

Gabriel Drozdov

Design + Community

Research Project

Final Report

RISD Fall 2022 Semester
UX Research & Strategy Methods
Prof. Aaron Simmons

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Project Brief

We have researched **online communities** to help designers and artists have **meaningful discussions about creative work** through a social media platform that employs a **unique user experience**.

Overview

01 Research

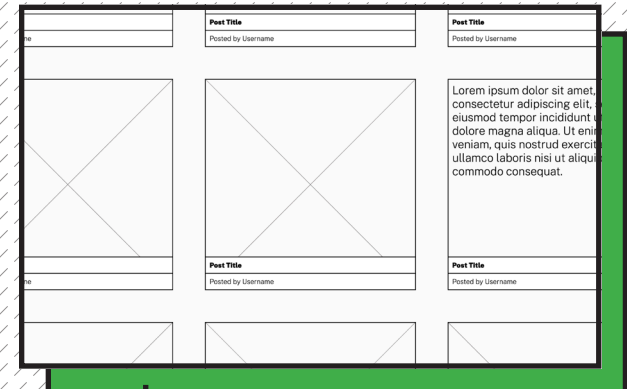
- 5-week phase
- 7 user interviews
- 7 expert interviews
- Survey of 12 users

02 Ideation

- 3-week phase
- Journey map
- Persona development
- In-person workshop with 3 users

03 Prototype/Testing

- 4-week phase
- Prototype development
- Testing with 6 users
- Development of new prototypes

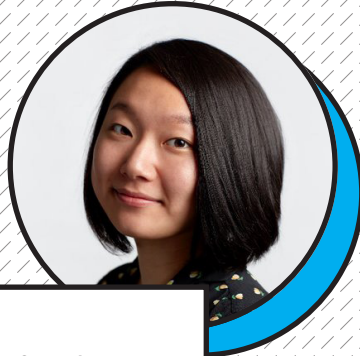


Executive Summary

- Current social media platforms **do not meet the wants and needs** of artists and designers.
- Artists and designers are gradually moving into more **niche communities**.
- User experience can **determine the kinds of communities and content** that form on a site.
- Users are open to trying a social media platform with a **unique user experience**.
- There is a **wide range of possible user interactions** that can be incorporated into a social media product.

01

Research



Lynne Yun
Type Designer & Educator
Space Type Co.



John Caserta
Dean Arch + Design
RISD



Talia Cotton
Design & Coder
Pentagram



Mindy Seu
Designer & Educator



Laurel Schwulst
Designer & Educator



Sam Drozdov
VP, Metaverse Products
Super League Gaming



Ramon Tejada
Design Professor
RISD

Experts Interviewed

- Designers, coders, and educators representing a wide range of backgrounds and practices.
- All invested in helping form the next generation of designers.

01

Research

Expert Insights

Lynne Yun talked about the difficulties of balancing work and online engagement.

Ramon Tejada had a strong negative reaction to the mention of the word “metaverse.” Ramon also discussed how the original purposes of social media sites have been distorted or forgotten over time.

Laurel Schwulst brought up numerous newer technologies like Mastodon that met the needs of niche interest groups.

Sam Drozdov described Roblox as thriving community for young creatives to socialize in.

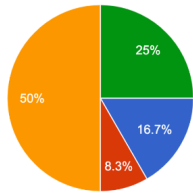
Talia Cotton warned against atypical user experiences that might alienate new users.

01

Research

User Insights

Do you agree with the following statement: "Browsing social media is fun."



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

From our survey, Are.na and TikTok were voted most fun over other older social media platforms.

"I don't use Reddit or Twitter because they're too fast for me."
— Kelly

Soo Min described her ideal website as a community of creatives that share her niche interests.

Husna described the community on Instagram as "performative" and not genuine.

"Sometimes when a community gets too big, it loses its sense of community... You don't find community in Reddit as a whole, but in certain Subreddits you do."
— Jonathan

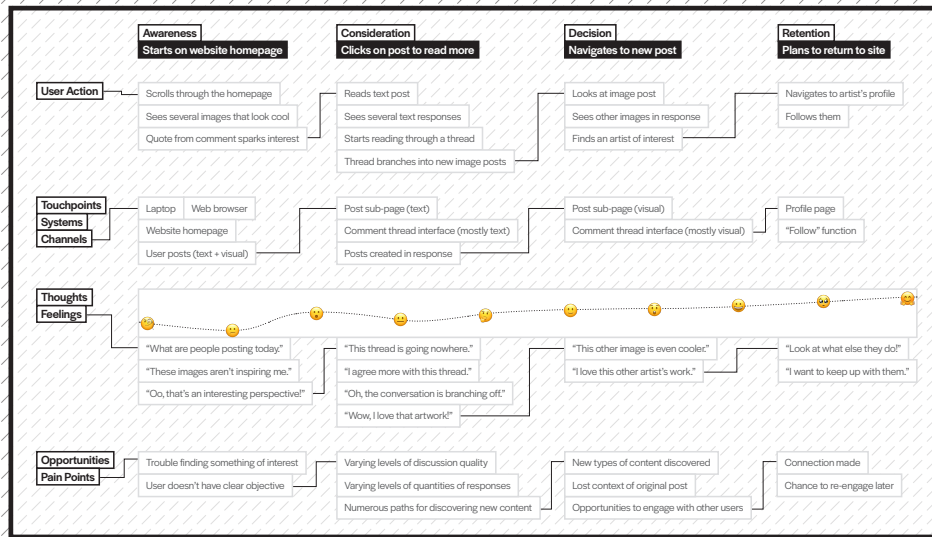
From our survey:
92% associated negative emotions with social media use
0% associated happiness with social media use

Research Takeaways

- Social media platforms **do not encourage discussion.**
- Competing **personal and professional interests** affect users' willingness to participate in online communities.
- **Smaller communities** are associated with higher levels of engagement and discussion.
- Creative output often **differs from standard post requirements** for format and content.
- Our typical **standardized user experiences** are exacerbating all of these issues.

02

Ideation



Journey Map & Persona

- We created a framework for the user experience of the final product.
- To complement this, we detailed the persona of a user in our target audience.



Rebecca

she/her/hers

Age 30 Illustrator

Based in Chicago, IL

Hey! This is Rebecca.

She's an illustrator working in Chicago, where she was born and raised. She creates drawings and graphics for brands and publications as a freelancer. On the side, she draws for fun and posts some of her work on Instagram. She also runs a web comic through Reddit.

Here's what you can't forget about her:

- Chicago plays a huge part in her identity and work.
- She thinks social media should be a place to relax.
- Like her peers, she stays skeptical of big corporations.
- She's built up her social media presence over ten years.
- Despite this, she's not the most tech-savvy.

Here's what holds her back:

- Often turns off comments on her posts to avoid hate.
- Puts on a persona when she posts online.
- Increasingly sees art as work, not pleasure.
- Gets jealous of other artists' work.
- Has trouble socializing and making friends.

Here's what inspires and motivates her:

- Community and kindness are her #1 priorities.
- Needs a safe space in order to feel genuine.
- Wants to find ways to reach people outside of Chicago.
- Hopes people relate to her work emotionally.
- Participates in online communities that bring her joy.

02

Ideation



Workshop

- We refined our concepts through group workshops.
- From these, we discovered enthusiasm for a final product that deliberately differed from existing social media platforms.

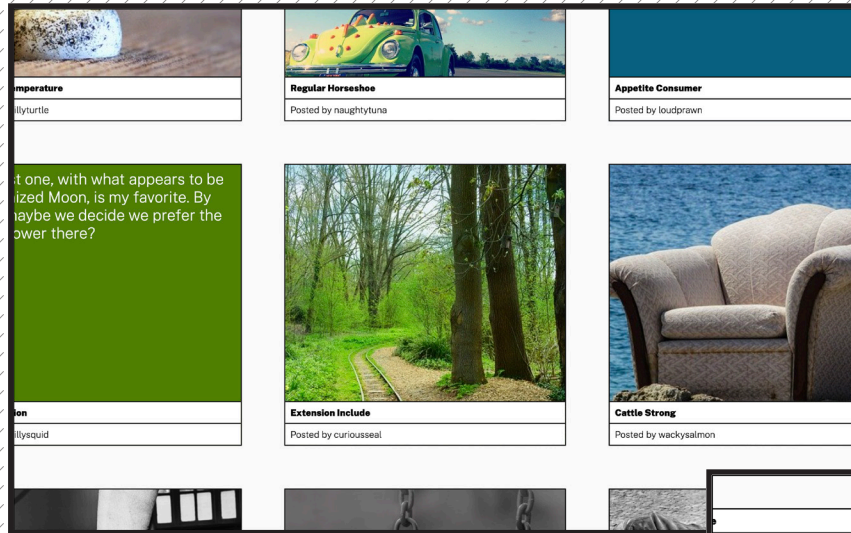


Ideation Takeaways

- Our journey map exposed the need to design an **interaction loop** to keep users engaged.
- Meanwhile, our proto persona highlighted a need to make the **user experience clear, simple, and fun.**
- Lastly, our workshop emphasized the need to prioritize creating a **meaningful experience over a purely addictive one.**

03

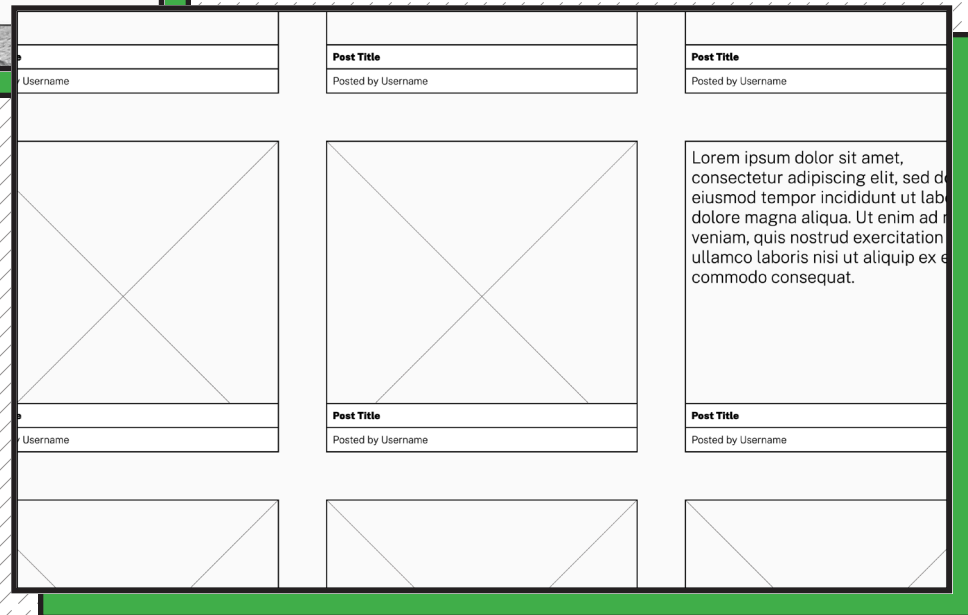
Prototype/Testing



<https://gabrielrozdov.github.io/risd22-source/prototype/>
<https://gabrielrozdov.github.io/risd22-source/prototype/index-alt.html>

Working Prototypes

- We went straight into developing 2 versions of a working prototype.
- One version featured content placeholders, while the other featured sample content.



03

Prototype/Testing

User Insights

Over 2/3s of users compared the site to Instagram because of the square format of posts.

Visual/graphic cues were frequently meant with overwhelming positivity.

Users have an expectation for infinitely-populated websites.

Around 50% of users wanted a way to trace their navigation.

Users wanted more transparency about why they were seeing certain posts.

If functionality (e.g. comments, replies) is not explicitly denoted, users assume it doesn't exist.

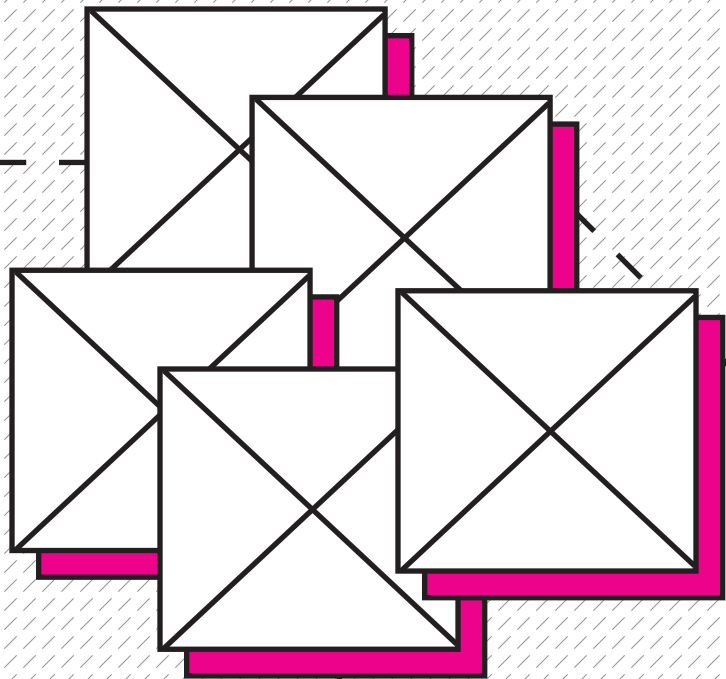
All users initially tried to scroll on the website, but quickly grew to understand and enjoy the atypical navigation.

Because of the stark departure in user experience, users don't initially perceive the prototype as a social media site.

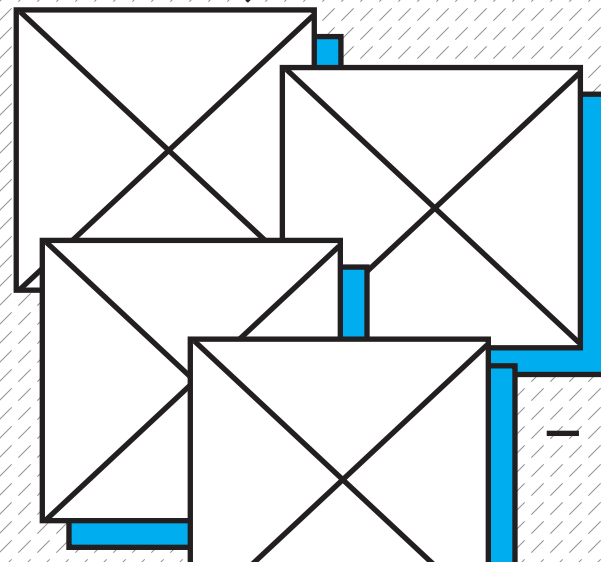
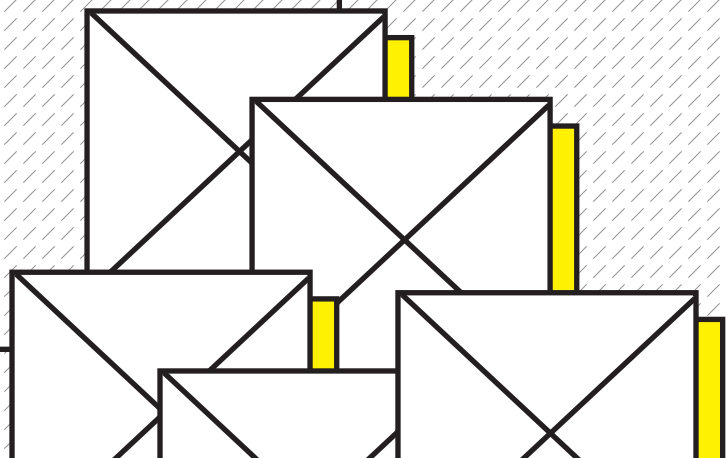
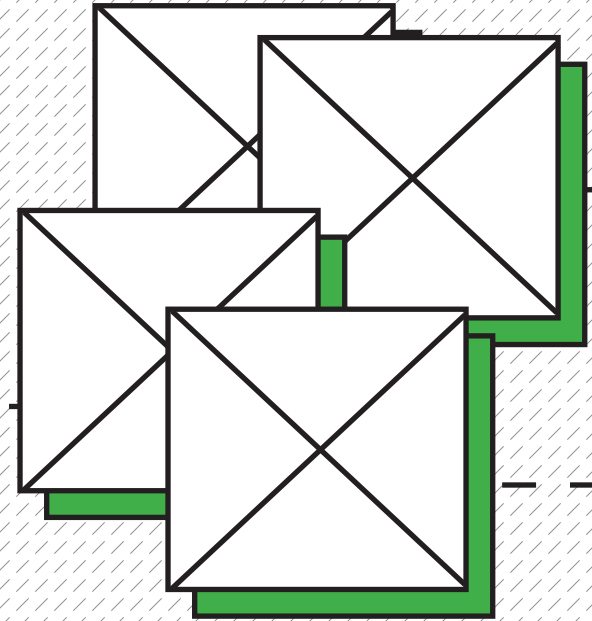
03

Prototype/Testing

Revised Concept



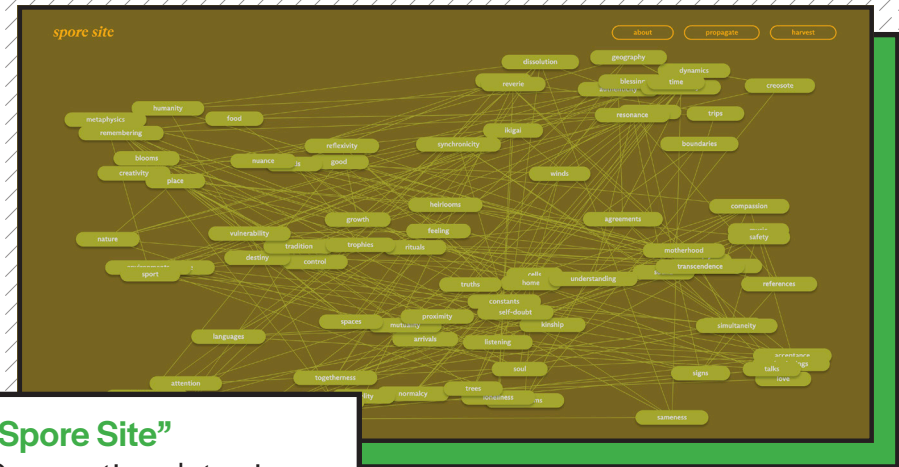
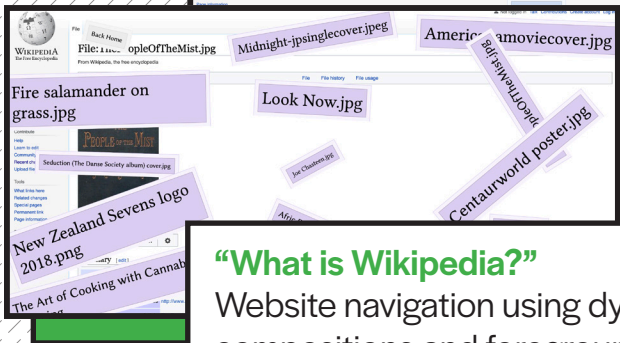
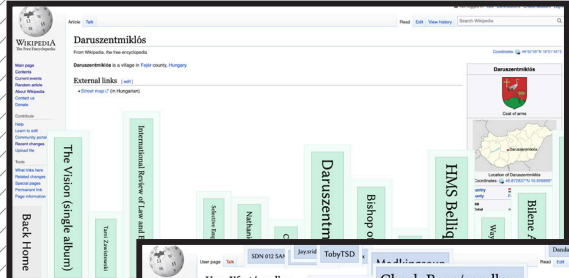
Start Here



03

Prototype/Testing

Related Experiments



“Spore Site”
Connecting data via a network of links.

“What is Wikipedia?”
Website navigation using dynamic compositions and foreground/background compositions



“Archive Arcade”
User interactions using facial expressions.

<https://gabrieldrozdov.github.io/what-is-wikipedia/>
<https://spore-site.com/>
<https://gabrieldrozdov.github.io/archive-arcade/>

Prototype Takeaways

- While challenging, new modes of user interaction **spark joy and excitement** in users.
- **Simple, consistent user interactions** help make the experience more accessible for a wider audience.
- We must **strike a balance** between simplifying the experience and showing all of the expected components of a social media interface.

Next Steps

- We will continue developing/testing the **homepage concept** as a working prototype.
- We are looking into testing **other forms of user interaction** in conjunction with the homepage.
- The **pages for individual posts** is still an open concept to be explored in later prototypes.

Thank you!

For more information:

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