

Ethical UX Beyond Virality

A Study of Ethical Persuasion in Community-Centric Platforms for Emerging Conceptual Artists in Comparative UK and China Contexts



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#Ethical Persuasion
#User Experience Design
#Platform Extractivism
#Cross-Cultural Study
#Community-embedding Platform
Reflective Practice
#Emerging Conceptual Artists



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Abstract

Artist-centered platforms such as Behance and Instagram have evolved from static portfolios into algorithm-driven social networks where visibility depends on performative self-branding and visual spectacle rather than intellectual depth. Regarding conceptual artists whose practice privileges ideas over objects and theoretical rigor over aesthetic immediacy, this metric-driven shift fosters anxiety, intellectual fragmentation, professional under-acknowledgement, and pressure to compromise their artistic voice [24]. For emerging artists lacking institutional buffers, these dynamics frequently result in career attrition, with many abandoning conceptual rigor for platform-legible work or exiting artistic practice entirely [14]. Despite increasing concern about platform extractivism and creative labor precarity, limited research has examined how these dynamics distinctively impact concept-first art practitioners. The study addresses that gap by proposing an ethical UX framework grounded in ethical persuasion and loyalty-driven design, moving beyond engagement-centric models to privilege conceptual depth over virality, sustained inquiry over content consumption, and intellectual community over metrics.

Methodologically, this practice-led research follows a four-phase process: (1) theoretical framework mapping, (2) self-reflexive inquiry, (3) participatory design and usability testing, and (4) evaluative framework refinement. Grounded in a cross-cultural analysis of how sociocultural ecosystems in the UK and China shape artistic identity and digital labor, the study progresses systematically from critique to construction. Through engagement with mid-fidelity prototypes, the resulting 3-pillar VRC framework translates ethical-persuasion principles into design practice: **Value**-Aligned Showcase (V) privileges concepts over visual consumption, Critical **Reflection** (R) embeds architectural slowness enabling reflective resilience and consolidation, and Upward **Community** Connections (C) creates bounded communities resisting platform scalability imperatives. This framework operationalizes abstract ethics into concrete design strategies, demonstrating that non-extractive platforms supporting intellectual flourishing are practically achievable through fundamental reorientation from extraction-based to ethical design values that nurtures authenticity and creative wellbeing.

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LIST OF GLOSSARIES

Algorithmic Visibility: The logic by which content is ranked, surfaced, or hidden on digital platforms, governed by algorithms that favor particular types of engagement (e.g., likes, shares, dwell time). These systems often influence who gets seen, when, and how, thus shaping cultural recognition and access to opportunities [1].

Emerging Conceptual Artists: Early-stage art practitioners whose work foregrounds ideas, research, and theoretical inquiry over material or aesthetic production, and who are in the process of establishing artistic identity and recognition within algorithmically mediated cultural economies.

Ethics: In the context of UX, ethics refers to the design and implementation of digital systems that safeguard user wellbeing, protect against manipulation, and support values such as autonomy, inclusivity, and sustainability. Ethical considerations include avoiding dark patterns, ensuring data transparency, and aligning platform goals with user interests [2, 3].

Ethical Persuasion: A developing concept in UX that builds upon the foundational theories of persuasive technology [4] and persuasive system design [5], but introduces a strong ethical dimension concerned with user autonomy, wellbeing, and trust. It seeks to distinguish influence from manipulation, aligning design with human-centered and value-driven outcomes. Avoiding coercive or deceptive techniques such as dark patterns, this research conceptualises ethical persuasion as the alignment of platform objectives with artists' authentic interests, articulated through four key ethical dimensions: transparency, autonomy, motivation, and value alignment.

PET Design (Persuasion, Emotion, Trust): A design methodology developed by Human Factors International (HFI), which focuses on persuasive interaction, emotional resonance, and trust-building in user interfaces. PET design combines research-based techniques to ethically influence user behavior by aligning interface design with users' psychological and emotional triggers [6].

Platformisation: The process by which digital platforms reshape and mediate economic, cultural, and social life. It refers to the infrastructural and algorithmic integration of platforms (e.g., Instagram, TikTok, Patreon) into everyday practices, often resulting in new forms of labor, visibility politics, and monetization models [7].

Trust: Trust is a relational and iterative construct guided by shared empathy, open communication, emotional awareness, and responsibility. It has both emotional (affective) and rational (cognitive) components and looks at trust as a process rather than a static state. In this study, trust is considered an essential element for sustaining authenticity, loyalty, and long-term user engagement [8].

UX Design (User Experience Design): The discipline of designing digital interfaces and systems that are accessible, user-friendly, and responsive to human needs and behavior. UX design emphasizes usability, interaction quality, and user satisfaction through iterative and research-driven processes [9].

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

Platform capitalism has systematically restructured conceptual art practice through algorithmic mechanisms that are epistemologically contradictory to intellectual work. Emerging conceptu-

al artists engaging with Instagram, Behance, and ArtStation get to confront a structural paradox: platforms designed for visual consumption cannot accommodate work whose primary medium is ideas. Algorithmic curation privileges immediate aesthetic impact over theoretical complexity, engagement velocity over sustained inquiry, and metric-based validation over discourse recognition [10, 11]. This kind of epistemological violence has contributed to the architectural erasure of intellectual labor's value through design systems that render conceptual rigor algorithmically illegible.

The consequences are measurable. Art practitioners reported cognitive fragmentation from attention architecture designed to prevent deep work [12], conceptual dilution from pressure to simplify ideas into caption-length explanations, and validation collapse as engagement metrics replace critical discourse [13]. Unlike established artists with institutional buffers, emerging practitioners lack the cultural capital to resist platform dependency, creating dual precarity: economic instability and intellectual devaluation operating simultaneously [14]. Current platform logics do not merely fail to support conceptual practice; instead, they tend to undermine the cognitive conditions and social structures rigorous thinking requires.

The counter-extractive platform architectures stand for its practicality and innovation of educational level. The central research question investigates: How can an ethical persuasion and loyalty-driven UX framework mitigate algorithmic precarity and foster epistemic sustainability of conceptual integrity, intellectual resilience, and reflective community reciprocity for emerging conceptual artists?

The study delivers three concrete contributions that address existing research gaps. First, it provides empirical documentation of platform harm mechanisms specific to conceptual artists by identifying which algorithmic logics, interface affordances, and metric architectures produce cognitive fragmentation and intellectual devaluation. Existing research generalizes 'creator anxiety' without distinguishing how conceptual artists' epistemic needs (slowness, complexity, discourse) create unique vulnerabilities. Second, it synthesizes fragmented theoretical frameworks, including persuasive systems design [4], self-determination theory [15], reflective practice pedagogy [16], and communities of practice [17] into an

operational ethical UX model calibrated for intellectual labor. This moves beyond abstract ethical principles to specify concrete design patterns, interaction affordances, and algorithmic alternatives. Third, it validates feasibility through practice-led research, producing testable prototypes that prove non-extractive platforms can operationalize ethical commitments while meeting user needs. The resulting framework equips designers, institutions, and artist collectives with implementable specifications for building alternatives to attention economy platforms.

This research adopts a practice-led, design-based methodology rooted in ethical UX principles and critical design thinking. Methodologically, the research unfolds through a four-phase integrated design process, combining reflective, empirical strategies to build both theoretical insight and practical intervention:

Phase 1 maps theoretical analysis across platformisation case studies, digital self-branding, creative wellbeing, and ethical UX design principles as potential alternatives to current platform norms.

Phase 2 gathers situated knowledge through a first round of focus group interviews with six early-career artists, complemented by a self-reflexive diary that documents ideation and the development process of a functional web-based minimum viable prototype from the perspective of the artist-researcher.

Phase 3 translates the insights and design principles into mid-fi 'research artefact', which are refined through multiple rounds of usability testing and value proposition canvas exercises conducted with the same participant cohort during a second focus group.

Phase 4 continues with iterative evaluation of the prototype, integrating a critically informed position and risk management strategies, and concludes with the articulation of final insights and the delivery of a framework-ready structural design.

Employing the constructs of the design thinking method, the documentation of this research journey will be divided into four phases, each sequentially building upon the previous to provide a thorough understanding of the evolving platforms of UX regarding artists and the significance of ethical persuasion:

Phase 1: 'Preliminary Reviews & Planning'
 Phase 2: 'Auto-ethnography Research'
 Phase 3: 'Participant Research: Usability Testing'
 Phase 4: 'Analysis & Refinement'

Ultimately, this research demonstrates that counter-extractive platforms are not utopian aspirations but achievable technical interventions requiring only commitment to different design values. Drawing on Shneiderman's [2] argument that ethical design must actively protect users from harm rather than merely avoid causing it, the framework embeds safeguards against cognitive fragmentation, intellectual devaluation, and validation collapse. The resulting prototype and specifications champion sustainable, intellectually reciprocal digital ecologies where emerging conceptual artists can develop rigorous practices without sacrificing theoretical depth, conceptual integrity, or capacity for sustained inquiry. This constitutes not incremental improvement but paradigmatic shift — from platforms extracting value from artistic labor to platforms cultivating conditions where intellectual work flourishes.

Research Questions

As aforementioned, the key research question is: How can ethical persuasion and loyalty-driven UX design mitigate algorithmic precarity and foster epistemic sustainability of conceptual integrity, intellectual resilience, and reflective community reciprocity for emerging conceptual artists, as understood through comparative UK and China contexts?

This will be addressed by the following sub-questions:

1. What pain points and value conflicts do emerging conceptual artists encounter when engaging with current portfolio and social platforms?
2. How do cultural contexts in China and the UK shape these needs and appropriate design responses?
3. What ethical design strategies or existing interdisciplinary models can be synthesized into actionable platform design principles?
4. How can principles and user research insights inform the prototype creation of concrete affordances, ethical patterns, and non-extractive algorithmic alternatives?

Research Aims & Objectives

The aims of this research are:

1. Through the design thinking method, define the current challenges that emerging conceptual artists (aged 21-26) encounter on digital platforms and identify the assumptions that underlie their pain points.
2. To critically investigate and synthesize ethical UX design strategies currently implemented (or lacking) in artist-centered platforms and multiple ethical design models, with particular focus on ethical persuasion and loyalty-driven tactics to effectively craft more ethically persuasive user experiences.
3. To propose and test an ethical design framework that provides clear recommendations, actionable guidelines for UX designers and digital practitioners to create a supportive digital environment for emerging conceptual artists.

Research Hypothesis

Based on preliminary observations and theoretical grounding, the following hypotheses are proposed. For diagnostic hypotheses, it is suggested that emerging conceptual artists experience heightened intellectual fragmentation and conceptual devaluation in response to platform environments that prioritize visual immediacy, engagement velocity, and metric-based validation over theoretical depth, sustained inquiry, and discourse-based recognition. These pressures produce intellectual erosion, including compromised conceptual rigor, reduced capacity for deep work, epistemic disorientation, and the systematic invisibility of complex theoretical labor. Conversely, artists express a growing need for digital ecosystems that enable intellectual safety, theory-centered visibility, and the preservation of conceptual integrity through reciprocal, reflection-oriented interaction models that honor slowness and complexity.

For interventional hypotheses, this study proposes that a UX-centered platform prototype, designed using principles of ethical persuasion (transparent guidance toward intellectual depth) and loyalty-driven reciprocity (mutual platform-artist intellectual growth), will be perceived by emerging conceptual artists as more supportive of sustained theoretical development, conducive to rigorous peer critique, and generative of meaningful discourse-based community than conven-

tional algorithm-driven platforms. Rather than aiming for empirical measurement of engagement or visibility metrics, the research focuses on the perceived impact of how artists intellectually develop, critically reflect, and participate in theory-centered exchange within the digital space.

The success of the proposed intervention will be evaluated through a combination of qualitative and behavioral indicators: self-reported satisfaction and psychological safety, reduced anxiety linked to self-branding, deeper engagement with non-viral, process-oriented features, and increased participation in peer-to-peer dialogue and collaborative practices.

Additional evidence may emerge in the form of active use of privacy tools, customizable features that support autonomy, and a shift toward intentional, non-competitive content sharing. These responses will collectively inform how an ethical UX framework can be both theoretically grounded and practically implemented to shape digital platforms that foster sustainable, intellectually reciprocal environments for conceptual artists.

Scope of Research

This research intentionally limits its scope by:

- Focussing primarily on emerging artists rather than mid-career or established creators, as the targeted individuals often face heightened vulnerability and dependency on platform exposure.
- The range of emerging artists (21-26 years old) is chosen to reflect a transitional life stage in which many artists are navigating the shift from education to professional practice.
- The study is not a large-scale quantitative study but a qualitative, design-led inquiry, emphasizing depth of insight over generalizability.
- It does not evaluate all existing platforms exhaustively; instead, it focuses on a critical analysis of dominant patterns and mechanisms that represent broader trends in persuasive and extractive design.
- While the research touches on psychological effects such as anxiety or burnout, it does not attempt a clinical or diagnostic assessment of mental health.
- The study proposes a design prototype as a mid-fi conceptual research artefact under the comparative UK and China contexts rather than as a fully functional commercial product.

The boundaries are set to maintain focus and to allow for methodological depth. The scope ensures that the expected findings can remain relevant and actionable for both scholars and practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

1. The Digital Transformation of Artistic Labor

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated a transformation already underway: digital platforms have fundamentally restructured how artists develop careers, build audiences, and sustain creative practices. What began as supplementary promotional tools, artist social media or websites serving as digital business cards, have evolved into essential infrastructure shaping every dimension of artistic life [18]. Platforms like ArtStation, Behance, Instagram, and Dribbble compete for artists' attention, each promising visibility, community, and professional opportunity. This proliferation, however, has not democratized artistic careers as promised. Instead, it has reconfigured new forms of gatekeeping, anxiety, and intellectual compromise that disproportionately affect the development of artists.

1.1. Platformization and Algorithmic Gatekeeping

While platforms claim to liberate artists from traditional gatekeepers — galleries, curators, institutions — they have erected new barriers equally opaque. They have introduced new gatekeeping mechanisms through algorithmic curation systems that prioritize engagement metrics over artistic merit [13, p. 1315]. This shift exemplifies what Nieborg and Poell [19] term 'platformization': the process whereby digital infrastructures actively govern creative production through metric systems and engagement optimization.

Untransparent algorithms of governance re-determine visibility through logics that systematically disadvantage conceptual work. Content is driven by unseen mechanism and virality, not depth or theoretical rigor [20]. While visual spectacle and immediate entertainment pleasure outperform intellectual complexity in recommendation feed, the system has already been optimized for the 'poor image' [21], prioritizing circulation over contemplation. This produces concept devaluation: the algorithmic erasure of theoretical complexity in favor of platform-legible content of likes and shares.

More critically, platforms cannot assess conceptual sophistication. Algorithmic systems

measure behavioral signals, such as watch time, engagement rates, sharing patterns, but not intellectual rigor or theoretical contribution [11, p. 169]. This produces structural misalignment between art's epistemological values and platform reward systems. Work requiring sustained intellectual engagement, theoretical literacy, or contextual framing to activate meaning is systematically disadvantaged regardless of its critical contribution [22, p. 27]. The intellectual labor foundational to conceptual practice of theoretical reading, philosophical inquiry and critical discourse remains invisible within platform architectures designed to showcase visual production.

1.2. Visibility as Pathology: A Compromise

What faced by artists became an inescapable structural tension: platform visibility has become mandatory for professional legitimacy, yet not necessarily associated with intellectual documentation. Artists find limited alternatives and vulnerability to entry, which leads to a visibility dilemma: they must choose between accepting platform compromise or risking professional marginalization. The choice, however, proves illusory: lacking the institutional capital established artists possess, emerging practitioners have no viable alternative to platform participation [14, p. 283]. They cannot afford invisibility.

The compromise manifests through what Marwick and Boyd [23] identify as 'performative self-branding': artists transform themselves into algorithmically legible content producers, prioritizing platform presentation over conceptual development. Accordingly, Duffy [24] characterizes this as 'aspirational labor' describing the unpaid work of cultivating platform presence under perpetually deferred promises of recognition. This operates eventually through what Bucher [1] identifies as 'algorithmic imaginaries': artists develop folk theories about platform preferences, pre-emptively modifying practice to conform with perceived algorithmic demands. This pervasive self-censorship resulted in complex conceptual investigations being often abandoned for work promising visual appeal and greater visibility [13].

Sustained engagement with value-misaligned practice and systematic dilution of conceptual rigor produces significant psychological consequences. The cognitive dissonance inherent

in platform participation — wherein artists intellectually recognize that virality does not indicate conceptual rigor yet experience daily metric feedback suggesting otherwise — generates what can be characterized as legitimacy crises [25]. When engagement metrics function as proxies for artistic worth, artists navigate constant tension between their understanding of conceptual value and platforms' assessment mechanisms. This tension manifests as chronic anxiety, self-doubt, and what clinical literature identifies as impostor syndrome: the internalized belief that one's work lacks value despite evidence of competence. Duffy and Wissinger [26] observe that this creative anxiety becomes characteristic of platform-dependent practice, as artists increasingly internalize platform logics as self-assessment criteria. The result is not merely temporary stress but structural psychological precarity. Even though artists understand intellectually that platforms misvalue their work while experiencing perpetual evidence suggesting their practice fails to meet success indicators. Over extended periods, this cognitive dissonance erodes confidence in one's artistic identity and conceptual rigor.

Viewed through evidence points, while 'online presence' has become mandatory, there exists a blank in platforms' infrastructure to support artists' artistic identity formation. Lost in the pressures of performative branding, metric-driven success indicators, and polished self-presentation, artists risk compromising their long-term development. Platforms require intervention to facilitate spaces that nurture epistemological values and employ non-extractive methods to foster sustained engagement rather than frustration.

2. Emerging Conceptual Artists as a Distinct User Population

Conceptual artists constitute a specific population navigating today's platform-dependent cultural production, wherein the emotional costs of visibility, intellectual compromise, and economic survival converge. Although aware of algorithmic demands, their creative intent originates from theoretical inquiry rather than platform optimization. They experience persistent tension between maintaining visibility and preserving conceptual integrity, often choosing intellectual rigor over algorithmic legibility when forced to decide.

2.1. Defining the Group: Practice, Identity, and Epistemological Integrity

In this study, conceptual artist refers to practitioners for whom ideas precede and supersede execution, where individuals construct artistic identity through intellectual inquiry, theoretical engagement, and concept-driven work [27, 28]. This encompasses diverse practices including installation, performance, social experimental practice, institutional critique, text-based work, and durational art. Upon that, although I have attempted to distinguish the blurred lines between ‘commercial’ and ‘conceptual’ fine art [29], research shows that monetisation remains an inevitable part of artists’ livelihoods. This research focuses on artists for whom intellectual integrity and conceptual rigor take precedence, adopted from Bridgstock’s [30] framework of ‘creativity-first’ orientation wherein economic aims remain subordinate to artistic values. Commercial strategies, when employed, function as means to sustain conceptual investigation rather than primary objectives.

The choice to focus on conceptual artists, as distinct from the broader category (Table 1) of ‘visual artists’, ‘designers’ or ‘creators’ or ‘AI automated image makers’, rests on the fact that self-identified artists often operate

with heightened identity attachment to their practice, and greater exposure to labour precarity, public evaluation, and structural marginalisation [31, 32]. While designers prioritize problem-solving and creators optimize for engagement, conceptual artists pursue work fundamentally rooted in theoretical depth and critical inquiry. This renders them particularly vulnerable to platforms’ structural inability to assess or reward intellectual sophistication.

2.2. The Psychological Precarity of Intellectual Work

Multiple studies confirm that artists experience elevated rates of anxiety and depression compared to general populations. A 2023 survey by Changing Arts and Minds documented that 62% of creatives self-reported anxiety and 44% depression, with the sector’s overall mental health risk three times that of general population [33]. For conceptual artists specifically, these risks intensify due to the cognitive demands and emotional investment required for sustained intellectual work. Unlike designers following functional briefs or creators optimizing engagement, conceptual artists pursue intrinsically motivated inquiry requiring theoretical depth, philosophical engagement, and critical thinking – forms of labor platforms structurally devalue.

Tab. 1 Comparative Overview of Creative Groups in Key Categories.

Groups	Motivation	Output	Platform Use
Conceptual Artists	Theoretical inquiry, critical thinking, idea development	Concept-driven work requiring contextual framing	Algorithms cannot assess intellectual rigor; visual reduction erases meaning
Visual Artists	Aesthetic exploration, material experimentation	Image-based work with immediate visual appeal	Platform-compatible but may face oversaturation
Designers	Problem-solving, clarity, UI/UX styles, logic, usability	Functional solutions, product design, feasibility flows	Optimize for usability, aesthetics, branding, outcomes
Brand Creators/ Influencers	Visibility, story-telling, content, monetization	Aesthetics, market-driven work	Metrics-first, quality content, short reels, “hooks”, dissemination
AI Automated Image Makers	Speed, novelty, viral impact	Auto-generated visuals	Trend-surfing or mimicry, advanced database, innovation experimentation, productivity

Source: Own Work.

2.3. Redefining Primary Needs: From Visibility to Value

Emerging conceptual artists are not seeking yet another efficiency-maximised visibility machine. What they fundamentally require is a more holistic and durable ecosystem of support in which prioritises not only exposure, but also mental wellbeing, professional sustainability, and resilience. What emerging they fundamentally require therefore articulate 4 intertwined needs: (1) Sustainable intellectual opportunities that bolster conceptual confidence, provide access to critical discourse networks, curatorial recognition, and meaningful pathways into institutional and theoretical conversations rather than purely commercial visibility; 2) Safe community zones for trial-and-error, where failure is tolerated and critique is paced by cool-down periods; (3) Quality feedback and upward social ties that replace like-driven validation with informed dialogue; and (4) Slow, contemplative, and value-aligned expressions that accommodates concept-first expressions and encourage sustainable research practice over episodic virality.

These needs imply fundamental reorientation from user-centered efficiency to value-centered design ethics. Rather than optimizing for engagement, platforms must embed the intellectual friction, which is considered as intentional design decisions making audiences pause, read, and think. Attention should be earned through depth rather than dopamine loops. For early-career conceptual artists, what proves most necessary is not exposure but resilient infrastructure for intellectual belonging, theoretical reflection, and intellectual community — systems supporting the thinking that defines their practice rather than demanding its simplification for algorithmic legibility.

3. Ethical UX Design: Values, Power and Responsibility

Ethics in platform design cannot be neutral. As Sections 1-3 demonstrated, current systems systematically privilege engagement over intellect, circulation over contemplation — choices that constitute ethical positions whether acknowledged or not. Any intervention addressing these structural biases requires grounding in what ethics means when intellectual work is at stake.

In classical philosophy, ethics is the inquiry into moral principles that distinguish right from wrong [34, 35]. Scholar Buwert [36] mentioned in 'Ethical Design: A Foundation for Visual Communication' that "The ethical [is] a mode of existence

characterised by sensitivity to and recognition of qualitative differences between experienced potentialities." In his perspective, ethical design is not a special category of 'good' projects, but the recognition and responsible steering of the inherent power. Upon that, design theorist Clive Dilnot [36] in authentic design ethics research further points out the danger of constructing an insular discipline specific conception of ethics:

...we cannot simply develop a cozy set of design-ethics that will swaddle current practice in a cocoon of easy moral probity (much like "green architecture" attempts with current building practices). What we need in fact is an ethics - or an ethical principle - that is, at the same time, adequate as ethics per se.

Translating those definitions into platform design for conceptual artists means asking how interfaces and algorithms can be systematically deliberate, transparent, and value-aligned to enlarge rather than constrain intellectual capacity. Each visual, behavioral, and algorithmic choice should serve users' informed intellectual interests — not platform revenue optimization. As Berman [37] argues, designers function as gatekeepers of culture, their decisions shaping what forms of cultural production become structurally viable. This positions ethical responsibility beyond avoiding harm: designers must actively reject dark-pattern manipulation while cultivating conditions enabling sustained theoretical thinking, conceptual experimentation, and intellectual community.

However, understanding ethics framed with ostensibly good intentions can still enable manipulation. Practitioners Chris Nodder and Harry Brignull further sharpened the lens and drew a clear line by establishing precise boundaries. As Nodder cautions in *Evil by Design*, persuasive UX crosses into unethical territory when it weaponizes social proof, for instance, by displaying fabricated or selectively curated product reviews to manufacture false popularity and urgency, thereby manipulating trust to increase conversions [38]. The ethical threshold crystallizes where design transitions from facilitating informed choice to systematically exploiting psychological factors.

4. Toward Ethical Intervention: Theoretical Frameworks for Platform Design

The challenge of designing platforms supporting rather than exploiting conceptual artists requires

synthesizing theoretical frameworks across behavioral psychology, motivation theory, and user experience design. This section examines how established models and other motivational frameworks can be adapted from their original contexts (health behavior change, consumer engagement) to address the distinct requirements of intellectual work in the artist community.

4.1. Persuasive Systems Design: Defining Ethical Boundaries

Persuasive Systems Design (PSD) is an established theoretical framework in the UX field that provides foundational principles for technology influencing user behavior ‘without coercion, compulsion, or force’ [4, 5, p. 485]. The framework distinguishes voluntary persuasion from manipulation, requiring designers to analyze intent, context, and strategy before deployment. Benner et al.’s [39] systematic review identifies six ethical conditions for legitimate persuasion: Awareness, Outcomes, Choice, Autonomy, Transparency, and Motivation (Table 2). When these conditions are satisfied, PSD demonstrates measurable benefits including higher engagement, reciprocal relationships, and enhanced trust.

Compiling results from review sections of ethics and creative practicality, 4 strong-related value propositions for ethical PSD are applied and foregrounded across the practical compo-

nent of the research: P2 Outcomes, P4 Autonomy, P5 Transparency, P6 Motivation. *[This study will intentionally exclude Proposition 1 (Awareness) and Proposition 3 (Choice) from its evaluative framework, as the research paradigm is inherently predicated on conscious participation and voluntary decision-making. By design, all experimental conditions require baseline awareness and explicit opt-in mechanisms, making these variables constants rather than testable parameters in the current investigation.]*

However, when the basic assumptions of PSD are inconsistent with the requirements of intellectual work, merely choosing the appropriate propositions is insufficient. The PSD framework developed to change health behaviors (such as increasing exercise and adhering to medication) assumes that behaviors can be isolated, measured and gradually changed through targeted intervention measures [4, 5]. The development of the concept shows contradictories of the logic. Intellectual work is carried out through nonlinear processes: extended theoretical reading does not produce visible outputs, conceptual dead ends constitute productive inquiries, reflective pauses contribute to the consolidation of cognition, and iterative experiments require tolerance for ambiguity. The behavior-centered focus of PSD – triggering discrete and measurable actions – must be fundamentally reconceptualized to adapt to situ-

Tab. 2 Overview of Ethical Persuasive Design Proposition Table.

No.	Name	Sort description	Origin
P1	Awareness	Importance of developer and designer awareness for applying PSD	L1, I1, I7
P2	Outcomes	Alignment of outcomes with ethical and individual concerns and needs	L2, L4, L5, I1, I5, I8
P3	Choice	Consider users’ needs when designing the choice architecture	L7, L4, L5, I1, I5
P4	Autonomy	Provide freedom and autonomy, use opt-in design	L3, L5, I2
P5	Transparency	Balance transparency between users’ needs and PSD effects and effectiveness	L2, I1, I2, I4, I5, I6
P6	Motivation	Choose PSD elements that do not foster immortality but provide aesthetically motivating design	L6, I3, I4, I6, I8

Source: [39, p. 564].

ations where the goal is not behavioral change but cognitive ability maintenance: the sustained attention, intellectual risk-taking spirit and intrinsic motivation that the protection platform typically weakens. This re-conceptualization requires studying how the relevant behavioral and motivational frameworks address (or fail to address) the different needs of intellectual work.

4.2. Comparative Framework Analysis

In the domain of behavior change and persuasive design, several models have been assessed and investigated in research and practicality. This analysis examines 9 prominent user experience and behavioral modification models: particularly Fogg’s Behavior Model (Fig. 1), Self-Determination Theory (Fig. 2), and ARCS model (Fig. 3), while juxtaposing them with critical viewpoints that challenge strictly efficiency-driven design paradigms. A detailed framework & model analysis table 2 is documented as comprehensive take-aways of the research. By comparative analysis, the existing behavioral frameworks thematically address four domains critical for platform design: motivation, autonomy, competence recognition, and temporal structure (Tab. 3).

4.2.1. The Intrinsic-Extrinsic Motivation Paradox

A central tension across behavioral frameworks concerns motivation’s source and sustainability. Fogg’s Behavior Model [40] treats motivation as a measurable variable enabling triggered actions, assuming higher motivation increases behavior likelihood. Conversely, Self-Determination Theory [15] distinguishes motivation types: intrinsic (inherent interest) versus extrinsic (external rewards), arguing extrinsic motivators systematically crowd out intrinsic engagement, particularly for creative tasks requiring cognitive flexibility [41, p. 659].

This proves critical for conceptual artists. While reviews documented platform engagement metrics driving behavior, SDT predicts this outcome: continuous metric feedback shifts motivation from “does this concept interest me?” to “will this get engagement?” – the cognitive colonization observed. Keller’s [42] ARCS model attempts synthesis by emphasizing intrinsic satisfaction, yet its attention-capture mechanisms risk replicating platform capitalism’s attention extraction. While SDT theorizes motivation crowding, the ethical

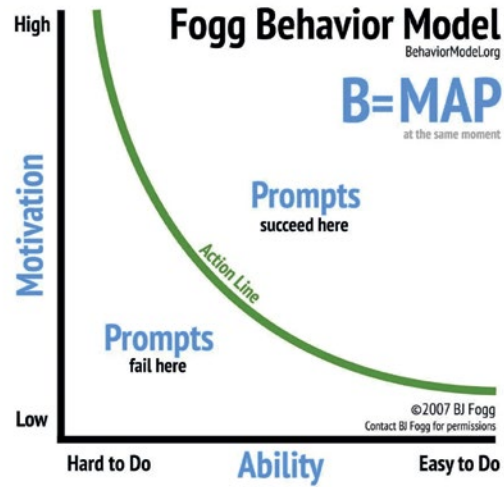


Fig. 1 Fogg Behavior Model. Source: [43].

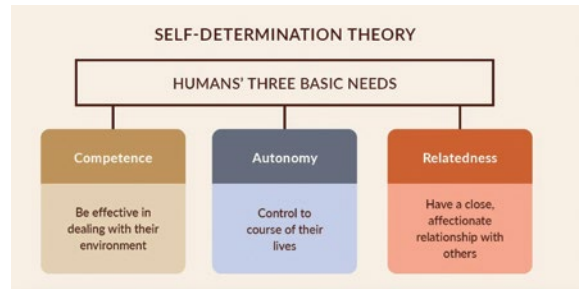


Fig. 2 Overview of Self-Determination Theory. Source: [44].

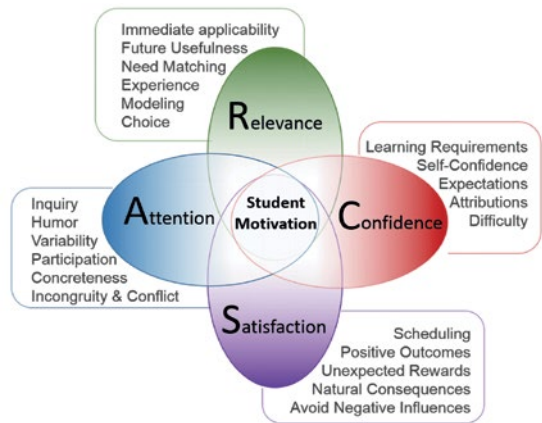


Fig. 3 Overview of ARCS Model. Source: [45].

Tab. 3 Framework Model Analysis Table.

#Model_ Name	Brief_ Description	Components	Key Words	Benefit	Limitations	Ethical Considerations	Industry_ Applications
Reasoned-Action Theory	Suggests that people's intentions predict behavior, influenced by attitudes and social norms	Behavioral intention, attitudes toward behavior, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, actual behavior execution	#Changes of Attitudes #Relationships	Strong predictive power for planned behaviors, useful for intervention design, applicable across cultures	Relies heavily on self-reported intentions; does not fully account for perceived behavioral control	Must account for social pressure, cultural bias, and the challenge of self-reporting	Education, Healthcare, Marketing, Organizational Change
ARCS Model (Motivational Design Theory)	Framework for designing learning experiences that enhance motivation and engagement	Attention, Relevance, Confidence, Satisfaction, motivational strategies, engagement techniques	#Effective Learning #Engagement #Expectancy-value theory #Instructional Design #Motivation	Enhances learning engagement and student motivation; structured educational design	Doesn't guarantee learning retention; may not suit all learning styles	Ensure motivation techniques serve meaningful learning outcomes	Corporate Training, Digital Media, E-learning, Education, Organizational
Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)	Describes how people process persuasive messages via central and peripheral routes	Central vs. peripheral routes, message quality, source credibility, audience motivation	#Change Someone's Mind #Changes of Attitudes #Decision-Making #Effective Communication #Persuasion #Processing Stimulus #Social psychology	Framework for persuasive messaging; predicts effectiveness; adaptable	Can oversimplify decisions; peripheral route risks shallow persuasion/misinformation	Responsibility in using peripheral cues; avoid manipulation	Digital Media, Marketing, Mass Media, Political, Social Appeals
Hook Model	Behavioral design framework explaining how products form user habits through trigger-action-reward cycles	Triggers, Action, Variable Reward, Investment, Habit Formation Loop	#Addiction #Digital Habits #Engagement #Habit-forming #User Mental Model # 'Hooked'	Creates habit-forming products; boosts engagement and retention	Can lead to addictive behaviors if misused	Must avoid harmful addiction cycles	Education, Retail, Technology
Mayer's Multimedia Learning Principles	Research-based principles for designing effective multimedia learning experiences	Multimedia, Contiguity, Modality, Redundancy, Coherence, Personalization, Embodiment, Segmenting, Pretraining, Signaling	#Attention #Digital Learning #Emotional Engagement #Interactive Learning #User Experience	Reduces cognitive load, improves learning outcomes	Focuses on cognitive aspects; may miss emotional/motivational factors	Support genuine learning, not just engagement metrics	Education, Healthcare, Technology
CHOICES Framework	Explains how people make choices based on cognitive biases and heuristics	Context, Habits, Other People, Incentives, Congruence, Emotions, Salient	#Decision-Making #Motivation #Persuasion #Trust #Social Psychology	Structured understanding of decision-making; improves choice architecture	May oversimplify and ignore cultural contexts	Respect user autonomy, avoid manipulative nudging	E-commerce, Environmental, Finance, Healthcare, Retail
PET Model	Framework for persuading users using emotion and trust in digital design	Persuasion, Emotion, Trust	#Decision-Making #Motivation #Persuasion #Trust #Social Psychology	Builds trust, enhances engagement and conversion	May oversimplify and overlook cultural differences	Avoid manipulative dark patterns	E-commerce, Education, Retail, Social Media, Technology
Fogg Behavior Model	Explains behavior as a result of motivation, ability, and a trigger converging	Motivation, Ability, Trigger	#Accessibility Action #Behavioral Theories #Friction #Habit-Forming #Motivation #Persuasion #Simplicity #Triggers #User Experience	Clear framework for behavior design; reduces friction; increases conversions	Best for simple behaviors; lacks depth for complex change	Avoid manipulation; ensure alignment with user goals	Behavioral Science, E-commerce, Fintech, Healthcare, Retail, UI/UX

Source: own work.

framework should introduce the mechanism of how to protect intrinsic motivation from platform-native extrinsic reward systems. Conceptual artists require not merely balance between intrinsic/extrinsic motivators but systematic consultation or customised prompting guidance from metric-based validation corroding intellectual engagement.

4.2.2. Meta-autonomy Beyond Choice

Autonomy was highlighted among patterns. PSD's Proposition 4 mandates users retain meaningful choice over system influence [39, p. 564]. SDT positions autonomy with self-direction and volition, which is as psychological need foundational to wellbeing [15, p. 227]. ARCS's relevance dimension requires aligning system goals with user objectives [42]. However, assessing them implies that frameworks that is developed for commercial contexts define autonomy narrowly: choice among platform-provided options (notification preferences, privacy settings, feature toggles). For conceptual artists navigating platforms whose fundamental logics privilege engagement over intellect, this proves insufficient. Artists require what can be termed meta-autonomy: control over whether and how platforms influence their intellectual direction at all, including capacity to resist platform logics entirely.

Consider the distinction: Standard autonomy asks "Can users control how algorithms surface content?" Meta-autonomy asks "Can users opt out of algorithmic curation while retaining platform benefits?" The former accepts platform mediation as inevitable; the latter questions whether mediation serves users' intellectual development. The framework should create opportunities that foreground choice about participation itself, allowing users to reflectively define when, how, and to what extent they engage with platform systems.

4.2.3. Recognizing Invisible Intellectual Labor

Competence, as the feeling of growth and mastery, appears across frameworks as motivational prerequisite. SDT argues competence satisfaction requires clear progress signals and positive capability feedback [15, p. 229]. ARCS's confidence dimension suggests systems should provide achievable challenges with visible skill development [42]. Fogg's ability variable treats competence as friction-reduction: making desired behaviors easier [40].

Conceptual ideas can work reversly about competence indicators. Conceptual dead-ends, abandoned frameworks and readings, failed experiments — they all appear identical produces no platform-visible yet constitute productive inquiry. Intellectual risk-taking may decrease measurable output while advancing thinking. How can artists experience competence growth when platforms provide only engagement metrics irrelevant to intellectual development?

Conceptual art involves open-ended inquiry where progress remains ambiguous and 'mastery' perpetually deferred. Platforms needs to leverage the advantages of digital accessibility to visualize visualising theoretical engagement and recognizing artists' unique competence, conceptual experimentation, and intellectual consolidation as legitimate practice activities deserving recognition. Integrated with competence, the appropriate signals and instant feedback can be grounded as embedded features.

4.2.4. Temporality: Fast Actions vs. Slow Thinking

Behavioral frameworks privilege action and immediacy. Fogg's [40] model emphasizes precise prompt timing — behavior occurs when motivation, ability, and trigger converge simultaneously. This assumes behaviors are discrete, completable actions occurring in moments. PSD similarly focuses on interaction design: how interface elements trigger specific responses [5]. Recognising conceptual work operates through incompatible temporalities, artists require reflective pauses to spark intellectual consolidation. They may go through weeks or months reading theory, investigating precedents with no output occurs. Frameworks assume continuous engagement is success. Intellectual work requires accommodating what can be termed productive invisibility in the periods where rigorous thinking happens but platforms see nothing.

Frameworks assume continuous, measurable engagement as design goal. Intellectual work requires platforms accommodating discontinuous participation, extended research phases, and cognitive rhythms resisting quantification. This will also demand reconceptualizing what 'successful platform use' means for conceptual artists.

Comparative analysis indicates that existing motivational frameworks, focusing on behavior change, autonomy, competence, and engagement, require significant revision for intellectual work contexts. Four key adaptations emerge.

- (1) From behavior change to capacity preservation: frameworks must protect cognitive resources such as sustained attention, curiosity, and tolerance for ambiguity that platforms often erode.
- (2) From choice provision to resistance legitimization: systems should respect users' selective disengagement from platform logics that hinder conceptual growth.
- (3) From visible output to invisible labor: recognition must extend to theoretical reading, reflection, and conceptual experimentation beyond measurable activity.
- (4) From continuous engagement to rhythmic participation: platforms should align with the nonlinear rhythms of intellectual work, valuing depth and productive invisibility.

These shifts, integrated with PSD's ethical principles of Outcomes, Autonomy, Transparency, and Motivation, inform subsequent design interventions: ethical persuasion for intellectual depth, loyalty systems for conceptual growth, reflective affordances, and discourse-oriented communities.

5. Case Studies: Ethical Design in Practice

To illustrate how ethical persuasion and user-centric design can be implemented, the case studies analysis is conducted through three digital platforms called Cara, Are.na, and i-D. Each plays a critical role in informing different facets of the ethical UX prototype:

- Cara is positioned as a benchmark for how infrastructural policies can align with user values to foster trust and creative wellbeing;
- Are.na is taken as a reference for its interaction model that prioritizes non-coercive autonomy, reflective engagement;
- and i-D platform is regarded as a precedent, demonstrating how editorial curation and slow reading can function as a form of ethical persuasion that reinforces community fairness and authenticity.

5.1. Infrastructural Value Alignment:

Cara's Policy-Based Ethics

Cara is a new social platform (launched 2023) built explicitly 'for artists, by artists', and it has quickly become a testbed for ethical design principles in action (Fig. 4). Unlike mainstream art-sharing sites, Cara's defining stance is an ethical one: it staunchly opposes AI-generated art and the misuse of artists' work for AI training. In practice, this means Cara implements features and policies

to protect user autonomy and intellectual labor, which is a sharp contrast to big platforms that often treat user content as a free resource. For instance, Cara automatically adds 'No AI' metadata tags to every image upload to discourage scraping by AI models. It outright bans AI-generated images in portfolios and forbids using any content on the site to train AI without consent. Another collaboration is working by an anti-AI filter called Glaze (Fig. 5), with its outstanding feature is to fool generative AI into thinking that source images have properties that are different from a person's eye view, making the digital artwork useless to the AI program. These principled decisions align the platform's values with its users' values: many artists are deeply anxious about algorithm performance and the tendency of mining their creations without permission.

Beyond AI issues, Cara's scheme design also mimics familiar social media functions (feeds, follows) but prioritises community and well-being. There are no inscrutable algorithms manipulating what artists see: users can customize their home feed (Fig. 6) and see posts chronologically or based on their chosen preferences. The services of monetization are aligned with users' needs (e.g. optional job boards and portfolio features) rather than exploiting attention through ads. The key lesson is that persuasion and loyalty can be achieved ethically: Cara persuades artists to join and share human-generated content, but by tangibly demonstrating it values their creative rights and long-term trust with autonomy. By building ethical policies against AI misuse as a benchmark, it supports users to share authentically in both mindset and work on Cara community, by alleviating the fear and friction they feel elsewhere.

5.2. De-Escalation: Are.na's Anti-Metric Architecture

Are.na takes a markedly different approach from mainstream social networks to ensure an anxiety-free reflective space. With no 'like' buttons (Fig. 7), no follower counts, no algorithmic feed, and no ads [48], it is often dubbed 'the social network antithesis' [50]. Founded in 2011 as a creative research and bookmarking tool, Are.na has steadily cultivated a niche but dedicated community of artists, designers, and thinkers. Its philosophy is prioritised to be a 'mindful space' for collaborative knowledge-building rather than an attention silo. Instead of vanity metrics, Are.na focuses on content and connections, such as

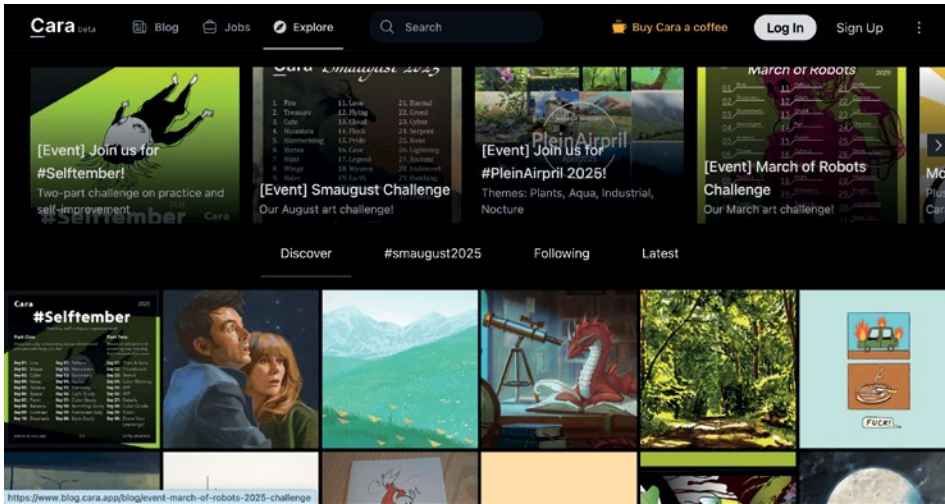


Fig. 4 Screenshot of Cara's Exploring Page Illustrating Social Feed. Source: [46].



Fig. 5 Explanation of Glaze AI-blocking tool. Source: [47].

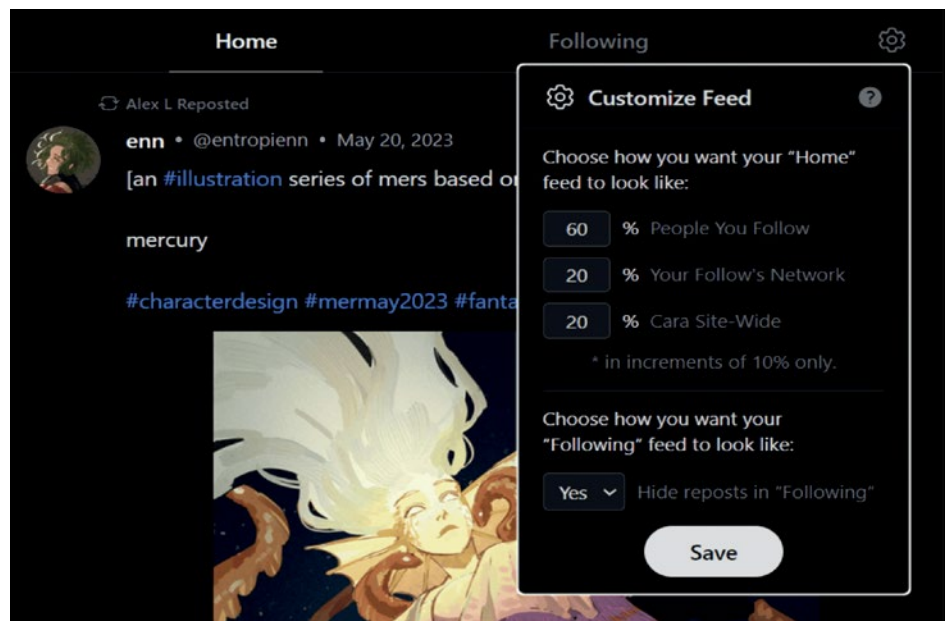


Fig. 6 Screenshot of Cara Feed. Source: [47].

users saved images, links, and ideas into thematic channels and collaborate freely.

The absence of recommendation feeds reduces anxieties like FOMO, virality, and social comparison [48]. Are.na subtly encourages participation through intrinsic rewards through raising satisfaction levels of curating ideas in a quiet, non-competitive space. As the team explains, the goal is to give users “more control over their digital footprints” and to promote exploration “on their own terms”, fostering long-term curiosity over dopamine-fueled engagement [48].

In practice, regarded as ‘a tool for thinking together’ that builds around shared inquiry [48], Are.na functions more like a collaborative studio

or digital library opposed as social feed. Ethically, it exemplifies pro-social persuasive design: while enhancing thoughtful curation and collaboration in a respectful way, it diligently avoids addictive dynamics, using natural stopping points rather than endless scroll. The platform’s user loyalty, though modest in scale, proves that quality-oriented, user-respecting design can sustain community over time.

5.3. Curatorial Legitimacy: i-D’s Editorial Validation Model

i-D reveals a unique perspective as a media platform that has long championed emerging creative voices. i-D Magazine, founded in 1980, brands itself as ‘a global platform for emerging talent, celebrating fashion, culture, individuality and youth’, considered as a precedent for creator-focused spaces. While primarily a publication, recently revitalized in both print and digital formats after its acquisition by new ownership, its curatorial approach models ethical platform design through editorial integrity [51]. Over four decades, i-D’s editorial ethic emphasizes authenticity, subcultures, and avant-garde expression, building a community through cultural credibility rather than algorithmic manipulation. For young creatives, being featured by i-D confers authentic validation: the quality recognition grounded in curatorial selection, not social media virality. For instance, inclusion in ‘Ones to Watch’ (Fig. 8) lists is perceived as a signal of originality and creative legitimacy. This model aligns with ethical persuasion: i-D inspires rather than manipulates, drawing audiences not with dopamine-triggering scroll mechanics but with human-curated stories that resonate with identity and aspiration.

Equally significant is its adoption of a slow-reading interface (Fig. 9), encouraging engagement with long-form, immersive

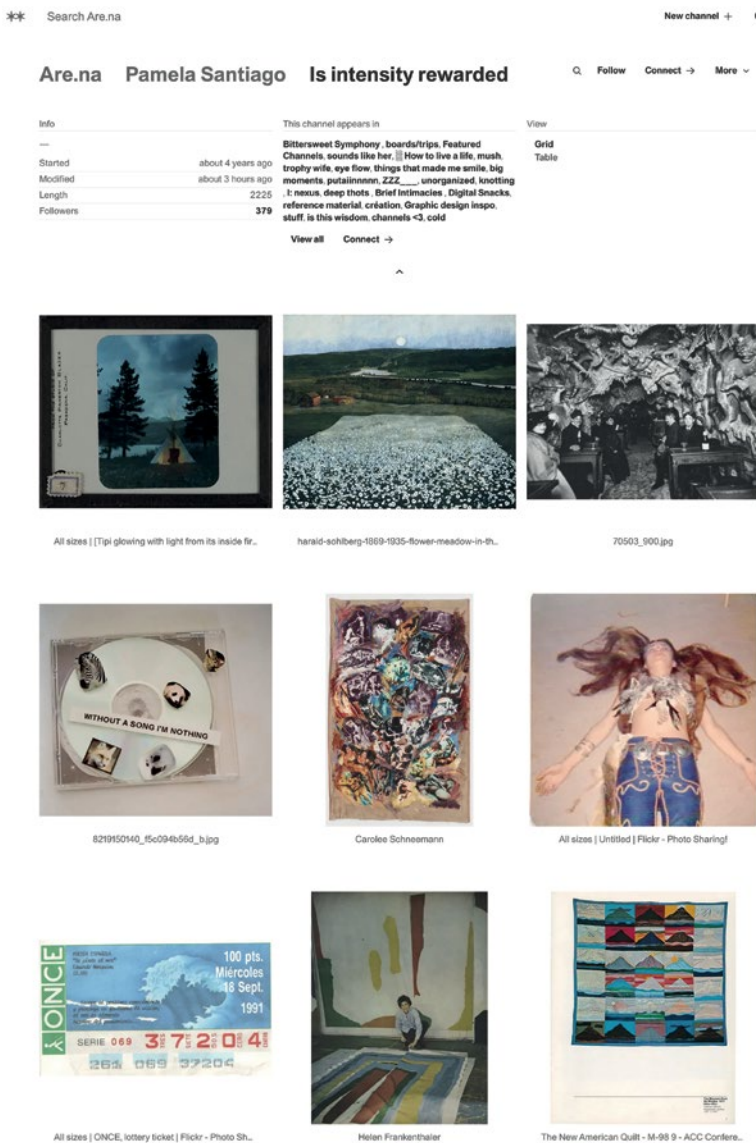


Fig. 7 Screenshot of Are.na Interface showing no algorithmic feed (2025). Source: [50].

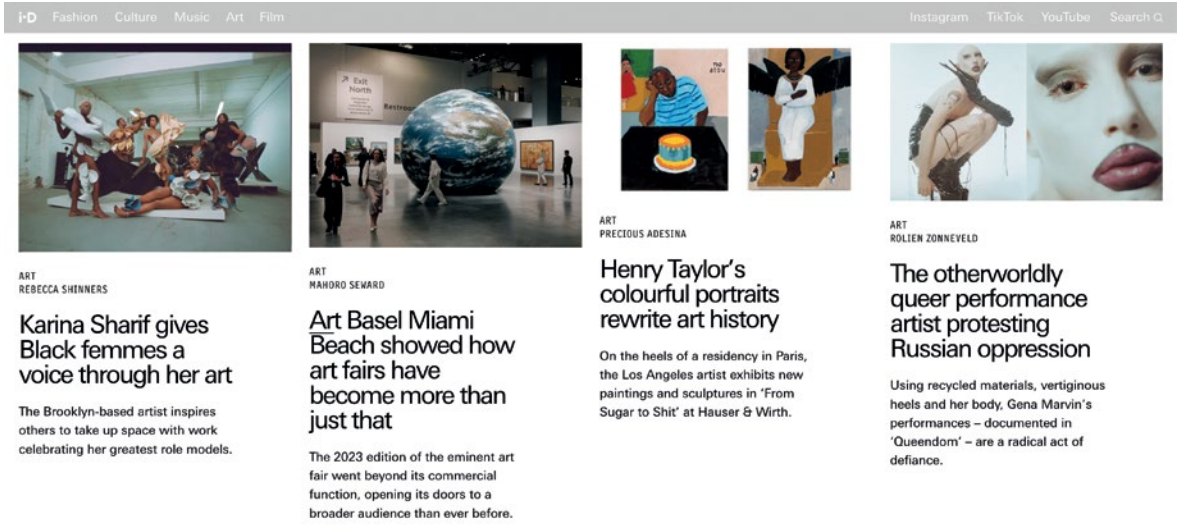


Fig. 8 Ones in Watch Series of Reading (2025). Source: [52].

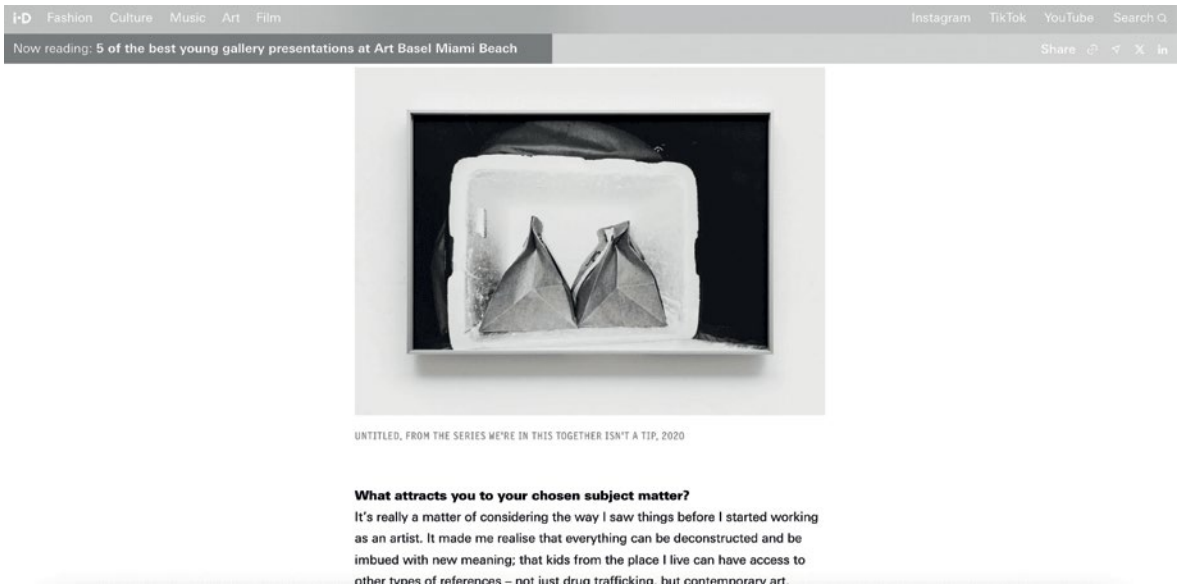


Fig. 9 Screenshot of Slow-reading Interface(2025). Source: [53].

editorial reels instead of algorithmically ranked, bite-sized content. This deliberate design fosters deep, sustained attention, inviting readers to linger with both visual and textual stories while resisting the distraction-driven patterns of mainstream platforms. The loyalty i-D has cultivated highlights the power of a platform that values talent, substance, and trust over virality [51].

Taken together, these platforms offer viable alternatives to the virality-first logic that dominates mainstream social networks under the applied ethics in design system. Insights from the visual research phase were translated into concrete visual guidelines that shape the frame-

work's ethical orientation. These include the use of generous whitespace, neutral backgrounds, and clear typographic hierarchy to produce cognitive calm; the removal of likes, rankings, and follower counts in favor of narrative signals such as "added to collections" or "discussed in." The layout system is modular and narrative-driven, combining image-first and text-rich tiles with natural stopping points to counter infinite-scroll fatigue. Navigation prioritizes thematic and depth-first exploration over trend-based or algorithmic curation, supported by non-coercive interaction cues such as soft prompts and opt-in reveals. Collectively, these principles establish

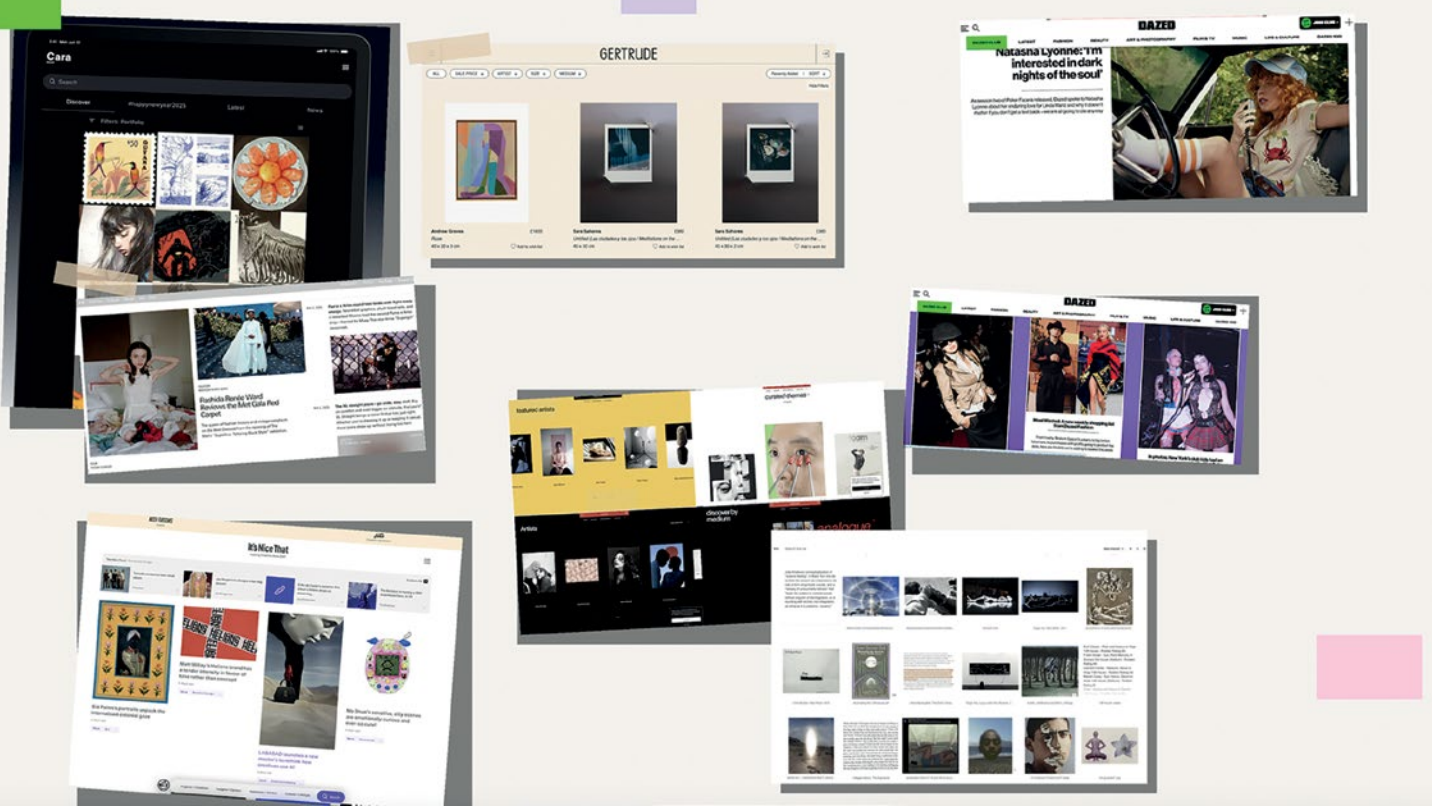


Fig. 10 Visual Moodboard. Source: [54].

a slow, intentional, and inclusive visual direction for the design framework.

6. Synthesizing an Ethical Framework

This section synthesizes these fragmented constructs and continued insights into a unified framework operationalizing ethical platform design for conceptual artists. The resulting Value-Reflection-Community (VRC) model constitutes theoretical innovation across dimensions: reconceptualizing platform ethics from harm reduction to capacity cultivation, integrating behavioral psychology with epistemology, and operationalizing abstract principles into concrete design interventions.

6.1. Theoretical Integration and Innovation

The conceptual framework VRC's architecture comprises three interdependent pillars responding directly to structural pathologies:

Pillar 1: Value-Aligned Showcase addresses concept devaluation by inverting platform presentation hierarchies. Where conventional systems privilege visual spectacle, VRC embeds concept-first presentation: portfolio architectures guiding artists to articulate theoretical frameworks, intellectual influences, and philo-

sophical contexts before visual documentation. This operationalizes PSD's Outcomes proposition and SDT's autonomy principle through what can be termed epistemic scaffolding – interface prompts structured around intellectual inquiry („What theoretical problem does this address? What thinkers inform this work?") rather than engagement optimization. Discovery mechanisms curate via theoretical alignment that connects artists investigating similar conceptual frameworks rather than algorithmic popularity. The innovation lies in systematically prioritizing ideas over images within platform architecture, materializing the epistemological values conceptual practice requires.

Pillar 2: Critical Reflection addresses intellectual compromise by embedding temporal structures accommodating thinking's actual rhythms. Drawing on slow technology principles and reflective practice theory, this pillar introduces productive friction: a posting delay requiring theoretical contextualization, posting caps preventing content treadmill, de-emphasized engagement metrics replaced by conceptual development tracking. Private intellectual journals document theoretical reading, failed concepts, and evolving frameworks separate from public presentation.

The theoretical contribution lies in reconceptualizing ‘successful platform use’ from continuous visible activity to discontinuous intellectual consolidation – legitimizing where Section 4.2.4 termed productive invisibility.

Pillar 3: Upward Community Connections addresses validation collapse by architecting intellectual communities: bounded intellectual spaces organized around shared conceptual frameworks rather than aesthetic similarity or popularity metrics. Curated entry requires theoretical statements demonstrating conceptual seriousness; mentorship matching connects early-career artists with established thinkers based on shared intellectual terrain; collaborative tools facilitate reading groups, theory discussions, and rigorous critique rather than performative affirmation. This synthesizes communities of practice theory with SDT’s relatedness needs and Are.na’s metric elimination, creating what can be termed intellectual bonding capital, deep ties enabling vulnerable theoretical exchange impossible within broadcast-oriented platforms.

6.2. Interconnections

The framework’s theoretical innovation lies not in discrete pillars but their mutually reinforcing relationships. Value-aligned presentation (Pillar 1) identifies artists’ intellectual commitments, which inform reflection prompts (Pillar 2): “Since you value phenomenological inquiry, how does this work engage embodied experience?” Reflection reveals conceptual gaps and triggers community connections (Pillar 3) with scholars engaging similar frameworks. Community critique feeds reflective practice with external perspectives, deepening intellectual sophistication. Refined thinking enhances portfolio presentation, attracting theoretically aligned audiences, strengthening community discourse quality. This creates virtuous intellectual cycles: each pillar amplifies others’ capacity to support sustained conceptual development.

Critically, VRC architecture embeds anti-extractive defaults: intrinsic motivation protection through metric de-emphasis, meta-autonomy through algorithmic opt-out mechanisms, invisible labor recognition through theoretical development tracking, temporal accommodation through posting caps and reflection requirements. These design decisions instantiate ethical principles identified

in Section 4 – transparency, autonomy, value alignment – within technical infrastructure rather than leaving them as aspirational guidelines.

6.3. Theoretical Contributions

This research advances three contributions. First, it distinguishes conceptual artists’ platform vulnerabilities from general creator populations, identifying how algorithmic logics privileging visual spectacle over theoretical complexity produce concept devaluation, intellectual compromise, and cognitive colonization. Second, it synthesizes persuasive systems design, self-determination theory, reflective practice, and communities of practice into the Value – Reflection – Community (VRC) model. This is a cornerstone of abstract ethical principles into concrete design interventions: epistemic scaffolding, productive friction mechanisms, intellectual communities, and metric de-emphasis. Third, it theoretize feasibility to inform practice-led research, producing future prototypes that prove non-extractive platforms can operationalize ethical commitments.

At its core, the framework integrates ethical persuasion, loyalty-based design, reflective practice, and community grounding into one coherent architecture. It directly addresses conceptual artists’ needs while resisting the extractive defaults of platform capitalism. The following sections translate these principles into tangible design forms of interface affordances, algorithmic alternatives, and interaction patterns for a genuinely non-extractive online community.

7. Methodology

The research adopts a practice-led, design-based methodology grounded in ethical UX principles, persuasive system design (PSD), and critical design thinking. The structure of the research follows a four-phase integrated design process: 1) Theoretical framework mapping; 2) Contextual self-reflection insights of autoethnography; 3) Usability testing, and 4) Critical evaluation & framework consolidation. The primary specifics of Phase II-IV assess the theoretical ethics (autonomy, transparency, motivation, and value alignment) into practical design outputs.

7.1. Methodology Overview

Throughout the research, the methodology employed the 6 phases of design thinking in con-

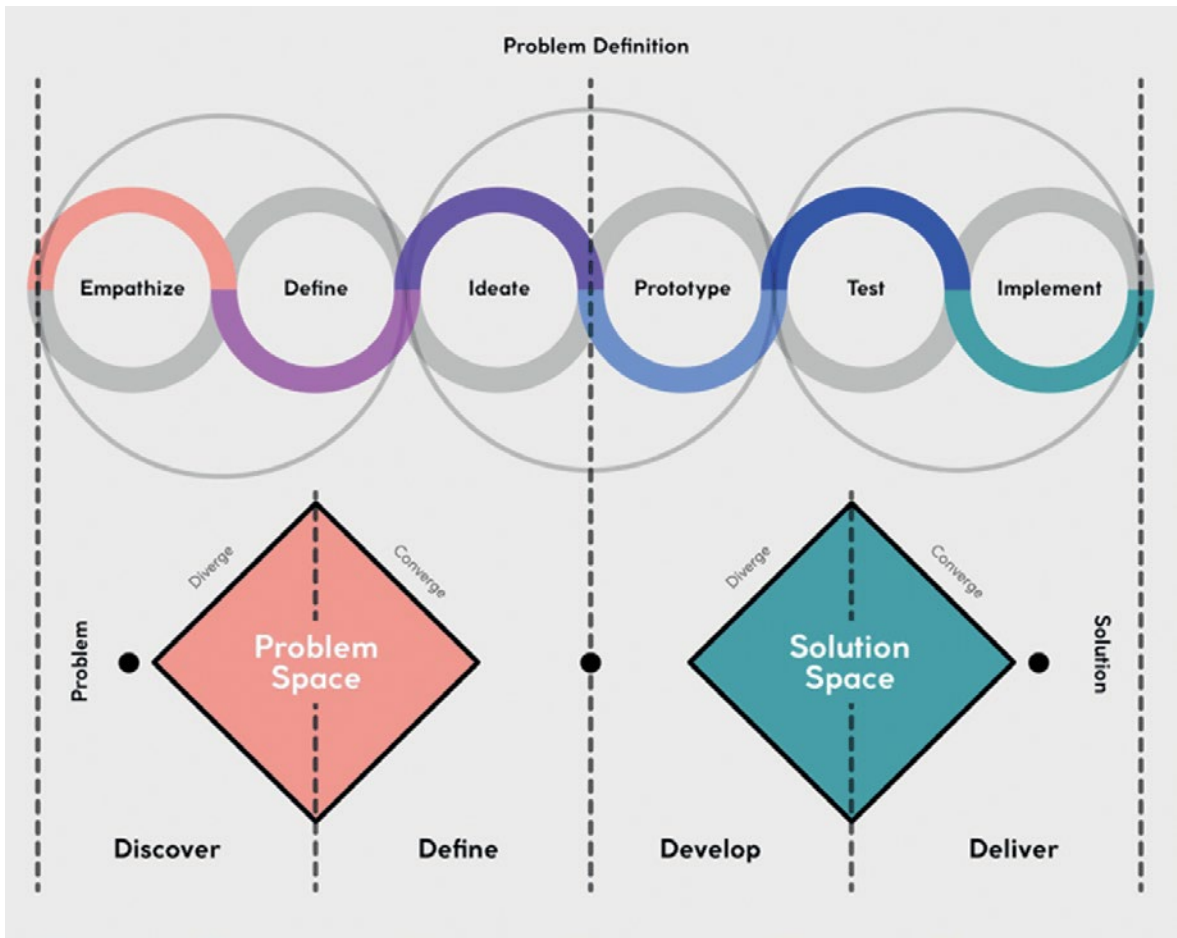


Fig. 11 Double Diamond and the 6 Phases of Design Thinking. Source: [55].

junction with the Double Diamond strategy (Fig. 11), from empathising with the audience and market, defining the core problems, and gathering ideation insights through autoethnographic reflection; This was followed by iterative stages of prototyping, usability testing, and finally implementing the deliverables in the form of a UX persuasive framework. The research adheres rigorously to design integrity to facilitate iterative choices and cycles of problem identification. The findings are structured to serve as useful tools for UX/UI designers, platform developers, system architects, and other stakeholders interested in developing ethically sound, artist-centered digital experiences.

The following is the holistic research process flowchart, informed by the ‘6 Design Thinking Phases with Integrated Double Diamond’ [54], to respond accordingly to timeline, phase division, and corresponding tasks to finish in each design phase. A detailed research framework is visuali-

sed in Fig. 12 and will be expounded in the following sections.

Phase I (Preliminary Reviews and Planning): this phase of secondary research maps theoretical analysis across platformisation case studies, digital self-branding, creative wellbeing, and ethical UX design persuasion frameworks as potential alternatives to current platform norms. Followed by the literature reviews, the following sequential phases will be implemented as described below.

Phase II (Self-Reflexive Practitioner Inquiry) aims to generate situated, embodied knowledge through a reflexive, design-led methodology. Conducted during an overseas research period, this phase brings together the researcher’s critical ideation logs, co-created 10-day participant diaries, and comparative interviews with early-career artists in the UK and China. These activities foster both internal reflection and participant-driven insight, grounding the design process in

lived creative realities. The culmination of this inquiry will be a set of evidence-informed wireframes and key user flows for a minimum viable prototype (MVP), developed through continuous reflective journaling. The process supports an ethics-aligned, culturally responsive design practice that bridges personal experience with broader user needs.

Phase III (Qualitative Participant Research): integrates primary participant research through a structured usability testing of individual, facilitator-led usability sessions. Early-career artists will be selected and meet 1-on-1 with the researcher, who will guide them through a series of goal-oriented tasks on the MVP prototypes. While introducing each task, the researcher as the host observes neutrally, then conducts a brief post-task interview on ease, clarity, and ethical fit. Data collected include task-completion rates, time, error counts, observational notes, and satisfaction ratings. These evaluated metrics will be cross-checked against Phase II autoethnographic insights to surface mismatches or overlooked pain points, ensuring the prototype honours ethical persuasion propositions.

Phase IV (Analysis & Refinement): continues with iterative evaluation and refinement of the prototype. Insights are consolidated through documentation analysis tools along with the development of a holistic user journey map and system map based on usability testing. These methods support the synthesis of key findings and culminate in the articulation of final insights and the delivery of a framework-ready structural design.

Below is a more detailed outline of each phase to provide a clearer understanding of their key sectors and significance.

7.2. Preliminary Reviews and Planning | PHASE I

In this preliminary phase, the literature review brings together insights from platform studies, media theory, digital sociology, behavioral research, and applied ethics. It combines these with industry data and artists' testimonies to establish a strong foundation for the project. The first part explains how platformisation and algorithm-driven self-branding are reshaping early-career artists' practices and wellbeing. Next, the review examines how UX design, especially AI-accelerated persuasion, influences behavior and highlights specific pain points that artists experience on mainstream platforms. To propose grounded

alternatives, the study also reviews market data and case studies of platforms such as Cara, Are.na, and i-D, which show different design strategies in practice. A key section systematically evaluates leading behavior-change models (PSD, Fogg, PET) to identify where they succeed or fail in protecting creative authenticity and community. From this mapping, the review develops four ethical propositions — outcome, transparency, autonomy, and motivation. The outcome of Phase I is a clear framework that highlights existing gaps, justifies an ethical-persuasion and loyalty-driven approach, and sets the criteria for the practice-led prototyping and evaluation in the next phases.

7.3. Self-reflexive Practitioner Inquiry Approach | PHASE II

Phase II centers on gathering situated knowledge through an autoethnographic reflective diary, documenting ideation and early concept development in the researcher's dual role as emerging artist and UX practitioner. From August to December 2025, a five-month fieldwork in China and UK, conducted with an Art Foundation, will provide a context-rich environment for reflection, observation, and practice as a UX associate. A reflective diary/log will capture ideation, critique, and design processes leading to a functional web-based MVP, with monthly submissions to the supervisor at ADM, NTU.

To operationalize this self-reflexive inquiry, Phase II is structured into four interrelated components: (1) Reflexive Design Journaling, (2) Comparative Cross-Cultural Interviews, (3) 10-Day Solicited Participant Diaries, and (4) Wireframe and MVP Development, together enabling multi-perspective reflection and triangulated data.

7.3.1. Reflexive Design Journaling

In this study, the researcher assumes a dual role: both as a UX designer prototyping a digital platform and as a reflexive researcher conducting ethnographically informed inquiry. To sustain this reflective stance, a structured Reflexive Design Journal will be maintained throughout the design process, with a minimum of two entries per week during active phases such as ideation, wireframing, and usability feedback loops.

Each entry will be dated, tagged (e.g., #trust, #issues, #platformisation), and structured to include five elements: Context (e.g., design decisions, meetings, or user feedback), Reflection (what was felt, noticed, or questioned), Tensions (ethi-

RESEARCH ABSTRACT

TITLE: ETHICAL UX BEYOND VIRALITY: A STUDY OF ETHICAL PERSUASION IN COMMUNITY-CENTRIC PLATFORMS FOR EARLY-CAREER ARTISTS

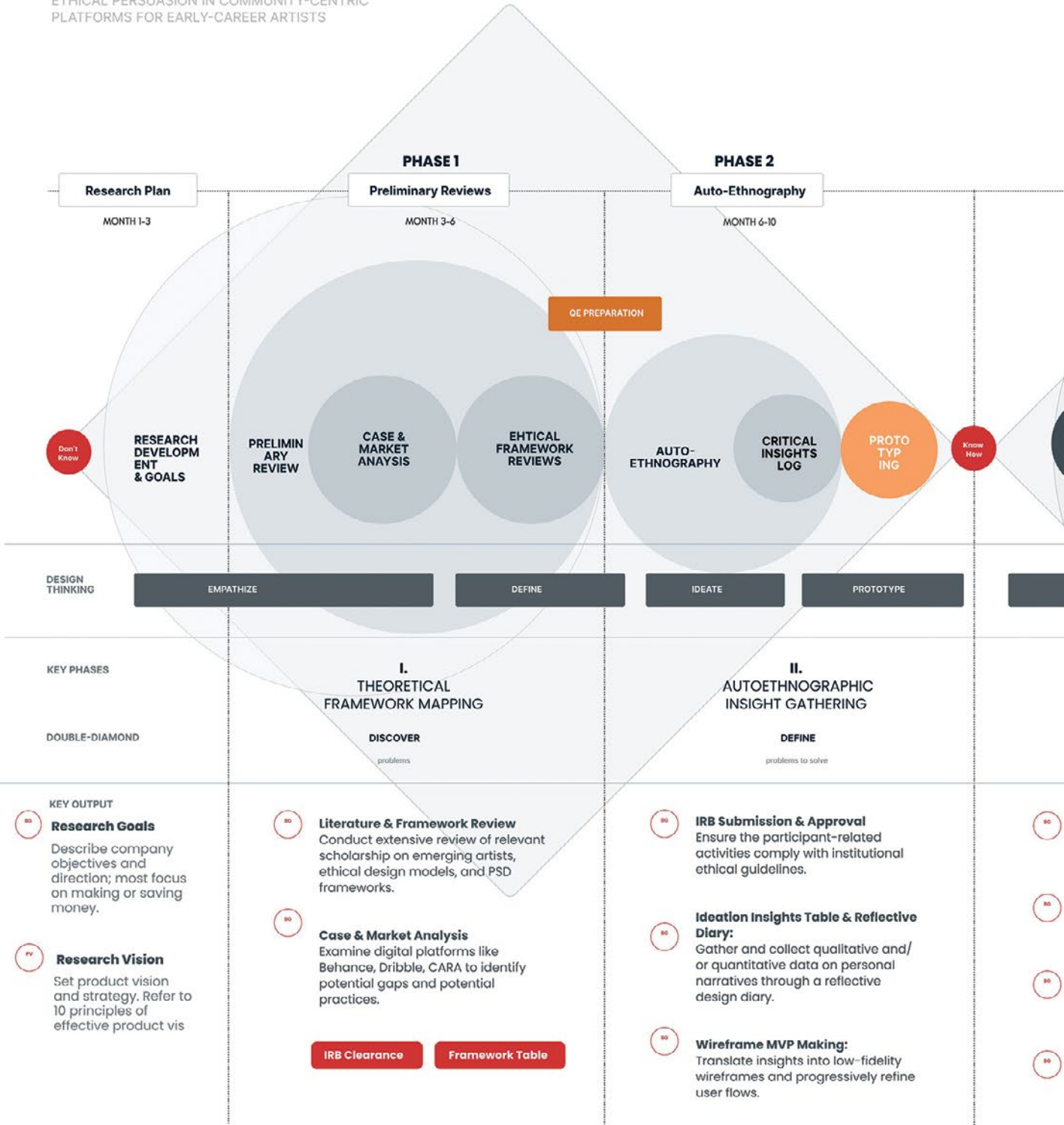
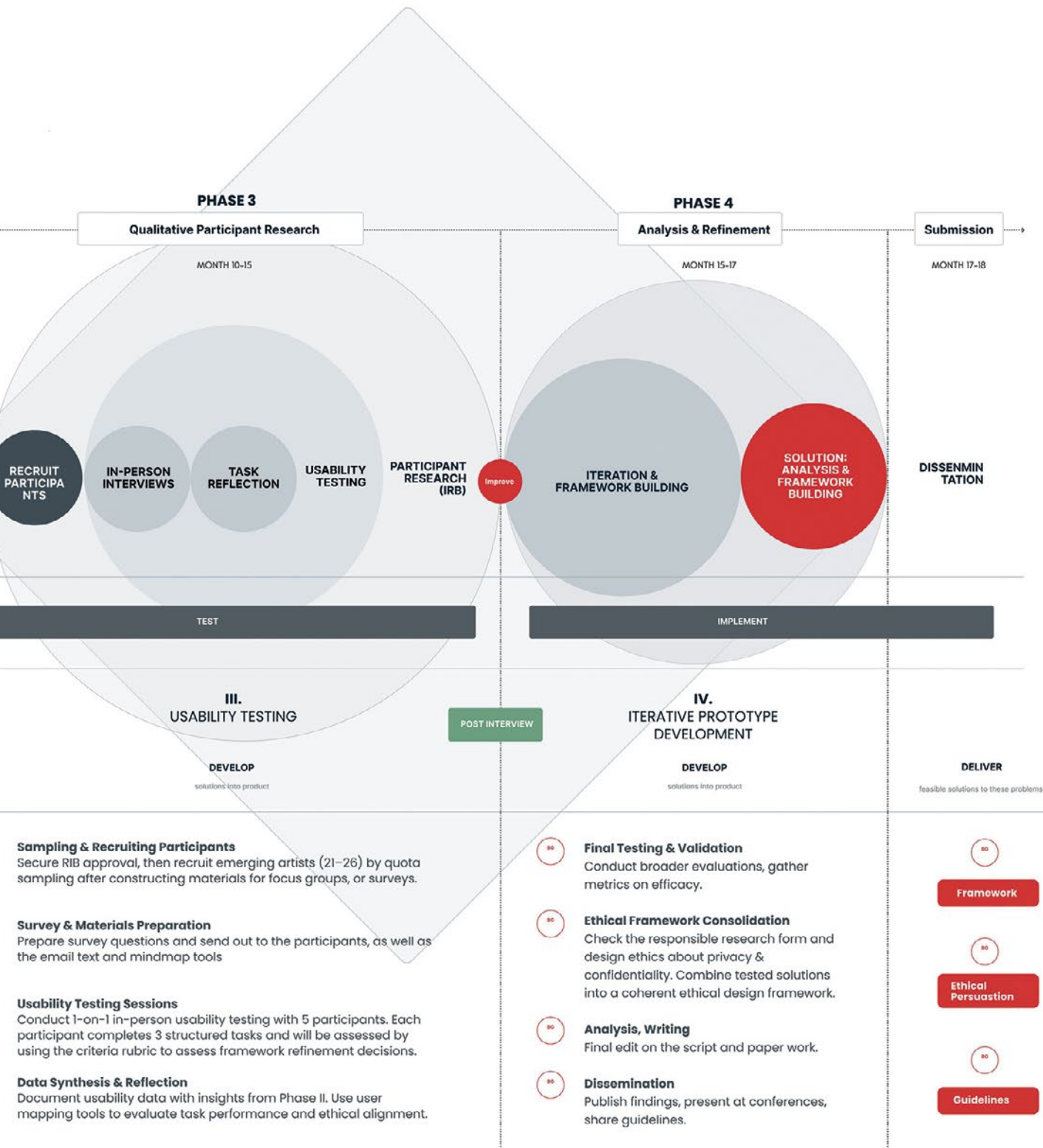


Fig. 12 Research Framework. Source: [56].



cal, aesthetic, or institutional conflicts), Implications (adjustments or new ideas arising), and an Alignment Check (how the activity relates to the four ethical principles of persuasion). Special attention will be given to three analytical contexts: (1) how personal values and ethical priorities are challenged or reinforced in design, (2) how institutional forces in the UK and China, such as time, hierarchy, or resource constraints, shape UX decisions, and (3) how embedded observation during collaboration and journey mapping reveals gaps between theoretical frameworks and applied practice. The journal will allow for diverse forms of input, including sketches, annotated screenshots, and quotations from internal discussions. Its key functions are to act as a situated trace of how theory meets design in practice, guide transitions from low-fidelity to higher-fidelity prototyping by identifying cultural differences, usability uncertainties, and ethical dilemmas, and support comparative analysis by showing how design decisions evolve through lived and reflective experience. The journal contributes to the foundation of persuasive UX user flows and key design decisions, ensuring that the final MVP embodies both rigorous reflection and practical application.

7.3.2. Comparative Cross-Cultural Interviews

The key component of Phase II is a comparative cross-cultural study that anchors a set of interviews with 2-4 early-career craft artists based in two different cultural contexts (the UK and China). The motivation for this component is to broaden the perspective of the inquiry and examine how cultural and institutional contexts shape the interplay between artistic trajectories and digital platforms. Many issues identified in diaries (e.g., self-promotion discomfort or seeking validation online) may manifest differently across cultures due to varying social norms, market structures, and support systems for artists. Thus, by conducting in-depth interviews in two distinct settings, the research can contextualize and contrast the findings, enhancing the robustness of the conclusions.

7.3.3. Semi-structured Question Glossary List

Each interview will be semi-structured, following a flexible guide of themes rather than a rigid questionnaire. This approach ensures consistency in covering key topics while allowing each conversation to flow naturally and surface the interviewee's unique experiences.

The interview guide is informed by earlier phases (surveys and diaries) and is organized around several core themes central to the research questions. These include in the glossary of questions will evolve and expand from any informative findings during Phase II:

Platform Use & Posting Habits: How artists engage with platforms-frequency, type of content shared, strategies for visibility, and attitudes toward posting.

Emotional Comfort & Exposure: Their comfort with being visible online; feelings of vulnerability when sharing; how they deal with critique, silence, or rejection.

Career Pathways & Livelihood: How artists pursue careers, and how online presence supports or hinders income, opportunities, and professional identity.

Validation Sources: Differences between online validation (likes, comments, follows) and offline validation (gallery shows, critique, community recognition).

Cultural Views on Self-Promotion: How cultural norms shape self-promotion-whether seen as entrepreneurial or as arrogance, and how artists navigate this.

Visibility vs. Vulnerability: Trade-offs between visibility (opportunity, recognition) and risks (judgment, copying, trolling), and strategies artists use to cope.

Post-Graduation Transition & Support: How recent graduates navigate the shift into professional life, including institutional support gaps and the role of digital platforms in filling them.

7.4. Wireframe prototyping and MVP Development

Following above findings, I will begin translating insights into low-fidelity wireframes and progressively refine them toward a minimum viable prototype (MVP). This will be critically informed from the Reflexive Design Journal, Comparative Interviews & Solicited Diaries. This design process will prioritise several components, while staying iterative across different stage. Firstly, it will develop the key user flows that reflect artist values surfaced in the creative institution (e.g., non-algorithmic discovery of artists, user-based process sharing, opt-in autonomy). Secondly, it maps out the modular, ethical interaction components, such as feedback without performative pressure, visible privacy controls, and creative

milestones. Lastly, scenarios that capture emotional decision points will also be demonstrated, such as ‘publish vs save in private studio’, or ‘opt in to shared curation’. Each design choice will be annotated with its ethical rationale, supported by field insights and reflections from both my lived practice and theoretical findings.

7.5. Qualitative Participant Research | PHASE III

7.5.1. Participant Sampling

This study will adopt Winstanley (2023)’s Purposeful Homogeneous Sampling (PHS) method to recruit participants who share key characteristics relevant to the research objectives. All selected individuals will be emerging conceptual creatives with direct experience in artistic practices both as users or both with a comparable range of age (typically 21-26 years), in alignments of this study on digital platform interaction on the part of conceptual artists. PHS is used in this context to support the particular purpose of the study: to examine shared challenges and perspectives among participants who are at a comparable career stage and operate within similar creative and digital environments.

7.5.2. Sample Size and Selection Criteria

While PHS will be applied, selection criteria are:

- N = 5 participants for usability testing,
- Full/part-time, studio-based conceptual artists in art, design, interaction design, or digital media,
- Actively use digital platforms (e.g., Instagram, Behance) to share/distribute work,
- Aged 21-26, representing early-career creatives in their first decade of professional practices,
- Basic-intermediate knowledge of UX/interface design (via coursework, projects, or platform use).

Gender, age (within range), and race are not exclusion criteria; diversity is encouraged. Geographic origin is open, as the study focuses on shared user experience. A sample of 5 ensures depth, feasibility, and rich data for focus groups and usability testing.

7.5.3. Usability Testing

To properly scale the research method, a round of focused usability testing is leveraged alongside the auto-ethnographic reflections. Referred to guidelines in the Interaction Design Foundation

site, there are 5 structured steps to facilitate the implementation of the whole testing process.

Define

The usability testing aims to determine whether the prototype fundamentally helps early-career artists feel supported and authentically expressive within a peer community. The goals of successful testing are: (1) gauge the perceived impact of key features on creative wellbeing and narrative depth, (2) identify persisting pain points the design must conquer, (3) decide if the current work-in-progress is mature enough to advance to framework refinement, and (4) surface any major adjustments or missing elements required for the next iteration. All findings will be interpreted through the viewpoint of the ethical-persuasion propositions and user loyalty.

Decision

In-person sessions will be conducted, each lasting ~45 minutes. The scope for the testing is to test usability with ethical persuasion perspective on post feed, feedback & discussion, social connection building within artist-centric community.

Tasks

During the testing, the researcher will act as the host and facilitator. While observing, participants complete task scenarios and give feedback that mirror their experiential workflows but also emotional status, testing the platform’s persuasive ethics in 3 prototype sections of a) Portfolio Album Sharing & Collection, b) Discussion Topic Board, and c) Social Feed + Connection Board List with 3 scenario-based tasks accordingly:

1. Authentic Post Sharing: To upload a new work-in-progress, decide whether to publish it publicly or save it to a private collection, and describe the reasoning.
2. Slow-Paced, Quality Community: To read a peer’s post in full and leave a considered comment that advances the discussion.
3. Network You Choose: To customize the feed by selecting preferred themes, then follow at least two artists whose work resonates.

Recruit

A screening survey was developed to assemble a diverse sample of emerging artists for the usability study. The instrument contained 18 items structured into four domains: (1) demographic

and identity information, (2) artistic practice and mediums, (3) platform use patterns and challenges, and (4) attitudes toward algorithmic visibility, authenticity, and platform trust. Participants identified their creative disciplines (e.g., conceptual art, illustration, photography), typical mediums, and the digital platforms they use to showcase or manage their work.

To assess creators' relationships with platform dynamics, the survey included Likert-scale items measuring pressure to optimize content algorithmically, the influence of engagement metrics on creative decisions, perceived emotional support, and trust in visibility mechanisms. Participants also ranked common challenges (e.g., gaining visibility, receiving fair feedback, maintaining motivation, avoiding burnout). The instrument concluded with open-ended questions that invited participants to describe frustrations, define what constitutes a "trustworthy" and "artist-

-friendly" platform, and suggest features to add or remove. Collectively, these responses informed the sampling criteria and provided early qualitative signals about the ethical and experiential concerns shaping artists' platform practices. Five emerging conceptual artists will be recruited based on the selection criteria, with invitation email attached with participant consent form.

Facilitate/Moderate

Testing occurs in a relaxed studio space with the prototype on a laptop and sketch materials nearby. After reconfirming verbal consent, participants are encouraged to think aloud while tasks are timed and screen-recorded. Post-task mini-interviews capture perceptions of ease, clarity, ethical fit, and emotion. As shown in Table 1, their reactions will be specifically scored with the six-dimension rubric covering 5 assessing dimensions that mapped to the four ethical propo-

Tab. 4 Prototype-Perceived Success Rubric for Emerging Artists.

Dimensions	Key Question	1 – 2 (poor)	3 (good)	4 – 5 (Strong)	Proposition Tags
A. Safe Community Zone	Does the interface create a psychologically safe space for trial-and-error?	Few/no guard-rails for failure; immediate public exposure; no opt-outs	Some privacy controls; basic content warnings; limited cooldowns	Granular visibility (draft / peer-only / public); optional cooldown before comments; clear norms of respectful critique	P2 Outcome P4 Autonomy P6 Motivation
B. Ethical Friction	Does the system slow users enough to encourage reflection?	Infinite scroll, real-time counts, rapid reaction prompts	Scroll has natural stops; light prompts to pause	Chunked feeds, article-length scroll reels; no vanity metrics	P2 Outcome P5 Transparency P6 Motivation
C. Quality Feedback	Does feedback move beyond like-counts to informed dialogue?	Only likes or emoji; no context	Comments allowed but shallow; limited prompts	Structured critique templates, taggable feedback types, private peer notes	P2 Outcome P4 Autonomy P5 Transparency P6 Motivation
D. Upward Social Ties	Does the platform foster mentorship & meaningful connections?	Random follow lists; no discovery of peers/mentors	Basic search & follow; occasional suggested users	Curated 'connect' suggestions by theme/skill; mentor request feature; collaborative boards	P2 Outcome P4 Autonomy P6 Motivation
E. Authentic, Value-Aligned Expression	Does the UX/UI allow depth over virality?	Character limits; emphasis on trending tags	Medium detail fields; optional captions	Rich process reflection, long-form posts, multi-narratives; trending	P2 Outcome P4 Autonomy P5 Transparency P6 Motivation
F. Sustainability & Usability of Practice	Does use feel helpful, usable, and engaging rather than exhausting?	Feel pressured to post; visible streaks; Unethical perception	Neutral workload; occasional prompts	Flexibility, wellbeing contents or reminders, zero-growth anxiety cues	P2 Outcome P4 Autonomy P5 Transparency P6 Motivation

(Each dimension scored 1 - 5, where 1 = poor / 5 = excellent). Source: own work.

Tips for Moderating Usability Tests

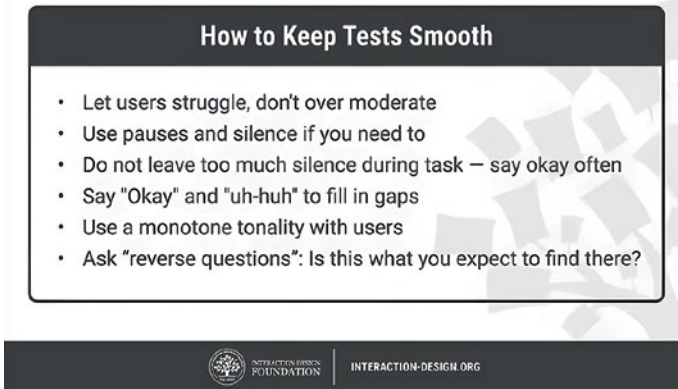


Fig. 13 Usability Test Tips (2025). Source: [57].

situations shown in Table 2. Concurrently, quantitative metrics (completion, retention rates, errors, time) and qualitative notes (fulfillment, attitude, confusion points) will also be taken down to be triangulated against Phase II self-reflexive practitioner inquiry approach.

Throughout the participant research, the researcher will adhere to testing guidelines and tips (Fig. 13) to ensure research integrity and elicit authentic feedback.

7.6. Analysis & Refinement | PHASE IV

Following the usability testing and autoethnographic inquiry, the research moves to the last but the most crucial stage of synthesis and design refinement. The goal of Phase IV is to critically

evaluate and prioritise the diverse ethical insights gathered from usability testing and translate them into actionable directions for ethical UX design. To support this, a suite of mapping tools will be applied, both serving an analytical function to provide qualitative feedback and decision-informing iterations.

7.6.1. User Journey Map

To capture the comprehensiveness and emerging patterns of user experience, the synthesis of the usability test data collection will employ a User Journey

Map. This is defined as a well-established tool that intuitively illustrates a user's emotional status, goals, and actions across key interaction milestones. This method is foundational in service design and UX research [58] and is especially useful in research focused on systematic experiences, where affective states such as anxiety of algorithmic pressure or creative wellbeing can influence interaction. The journey map of making a mapping wall (Fig. 14) or digital map (Fig. 15) all helps to visualise 'critical moments' when trust, motivation, or loyalty is either enabled or compromised, providing the basis for the project focused on ethical persuasion.

Specifically, the mapping will also be used to detect and assess the evidence of: (1) artists can authentically express their work and personal narratives; (2) successful trust-building and re-

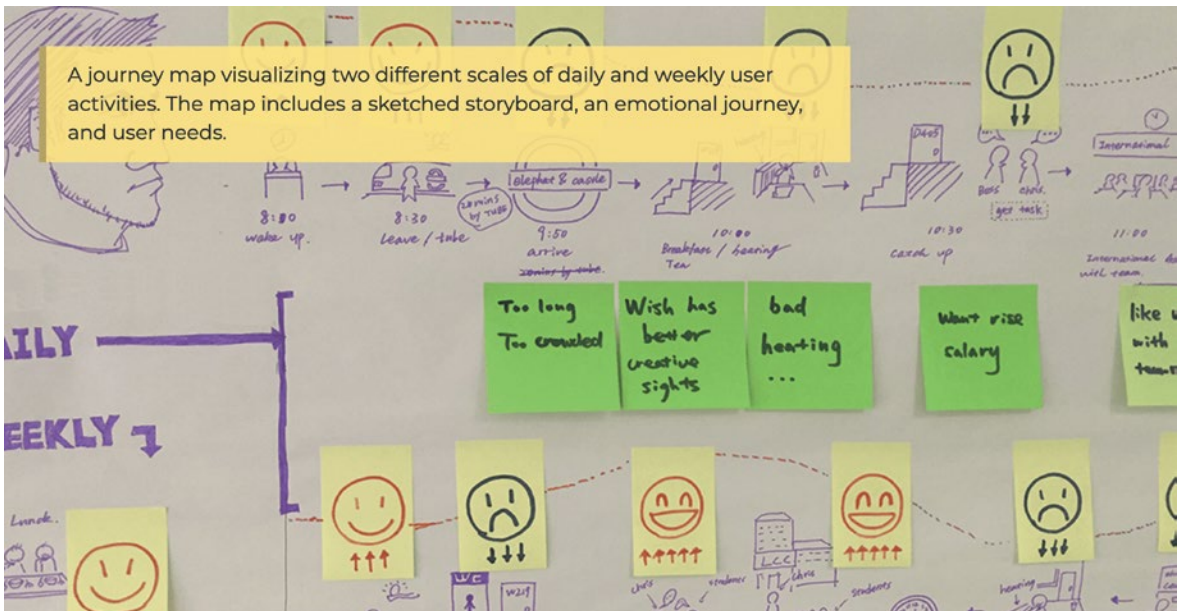


Fig. 14 An Example of Sketching Out User Journey (2025). Source: [59].

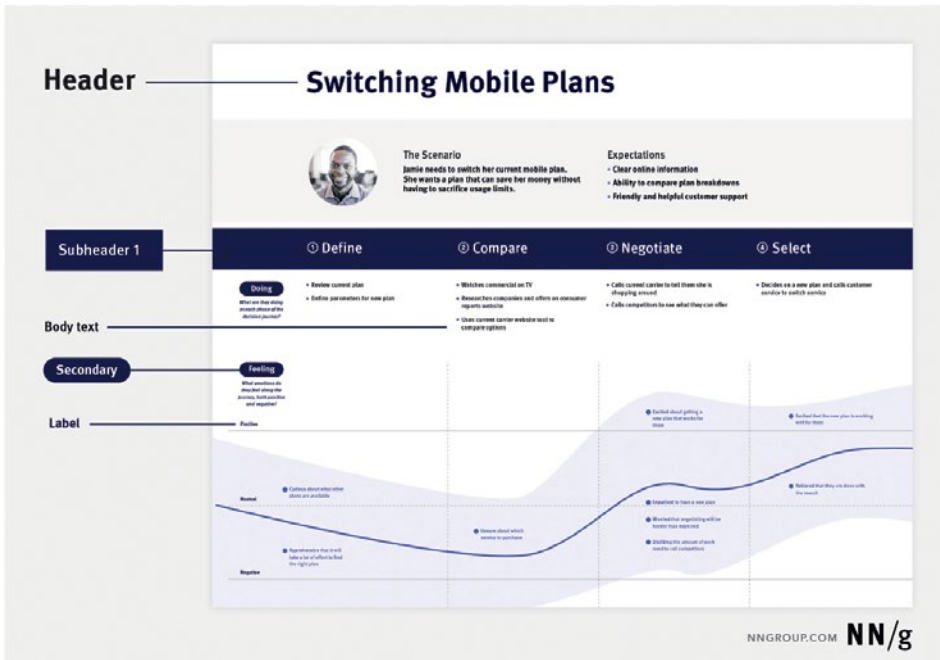


Fig. 15 A Digital Example Applied to a Journey Map. Source: [60].

duction of manipulative or performative pressures; (3) emergence of reflective, community-oriented interactions rooted in artistic integrity; and (4) meaningful protection of intellectual and emotional labor at key decision points.

7.6.2. System Map

To account for the broader cultural and interdisciplinary environment, a System Map is created to visualise the interconnected actors, services, and community-based stakeholders that shape plat-

form use. System mapping, derived from systems thinking and strategic design [61, 62], helps researchers and designers understand the multi-layered factors influencing user experience beyond the interface. The sample system map (Fig. 16) demonstrates how these relational dynamics can be meaningfully visualized to guide strategic and ethical decision-making by illustrating key connections between relational terms. For early-career artists as the audience, the system map mainly responds to 'How might we' questions to ensure that the final synthesis stage is empathetically

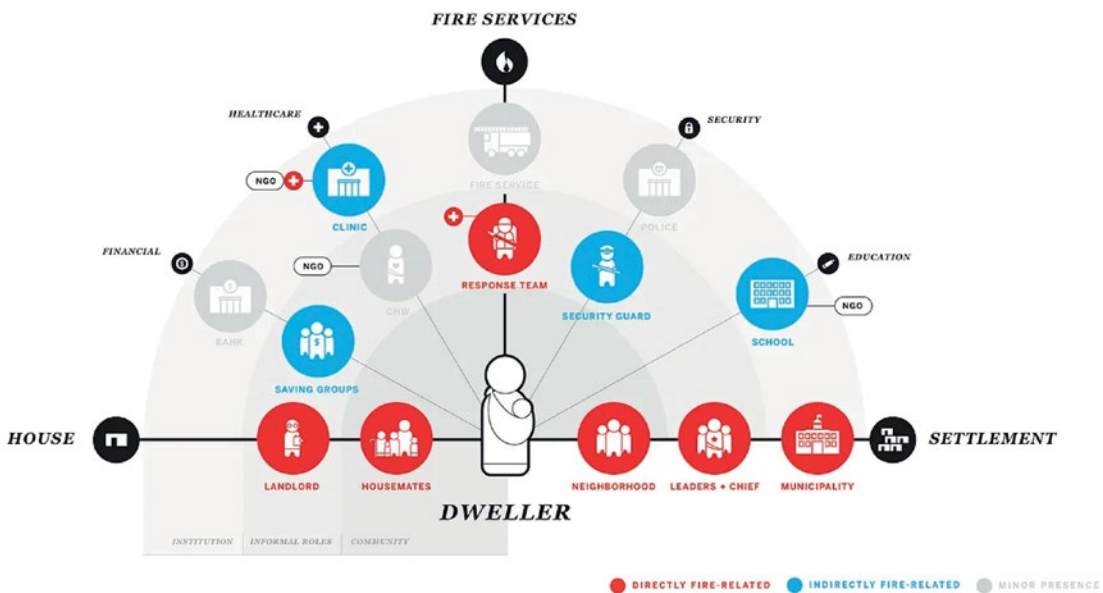


Fig. 16 An Example of Ecosystem map that draws the relations of different stakeholders. Source: [63].

and ethically grounded in prototypes with expected fidelity.

Final indexing will also be leveraged to organize the key insights and facilitate the final iteration of the ethical framework prototype itself. Together, the experience-oriented investigation grounded in recurring patterns and identified evidence can be consolidated.

8. Project Synopsis

This research project presents a practice-led inquiry into the development of an ethical user experience (UX) framework for digital platforms tailored to emerging conceptual artists navigating the tensions of algorithmic visibility, platformization, and digital self-branding. Rooted in critical UX scholarship and persuasive systems design (PSD), the study proposes a shift away from extractive design models that prioritize engagement metrics, toward systems that foreground narrative depth, creative autonomy, and long-term relational loyalty.

The central outcome is a series of functional wireframe prototypes, designed to embody a new form of 'ethical-persuasion and loyalty-driven UX'. These prototypes reject engagement optimization's extractive logics, instead embedding temporal structures accommodating slow thinking, validation systems recognizing invisible intellectual labor, and community architectures cultivating bonding capital through bounded intellectual spaces. The research demonstrates that ethical platforms supporting rather than exploiting conceptual practice are technically feasible – requiring not technological innovation but fundamental value reorientation from capacity extraction to capacity cultivation. By bridging critical platform analysis with constructive design intervention, this study contributes actionable frameworks for designers, institutions, and alternative platform developers committed to sustaining intellectual work's flourishing in the digital age.

Logistical & Operational Details

Equipment and Facilities: The study will use standard equipment and facilities, including a personal laptop, office computer, design softwares and online collaboration platforms. The research will use Microsoft Forms for surveys, Miro & Figma for documentation and idea mapping Otter.ai for audio recording, Figma for prototyping develop-

ment. Usability testing will be conducted in-person while booking a studio space.

Budget Estimates: The projected budget is minimal. Key expenses include overseas research expenses, studio booking, printing materials, stationary supplies, and software subscriptions (Miro, Figma Pro, etc.). Total estimated cost: S\$1200-1500.

Copyright & Clearance: The research is based on original materials and voluntary participant contributions, all of which will be documented with consent. There are no anticipated access issues, as recruitment will occur through existing online artist communities and networks in which the researcher is actively embedded.

Access Considerations: All participants will be emerging conceptual artists aged 21-26, recruited through purposive and quota-informed sampling. Access to participants will be facilitated via university networks, creative community outreach, and snowball sampling when appropriate. Due to the sensitive nature of emotional and creative identity, additional care will be taken to ensure inclusive language, flexible scheduling, and participant autonomy.

Personnel: The project is led by Principal Investigator Associate Professor Lisa Winstanley and Student Principal Investigator Xiao Leyang who is an ADM postgraduate student at NTU with interdisciplinary experience in UX, visual culture, and platform critique. No additional personnel are involved; however, input will be gathered from artists and design peers during participatory phases.

Ethical considerations: The study promises to prioritise user data & confidentiality, user agency, emotional boundaries, and creative autonomy at all stages. By waiting to engage participants until after formal IRB approval, the research demonstrates its commitment to responsible data collection and respectful human-centered inquiry.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates both the urgent necessity and technical feasibility of reimagining platform design through ethical frameworks specifically calibrated for conceptual artists naviga-

ting platformized creative labor. In response to extractive digital systems privileging virality over intellectual depth, this study developed an ethical persuasion and loyalty-driven UX framework challenging prevailing design norms through actionable alternatives grounded in outcome alignment, transparency, autonomy, and motivation.

Through practice-led methodology integrating theoretical synthesis, self-reflexive inquiry, participatory design workshops, and iterative prototyping, the research documented how current platform architectures produce concept devaluation, intellectual compromise, and cognitive colonization among early-career practitioners. The resulting Value-Reflection-Community (VRC) framework operationalizes four ethical propositions – outcomes, autonomy, transparency, motivation – into concrete design interventions: concept-first presentation scaffolding, productive friction mechanisms enabling reflective consolidation, theory-based micro-communities fostering rigorous discourse, and metric de-emphasis protecting intrinsic motivation.

The mid-fidelity prototypes function not merely as design proposals but as provocations demonstrating that non-extractive platforms can materially instantiate ethical commitments

while meeting users' intellectual development needs. These interventions do not reject digital persuasion itself but reclaim it as methodology for strengthening conceptual identity, cultivating intellectual community, and sustaining artistic wellbeing against platform capitalism's corrosive effects.

Ultimately, this research establishes that ethical UX constitutes not compromise but necessity – the generative foundation enabling digital platforms to support rather than exploit intellectual work. By reorienting design values away from engagement extraction toward capacity cultivation, the framework offers implementable specifications for systems honoring creators' lived realities, amplifying authentic expression, and fostering long-term flourishing of conceptual practice in the digital age. The question is no longer whether ethical alternatives are possible, but whether designers, institutions, and platform developers possess the commitment to build them. ■

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Lisa Winstanley

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