

# **Be right back: entrepreneurial identity under construction**

Narrative identity work of Slovenian creative entrepreneurs on social media

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to contribute to a better understanding of the entrepreneurial identity work and entrepreneurial identity development of graphic designers and illustrators that are with their work present on social media platform Instagram. Social media has become a big part of our lives, especially those who actively present themselves and their work on these platforms to become more recognisable. Instagram is seen as a very powerful tool for visual artists such as illustrators and graphic designers to showcase their work, network with others, and to build a community. However, much about how these graphic designers and illustrators that belong to the creative sector develop their entrepreneurial identity while being present on Instagram or any other social media platform is not known. To get more insights into how the entrepreneurial identity is developed through narrative identity work over Instagram 15 qualitative interviews were conducted with illustrators and graphic designers based in Slovenia. The analysis shows that Slovenian graphic designers and illustrators must overcome different challenges when presenting themselves and their work on Instagram. Their stories on Instagram have changed over time and are now strategically developed. They are developing their entrepreneurial identity most actively when they need to put themselves out there and are in the process of becoming a brand. Becoming a brand on Instagram can be a struggle for graphic designers and illustrators, some of the most obvious pressures are showing themselves behind their brand and becoming an a kind of influencer, keeping their style and feed consistently to become recognisable, following Instagram trends to stay relevant and sudden changes in the Instagram algorithm. Slovenian illustrators and graphic designers are aware of the identity development processes and are very active in developing an entrepreneurial identity or rejecting it. The main reasons why Slovenian graphic designers and illustrators decide not to act entrepreneurially are due to lack of education about entrepreneurship in the Slovenian educational system and the fear of not declaring the taxes correctly due to an outdated tax system for small businesses in Slovenia. This research concludes that a better introduction to entrepreneurship in the early stage of education or later at the University and a better, more modern, and user-friendly tax system for small businesses could encourage Slovenian creatives to start creating a more confident entrepreneurial identity.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial identity development, Creative entrepreneurs, Instagram storytelling, Narrative identity work, Illustrators, Graphic designers

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# 1 Introduction

Identity has been for a long time a central concern in organizations studies more broadly (Brown, 2015, 2017; Coupland & Brown, 2012; Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Gioia, Patvardhan, Hamilton, & Corley, 2013; Schultz, Maguire, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2012) and now growingly in entrepreneurship research (Betta, Latham, & Jones, 2008; Fauchart & Gruber, 2011; Leitch & Harrison, 2016; Nielsen, Norlyk, & Christensen, 2018; Watson, 2009). The notion of identity relates to central topics of meaning, decision making, motivation, stability and disruption during changes in individual's life (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003) and this helps us understand how individuals relate to the groups in organizations in which they participate (Brown, 2001).

Increasingly, studies focus more on the idea of individual-level processes of identity construction and development (Alvesson, 2010; Brown, 2017; Wieland, 2010) and investigate how people see themselves in relation to the organization or social context (Brown, 2015). Here, the concept of identity work becomes greatly important (Beech, Gilmore, Cochrane, & Greig, 2012; Bhansing, Wijngaarden, & Hitters, 2020; Brown, 2017; Brown & Coupland, 2015; Kornberger & Brown, 2007; Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Sheep, 2006; Oliver, 2015; Watson, 2008). Identity work refers to identity construction processes that are happening inside an around organisations (Brown, 2015) and it is therefore a crucial aspect of processes of socialisation (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Furthermore, identity work refers to the means by which individuals form both immediately situated and long-term understandings of their selves (Clegg & Baumeler, 2010). This conception assumes a constructivist notion of identity and highlights that human beings are being capable of subjectively constructing understandings around themselves and of who they are, who they were in the past and who they would like to become (Brown, 2015).

This conception and understanding of (self-)identities as something socially constructed is highly relevant today. In current times of "liquid modernity", where we see a proliferation of networks, fluidity, instability and uncertainty (Bauman, 2000, 2005; Bauman & Raud, 2015), more and more people are pushed to consider, refine and reflect on their various identities and make conscious acts towards constructing them (Ybema et al., 2009). Therefore, Brown (2017) suggests that researching the identity work of individuals inside and around organisations is important for two reasons. Firstly, it redirects the attention from a single dominant paradigm that is associated with Social Identity Theory or Self Categorisation Theory (SIT/SCT) and opens a new possibility of focusing on different ways

with which individuals construe their selves in relation to their organisations. Secondly, it facilitates the recognition that identities and identifications are in fact ‘worked on’ by embedded social actors who are limited and enabled by social context (Brown, 2017).

The notion of identity work and seeing the self as a continuous project that requires communicative effort has, so far, largely been absent in studies of the creative industries (Bhansing, Hitters, & Wijngaarden, 2018; Horst, Järventie-Thesleff, & Perez-Latre, 2019; Nielsen et al., 2018), while becoming important (Hausmann & Heinze, 2016). For example, a recent study by Werthes, Mauer, & Brettel (2018) focuses on the working conditions of creative worker and how these are connected with constructing identities in creative industries, but it does not elucidate how these creatives construct their identity through “identity work”. Increasingly, these creatives use digital media to talk with their audiences and “narrate” their story about their development, thereby co-constructing their identities with their audiences (Betta et al., 2008; Fletcher & Watson, 2007; Hamilton, 2014; Horst et al., 2019; Jones, Latham, & Betta, 2008). This show, the focus on narratives is important (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Similarly, but more poetically, Salman Rushdie approached what can be understood as identity work in his collection of essays by writing “Those who do not have power over the stories that dominate their lives, power to retell them, rethink them, deconstruct them, joke about them, and change them as times change, truly are powerless because they cannot think new thoughts” (1992, p. 432).

Narrative identity work is a refinement of the concept of identity work and can serve as a prime conceptual frame for one of the most interesting areas of identity and identity work research today, namely new trends around and uses of digital media by entrepreneurs, especially creative entrepreneurs, as their individual behaviour makes us want to understand their autonomy and personal drive (Betta et al., 2008; Bhansing, Hitters, & Wijngaarden, 2018; Bhansing et al., 2020; Horst et al., 2019; Matlay & Harmeling, 2011). This is complementary to current studies in entrepreneurship that take and advocate for a post-positivistic epistemology (Karatas-Ozkan, Anderson, Fayolle, Howells, & Condor, 2014; Steyaert, 1997; Zahra & Wright, 2011; Zahra, Wright, & Abdelgawad, 2014). Here, Zboralska (2017) argues that entrepreneurship is best understood as a social activity which involves complex processes and interactions between dynamic collection of factors, therefore examining entrepreneurial identity *in context* is needed in order to develop more accurate and meaningful theory and as well a deeper understanding of entrepreneurial actions, processes and activities.

This thesis is theoretically relevant for several reasons. First, understanding how people work on their identities is currently facilitated by “contextual factors” stemming from mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, 2017; Deuze, 2011, 2012; Lindgren, 2017) and liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000, 2005; Bauman & Raud, 2015). Therefore, the notion of “identity work” is becoming increasingly important and remains under-researched (Brown, 2015, 2017; Coupland & Brown, 2012; Schultz et al., 2012). Second, and as a current theoretical gap in the literature, we know little about how individuals that start their own business and are acting entrepreneurially develop their identity through narrative identity work over digital media (Horst et al., 2019). This relates back to broader developments in society because of which more and more people decide to quit their fulltime job in order to start their own business or follow a new, different, more fulfilling form of work (Ivtzan, Gardner, Bernard, Sekhon, & Hart, 2013). This can mean founding a start-up company, beginning freelancing work, or starting a line of handmade goods. Overall, with the autonomy and innovative ideas they possess, most of them could be considered as becoming entrepreneurs (Hormozi, 2004). Third, it is interesting to look at the motivations that drive these individuals to quit their regular nine to five job and throw themselves into the uncertainty of entrepreneurial life. Some call it passion and inspiration that some individuals already carry within themselves (Bhansing et al., 2018), others find the reason in the forces of the new economy that give rise to the entrepreneurial labour (Neff, Wissinger, & Zukin, 2005). Even though entrepreneurs have the need to be independent, they are still individuals who come up with ideas and carry out their activities in certain social and professional environments (Bhansing et al., 2018). Fourth, it is important that we explore the entrepreneur’s identity construction from a processual perspective (Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Leitch & Harrison, 2016; Schultz et al., 2012). Essentially, identity work is an important aspect of the socialisation processes (Brown, 2015; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) and can act as a focal point in explaining the reasons of how and why do individuals engage in entrepreneurship (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011). Therefore, this thesis focuses on the narrative identity work of entrepreneurs and is rooted in a small but rapidly expanding literature that includes the evidence of entrepreneurial activities being “infused with meaning because they are an expression of an individual’s identity” (Fauchart & Gruber, 2011, p. 935).

The empirical focus of this thesis will be home-based online entrepreneurs. This specific group of entrepreneurs is growing increasingly all around the world but is currently under-researched. This lack of studies has been noted by Bhansing et al. (2018), who propose that future research could focus on creative entrepreneurs that work from home. Similarly, Di



Domenico, Daniel and Nunan (2014) agree that home-based online businesses are very important for the economics of the country where they are situated as their numbers are increasing every year. However, previous studies about individuals working at home mainly focused on employees working for big organisations, while relatively little research was conducted about individuals that are working from home (e.g. self-employed) as they tend to be invisible to researches and also to the society (Crosbie & Moore, 2004; Di Domenico et al., 2014). Without a clear understanding of how they navigate the spaces between the physical and digital spheres of work and the overlapping space between workplace and home it is impossible to understand how they work on their identity and what kind of emotional, spatial and temporal tensions are present in such work environments (Di Domenico et al., 2014). Without exploring home based entrepreneurs, the society and the government often forget that they exist, therefore not a lot is done for their wellbeing and no one helps them out in some extraordinary situations as for example the outbreak of a pandemic that is happening currently.

This empirical focus on home-based online entrepreneurs in the creative industries can be further narrowed down on how they use digital media for their narrative identity work. Since the arrival of Web 2.0 and later social media platforms, big companies and small businesses found their way of being present on at least one of these platforms. Social media has become a tool that helps small businesses to have a voice and to show their product or service to a large audience, without having an actual physical store. Creative entrepreneurs that work from home no longer showcase their portfolio on personal websites (Neff et al., 2005) but instead share their work on social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest or Instagram. Today, Instagram is well known to be the most visual oriented social media platform out there (Campbell, 2019).

The use of Instagram for entrepreneurial development relates to my personal entrepreneurial journey. Starting my own creative small business of hand painted tote bags five years ago I started showcasing my products on Instagram because I couldn't afford a personalised webpage. Since then it has become my main window to my audience and my customers. Finishing my bachelors and starting my own business at the same time I stumbled upon some important questions before I considered myself an entrepreneur. The transition from seeing it as a hobby and then addressing it as a small business was long and didn't happen overnight. I had to answer questions such as: How do I see myself? Is my brand already big enough so I can start calling myself an entrepreneur? Am I showing off if I consider myself an entrepreneur? How do I relate to my followers? Am I posting what they

like? What can I learn from them? These were so important that I was constantly asking myself if I was doing the right things. It wasn't until the support of the creative community on Instagram that I have found myself and finally let myself partly accept the entrepreneurial identity. I am still in constant search of myself and I hope that this research paper will help me with my own identity work of becoming an entrepreneur.

This understanding creates an additional drive for diving deeper into the empirical phenomenon of narrative identity work of creative home-based entrepreneurs. For matters of convenience, and to address this empirical phenomenon, I drew on my own entrepreneurial network from Slovenia to explore the entrepreneurial identity work of Slovenian home-based creative entrepreneurs. In particular, I focus on graphic designers and illustrators who are present and active with their work on Instagram to understand their process of becoming entrepreneurs while adopting, forming and upholding their entrepreneurial identity(ies). This specific subgroup of home-based entrepreneurs allows describing and learning more about narrative identity work because graphic designers and illustrators naturally use a lot of storytelling in making their work visible and while being present on social media, they also use storytelling in narrating their feed (Association of illustrators, 2018). Storytelling is considered to be one of the most important tools of identity creation which makes these creative entrepreneurs a great example to study (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

In addition, the *social and practical relevance* of this research comes from creating a better understanding how creative workers develop an entrepreneurial identity and why they decide to start their own small business. We need to understand better what drives them to work on their own brand and take more risks when working as freelancers or being self-employed. This could help support them in what they need for establishing their home-base, receive funding, building communities and making local connections with cities and neighbourhoods. It could be supportive of better policy-making. After all, the creative industries are becoming one of the top sectors of economic growth in most of the European countries, in Slovenia as well, and creative entrepreneurs need to be better understood in order to develop the support for them and their brand to become more successful (Eikhof & Warhurst, 2013). Without a better understanding of cultural and creative entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial identity development, it is hard to support their entrepreneurial performance and establish the economic relevance of cultural and creative industries (Werthes et al., 2018). Better knowledge in this area can lead to more targeted policy-making and infrastructural investments that can support their development.

To summarize, this thesis aims to research the narrative identity work of Slovenian creative entrepreneurs by examining how they talk and reflect about themselves, how they connect with their followers and how their practices of communication shape their development of entrepreneurial selves. This leads to the following research question:

- **“How do Slovenian graphic designers and illustrators develop their entrepreneurial identity through narrative identity work over Instagram?”**

The thesis is structured as follows. The following shows a literature overview and theoretical framework based on the literature that refines and reflects our current understanding of entrepreneurial identity work. Subsequently, this above research question will be answered by employing a qualitative methodology. Data from in-depth interviews with digital artists (graphic designers and illustrators) which represent themselves and their work on the social media platform Instagram is analysed in qualitative manner. The findings and interpretations from the analysis are presented in the results section. Ultimately, the discussion and conclusion complete this thesis.

## 2 Theoretical framework

Within this chapter, the main concepts and theories behind them will be thoroughly presented, starting with identity work and continuing with the entrepreneurial side of identity work as well as focusing on narrative identity work of creative entrepreneurs that are present on social media and also work from home.

### 2.1 Identity work

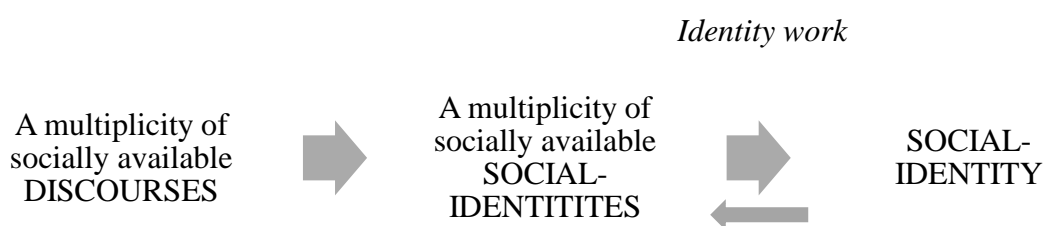
Brown (2015) argues that identity work is the most significant concept when it comes to analysing the construction of (self-)identities inside and around organisations. Alvesson, Ashcraft and Thomas (2008) underline the importance of researching identity, as well as identity formation and change, as it is experienced by individuals. This centres clearly on the emergingly predominant notion of “identity work” and its many facets (Brown, 2015, 2017; Brown & Coupland, 2015; Winkler, 2018).

While the concepts self and identity have been explored by philosophers like Plato and Buddhist monks approximately 3000 years ago, they have only recently become a central topic of intellectual debates. One of the reasons for the sudden interest in the topic might be the changes in the society, the traditional structures are dissolving causing identities to be less secure and more and more individuals are craving for more autonomy and freedom in their lives (Brown, 2015; Coupland & Brown, 2012). Brown (2017) emphasizes that the phrase identity work is, however, generally very under-specified. In most of the research that has already been done it is pointed out only implicitly, and in some they employ multiple distinct conceptions of it (Brown, 2017). In different studies identity work is sometimes referred to by different names such as *identity construction* (Pratt, 2012), *identity quests* (Turner, 1975), *bricolage* (Visscher, Heusinkveld, & O’Mahoney, 2018) and *identity projects* (Giddens, 1991), the phrase *identity work* has achieved the most widespread acceptance within organisation and management studies and is slowly being integrated in broader social science literature (Brown, 2017). The perspectives on identity are distinctive and vary between different theories, however the definitions around identity work do not differ one from another in their core meaning and can be explained with a definition provided by Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003), which suggests that “identity work refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (p. 1165). There is a disagreement among scholars whether identity work takes place continuously or is it restricted only to

certain periods of intense activity when individuals need to deal with identity disruptions such as job role changes (Brown, 2017). This is connected with different ontological assumptions behind the nature of identity as a concept and the related notion of identity work. This study, however, follows the increasingly recognized assumption that (self-)identities are socially constructed (Brown, 2015, 2017) and can be best understood and researched from a processual perspective (Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Gioia et al., 2013; Schultz et al., 2012).

### 2.1.1 Social context

Identity work can therefore be understood as identities being in the process of their formation all the time, while an individual is going through different life situations and changes (Coupland & Brown, 2012). Ybema et al. (2009) proposes that our surrounding helps individuals the most with making sense of themselves. If there wouldn't be anything else in the World, just us, we would not be able to make sense of our 'self' as there would be no 'other' to compare ourselves to. Society is therefore the fundamental background for an individual to perform the identity work (Ybema et al., 2009). Alvesson and Willmott (2002) also noted that one of the situations where identity work happens is when the process of "defining a person by defining others" occurs (p. 629). Following on that, the relationship between the discursive aspects of social life and people's personal engagement in identity creation can be portrayed with a three step process which gives social identities the recognition in the social context of identity work (Watson, 2008).



*Figure 1.* A 'three step' view of the relationship between discourses and self-identities (Watson, 2008).

Giddens (1991) emphasizes that involvement in identity work seems unavoidable because so many different, competing, and conflicting discursive pressures exist and resources that are available to every individual in the contemporary world. Therefore the identity work needs to be understood as not only an internal self-focused process but instead a coming together of inward/internal self-reflection and outward/external engagement that

develops through talk and action (Watson, 2008). The external aspect of constructing an identity is therefore strongly connected with identity work as Jenkins (1996) points out, “individuals are unique and variable, but selfhood is socially constructed: in the processes of primary and subsequent socialisation, and in the ongoing processes of social interaction within which individuals define and redefine themselves and others throughout their lives” (p. 20).

### **2.1.2 Organisational context**

Looking at identity work in the organisational context is crucial as self-concepts develop most drastically, entering an unknown territory where our individuality is tremendously pressured and suppressed. Being a part of organisation it often means that we need to wear a mask of ‘professionalism’ in order to fit in as well as acting contrary to our desires and beliefs (Brown, 2001; Brown & Coupland, 2015; Slay & Smith, 2010).

While the individual identity has been in the spotlight since the beginning, with the start of the millennium a new interest of identity in organisational context has arisen (Brown, 2001). There are numerous reasons why identity and identifications are exceptionally important in contemporary organisational life (Albert, Ashforth, & Dutton, 2000). Albert et al. (2000) expose two sides, looking from the macro side, environment became ever more dynamic and complex and therefore organisations became more organic, this means the growth of team works, empowerment, more flexibility and flattening the hierarchy. A clear sense of the organisation’s identity serves as a strong point when organisational changes happen. From the micro side, long-term contracts have been exchanged by short-term ones and boundaryless careers started growing (Rousseau & Arthur, 1996), and the relationship and identification with the employer, the organisation and a workgroup has changed in the way that loyalty can be in many ways questioned (Albert et al., 2000). Since the 1960, the recognition that people bring their own meanings into organisations started growing and the fact that an individual’s work orientation might change over time challenged the conventional belief that the members of an organisation are fixed entities with already given personalities which do not change a lot over time or even in a lifetime (Watson, 2008). Albert, Ashforth and Dutton (2000) as well as Alvesson and Willmott (2002) suggest that the identity is not only ‘crucial’, but also problematic which is why the dynamics of identity must be better understood.

Coupland and Brown (2012) pointed out the insufficient attention has been given to how the identities are involved in the processes of organising. However, the main research focus on how individuals construct their identities considering each other and the role they establish in the organisation. The scholars only recently started addressing the idea of how individual identities are constructed in organisations (Albert et al., 2000). Ybema et al. (2009) focuses on individual's "autobiography, narrative, storytelling and everyday interactions" (p. 300) that can illustrate how people "experience, shape, reconstruct and are subject to the situational and structured 'realities' they inhabit" (p. 300), while Alvesson et al. (2008) focuses on addressing the important twin question 'Who am I?' which leads to 'How should I act?'. That is why in organisations, individuals are required to take on different corporate personas and these personas are possibly going to differ from the ones that one adopt in other parts of their lives and can as well come into tension with them (Watson, 2008). For this reason, processes and practices of identity work need to be understood in greater depth.

### **2.1.3 Narrative identity work**

Being a part of an organisation therefore means that individuals need to actively craft and negotiate their identity, for example how they use humour, in the way they dress, personal style and even how they decorate their work space in order to show how they relate to others and how they conceive themselves. Telling a good story is one of the strategies people use to create meaning and increase the likelihood that who they claim to be will be acknowledged by others (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). As most of the people spend eight or more hours working in a company or on their own business, this means that most of the time in the individual's life is spent in some sort of organisation. Narrative identity work is a person's internalised and evolving life story that does not have a pause button and is therefore essential to be looked into more detail in the organisational context (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Narrative forms of expressing and claiming identity have not been given enough attention in the organisational studies (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) while in psychology research it took the central role in exploring individual's life stories in connection with mental health, well-being and maturity (McAdams & McLean, 2013). In the 90's the understanding and attention of identity formation shifted from *representational* to *ontological* narrativity (Somers, 1994). Somers (1994) is critically evaluating that it was only recently accepted among scholars that social life is itself *storied* and that "the narrative is an

*ontological condition of life*” (p. 614). Narrative identity work is a person’s internalised and always evolving life story, which is integrating the regenerated past and imagined future to present life with some amount of unity and purpose (McAdams & McLean, 2013). While Somers (1994) also emphasizes that people construct identities, which are multiple and always changing, individuals are locating themselves within a repertoire of stories, while the experience is created through narratives, they are trying to make sense of what is happening or what has happened in the past by integrating these happenings within one or more narratives. People’s lives and biographies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century’s late modern world have been increasingly driven by choices, contingency and risk, and are oriented towards a goal of “responsibility for the self by the self” (Riach & Loretto, 2009, p. 114) . People need to cope for themselves with changing social structures, continuous communication over networks, increasing “fluidity” of relations and personal bonds, and a greater uncertainty about the future, due to accelerating technological progress and a wider dispersion of traditional structures (Bauman, 2000, 2005; Bauman & Raud, 2015). For example, Somers (1994) exposes that when looking into ‘narrative identity’, the main argument around it is that narrative is more than just a mode of representation, it is also an “ontological condition of social life” (p. 614) and through it we get to know our social worlds and ourselves (Foster, 2012). Somers (1994) explains that “all of us come to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple and changing) by being located or locating ourselves (usually unconsciously) in social narratives rarely of our own making” (p. 614). However, Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) expose that the clear understanding of how self-narrative forms an narrating processes may vary. For this reason, several theoretical issues remain undeveloped around narrative identity work, especially the elements of narrative that allow individuals to accomplish desired identity and the dynamics of the processes, where narratives are rejected or restructured for the future use (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

To sum up, taking narrative identity work seriously means to focus on the ongoing process and practices, related to upholding, strengthening, refining, revising and co-constructing a sense of self through communication and in relation to others (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; Mallett & Wapshott, 2012; Soreide, 2006). This is critical to understanding the formation and change of entrepreneurial identities over social media.



## 2.2 Entrepreneurial identity work

Entrepreneurs are individuals who need to work on their identity and continuously refine their presentation of what they are, who they are becoming and reflecting on what to change and what to learn. With establishing their own business, they might go through big disruptions. They have to go through a lot of challenges and there is always a chance that they will not succeed.

The current work around entrepreneurial identity and identity work highlights that identity is specific to an individual (or social context) but also that it is a social phenomenon that is constantly in the process under construction through interaction with others (Ollila, Williams Middleton, & Donnellon, 2012). Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003) emphasize that identity is essential to meaning, motivation, decision-making and other similar activities that are considered crucial for entrepreneurial process. To act entrepreneurially, Obrecht (2004) argues that individuals require some sort of a set of personal, organisational and societal capabilities. Identity work needed to establish entrepreneurial identity therefore not only needs the internal self-reflection but also social engagement, which is talk and action (Watson, 2009).

Some researches focus primarily on socialisation and collectivity as a main part of entrepreneurial identity work. Falck, Heblich and Luedemann (2012) argue that entrepreneurial identity cannot be taught in a course or a workshop, even if it is very practically oriented. The most essential part of entrepreneurship, in their words the ‘will to conquer’ cannot be taught but is already a part of person’s identity and develops through time out of background and experience. Rigg and O’Dwyer (2012) emphasize that the entrepreneurial identity is developed through a conversation with family, customers, employees, suppliers, competitors, and others.

While other researches focus more on storytelling as a part of entrepreneurial identity work, which will also be used as a main aspect in the final paper when we will be researching the entrepreneurial identity work. Steyaert (2007) for example noted that storytelling and narrative identity work is seen as very helpful in understanding entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs, but we should have in mind, that the storytelling is happening all the time and therefore no story is ever a final story. While Fletcher and Watson (2007) discuss the social and relational aspect of entrepreneurial identity as “an expression of relationship to past (and future) conversations, events, experiences, thoughts, ideas, families, backgrounds and cultures” (p. 13). Rae (2005) in his research presents a model for entrepreneurial learning

with three main subjects, which are personal and social emergence, contextual learning and negotiated enterprise. Entrepreneurial identities are by his findings often in dynamics with existing roles, such as mother/wife or father/husband and are constructed through narrative identity work and storytelling at the time that the individual develops confidence in the entrepreneurial role. Jain, George and Maltarich (2009) while exploring the identity development of academics becoming entrepreneurs concluded that the process of entrepreneurial identity work depends on both the individual and social factors. While on the individual level the process of sense making was the core factor and translating values onto existing identity, the social factors can be understood as the norms of the local context.

Recent calls have been made to start paying attention to the social constructionist approach to entrepreneurial identity, exclusively focusing on discursive approaches and narratives (Cohen & Musson, 2000; Fletcher, 2003; Foss, 2004; Hamilton, 2006; Hytti, 2005; Johansson, 2004). This research direction has been called a *fifth movement in entrepreneurship research* by Fletcher (2003), which focuses on processes through which language and discourse construct entrepreneurial knowledge in a set of understandings and meanings (Jones, Latham, & Betta, 2008). This idea accepts the fact that entrepreneurial activities, features and characteristics are not “objects” and do not possess a fixed ontological status but instead are “dynamic and constantly emerging, being realised, shaped and constructed through social processes” (Fletcher, 2003, p. 127).

Jackson and Oliver (2003) argue that the socioeconomic impact of entrepreneurship has already been extensively explored and is therefore widely explored, the same cannot be said about individual entrepreneurs and their networks. Zboralska (2017) urges scholars to focus their research on entrepreneurship, but not from a science-based paradigm which assumes that entrepreneurial identity work can be empirically and objectively measured and analysed, put into stable categories and generalised. Instead, she suggests that quantitative methodologies should be broadened (if not dropped) and supported by (or exchanged in favour for) qualitative and mixed-method studies. She argues that examining entrepreneurial activity in context could lead to more authentic and meaningful theory that would also deepen the understanding of entrepreneurial intentions, actions and processes (Zboralska, 2017).

### **2.3 Entrepreneurial identity work in creative industries**

Entrepreneurs in cultural and creative industries often struggle with their entrepreneurial identity, as they see themselves rather as artists or creatives (Albinsson, 2018;

Bhansing et al., 2020; Manto, Constantine, Marianne, & Amy, 2010; Nielsen & Gartner, 2017; Nielsen et al., 2018; Werthes, Mauer, & Brettel, 2018). They may not consider themselves as entrepreneurs-and-creatives, and might therefore avoid acting entrepreneurially (Werthes et al., 2018). Eikhof and Haunschild (2007) emphasize that there is still lack of knowledge on cultural and creative entrepreneurs and their identity development as they feel that business values contradict their personal ones. Although traditional entrepreneurship is seen more as the stereotypical entrepreneur aiming to follow capitalism and making as much money as possible, cultural and creative entrepreneurs have a different mindset and are motivated by their own creativity while they also strive for freedom and flexibility (Werthes et al., 2018).

Creative industries have become a key ingredient of government economic policy across the world, most of the countries expect them to drive the GDP and job growth with attracting new talent, facilitating urban regeneration and community engagement (Florida, 2019; Hennekam & Bennett, 2016). The creative industries are therefore a significant components of most of the advanced economies around the world, including European Union, the United States, Asia and Australia (Hennekam & Bennett, 2016). However, the world of creative workers and in particular their careers are very complex, unstructured and unorganised and tend to be very hard to analyse (Dubois, 2010). Hennekam and Bennett (2016) highlight the challenges that creative workers need to face related to unstable income, adapting to different roles which lead to changes in professional development and in identity.

There is a lack of studies focusing on artists from CCI acting as cultural and creative entrepreneurs, sometimes also labelled as *culturepreneurs*, which is by Murzyn-Kupisz and Działek (2019) quite surprising, considering that artists are almost by definition enterprising individuals who regularly take risks while implementing new ideas, translating them into artworks and creative goods, not knowing if they will succeed or not in commercial and social sense. By Hausman and Heinze (2016) there is no consent on a definition that would cover arts, cultural and creative entrepreneurship. Even though the most researchers agree on the core characteristics of entrepreneurs, the understanding of entrepreneurs in cultural and creative studies is still in its starting point. Recent study from 2016 found out that the terms ‘cultural entrepreneurs’ and ‘art entrepreneurs’ are used the most when authors are trying to explain entrepreneurship in creative industries (Hausmann & Heinze, 2016). Another finding from 2018 suggest that creative and art entrepreneurs struggle with their entrepreneurial identity as they do not identify themselves as being entrepreneurs and therefore avoid acting entrepreneurially (Werthes et al., 2018). It is important to establish a difference between

traditional entrepreneurs and creative/art entrepreneurs, while the aim of the former is usually to follow capitalism and unlimited growing of resources, the latter own a more contrasting mind-set and with a more distinctive set of values (Murzyn-Kupisz & Działek, 2019; Throsby, 2001; Werthes et al., 2018). Creative/art entrepreneurs don't only want to make a living with their business but while being motivated by current cultural concerns, their primary focus is creating and developing their creativity and art. The results of the qualitative research conducted by Werthes et al. (2018) shows two phases through which the creative/art entrepreneurs go, while developing an entrepreneurial identity next to their already existing creative/art identity. Both phases can be seen in Figure 1 and 2. Authors also suggest that identity work and development is a constant process for creative/art entrepreneurs (Werthes et al., 2018).

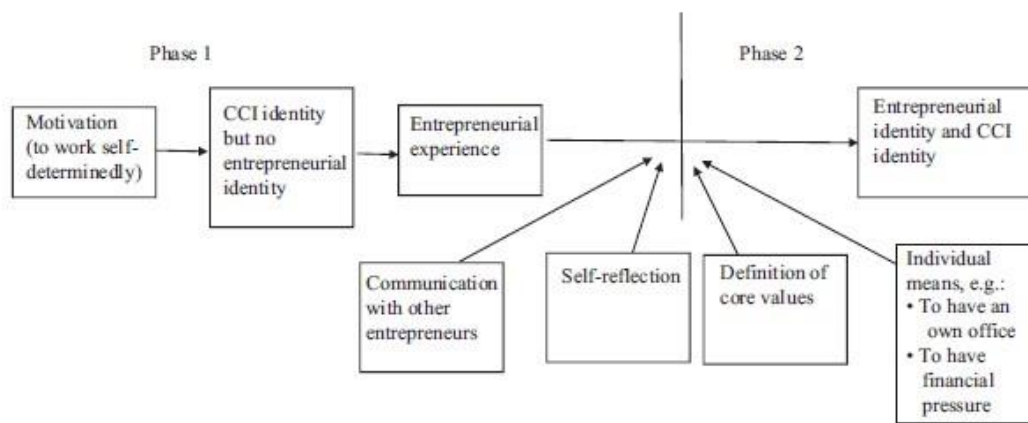


Figure 2. The development process of the entrepreneurial identity of CCI entrepreneurs (Werthes et al., 2018, p. 300).

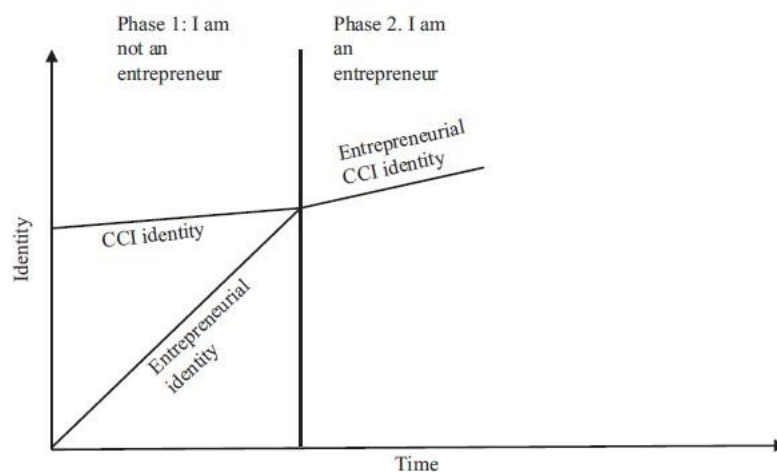


Figure 3. Path of identity development for CCI entrepreneurs (Werthes et al., 2018, p. 300).

## **2.4 Identity work and work conditions in creative industries**

Creative industries are a distinct context in which identity work and creative labour takes place (Wijngaarden, 2019; Wijngaarden, Hitters, & Bhansing, 2019). Working in creative industries tends to be very romanticised and it is by some creative workers portrayed as having a “cool job in hot industries” (Neff et al., 2005, p. 307). Neff et al. (2005) suggests that there are eight forces that gave rise to the phenomenon of creative entrepreneurial labour. These forces are “the cultural quality of cool, creativity, autonomy, self-investment, compulsory networking, portfolio evaluations, international competition and foreshortened careers” (Neff et al., 2005, p. 307). Workplace and working hours became more flexible, this meaning that creative workers need to work outside full time as well, individuals are hired as independent contractors more often than in the past and employers need to ‘keep up’ with new skills on their own time (Kotamraju, 2002), while they need to accept more risk and bigger responsibilities (Neff et al., 2005). Adapting to these new demands, individuals need to work more and more often on their sense of self (Beck, 1992; V. Smith, 2001). Hennekam and Bennett (2016) argue that in many aspects, managing a career in creative industries can be considered as a unique challenge.

Scholars have recently focused more on how creative workers are carving out identities while focusing on freedom, passion and work-life balance (Hermes, Koch, Bakhuisen, & Borghuis, 2017; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010). Identity construction is therefore actively happening when an individual needs to go through organisational or life changes, but also through knowledge sharing, networking and reputation building (Tremblay & Dehesa, 2016). As Werthes et al. (2018) suggest that “all that glitters is not gold” (p. 292) the romanticising of cultural and creative industries needs to be explored from the critical perspective as well. Main points of criticism mainly refer to the working conditions in cultural and creative industries which are often characterised by exploitation of workers, irregular work, long working hours, short-term contracts, little job protection, entry barriers and underpayment (Hesmondhalgh, 2008). Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2010) cover most of the tensions in identity work of creative workers, when they need to choose between pleasure and obligations, which can lead to anxiety and isolation. Creative workers label their experience of working in cultural and creative industries as a “very complicated version of freedom” where pleasure, enjoyment and anxiety are a part of their everyday life (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2010, p. 4). The instability and irregularity of incomes, flexibility

of employment and multiple job holding of both artistic and non-artistic character bring creative workers to a constant search for new paths and express the need to redefine themselves with every new opportunity and challenge they stumble upon (Pasquinelli & Sjöholm, 2015).

## **2.5 Entrepreneurs and their identity work through social media**

The current processes and challenges about how media developments influence the ways in which personal and collective identities are formed are a topic that got a lot of attention by scholars lately (Brydges & Sjöholm, 2018; Costa, 2018; Fornäs & Xinaris, 2013; Horst et al., 2019; van Dijck, 2013). However, a lot of social media focused research focuses more on marketing, product promotion and facilitating or creating a brand (Carah & Shaul, 2015; Colliander & Marder, 2018), sometimes as a constructive co-creation with audiences (Bange, Moisander, & Järventie-Thesleff, 2019), rather than squarely on the co-production of identity. At the same time, individuals use social media differently in their everyday lives and Fornäs and Xinaris (2013) emphasize that identity formation in the digital era is indeed important to understand how “individual self-understanding increasingly has to negotiate how different identity dimensions are proposed and ordered in media texts of various kinds” (p. 12). Considering that identities are formed on different levels, individual or collective, these identities are not fixed, stable or unified entities, they are constantly in process of change and transformation (Fornäs & Xinaris, 2013). The internet, in particular has had a lot of influence in formatting people’s identity as media competence is known to be a necessary life skill to participate in the society and is helping to define understanding of oneself, that is why Fornäs and Xinaris (2013) propose that more research about how the connection between media practices and identity formation actually function is needed.

Social media has become a great way for entrepreneurs and creative entrepreneurs to showcase their business and products to their audience and to establish an authentic connection with their fans while they are communicating to them (Horst, Järventie-Thesleff, & Perez-Latre, 2019). Horst et al. (2019) emphasize that the dynamics of developing an entrepreneurial identity through social media might be different as identity work is in this case ‘mediated’ and could construct potentially multiple digital selves and identities. On social media an individual has an opportunity to become whoever he or she wants, which also depends from expectations in the current society and current trends which can lead to a modified self-representation (Fornäs & Xinaris, 2013).

## **2.6 Invisible work-from-home entrepreneurs and their identity work**

Most of previous research about working from home is mainly focused on employees working for larger organisations and their work-life balance, trust and relations of control (Di Domenico et al., 2014). That is why Mason, Carter and Tagg (2011) propose that more has to be done around home-based businesses, which are very important for economic development but are quite invisible to researchers and also to the society. It is important to point out that they are entrepreneurs, they are self-employed, autonomous and self-managing actors that work in their own homes to run and build their own online business (Di Domenico et al., 2014). There has been a growth in home-based businesses and the report from the UK shows that nearly two-thirds of all home based workers are self-employed (Mason et al., 2011). Wilson and Mitchell (2004) also emphasize that while the entrepreneurial businesses operated by home-based entrepreneurs are usually done in isolation and out of view, they contribute greatly to the economy. They all provide employment for themselves and in some examples when the business goes well, they even employ others and contribute to the national record of low unemployment rate. Home-based online entrepreneurs use technology to implement business growth not being limited by their home, while they are still located there (Di Domenico et al., 2014). They are autonomous actors that are not under the direct control of a bigger organisation, and are therefore living a dynamic life that consists of freedom and autonomy, self-regulation and boundary management (Di Domenico et al., 2014; Tietze & Musson, 2010).

Working from home requires individuals to deal with certain contradictions, for example being both 'at home and at work'. This can throw the identity of home-based entrepreneurs into a state of constant change, highlighting the contingent character of identity processes (Tietze & Musson, 2010). Wilson and Mitchell (2004) in their study explore the problems and tensions that home-based entrepreneurs stumble upon. One of the main challenges of working from home is the problem of separating work from personal life, the surroundings are the same all the time and you start associating your personal space with work. Another one, closely connected to the first challenge is motivation and time wasting. Financial worries are also a concern. Home-based entrepreneurs, especially women, need to fit their business around the needs of the family and it often happens that female home-based entrepreneurs usually put their business on hold or even close it when they start a family.

While home-based entrepreneurs already worry about the financial aspect of their business as their work is project based and they do not have a regular income, the recent

outbreak of a COVID-19 pandemic made the situation even more uncertain. The challenges of small businesses during the recession in 2008/09 will probably be similar if not worse after the end of this pandemic. The impact will be seen throughout the whole economy, while small businesses will feel it the most (Murray & Gollmitzer, 2012). The current situation can be seen as yet another challenge a creative entrepreneur has to overcome, while for some it can be a big struggle, for others it can be seen as a new opportunity. And while home-based entrepreneurs are already based at home and their business already operates online, it might not be perceived so negative from a financial point of view for some but can present a new form of psychological pressure not many of us are familiar with. These weeks of lockdown are like another month of working from home for some home-based businesses with some difficulties of buying supplies, for others it is very stressful and involves more identity work than ever before.

It is therefore important to understand how entrepreneurs that run a business from home, work on their identity and continuously work on their conception of selves in relation to what they are doing, what products or services they offer, and where they want to go. Creating a sense of stability or permanence around who one is and what one does may be even more important when individuals experience tension in transitional and transformative circumstances such as disrupting the idea of working from nine to five from an office to working from home (Tietze & Musson, 2010) or during times of crisis – such as COVID-19. Therefore, this thesis focuses on the narrative identity work of Slovenian creative entrepreneurs conducted and facilitated over Instagram and explore how they “perform” their identity during a time of crisis.



### **3 Methodology**

This section gives an overview of the qualitative methodology employed and the different steps taken in the analysis. It is complemented by a short reflection on the epistemic quality.

#### **3.1 Qualitative research approach**

To be able to understand how Slovenian graphic designers and illustrators develop their entrepreneurial identity and how their entrepreneurial identity work is constructed through Instagram, I will follow a qualitative research design. Qualitative research methods examine how people see things, how they interact with others and what income does that have, that is why it allows a deeper understanding of topics that cover identity, identity work and narrative construction of identity (Silverman, 2014). Qualitative research focuses on the diversity of meanings and values that are created in media, trying to understand the important relationship that exists between the society and media (Brennen, 2017). Understanding these topics is crucial to answer the research question which focuses on the development and construction of entrepreneurial identity through a social media platform Instagram. Choosing a qualitative research design allows digging deeper in the performative and processual aspects of identity and specifically identity work to understand them better and construct meaning.

“Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). When researching people’s personal perspectives and stories, trying to find and establish themes and patterns, qualitative research seems the perfect approach to gather all this sensitive information. Specifically, if a problem or a complex detailed understanding of the issue needs to be explored, qualitative research is an appropriate way of conducting the research. The details and silenced voices can only be heard and found if we encourage individuals to share their stories by talking directly to them in order to further understand the contexts or settings in which participants in the research address a problem or an issue. Quantitative research would therefore be less suitable as the concept of identity is very complex. It is important to gather information about identity work with a personal approach with the participants to gain insights into such a personal behaviour. Qualitative research is more suitable for this study because it “involves verbal description of real-life situations” (Silverman, 2014, p. 26) and

because it allows researchers to get into the inner experience with participants and understand how certain meanings are formed inside and around certain culture, the main focus of qualitative research is to discover, rather than test variables (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

There are different approaches when it comes to qualitative research. Creswell (2007) presents five core approaches, which are narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Even though this research is focusing on narratives of individuals and their personal storytelling, the narrative research might not be the right method to be used. Narrative research is considered to be the best for capturing detailed stories and life experiences of an individual or a small number of them, it would not be possible to collect extensive information about them as well as having a clear understanding of the context of participants' life as I do not personally know them. Phenomenology wouldn't fit either, as the participants would need to be chosen carefully in a way that all of them would need to experience the same phenomenon so the researcher can develop a common understanding from it (Creswell, 2007). While this study focuses not on a single phenomenon but on different stories and experiences that individuals tell about themselves. Ethnography is not feasible as an approach as it focuses on a larger cultural group where people interact with each other over time which is observed on a day-to-day basis and through a larger period. A researcher needs to experience the phenomenon to understand it, while in this study the focus is on individual stories and identity construction which could not be experienced by a researcher or an outside source. As it was already stated, the identity construction cannot be experienced by an outside source in order to be understood and that is why case study is not an appropriate method for this research (Creswell, 2007). Grounded theory on the other hand might be the right method for this study. In grounded theory approach the researcher develops the theory after researching different individuals that are sharing the same processes and are not likely to be a part of the same group or interact on a daily basis so they would develop the same patterns (Creswell, 2007). Grounded theory is by Creswell (2007) a good research design when there is not enough theory available in order to explain a certain process. Regarding identity work and identity development, research that has been done around it is strong enough in order to back up and develop this study but on the other hand still too broad and too loose in order to be able to predict the results. The fact that identity work still goes by different names in many studies and that perspectives and definitions around it still vary between different theories (Brown, 2017). Considering this facts, grounded theory proves to be the right method for this research. With this method, the identity work can be approached with gaining more insights into the individual's stories and

most common themes and patterns that they stumble upon while constructing an entrepreneurial identity.

Qualitative data can come in various forms, the database usually consists of interview transcripts that are a result of different in depth, semi structured and exploratory interviews. Other analytical methods in qualitative research can also be ethnography (“field experiences”) and its recorded observations, but also focus groups, texts and documents, photographs and other multi-media sources (Thorne, 2000). Interviews further allow for shared and guided reflection of the topic, which increases the reflexivity of the research content. Recorded observations, texts and photographs might only show us the surface of individuals and would not give us the insight in the life of graphic designers and illustrators and how they are working on their entrepreneurial identity (Ravasi & Canato, 2013). Some observations have been a part of interviewing as well. Having a talk with someone in front of you, even though it had to be done through Skype, because of the current situation of global pandemic, it shows you nonverbal communication, especially face expressions, that were taken in consideration as well, when doing the final analysis. Analysing social media posts could be a good addition to the study as stories might be revealed but not in such depth as with in-depth interviews (Horst et al., 2019). Interviews were therefore chosen as an analytical method for this research as they provide the possibility to really focus on the individual you are having a conversation with and it offers insights into the personal topic of identity construction processes of becoming entrepreneurs.

### **3.2 Reflections on analytical opportunities and methods of gathering data**

To answer the proposed research question “**How do Slovenian graphic designers and illustrators develop their entrepreneurial identity through narrative identity work over Instagram?**” qualitative semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method for data gathering. In-depth interviewing is a great fit for this thesis because it “is among the most basic and fundamental of methods, and one which, if executed well, brings us arguably closer than many other methods to an intimate understanding of people and their social worlds” (Hermanowicz, 2002, p. 480). Semi-structured interview allow having a better flexibility when conducting an interview and giving the opportunity to the participants to really open up while giving them much more space and freedom than structured interviews (Edwards & Holland, 2013). This is especially important when exploring topic around identity

construction processes and identity development (Coupland & Brown, 2012). The most important characteristic of the semi-structured interview is that it allows the participants using their own frame of reference, ideas and meanings that are familiar to them. Covering the topic of identity work, especially focusing on narrative identity work of creative entrepreneurs the interview was shaped as a ‘narrative interview’ which is by Edwards and Holland (2013) based on the idea that people produce narratives about the self and identity through their own experiences and the society they live while trying to make sense of the world and themselves in it. Czarniawska (2004) defines this as a specific qualitative design in which “narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected” (p. 17).

Different interpretive approaches for constructing theoretical observations on the basis of qualitative empirical data, such as e.g. grounded theory are often closely connected with constant comparison (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). When conducting qualitative interviews, a researcher is usually searching for themes and patterns common between certain individuals that are studied. In constant comparative analysis each new interview is compared with all the others and the comparison is therefore happening constantly. Studying identity development and identity construction processes means that we assume fundamental social processes do explain a certain human behaviour, in this case constructing an entrepreneurial identity (Thorne, 2000). The process of comparing the interviews and participants’ ideas when searching for emerging themes is called thematic analysis. Floersch, Longhofer, Kranke and Townsend (2010) emphasize that thematic analysis and grounded theory indeed go well together when doing a qualitative research as the first makes it possible for us to see patterns in our dataset while the second helps us to see in what ways these patterns connect and relate. Lewins and Silver (2007) offer a definition of qualitative coding which is “the process by which segments of data are identified as relating to, or being an example of a more general idea, instance, theme or category” (p. 81). Boeije (2010) describes thematic content analysis as a process which consists of open, axial, and selective coding. First step in thematic content analysis is open coding, the process of breaking down, comparing and categorising data, the second step is axial coding with which already some connections are made between categories and the last step is selective coding where deeper connections are recognized between categories and are the final step in making sense of the findings (Boeije, 2010). For thematic analysis to be possible, the interviews need to be carefully transcribed. Transcription of interviews is usually time-consuming and can lead to a certain amount of errors (Chapman,

Hadfield, & Chapman, 2015). Thematic analysis has great flexibility but needs to be consistent and systematic in order to produce reliability (Floersch et al., 2010).

An important understanding of qualitative research is that it explores the meaning people give to their social worlds, society, and the culture they live in, and understanding their social behaviour. It assumes that people are active in the meaning-making process and are actively building their social reality (Boeije, 2010). The research around identity work and identity development is therefore extremely connected with the main ideas of qualitative research. It also allows researcher to search for common themes, which can be used in building the theory around identity work and can provide some new insights for the further research on the topic (Boeije, 2010).

### **3.3 The context of study**

The research was conducted online, due to the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic right at the time when I was planning a trip to Slovenia to conduct interviews face-to-face. Adapting to the situation all of the interviews took place from my apartment in Rotterdam during the lockdown.

Following the research question the sample for this research were creative entrepreneurs, specifically digital illustrators and graphic designers that are with their work present on social media, specifically Instagram. These creative entrepreneurs are based and work in Slovenia except two of them, one is based in Australia and the other currently studies in Austria. Digital illustrators and graphic designers were chosen because they tend to share their work and art very regularly on social media, especially on Instagram. Their work is visual, and Instagram is known to be the most visually oriented social media platform, that is why Instagram became a window shop for a lot of graphic designers and digital artists.

All the participants for this study were chosen and selected carefully. Purposeful sampling was used in this research, which means that the individuals that were chosen to be interviewed understand the research topic and central phenomenon in the study and were therefore able to understand the questions and how to answer them (Creswell, 2007; Palinkas et al., 2015). Being present on Instagram with my own brand of hand painted tote bags, I already followed a few of the participants (10) and even though I did not know them personally, I knew their work and that they are actively working on graphic design or illustration. Other participants (5) were found through following suggestions or comments on already chosen creatives' Instagram posts. For these 5 participants the criteria for including

them in the research was observing their profiles for at least a week to make sure that they fit in the group of graphic designers or illustrators and having one of these identifications written either in their Instagram handle or profile biography. Sampling needs to be consistent in order to be efficient and valid (Palinkas et al., 2015), that is why the range of followers per profile was decided to be between around 1000 followers to 5000 followers and not more as this research was more interested in individuals that are still building their identity, and did not want to focus on already established individuals with more than 10.000 followers.

### **3.4 Data gathering**

The interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. On 20<sup>th</sup> of March of 2020 *de facto* quarantine (with some exemptions) was established in Slovenia and the first interview was conducted three days after that, on 23<sup>rd</sup> of March. On 15<sup>th</sup> of May, Slovenia was the first European country that declared the end of epidemic and the last interview was conducted 9 days before that, on 6<sup>th</sup> of May. A total of 15 interviews were conducted with graphic designers and illustrators in that period. Interviews were from 50 to 110 minutes long and were all conducted from the apartment in Rotterdam. All participants are female, and they are from 20 to 34 years old. All the graphic designers and illustrators interviewed are Slovenian and are based in Slovenia except two of them. Due to COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in the early 2020 all the interviews needed to be made through Skype. All the interviews have been recorded and the informed consent was obtained both orally and in written form. Even though researchers encourage conducting interviews face-to-face and emphasize that long-distance Skype calls should be considered only as a last resort as it can come to a lot of breakdowns, lost internet connection and misunderstandings in communication (Hermanowicz, 2002), others do believe that an access to verbal and nonverbal cues through Skype interviewing can still provide equal authenticity level as the ones conducted face-to-face (Janghorban, Roudsari, & Taghipour, 2014). In this case, face-to-face interviews were planned but could not be realised due to the pandemic outbreak and consequently a lockdown of a lot of countries and even cancelation of flights, conducting interviews through Skype was the only option at the end.

All interviews, except one, were conducted in Slovene language. Most of the participants do speak English but people tend to open up and relax more when they speak in their native language, so I have decided to conduct them in Slovene to get more authentic insights. The only interview that was conducted in English was with a graphic designer who

lives and works in Australia and therefore communicates in English daily. The interviews were translated and transcribed by hand, which means that no digital method was used in the process. In order for the meanings not to be lost in translation, Filep (2009) recommends for the interviewer to know the language and the culture of the interviewees well. Being myself of Slovene origin, I was able to understand ideas that the participants shared with me, without the need to find an interpreter to translate them to me. The topic of identity work and identity development is not very culturally sensitive and therefore I did not have many problems of finding deeper meanings when communicating with the participants. Interviews were translated and transcribed verbatim, where that was possible, otherwise the main idea that was at a certain moment expressed was written down.

Continuing that, the data was collected with semi-structured qualitative interviews, which was designed in a narrative way, to give the participants the opportunity to share their life stories and how they see themselves. The interviews were semi-structured which means that a list of questions is prepared before conducting interviews, but it allows certain flexibility in adding and reducing questions on the list in order to follow the conversation and to gather more insights into the topic. With semi-structured interviews the researcher has a clear aim of the research and a topic of study, but most important is to allow the interviewee to express their own perspective while using their own ideas and meanings that they are comfortable with and are also familiar to them (Edwards & Holland, 2013). After the first 6 interviews the list of questions was adapted and can be found in Appendices. The topic around the current situation of COVID-19 pandemic arisen quite often at the beginning, that is why some question were added to the question list. Before each start of the interview the topic of the interview and the whole process of data collection was explained to each of the participant to make sure that they consent the participation in the study (Boeije, 2010). It was also clearly stated that they can stop the interview whenever they feel like not answering anymore, but no one decided to do so.

### **3.5 Operationalisation of theoretical concepts into interview questions**

To answer the research question of how Slovenian graphic designers and illustrators develop their entrepreneurial identity work through social media platform Instagram, a set of questions was developed. A list of questions that formed together the interview were operationalised from the theory and theoretical concepts that were researched for this study. Four main categories derived from the theoretical framework, these are 'Identity', 'Identity

work’, ‘Narrative Identity Work’ and ‘Identity work through working conditions in CCI’ and can be seen in Appendices. The concept of ‘Identity’ was divided into questions regarding how the person perceives himself/herself and how this individual sees himself/herself also in connection with the society and others. These first questions were introductory, and its purpose was to break the ice and to create a relaxed trustworthy environment where the participant became comfortable answering questions. Regarding how they see themselves in connection with others, I introduced another group of questions, where the focus was on their everyday roles and how they change their roles in various situations regarding who they are in contact with. With the next concept of ‘Identity Work’ a series of questions were prepared, where I explored the identity construction processes and how active are these processes among Slovenian graphic designers and illustrators. This set of questions started focusing on the entrepreneurial identity, trying to examine if the entrepreneurial identity exists and how dominant is it. I introduced the third concept ‘Narrative Identity Work’ to examine the stories these individuals tell, focusing on narrative identity construction through their presence and stories shared on Instagram. The last concept ‘Identity work through working conditions in CCI’ presented a continuing set of questions regarding networking and how Slovenian graphic designers and illustrators use their narrative skills to present themselves to collaborators or potential employers. Two more topics were packaged under that concept, one was the idea of working from home and what limitations and advantages does that have for them, and the other was exploring the current challenges that Slovenian graphic designers and illustrators might have because of the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and how does that influence their current identity construction processes.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

Data collected with interviews was analysed with thematic content analysis, yet acknowledging the reflective appreciation that constructing interpretations from qualitative empirical data usually contains (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2009; Dubois & Gadde, 2002). The analysis began with a sensitivity for how to research and understand identity from a processual perspective (Fachin & Langley, 2017; Ravasi & Canato, 2013).

First, I recounted my experiences from the interviews and my first impressions to have an idea of how to approach the coding process.

Second, I coded the material from the data while looking back at the theoretical framework as some concepts were in great help when the data needed to be analysed further.



As interviews were conducted in Slovenian language, each interview needed to be translated and written down. Listening all the interviews again, translating and transcribing them was already a start to open coding as some patterns started emerging. At this point notes were taken regarding topics that were common to each new interview that needed to be translated. After that the summaries were written for each interview to continue with axial coding.

Third, I refined the codes and ordered them into themes. When comparing the patterns and common ideas, certain themes started emerging that I wrote down and compared again to sort them under main categories. After the second step of thematic analysis was conducted called also axial coding. More sorting and selecting was done and some main ideas and themes emerged. Themes that emerge in this step are important as they are crucial in order to answer the research question (Boeije, 2010).

The outcome can be seen in the coding tree (Appendix D), which acts as visual representation of my latest stage of the analysis. The main themes are ‘entrepreneurial identity work’, ‘identity work through Instagram’ and ‘Current conditions and challenges’.

### **3.7 Reflections regarding quality and good epistemic practices**

Validity and reliability are often questioned in qualitative studies. Validity refers to the accuracy of the representation made by the researcher and reliability refers to the degree to which the findings of the research are independent of accidental circumstances of their production (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Moisander and Valtonen (2006) emphasize that the validity cannot be accomplished through correct use of method alone but should therefore be enriched with a combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, and perspectives, which is also known as triangulation. This study was limited to the location of Slovenia and participants come from all parts of the country, this includes villages and cities. Participants come from slightly different backgrounds as they have education in graphic design, illustration, architecture, photography, art, and art pedagogics. Different age groups were represented in this study; the youngest participant is 20 years old and the oldest is 34 years old. Different statuses were also included as 3 of them are still students, 10 of them are self-employed and 2 of them are already mothers.

On the other side, to talk about reliability in qualitative research the process of the study needs to be transparent. Besides the methodological transparency, where data production process, analytical procedure and principles need to be carefully described and, in this case, interviews need to be recorded and transcribed, attention needs to be paid to the

theoretical transparency. Theoretical frame used in a certain research produces particular interpretations and can also exclude others (Moisander & Valtonen, 2006). Interview questions in this study were already used in other studies regarding identity work and are therefore reliable while my own addition to these questions were confirmed by Thesis supervisor before the interviews were conducted. To see how the interview flows and if there are any misunderstandings a pre-test was also conducted.

## **4 Results**

### **4.1 Social processes and entrepreneurial identity work**

Some graphic designers and illustrators have already embraced themselves as entrepreneurs and are proud to be one, some are actively working on becoming one of them and others do not really want to have anything to do with entrepreneurship. Most graphic designers and illustrators generally feel that in order to start perceiving yourself as an entrepreneur, a lot of self-reflection and communication with others that are in similar position as they are needed.

Both graphic designers and illustrators expose motivations to become an entrepreneur and reasons for not acting entrepreneurially, which are a part of the social process of becoming an entrepreneur and how they experience entrepreneurship on their daily basis, with focusing on their entrepreneurial identity work

#### **4.1.1 Social processes of entrepreneurship**

Outside forces are very important regarding if graphic designers and illustrators decide to act entrepreneurially or not. While an entrepreneurial path is completely natural for some, others see it more as a necessary evil and do not enjoy the ‘business part’ of their small business. Motivations to become entrepreneurs and reasons of not acting entrepreneurially are social processes that some find challenging and others enjoyable.

##### **4.1.1.1 Motivations to become an entrepreneur**

There were several motivations of why graphic designers and illustrators decide to become self-employed and eventually entrepreneurs. One of the main reasons and the strongest one was to have freedom when working on your own, being able to decide on your own working schedule, who they want to work with and which projects they want to work on. Having freedom was strongly connected with being self-employed in comparison with working in a company. For example, Hana emphasizes that when working in a company, she does not have same possibilities as working on her own:

*‘You have the freedom in comparison with working in a company. You can decide by your own where do you want to invest your time and with who you want to work with.’ – Hana, 28 years old, illustrator*

Another motivation, connected very strongly to freedom, is escaping the 9 to 5 job. Many did not feel comfortable with working in a team, being pressured with deadlines, and having someone above you, telling you what to do. One of graphic designer notes:

*'Even when I started doing this [being self-employed] I really wanted to have the freedom to craft my own day so not be in an enclosed time and space, for example I would need to be in Ljubljana, Slovenia from 9 to 5 every single day. I had two internships, they both failed. That was my clue to actually start exploring entrepreneurship and starting my own company which gave me freedom to create whatever I want for myself, the freedom to work with the people I want and to really do what I love. To really pick my projects instead of working for somebody else.'* – Anamarija, 28 years old, content marketing manager

Working in a company does not only limit creative entrepreneurs' freedom but also becomes a routine and it is therefore very boring in comparison with working on your own. Anja explains that she was not able to grow personally when she was working in a company:

*'I wouldn't grow that much in someone else's company, for sure. Working in a company, I realized I stopped growing, it became boring for me and I was not happy anymore.'* – Anja Korenč, 33 years old, packaging designer

Another example of not only limiting the freedom when working in a company is also subordinating to different styles when working for a company, that can be quite challenging and devaluing as quoted by Ana:

*'I have two different styles, one is in graphic design and another in illustration, so working for a company would mean that you need to subordinate to their standards and clients, it means that you don't have that much freedom in choice and creatively as well.'* – Ana, 24 years old, graphic designer and illustrator

The last motivation to becoming an entrepreneur that emerged from this data is being pushed into becoming entrepreneurs. Some of the designers and creatives were finishing their studies right when the last big recession happened in Slovenia and the lack of employment opportunities was the reason, they needed to start something on their own:

*'I also do not really remember how it was when I started this business, because I was a bit pushed into starting to work for myself. I finished my studies when the crisis arrived to Slovenia, that was in 2012. And I needed to do something, I was lucky to have clients from my study years and I was firstly working for them as a student and then through company.'* – Anja Korenč, 33 years old, packaging designer

Similarly, some feel that they are pushed into becoming an entrepreneur to sell their work and being able to get an income and live from it. Anja Kohek is one of illustrators that started acting entrepreneurially to get paid for her work:

*'Creativity and acting entrepreneurially. I can draw nicely, but if I don't know how to sell it, what is the point of it?'* – Anja Kohek, 32 years old, illustrator

#### **4.1.1.2 Reasons for not acting entrepreneurially**

The analysis shows that there may be reasons for not acting entrepreneurially. A strong reason for not acting entrepreneurially could be having to deal with bureaucracy and the lack of knowledge about the administrative part of the business. The lack of knowledge and the fear of not doing things right that could result in getting a fine was strongly connected to the criticism over the outdated system of registering your business and presenting the bills monthly in order to be taxed in Slovenia. Tanja is one of the owners of a small business that sometimes has second thoughts about continuing with her business, just because of these reasons:

*'I have the fear of maybe something not doing right all the time. Because I think that in Slovenia this is really badly organized. No one knows anything, you go and ask three different institutions and no one knows how to explain you stuff. I think you need to really do a research on your own and do everything by yourself and hope that you are doing things right, because as they don't really help you they come after you really fast in order to give you a fine, so it means that they are only efficient in punishing individuals that want to make something on their own.'* – Tanja, 29 years old, graphic designer

Another reason for not acting entrepreneurially is the perception of entrepreneurship being stressful, risky, and insecure. Working as a freelancer or having your own business mean that you depend on your own income. The salary is not fixed and working on your own is perceived to be more insecure than for example having a steady job. Both Vida and Tara share a similar opinion:

*'It is a bit risky still, on the 15<sup>th</sup> in the month you don't have the stable payment as you would in a 9-5 job.'* – Vida, 28 years old, graphic designer and illustrator

*'Freelancing can be risky as well, it is not guaranteed that you will have work and projects every month, you have to work for it, the salary is not secure and fixed.'* – Tara, 26 years old, graphic designer

The last reason for not acting entrepreneurially is the opposition to the entrepreneurial idea of doing something to gain economic power. A lot of them feel that entrepreneurship relates to business values and this contradicts their personal values. Entrepreneurship is seen as profit oriented and with having a focus on only selling their work, they feel limited in a creative aspect. Neja exposes two reasons why she doesn't want to act entrepreneurially, the first is that entrepreneurship is too business oriented and working on everything strategically limits creativity, while creative expression in her opinion is more important than profit:

*'I don't find myself in entrepreneurship really. I don't see myself in strategic thinking and I think that I see myself more as an artist and not as an entrepreneur [...], not working on something that will sell good, but on something that I want to put out as an artist. To work more for myself, not for others, [...] maybe I don't see myself the most in entrepreneurial part, where you need to think about what will I tell people, how will I get the money.'* – Neja, 32 years old, illustrator

Interestingly, there can also be a “linguistic” or “conceptual” aspect involved. Some graphic designers and illustrators do not see themselves as entrepreneurs, because there is a slight difference between the understanding of the Slovenian translation for entrepreneur, which is *podjetnik* and the English word entrepreneur. Interviews were conducted in Slovenian language but both words, Slovenian, and English, were used when asking questions about entrepreneurship.

Firstly, the definition of entrepreneur and entrepreneurship needs to be examined in both languages. *Podjetnik* is in Slovene language according to Besede slovenskega jezika defined as “in capitalist economics the owner of a business” (“podjetnik”, n.d.) and *podjetništvo*, which can be translated as entrepreneurship is by SSKJ defined as “striving to maximize financial success at risk” (“podjetništvo”, n.d.). The definition of an entrepreneur in English was taken from Cambridge dictionary and is defined as “someone who starts their own business, especially when this involves seeing a new opportunity” (“entrepreneur”, n.d.) and entrepreneurship is in the same dictionary defined as “skill in starting new businesses, especially when this involves seeing new opportunities” (“entrepreneurship”, n.d.).

It can be seen that the definitions in Slovenian language are different from definitions provided in English language, while both of Slovenian definitions are clearly more monetary and profit oriented, the ones in English are much more open and do not focus that much on the economical aspect of a business. When I was translating interviews from Slovenian language to English, I already had a difficulty of how to translate certain concepts correctly. I decided to check this idea with asking the creatives about it, and it appears that graphic designers and illustrators have a problem of defining them as being a *podjetnik*, but would have less problem of identifying themselves with being an entrepreneur:

*‘Yes, I agree, maybe that is why a lot of people do not consider themselves as a podjetnik/entrepreneur in Slovenia. I didn’t think about it before but now that you mentioned it I see them completely differently as well. Entrepreneurship really sounds much more creative and podjetnik is just like, nope I am not that. Maybe we would need another word for that in Slovenian language.’ – Neja, 32 years old, illustrator*

*‘Yes, in Slovene it sounds so business like, very connected to the economy while entrepreneurship covers much more. I think it consists of accounting, which I hate, everything that connects with numbers and the government I don’t like at all.’ – Sara, 31 years old, illustrator*

Lack of knowledge about entrepreneurship and lack of information makes graphic designers and illustrators not acting entrepreneurially. Their biggest motivations to becoming entrepreneurs is the freedom and fulfilment that you cannot achieve while working for someone else. These motivations for becoming an entrepreneur and reasons for not acting entrepreneurially focus mostly on outside forces that fit more to the social processes.

## 4.1.2 Becoming an entrepreneur and entrepreneurial identity work

The analysis shows that the creatives have a rather clear understanding of their inner processes and were able to search for and expose the moments and situations when they started realising, they are becoming entrepreneurs. This, in turn, marks a beginning of more conscious entrepreneurial identity work that continues through being more active as “entrepreneurs”. Once they believe they are entrepreneurs, they go through different challenges in acting entrepreneurially. The most active entrepreneurial identity development happens when they communicate with like-minded people and stumble upon different challenges that entrepreneurship introduces in their life. This stimulates greater self-reflection and self-talk for finding solutions. The most significant situations that need identity work are working from home and balancing projects for clients and their own projects.

### 4.1.2.1 Realisation of becoming an entrepreneur

In the path of becoming an entrepreneur –or at least starting to feeling like one– and being more active in entrepreneurial identity work, connecting and talking with like-minded individuals that were or are going through the same struggles, as well as ongoing self-talk and self-reflection are important. Conversations with others and their feedback enable the graphic designers and illustrators to start realising that they are becoming entrepreneurs. All graphic designers and illustrators in this study seek for approval and feedback from others, which are often more experienced entrepreneurs:

*‘I think what helped the most were conversations with people that are in similar position as I am. People that work in creative industries in general, it was a huge help yes. Having a community behind me, having people that have similar experience as I do, this is very important, [...] people that I have met in the creative sector, in connection with them I also defined myself as an entrepreneur.’ – Ana, 24 years old, graphic designer and illustrator*

*‘Of course, also conversations with people that are going through similar situations help me to build my own mindset. Internet sources as well, I always try to learn as much as possible, but usually it goes through the conversations with others. People that are more entrepreneurial than I am, and I look up to them.’ – Špela, 20 years old, illustrator*



Getting positive feedback for what you do is recognised as an important aspect for becoming an entrepreneur. Positive feedback from clients, customers and friends seem to be crucial in building entrepreneurial identity while being recognized as successful and being invited to different events is also seen as important. Both, Špela and Hana started realising they are becoming entrepreneurs because of positive feedback and being recognised as successful:

*'Every time that I get an offer or collaboration, I need to think about it more entrepreneurially.'* – Špela, 20 years old, illustrator

*'I think the fact that at both events that I participated, they invited me to participate, I think that was it, [...] others gave me the motivation, with showing me that they like my things.'* – Hana, 28 years old, illustrator

Graphic designers and illustrators describe that working on bigger projects and dealing with bureaucracy also helps them realise that they are becoming entrepreneurs. Bureaucracy can be understood as dealing with the legal aspect of your business, preparing contracts, opening, and registering the business and dealing with copyrights. Nea explains:

*'I think the first time would be when I was sitting next to a lawyer, writing copyright contracts. Which happened after having a negative experience. And I kind of realised in that moment. Probably also landing bigger projects, [...] now I am an entrepreneur, now I have landed this project. When I started dealing with contracts, I think this was the moment when I sobered up.'* – Nea, 30 years old, illustrator

Starting your own business means incorporating new roles in your life. Administrative roles are by far the least comfortable roles for graphic designers and illustrators and are therefore seen as challenging. Neja sees these challenges as an introduction in becoming an entrepreneur:

*'You need to change and adapt to different roles all the time, so maybe this would be it. Adapting to roles that are not your favourite ones, like administration and being a graphic designer. I don't like being graphic designer that much, but it pays my bills.'*  
– Neja, 32 years old, illustrator

#### 4.1.2.2 Ongoing self-reflection

Ongoing self-reflection and self-talk are crucial in the process of becoming entrepreneurs and when the creatives already consider themselves as entrepreneurs. Most of them are positive about the changes, they welcome everyday challenges and work on them actively as they understand that with each challenge they learn something new about themselves, they get more confident and experienced, which leads to a better self-perception and a better understanding of themselves. The general understanding is that entrepreneurship is a journey where nothing happens overnight. That is why working on yourself is essential for becoming or being an entrepreneur. They see themselves changing over time, which underlines that they work on their identity consciously and actively:

*'It is not only people telling you, ah you have changed so much, if you say something like this to me now, I say I know, this and this and that changed. I completely understand what is happening to me and inside me. Before I was not able to do that but now I am mastering it quite well.'* – Maša, 26 years old, branding strategist

*'Maybe every once in a while, some kind of a self-reflection happens, I think a bit more about what is happening to me and where I am going, and this usually happens in a positive way. When I look back, I realise I have changed for the better and that I moved forward. I welcome the changes always. This brought me some nice things, like being more confident about myself.'* – Jovana, 24 years old, illustrator and 2D animator

Entrepreneurship is seen as going out of comfort zone and therefore identity work is much more active and present in comparison with working for a company. Being on your own and being alone for everything accelerates the search of meaning-making. Anja explains:

*'Entrepreneurship gave me a lot of experience, very bad ones and very good ones. I had to go through so many challenges because of entrepreneurship that taught me a lot. Even though I had to go through so many things, but I am grateful, as you also get thick skin that you otherwise wouldn't have. You achieve things that you would never say you could. I see entrepreneurship as a hard path, but I cannot go without it. Working for your own business means working on your identity and constantly searching for yourself, much more if we compare it with a 9-5 job where you*

*turn off your working mindset the first minute you are on your way out of the building.* – Anja Korenč, 33 years old, packaging design

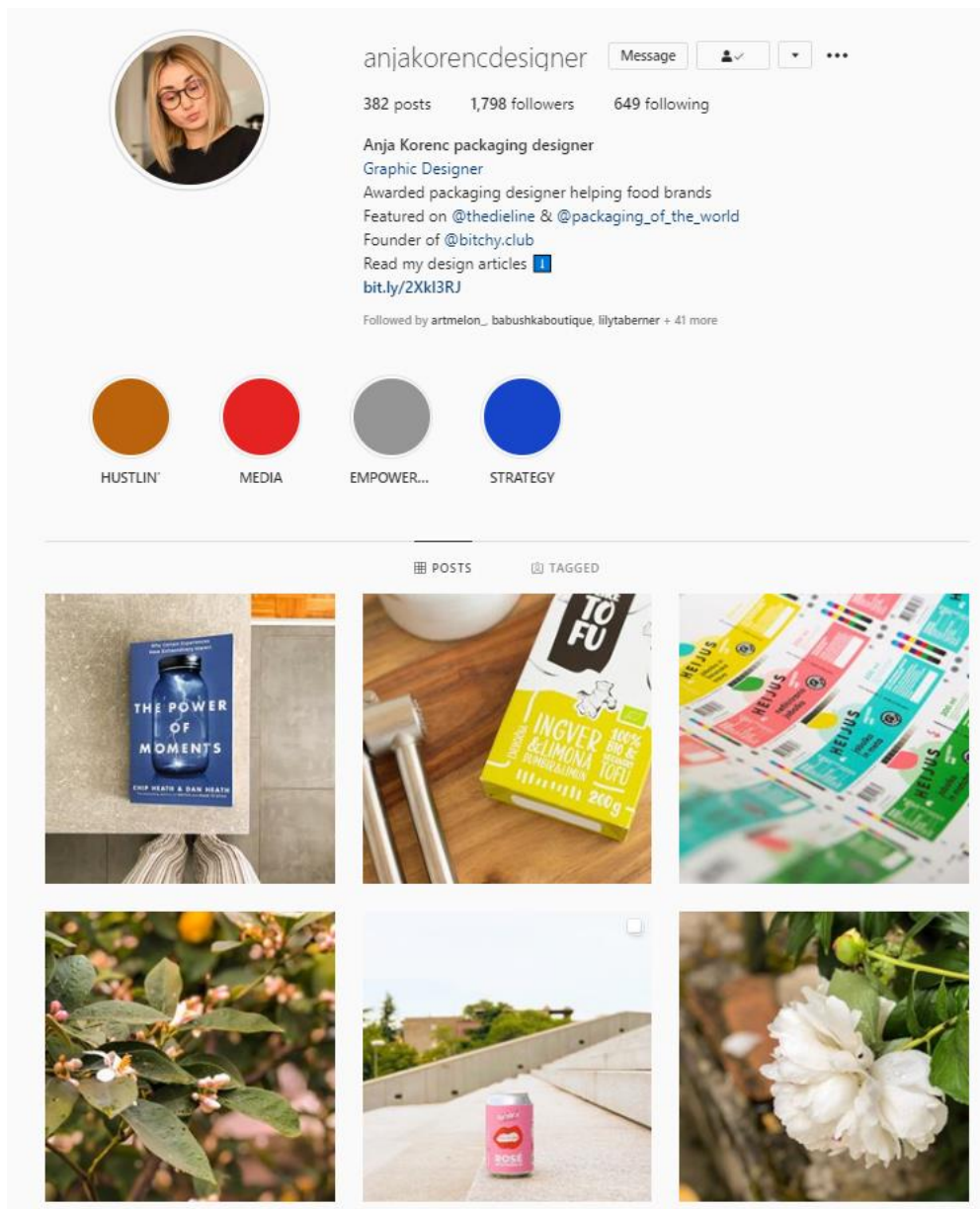


Figure 4. Instagram profile of Anja's personal account focusing on packaging design (Korenč, 2020b).

#### 4.1.2.3 Balancing client work and own projects

Most of the graphic designers and illustrators that participated in this study are self-employed and having the freedom was the main motivations for beginning their entrepreneurial journey. Despite rejecting the notion of working in a company, having a 9 to 5 job, or working for someone else, most of them still have clients or collaborate with others

on different projects. A goal for most of them for the future is to focus solely on their own projects and live from them. Neja and Anja note:

*'I want to continue working on my own projects to be able to live from it in the future. I really hope that it will become my main thing and my only source of income.'* - Neja, 32 years old, illustrator

*'Regarding my company the goal is to start again, to be able to live from this, [...] I don't want to work with clients anymore. It was very stressful to work for clients, if there wouldn't be anything else, I would continue with this work but I also have my own brand.'* – Anja Kohek, 32 years old, illustrator

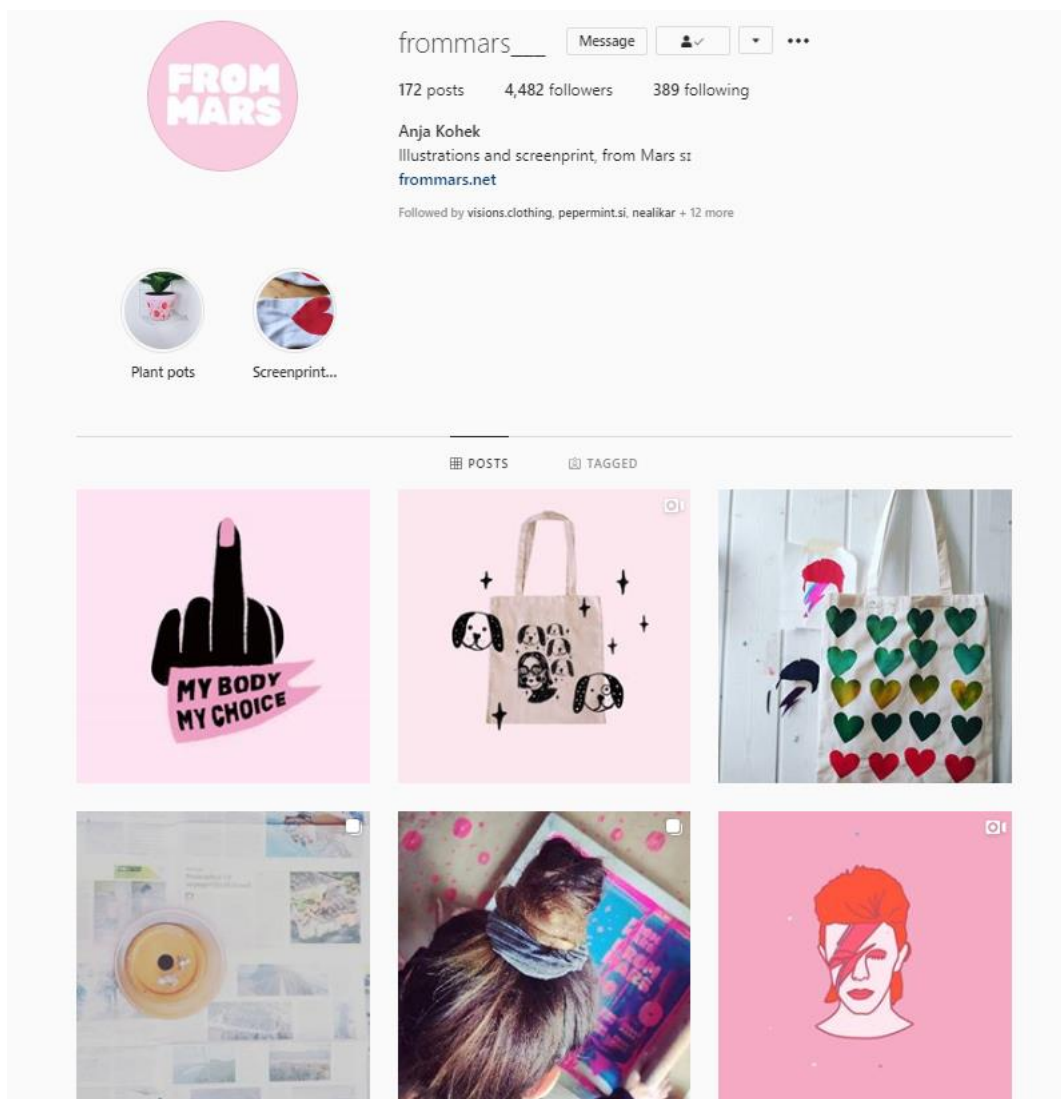
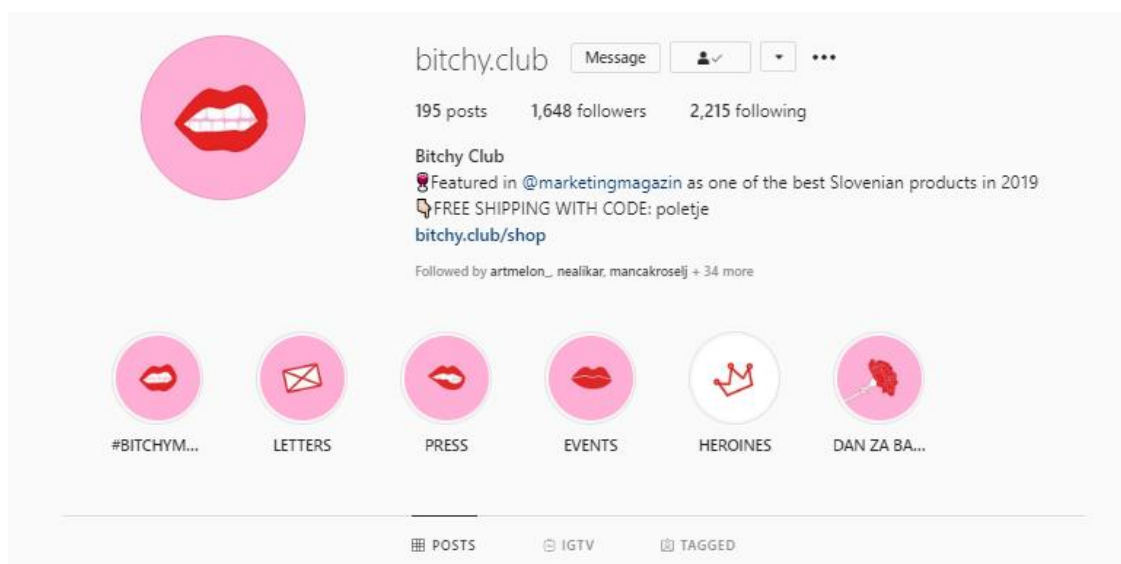


Figure 5. Anja's business Instagram profile (Kohek, 2020).

Current challenge that they are struggling with while being freelancers is that client work brings in more money but gives you less freedom. Working with clients seem easier as the role they have there is usually always the same. They have a lot of experience working on projects, they approach it very professionally and are very confident about it, while working on their own business is still an unknown territory and means more identity work, more role changing and more insecurity and risk taking. Anja explains:

*'When I work for my brand there are more roles that I need to perform than for example when I work with clients, where I work on one thing, I offer one thing and I do not accept other things or I get someone that does that for me. Switching roles is the most visible when working on my project, I need to be a supplier, seller, designer, marketing manager, everything, [...] I feel the strongest when I work for my clients, not when I work on my project. The reason might be that there I really feel sovereign when working with clients, 100 percent sure what I am doing. With my own project I am working with new thing, every day something new surprises me and there I do not feel the same powerful as when I am dealing with clients. You are more unsure and uncertain when it comes to your own brand.'* – Anja Korenč, 33 years old, packaging designer



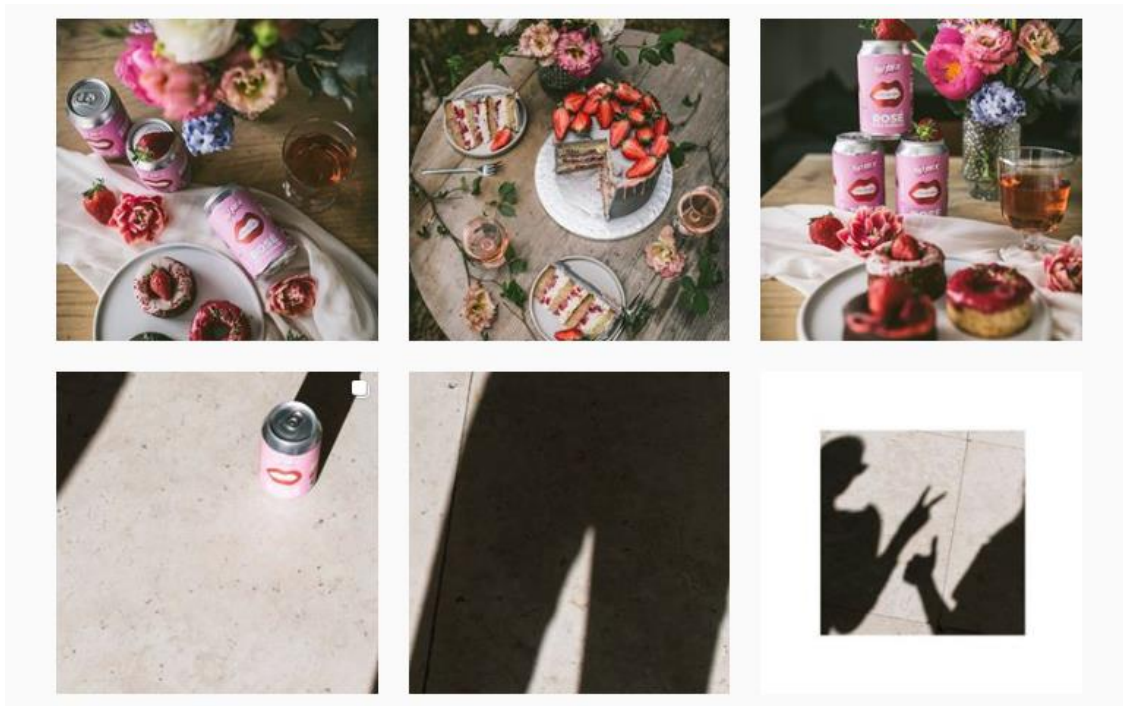


Figure 6. Anja's Business Instagram profile where she is promoting her own product (Korenč, 2020a).

#### 4.1.2.4 Challenges of working from home

Another challenge that graphic designers and illustrators that are self-employed have in common is working from home. Most of them like working from home as it is in their opinion more comfortable than working in a studio or in a company and they can concentrate more on the process of their work and are more productive. They describe that working from home is not considered as serious as if they would be working in an office every day, even though as a self-employed entrepreneur you work more than 8 hours per day:

*'At home they were not taking me seriously, they did not see me as someone that has a full-time job just because I was working from home. Everyone thought that they can just get into my room while I was working and ask me to do stuff, like can you please help me with this and that. And I was like a bit in a bad mood. At some point I had a talk with them, explaining them that even though I work from home and I am in the room, it is the same as I would be in an office somewhere for 8 hours.'* – Tara, 26 years old, graphic designer

*'Sometimes I work 12 hours, but as I am home, they have a feeling that I am not doing anything'* – Ana, 24 years old, graphic designer and illustrator



Isolation and lack of socialization is also shown as something that creatives that work from home can experience quite often. Some found a compensation with working on things where they have more opportunities to socialise, as for example Tara and Nea:

*'I work from home, two times per week I also work from a studio in Celje, where we also collaborate. It is nice to have such a diverse jobs and work to do during the week as I am not at home, closed in my mini office the whole day but I go out and do different things. It feels good having a connection with some people as well, not being alone.'* – Tara, 26 years old, graphic designer

*'I am also a make-up artist, I finished school of make up as well. Why did I decide for that? Because illustration and design are great jobs and I know this is it but they are usually very lonely, I am quite an extrovert and I need to work with people and I did a great combination which is very healthy for my mind.'* – Nea, 30 years old, illustrator

Connecting and communicating with like-minded people is most important for the graphic designers and illustrators to realise they are becoming entrepreneurs. Developing work structures is also important to introduce new roles and knowledge into their lives when they start a business. Isolation and the lack of respect towards their choice of work are the biggest challenges of working from home.

## **4.2 Identity work through Instagram**

Instagram is presented as the most important and as the only platform that graphic designers and illustrators use to present themselves, their business or their products and services. Storytelling, communicating and interacting with others to learn how to present themselves is a very active practice of narrative identity work that is happening through digital media. While the platform is free to use and gives creatives a lot of opportunities to get recognised and to reach different audiences, they have exposed a lot of challenges and struggles that they need to actively work on while presenting themselves on Instagram. All the challenges and pressures they experience on that digital platform is due to them becoming a brand and consequently acting entrepreneurially. Putting themselves out there and becoming a brand was exposed as challenging for most of them and is seen as one of the most active forms of entrepreneurial identity work through Instagram.

## **4.2.1 Storytelling and networking**

### **4.2.1.1 Presenting their stories**

Graphic designers and illustrators use Instagram to show their work and present themselves and their products or services. Instagram is seen as an extension of themselves while they are presenting their personal views and values, connecting them with their work. Ana sees storytelling as one of the most important part of presenting yourself in social media:

*'Definitely communication with the public, with customers. This is something that is the most important, especially in our sector, considering that everything is on social media today. You need to know about storytelling, you need to know how to get them to react and visit your website.'* – Ana, 24 years old, graphic designer and illustrator

### **4.2.1.2 Strategic building of added value**

Stories that graphic designers and illustrators are sharing on Instagram have all changed through time. All graphic designers and illustrators started building their stories strategically to develop an added value to their name or to their brand. Jovana and Maša work on their storytelling on Instagram strategically:

*'Yes. I developed my style through time and stories as well. Now it is more personal, before it was more objective. And I am communicating more my personal values.'* – Jovana, 24 years old, illustrator and 2D animator

*'I see Instagram from quite an entrepreneurial angle already, it is a tool that helps me grow, my personal account is not only a profile where I can take a photo of my legs and upload it but I really put a lot of thought into what I post on Instagram. Everything is very strategically oriented.'* – Maša, 26 years old, branding strategist



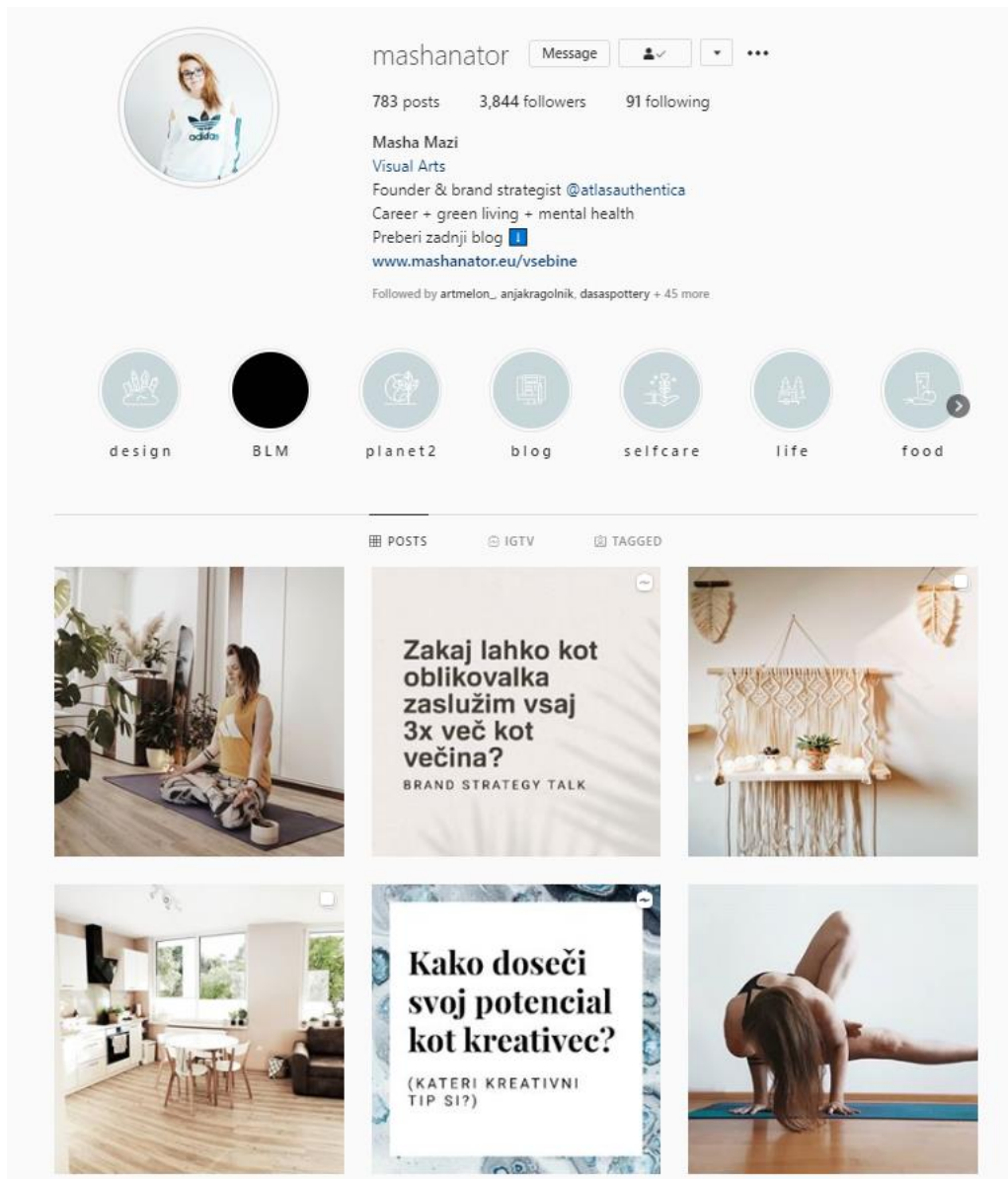


Figure 7. Maša's personal Instagram account that was strategically changed through time (Mazi, 2020).

Adding value is seen as the most important part of building their brands and acting entrepreneurially on Instagram. They are distancing themselves from posting content that does not have any value for their followers. Anamarija decided to turn her Instagram around and educate them instead of showing the happiest moments of her life and building an artificial and fake life online:

*'With Instagram before I was really focused in you know presenting beautiful imagery and stuff like that, but then I realised that it's a part of the picture and Instagram really needs to support where I need to go as a business. Then I completely*

*restructured it and I am now actually teaching people through it. I want to have a more educational content; I really want to present myself as an educator not as somebody who's doing really pretty pictures. Instagram is reflecting that shift.'* – Anamarija, 28 years old, content marketing manager

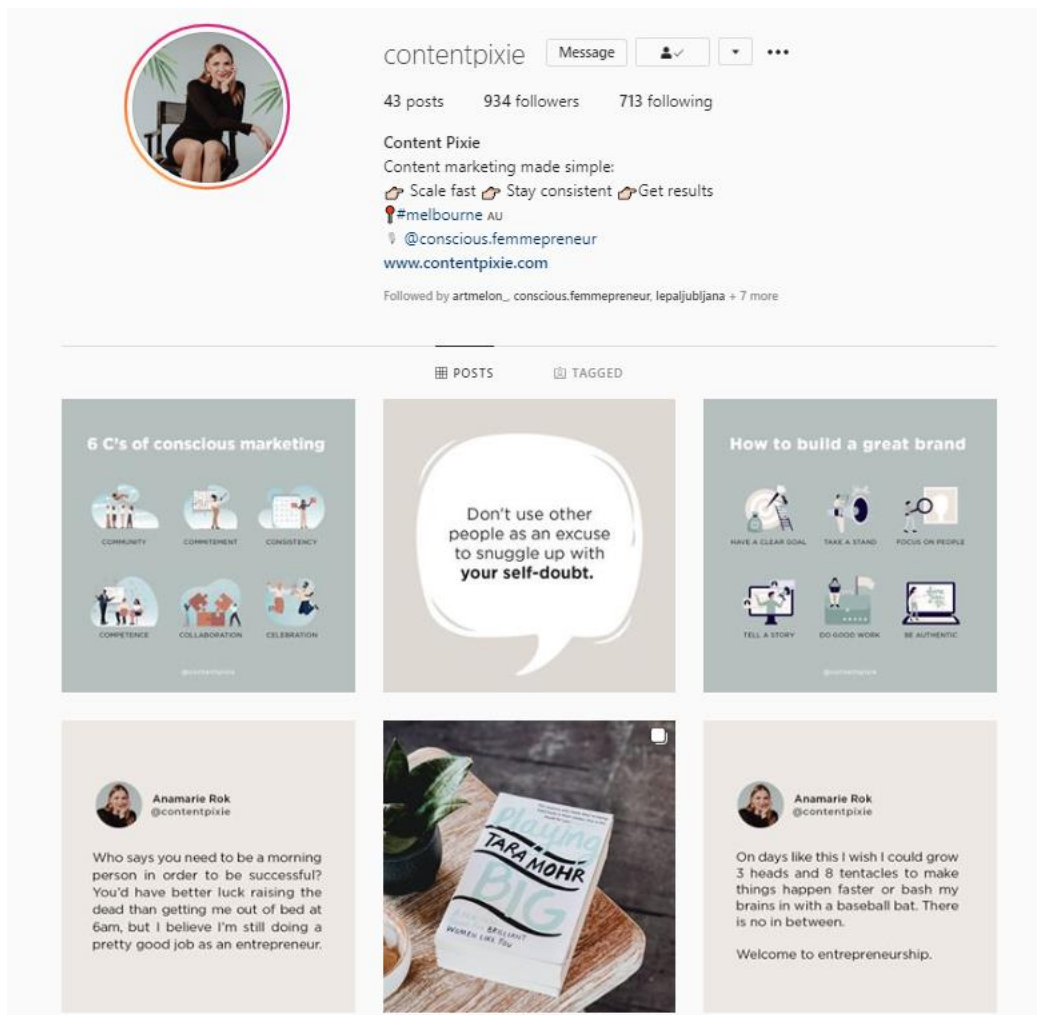


Figure 8. Anamarija's business Instagram profile where she is focusing on educating her followers (Rok, 2020).

Sustainability is also a topic that graphic designers and illustrators are incorporating in their stories. Thinking about next products, packaging design, or ordering materials from abroad, they have sustainability in mind. Jovana and Maša explain that sustainability is important when you are a small business and it adds value to your products and services:

*'Also, I am communicating sustainability. Expressing my values, so this is how they can get to know me more. This is also how I explore who I am as a person.'* – Jovana, 24 years old, illustrator and 2D animator

*'That is why I am leaning towards this as I ask myself what can I bring to the world? With my knowledge I am trying to focus on sustainability as well.'* – Maša, 26 years old, branding strategist

#### **4.2.1.3 Learning to present themselves through Instagram**

The most important way of learning how to present themselves is observing others on Instagram, connecting with them, and building a community. This seem to be the most active process of self-development that happens through social media. Jovana learns how to present herself most actively on Instagram, by observing others:

*'I think this is the most active for me in Instagram. It would be better to work more on it but well. I learn the best by observing others.'* – Jovana, 24 years old, illustrator and 2D animator

Instagram is primarily seen as a tool to connect with others ignoring the distance in space and as a perfect tool to network as an introvert. Anamarija and Maša explain:

*'I think networking and building a network would be one of the most important things every entrepreneur should do. I would use Instagram not that much for sharing my story, it would be actually to connect with likeminded individuals, so I connect different strategies with Instagram.'* – Anamarija, 28 years old, content marketing manager

*'So, my networking skills a few years ago were non-existent. After that I found Instagram and I realised that I can get to know a lot of people there.'* – Maša, 26 years old, branding strategist

Getting positive feedback in the community or from satisfied customers and clients through Instagram is one of the most important factors for building confidence. Confidence is very important for further self-development and is crucial for graphic designers and illustrators to continue with their work and act entrepreneurially. Lea and Tanja explain that positive feedback feels like an extra push in the right direction:

*'If you get a good feedback confidence comes.'* - Lea, illustrator

*'I think that when you get more demand for your products, you get more confidence as well. You also see what things you should evolve further and what people like. Also you see that you shouldn't give up too fast, having more will to continue. I would say confidence, as you start quite insecure.'* – Tanja, 29 years old, graphic designer

Stories and narrative identity work are present in all graphic designers and illustrators. They build their stories strategically, which can be strongly connected to their entrepreneurial identity work. Their stories have changed through time and they mostly learn how to present themselves through observing and connecting with others which also indicates the presence of identity work and entrepreneurially identity work through Instagram.

## **4.2.2 Pressure of becoming a brand**

### **4.2.2.1 Pressure to show themselves behind a brand**

Entrepreneurial identity work through Instagram is the most obvious when graphic designers and illustrators are exposed to certain challenges and pressures on that platform. One of these challenges is the pressure of becoming a brand and showing themselves behind it. They feel that they must put too much of themselves on social media to stay relevant. Tanja remembers that a few years ago having a small business on Instagram and the way of presenting yourself was completely different:

*'I had dilemmas at the beginning, presenting my company as a team of people, even though it was only me behind. For example, I was writing, we will prepare, we will do that ... A few years ago I had a feeling that people wouldn't take you seriously if you tell them that you are alone behind your brand, it sounded more professional to tell people that here is a whole team behind. We will reply to the email, well no, it is just me. Now it is a bigger pressure on showing yourself behind the brand. You have to show your personality. It changed a lot in the last few years.'* – Tanja, 29 years old, graphic designer

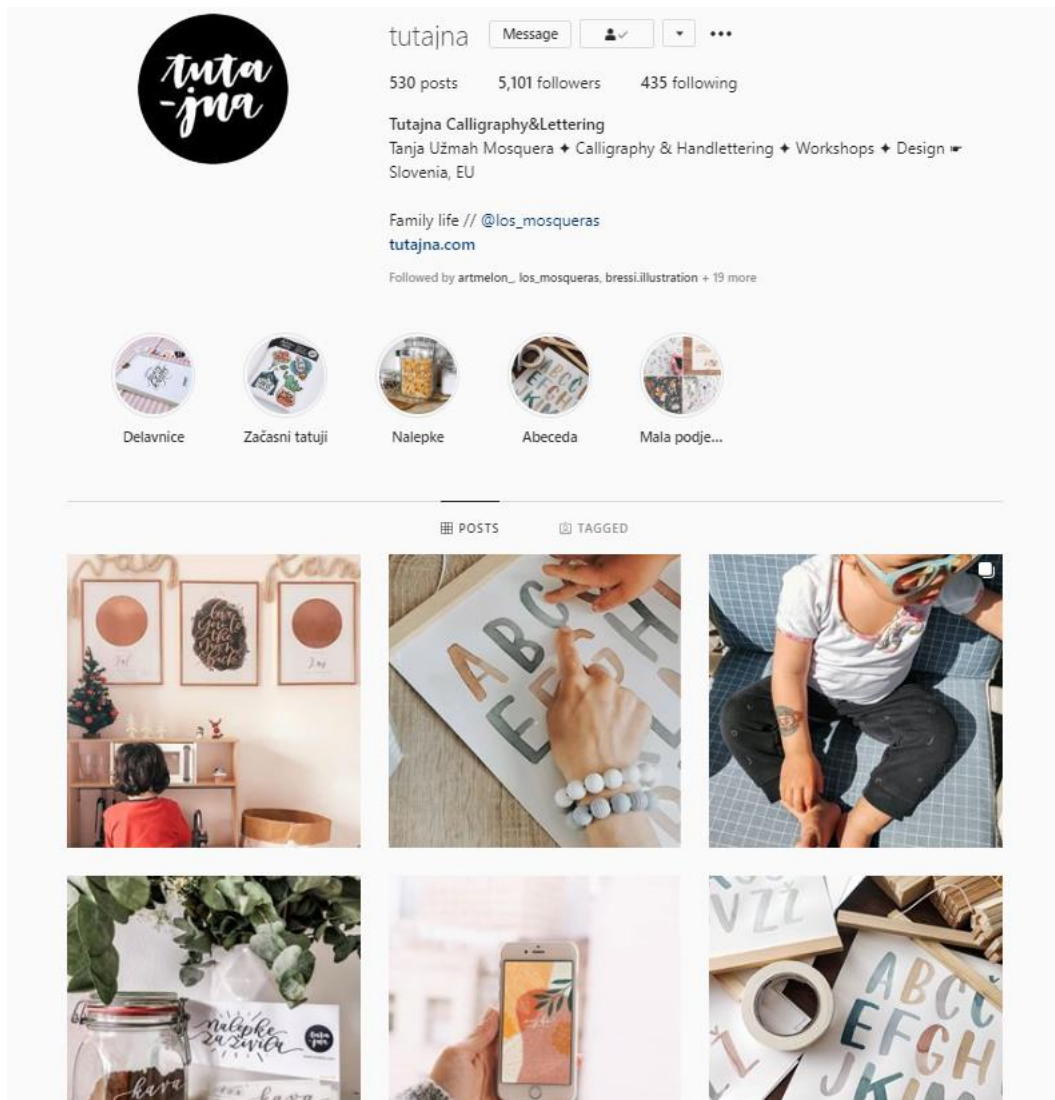


Figure 9. Tanja's business profile (Uzmah Mosquera, 2020).

Creatives are not comfortable with becoming a brand and showing more of themselves and their opinion, they feel that they are all the time in the spotlight and in order to be an owner of a small business on Instagram nowadays, you need to become some sort of influencer:

*'This is a thing that I am fighting with all the time. A lot of people that I know and are illustrators and graphic designers have a problem with that. Now you really have to put yourself out and present yourself. You have to have a very personal approach and before it was possible that your work speaks for you. Now you really have to put yourself out there and be even more present than your work. You need to become some sort of influencer. I wouldn't say that I am a very private person, but this is not*

*the most comfortable thing in the whole world. It is quite a struggle.* – Neja, 32 years old, illustrator

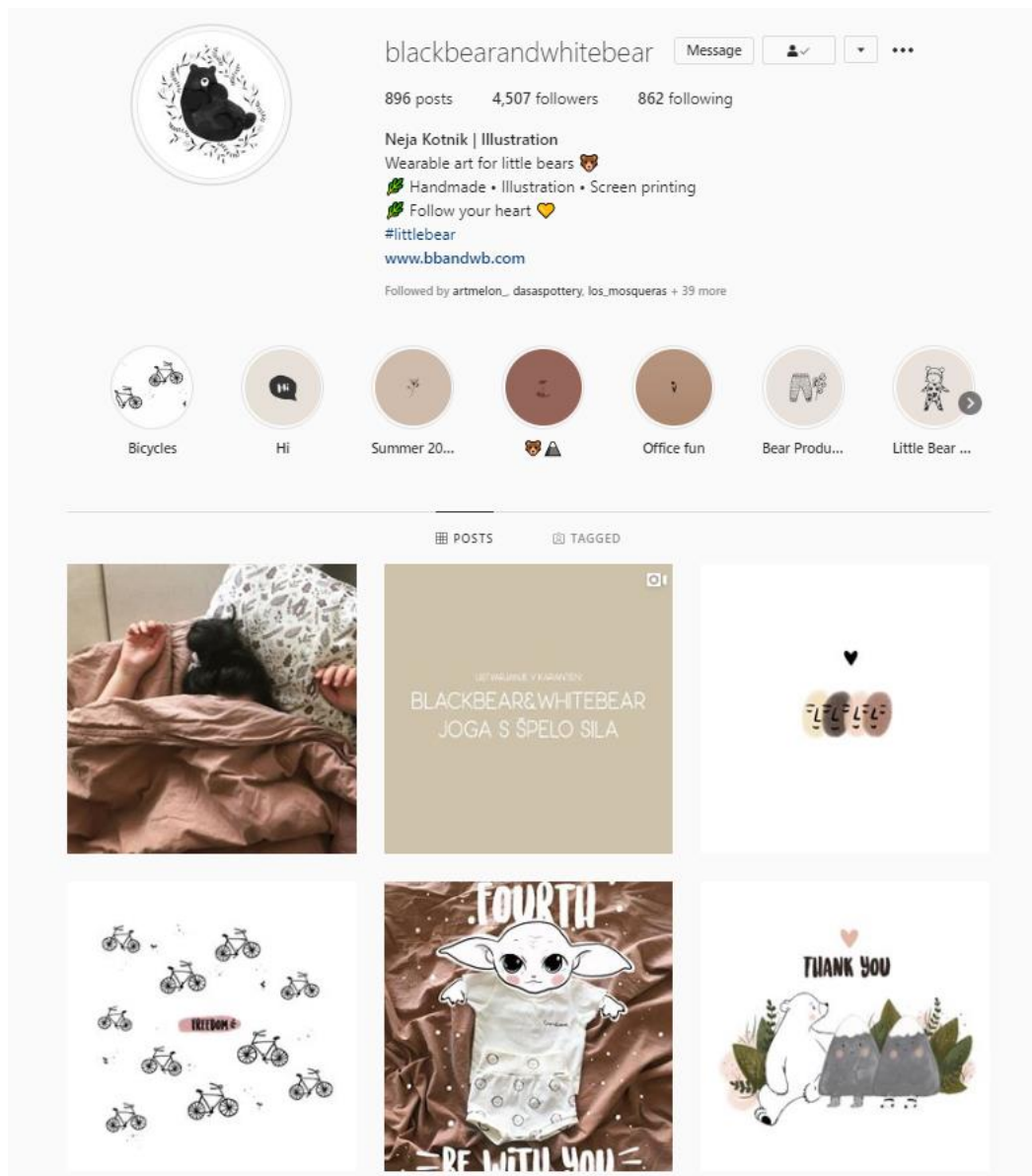


Figure 10. Neja's business profile (Kotnik, 2020).

#### 4.2.2.2 Pressure to stay consistent

Another pressure exposed was the need of keeping a consistent feed on Instagram. Instagram being a visual platform, everything is about presenting your story in a certain style, that is recognisable and that makes your presentation unique and differentiates you from other brands. This is seen as challenging especially for illustrators and graphic designers that are students and are still searching their style. Jovana explains:



*'For example, brand limiting you, I can see that in doing something for a client, and as it doesn't really fit on the feed, I have a problem publishing it for example. It destroys the consistent feed. Now it is also much more structured, before it was just whatever I decided to put on.'* – Jovana, 24 years old, illustrator and 2D animator

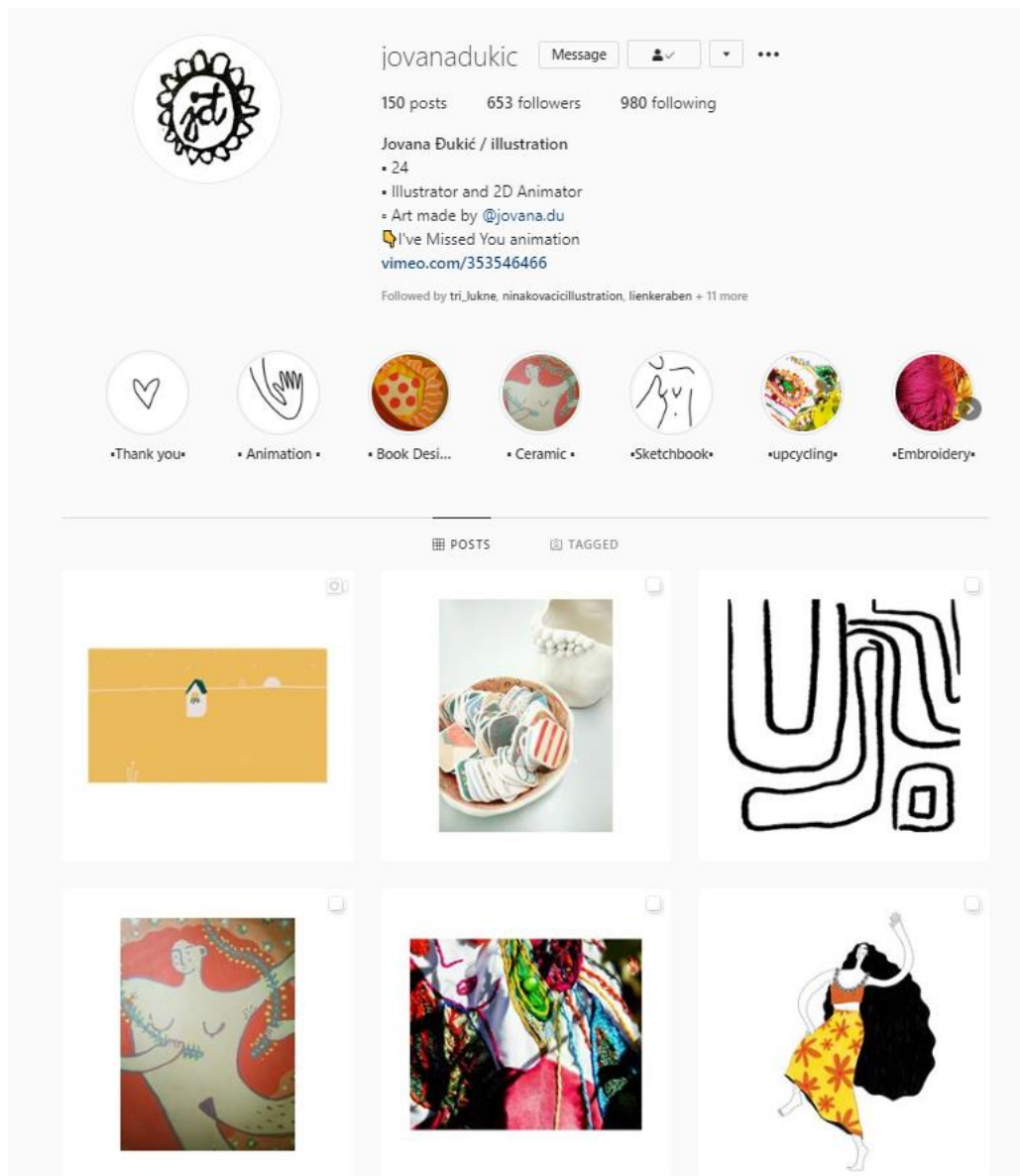


Figure 11. Jovana's Instagram profile where she is still exploring her style (Đukić, 2020).

Hana explains that having a consistent feed and style is crucial for presenting yourself on Instagram for people to recognize you:

*'You need to promote yourself a lot, a personal connection helps a lot. You need to have a consistent style, which is hard for me because I work in different media and*

*have different styles. People react better to consistent feed, on Instagram and on events. So, they recognize you.’ - Hana, 28 years old, illustrator*

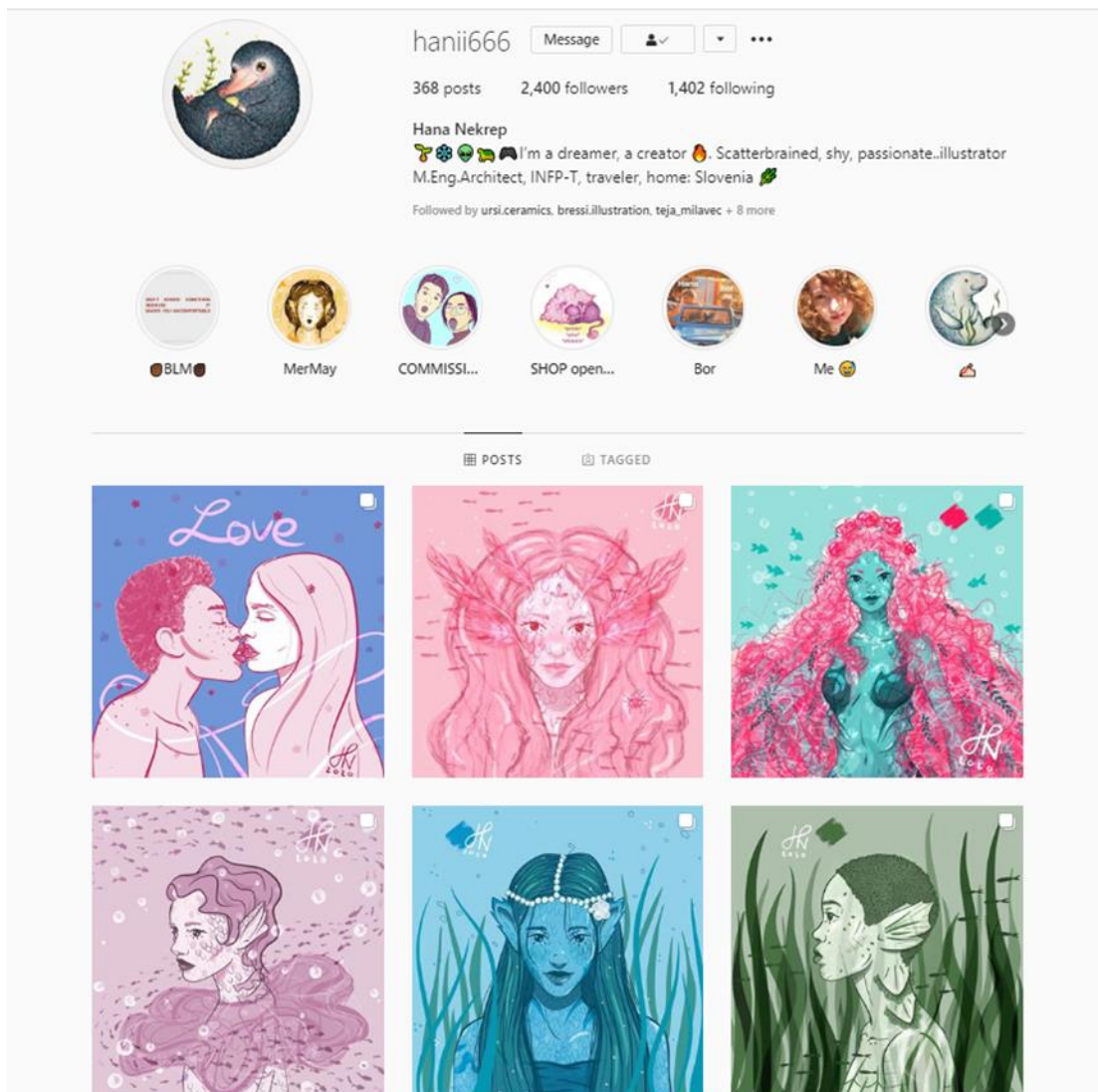


Figure 12. Hana's Instagram profile (Nekrep, 2020).

Some graphic designers and illustrators that have different styles even decided to open another Instagram account, to keep both consistent and communicate in separate styles and stories. Ana keeps her two styles separated to not confuse her customers and followers:

*‘I have two Instagram accounts. One of them is about design and minimal illustration, the other is for illustration that is more youthful maybe. Both of them are still me, one is a bit more serious and gentle, the other a bit more playful. I wanted to divide them because of consistency. Consistency is the key, so if I would be mixing both of*



*them it wouldn't be consistent. So, people are not confused as well, about what you are offering.'* – Ana, 24 years old, graphic designer and illustrator

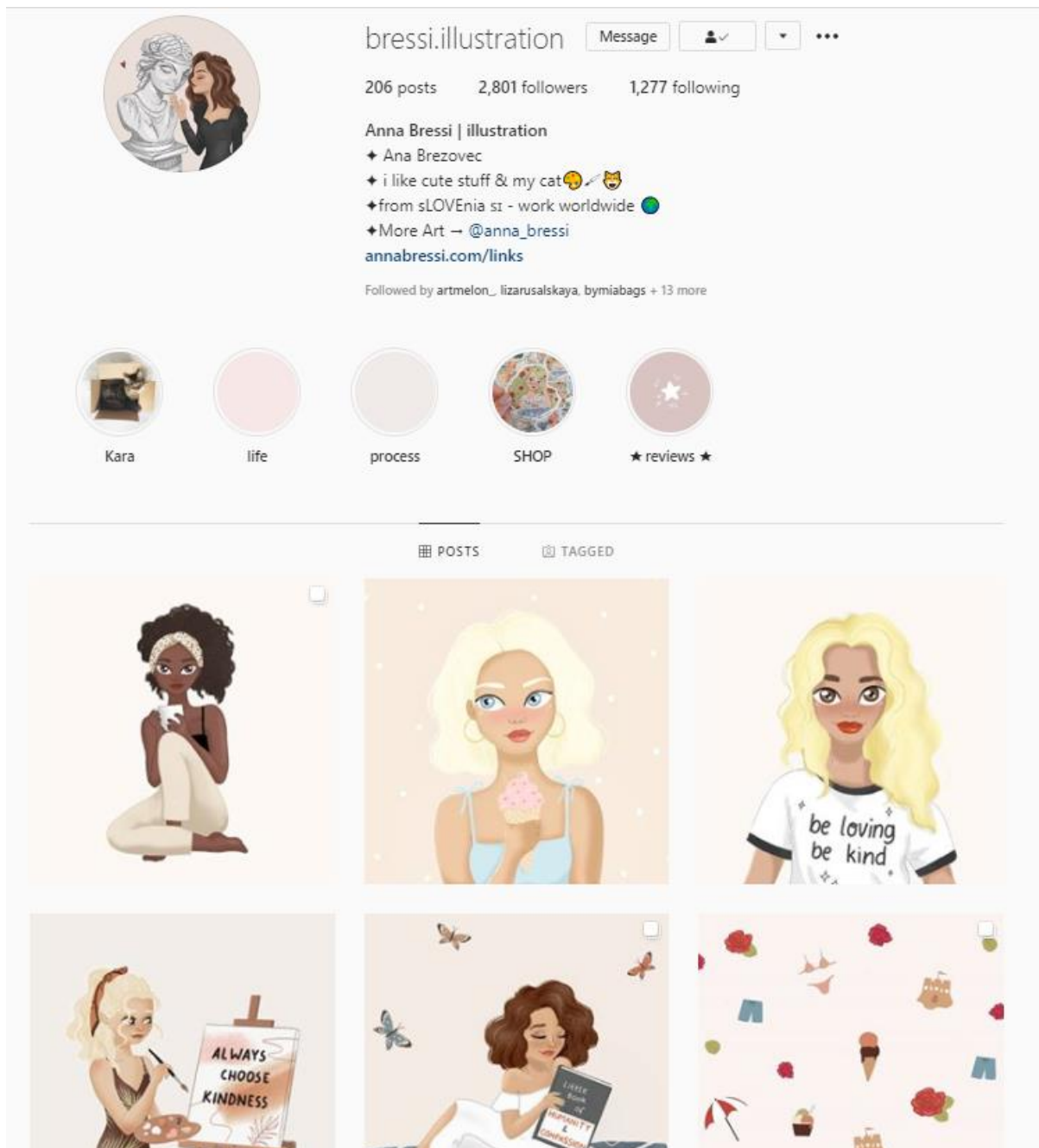


Figure 13. One of Ana's business Instagram profiles where she is presenting a more youthful style of illustration (Brezovec, 2020a).

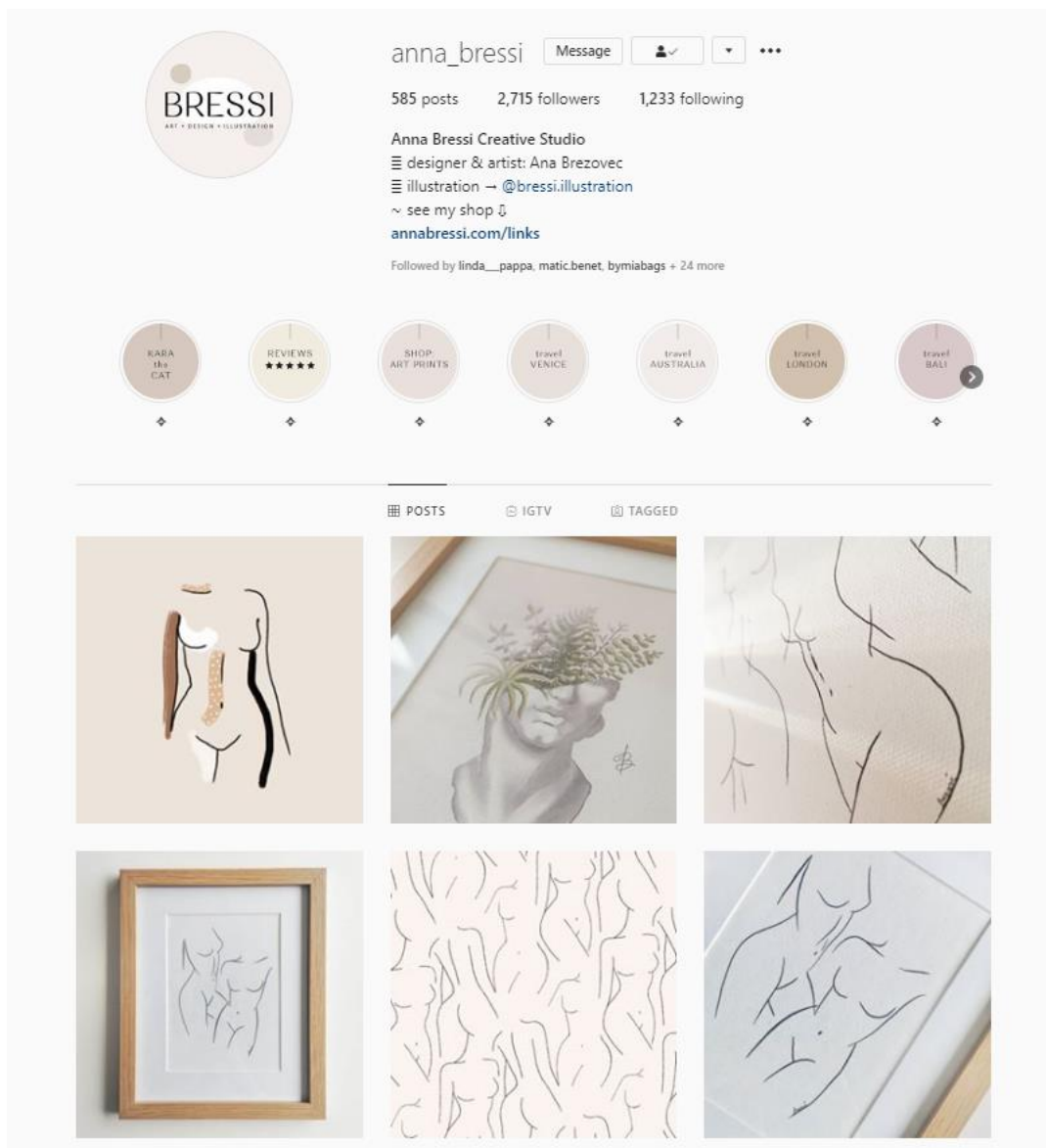


Figure 14. Ana's second business Instagram profile where she is presenting her minimal style of illustration and graphic design (Brezovec, 2020b).

#### 4.2.2.3 Pressure to follow Instagram trends

Another pressure that graphic designers and illustrators must deal with while presenting themselves on Instagram is following Instagram trends. They need to know what current trends are and what is currently popular on Instagram for their art and posts to have a better reach. Some of them that have a more original style feel pressured of doing something that is currently popular just because they know it will sell more in comparison with their original work. Jovana and Špela explain:

*'A successful brand has to do things that I personally don't like or wouldn't do. For example, sponsoring posts or put yourself inside more, to show who is behind the*

*brand. I would prefer to be more unique and show people some different things, but the market limits you nowadays in this and you need to do what others are doing.'* - Jovana, 24 years old, illustrator and 2D animator

*'There is a huge pressure coming from social media about what kind of art you should post on it. There are certain things that are very relevant and modern and it makes you question your work and also I think a lot of people subject to pressure and start making things that they know will sell.'* – Špela, 20 years old, illustrator

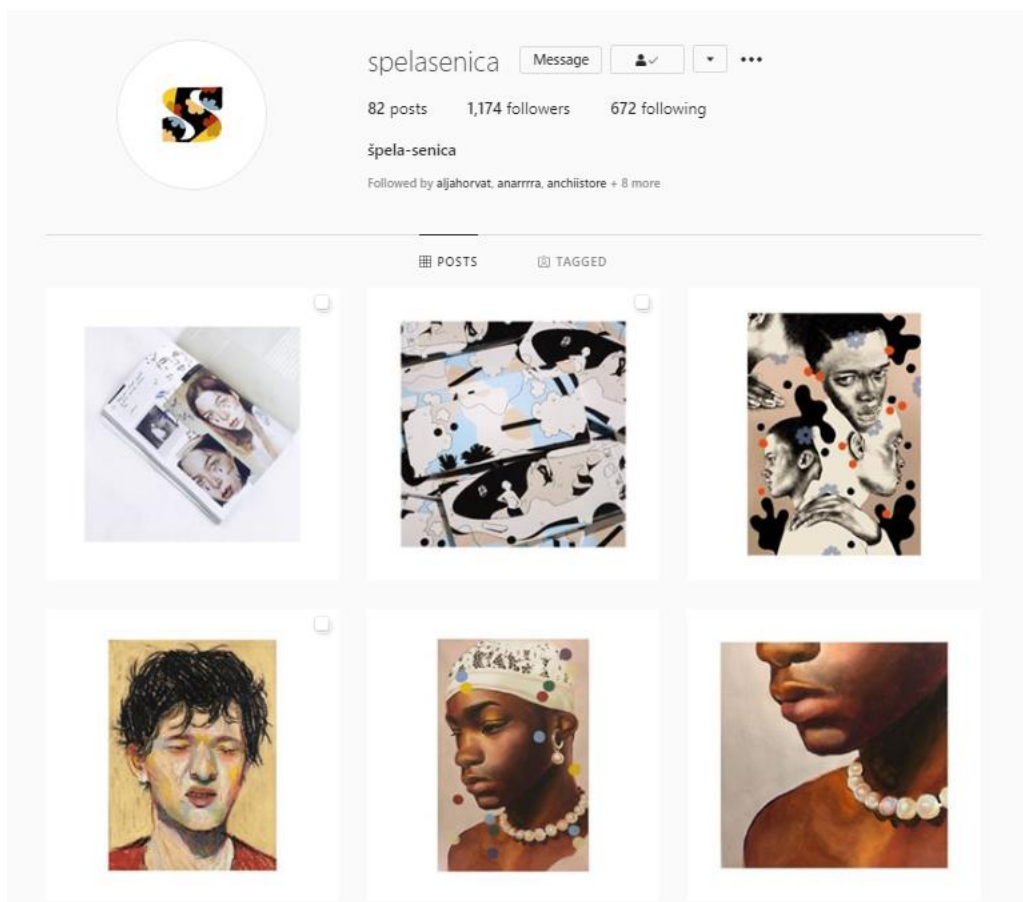


Figure 15. Špela's Instagram profile (Senica, 2020).

Because of these trends some of them still doubt after posting something on Instagram if it is relevant or not. Lea and Vida still struggle with having second thoughts after they post something on their feed:

*'As soon as you put yourself out and post something on Instagram, you want it or not, there is some sort of doubt, was it okay that I posted or not. I am trying to tell myself*

*that it doesn't matter. It is easy to say, but the other thing is what is happening in your brain. I always say that it could be better, so it is not always easy to show people yourself and what you have made.'* - Lea, illustrator

*'This was quite a process for me (putting herself out there and becoming a brand). I am mostly confronted with that on Instagram. I am trying to share my story and my thoughts; this is not always for granted and it doesn't come easy always. I can stumble up to a blockage and thinking if people even care and are they even interested in that. Is it relevant, am I talking about myself too much? Confrontation with fears of how others will see that and on the other side I am trying to keep that note of expressing myself and if some people will not find it interesting I shouldn't care so much.'* – Vida, 28 years old, illustrator

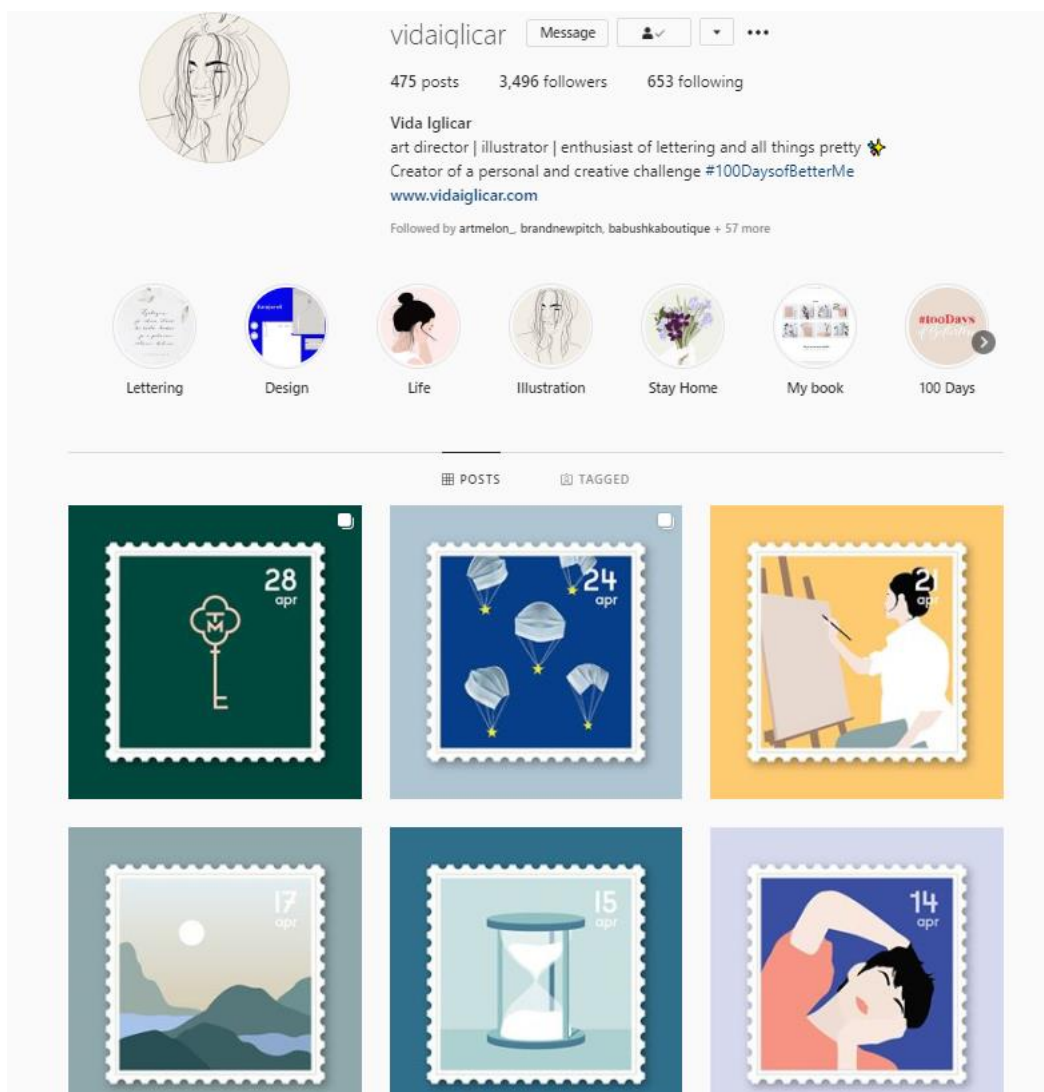


Figure 16. Vida's business Instagram profile (Igličar, 2020).

#### **4.2.2.4 Instagram algorithm changes**

Instagram tends to change its algorithm quite often, adapting it to the amount of people that join this platform daily, and when it does, the reach and engagement drops visibly. Graphic designers and illustrators feel the drop in reach every time it happens and take it very personally and start questioning themselves. Hana explains:

*'I promote myself and my work on it and you need to post new things all the time, the reach falls immediately you stop posting regularly. If you are not active enough, the algorithms hide you because they want you to pay for advertisements and I don't want to do that.'* – Hana, 28 years old, illustrator

Identity work is more active when graphic designers and illustrators need stumble upon challenges and pressures on Instagram. Constant pressures on Instagram results in active identity work and entrepreneurial identity work when they are becoming and presenting themselves as a brand.

### **4.3 Current conditions and challenges**

Some current conditions and challenges were exposed to be influencing not only the entrepreneurial identity work of graphic designers and illustrators, but also their identity development in general. As this study was conducted in the middle of the global pandemic and while Slovenia was in a strict lockdown, certain emotions and frustrations came out and were exposed that need to be investigated as well. Corona crisis is by some of graphic designers and illustrators seen as a big challenge for their work, especially for those whose main income depends on their personal projects and not from working with clients. While others do not find the situation that much different from their everyday life, they work from home anyways, so their daily routines did not change drastically. Some even took advantage of the current crisis and see it as an opportunity to start some projects they did not have time before to focus on. While Corona crisis arrived at Slovenia, the government changed. Without going deeper in the political views, the fact is that the current government is not in favour of self-employed individuals and small businesses and does not support them on their way, that is why certain frustrations regarding the current political and general situation were expressed as well.

## 4.3.1 Corona crisis

### 4.3.1.1 Negative aspect

The complete lockdown in Slovenia because of global pandemic brought a lot of insecurity among graphic designers and illustrators. Some projects were put on hold and most events were cancelled. Some also mentioned not being able to buy material for their work and sending out packages as local post offices were working with limited time schedule or were even closed. Sara and Hana sell a lot of their art at events like Comic Con, which were due to pandemic cancelled and their income has been put on hold as well:

*'Because I was supposed to go to a lot of Comic Cons in the next months, where I would be able to sell a lot of my products. It is quite easy to sell there. I already had agreements with touristic stores as well, but things turned the other way now.'* –

Hana, 28 years old, illustrator

*'I attend Comic Cons and I love them. I go every year to a few of them, this year I was supposed to go as well, but now of this Corona situation, you see what is happening.*

*In Rotterdam you have a lot of these conventions also. I was supposed to come in March. And my goal this year was going to a lot of conventions abroad, look at me now.'* – Sara, 31 years old, illustrator

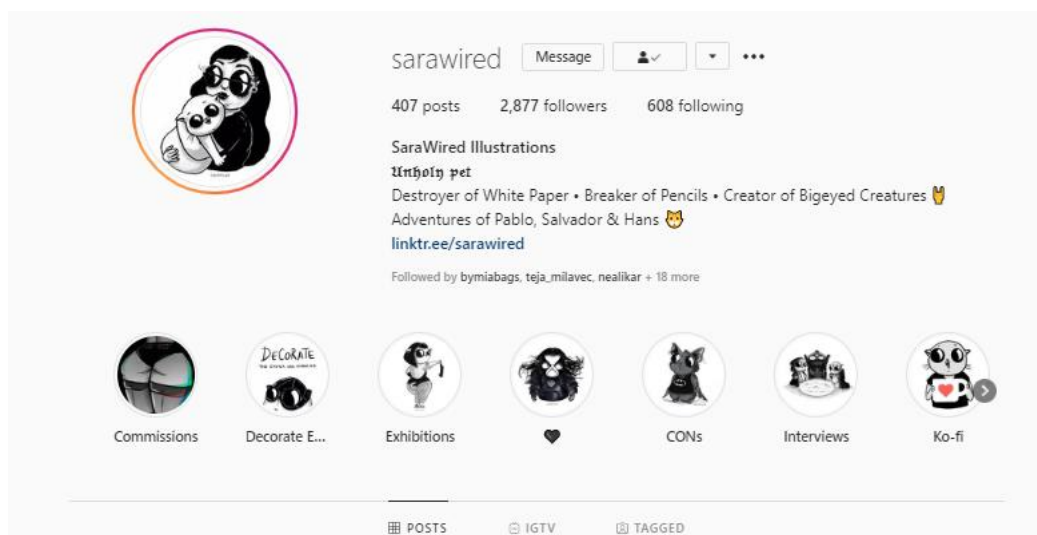






Figure 17. Sara's business Instagram profile (Žičkar, 2020).

A lot of fear can be felt regarding the economic crisis that is going to hit the Slovenian, European and even World market after the end of lockdown. Sara and Ana explain:

*'We will see now, the European capital. Now that there will be crisis. Will this make people think a bit more where they put money into. I remember the recession from 2008/09 that really made an impact on small businesses.'* – Sara, 31 years old, illustrator

*'We will see now, when the lockdown finishes. Creative industries, especially illustration, this is luxury, so we will see what will the economic crisis brings.'* – Ana, 24 years old, graphic designer and illustrator

Some of them wanted to start working on their own projects full time right before the start of pandemic and think that they will have to wait and see what happens in the future. Sara was about to register herself as an entrepreneur and Hana did that just before the start of pandemic:

*'Otherwise currently I still am not registered as a self-employed small business, in the current situation around Coronavirus and what is happening around Slovenian*

*government, I am quite happy I haven't decided to register it still, but I had an intention to do it recently.*' – Sara, 31 years old, illustrator

*'I have a Master of Engineering in Architecture, but I have at the beginning of crisis decided to go full time into the art. And now I thought that I can finally focus on my art career but because of Corona, everything is on hold, my income as well, it is quite frustrating.'* – Hana, 28 years old, illustrator

#### **4.3.1.2 As an opportunity**

Some do not see any big impacts on their work or income because of the current situation as they already work from home and therefore did not have the need to introduce any new routines to their work. Ana doesn't see a lot of changes since the introduction of a lockdown:

*'Except the plans being on pause, I still have projects. Things haven't drastically changed as I also work from home, it is not that different now.'* - Ana, 24 years old, graphic designer and illustrator

Most of graphic designers and illustrators that still have work see the current situation regarding the Corona crisis more as an opportunity. Some have more time to focus on some things they didn't have time to work on before or it gave them a different perspective on some of their ideas. Nea and Tanja quote:

*'Also, this quarantine, I really miss people but I also took it as an opportunity to work on something that I was postponing for quite a long time. I finally have time to work on these things.'* – Nea, 30 years old, illustrator

*'Corona I think that one of my ideas came out even more visibly, I wanted to make a notebook, to practice calligraphy from home for a while and Corona just confirmed that I really should do that.'* – Tanja, 29 years old, graphic designer



Some started working on new projects because of Corona crisis and some got more orders because people stayed at home and had more time to decorate their apartments, like Nea for example:

*'We can see this perfectly in the current situation. The first few days I was quite pessimistic, in a way f\*\*\*, we will be the first thing that will be cancelled. But I think it is not true, a lot of people are at home right now and they are making their homes even more comfortable, and they start thinking, on this wall a nice illustration would fit. This is how I got a lot of new order. Businesses are searching for more creative aspect of their work or products and this is where we come in. I think that we will always have work it is just that we need to adapt more. People enjoy visual communication since the stone age.'* – Nea, 30 years old, illustrator

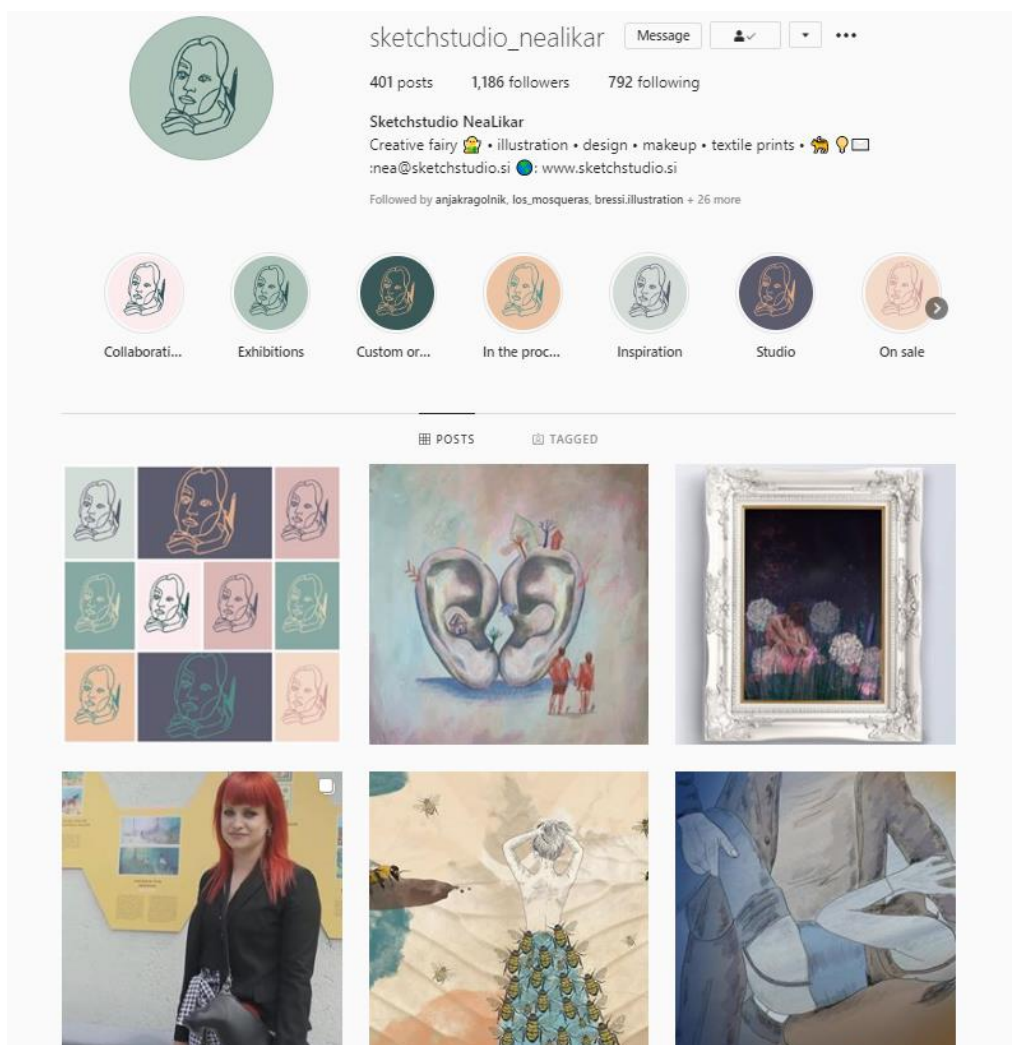


Figure 18. Nea's business Instagram profile (Likar, 2020).

The current situation also changed the way some graphic designers and illustrators see themselves, they had time to think about the future and to look deeper into themselves. Anja Korenč and Neja explain their experience:

*'I cannot go through the border with Italy and get my pasta, or to see friends. This is my biggest challenge. Otherwise I am happy where I am, what mindset I have right now. I still want to change something, but Corona, even though I was alone for a while, I explored myself so much that I am a better person than before. I am very grateful that this happened, I needed it so much'* – Anja Korenč, 33 years old, packaging designer

*'I think that everything like that that makes you feel really uncomfortable, you start learning about yourself from a different angle'* – Neja, 32 years old, illustrators

## **4.3.2 Criticism regarding Slovenia**

### **4.3.2.1 Lack of help from the government for self-employed individuals**

Not only in the time of the global pandemic, graphic designers and illustrators feel left out as being self-employed and having their own small businesses. They feel that the government does not support them and encourage them to continue their solo journey. Jovana thinks that there is still a place for improvement in Slovenia regarding the help to self-employed individuals and while Tara emphasizes the same, she exposes that the help could also be better especially in the case of younger people that are starting from nothing:

*'Especially when you are starting and you get such a small income and then you still have to pay taxes to the country, it hurts. A lot goes into taxes at the end. So it is quite hard to get somewhere in the freelance world, because no one can really survive with such high taxes [...] when I compare Slovenia to some other countries I see how taxes work in different places and I think that in Slovenia there is still a lot of place for improvement.'* – Jovana, 24 years old, illustrator and 2D animator

*'Also, the costs are getting higher and higher every year so you need to give back to the country more and more money each year. The cost of having accompany open as an SP is around 500 euros already, so you need to get enough money to pay this and then some money to survive with. I miss the support of the country in this case. They could be more business friendly, especially to young people that are starting.'* – Tara, 26 years old, graphic designer

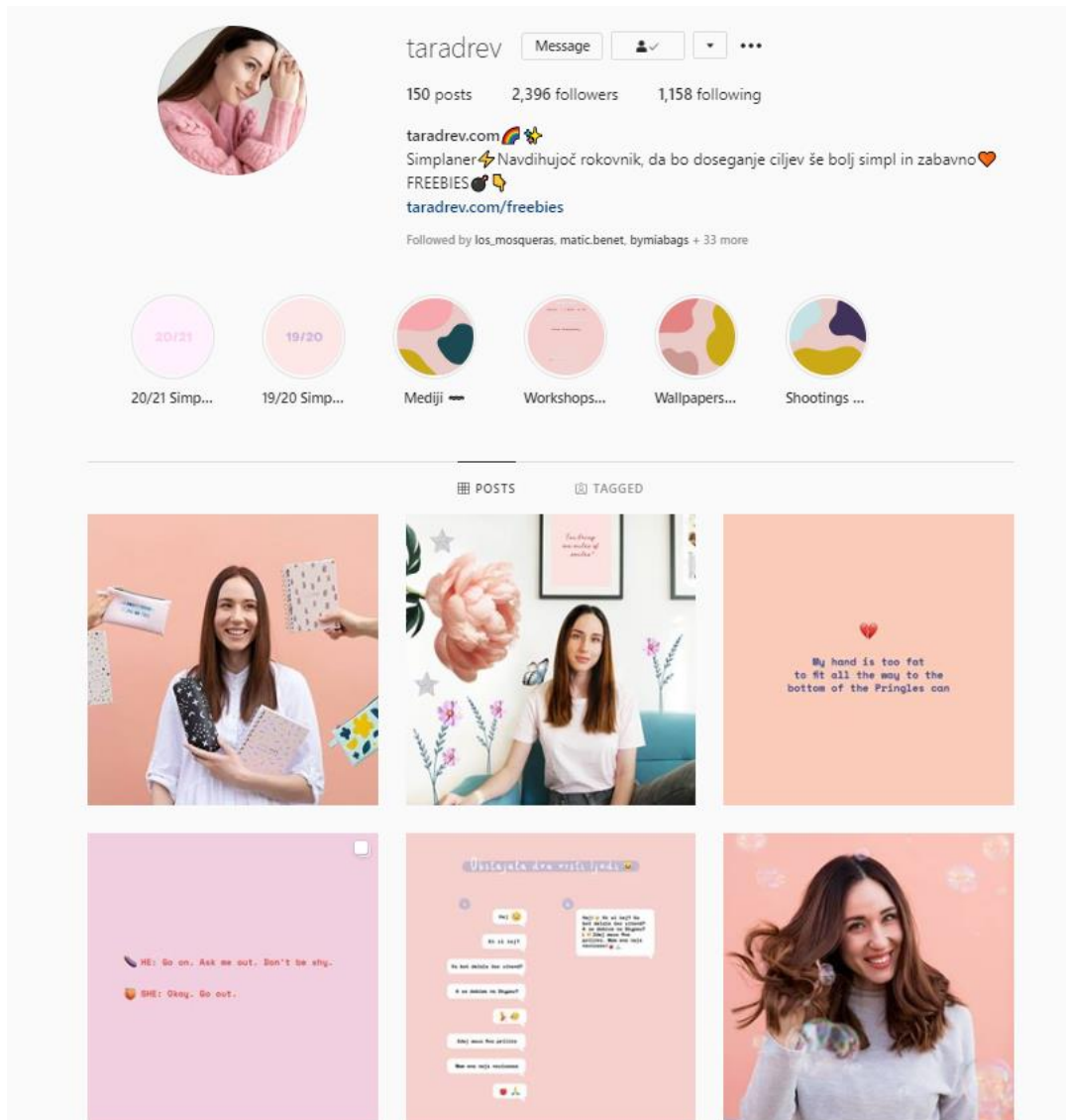


Figure 19. Tara's business Instagram profile (Drev, 2020).

A lot of graphic designers and illustrators express the frustration regarding the time they needed to register themselves as being self-employed for the first time or when they needed to open their own business and also working with the administrative part of their business every month. The Slovenian system is described to be outdated and no one really knows how

to help you, that is why most of them needed to gather all the information by themselves. While on the other side the Slovenian financial administration gives a lot of attention if someone is not doing things correctly, for example sending the monthly bills to tax them and send out fines without a problem. Tara and Tanja express their frustration:

*'In Slovenia the system is so outdated when you want to open a business, that I was already so pissed to actually tell them to do a better system for them.'* – Tara, 26 years old, graphic designer

*'I have the fear of maybe something not doing right all the time. Because I think that in Slovenia this is really badly organized. No one knows anything, you go and ask three different institutions and no one knows how to explain you stuff. I think you need to really do a research on your own and do everything by yourself and hope that you are doing things right, because as they don't really help you they come after you really fast in order to give you a fine, so it means that they are only efficient in punishing individuals that want to make something on their own.'* – Tanja, 29 years old, graphic designer

#### **4.3.2.2 Entrepreneurship should be implemented in Slovenian educational system**

While exposing the lack of support from the Slovenian government towards self-employed individuals and the ones that own small businesses, a lot of graphic designers and illustrators exposed the fact of entrepreneurship not being implemented enough in the Slovenian school system, this resulting in young people not even considering this as an option when they are finishing their studies. Maša strongly believes that courses of entrepreneurship should be a part of every curriculum, not only the ones connected to graphic design and illustration:

*'While now, that I am talking with younger people, they don't even know that this is an option, because no one really present it to them. No one talks about it and it sound very complicated and scary to them. For me it was one of the most real options [...] one of my long-term goals is to educate young people about these things. It is awful when young people start asking me about my beginnings, like how did you just start in UX design, because this is not something that you can really learn in Slovenia at a*

*University. I don't know this is so not encouraged here, no one even knows it exists.'*

– Maša, 26 years old, branding strategist

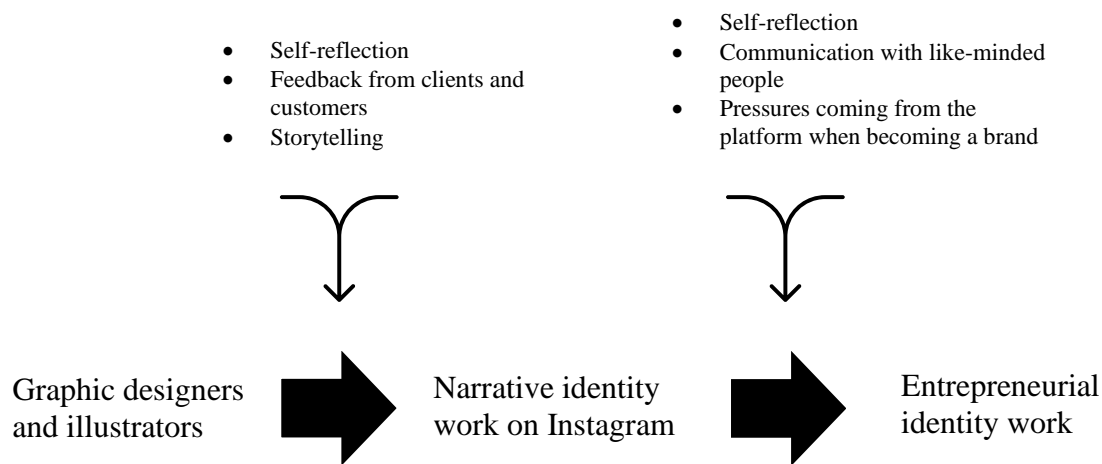
*'I think that they should teach entrepreneurship already in primary schools. They should give the kids the opportunity to learn about it, as this is one of the most liberating things that have ever happened to me. It hurts me to see people that are unhappy with their work or jobs and they don't have the courage, knowledge or support to start something of their own.'* – Anja Korenč, 33 years old, packaging designer

*'There should be more about this in education and in general the country should encourage young people to go on their own path. There is nothing nicer than having proactive young people to work on something that is theirs. This is something that frustrates me but understanding it, it gives me confidence as well.'* – Jovana, 24 years old, illustrator and 2D animator

Current crisis regarding COVID-19 is seen as an opportunity now, but looking long-term, creatives are concerned what will the upcoming economic crisis mean for their business. Graphic designers and illustrators share same struggles regarding the Slovenian outdated system and would like to see more education about entrepreneurship in the Slovenian school system.

## 5 Discussion

Our current understanding of identity work in social and organisational context, narrative identity work and entrepreneurial identity work inside and outside of creative industries was covered in depth in theoretical framework. Even though the analysis of interviews provided some significant insights into the processes of entrepreneurial identity work inside creative industries as well as existential new information regarding entrepreneurial identity work happening on social media platform Instagram. Based on these insights theoretical contributions and practical implications will be explained further and in more detail in this chapter.



*Figure 20.* The development process of the entrepreneurial identity of graphic designers and illustrators through Instagram (own illustration).

### 5.1 Theoretical contribution

#### 5.1.1 Identity work in social and organisational context

Identity work is one of the most important concepts when it comes to exploring and analysing the processes of identity construction of individuals (Brown, 2015). Identity work means that each individual is actively engaged in forming his or her identity while going through different situations in life that can be more or less challenging (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). Most of the creatives in the interviews are aware of these processes of identity construction and welcome new challenges in life as they know that they are going to learn something new from them and be able to work on their identities consciously. Even though there is a disagreement between different studies regarding identity work happening

all the time or only during the most intense periods of time (Brown, 2017), most of the creatives work on their identity daily, while the minority describes that they needed to work most actively on their identities during the hardest moments of their life, for example during the loss of people close to them and going through different health conditions. This was very much in line with Coupland's and Brown's (2012) idea of identities being in formation most actively while going through different challenges and situations in life. Experience is important for graphic designers and illustrators to be more aware of how they develop themselves, but age was completely irrelevant as a factor. A 20-year-old illustrator is for example more aware of how she is constructing her identity than a 32-year-old graphic designer, that just recently realised about the processes in her mind. A really important factor for identity work and realising that something is changing in the way they think about themselves were experiences abroad. Internships, exchanges and working abroad were a very strong disruption for the ones that have lived and worked in a different country. Moving to another country triggers a more intense identity work, as an individual seem to search for the meaning of their life and who they are more often in a foreign environment than in a comfortable environment of their own country.

Social context of identity work connects the most to the ideas developed from the interviews. The main understanding of social context in identity work by Ybema et al. (2009) is that the society is one of the most important things in constructing one's identity and make sense of themselves. The most important idea is that for individuals to define themselves they need someone else to compare themselves with and therefore build their identity. All graphic designers and illustrators find connection and socialisation the most important to find meaning. It is important for them to collaborate and connect with others. They learn how to present themselves through communicating with others, not only face-to-face but online as well. They watch YouTube videos and observe other graphic designers and illustrators on social media to learn how to present themselves. This connects well also with the idea of Jenkins (1996) which explains that every person's identity is socially constructed and that the society and others have the biggest influence on someone's construction of identity.

Organisational context of identity work was not that much in the foreground as the social context. It could be because most of the graphic designers and illustrators interviewed do not work with others in some sort of organisation but are except for a few of them all self-employed and work alone from home. The most interesting finding in the organisational aspect would be that two of graphic designers, one just started her own studio and the other is working as a graphic designer in a company, both recently started exploring their role as

mentors or leaders. These new identities that they are forming are indeed happening inside of an institution and they need to explore their identity in relation with others in this institution as well. In this situations of both graphic designers exploring their new role and establishing it among their co-workers the important questions of who they are and how they should react are crucial in order to construct their identity as a mentor (Alvesson et al., 2008). The organisational aspect is the most obvious in the case of graphic designers and illustrators that work with clients, for example working on creating brand images, and at the same time they also have their own projects, which are mostly products. In this case, there is a difference between how they see themselves when working with clients and when they are working on their own projects. When working with clients they are more professional and most of them see themselves and present themselves differently than when they work on their project. Similarly as in an organisation, when working with clients they do need to put on a different corporate persona, which is different from the other roles they adopt in other aspects in their lives (Albert et al., 2000).

### **5.1.2 Entrepreneurial identity work**

Entrepreneurs are under a constant pressure of doubting if what they do is right or no, they need to recognize certain opportunities in order to react on time and their actions can be very risky for their business, that is why entrepreneurs need to work on their identity the most. As some of the authors propose, the identity work to become and act entrepreneurially mostly depends on the social action, while self-reflection is indeed very important, the individuals need feedback from others in order to confirm or discard some of their thoughts or intentions (Ollila et al., 2012; Watson, 2009). While most of the graphic designers and illustrators agree that entrepreneurial identity cannot be taught in a course or a workshop as Falck et al. (2012) argue, education regarding entrepreneurship is indeed very important and the lack of it was recognized in the Slovenian case. With a proper education regarding entrepreneurship and with introducing it to the Slovenian educational system, young people could choose if this is something, they see themselves working in in the future. A lot of criticism is exposed regarding the lack of education about entrepreneurship and young people asking graphic designers and illustrators regularly how they started and how can they choose the same path they did years ago. Entrepreneurship education is important for identity work as it is crucial for students to explore the possible entrepreneurial identity in order to decide at the end of their studies if this is something they would like to continue with (Nielsen & Gartner, 2017).



The biggest motivations to become an entrepreneur were having freedom to express themselves and to choose with who and on what projects they want to work on. These motivations are very closely connected with escaping the 9 to 5 job where they would feel very subordinated and in general, they do not like the idea of working for someone else. Evidence of negative motivation was also found as some of graphic designers and illustrators were after finishing their studies pushed to become self-employed because of the 2008 recession and the lack of employment positions. All of the motivations are closely connected with the ideas of Gilad and Levine (1986) of the 'push' and 'pull' theory. The 'push' theory claims that individuals decide to become entrepreneurs because of negative external forces, such as lack of employment, not being satisfied with their job or their work schedule not being enough flexible. While the 'pull' theory talks about positive factors and motivators of becoming entrepreneurs, these are seeking freedom, self-fulfilment and a higher income.

Entrepreneurs in cultural and creative industries tend to struggle more with connecting themselves with an entrepreneurial identity. As they do not consider themselves entrepreneurs, they also do not act that way (Werthes et al., 2018). The reasons for not acting entrepreneurially were in the interviews mainly explained by not understanding the administrative part of the business, how to even begin and a lot of work with the bureaucracy, which was exposed in almost all the interviews, due to the outdated system Slovenia has regarding starting your own business and later managing it. One of the minor reasons was also the fact that entrepreneurship tends to be risky, stressful, and insecure. The most important reason for not acting entrepreneurially was contradiction between the cultural and creative values and the business values. This is very well captured by Werthes et al. (2018) and Eikhof and Haunschild (2007) as they explain that traditional entrepreneurship does have more connection with capitalistic ideas, cultural and creative entrepreneurs have a different mindset, they are more connected with cultural value than business values and it is therefore harder for them to adopt an entrepreneurial identity. Individuals that identify themselves as illustrators see themselves more as artists and creative workers and less as entrepreneurs. For them entrepreneurship is a necessary evil and would prefer to have someone who would deal with all the entrepreneurial aspects such as administration, marketing, and social media management instead of them. While individuals that identify stronger as graphic designers adopt entrepreneurial identity much faster and more willingly. One of the creatives that identified as being an illustrator mentioned that for her illustration is art and a happy place, while graphic design means business and unhappy place. Most of graphic designers also did not see themselves as artists, only with creativity.

A big part of entrepreneurial development is the communication with their family, friends, customers, clients, and like-minded people. This finding by Rigg and O'Dwyer (2012) connects perfectly with how graphic designers and illustrators build their entrepreneurial identity. Being an entrepreneur is not easy, while being an entrepreneur in cultural and creative industries seems like even a bigger struggle. The realisation of becoming an entrepreneur for graphic designers and illustrators did not happen overnight, it is seen as a long process full of challenges and a lot of searching for oneself. Another point that was aligned with the already existing findings is the one from Werthes et al. (2018) regarding the most important factors of someone realising they are becoming entrepreneurs. They explain that communication with other entrepreneurs and self-reflection is crucial to develop an entrepreneurial identity. Graphic designers and illustrators exposed communication with like-minded individuals, clients, and customers as the most important factor in order to start seeing themselves as entrepreneurs, next to an ongoing self-reflection. Another important factor was also dealing with bureaucracy and introducing new administrative roles into their life, which also connects well with the challenges that mostly creative entrepreneurs face regarding adapting to different roles which can also lead to a different identity development exposed by Hennekam and Bennett (2016).

Graphic designers and illustrators were not critical about the working conditions in the creative industries. The only observation was made that they normally work more than 8 hours per day and also during the weekends, but as they are self-employed, no one is really in charge of them so they decide by themselves how much and how long they will work every day. Next irregular income and long working hours, they were mostly focusing on the lack of support from the government, not being recognised as an important ingredient of the GDP growth and the employment reduction in the form of job growth which was well emphasized by (Florida, 2019; Hennekam & Bennett, 2016).

Another aspect graphic designers and illustrators exposed regarding not being recognised as important and even feeling invisible sometimes is the fact that they are running their businesses from their home. Even though working from home can be more comfortable than working from a co-working space or studio/company, there are a lot of challenges connected to it. Mason et al. (2011) see home-based businesses very important for economic development as they are sometimes quite invisible to the society. The rapid growth of home-based businesses means that there should be more focus regarding understanding these entrepreneurs and their identity work. The majority of graphic designers and illustrators interviewed work from their homes and they exposed that they often feel isolated and they

need to manage with challenges of blurring the line between the personal and professional identity while they need to be very well organised and self-disciplined in order to not waste their time but be productive. These contradictions in identities connect well with study done by Tietze and Musson (2010), while the tensions connect with a research done by (Wilson & Mitchell, 2004).

The current situation around the global COVID-19 pandemic is worrying but most of them do not feel any new pressures because of it. Some even signed more contracts and got more orders in the time of lockdown. They are mostly positive about the future of their businesses as they feel that graphic design and illustration will in some way always be needed by different brands and organisations.

### **5.1.3 Narrative identity work and storytelling through social media**

Graphic designers and illustrators are exposed to changes and challenges online as well, especially on social media. Their most popular social media platform is Instagram, as it is described to be the most visual and gives the possibility to reach people all around the world. Storytelling is one of the most important aspects of Instagram and how they present themselves there. Storytelling and narrative identity work are very visible in the case of graphic designers and illustrators presenting their core values, ideas, and stories on Instagram. Researchers agree that storytelling is very important for entrepreneurial identity work as well. Regarding the idea of Steyaert (2007) storytelling is indeed seen as very helpful when trying to understand entrepreneurship. Stories that graphic designers and illustrators share seem to be strategically built and that a lot of effort is put into crafting them. They all exposed that the stories on their Instagram feed have changed through time and that these changes happen because they have changed their mindset as well through years. These stories are not final and will probably change again in the future (Steyaert, 2007). Graphic designers and illustrators that already present themselves as entrepreneurs craft their story on Instagram much more strategically than the ones that still do not act entrepreneurially and reject the idea and core values of entrepreneurship. The ones that see themselves as entrepreneurs also see Instagram as more than just a platform where you publish pretty pictures but more as an interactive tool where you can present yourself, your work and build a community. Strategic building of the value of their brand on Instagram is seen as a very entrepreneurial thing to do. Not only they have changed the stories on Instagram strategically, they use insights in Instagram's statistics to create content that really fits their audience.

The most important observation is regarding networking and building communities online. Connecting with other graphic designers, illustrators and creative entrepreneurs is happening mostly online. No one is attending events anymore to network with potential clients, it is even seen as too pushy and not natural at all. Instead, graphic designers and illustrators connect with like-minded people on Instagram and clients find them there as well. All graphic designers agree that social capital is crucial in cultural and creative industries to be able to work with clients and gain the income. Even though none of them need to actively search for clients as they all find them through word of mouth and recommendations from their previous clients as Slovenian market is quite small, they do give great importance to networking and connecting with other creative entrepreneurs on Instagram in order to establish strong connections, do collaborations and learn how to present on Instagram. Early studies about how entrepreneurs use social media have confirmed that being present on social media is very important for entrepreneurs in order to network with others (Fischer & Rebecca Reuber, 2014; Fischer & Reuber, 2011). While the main findings of the study by C. Smith, Smith and Shaw (2017) provides key aspects of social capital, which are that entrepreneurs work on relationships online mostly to achieve certain desired outcomes, these outcomes can be seen as monetary goals or emotional support. Creative entrepreneurs see networking differently than traditional entrepreneurs. Creative entrepreneurs see social media as a great tool to connect with like-minded people because they are still learning how to present themselves and how to act entrepreneurially. It is important for them to connect with people that already have some experience regarding entrepreneurship and can help them with their tensions of identifying themselves as entrepreneurs. Building a community on Instagram, building meaningful connections, and getting positive feedback from their customers or followers is crucial in their identity development towards becoming an entrepreneur and it is seen as the biggest motivator of entrepreneurial identity work.

Being present on Instagram also brings certain challenges and pressures for graphic designers and illustrators, especially for the ones that identify themselves more as artists and less as entrepreneurs. They have exposed different pressures of becoming a brand on Instagram and how this also influences their identity work. These pressures come from others on Instagram and from the platform itself. Becoming a brand is very strongly connected with showing yourself on Instagram, building your own style to become recognizable and curating a consistent feed. The biggest struggle is for the ones that identify as illustrators the fact that they need to show their face behind their brand, graphic designers have less problems with that. Some illustrators even refuse the idea of becoming a brand, as this relates to

entrepreneurship too much, while others expose that recently the pressure of showing yourself on Instagram is growing stronger and stronger. They have a feeling that in order for your brand to be successful, it doesn't really matter what product or service you are offering, what is more important is showing yourself as a person and share your values, your ideas and views, so people can relate to them or they don't. This seem to be more important for a brand to succeed and to build a community than having a quality product or service. Some are very frustrated with that idea of showing themselves so much, they feel like they need to become some sort of influencers in order to succeed.

An important pressure is also to stay consistent and to have a developed style while also following trends in illustration and graphic design and what is currently popular and working well on Instagram. Consistency is key for every brand on Instagram as helps clients and customers to envision what they can expect from a certain brand or service. Some graphic designers and illustrators open multiple accounts on Instagram to separate different tones of communication, identities of brands, values, and styles. Being consistent seems to be the hardest for illustrators and graphic designers that still haven't developed a certain style. These happen to be individuals that are still students and are still exploring their style and experimenting with different things. Graphic designers and illustrators feel pressured to only create what is currently popular on Instagram and feel that there is not enough space for originality. Not following trends on Instagram can lead to less income, so they feel that they need to create something they do not feel strong and confident about to sell more and to get more followers.

The last pressure comes from Instagram and its constant algorithm change. Whenever an algorithm changes the reach of posts that are uploaded to the feed and stories drops significantly. This means that less people see it, less people like it and share it and consequently graphic designers and illustrators are left discouraged and need to actively work on their self-esteem and motivation, which can be also seen as active identity work in searching of meaning and if they should even continue with what they do.

Following on that we can agree that identity formation on social media is not yet researcher enough and from these findings we can conclude that identities are formed on individual and collective level and that they are not fixed, they do change through time and they are never final (Fornäs & Xinaris, 2013). It is important to expose that graphic designers and illustrators strive towards showing their authentic selves on Instagram and that they want to be transparent and communicate their real values. They feel that becoming someone else on social media does not do any good for their brand and they like to connect with their

clients and customers on a genuine level. They see their presentation on Instagram as an extension of themselves. They feel that they could be influenced by the current expectations from their customers and the current popular trends on Instagram, which could also lead to a modified self-representation (Fornäs & Xinaris, 2013), but they actively try to stay original, even if this could mean less income in some occasions.

## **5.2 Practical implications**

Firstly, a common topic regarding the position of self-employed individuals on Slovenian ground was emerging in every conversation. Slovenian government should realise the importance of self-employed individuals and small businesses as they do contribute greatly to the economic growth of a country (Florida, 2019; Hennekam & Bennett, 2016). Criticism over how Slovenia only sees self-employed individuals and small businesses as a burden of the country emerged in the conversations very strongly because of the current situation regarding the global pandemic and how they are helping or in Slovenian case, not helping creative entrepreneurs. A research that was conducted between 6<sup>th</sup> of April and 3<sup>rd</sup> of May among Slovenian culture and creative entrepreneurs and was focusing on how COVID-19 crisis influences their life and work, 63,4% of all participants described the government's measures on self-employed individuals in CCI operations as insufficient, which can confirm the dissatisfaction that graphic designers and illustrators expressed in this study (Matjaž, Černič, & Kosi, 2020). It is therefore advisable for a Slovenian government to offer a better support to these individuals which means less bureaucratic procedures for obtaining aid, providing maximum assistance to the most affected, assistance to those affected by the crisis, and stronger state and EU incentives for the whole sector. It is also important to develop a better system for them and better-informed employees at institutions like Financial Administration of Slovenia and local municipalities. The system of opening a business or simply registering yourself as self-employed is outdated and does not provide clear information. The same goes with employees at the beforementioned institutions as they usually do not provide accurate information or are not prepared enough for different questions regarding opening a small business.

Secondly, Slovenia should implement entrepreneurship in its educational system. Young people do not see becoming self-employed or starting something of their own as a possibility, because it is not introduced to them. Entrepreneurship should be introduced as

one of the possibilities of employment in order to save the individuals what can become years of searching for other possibilities rather than employment at some other company (Nielsen & Gartner, 2017). Graphic designers and illustrators emphasized that they needed to search for the information of how to start something on their own by themselves and did not have any kind of help, information or education provided by the state. A study from 2012 emphasizes that teaching entrepreneurial skills to graphic designers and illustrators is as essential as teaching them design and illustration skills (Gunes, 2012). They feel sorry for younger generations as they need to search for the possibilities by their own as well. Some graphic designers and illustrators emphasized that they get asked by younger students about their beginnings and how did they manage to get to where they are now. A goal of two of the creatives in this study is to educate younger generations about the possibilities they have as entrepreneurs and how to start your own business.

### **5.3 Limitations**

Several limitations should be discussed. First, studying identity of others can lead to certain limitations. Identities can be made up and some answers can as well be reshaped to satisfy me as an interviewer. Asking about identity can also be tricky when asking how their perception of self has changed through time. Memories can be distorted through time and some important information might be pushed more in the back and do not seem that important to the interviewee.

Second, the roles of the researcher might have a big role in this study as I am one of the creative entrepreneurs as well and therefore some answers could be more subjective because of that in order to find an approval from my side, considering I understand what they are going through because I have similar experience as them. Sometimes they finished a sentence with a phrase you know what I mean, and they did not elaborate further. Because of my background I sometimes as well assumed that I understood things that might have a different intention. The loss of meaning could be a limitation to this study.

Third, conducting interviews in Slovene language was in some occasions proved to be a better choice as some of them could not express themselves so well as in their native language. The biggest challenge was translating the interviews in English, where some phrases could not be literally translated but I was able to translate ideas behind them. Misinterpreting the data could also be a limitation to this study.

Fourth, this study was focusing on Slovenian graphic designers and illustrators. Only women were participating in the study as it was hard to find male graphic designers and illustrators that would be as active and present on social media as women are. This could also be limitation as we have only heard female voices while including male opinions could have changed the results of this study. In further research, male graphic designers and illustrators should also be included in a study.

## **5.4 Future research**

In order to focus more on narrative identity work and how creative entrepreneurs are presenting themselves on social media a content analysis of their Facebook or Instagram posts would be helpful to connect it to this study and to compare how their stories are changing on social media and if all of them are indeed going in a similar direction of showing themselves more behind a brand. It would be interesting to observe the influence of observing others like this as well, in what ways content is becoming similar and where do they find inspiration. Instagram already realized the power that small businesses and creative entrepreneurs have on that platform as visual artists and entrepreneurs adopted it as their own. During the global pandemic they have released a new feature to share small businesses on stories. They realise who are their users and how many they are, that is why it is important to understand how creative entrepreneurs behave online and how can we help them to evolve their story.

A difference between illustrators and graphic designers has already been exposed in this study. It would be interesting to explore more in detail how illustrators are developing their entrepreneurial identity in comparison with graphic designers as they tend to refuse the idea of being associated with entrepreneurship more strongly. Some main observations have already been made by a very recent study conducted by Werthes et al. (2018) but they mainly focus on creative workers and entrepreneurs in general. As we have established in this study, all creative workers cannot be generalized and put in the same group.

Graphic designers tend to accept an entrepreneurial identity much faster and enjoy the role of being entrepreneurs. The main similarity between graphic designers and entrepreneurs is that they are both creative problem solvers. Therefore, it is much easier for graphic designers to adapt an entrepreneurial identity. A new concept of “design entrepreneur” has emerged because there are more and more of graphic designers every day that are focusing on starting something of their own, and this is why educating graphic designers about



entrepreneurship is crucial and should be implemented in the educational system (Gunes, 2012). Future research should focus on how effective the right entrepreneurial education is long-term and how can these design entrepreneurs achieve with the right support from a certain country and what influence do they have for the economic growth.

## 6 Conclusion

Instagram is a platform that enables graphic designers and illustrators to present themselves, show their stories and build a community. It is also a platform that pushes them to think out of their comfort zones and in this case identity work is needed to find sense of themselves again. Especially illustrators find presenting themselves as a brand on Instagram quite challenging, but it is visible that they are working on becoming more comfortable with showing themselves and their opinion behind their evolving brand. While graphic designers adapt the entrepreneurial identity rather easier, illustrators reject the idea of becoming an entrepreneur mostly because of lack of knowledge about what entrepreneurship even is and because of the collision of their personal values and business values. As Instagram became more an interactive tool for brands than just a personal tool to share pretty photos, entrepreneurial identity work through Instagram is obvious and active in the case of Slovenian graphic designers and illustrators.

The collective idea and criticism go to the Slovenian government for not recognising small businesses and self-employed individuals as drivers of economic growth and also to the Slovenian education system which is not educating creatives about how to act entrepreneurially. It is therefore crucial to improve that in the future for graphic designers and illustrators to learn about the possibility of going their own way already in the early years of their education.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Table of participants

Respondents	Gender	Age	Level of education	Place of residence	Occupation	Nationality
Ana Brezovec	Female	24	6	Slovenia	Registered as a small business	Slovenian
Anamarija Rok	Female	28	6	Australia	Self-employed	Slovenian
Anja Kohek	Female	32	6	Slovenia	Self-employed	Slovenian
Anja Korenč	Female	33	6	Slovenia	Limited liability company	Slovenian
Hana Nekrep	Female	28	7	Slovenia	Self-employed	Slovenian
Jovana Đukić	Female	24	7	Slovenia	Registered as a small business	Slovenian
Lea	Female	34	6	Slovenia	Self-employed	Slovenian
Maša Mazi	Female	26	6	Slovenia	Self-employed	Slovenian
Nea Likar	Female	30	7	Slovenia	Self-employed	Slovenian
Neja Kotnik	Female	32	6	Slovenia	Self-employed	Slovenian
Sara Žičkar	Female	31	6	Slovenia	Registered as a small business	Slovenian
Špela Senica	Female	20	6	Austria	Registered as a small business	Slovenian
Tanja Užmah Mosquera	Female	29	6	Slovenia	Afternoon self-employed next to the full-time employment	Slovenian
Tara Drev	Female	26	7	Slovenia	Self-employed	Slovenian
Vida Igljčar	Female	28	7	Slovenia	Self-employed	Slovenian

### Overview of participant's Instagram accounts

Name of the participant	Instagram handle/brand name	Number of followers on 20 <sup>th</sup> of May 2020	Specialisation (as stated on Instagram)
Ana Brezovec	@anna_bressi @bressi.illustration	2663 2615	Illustration, designer, artist
Anamarija Rok	@contentpixie	921	Content marketing
Anja Kohek	@frommars__	4534	Illustration and screen print
Anja Korenč	@anjakorencdesigner @bitchy.club	1745 1645	Packaging designer
Hana Nekrep	@hanii666	2348	A dreamer, creator, illustrator, architect
Jovana Đukić	@jovanadukic	644	Illustrator and 2D animator
Lea	/ (wanted to stay anonymous)	1474	Illustration and graphic design
Maša Mazi	@mashanator	3730	Brand strategist
Nea Likar	@sketchstudio_nealihar	1166	Illustration, design, make up, textile prints
Neja Kotnik	@blackbearandwhitebear	4477	Illustration, screen printing
Sara Žičkar	@sarawired	2854	Illustrations



Špela Senica	@spelasenica	1161	/
Tanja Užmah Mosquera	@tutajna	5101	Calligraphy, hand lettering, design
Tara Drev	@taradrev	2348	Brand, colourful stationery
Vida Igličar	@vidaiglicar	3478	Art director, illustrator, enthusiast of lettering

## **Appendix B: Interview topic list in English and Slovene**

### **English version of interview questions**

#### **Background**

- Learning about the creative entrepreneur, their work
  - o Could you please describe yourself a bit:
    - How old are you? What is your current occupation? Where do you currently live and work?
    - What did you specialise in? What is your study background? Important differentiation (graphic designers, marketing graduates, artists)

#### **Warm up**

- How would you describe your normal workday?
- How do you structure your work?
- What are you currently working on?
- What is your experience with ... briefly discuss ...?
  - o freelance experience/experience working for a company (if applicable)
  - o experience with “being self-employed”, working on starting your own business, etc. (entrepreneurship)
  - o working on my own business while keeping my 9 to 5 job.
- How would you describe entrepreneurship with your own words?

#### **Identity**

- Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur/artist/creative worker/other? (What does it mean to you?)
- How do you experience being an entrepreneur/artist? Could you describe that?
- How do you see yourself most of the time? (Role(s), attitude, etc.)
- In what way does this image of yourself alter in various (work) situations?
- Do you sometimes have to perform different roles?
- Do you feel differently in different situations?
- How has this image of yourself changed the last few years?
- What made you become aware that something was changing?
- Have your ideas or self-perceptions changed? Can you describe that?

#### **Identity work**

- How do you react to these changes?
- How do you present yourself?

- Do you present yourself differently to your co-workers, family and friends?
- In what way does this representation of yourself change in various (work) settings?
- How do you feel about “putting yourself out there” and becoming a “brand”? (Tools?)
- Is that challenging? How do you manage these challenges (of becoming a brand)?
- Could you describe the skills you need as an entrepreneur?
- Was there a specific moment in your life when you realised, I am an entrepreneur?
- What helped you realise you are becoming an entrepreneur?

### **Narrative**

- Which stories they tell.
  - o Are there particular goals that you work towards?
  - o How do you want to reach these goals?
- Instagram
  - o What stories do you present about yourself on Instagram?
  - o In what ways is Instagram helping you with sharing your story?
  - o Have these stories changed over time?
  - o How did this story evolve? What is different now?
  - o What prompted these ways of seeing/presenting/changing yourself?
  - o Do you feel there is a difference between how you present yourself at work and how you present yourself on Instagram? (Identity work through social media - construct potentially multiple digital selves and identities)

### **Conditions in CCI and how they influence the identity construction and future**

- How are you learning to present yourself?
- How successful are these representations? (Experiences, successes, failures)
- What is the feedback that you get from others?
  - o Do you feel like you are not taken seriously by some clients or friends when you tell them about your work? (having a feeling that your work is not real work)
- What do you need to become a successful creative entrepreneur?
- What do you think is the role of networking?
  - o How do you find clients and how do you search for work in CCI?
  - o Would you say that social and economic capital are crucial when working in CCI? (social capital, economical capital, networking, landing jobs, payment)
- What are your/the current challenges?

- How do you perceive the difficulties arising from the Corona-crisis?
- How are they different from other challenges that you faced before?
- Do you have new routines in your work?
- How do you communicate differently now?
- (how) Do you perceive yourself developing differently now?
- What are you doing to manage well during these times?
- How do you see your future? (as an artist, as entrepreneur and your identity)

### **Slovene version of interview questions**

#### **Background**

- Spoznavanje kreativnega podjetnika, njihovo ozadje
  - o Se lahko na kratko opišeš:
    - Koliko si stara? Kaj je tvoj trenutni poklic? Kje trenutno živiš in delaš??
    - V čem si se specializirala? Kaj je tvoje študijsko ozadje? Pomembna razlika (Grafični oblikovalci, diplomirani tržniki, umetniki)

#### **Ogrevanje**

- Kako bi opisala svoj običajen delovni dan?
- Kako si strukturiraš delo?
- Na čem trenutno delaš? Na katerem projektu trenutno delaš?
- Kakšna je tvoja izkušnja s ... briefly discuss ...?
  - o Freelance delom/delo v podjetju (if applicable)
  - o Izkušnja s "samozaposlitvijo", ustvarjati svoje podjetje, delati na svojem podjetju, itd. (podjetje)
  - o Delati na svojem podjetju ali znamki, poleg 8 urnega delavnika.
- Kako bi opisala podjetništvo s svojimi besedami? (Entrepreneurship)

#### **Identity**

- Kateri koncept ti je najbližje, v katerem se najbolj najdeš? Podjetnica/ Umetnica/creative worker (kreativni delavec)/ kaj drugega? Kaj ti ta naziv pomeni?
- Kako doživljaš življenje podjetnice/umetnice? Lahko podrobneje razložiš?
- Kako se večino časa počutiš? (Kakšne so tvoje vloge, tvoj odnos in pogled?)
- Na kakšen način se ta podoba, ki jo imaš o sebi spreminja v različnih situacijah, (recimo na delovnem mestu, ali pa pri upravljanju svojega podjetja)?
- Ali kdaj preklopiš in opravljaš različne vloge? (Do you sometimes have to perform different roles?)

- Ali se počutiš drugače v različnih situacijah? (Do you feel different in different situations?)
- Kako se je ta podoba, ki jo imaš o sebi spremenila v zadnjih nekaj letih?
- Kaj je bila tista točka, ko si se začela zavedat, da se nekaj o tebi spreminja?
- Ali so se tvoje ideje oziroma dojemanje same sebe spremenile skozi čas? Lahko malo opišeš na primeru?

### **Identity work**

- Kako reagiraš na te spremembe?
- Kako se predstavljaš oz. kako se po navadi predstaviš?
- Ali se predstaviš drugače svojim sodelavcem, družini in prijateljem?
- Na kakšen način se ta predstavitev sebe spreminja v različnih (delovnih) situacijah?
- Kako se počutiš, ko narediš tisti korak naprej, (put yourself out there) in postaneš znamka? Kakšna orodja uporabiš pri tem?
- Je to zate izziv? Kako se soočaš s temi izzivi, med procesom nastajanja znamke, ko postajaš znamka?
- Lahko opišeš spretnosti in veščine (skills), ki jih potrebuješ kot podjetnica?
- Se morda spomniš določenega trenutka, ko si se zavedala, da si podjetnica?
- Kaj točno ti je pomagalo pri spoznanju, da postajaš podjetnica?

### **Narrative**

- Katere zgodbe pripovedujejo.
  - o Imaš mogoče določene cilje, h katerim stremiš in delaš na tem da jih dosežeš?
  - o Kako si želiš doseči te cilje?
- Instagram
  - o Katere zgodbe predstavljaš o sebi na Instagramu? Kako se predstavljaš?
  - o Kako ti Instagram pomaga pri delitvi te zgodbe?
  - o So se te zgodbe spremenile skozi čas?
  - o Kako se je ta zgodba razvila? Kako je zdaj drugačna od prej?
  - o Kaj je sprožilo način kako gledaš nase, kako se predstaviš in kako spreminjaš sebe?
  - o Meniš, da je razlika med tem kako se predstaviš na delovnem mestu in kako se predstaviš na Instagramu? (Identity work through social media - construct potentially multiple digital selves and identities)

### **Conditions in CCI and how they influence the identity construction and future**

- Kako se učiš predstaviti sebe?

- Kako uspešne so te reprezentacije? (izkušnje, uspeh, neuspeh)
- Kakšen je feedback, ki ga dobiš od ostalih?
  - o Se ti zdi, da te ne jemljejo resno, ko na primer kakšnim klientom ali prijateljem, družini poveš kaj delaš? (imaš občutek, da tvoje delo ni resno delo)
- Kaj potrebuješ, da postaneš uspešna kreativna podjetnica?
- Kakšna je po tvojem mnenju vloga mreženja (networkinga)?
  - o Kako najdeš kliente in na kakšne načine poiščeš delo v kreativnih industrijah?
  - o Meniš, da je družbeni in ekonomski kapital ključnega pomena za tiste ki delajo v kreativnih industrijah? (social capital, economical capital, networking, landing jobs, payment)
- Kateri so tvoji trenutni izzivi?
- Kako dojemaš trenutne težave povezane s Korona krizo?
- Kako se ta izziv razlikuje od ostalih izzivov s katerimi si se morala soočiti?
- Imaš mogoče kakšne nove rutine v svojem delu?
- Kako komuniciraš drugače zaradi te situacije?
- Se ti zdi, da se zdaj osebnostno razvijaš drugače/na drugačen način?
- Kaj ti najbolj pomaga pri obvladovanju trenutne situacije?
- Kako vidiš svojo prihodnost? (kot umetnica, kot podjetnica in tvoja identiteta)

## Appendix C: Theoretical concepts connected with interview questions

Concept	Focus	Questions
Identity	Self-representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How old are you? What is your current occupation? Where do you currently live and work?</li> <li>- What did you specialise in? What is your study background? Important differentiation (graphic designers, marketing graduates, artists)</li> <li>- What is your experience with ... briefly discuss ...?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o freelance experience/experience working for a company (if applicable)</li> <li>o experience with “being self-employed”, working on starting your own business, etc. (entrepreneurship)</li> <li>o working on my own business while keeping my 9 to 5 job.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- How would you describe entrepreneurship with your own words?</li> <li>- Do you consider yourself an entrepreneur/artist/creative worker/other? (What does it mean to you?)</li> </ul>
	Identity in social context (relation to others)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you experience being an entrepreneur/artist/creative worker? Could you describe that?</li> <li>- What does being an artist/entrepreneur/creative worker mean to you?</li> <li>- How do you experience being an artist/entrepreneur/creative worker?</li> <li>- How do you see yourself most of the time? (Role(s), attitude, etc.)</li> <li>- In what way does this image of yourself alter in various (work) situations?</li> <li>- Do you sometimes have to perform different roles?</li> <li>- Do you feel differently in different situations?</li> <li>- How has this image of yourself changed the last few years?</li> <li>- What made you become aware that something was changing?</li> <li>- Have your ideas or self-perceptions changed? Can you describe that?</li> </ul>
Identity work	Ongoing and active process of identity construction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you react to these changes?</li> <li>- How do you present yourself?</li> <li>- Do you present yourself differently to your co-workers, family, and friends?</li> <li>- In what way does this representation of yourself change in various (work) settings?</li> </ul>

	Identity construction processes towards becoming an entrepreneur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you feel about “putting yourself out there” and becoming a “brand”? (Tools?)</li> <li>- Is that challenging? How do you manage these challenges (of becoming a brand)?</li> <li>- Could you describe the skills you need as an entrepreneur?</li> <li>- Was there a specific moment in your life when you realised, I am an entrepreneur?</li> <li>- What helped you realise you are becoming an entrepreneur?</li> </ul>
Narrative (identity work)	Storytelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are there particular goals that you work towards?</li> <li>- How do you want to reach these goals?</li> </ul>
	Self-narrative through Instagram	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What stories do you present about yourself on Instagram?</li> <li>- In what ways is Instagram helping you with sharing your story?</li> <li>- Have these stories changed over time?</li> <li>- How did this story evolve? What is different now?</li> <li>- What prompted these ways of seeing/presenting/changing yourself?</li> <li>- Do you feel there is a difference between how you present yourself at work and how you present yourself on Instagram? (Identity work through social media - construct potentially multiple digital selves and identities)</li> </ul>
Conditions in CCI and their influence on identity construction	Working from home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How would you describe your normal workday?</li> <li>- How do you structure your work?</li> <li>- What are you currently working on?</li> </ul>
	Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How are you learning to present yourself?</li> <li>- How successful are these representations? (Experiences, successes, failures)</li> <li>- What is the feedback that you get from others?</li> <li>- Do you feel like you are not taken seriously by some clients or friends when you tell them about your work? (having a feeling that your work is not real work)</li> <li>- What do you need to become a successful creative entrepreneur?</li> <li>- What do you think is the role of networking?</li> <li>- How do you find clients and how do you search for work in CCI?</li> <li>- Would you say that social and economic capital are crucial when working in CCI? (social capital, economical capital, networking, landing jobs, payment)</li> <li>- How do you see your future? (as an artist, as entrepreneur and your identity)</li> </ul>



	Current situation around COVID-19 crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- What are your/the current challenges?</li><li>- How do you perceive the difficulties arising from the Corona-crisis?</li><li>- How are they different from other challenges that you faced before?</li><li>- Do you have new routines in your work?</li><li>- How do you communicate differently now?</li><li>- Do you perceive yourself developing differently now?</li><li>- What are you doing to manage well during these times?</li></ul>
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## **Appendix D: Informed consent form**

### **CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH**

#### **FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:**

Miša Sajovic, Galvanistraat 567, [missa.sajovic@gmail.com](mailto:missa.sajovic@gmail.com), +38631701834

#### **DESCRIPTION**

You are invited to participate in a research about identity work processes around creative entrepreneurs. The purpose of the study is to understand how Slovenian digital illustrators develop their identity through entrepreneurial identity work through Instagram.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms,

- the questions interview will be related to entrepreneurs and their identity work

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a tape recorder for the interview.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

#### **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information, such as Instagram handle, in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by your name or Instagram handle and I will instead use pseudonym and general identification such as mentioning age and gender, etc.

I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

#### **TIME INVOLVEMENT**

Your participation in this study will take from 30 to 60 minutes. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

#### **PAYMENTS**

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

#### **PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS**

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

### **CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS**

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish– Sven-Ove Horst, Assistant Professor Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication Department of Media and Communication (horst@eshcc.eur.nl).

### **SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM**

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you **DO NOT NEED** to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

Name	Signature	Date
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I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

Name	Signature	Date
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## Appendix E: Coding tree

First order observations		Subcategories	Main categories	
Having freedom		Motivations to become an entrepreneur	Entrepreneurial identity work	
Escaping 9 to 5 job				
Being pushed into it				
Stressful, risky, and insecure		Reasons for not acting entrepreneurially		
Bureaucracy and lack of knowledge				
Creativity vs business values				
Conversation and feedback (social context)	Realisation of becoming an entrepreneur	Becoming an entrepreneur and entrepreneurial identity work		
Working on bigger projects and dealing and dealing with bureaucracy				
Ongoing self-reflection				
Balancing client work and own projects				
Challenges of working from home			Storytelling and networking	Identity work through Instagram
Presenting their stories				
Strategic building of added value				
Learning to present yourself through observing and connecting with others				
Pressure of showing yourself behind a brand				
Pressure to stay consistent				
Pressure to follow Instagram trends				
Instagram algorithm changes				
As a necessity		Instagram as a platform		
As an opportunity				
Negative aspect (less income, anxiety, risky)		Corona crisis	Current conditions and challenges	
Corona as an opportunity (new projects, different identity work, more time to reflect)				
Not enough help from the government for self-employed individuals		Criticism over Slovenia		
Entrepreneurship should be implemented in education system				