose to follow. It can include using strategic wording in bios, captions, and websites. It includes cross-platform awareness without ambushing audiences with the same content over and over again. Social strategy includes how and when a user posts; It even includes what a user posts. Examining how audiences respond to all of these factors can be the detriment or driving force behind a design influencer's success. The only thing that matters more than the content being created is how and to whom it is being presented to. Targeting the right audience depends on discoverability, engagement, and the constant monitoring and evolvement of these strategies in order to keep up with such a volatile platform and audiences that have an innumerable amount of other options. Instagram and other social media platforms are now some of the most powerful marketing tools in any industry because audiences became and are increasingly averse to typical marketing tactics. This very mindset that created the influencing industry also threatens it as influencers in every field have become career influencers and therefore are brands themselves. Design influencers must walk a fine line of providing people the content that allows them to draw revenue while also making their audiences members feel like they have a relationship, like they know and can trust them.

Keeping a social media audience intrigued while not overmarketing or spamming them with too much promotional-type content can be a delicate balance that many designers have previously never had to consider. While some aspects of an influencing strategy are very familiar to designers by trade, others are not.

Perhaps one of the most notable, observed overarching patterns is a shift from institutionalized values to more humanistic values. Designers and illustrators on Instagram do not have any degree or association requirements to meet. Success on Instagram is instead determined by the audience and the value they find in the designer's work. Today, influencers are often seen as thought leaders due to the vast influence they have over their online communities. An impressive resume carries little weight on the social media platform or with its audience. Outside of the educational sphere, audiences have been the determining factor in the success or failure of a design. On social media, the audience holds that same jurisdiction over the designer. An impressive education and years of experience often go hand in hand with a great designer as great design takes time and effort. However, with the rise of social media, these are no longer a barrier to becoming an influential designer. A designer's Instagram audience does not care about where their favorite designers earned their degree or where they worked, because they care about the end result and what it provides them. The designers speaking at conferences, writing books, sitting on panels, and selling their brand do not share an educational or even professional background. What they do share is growing popularity on one of the world's largest social networks. The most successful design influencers share a magnetism that draws people to their work and to their products, a quality that likely cannot be taught. However, while this magnetism may be necessary for cultivating a following of hundreds of thousands, a following of that size is

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not necessarily essential for building a lucrative personal brand. In fact, only a fraction of that size is necessary. While social media stardom may not be able to be built or replicated by following a formulaic approach, a career as a design influencer, marketing a personal brand that is based upon a singular unique style, is. Just as with any strategy, there are opportunities for failure. However, with the broad expanse of Instagram, if a designer is able to cultivate a personal brand that caters to a niche audience, and considers the aspects of social media strategy and personal branding mentioned and examined in this study, there is an extremely heightened probability of their success as a design influencer as exhibited by the 90 subjects all either experiencing or in the process of building their design influencing career.

Limitations

The aspects tracked in this study resulted in an innumerable amount of small patterns to be employed as well as two very large patterns to consider. While the elements being tracked were limited to information that was readily available, either directly on or linked to from each individual subjects' profile in order to maintain the focus on Instagram, additional elements and data should be collected such as metrics related to linked websites, posting times, and point of sales. Additionally, subjects were limited in the identification process by the fact that there is no list from which one can see a name of all of the existing or aspiring influencers. Profiles that were selected were examined at random by the researcher. The identification process was also muddied by the fact that the way in which Instagram presents new potential users to follow depends on the content the researcher's account had previously viewed. If a user typically follows muralists, the program will suggest more muralists etc. The algorithmic process by

which content and users are recommended within the app itself caused the selection process to be both random and biased in that the potential subjects presented were not able to be selected from a list and therefore were chosen randomly but also were presented by the app's algorithm which takes any and all activity into consideration. Additionally, the use of a new 'unbiased' account was not utilized due to the fact that there would then be no existing library of influencers to choose from, there would have to be one subject chosen as a starting point and every subject after that starting point would be algorithmically biased based on that starting point.

The bulk of this study's methodological data collection occurred during unprecedented global circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected any and everything including, likely, this study. While social media is perhaps one of the least affected facets of modern life, tolls taken on economies worldwide have undoubtedly affected every industry, including the influencing industry. While the job markets, economy, and general halt to everyday activities are more than enough reason to mention the circumstances under which this study was performed, it should also be mentioned that the psychological effects of a pandemic as such are under-researched and likely underestimated. Not only was the audience likely compromised during this event, so were the creative subjects. While no trends that could be blatantly attributed to the pandemic were observed. It is likely that an event as such had an effect on not only the following count and engagement rates but also perhaps the posting frequency and use of hashtags or gimmicks at the very least. It is impossible to determine the certain effects of the global pandemic on this study. Whether these effects are fleeting or more permanent, conducting this study under a longer period of time with more typical circumstances would be the first

recommendation for areas of improvement followed by the need for a broader subject base and more sales-related data.

It should also be noted that the data obtained does not take into account every social media practice or phenomena, specifically, the use of 30-day challenges or the like thereof that might affect factors such as growth, likes, engagement, and posting frequency. The data obtained was also limited by subjectivity. Criteria tracked such as value provided, archetype, and niche were tracked as they were perceived by the researcher and therefore lacking in objectivity.

Considerations

Another key consideration of this study is the volatility of social media. Social media was a key development in what many refer to as the digital era. With it came to more reliable communication, faster internet speeds, and higher rates of productivity. With the increased pace of nearly every aspect of communication also comes increased volatility of markets and trends, included graphic design trends. Instagram has created a space where normal individuals from any corner of the world can make a name and a brand for themselves. Talented individuals no longer have to wait to be discovered. Though this increase in communication has oversaturated nearly every industry with talent, if a designer is truly remarkable, there are very few barriers preventing them from forging a career around and catered to their personal strengths and preferences. However, with increased potential for faster growth comes an increased potential for sudden collapse. While a design influencing career can result in unparalleled levels of success and greater creative fulfillment, it also comes with a degree of uncertainty. The social media landscape is ever-changing and so are the preferences of the Instagram community. In order to sustain social media success, influencers have to be ahead of trends both technologically and within their industry. These trendsetters have to stand out

on a landscape that allows trends to spread globally in a matter of hours if not seconds, but also prepare to alter their content that is at the mercy of an app whose algorithm could change and greatly alter their visibility at any given second. Though the industry seems to be only in its infancy, social media is an unpredictable space that requires a great deal of flexibility and innovation. Aspiring design influencers have to be prepared to create a brand that can survive the tumultuous landscape in order to create lasting success. In a world where the average user's attention span is less than 8 seconds and success is determined by whether or not you can get that user to stop scrolling long enough to tap the screen twice, the fear of obsoletion is as real as the promise of overnight success. The long hours, effort, and strategic decisions behind a personal brand that is made well before said 'overnight success' are the only ways to ensure the brand that has been created can withstand the imminent changes that are sure to see the demise of the lesser-prepared.

Perhaps one of the biggest unknown impacts of Instagram and other social media networks is their effect on the mental well-being of users and content creators alike. While the size of the platform itself has allowed some to experience levels of success and visibility they likely would not have been able to experience otherwise, it also has resulted in increased levels of competition within the industry and personally. The vast expanse of Instagram's talent pools afford some users a great level of success. However, even for those who have experienced this success, a platform of this extent, that bases success of content and profiles on 'likes' undoubtedly has impacts on the self-esteem of users as they increasingly value their professional and personal worth on online popularity. For this reason, in 2019, Instagram began testing the removal of 'likes' in some countries such as Australia, Brazil, and Canada. This was done only in 7 countries on an experimental basis with the hopes of reducing the psychological impact of the app and the constant comparison metrics that are available to users on the platform. This removal of likes would still allow the user who

posted the content the ability to see the like count, however, those scrolling past would not be met

with the number of likes for content they didn't create. This act would hopefully reduce the level of

pressure users feel to meet a self-imposed level of popularity, however, the effects of this change on

the influencing industry is yet to be seen. While follower count would still be available the question

remains whether or not influencers will be able to experience the same amount of success once or if

the 'like' count is removed from posts permanently. Influencing is an industry based solely on

popularity. While experimentations like this are a huge step forward for mental health awareness,

they may actually signify a step backward for the influencing industry which is in-fact built on

competition and comparisons.

Suggested areas for future research

This research is intended to serve as an initial study and requires further refinement in the areas of

data collection and subject procurement. Areas for future research may include interviews with subjects,

collection of data regarding sales and income, as well as further examination of design influencing

outside of Instagram. While the study examined design influencing as it pertains to all subcategories of

design, further and specified research may be necessary to examine each subcategory specifically and

regarding platforms that are more specific to each. Additionally, as mentioned previously in the

limitations of the study, certain criteria around which data collected was subject to the researcher's own

perceptions of how subjects provided value to their audience, how they fit into archetypes, and which

descriptors were used for niche and style. Future research should include a tool or method of ascertaining

this information in a more objective and/or quantifiable manner, such as a formulaic approach to

determining brand archetypes. In order to reduce bias, the implementation of such tools is essential to the

validity of future research that may also require the assessment of criteria that could be perceived as

subjective.

Definition of Terms

A

1. **Account**

    a. A social media channel or page controlled by a brand, person, or other entity.

2. **Algorithm**

    a. A set of rules and calculations used to prioritize the delivery of content to users.

3. **Alt-text**

    a. a short, descriptive phrase added to images to assist with search engine results and to provide context for screen readers.

4. **Audience**

    a. a strategically defined group of individuals for whom the brand is designed.

B

5. **B2B (Business to Business)**

    a. Tactics and strategies in which a brand promotes its products and services to another brand.

6. **B2C (Business to Consumer)**

    a. Tactics and strategies in which a brand promotes its products and services to individual people.

7. **Back Clicks**

    a. an action taken by a user that results in the replay of another user's story.

8. **Bio**

    a. a short description of an account that appears on the account page as part of the profile.

9. **Blogging**

    a. a discussion or informational content published on a platform consisting of personal experiences and knowledge.

10. **Body of Work**

    a. The entirety of the creative output produced by a particular individual or brand.

11. **Brand Archetype**

    a. The personification of a brand into distinct stereotyped personalities based on the brand's goals and desired perception.

12. **Brand Awareness**

    a. the extent to which consumers are familiar with the distinctive qualities or image of a particular brand.

13. **Brand Descriptors**

    a. A shortlist of adjectives used to identify a brand's distinguishing traits.

14. **Brand Drivers**

    a. Specific motivating factors that determine a brand's success metrics.

15. **Brand Essence**

    a. The core characteristics and intangible attributes that define a brand.

16. Brand Guides or Brand Standards

    a. A document made to govern the elements of the brand strategy such as story,

       vision, mission, tone, voice, and aesthetics.

17. Brand Mission

    a. A short statement that declares the brand's purpose and how it intends to serve the

       audience.

18. Brand Personality

    a. A set of human characteristics that are attributed to a brand name.

19. Brand Strategy

    a. A long-term plan for the development of a successful brand in order to achieve

       specific goals.

20. Brand Story

    a. A cohesive narrative that encompasses the facts and feelings that are created by

       the brand and supported by strategic elements.

21. Brand Values

    a. A set of beliefs that guides a brand's story, actions, and behaviors.

22. Brand Vision

    a. A brand's long-term plan for future developments and idealistic impact.

23. Brand Launch

    a. A strategic plan to announce the development of a new brand or the rebranding of

       an existing brand.

24. Branding

a. The act of applying a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature in order to distinguish one company from another.

25. Branding Principles

a. Fundamental elements that guide a brand strategy.

26. Business Accounts

a. A version of an Instagram account that is tailored to the needs of companies and brands as opposed to the general public.

27. Buying Power or Purchasing power

a. The amount of money that a person or group has available to spend.

C

28. Carousel

a. An Instagram feature that allows users to upload up to 10 photos and/or videos as one swipeable post.

29. Chat Room

a. One of the earlier forms of social media, an area on the Internet or other computer network where users can communicate.

30. Content

a. Any piece of digital media a social media user chooses to share on the platform.

31. Content Calendars

a. A resource that allows social media users to plan and schedule posts.

32. Content Creator

a. An individual who produces entertaining or educational material that caters to the

interests and challenges of a target audience.

33. Comments

a. Written interactions from users on a given post.

34. Corporate Brand Identity Matrix

a. A tool that uses a structured set of questions that examine aspects of

identity-related to the organization's mission, culture, competencies, values, and

other defining characteristics.

35. Corporate Branding Principles

a. Key guidelines based on research that inform the brand strategy.

36. **Creative Influencer**

a. An individual of any creative field who has established a career in influencing.

37. Creator accounts

a. A version of an Instagram account that is tailored to the needs of content creators

as opposed to the general public.

38. Culture

a. A brand's evolving set of beliefs, values, and attitudes that create a collective

atmosphere.

D

39. **Design Influencer**

    a. An individual specializing in any sector of design who has established a career in influencing.

40. **Design Influencing**

    a. The act of creating a lucrative design career founded on a substantial social media following.

41. **Direct Messages**

    a. In-app communication between users as direct or group communication, only visible by the accounts involved.

42. **Discoverability**

    a. An account's ability to be seen by users that do not already follow it.

43. **Display Name**

    a. A name chosen to serve as an account's primary source of identification, typically shown first on the Instagram profile page.

E

44. **Economic Drivers**

    a. The tangible value the brand bring's the consumer, how it saves them time, money, or some other factor.

45. Engagement

    a. The degree of social involvement or interactions on a given piece of content.

46. Emotional Drivers

    a. How a brand makes its audience feel and what emotionally compels consumers into loyalty.

47. Exits

    a. Action taken on an Instagram story that allows a user to exit it without watching it in entirety.

F

48. Feed

    a. A selection of posts shown to a user based on the given social media algorithm.

49. Followers

    a. The sum of the total amount of accounts that have chosen to follow a particular Instagram user.

50. Follows

    a. The number of accounts that choose to follow a particular Instagram user within a given timeframe.

51. Forward Clicks

    a. Action taken on an Instagram story that allows the user to view the next story in the sequence.

52. Friends

    a. The term given to two social media accounts that follow each other, especially on Facebook.

53. Functional Drivers

    a. A basic need or needs a brand satisfies for its consumers.

G

54. General Messages

    a. messages a user doesn't want to receive notifications for, only available for business or creator profiles.

55. Generation Z

    a. The demographic cohort succeeding Millennials and preceding Generation Alpha, generally determined by birth years mid-to-late 1990s - early 2010s.

56. Get Directions

    a. Actions taken on a location tag that allows users to see exactly where certain content was posted.

57. Gif

    a. An extremely short, usually looped video that requires no action taken by the viewer.

58. Grid

    a. A comprehensive, photographic view of a user's projected aesthetic in chronological order.

H

    59. Handle

        a. An Instagram user's account name preceded by the '@' symbol, used for notifying that user and hyperlinking to their profile.

    60. Hashtags

        a. A word or phrase preceded by a hash sign (#), used on social media, especially Twitter and Instagram, to identify messages on a specific topic.

I

    61. Imposter Syndrome

        a. A collection of feelings of inadequacy that persist despite evident success.

    62. Impressions

        a. The total number of times users viewed a particular piece of content.

    63. Influencer

        a. An individual person or account with a substantial amount of followers that results in the ability to garner full or partial income from their social media presence.

    64. Insights

    a. A native analytics tool available with a creative or business Instagram profile that provides data on follower demographics, actions, and content.

65. Integrated Pricing

    a. An in-app integration that allows business and creative accounts to price items in a post and link to purchasing options.

66. Interaction

    a. The number of actions taken on a specific post or account.

K

67. Keywords

    a. keywords and phrases in digital content that makes it more likely for other people or accounts to find your site via search engines, including in-app searches.

68. KPI- Key Performance Indicator

    a. A highly important metric by which to measure brand success.

L

69. Likes

    a. An action that can be taken on any Instagram post that allows followers to signify their approval of certain content, often used as a metric to determine content popularity.

70. Link Clicks

    a. The number of times a specific link within a piece of content or on a profile was interacted with.

71. Logo

    a. A symbol or combination of designed elements adopted by an organization to identify its products, services, and other entities.

M

72. Measurement

    a. An assessment of the brand's position as it stands relevant to its competition.

73. Mobile-first

    a. An interface strategy and that assumes smartphones, tablets, and other mobile devices are a user's preferred method of delivery for digital content.

74. Mockup

    a. A realistic but fictional model of how a design would appear in application.

N

75. Niche

    a. A specialized subset of a larger set that targets a select segment of the general population, especially within a social network.

O

76. Organic Reach

    a. The number of people who see an account or piece of content without paid distribution.

77. Organic growth

    a. The attraction of followers in the most natural possible way. Mostly it relies on your niche, story, great content and hashtags.

P

78. Personal Branding

    a. The practice of marketing people and their careers as brands.

79. Personal Style

    a. a consistent way of presenting and creating content usually by a combination of factors including aesthetics, tonality, or method of delivery.

80. Positioning

    a. The place that a brand occupies in the minds of the customers and how it is distinguished from competitors.

81. Post

a. A photo or video that an Instagram user publishes to their account, excluding temporary content such as stories.

82. Primary Messages

a. Messages that the user wants to be notified about.

83. Profiles

a. An account's main page that displays pertinent information, such as a bio, account, name, photo, links, and a chronological organization of their content.

84. Profile Visits

a. The number of accounts that have visited the user's profile page within a given timeframe.

85. Promotions

a. Regular, non-advertisement posts that a user would want to convert to a sponsored post, with elevated reach.

86. Prototypes

a. A preliminary model of a design, typically and interface, used to show working functionality

87. Public

a. An account setting that allows users to follow the account without requesting permission.

R

88. Reach

    a.   The total number of unique accounts that have seen a post or story.

89. Requests

    a.   Messages from accounts the user doesn't follow.

90. ROI (return on investment)

    a.   The sum of all social media actions that create value.

S

91. Saves

    a.   The number of times a certain piece of content was saved by users.

92. Searchability

    a.   The degree to which an account or content is discoverable when searching certain

       terms.

93. Self-expressive Drivers

    a.   How a brand makes their audience feel; how it contributes to their personal

       identities.

94. Seo (Search Engine Optimization)

    a.   The practice of increasing the quantity and quality of traffic to a certain website,

       profile, or piece of content through organic search engine results.

95. Shadowbanned

a. The act of blocking or partially blocking a user or their content from an online community such that it will not be readily apparent to the user that they have been banned.

96. Shares

a. The number of times a certain piece of content was shared by users to other users.

97. S.M.A.R.T. rule

a. Criteria for setting goals and objectives, namely that these goals are: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound.

98. Social Listening Tools

a. The process of monitoring digital conversations to understand what customers are saying about a brand or industry.

99. Social Media

a. Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

100. Stories

a. A piece of content that an Instagram user can post that is only viewable for a limited amount of time. This content appears above a user's feed or can be viewed when clicking an account's profile image.

101. Social Proofing

a. The act of making something acceptable or desirable through societal or peer influence.

102. Swipe-up Links

    a.   A link within an Instagram story that allows the user to direct their audience to external content.

103.   **SWOT analysis**

    a.   A strategic planning technique used to help a person or organization identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to business competition and/or project planning.

T

104.   **Tagline**

    a.   A short, memorable phrase that is used throughout marketing to concisely embody the brand's primary message

105.   **Tags**

    a.   The act of mentioning another user by their handle, notifying the recipient and hyperlinking to the tagged profile.

106.   **Talent Influencer**

    a.   An individual who has established a career in influencing based on a particular aptitude within their designated career field.

107.   **Thought Leader**

    a.   An individual whose views on a subject are taken to be authoritative and influential.

108.   **Time-lapse**

a. A type of video that records changes that take place slowly over time. When the frames are shown at normal speed, or in quick succession, the action seems much faster.

109. **Tone or Tone of Voice**

    a. How a brand communicates with its audience and thus influences how people perceive the messaging.

110. **Traction**

    a. The rate at which social media following and interactions are growing.

U

111. **Username**

    a. A set of characters, symbols, and/or numbers used to distinguish one account from another.

112. **Users**

    a. An individual who chooses to have a social media account.

V

113. **Value Proposition**

    a. A promise of value to be delivered, communicated and acknowledged between a brand and its consumers.

114. **Vanity metrics**

    a. Metrics that generate the appearance of success to others but do not accurately portray performance levels in a way that informs future strategies.

115. **Voice**

    a. Uniformity in the selection of words, the attitude, and values of a brand while addressing the target audience or others.

W

116. **Website clicks**

    a. The number of times the link in an Instagram user's profile was clicked during a certain period of time.

117. **Wireframes**

    a. A skeletal model of a design used to portray functionality without form.

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Appendix

List of Sample Subjects

Capitalization and punctuation are shown exactly as displayed on the subject's Instagram profile.

Micro Sample	Name	Display Name	Handle	Followers (K)		Growth
Illustration				Start 3/22/2020	End 6/22/2020	Total Growth (3 mos)
1	Amy Moss	Amy Moss	amymozart	2065	3315	1520
2	Agathe Marty	Agathe M. Illustration	agathem.illustration	5263	28k	22,737
3	Katja Perez	Katja Perez	katja.perez	5435	26.1k	20,665
4	Rachel Parker	Rachel Parker	rachelparkerdesigns	6150	9439	3289
5	Mal Fisher	MALMADE	mal_made	6274	25.5	19,226
6	Sheila Chen	Sheila Chen	sheilachenart	6520	7788	1740
7	Geraldine Sy	Geraldine Sy	gerri.sy	6792	7153	361
8	Lisa Fagegaltier	Asyle	asyleart	7126	17.8K	10,674
9	Chloe Smart	Chloe Smart	schoesmartprint	7764	47.4	39,036
10	David Van Der Veen	David van der Veen	davidvanderveen	8521	8485	-36

11	Annie Konst	Annie Konst	knstartstudio	9734	33.6	23,866
Lettering						
13	Nancy Kouta	NancyKouta	nancykouta.me	5023	4903	-54
12	Nathan Holthus	Nathan Holthus	nathanholthus	2312	2395	83
14	Frances Macleod	Frances MacLeod	francesblank	5447	5431	-16
15	Jane Wongirad	Jane Wongirad	cottonwood312	5739	6788	1049
16	Johnathan Ball	Johnathan Ball	balloftheabove	8959	9090	131
17	Jeff Rogers	JEFF ROGERS	frogers	10.1k	10.4k	3k
18	Jed Chisolm	Jed Chisolm	jedchisolm	10.7	11.9	1100
Design						
19	Cole Friedman	Cole Friedman	colefdesign	2378	3897	1529
20	Eric Lee	Eric Lee	ericwleedesign	4143	4514	371
21	Michael Penda	Michael Penda	peanutfreependa	5671	7436	1765
22	Nathan Bolger	Nathan Bolger	nb_create	5719	6561	842
23	Andrew Korepan	Andrew Korepan	andrew_korepan	5971	7336	1365

24	Marko Vlasic	Logo Designer-Marko Vlasic	marko_vlasic	6208	6387	179
25	Drew Lakin	DREW LAKIN	drwlkn	6913	7352	439
26	Jordan Mahaffey	Jordan Mahaffey	mahaffeydesignco	7518	7909	391
27	Alana Louise Lyons	Alana Louise Lyons	alanalouise	8121	8922	801
28	Cale Pots	Cale Potts	calepotts	8242	7946	-296
29	Jordan Jameson Kabalka	Jordan Jameson Kabalka	jordanjameson	10.3	10.4k	100
Animation						
30	Kyle Strope	Kyle Strope	strooope	5183	5436	253

Macro Sample	Name	Display Name	Handle	Followers (K)		Growth
Illustration				Start 3/22/2020	End 6/22/2020	Total Growth (3 mos)
1	Lisa Glanz	Lisa Glanz - Illustrator	glanzgraphics	12.9	14.2k	4600
2	Jimmy Bryant	Retail Ready	atomicchilddesign	22.4	25.9k	3500

		Designs				
3	Justin Mezzell	Justin Mezzell	justinmezzell	22.2	22k	-200
4	Natasha Coverdale	Natasha Coverdale	studiocoverdale	24.3	35.3k	11k
Lettering						
5	Eren Gurbuz	Eren Gurbuz	shmartstudio	12.3	13k	
6	Phaedra Charles	Phaedra Charles	phaedra.xyz	13.1	12.8k	-400
7	Monique Aimee	Monique Aimee	moniqueaimee	13.3	16.1k	2.8k
8	Alec Tear	Alec Tear	alec_tear	13.7	17.5k	3800
9	Ann Chen	Ann Chen	annlettering	15.6	18.6k	3k
10	Ilana Griffo	Ilana Griffo	ilanagriffo	16.3	17.1	800
11	Kelli Laderer	KELLi LADERER Artist+Designer	goodvibestype	17.4	21.1k	3.7k
12	Kenny Coil	Kenny Coil	kennycoil	18.2	19.4	1200
13	Caren Kreger	Caren Kreger	everday.hooray	21.8	23.3	1500
14	Meg Lewis	Meg Lewis	yourbuddymeg	25	30.3k	5300
15	Joanna Munoz	Joanna Munoz	winkandwonder	25	27.6k	2600
Design						
16	Antonio	Antonio	antonio_calvino	11.7	12.5k	800

		Calvino	Calvino				
	17	Zach Roszczewski	Zach Roszczewski	createdbyzach	11.9	11.9k	0
	18	Adam Anderson	Adam Anderson	doublecreative	12.5	12.7k	200
	19	Jason k. Yun	Jason K Yun	jky.desin	13.5	14.7k	1200
	20	Lauren Dickens	Lauren Dickens	el_dick	14	14.5k	500
	21	Daniel Tan	Daniel Tan	danieldesignwork	15.5	18.4k	2.9k
22		Nick Stewart	Nick Stewart	vanguarddesignco	16.3	18k	1700
23		Israel Ramirez	israel ramirez	isra.design	17.6	17.7k	100
24		Daniel Sheridan	Daniel Sheridan	d.sheridan	18.5	20.5k	2k
25		Kostadin Kostadinov	Kostadin Kostadinov	kostadin_ov	18.9	19.7k	800
26		Brandon Nickerson	Brandon Nickerson	bmnicks	19.2	25.1k	5900
27		Luke Harrison	Luke Harrison	begoodstudio	19.5	21.4k	1.9k
28		Patricia Reiners	Patricia I UX & UI Designer	ux.patricia	19.9	26.2k	6300
29		Johnathan Schubert	Johnathan Schubert	theschubertstudio	23.8	24.4k	600
Animation							

30	Hannah Jacobs	Hannah Jacobs	hannahjacobs_animates	17	18.3k	1300

Mega Sample	Name	Display Name	Handle	Followers (K)		Growth
Illustration				Start 3/22/2020	End 6/22/2020	Total Growth (3 mos)
1	Alexis Eke	ALEXIS EKE	alexis.eke	31.5	40.9k	9400
2	Kathrin Honesta	Kathrin Honesta	kathrinhonestaa	32.1	35k	3k
3	Jess Phoenix	Jess Phoenix	jessraephoenix	38	46.5k	5.5k
4	Alissa Levy	Alissa Levy	levys friends	46.2	80.8k	34.6k
5	Luke McGary	Luke McGary	lukeymcgarry	47.6	52.7k	5.1k
6	Zulfa	Zulfa Ishak	thecosmicfeminist	46	98.2k	52.2
7	Nancy Chalmers	Nancy Chalmers	nancychalmers_	51.6	52k	400
8	Victoria Johnson	Victoria Johnson	Art, Design	victoriajohnsondesign	52.5	53.8k	1300
9	Dan Tavis	Dan Tavis	dantavis	66	67.1k	1100
10	Andy Dixon	Andy Dixon	andy.dxn	66.5	58.5k	-8k
11	Michael Fuguso	Michael Fugoso (	fugstrator	68.9	75.6k	6.8k

			FUGS)			
12	Beya Rebai	Beya Rebaï	beya.illustration	96.8	101k	4.2k
13	Mark Conlan	Mark Conlan	markconlan	185	201k	16k
14	Steven Harrington	Steven Harrington	s_harrington	210	220k	10k
15	Teagan White	Teagan White	teaganwh	235	245k	10k
16	Lisa Congdon	Lisa Congdon	lisacongdon	358	389k	31k
17	Gal Shir	Gal Shir	thegalshir	725	775k	40k
Lettering						
18	Anthony Hos	Anthony Hos	anthonyjhos	30.7	30.3k	-400
19	Timothy Goodman	Timothy Goodman	timothygoodman	170	176k	6k
20	Jessica Hische	Jessica Hische	jessicahische	173	179k	6k
21	Lauren Hom	Lauren Hom - Lettering Artist	homsweethom	203	214k	11k
22	Adam J Kurtz	ADAMJK	adamjk	312	317k	5k
23	Ian Barnard	Ian Barnard	ianbarnard	410	404k	-6k
Design						
24	Allan peters	Allan Peters	allanpeters	42.9	44.7k	
25	benny gold	Benny Gold	bennygold	92.6	93k	400
26	Steve wolf	Steve wolf	stevewikfdesigns	107	108k	1900

27	James Martin	James Martin	made.by.james	131	149k	18k
28	Aaron Draplin	Aaron James Draplin	draplin	210	217k	7k
29	Jessica Walsh	Jessica Walsh	jessicawalsh	500	513k	13k
Animation						
30	James Johnson	James Johnson	jamesjohnsta	62	66.5k	4.5k

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