

Building an Online Community for Designers and Artists

Qualitative + Quantitative Study

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1 Project Overview

- a Origins
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1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

a Origins

This study originated as an audit of the user experience for the commenting system on YouTube.

Initial interviews exposed frustrations with commenting systems across multiple social media platforms.

To respond to these findings, we broadened the study's focus into an **audit of various online communities aimed at designers and artists.**

1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

b Topic

We talked to designers, artists, and educators about their experiences in online communities.

Our research was focused on **online discussion** and **frameworks for posting and viewing content**.

This report is an overview of our findings.

1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

c Scope

This study took place over 5 weeks.

- Qualitative analysis consisted **12 interviews: 6 users and 6 experts.**
- Quantitative analysis consisted of a **survey of 12 users.**
- Additional resources included **field research** and **trend reports.**

We focused on the following categories of online communities:

- 1 General-use social media platforms (e.g. Facebook, Reddit)
- 2 Specialized social media platforms (e.g. Instagram, Dribbble)
- 3 Social media/design tool hybrid platforms (e.g. Pinterest, Are.na)
- 4 News sites, blogs, and other online publications (e.g. It's Nice That, Brand New)

1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

d User & Expert Groups

User Group (6 members)

- Early-career creative professionals
- Age: 25–31
- Gender: 1NB/F, 2F, 3M
- Location: Working or studying in the U.S., based nationally or internationally

Expert Group (6 members)

John Caserta, Dean of Design+Architecture at RISD

Talia Cotton, Creative Technologist at Pentagram

Sam Drozdov, VP Metaverse Products at Super League Gaming

Laurel Schwulst, Creative Director and UX Consultant

Ramon Tejada, Graphic Design Professor at RISD

Lynne Yun, Type Designer and Educator

2 Executive Summary

2 Executive Summary

- a **Competing professional and personal interests greatly limit online engagement.**
Creatives are consistently worried about the audience, visibility, and context of their online activity.
- b **Social media platforms do not meet user expectations for discussion.**
Comments and discussion are always secondary experiences despite high user interest.
- c **Smaller communities are associated with higher levels of positive engagement.**
Users are more likely to both contribute in and follow communities with either specialized interests or fewer members.
- d **Creative output does not align with the permitted formats for social media posts.**
Content by designers and artists varies greatly, and often does not fit within a single medium or social framework.
- e **“Metaverse” platforms offer potential solutions to the aforementioned issues.**
Simulated/virtual spaces naturally solve issues of visibility, discussion, community, and format/medium.

3 Findings

- a Professional Pressures on Online Engagement
- b Underdeveloped Commenting Systems
- c Natural Community Size
- d Multidisciplinary Content
- e Pervasive Negativity
- f New Platforms

3 Findings

a Professional Pressures on Online Engagement

We heard that across all social media platforms, creatives are anxious about how their online activities affect their career prospects.

On the other hand, social media activity usually does not affect users' careers.

From our survey:
75% said professional concerns affected their decision to post or not post something
33% had social media affect their career positively
0% had social media affect their career negatively

“I would love to use Instagram as a networking tool, but it is difficult and very opaque.”
— Joseph

“I don't think I would post my work on Twitter anymore... Someone who was never in the intended audience can somehow stumble upon it.”
— Jonathan

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

3 Findings

b Underdeveloped Commenting Systems

We heard that users highly valued comments and discussion.

Despite this, social media leads users to engage with content more than comments.

“I love comments... Most of the time, when I’m watching videos, I’m reading comments.”

— Husna

“Someone among my friends would post a status [on Facebook], and then it became a sort of chat room in the comments.”

— Alec

“What I like about Instagram is like in the comment section, you can have a dialogue...”

— Kelly

Jonathan expressed that the only time he’s felt part of an online community was in a Discord channel.

Our survey shows that users rate, share, and save posts more often than comments, and also sort comments more often than posts.

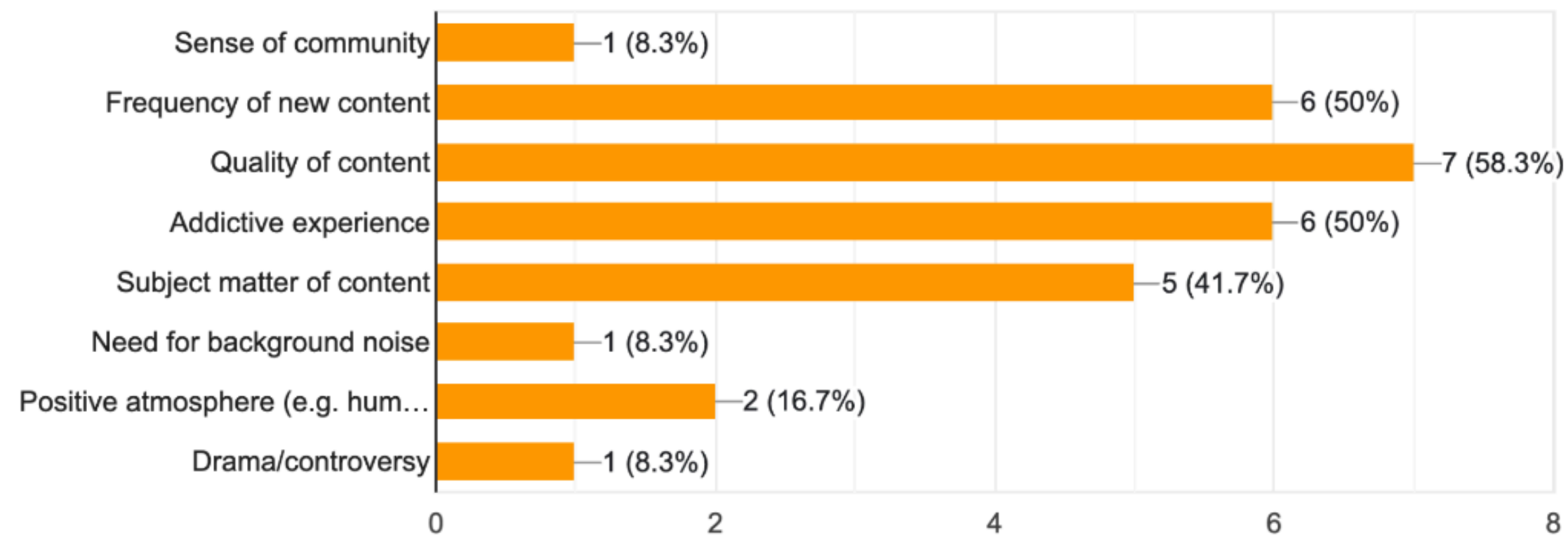
In our interviews, only one user could remember a comment from the past week, but every user remembered a post from the same time period.

3 Findings

b Underdeveloped Commenting Systems

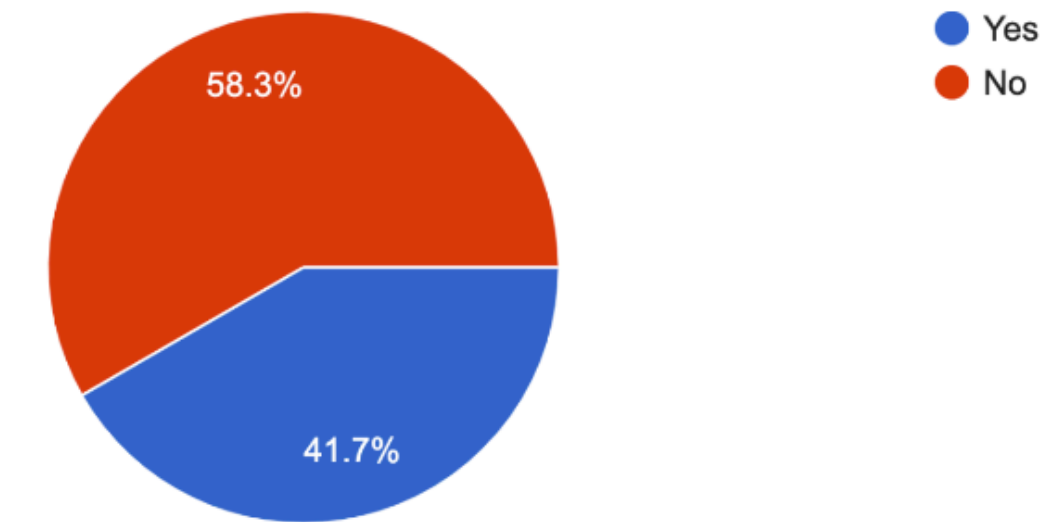
What factors lead you to browse a website more frequently?

12 responses



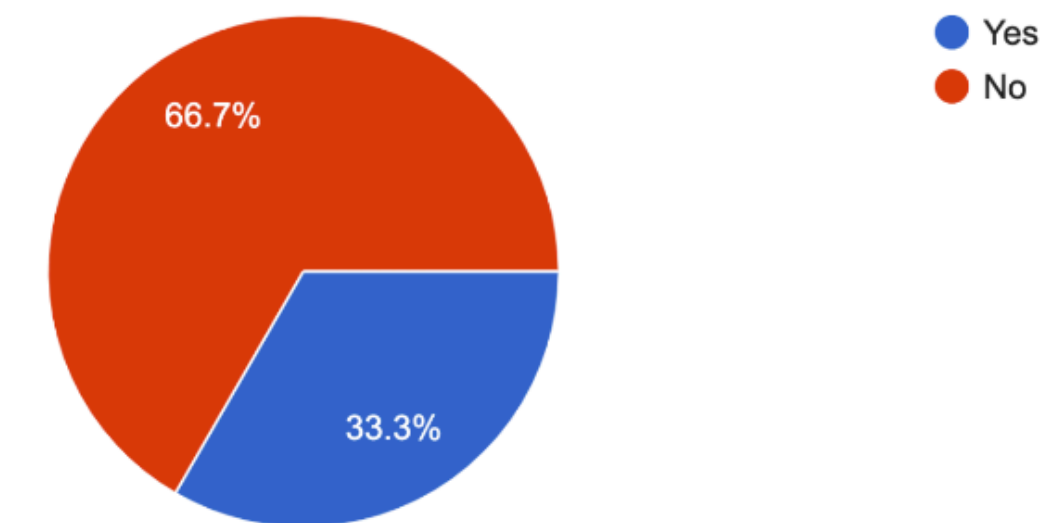
Have you ever had a discussion on a social media site that lasted more than one day?

12 responses



Have you ever returned to someone's old social media post to see if anyone left new comments?

12 responses



3 Findings

c Natural Community Size

We heard that smaller, specialized communities feel more welcoming.

On the other hand, larger communities are harder to get into.

Instagram is an example of a large platform that lacks community.

From our survey:

92% browse Instagram regularly

58% browse it most often

0% felt a part of its community

“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

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

“I don’t use Reddit or Twitter because they’re too fast for me.”
— Kelly

Alec prefers browsing Letterboxd because of its film-centric focus and frequent inside jokes.

3 Findings

d Multidisciplinary Content

We heard that multidisciplinary content is becoming more common and attracting the most attention online.

Husna prefers browsing Tumblr because she follows accounts that share images, links, writing, and other comments.

Soo Min feels most inspired by looking at personal websites because of the freedom people have to show off their work.

“I don’t like need that [content] has to be a square on Instagram. That’s a weird creative restraint that a lot of content creators don’t usually think to do.”
— Kelly

Jonathan feels most inspired by YouTube and video content because of the medium’s full experience.

“A platform that embraces diversity, TikTok encourages users to project images of themselves without thinking too much about complying with certain standards.”
— Cassandra Tan

Director of Insights and Analytics at
Universal Music Group, Southeast Asia and Korea
(HubSpot/Talkwalker 2022 Social Media Trends report)

3 Findings

e Pervasive Negativity

Across the board, we heard users express negative feelings with using social media even though social media use was high.

Although “metaverse” ventures try to address issues with social media, many users have an overwhelmingly negative perspective of them.

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

Jonathan mostly follows comment threads when they have an element of controversy.

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

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.

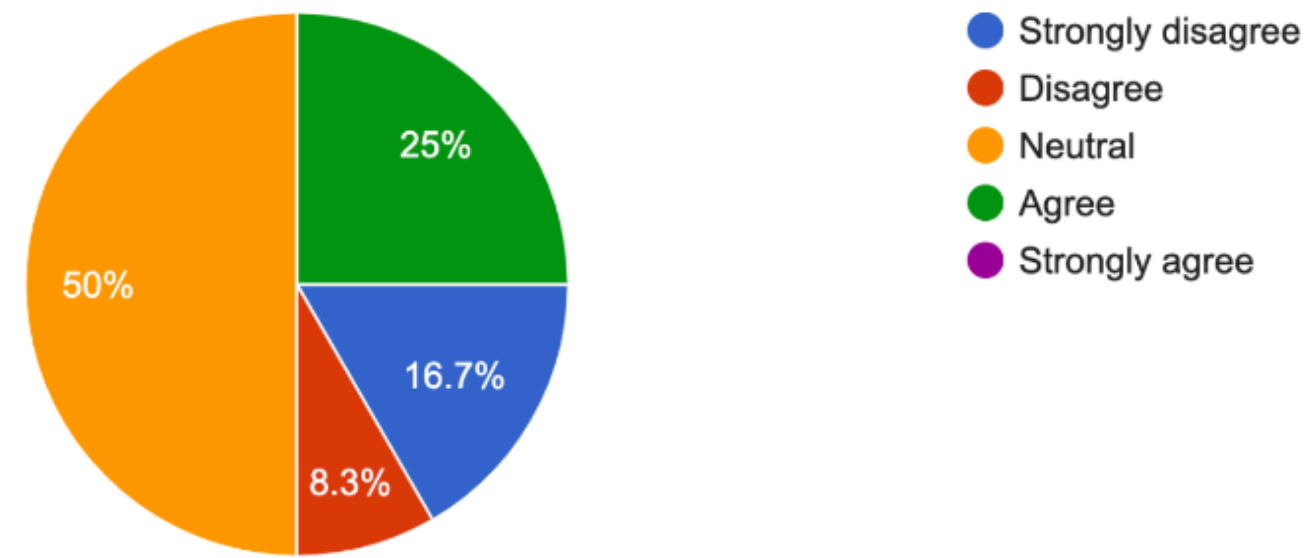
3

Findings

e Pervasive Negativity

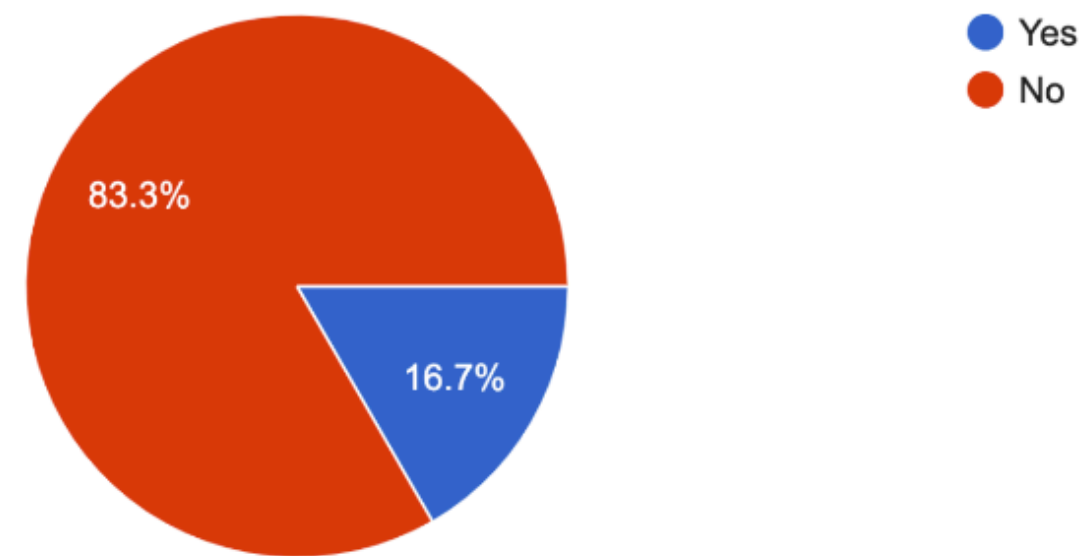
Do you agree with the following statement: "Browsing social media is fun."

12 responses



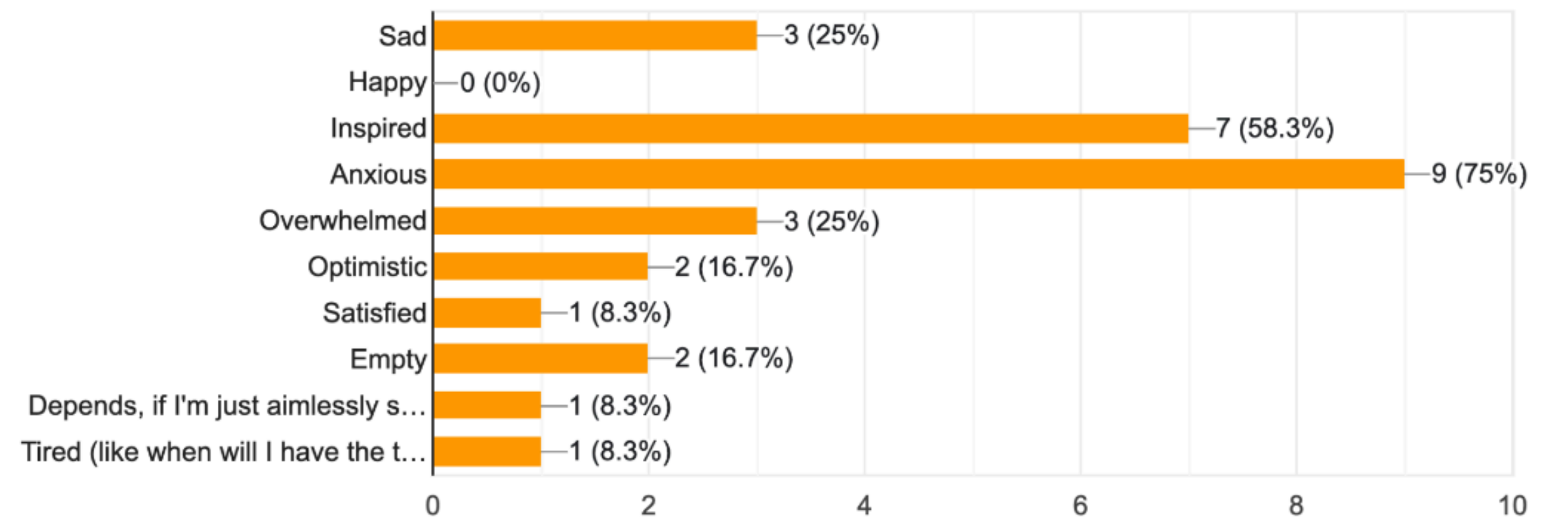
Has your answer to the previous question changed since the start of COVID?

12 responses



After browsing these websites, how do you typically feel?

12 responses



3 Findings

f New Platforms

Users are open to trying new websites and experiences. Even “metaverse” platforms are gaining traction.

These are often uncharted territories though, and new user experiences require testing.

“I wasn’t on TikTok before the pandemic. And now, I am on TikTok all the time... A couple of people I’ve been working on projects with recently are people I [discovered] on TikTok.”

— Joseph

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

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.

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

3 Findings

f New Platforms

Designers have attempted to create new platforms.

Reading Machines MUTE

A publishing platform for non-teleological reading.

No.	Title	Author	Mobile?
RM-22	and I still welcome you home,...	Lara Kalecik My heart was an artichoke and I had given it to the sun. <i>Website</i>	No
RM-21	the distance between anything at all and the center	Hannah Joyce is the beginning of a story. <i>Website</i>	No
RM-20	I Never Believe it Until it Happens Again	Tiger Dingsun is my second language. <i>Website</i>	No
RM-19	Affirmations for My Existence	Zainab Aliyu ("Zai") feels most at home when lost in archives. <i>Website</i>	No
RM-18	25x50	Paul Bouigue <i>Website</i>	No
RM-17	GUSHGUSHGUSH	Emma Kemp is a writer, artist and educator based in LA. <i>Website</i>	No
RM-16	Portraits and Repetition	Wen Zhuang	Yes
RM-15	Dream Dress	Aayushi Khowala	No
RM-14	Excerpts from No Man's Land	Ali Dipp	Yes
RM-13	Neograph	Tiger Dingsun is my second language. <i>Website</i>	Yes
RM-12	Itchy, Fluffy, and Incomplete Things	Danning Niu is working towards a sound and	No

Reading Machines by Tiger Dingsun
(<https://tdingsun.github.io/reading-machines/>)
(accessed on October 16, 2022)

special fish links everyone login

here-there.ca
stories from the asian canadian diaspora
sediment

homep.online
editorial/curatorial/publishing under construction
zeste

colash-2017.netlify.app
I made collages back then
manegame

I knew that if I walked in your footsteps, it would become a ritual
This is a video work I made
aarati

bianca

support special fish!

mastar2323

c0py

treehouse

emotional.codes
wesleyac

Better Off Alone Alice DeeJay

Dog Purity KAISE

special.fish
brought up by Laurel Schwulst
(accessed on October 16, 2022)

mastodon
Follow friends and discover new ones

Registrations are currently closed, as we are reforming the instance and the cooperative. If you would like to be a part of discussions around the instance, the coop, and the future, please stop by our [Discourse page](#).

Discover users
Browse a profile directory and filter by inte

Sunbeam City
Sunbeam City is an anticapitalist, antifascist solarpunk instance that is run collectively. [Learn more >>](#)

ADMINISTERED BY: **wakest (team admin)** @wakest
SERVER STATS: **1.89K** users **117** active *

A Mastodon community
brought up by Laurel Schwulst
(accessed on October 16, 2022)

4 Recommendations & Next Steps

- a Prototyping
- b Further Research

4 Recommendations

a Prototyping

Based on our research, there are three topics worth exploring further through prototypes and user testing:

- Homepage experiences

How can we accommodate more types of content?

Are there alternatives to grid-based, vertically-scrolling layouts?

- Comment sorting and presentation

How are comments shown? Where are they found?

How can we balance comments with content from the user's perspective?

- Sub-community structures

What are the ways to cater to niches within a larger website?

4 Recommendations

b Further Research

Two concepts came up during our research that are not immediately actionable but worth following-up on:

- Online communities built in “metaverse” platforms
Can you emulate in-person communities in a virtual environment?
What is causing the negative reaction to virtual experiences?
- User-centric/decentralized social media experiences
What tools are available for groups to create their own social platforms?
How are these tools (Discord, Mastodon, etc.) being implemented by creatives?

i Appendix

i Appendix

Hubspot/Talkwalker 2022 Social Media Trends Report

(<https://offers.hubspot.com/social-media-trends-report-2022>)

Art+Design Website Resources

- [Are.na](https://www.are.na/about) (<https://www.are.na/about>)
- [Behance](https://help.behance.net/hc/en-us/articles/204483894-Guide-Intro-to-Behance) (<https://help.behance.net/hc/en-us/articles/204483894-Guide-Intro-to-Behance>)
- [Dribbble](https://dribbble.com/about) (<https://dribbble.com/about>)
- [Instagram](https://about.instagram.com/) (<https://about.instagram.com/>)
- [Pinterest](https://help.pinterest.com/en/guide/all-about-pinterest) (<https://help.pinterest.com/en/guide/all-about-pinterest>)
- [Reddit](https://www.redditinc.com/) (<https://www.redditinc.com/>)

Thank you!

For questions, please contact gdrozdov@risd.edu.