Cultural Curators

Intersection of Personal and Professional Identities on Instagram of Advertising Creatives

Student Name: Tingting Shi
Student Number: 726238

Supervisor: Marlen Komorowski

Master Media Studies - Media & Creative Industries
Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Master's Thesis
June 2025

Word Count: 15,858

Cultural Curators: Intersection of Personal and Professional Identities on Instagram of Advertising Creatives

ABSTRACT

Steering away from its original nature of life sharing, social media platforms have increasingly become sites for advertising creatives to maintain a professional presence. While an abundance of studies on social media and creative work have been conducted on self-presentations and online identity construction, few have focused on the intersection of personal and professional identity in the specific field of advertising creative workers. This paper draws on semi-structured interviews with a group of senior creatives in the advertising industry and content analysis of their Instagram data to explore the ways and motivations of their self-presentations on Instagram and investigate how social media mediates the intersectionality. The findings reveal that advertising creatives tend to blur the boundary between personal and professional identity through curatorial self-presentation, constructing a unified "cultural curator" persona that merges personal taste, aesthetic expression, and professional credibility. Instagram's affordances, especially its visual formatting and dual structures of permanence and ephemerality (Grid vs. Stories), enable this blended identity construction. Rather than experiencing context collapse as a major tension, most participants actively embrace the overlap between personal and professional spheres, using authenticity and visual cohesion to assert creative autonomy and build visibility. However, this intersectional identity also intensifies the emotional labor of self-branding, reflecting broader tensions in the advertising industry between artistic ideals and commercial imperatives.

KEYWORDS: Self-presentation, Social media, Advertising, Creative, Online Identity

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Since New York's Madison Avenue became the symbolic and literal centre of the American advertising world in the golden era of the 1960s, the advertising industry has been associated with a public image of fun and cool (Frank, 1998; Nixon & Crewe, 2004, p. 131). The acclaimed television series *Mad Men* (2007-2015) offers a stylized portrayal of "ad men" - advertising professionals on Madison Avenue, showcasing their sharp suits, sleek office spaces, and frequent drinking and smoking during meetings and brainstorming sessions. Both companies and workers in this field are conferred with a distinctive social status that is aspired to be different and not ordinary, working innovative jobs that break conformity. Today, this image continues to persist. Creative agencies and industry practitioners themselves tend to facilitate the reproduction of such an image of uniqueness by making bold claims about their business philosophy (Quality Meats, n.d.) or defining their agency name as "deviation or departure from the normal or common order, form or rule" (Anomaly, n.d.).

The association between advertising work and cultural capital is not coincidental but deeply rooted in the industry's historical evolution. The "conquest of cool" (Frank, 1998) signified a turning point where countercultural aesthetics were appropriated by capitalism to market products, thereby blurring the line between culture and commercialism. This legacy persists in the way advertising creatives often position themselves at the intersection of art, commerce, and subculture. As Taylor (2009) elaborates, advertising has played a crucial role in the shift to a cultural economy with the increasing replacement of the value of high art with what's cool and trendy (p. 421). In this context, being "cool" is not a frivolous by-product but a strategic asset. This creates a labor culture where personality, taste, and social presence are seen as extensions of professional capability. Nixon and Crewe has found themselves confronted with certain "stylistic choices" of the combination of sneakers, casual shirts, sportswear in their research with the advertsising creatives (Nixon & Crewe, 2004, p. 135) and observed a distinctive social life evolved around a drinking culture after or during work and access to private clubs that symbolizes seniority (ibid., p. 137). However, the seemingly glamorous happy work that is linked with coolness, sociability and social capital that is the source of attraction for many young aspirants (Nixon & Crewe, 2004, p. 141) has another side to the coin. McRobbie noted that creative works disrupt the division between work and leisure with their demand for socializing at non-workplaces and

encroachment into leisure time (McRobbie, 2002b, p. 99), with examples of office fashion and cocktail-hour networking.

1.1 Shift of the Industry

A firm ecology dominated by dependent work and permanent employment of staff has gradually transitioned to a project ecology since the millennium (Grabher, 2002, p. 246). As market gets more and more competitive, where creative agencies are expected to cover much more than their traditional roles as providers of creative services (Derda, 2023, pp. 22–23), different and complex tasks are increasingly organized around individual campaign projects, causing creative agencies and production companies relying more on hiring independent contractors for creative services based on the budget, requirements, and scope of a campaign project (Younger, 2020). Covid -19 forced the world to be more adaptive to remote work, and many people have reconsidered work-life balance, bringing the post-pandemic "great resignation" and the sharper rise of the freelancer economy in recent years. A freelance management company has reported a significant 40% increase in the number of freelancers hired by agencies in Q1 2024 compared to the same period in 2023 (Worksome, 2024).

This rising freelancer economy and consequent changes in the industry provide creative workers opportunities for remote work, offering freedom and flexibility in working hours and locations, but it causes precariousness to creative workers by removing the protection and security that are conventionally offered by long-term contracts, in this vein the institutions and companies pass the uncertainty of larger-scale markets and economies directly to them (S. Taylor & Littleton, 2016, p. 134). In the post-pandemic era, high inflation and economic slowdown (*A Widespread Economic Slowdown*, 2025) and an unstable job market have created immense job insecurity associated with lower life satisfaction, poorer health and mental well-being, and a greater likelihood of feeling excluded from society (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions., 2023) for workers who do not have fixed contracts. Morgan & Nelligan (2018) bluntly call the freelancers under the gig economy *labile labour*, who stay precarious from gig to gig with "a state of heightened arousal by the prospect of serendipitous opportunity, infinitely malleable and manically eager" (Preface).

1.2 Social Media as a Self-Branding Tool

In the advertising industry, portfolios have always been widely used in proving work experience and skills to land new jobs (Rusnac, 2022; Savage, 2024). In the film *Lee* (Kuras, 2023), when the protagonist Lee Miller went to meet the editor in chief of Vogue UK for the first time, she brought an enormous physical album filled with photos she had taken. This scene is astounding to many modern audiences, but perfectly delineates the original format of the portfolio. Since the computer revolution in the 1990s, digital portfolios have taken the main stage, with the rise of personal websites and related platforms such as Vimeo, Behance, and Pinterest. The advent of digital platforms adds to the interaction characteristic of portfolio sharing in modern times, while serving as both intermediaries and infrastructures that favour relations (Trimble & Kmec, 2011, pp. 147–148). Recent years saw a surging trend of maintaining portfolio presence on social media, among which Instagram is the most popular one (Cesarato, n.d.; D&AD, n.d.; Schulz, 2024). With its social networking origin and functions, social media provides a wider content range allowance, providing the opportunity to create a more multi-faceted self-brand rather than simply showcasing work results; as intermediaries, it also affords more support for relations and networks, which could lead to higher employability.

In Lee's case, she could only reveal limited information to the editor in chief during the time of the interview - her photos, her identity as a woman photographer, and perhaps her previous experience in modelling. However, if she is living in the current time, a lot more information can be accessed by a few simple clicks into her social media profile, such as the face of her cat, her hobbies, and her taste in fashion

The phenomenon is not singularly dimensioned; there's a wide variation in the ways creatives use social media. Some creatives treat them purely as a portfolio platform by simply moving their works onto social media platforms and providing no access to other personal content that is usually found there. Others uses it with a mix of both - often in these cases, works are also presented in different ways, with some being presented straightforwardly as a work result (e.g. a released video for an advertising campaign), some being presented in alternative formats to provide a peek into the work experience (e.g behind-the-secene photos of the making). There are other less portfolio-oriented kinds, with little to no presentation of actual work results, but rather predominantly presenting their side-gigs or hobbies, while only mentioning their creative identity in their bio. (e.g, a

creative director who is a foodie & occasional chef might state in their bio: Foodie, traveller, creative director for advertising). This way of using social media is unique and worth studying because it also involves the offline action of sharing with industry contacts and potential clients, and is tied to the concept of context collapse, which I will dig into in later chapters of the thesis.

The change is surely an aspect of natural adaptation to new trends in Internet usage habits, but we can find the expectation of industry contributing to the change upon more reflection. Advertising practitioners are regarded as cultural intermediaries who mediate between cultural production and consumption (Bourdieu, 1984) and shape taste and trends. Studies have shown that the first source of inspiration for creative workers in advertising is themselves and their work (Soar, 2000, p. 17). Therefore, manifestations of cultural symbols can be regarded as important indicators of the possession of cultural relevance and connotation of coolness (Hackley & Kover, 2007, p. 64), contributing to the commercial success of improving brand image and consumer perception (Derda, 2023, p. 86).

Indeed, such evolution has the advantage of potentially helping young practitioners to be noticed from the sidelines, despite the shortage in the number of previous cases, while allowing companies and recruiters to gather more information about the candidates beyond portfolios. However, marketing oneself on the internet often demands laborintensive work in maintaining and updating social profiles (Scolere, 2019, p. 1904), which could further intensify the anxieties caused by the existing demand for sociability and hedonism in the representations of creative work (Nixon & Crewe, 2004, p. 131).

1.2 Research Objectives

Goffman's groundbreaking self-presentation theory (1959) proposed that human beings present themselves differently in different life scenarios based on the surroundings and audience. After several decades, it appears to be more valuable in today's world as the internet affords unique types of audience and curated performance. The study drew on the extended concepts of exhibition and context collapse from Goffman's self-presentation theory to probe into the strategy and perspective of advertising creatives in their representations on Instagram. The thesis uses two sets of data: one from semi-structured interviews with eight industry practitioners, including creative directors, film directors,

photographers, cinematographers, strategists, and captions; one from images and texts of bios and posts on their Instagram accounts.

Despite increasing academic attention to self-branding and identity work in digital environments, there is a dearth of studies that address how professionals in taste-making industries like advertising manage the intersection of online personal and professional identities (Kasperiuniene & Zydziunaite, 2019, p. 2) on social media in post-pandemic industry conditions. By examining this intersection under the context of Instagram, this research contributes to providing "insights into creative workers' self-understanding, and thus can be of interest to creative industries researchers" (Eikhof & Chudzikowski, 2019, p. 34). With the normalization of remote, freelance, and portfolio-based work, understanding how such identities are strategically presented online becomes not only timely but crucial for both individuals and institutions.

At a foundational level, this study seeks to understand the approaches and strategies advertising practitioners employ in their online self-presentations. By exploring their perspectives on this evolving phenomenon, the research aims to offer insights that may help creative workers navigate the increasingly blurred boundaries between leisure and work (McRobbie, 2002a, pp. 519–520) and cope with anxieties related to visibility and employability. In parallel, the findings are expected to be informative for industry practitioners and recruiters, prompting reflection on the implications of using social media for talent scouting and providing a deeper understanding of the meanings behind curated online portfolios.

Beyond practical relevance, this research also engages with broader questions about the cultural and societal shifts surrounding identity in creative industries. McRobbie (2002a) observed how youth culture increasingly shaped creative sectors in London, bringing with it new pressures for self-promotion and informal networking (p. 519). These trends, she argued, contributed to a redefinition of work identity among younger professionals, particularly those under 35 (ibid., p. 520). To investigate whether and how social media contributes to this reconfiguration, this study will examine the phenomenon and its many nuances, providing insight into whether Instagram facilitates the pressure to maintain cultural relevance and work in self-promotion and networking. It is guided by the following research questions:

a. *What is the intersection of personal and professional identities on Instagram for advertising creatives?*

b. *How does Instagram mediate the intersection of personal and professional identity for advertising creatives?*

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Identity

The concept of identity has been extensively studied across various disciplines of psychology, biology, philosophy, sociology, cultural studies, and media studies, etc. The term *identity* broadly refers to how individuals or groups define themselves and are defined by others. Psychoanalyst Erikson (1968) discusses identity as part of his seminal development theory, defining identity as an "organizational principle by which the individual maintains himself as a coherent personality with a sameness and continuity both in his self-experience and in his actuality for others" (p. 73). He refers to identity as a sense of continuity within the self that is made up by a person's experiences, relationships, beliefs, values, and memories. In sociological studies, sociologists contend that identities are instead flexible and constantly changing. Erving Goffman (1959) conceptualizes identity as a continual performance**;** he theorizes that people act differently on different stages in front of various audiences. In the same vein, Jenkins (2014) opened his book with a series of perfect examples of this view - everyone's identity is different in interactions on various occasions (p. 1-5). A woman's identity is a mother to her children, and a wife to her husbands, in social occasions such as her workplace, her identity becomes a coworker. Similarly, cultural studies theorists pointed out that identity is fluid and socially constructed (Hall & Du Gay, 1996), relational (Woodward, 2018, p. 430). Queer theorist Judith Butler's (1999) famous gender performativity theory contends that (gender) identity are entirely socially constructed through performance from the angle of gender studies.

Personal identity are often linked with the concept of the *self* and deals with metaphysical questions such as: What am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? Outside of philosophy, the term commonly refers to properties which people attach to or have ownership of (Olson, 2002), such as traits, beliefs and emotions (Drummond, 2021), values (Hitlin, 2003), and lifestyle choices (Cohen, 2010).

Reserachers define work identity as a multilayered and multidimensional phenomenon that describes one's self-concept and understanding of it in terms of the work role (Baugher 2003; Kirpal 2004a), and within the employment environment (Buche (2003:

11, 2008: 134) that “shapes the roles that individuals are involved in, in their employment context” (Lloyd et al., 2011, p. 65).

Overall, the concepts of identity have long been studied in different disciplines; hence is extremely complex as it relates to a vast array of aspects, including cognitive processes, emotional attachments, social roles, and contextual performances that evolve over time and across environments. Thus, considering that the study is within the strand of social media studies, concepts beyond the knowledge and scope of this study will not be elaborated here. Online identity construction was analyzed through the related theory of self-presentations (Goffman, 1959).

2.2 Social Media and Self-presentations

2.2.1 Self-presentation Theory

Goffman’s (1959) self-presentation theory has established its foundational status as an important framework for identity studies. It draws on the traditions of symbolic interactionism and presents a dramaturgical model that views everyday life settings as stages, where people are viewed as actors who actively manage their behavior by performing different roles. Much like actors on a stage, they use performance to do “impression making”.

Goffman (1959) further conceptualizes two sets of stages – the front stage and back stage (In his book, he calls them the “front” and “back region”). The front stage is the expressive equipment employed by individuals in interaction with others (p. 22), it contains the scenic – the physical objects and layout in the environment; and personal front, such as mannerism, appearance, clothing, sex, age, and racial characteristics (p. 23-24). The backstage normally refers to where one can relax, and it also is where they scrutinize, adjust themselves, and fabricate their performance (p. 112). In other words, the front stage refers to what is presented to the audience—what the actors intend for others to see— while the backstage is where the behind-the-scenes activities that support and sustain the main performance take place (Kivisto & Pittman, 2013, p. 280).

Goffman did not offer a detailed discussion on the concept of audience; the concept of audience is woven throughout the entire book. But undoubtedly it remains an important one as the audience is present during the performances for whom they are intended. The actor expects and seeks to have their observers take seriously the impression that they

make (Goffman, 1959, p. 17); the performance has influence on them, and their reactions and accounts play a key role in how individuals prepare, alter, and present their performance (Goffman, 1959, p. 22).

According to Goffman, self-presentation serves to define social encounters and one's role in them, definitions that then guide others' reactions and influence others' behaviors. Baumeister & Hutton (1987) identify the two types of motivations for impression making. The first is defined as an audience-pleasing motive to match one's selfpresentation to the audience's expectation; the other is for self-construction purposes that match the presentation to one's ideal self (p. 71). Leary & Kowalski (1990) expand these two aspects to three main motivations: (i) enhance self-esteem, (ii) develop a self-identity, and (iii) generate social and material benefits (p. 37).

2.2.2 Social Media

Social media has become an increasingly central focus of research among media studies scholars, as it continues to overtake mainstream media (Youngs, 2025) and become deeply embedded in everyday life. Social media is an umbrella term that widely refers to webbased platforms and services that allow users to create, share, and engage with content interactively in a digital environment. The more popular term after the Millennium, with the rise of MySpace and Facebook, is social networking sites (SNSs). Boyd & Ellison (2007) offers a clear definition of SNSs: "We define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p. 211). She later defines social media as "networked publics" that connects people and provides spaces for interactions and information exchange (boyd, 2010, p. 45), characterized by affordances such as replicability, persistence, scalability, and searchability (ibid., p. 46), which shape how users construct and maintain digital identities. These affordances create new modes of self-presentation and networking that were not possible in traditional media. Van Dijck (2013) foregrounds the implication of the adaptation of social media as communication increasingly switches to the public network; communication on social media platforms takes on a different value as data and has far-reaching and long-lasting effects (p. 7), which constitutes social practices (p. 6).

Social media requires users to continuously create virtual depictions of themselves online (Marwick, 2013, p. 355), because of the lack of face-to-face, time-bounded interaction, users need to choose and present symbolic markers to convey aspects of their identities along with textual and visual elements (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 655).
Goffman theorizes that individuals highlight a persona and project a particular image to others in particular settings as a means to show their identity (Bahar, 2024) to maximize rewards and minimize punishment. Social media affords limitless space and time in the backstage, giving people opportunities to maximize the rewards and minimize negative impression being given off; therefore, they are naturally motivated to strategize their selfpresentation.

In fact, the self-presentation theory has been widely used in social media studies (Bareket-Bojmel, Moran & Shahar, 2016; Ranzini & Hoek, 2017; Rui & Stefanone, 2013), and studies have shown that it is of great usefulness as an explanatory framework for understanding identity construction in the online world (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013, p. 1). However, scholars have also pointed out the shortage in its application to social media studies, as Goffman's theory came about before the digital age. Hollenbaugh (2021) systematically reviewed existing research on the impact of social media affordances and audiences on user's self-presentation and concluded that, for the growing demands of navigating the complex social media scene, a more comprehensive theory of selfpresentation is needed for researchers (p. 90-91).

As this research is situated within the context of social media and, more specifically, Instagram, attention must be paid to the unique conditions of the online context when using this theory. The major consideration is that the performance where Goffman's theory is originally rooted heavily in involves synchronous face-to-face communication (Stets & Serpe, 2016, p. 145) that requires instant reactions, while interactions in digital environments are mostly asynchronous, which allows time for planning and thinking for a desired performance. In other words, the reactions are relatively more designed rather than authentic and instinctive.

Impression making in real-life interactions also reveal physical aspects of a person, what Goffman called sign vehicles or carriers that include both language and body language (Goffman, 1959, p. 1), such as voice, tone, facial expressions, gestures, and postures, giving off more information, and adding transparency of a person's real performance. These are

the expressions one gives (Goffman, 1959). Social media interactions are the opposite; the physical detachment between the actors and the audience means that no indicators are shown (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013, p. 102). One might argue that in the comment sections, tone and phrasing are shown, and emojis also help to convey emotions. But let's not ignore the fact that these mentioned aspects are also posted after planning and editing, and that the interaction should not be considered the same as in real life. We all have experienced the difference between texting and phone calls, video calls, and face-toface meetings, where texting gives off fewer indicators of authenticity and face-to-face meetings reveal the most. Comparing which social media interaction falls into the lowest tier on the scale and therefore could be regarded as having the lowest approximation to the application of Goffman's theory.

Hogan (2010) provided a unique alternation of Goffman's theory by differentiating between "performances" and "exhibitions". Instead of performing directly to its audience a certain time-bound situation, the self-presentations are exhibited in the space of an account page, meaning they "require a third-party to store data for later interaction" with its audience (Hogan, 2010, p. 381). On the other hand, the content is submitted to a data repository without knowing who will see it, instead of being addressed to a particular audience as one would do in an email (Hogan, 2010, p. 381). This extension of theory also mentions the key factor of curators (Hogan, 2010, pp. 381-382), although it pins down the filtering, ordering and searching functions many social media platforms offer, it is not relevant to this research as it focuses on the self-presentation within each account page, where all curated "artefacts" are visible to the audience once entering it.

In his work, he also points to the problem in the conflation of backstage with private spaces in the online context. His argumentation focuses on the backstage as being created online with privacy settings (Hogan, 2010, p. 381), which is accountable in an entirely online setting. However, Hogan fails to adapt this theory to examine the offline-online interplay. Rather than adapting the private space on social media as the backstage in the theory, in the case of Instagram are posts that are hidden from the public, it's more suitable to conceptualize the backstage as the curator's offline space, as this is where the content planning, creating and editing take place.

In light of these consideration, the combination of Goffman's self-presentation theory (1959) and my alternation of Hogan's extension (2010) will provide an accurate lens for

analyzing the space (backstage and frontstage) and the action of performance (curated exhibition rather than real-time performance) in the online context where audiences' observations and interaction with the curator are not time-bounded.

With the *performance* and *stage* addressed, I should now turn my eyes to the *audience* - who are the audience and what's special about them in the social media context? Marwick & boyd (2011) has coined the significantly important concept of *context collapse* (p. 122) in their study on Twitter users and their audience, it accurately explains the phenomenon that different cohorts of audience are merged into one context afforded by social media technologies. The publicly shared space of social media "brings together commonly distinct audiences" (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 115). This phenomenon has several implications. Firstly, it causes tension in the actor's decision and presentation due to the need to navigate multiple audiences. On social media, audiences from different situations in real life all see the same self-presentation, making it impossible for the profile owner to differentiate them accordingly. Marwick & boyd (2011) found that people struggle to shift between different identities and strike a balance in come off as authentic or fake, because authenticity is a" localized, temporally situated social construct" (p.124). One may take up a more serious tone and manner in the workplace, but show their silly and funny side only to their family, with social media, a funny post might come off as "unprofessional" to fellow industry professionals, while being too serious or only post content about work could be seen as the user trying to establish a fake identity. Two tactics are used to navigate the collapse. Firstly, some people self-censor to only share content that is not controversial to all imagined audience (Marwick & boyd, 2011, p. 126), while some try to build a balance between content that "reveals personal information versus focusing on informative topics" (ibid., p. 127).

Scholars have also made critiques of it about the epistemological assumption of selfpresentation theory that all human behaviours or practices are 'performed' . This assumption considers that all activities, actions, behaviours, or conducts of humans are seen as social performances with the desire to manage impressions (Tan, 2014, p. 3). Though the majority of cultural studies theories put weight in the performativity of identity, they do not necessarily mean the identities performed are entirely fake. Baym (2010) pins down the idea of multiplicity of disembodied identities presented online, implying that people usually avoid creating drastically different versions of themselves online, instead

presenting relatively consistent identities (pp. 115-117). Similarly, Bullingham and Vasconcelos (2013, p. 111) also find that people are keen on re-creating their offline self online but edit certain facets, rather than creating a whole new persona.

2.3 Online Identity Construction

As pluralist theorists have contended, modern identities are socially constructed (McRobbie, 2003; Stuart, 1987). Giddens (1991) argues that new mechanisms of selfidentity shaped by the new institutional contexts of modernity are "a reflexive project" that people constantly work on (p. 5). In this project, the choice of lifestyle takes on significance. People are increasingly forced to negotiate lifestyle choices under the capitalist influence in the form of commodification (ibid.). Similarly rooted in semiotics, Woodward (2018)'s work on identity and difference argues later that a common way to differentiate oneself is with a system of symbolic markers shaped by the media and society (p. 433).

In today's world, people strive to construct identity with symbolic markers that showcase uniqueness. Socially constructed labels and meanings are commonly used to address oneself to a certain culture, race, profession, community or political affiliation, such as "Chinese", "queer", "leftist", "soccer-lover", or saying that they are a fan of Lady Gaga or a collector of vinyls. What's important here, though, is that it's not just one of these "labels" that helps to build uniqueness, but rather the combination of many, someone can be a part of the immigrant community, and a fan of Arsenal, and support the political idea of MAGA at the same time. However, these labels and concepts are socially constructed and can be manipulated by intentional self-presentation. Imagine going to a man's living room without him being there. Although the owner is not present, we can still always learn something about him – who he is, what his hobbies are, what his aesthetic preference is, all being presented by the displaying of objects in the space. A living room full of paintings and sculptures tells the visitor that the owner is enthusiastic about art, while a wall of family pictures indicates that the owner is more likely to be family-oriented. However, displaying a wall full of pictures of family members does not necessarily confirm the person as a good husband or father, but fits the socially constructed expectation of a "family guy".

In the computer-mediated world, digital platforms are equivalent to the living rooms, where people seek to individualize themselves as different from the others (Baym, 2010, p. 108). In Papacharissi's (2002) study on personal home pages, he found that users

imitate the offline social spirit of exchanging likes and dislikes by listing relevant sites, along with elements like design, palettes, and font type to convey aspects of their personalities and individuality (pp. 654–656). Similarly, Liu (2007) found that cultural interests such as books, music, and movies function as taste performance in constructing identity online (p. 273). In the age of social media, platforms like Instagram afford such presentation in multimedia form. Users perform the ritual to "stand out as unique individuals" (Marwick, 2013, p. 358) by presenting links, images, videos, and texts on their accounts. For example, if one wants to present themselves as an outdoor lover, they could post pictures of themselves on hiking trips or texts about high mountains they wish to conquer.

In real life, identity is constructed through performances (Goffman, 1959) and reinforced by the repetition of acts (Butler, 1999, p. 179). Online, an intended identity can, in a similar way, be established through continuous and accumulated presentations of content with symbolic markers. They can also be altered and refined over time, as Instagram provides the functions of pinning, editing, and deleting posts. Users can utilize these functions to steer them in the direction that they want if they are not satisfied with their current presentations.

2.4 Advertising Creatives

Advertising has existed since long before what we might regard as ads today as handicrafts and flyers that are handed in person, modern advertising has only existed for about 150 years. Today, this industry is described as a conglomeration of organizations that create and distribute ads that are seen or heard offline and online (Turow, 2018, p. 4); on TVs, outdoor screens, and more recently on Internet-afforded channels such as websites and streaming platforms. In 2025, the global advertising revenue is estimated to reach to $1.1 trillion (Narayanan, 2024). In adverstising, creativity has been put on a significant place in the industry (Dahlén et al., 2008; Derda, 2023; Zinkhan, 1993). With a clear overuse of the terms "creative" and "creativity" in recent years, they have undergone a significant transformation. While they were once primarily associated with artistic work, "they have now become key buzzwords in the discourse of contemporary capitalism" (Morgan and Nelligan, 2018, p. 15). Although creative has now been widely used as a noun to describe people who work in the advertising industry (Edelsten, 2024), debates exist in the industry for its usage in defining the complicated creative identity (Cole, 2017; Smith, 2017). Morgan

and Neilligan pointed out that “creative” essentially signified independent selfexpression (2018, p. 15); therefore, for the study, “creative” is defined as advertising practitioners who actively work with jobs that involve independent self-expression, such as art-direction, film and video directors, photographers, and designers.

2.5 Relevant Empirical Research

Despite extensive research on online identities and self-presentation across various disciplines, relevant studies within the cultural and creative industries have primarily focused on professional presentations on social media**,** as it increasingly serves as a working tool for the curation of professional image and managing social relationships for creative workers under a digital and freelance-based economy (Gandini, 2016, p. 124). Nada et al. (2024) highlighted the necessity of showing and sharing creative work on social media (pp. 137-138) while Scolere (2019) found that maintaining such creative portfolios that are labor-intensive and "never-ending" (p. 1904), requiring continuous content production, careful planning and brand management to establish a consistent digital presence (Petrides & Vila de Brito, 2024). The strategy employed by creatives in the documentation of creative work for the online presence often consists of presenting mundane practices and imperfections, incompleteness, and impermanence (Nata et al., 2024, p. 138). But to maintain the presence, the work extends beyond managing the account but also requires engaging with the audience and making networking opportunities both online and offline (Petrides & Vila de Brito, 2024, pp. 9–10).

Valoria (2024) contends that social media has shifted from platforms that only facilitate mere showcasing of work to more interactive and commodified places (pp. 153154). Social media platforms’ different affordances also require platform-specific strategies (Scolere et al., 2018, p. 7-8); they also disrupt creative practices and alienate people from their sense of self and audience (Simpson & Semaan, 2023, p. 1). Uski and Lampinen (2016) phrase strategic self-presentation as “profile work” and claim that it is configured by not just technical affordance but also social norms with a sociocultural goal to present authenticity (p. 447). Expanding on this, Bishop (2023) introduces the concept of “influencer creep”, suggesting that the way creative professionals manage their online identities increasingly mirrors influencer culture, characterized by self-branding, optimization, and authenticity (pp. 14-15).

The original cohort of this culture, such as influencers, YouTubers, fashion bloggers, and live streamers, engage in more personal presentations phrased as “authentic-self” on social media. An important relevant body of work is the platformization of cultural work (David Hesmondhalgh & Charles Umney, 2024; Duffy et al., 2019; Poell et al., 2021). Scholars have also analyzed how platform infrastructures create a new creative labour of professionalization and monetization (Simpson & Semaan, 2023, p. 14), shaping professional opportunities (Valoria, 2024, p. 152) and reinforcing particular narratives around social media careers (Duffy et al., 2021; Hoose & Rosenbohm, 2024).

For personal self-presentations on social media accounts that are not career-based, earlier study situated in the context of personal home pages suggested that people present themselves by drawing visual and textual symbolic elements such as design elements (colors, fonts, links) and involvement with online communities (Papacharissi, 2002, p. 15). Later, Jensen Schau and Gilly (2003) found that “consumers construct identities by digitally associating themselves with signs, symbols, material objects, and places” (p. 385). Liu (2007) compounds the findings, stating that presenting cultural interests functions as a form of taste statements on social media, with prestige and differentiation being the goal of the performance (pp. 271 - 272).

These studies provide valuable insights into personal and professional presentations in the context of social media**.** While the first branch of studies — focused on professional self-presentation — aligns more closely with the cohort in my study, it tends to examine only the professional dimension in isolation. The second strand, which explores the intersection of personal and professional identity, is more conceptually relevant; however, it often centers on individuals whose careers are inherently tied to social media, requiring them to almost completely merge these identities. Meanwhile, existing studies on personal self-presentation often overlook participants from creative industries, leaving a gap in understanding how personal and professional identities are negotiated in these fields. Therefore, there is a noticeable gap in research addressing the intersection of personal and professional identities among creative workers in the context of social media—particularly in understanding how these identities are curated, negotiated, and performed on platforms that demand both visibility and aesthetic coherence.

3. Research Design

3.1 Methodology

The research investigates how the intersection of personal and professional identity is constructed on Instagram for advertising creatives. It takes on a qualitative research method, with an empirical study conducted under the interpretive paradigm, adopting a digital ethnographic approach by combining semi-structured in-depth interviews with a qualitative content analysis of Instagram posts and bios.

In-depth interviews are valuable tools in research regarding the meaning of phenomena to research participants (Kelly, 2010, p. 4) and allow a grasp of "deep information such as individual self, lived experience, values and decisions .. or perspective"(Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 3). The interview provided a gateway into the approaches of their digital self-presentation and their perspective behind them, contextualizing their digital behaviour.

Besides the interview, a qualitative content analysis of participants' Instagram posts and bios was conducted, examining both visual and textual elements to identify recurring patterns, symbolic representations as a reflection of their identity practices.

3.2 Sampling Method

In studying a niche phenomenon such as the intersection of personal and professional identity on social media that is unique to these industry practitioners, depth is valued over breadth for meaningful findings. Convenience and purposive sampling methods were used to find initial participants for the study. Although both methods belong to nonprobability sampling techniques that have their own subject nature, they can be useful when faced with limited resources, time, and workforce (Etikan, 2016, p. 1).

Showcasing work-related content on social media is not a rare phenomenon, but users who post with a blurred line between personal and work content are relatively specific. Moreover, this study is tightly related to the advertising industry and its existing characteristics of blurring of boundaries between work and leisure influenced by the cultural scenes (McRobbie, 2002a, pp. 519–520) that encourages such blurred presentation of the practitioners. Hence, a suitable sample pool that ticks all the boxes and is relatively small.

Convenience sampling can enrich the data due to the likely established rapport between the researcher and the participants. The existing familiarity is also beneficial in understanding the meanings behind their answers, before long-term cultivation of trust with them. A general assumption of convenience sampling is that the results generated from the data have limited generalizability to the larger population (Etikan, 2016, p. 4). Purposive sampling deliberately chooses participants due to the qualities that they possess (Etikan, 2016, p. 2), which allows access to the directly relevant group of people "that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information" (Kelly, 2010, p. 317) that is of value to the study. This method is used to counteract the shortcomings of convenience sampling by diversifying the samples, purposively locate participants that come from different countries and have international backgrounds.

3.3 The Participants and the Platform

It is easy to predict that the group for the study uses various social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Rednote, WeChat, Linkedin, etc. To gain depth, Instagram was chosen as the platform of data and participants. This is mainly for three reasons. Firstly, Instagram is an image-driven platform, with its posting format dominated by pictures and videos. These formats align with how most of the assets are produced within the advertising industry. Secondly, Instagram uses portfolio as a key value proposition (Valoria, 2024, p. 150), creating an online environment promoting professional presence on the platform. Lastly, Instagram, as one of the most dominant social media platforms, ranked the third biggest user amount in the world as of February 2025 (Meltwater & We are social, 2025, p.375), therefore providing a wide selection range for the samples.

After locking down the platform as Instagram, candidates of the participants on the platform are considered. Advertising practitioners who were actively involved in creative content production for advertising campaigns at the time of the interview were identified, including individuals holding one or more standard industry roles—such as photographers, directors, creative directors, account directors, producers, and cinematographers—who specialize in the production process and contribute regularly to the creative development and execution of advertising content. This group has several features; their creative nature drives them to possess crossover identities and engage in non-commercial projects, including personal or non-profit creative works. Also, their careers are not entirely built on

social media, so they are not compelled to have an online presence. Rather, their online work presence serves more as a tool to help with their offline career. Another significant living experience they share is that they had been freelancers at some point in their career or were freelancing at the moment of the interview. The flexibility of their working status makes them a cohort of population that can utilize social media to present the diversity of their ways in creative expressions, and gain work opportunities. For example, one of my participants is an account director in a creative agency as her daytime job, while being a freelance photographer at the same time. Morgan and Nelligan (2018) have found that senior creatives are more aware of the limitations and contradictions of the glamour associated with the industry that attracts many young practitioners to the industry (p. 141). This awareness suggests that senior creatives may offer a clearer and more insightful perspective on self-understanding and how it is shaped by the industry's context. Based on this, all participants chosen had more than 10 years of experience in advertising to strengthen the depth of data. The full list of criteria for the sampling is listed below in Table 3.1.

The research questions shed light on the intersection of work and personal identities of advertising creatives. Set apart from the cohort whose career is built on social media, such as influencers, whose main source of income is from their online presence, striving to build social media personalities (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017). For the study subjects, work-related presentations usually do not take up the entirety of their social media. As mentioned in the above chapters, creatives use Instagram in many ways to indicate their work identities on Instagram; the obviousness of the indication ranges widely, but such indication is essential to be applicable to the study. In this vein, two main criteria were set for the sample selection: either they directly mention their job title in the bio or provide a link to their digital work portfolio (usually in the form of a website), or work-related posts are visible on the account page, these include work results, behind-thescene of a work setting, process of making. Since the study is designed to focus on the intersection of both personal and professional presentations, these indicators helped ensure that participants actively use their online presence to reflect both aspects of their identity.

The sample size was kept to eight; the participants occupied a range of national, racial, and gender identities. Of nine participants, five are Chinese and four were from other countries; details of their nationality and current residency are listed in Table 3.2. Four

identify as cis-female and four identify as cis-male. Two participants identified themselves as queer, while the others as heterosexual. Table 3.2 also lists their demographic information, job titles, years of experience, and whether their Instagram accounts meet the two criteria that were set up.

Table 3.1.

Criteria of Sample Selection

Criteria of Selection
More than 18 years of age
Creative content producers (e.g. directors, photographer, creative directors)
At least 20 open-to-public posts on their Instagram account's grid
Working experience within the advertising industry for at least 10 years
Indicates their identity as creative content producers in their bio or has work/projectrelated posts on the account page

Table 3.2.

List of Interview Participants

Pseudonyms	Gender/ Sexual Identity	Nationality	Residency	Job title(s)	Years in advertising	Criteria1*	Criteria 2**
Sky	Male/ Queer	Chinese	Shanghai, China	Creative director (Art based) / Director/ Producer	16	Yes	No
Moran	Female/ Queer	Chinese	Shanghai, China	Creative director (Art based) / Designer	10	Yes	Yes
Sui	Female/ Heterosexual	Chinese	Shanghai, China	Creative director (Art based)	14	Yes	Yes
Cam	Female/ Heterosexual	Brazilian	Amsterdam, The Netherlands	Creative director (Art based)	11	Yes	Yes
Yuting	Female/ Heterosexual	Chinese	Shanghai, China	Photographer/Account Director	10	Yes	Yes
Marc	Male/ Heterosexual	Dutch	Tokyo, Japan	Photographer/ Cinematographer	12	Yes	Yes
Andrew	Male/ Heterosexual	Brazilian	Sao Paolo, Brazil	Creative director (Copy based)	18	Yes	No

Rayn	Male/ Heterosexual	British	London, UK	Director	18	Yes	Yes

*Criteria 1: Indication of creative work identity in Bio

**Criteria 2: Account has work-related posts

3.4 Operationalization

Based on Goffman's dramaturgical model, Stets & Serpe (Stets & Serpe, 2016, p. 145) likened the process of content preparation to backstage work, and the products of posted content to the front stage performance - in this case, the content on their Instagram accounts.

As the backstage work and frontstage performance are both important elements of self-presentations, the preparation in the backstage is crucial in deciding how the final performance is presented; therefore, to answer the first research question - *What is the intersection of personal and professional identities on Instagram for advertising creatives?* - I propose two sub-questions regarding these two elements:

a1.How do advertising creatives present work & personal content on Instagram?

a2.How do advertising creatives blur the line between personal and professional self-presentations on Instagram?

The second research question: *How does Instagram mediate the intersection of personal and professional identity for advertising creatives?* – requires a thorough investigation of two core concepts of the theory - the *stage* and the *audience***.** As mentioned in the last paragraph, Instagram accounts where performance takes place can be likened to the frontstage, and offline life, where the preparation of content happens as the backstage (Stets & Serpe, 2016, p. 145); visitors to the accounts (including both followers and the public) are considered as the *audience* on Instagram. Hogan (2010) pointed out that in social media spaces, artifacts are stored in databases for later interaction, and real-time interaction is not necessary (p. 381). Recognizing the difference of social media and offline context, it is critical to examine the phenomenon from the perspective of Instagram and its affordances and dynamics. Among which are the persistence (artifacts that continue to live in the exhibition space), scalability (a platform algorithm could bring content to an unintended audience) (boyd, 2010, p. 46), imagined audience and context collapse (not

knowing who can see the content as it's open to public) (Marwick & boyd, 2011) are especially of great importance in this regard. Hence, two subquestions are proposed:

b1. What role does the imagined audience and context collapse play in shaping what is shared?

b2. How do platform affordances influence the identity presentation strategies of advertising creatives?

The sub-questions were answered through interpretations of subjective perspectives gained from interview data as well as content analysis of their Instagram posts and bios. The interviews were semi-structured with the goal of the study introduced as to find out about advertising creatives' usage of social media in presenting work and personal life. Work and personal life were defined with the interviewee rather than imposed with certain definitions by the researcher to allow for more genuine perspectives. The interviews commenced with questions about demographic information and creative career, including "Can you briefly tell me about yourself and your creative career?", and then moved onto core questions related to the research questions, including "How do you decide what to post on your Instagram?", "Is there a tonality/style for your Instagram?", "How do you post your personal life & your work?". Finally, reflective questions were asked about the platform's impact on life and creative career, including "Have you ever been recruited or contacted for work through Instagram?", "What do you think of social media in general?" (Full interview questions are listed in Appendix A).

Grounded in semiotic theories (Giddens, 1991; Woodward, 1997) and proven by previous empirical studies, people utilize both visual and textual symbolic markers such as signs, places, colors, links, and material objects to construct identity online (Jensen Schau & Gilly, 2003; Liu, 2007; Papacharissi, 2002). Symbolic representations are categorized to identify personal and professional self-presentations in social media data. (Table 3.3)

Table 3.3.

Indicators for Categorization of Instagram Posts and Bios

Category	Visual and Textual Indicators
Professional Selfpresentations	work results; work locations; creative process; formal tone; coworkers; job titles
Personal Selfpresentations	Leisure; family; friends; informal tone; personal reflections; beliefs; values

3.5 Data Collection

Data were collected with two methods through semi-structured in-depth interviews and from participants' social media posts with their consent.

The main source of data was collected through in-depth interviews. When planning an interview, it is important to make structured plans that cover the intended topics but also provide flexibility in altering the course of the interview to follow the informant's lead (Gubrium & Holstein, 2001, p. 9). A list of interview questions (Appendix A) was prepared to provide a general guide for the interviews, but did not necessarily have to be asked. A flexible flow of the conversation was allowed, and the participants were not led by the order of the questions or topics prepared to elaborate on their answers as much as possible. In between the questions, at least two to three seconds of silence were maintained before continuing with the next question to allow participants to finish their answers fully. Often the case, their answers to certain questions will come across some other questions that were prepared. In that case, those questions were skipped and followed up with newly generated questions on the spot to further the depth of the data. With some participants who easily get off track with the discussed topics, certain points in their answers that are related were picked to be further discussed and circled back to the original questions.

Participants were contacted via WeChat, WhatsApp, and Instagram and presented with a brief introduction to my study, along with an invitation to be my study subjects. After gaining their verbal agreement, informed consent forms (in English) were sent to their emails. All participants have signed and returned the consent forms before the interviews. These materials were stored digitally in my laptop, which only I have access to, and the participants kept digital copies themselves. All interviews were conducted over Zoom, with a time chosen and confirmed by them, which lasted 50 - 60 minutes each. All interviews were recorded in both video and audio formats and live transcribed with Zoom's recording and transcription features. All materials were saved digitally on my personal computer and backed up in a portable drive. Zoom's transcript feature does not deliver fully accurate results due to accents and sound quality. Considering that the majority of the texts were well-transcribed, only necessary sections were proofread during the analysis process. Seven out of the eight interviews were conducted in English, and for one interview done in

Chinese, the transcription was fed to ChatGPT for translation and then proofread verbatim by me.

After the interview, seven to ten posts were extracted from each participant's grid that contained both work-related and personal representations. Participants were then asked to validate and select five posts that best represent their current style and identity. Along with bio and stories, they make up the second source for this study. Emojis were kept as part of the data as they serve as a language (grammar) used in communicating on social media (Arafah & Hasyim, 2019, p. 494).

1. Bio (Texts and emojis)
2. 5 posts from the Instagram account's grid (Images, accompanying texts, and emojis)
3. Stories (if available and relevant to the study)

Social media content is often contextually private; people may post publicly but not expect their content to be analyzed in academic work. **(**Nissenbaum, 2010; 9). Although informed consent was obtained from every participant agreeing to reveal their identity in written data of the study, out of consideration of best ethical practices, I hid their account names and the faces of people in the selected posts when presenting the data for privacy protection reasons and avoid any unwanted judgment resulted from the study. Instagram's terms of use prohibit explicitly unauthorized automated data collection (*Terms of Use | Instagram Help Centre*, n.d.), so I manually captured the images and captions. This approach aligns with ethical guidelines for digital ethnography (Townsend & Wallace, 2016; Markham & Buchanan, 2012), ensuring respect for contextual integrity and participant agency.

3.6 Data Analysis

Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were used to conduct content analysis on the interview transcripts, and content analysis was used to discuss posting images and captions.

Transcripts of the interviews were fed into Atlas.ti (Version 25.0.1) to conduct open coding, relevant data were coded with general descriptive codes guided by my research questions until saturation was reached (Boeije, 2010, p. 107). Axial coding was then employed to find categories for the handles made in open coding. Necessary modifications

were made to certain categories, such as merging and dividing, to find the dominant and less important themes that emerged from the data (Boeije, 2010, p. 109). Finally, selective coding allowed me to make sense of the patterns and find core categories, which are identified with characteristics provided by Strauss (1987: 63), namely being linked to a lot of other categories and weaving pieces of the puzzle together.

This study employs a qualitative content analysis of participants' Instagram posts and bios, examining captions, emojis, and images. Each post is labelled with work-related or personal symbols. Categorization is based on predefined criteria (e.g., subject matter, language, tone, setting) grounded in the study's theoretical framework on the usage of symbolic markers in identity work (Giddens, 1991).

3.7 Credibility and Reliability

Data generated from in-depth interviews are the products of the interaction between interviewer and respondent (Kelly, 2010, p. 3); therefore, particular attention should be paid to reflexivity on the impact of my gender, personality, and previous background in shaping the interview data.

Being a creative producer in the advertising industry myself, I belong to the group I am studying. This made both the participants and I easier to grasp what some of the phrases and expressions stand for, hence creating a tighter communication. It was also proved in the interviews that strict reciprocity was achieved by us exchanging "views, feelings and reflections on the topics being discussed" (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001, p. 10), which sparked some surprisingly insightful points of view. On the other hand, the existing rapport between me and some of the interviewees is beneficial for achieving better data quality (Alam, 2024, p. 4). The rapport also entails disadvantages in some respects. Firstly, there is a possibility that interviewees withheld certain opinions out of concern for how I might perceive or judge them in the future, given our ongoing relationship.

Secondly, my interpretation afterwards could potentially be biased based on my previous knowledge of the interviewee. Two approaches were taken to mitigate the disadvantages. Firstly, the real names of the interviewees were hidden in the transcripts and instead coded as Q1, Q2,…, Q8 in order to avoid personal bias during the coding process. However, I still had partial memory of who the interviewee was based on the content of the interviews.

In this case, to further strengthen my findings, a second source of data, including images and texts, was collected from their Instagram bios and posts to conduct data triangulation. When working with self-presentations of creative workers, triangulation of methods and data sources could be crucial, as self-presentations on social media are highly contextual and could be very specific to an individual's situation (Eikhof & and Chudzikowski, 2019, p. 44) . Combining the analysis of two sources of data that are correlated (one from the subjective angle and one from the objective angle) can significantly adds richness and depth to the research inquiry (Heale & Forbes, 2013, p. 98) and "reduce the risk of drawing rash conclusions about what does or does not constitute the idiosyncrasies of creative work(ers)." (Eikhof & and Chudzikowski, 2019, p. 44)

4. Results

In this chapter, the data from the interview transcripts and Instagram bios, and posts samples are presented and analysed. The results are organised in four themes: *Selfpresentation on Instagram (The performance), What is work?, How personal is personal? (The stage), Cultural curator - Constructing the creative professional identity.* These themes emerged throughout the coding process and represented the results through the lens of the core theory – self-presentation theory from the angle of the *performance,* the *audience,* and the *stage*, addressing the prominent meaning behind the diversity of practice and perspectives on work and personal identities construction and their intersection on Instagram.

4.1 Self-presentation on Instagram (The Performance)

4.1.1 Two Pathways in Presentations

Although all the participants have both professional presentations and personal content on their Instagram accounts, the interviews and the materials taken from the accounts revealed a variety in their practice. (Here I refer to work as commercial works, with which the participants are commissioned as freelancers, or those done on a full-time job within a company for clients. For discussion of the definition of work and its relationship with advertising creatives, I will dive deeper in the later section.) Only one participant acknowledged in the interview that he does not present any commercial work content on his account. All other participants fall into different places in the spectrum of presentations,

with one end being full personal presentations and the other being full professional. The data manifests two main pathways that can be categorized for studying.

Firstly, most participants see Instagram as a channel mainly for sharing personal life, treating it as a “visual archive” of life, where they store records of memorable life moments over time. These accounts are dominated by non-work-related content, including daily life moments, travel photos, portraits of people, friends and family photos, and personal art projects, with a significantly lower amount of commercial work results. Many of them expressed high reluctance to showcase commercial work directly:

> But my… my job in the, like, for example, Lululemon, I don't really post that. You know, maybe on stories, I post one or two. But I would not really leave them… Uh, on my grid. And also, I… sometimes I post the… process of doing the shoot, but I will not post the final work. (Sui, personal communication, May 20th, 2025)

The reluctance, when observed in the social media data, is translated into a strategized alternative in showcasing commercial works. I noticed that several methods are used to present commercial works. Instead of work results, the most used type of content is behind-the-scenes. Some of which are more traditional behind-the-scenes, such as photos or videos of equipment and crew working on a set (Figure 4.1); Some are much less straightforward and are designed to contain the right amount of information that could reveal the nature of work in the content.

Sui posted a photo carousel of a shoot in her full-time job. At first look, the carousel presents a theme of summer and nature - trees, butterflies and summer sunshine are constitutive of the visual presentations. While a closer observation reveals that information are scattered around in the post, subtly revealing the setting of a commercial shoot from which the materials are made - keywords in the accompanying caption “summer shoot” & “For…#Neiwai”, a very small part of a C-stand, and the products hanging on the tree. (Figure 4.2)

Exemplified by the abovementioned post, carousels are often curated with a theme. The form of carousel with multiple pictures or videos offers a great opportunity to mix the content of professional presentations with that of personal presentations. Cam, a creative director specialized in food commercial production, she used the theme of “red” in one of her carousel posts. With the colour of red across the carousel, she placed a shot at work side by side with non-work-related content, including attending a concert and a typography

on the street. (Figure 4.3) The indication here of a working setting is also very minimal; the probe-lens shown in the first video is not the most commonly known equipment to the general public, such as cameras and monitors; therefore, only industry people would be likely to understand the connotation of this video. Since there is a high overlap between her job and interest (food), by using the carousel, she made the division between work presentation and personal presentation even less distinguishable than those of Sui's.

Direct work results are present but very rarely. Rayn was the one who posted more direct work results than others in this category. In one of his posts, although the commercial was posted in full, he accompanied a long heartfelt personal statement with the film he made. In the statement, he expressed gratitude to his team and client, along with a full credit list of the crew (Figure 4.1, Right side). Using the symbolic markers operationalized to analyse the data, informal tone and personal reflections mark personal self-presentations, while work results and mention of crew stand for professional self-presentations. This post exemplifies that even the seemingly most direct professional self-presentations are mixed with personal components.

The second pathway is leveraging Instagram as a tool to advertise themselves to gain work opportunities in the industry. This type of account, looking from the outside, is almost the reverse of the first type of account. The participants mainly post work-related content with an observable willingness to display work results, intending to showcase primarily their skills and professionalism. On the other hand, the purposive usage results in clear reluctance to share personal life. Marc said, "I'm more wary of what I want to share on a… personal level. Like, if it's an open door, then I don't need people to know what my personal life is like." (Marc, personal communication, May 19th,2025). Very few traces of personal content can be found on Marc's account. In only one post, he expressed personal

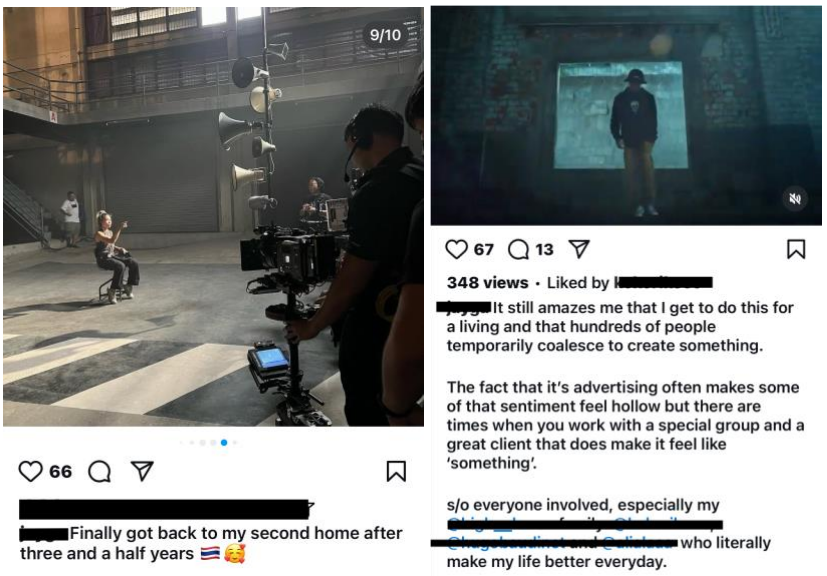

Figure 4.1. Left: Behind-the-scenes photo hidden in a carousel (Posted on June 4th, 2023); Right: A commercial ad on Rayn's Instagram (Posted on May 25th, 2021)

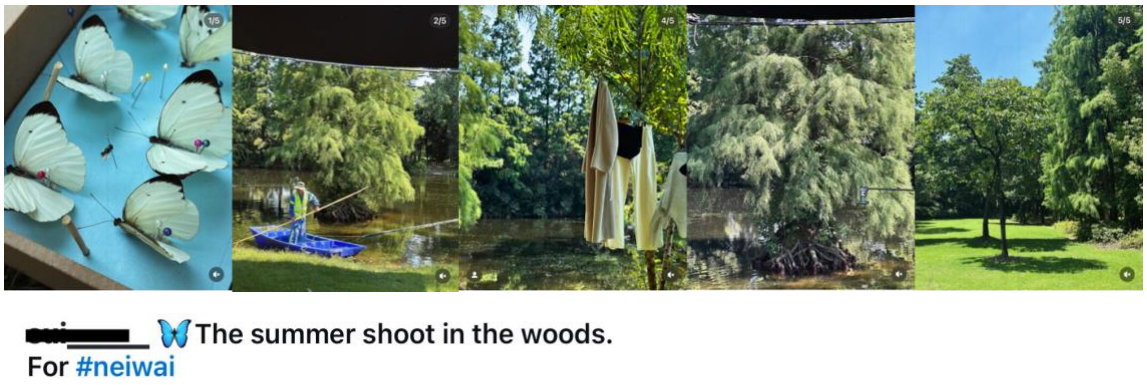

Figure 4.2. Carousel about a commercial shoot on Sui's Instagram (Posted on July 19th 2024)

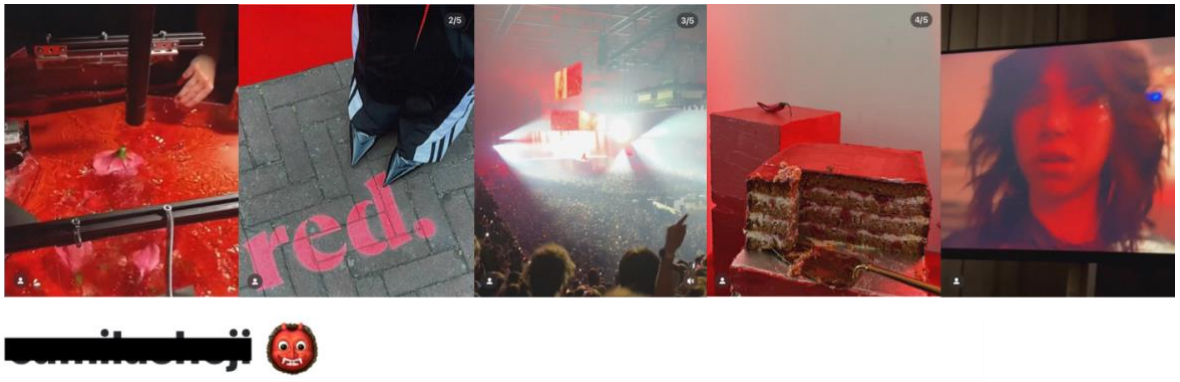

Figure 4.3. Red themed carousel on Cam's Instagram (Posted on May 23th 2025)

thoughts on a big life event – his injury while he was shooting a documentary on Everest during the 2015 Nepal earthquake, as shown in Figure 4.4, but the general setting of the narrative is still an event that happened during work. Yuting, who now only posts about work results, is very clear in her strategy, “I feel like I used that, uh, social media more as a medium to promote myself as a photographer, in order to get more business, which I don't feel like posting about my personal life helps.” (Yuting, personal communication, May 20th, 2025). Indeed, her grid shows an obvious shift from personal content to only posts of her photography works. But instead of deleting the posts from before after her decision to shift the style and purpose of her account, she kept all of them, which are pictures that she had taken in life of people, travel, and life, and a relatively small portion of pictures of herself. It’s also worth mentioning that with commercial work content, she often adds a personally toned description in accompanying texts, as if it is leisure instead of work.

The summarization of the above two categories concludes two main types of presentations found in the data. Participants in the first category try to manifest the commercial nature as little as possible when presenting work-related content, almost disguising it as something completely personal. Two layers of meaning behind can be interpreted behind this strategy; Firstly, showing the imperfections of the working conditions (Endrissat et al., 2024, p. 133) and fleeting aspects associated with commercial creative work, such as reflective expressions, render the creative work more accessible to the audience (ibid., p. 137). It serves as a gesture to dismount from the high horse, emanating from the public image of advertising people that is often portrayed negatively, with associations with capitalism and consumerism. Secondly, records of work process and results, personal values, views, and experiences taken by advertising creatives locate their strategy in a claim of creative autonomy. Methods that do not engage in posting work results are essentially creating new content with authorship. As the authors and curators of the photos and captions, creatives inherently transform client works to personal life moments recorded in media forms, thereby realizing the kind of creativity from the perspective of advertising practitioners that is often restricted in the context of client works (Derda, 2023, p. 15; Romeiro & Wood Jr, 2015, p. 17).

Participants in the second group are less worried about this “capitalist” image, driven by the desire to gain work opportunities, “A lot of it… those (are for) two things, it's like being driven professionally to make myself Uh, notice. Or just, like, let people know that

I'm still… around and doing stuff." (Marc, personal communication, May 19th, 2025). Seemingly opposite to the first category from the outside, I argue, the intention behind the second pathway is, in fact, like the first one. Adding personal touches to business-oriented accounts renders the image of a creative professional who is more humane, grounded, and accessible to the audience.

In both cases, keeping peers informed of one's active professional status acts as a key motivation, echoing Marc's statement on maintaining a visible online presence. Pursuing visibility in the industry becomes a shared motivation across both categories, regardless of whether the content leans more personal or professional. What differs is the strategy of framing: one masks commercial intent with personal aesthetics, while the other softens overt self-promotion through personal elements. Both approaches reflect an understanding of the platform logic and the expectation to remain culturally relevant, socially present, and professionally desirable.

Figure 4.4. Marc's post about his injury in 2015 (Posted April 25th, 2025)

4.1.2 The Common Ground – Curation of Consistent Style

Despite the different approaches taken by the participants, some common characteristics are evident. Firstly, all participants expressed that their Instagram posts represent their perspective of the world; these posts showcase to the audience their way of seeing and

experiencing life and the world around them. When talking about the content of his posts, Ryan said, ".. a lot of time, what I'm posting is about remembering how I was feeling at the moment." (Ryan, personal communication, May 20th, 2025). Similarly, Andrew used Instagram as a channel to showcase his photography, stating that the mission of his account was to "see the world" (Andrew, personal communication, May 19th, 2025). Yuting, whose account has the highest number of direct work results, also stated, "…the photos I posted are close to who I am.. is the way how I see the world and how I capture stuff." (Yuting, personal communication, May 20th, 2025).

A general pattern that participants expressed is how they strive to curate their posts in a consistent style. Sky metaphorizes his account as a magazine, "First, I think of my main feed like a magazine. So before I post anything, I ask myself, "Does this fit with the overall style of the magazine?" If not, I won't post it." (Sky, personal communication, May 20th, 2025). More importantly, the style is true to their taste. Sui emphasized the criteria in deciding her content as "spontaneity" and "nature"-related.

Social media data verifies their testimony, despite what the content is about, visual styles are mostly kept consistent. An interesting example is from Rayn's account, where he has developed and adopted a personal style, reflected in both imagery and captions. All of his posts, including commercial works and personal life (e.g, travels), are formulated in the same manner – same ratios and colour tones of imageries with space in between accompanying captions and hashtags as shown in Figure 4.5.

Curating content that represents their perspectives of the world and aligns with the account's visual style usually overcomes the consideration of what type of indication content gives off when they post. For example, in Moran's picture taken in a work setting, she was emphasizing more how the combination of shapes and colors align with the style of her "inspiration pool" and regards this as more important in her decision to post it. " I just feel… I just take it as the… at the moment when I see this scene, I just feel like everything is so… the tune, you know, like… And so harmony. It's not really about Nike." (Moran, personal communication, May 22th, 2025) She sees it as personal content rather than a work-related one, even though the visually predominant Nike logo and stage-control equipment clearly indicate the work setting of the photo taken in. To compare, Figure 4.6. shows the picture along with several other "Inspiration pool" posts Moran identified during the interview.

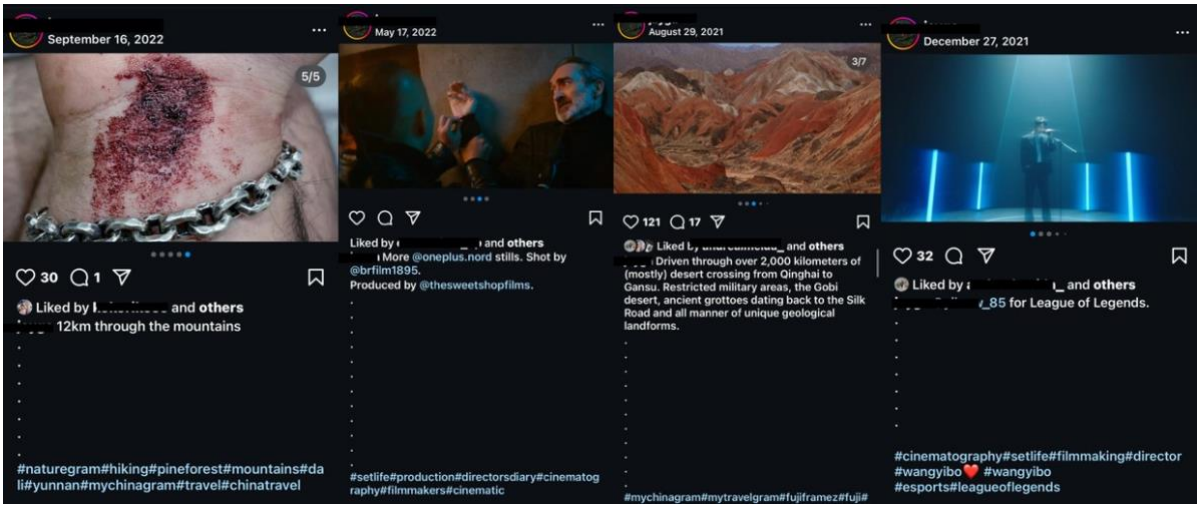

Figure 4.5. Rayn's formulation of work results and personal travel content

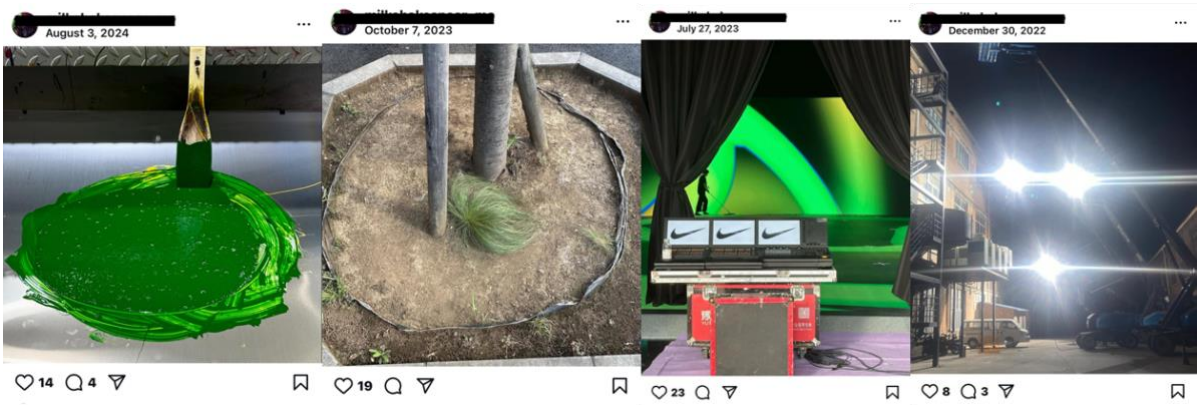

Figure 4.6. Inspiration pool posts categorized by Moran

4.2 What is Work?

Work has several meanings as both a verb and a noun. One is "to perform work or fulfill duties regularly for wages or salary", another one goes as "something produced or accomplished by effort, exertion, or exercise of skill" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). While in Chapter 4.1.1 I referred to work as commercial works, in this sub-chapter I will shed light on the other meaning of "work".

This necessity to discuss the definition is due to the emergence of two definitions in the communication with the participants. Full-time jobs or freelance projects in the advertising industry that involve the goal of achieving an external stakeholder's business goal are generally referred to as "commercial works" or "client works," which are the most financially rewarding works for the participants. Another type of work generally represents

personal projects or side gigs to them; this work does not necessarily bring income, but emotional value to the participants. Particularly, this type of "work" contains a connotation of work (of art). As Moran articulated the difference between them in the interview, to explain better what they are presenting in her accounts. "The fashion photography… some photography works. I would take it as work, like… Uh, works means, like, *zuopin*, right?" Here, she uses her mother tongue to articulate the connotation. *Zuopin* in Chinese means artistic production in the field of arts and literature and denotes the meaning of creation (Cambridge dictionary, n.d.). Andrew, who works as a creative director of advertising agencies, sees not only his photography but also his hobby of kombucha brewing and cheese-making as work, puts it as they are the creation of his (Andrew, personal communication, May 19th, 2025).

Contrary to the reluctance of showcasing commercial works among most participants, personal projects make up a large portion of their Instagram grids in all participants' accounts. Participants were keen on speaking about their motivations in posting this type of content. Andrew discussed multiple times how he feels proud of the content on his Instagram grid. Yuting, who posts a relatively equal amount of commercial works and personal projects, also stated that she only posts work that she is proud of. (Andrew, personal communication, May 19th, 2025; Yuting, personal communication, May 22th, 2025). Marc, though, phrased the majority of his grid as " stuff where I have sole creative control and not… Where someone pays me to do something that they want." (Marc, personal communication, May 19th, 2025).

Furthermore, participants find that gaining recognition through work that they are proud of is extremely empowering. Sky, who is the only participants that does not post commercial work on his Instagram, is the main organizer of a major queer and drag community event in Shanghai, told me" When I shared *Medusa* visuals on Instagram, I'd sometimes get likes from some really amazing people—even *RuPaul's Drag Race* queens. That was incredibly empowering. It gave me a lot of confidence." (Sky, personal communication, translated from Mandarin Chinese, May 20th, 2025)

To understand more deeply the distinction between the first and second meanings of "work", I quote Sky gain: "As for *Medusa*, regarding whether it can be considered as work, I'd say it's 50/50. When posting becomes a task—like, "I *have* to post this", then it feels like work." The line between two definitions of work is drawn by personal feelings towards it, as

demonstrated by Sky's elaboration on 50/50 and by other participants, personal fulfillment and satisfaction qualify something as work (that is produced or accomplished by effort, exertion, or exercise of skill), when they are pressured with those feelings derived, even personal interest or passion becomes work (as in something to be performed to fulfill duties).

The above findings provide answers to the first sub-research question "*a1. How do advertising creatives present work & personal content on Instagram? "*: Advertising creatives present work and personal content on Instagram through a cohesive visual and textual style that reflects their taste, while mixing symbols of work and personal presentations.

In this light, I propose the answer to the second sub-question: *a2. How do advertising creatives blur the line between personal and professional self-presentations on Instagram?*

Answer: Advertising creatives blur their professional and personal *self-presentations* by employing strategies such as mixing personal elements into work-related posts, combining content in carousels, or using consistent formatting to transform commercial content into personal creations, on the other hand, by extending the definition of work from commercial work to inclusive of personal work and hobbies in life, essentially merging both presentations.

4.3 How Personal is Personal? (The Stage)

In this chapter, I focus on the affordances of Instagram and their impact on advertising creatives' self-presentation and strategies employed in managing the presentations.

4.3.1 Grid vs. Stories: Two Types of Self

The study started off with a focus on the Instagram grid, as it takes up the main part of an account page upon entry. However, during the interview, most participants quickly shifted the discussion towards their usage of stories. Stories is a feature that was introduced by Instagram in 2016. The feature allows users to share photos and videos that disappear after 24 hours with no public archive. The timeliness shapes the strategy and content of the posting with the feature. Participants who use stories have expressed that they post more trivial content on stories from their daily life and do not care about repetitiveness since they disappear after 24 hours:

Instagram Stories came and changed everything.. I started using Instagram in different ways, like showing facts of my life, daily observations. simple things.. like what I cooked for breakfast, the books I'm reading, and tons of videos of my cat (Andrew, personal communication, May 19th, 2025).

On the contrary, grid posts are carefully curated and edited by the account owner with visual styles and content that represent what the participants truly like, with thinking of "if people are gonna like it, if it's fitting a persona, if it's fitting something, if there's a narrative" (Cam, personal communication, May 20th,2025). While stories encourage more spontaneity and rawness, participants describe that their choice of content for stories is "unfiltered" and they "put less thought into it" with approaches that are more "intuitive" (Cam, personal communication, May 20th,2025).

Previously, in the introduction, I distinguished the difference between advertising creatives' Instagram usage patterns from those of influencers. The interview data verified that many of them stated a lack of interest in posting highly personal content, especially selfies, even though they understand how the algorithm favours this type of content. Reels are rarely used by the participants unless views are desired, but are described to be labor-intensive and an unfriendly interface for video editing.

Participants used phrases that indicate authenticity such as "a major part of me" (Sui), "100% me" (Cam), "who I am" (Andrew and Yuting), "reflect my personality" (Rayn) to discuss what they see about the online persona that is built on the platform. However, at the same time, they admitted that the persona built on Instagram has its performative characteristics (Moore et al., 2017, p. 4). Sui said, "When you post, you don't want to always be so meaningless, always be so true to… the randomness that you… carries all the time. You want to put on a show" (Sui, personal communication, May 20th, 2025).

To conclude, as Baym (2010) addressed with the concept of multiplicity of selves, although somewhat performative, both self-presentations on Instagram grid posts and stories encompass authenticity; however, the personas built on Instagram can only represent partial facades of an individual. Different affordances of the grid and stories shape the persona on the grid as more "branded-self", while stories present a more "daily self", providing a better entry to understand someone by knowing what they are like in daily life.

4.3.2 Context Collapse (The Audience)

Participants recognized the performative nature of Instagram and the importance of audience, saying that it is "is a platform for other people to see you, to perceive you, to understand you" (Sui, personal communication, May 20th, 2025). Posts are made with their imagined audience in mind; however, this strategy is not taken up out of the motivations to get more views, but rather to gain satisfaction in knowing the imagined audience might react positively to their posts. "It's not that I just care about my audience, but sometimes I make a joke. Uh, and I'm thinking about the laughs and I'm gonna feel proud about people laughing at it" (Andrew, personal communication, May 19th, 2025).

Echoing with their claim of being authentic, almost none of the participants have experienced conflict about who might see their posts, be that family, co-workers, friends, or strangers who stumble into their account, backed up by a confidence and self-assurance in their content. Posts are made intuitively, as Cam stated, "I post whatever I want to post… I don't care if people want to see that or not" (Cam, personal communication, May 20th, 2025). More strategic posting targeting a certain type of imagined audience only applies to cases where business purposes are strong:

> Now I'm just, like, trying to find… the creative professional networks in Japan.…having to dig into archives to… post something that was from years ago…Starting to make it relevant to appeal to a certain type of you know, professional audience as well. (Marc, personal communication, May 19th, 2025)

Context collapse only brings tension when personal presentations have low proximity to professional work. In Sky's case, his marginalized identity as a queer man in China diverge far from his job in the advertising industry as a creative director for food commercials. When asked if he'd share his account with a potential client, he said, "No. My Instagram content is just too different from my professional work… if it doesn't help me professionally, then I don't see the point." (Sky, personal communication, May 20th, 2025) Based on the above finding, I provide answers to below two sub-research questions:

b1. What role does the imagined audience and context collapse play in shaping what is shared?

The imagined audience affects what advertising creatives post and how they post on Instagram, but it is not the decisive factor in their practice. Advertising creatives tend to post content that aligns with their taste and likes, with the anticipation of positive feedback

from their imagined audience. Context collapse is not a major influence either, due to the proximity of their online persona and offline professional identities as creatives. Tension occurs for creatives when such proximity is low, where segregation of audience access to the account is purposefully made.

b2. How do platform affordances influence their identity presentation strategies?

Instagram's various features (grid, stories, and reels) provide opportunities for advertising creatives to showcase multiple facets of themselves, which all entail authenticity (Baym, 2010). The permanence of grid posts encourages careful curation for "branded-selves," while the timeliness of stories affords unfiltered presentation of "dailyselves".

4.4 Cultural Curator – Constructing the Creative Identity

Through investigating the practice and approaches taken by advertising creatives, I found that instead of completely diminishing personal or professional identity on Instagram, they blur the lines between personal and professional presentations (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014, p. 476). The blurring of presentations is not only manifested as the inclusion of both work-related content and personal life content, but also a mix-up of symbols of both representations in individual posts. In between these blurred representations, creatives seek to construct a merged creative identity. As Marc puts it, he aims to be presented as a "… creative professional rather than a person" (Marc, personal communication, May 19th, 2025). The merged creative identity resembles that of a "cultural curator," reflected through the display of cultural elements and symbols that express personal taste and interests. Meanwhile, personalized visual and textual styles reveal their unique way of seeing and presenting culture. Participants place great emphasis on the key role that culture plays in shaping this identity: "…the whole thing is still being consistent that … this person… is very… cultured…" (Sui, personal communication, May 20th, 2025). Meanwhile, establishing themselves as credible curators of culture is a key priority for them as a person:

> If you want a curatorship at some point …to find a good restaurant for…a famous person who's visiting, and you need someone who's a local who will take you around. I want to be a person that people will think about. (Cam, personal communication, May 20th, 2025)

At the same time, the identity is also professional, because they understand that the image of a cultural person with good taste is surely beneficial for career advancement: I

see that I share my work when I'm sharing culture, because this is really important in the advertising industry. So, like, people, oh, this guy knows trends, this guy knows movies, this guy knows… songs. This guy will watch this music video. This guy knows this Korean photographer, this guy knows this Chinese photographer. Uh, so this is … a curatorship that helps me. (Andrew, personal communication, May 19th, 2025)

Furthermore, finding a unique positioning on social media is important because there are just too many people who already "tick certain boxes" (Cam, personal communication, May 20th, 2025)."Try to stand out" in the industry is difficult, and "if someone already filed that box", they would feel like they lost advantages to be recognized as a creative and would not get the attention from other people (Cam, personal communication, May 20th, 2025). Therefore, not only is becoming a relevant "cultural curator" crucial, but equally important to potential elevation for a career in the industry is finding a niche among the cultural areas that are often taken up by peers.

Presenting themselves as the "cultural curator" is undoubtedly beneficial for recognition and visibility in the industry, as advertising relies on personal taste and attitudes as sources of expertise in their work (Moor, 2008; Nixon, 2003; Sherman, 2011). Against the backdrop of a prevailing freelance economy and the permeation of social media into our lives, social media acts as a visual business card available worldwide and enables self-promotion to potential clients and co-workers through the Internet, providing channels for gaining potential work opportunities. On the other side of the coin, the trend of "being present online" puts creatives under heavy pressure to get involved with social media. FoMO is a major cause of anxiety related to social media (Roberts & and David, 2020, p. 390). Cam described her friend's situation:

> She always says..I know that I'm cool, and I know that I go to things, and I just don't like to post about it. But then I feel like if I don't post about it, I'm the only person who's not posting about it, then no one at work knows what I'm doing. (Cam, personal communication, May 22nd, 2025)

In some cases, the fear of getting behind the scenes and losing career advantages pushes creatives to join social media:

> I don't really care about playing this social media popularity contest.I just get dragged into it for professional reasons, which is… really annoying, but… This is something I have to do. (Marc, personal communication, May 19th, 2025)

Even the most unwilling ones to associate their Instagram with commercial works are surrendering to using it as a self-promotional platform. Andrew only presents his photography work and personal life, the only indication of his creative director identity is through bio where links to personal portfolio websites are included (Figure 4.7). He sees it as a separation of work and life and feels that “sharing work is a little bit cringe”, because he sees advertising as “bureaucracy” and is not suitable to be shown next to works that he’s proud of and people he loves (Andrew, personal communication, May 19th, 2025). But in need of a gig, he took advantage of the affordance of stories and posted his commercial works with a message of “open for work”. Howevever, the scene on Instagram is “busy and competitive” (Moran, personal communication, May 22nd, 2025), due to the nature of Instagram as a public platform that encompasses a wide range of lines of business - advertising creatives must compete for attention not just with their industry peers but also with individuals from other sectors, such as influencers.

Figure 4.7 Andrew’s bio includes a link to his portfolio website

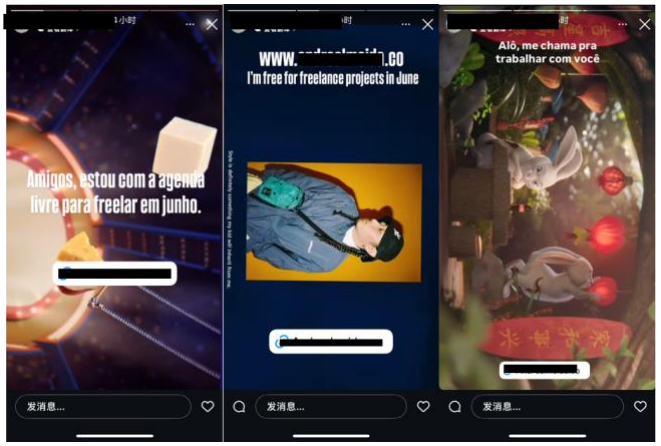

Figure 4.8 Message of “free for freelance projects” on Andrew’s stories (Retrieved on June 2nd, 2025)

5. Conclusion and Discussion

5.1 Conclusions of the Findings

Despite growing use of Instgram and social media platforms for self-promotion among advertising creatives, a great variety and nuances are observed in ways of selfpresentations and their linked motivations and impact. Different from the new group of occupations that reply on the Internet, primarily social media, such as influencers and livestreamers, advertising creatives tend to construct identities that encompass both professional sides and personal profiles. The primary focus of this study is to investigate the intersection of professional and personal identities on Instagram and how social media has mediated the intersection for adverstising creatives. To answer the first research question, "*a.What is the intersection of personal and professional identities on Instagram for advertising creatives?"*, answers offered in last chapter to sub-questions *a1* and *a2* about the look of self-presentations online and the strategy employed by advertising creatives are necessary foundations and need to be discussed here.

Firstly, advertising creatives rarely engage with singular dimensioned selfpresentation on Instagram. They don't tend to treat the platform as entirely personal or totally professional-oriented. Both types of content related to personal life and professional work are present on their accounts. However, they blur the distinction between personal self-presentation and work self-presentations purposively, by transforming commercial content into personal creations with the integration of personal tones and perspectives, mixing both types of content in carousels, or using similar visual style and formatting. Additionally, a cohesive personalised style is normally implemented to establish the creative authorship of the account. Secondly, they strive to establish a unique "cultural curator" identity. Drawing on Hogan (2010)'s concept of exhibition, Instgram accounts are spaces that contain permanent and temporary displays of artifacts that represent personal and professional identities of the creatives. As the curators of the exhibitions, advertising creatives own the creative autonomy to display symbols of culture and arts that consist of works of others and works of themselves. These curated exhibitions function as intentional "personal creations" that balance authenticity with professional appeal in a competitive industry.

Therefore, answering research question *a*, the intersection of personal and professional identities exists in a "cultural curator" creative identity constructed on

Instagram, where personal expression lies, through transforming work into personal creations, displaying cultural elements, and implementing cohesive visual and textual styles that represent personal taste.

To answer the research question "*b*. *How does Instagram mediate the intersection of personal and professional identity for advertising creatives?",* results based on analysis from Instagram features and affordances should be highlighted. Patterns of posting with two main features of Instagram – Grid and Stories – are examined, results reveal that advertising creatives present two different facets of presentations. The permanence of grid posts motivates them to present a more "branded self", emphasizing more curated and polished content, consistency with their style is key determinant of their decision; In contrast, the ephemeral nature of stories invites a different posting behavior, one that is often more spontaneous and personal. Overall, self-presentation on Instagram is inherently performative, shaped by users' awareness of the platform as a public space. However, this performance also involves a strong emphasis on authenticity. As Marwick and boyd (2011, p. 126) argue, individuals must carefully balance personal authenticity with audience expectations. Uski and Lampinen (2016) similarly found that strategic self-presentation on social media is influenced not only by the platform's technical affordances but also by prevailing social norms, with a sociocultural aim to convey authenticity (p. 447). The findings suggest that while audience perception influences what advertising creatives choose to post and how they present themselves, it is not the primary determining factor. Instead, creatives are largely driven by a desire to express their own taste and style—motivated by the hope of gaining recognition through an authentic presentation of self. Context collapse does not appear to be a major concern for most participants, likely due to the close alignment between their online personas and their offline professional identities as creatives. However, tensions emerge in cases where this alignment is weaker. In such instances, creatives may deliberately manage access to their accounts in order to maintain boundaries between different audiences. Considering all above, aligning with the findings that Leary & Kowalski (1990) contend as the three main motivations for strategic selfpresentations (p. 37), the results reveal that drivers of the construction of the creative identity are: taking creative autonomy (developing a self-identity as creative), pride in work and personal fulfillment from gaining recognition (enhance self-esteem), and maintaining visibility as active creative in the industry (generate social and material benefits).

People who stepped into the advertising industry, like other creative workers, are attracted by the image of the artist or a contemporary variant, the *auteur* (McRobbie, 2003a), however, working in advertising certainly turns out to be far from the ideal of *auteur.* Creativity in the industry is inherently associated with business and economic goals, therefore differentiated from the arts (Derda, 2023, p. 13). In a world where creativity is bounded (Romeiro & Wood Jr, 2015, p. 12) and given ways to other influences (Hackley & Kover, 2007, p. 65), the discrepancy between the values of arts and aesthetics and the commercial reality (ibid.) renders a love-hate relationship between the industry and the creatives within and causes immense tension in their self-esteem and understanding as professional creative workers.

In the freelance economy, the limited room for authentic and well-rounded presentations on social media that rarely reflect one's real capability in work heightens the pressure on advertising creatives to present themselves as culturally relevant "cultural curators," turning this identity into career capital that boosts employability (Mao & Shen, 2020). It also magnifies their ambivalence toward advertising, deepening the tension between artistic ideals and the need to stay commercially attractive.

In all, the above findings provide answers to the second research question "b. *How does Instagram mediate the intersection of personal and professional identity for advertising creatives?*": While Instagram's affordances—such as context collapse—do not significantly disrupt the intersection of personal and professional identity, the platform amplifies pressure on advertising creatives to construct and maintain an intersected creative professional identity online. This visibility intensifies existing social expectations for advertising creatives to appear as culturally relevant and deepening the tension in negotiating creative identity between artistic ideals and commercial demands of the industry.

5.2 Theoretical and Societal Implications

5.2.1 Theoretical Implications

Most fundamentally, the study fills a portion of the gap in research of the intersection of personal and professional identities in social media identities (Kasperiuniene & Zydziunaite, 2019, p. 2) by conceptualizing the "cultural curator" persona commonly sought by advertising creatives. The study delineates its contour and delves into the motivations

behind its construction, offering a situated understanding of how creative professionals use visual and textual cues to blend lifestyle, taste, and self-expression to build a branded identity. While self-presentation on social media has been explored as a window into creative worker' self-understanding, Eikhof & Chudzikowski (2019) have emphasized the importance of considering the processes and contexts in which these representations are produced considered (p. 44). Following their recommendation, this study triangulates social media content analysis with interview data to provide a more grounded and reliable understanding of how identity is actively negotiated within platform-specific constraints and professional norms.

Contrary to common findings about context collapse (Marwick & boyd, 2011), advertising creatives experience little conflict between their online and offline identities. This is due to the alignment, or at least proximity, between their curated digital persona and offline identity. In this field, personal taste and lifestyle disclosures are not just acceptable but often essential to professional image.This challenges existing self-branding theories (e.g., Hearn, 2008) by showing that the authenticity-performance tension may matter less when self-expression is part of professional labor. Key findings suggest that while audience groups and platform features don't strongly influence self-presentation, advertising creatives actively display blended personal-professional identities for professional recognition. Building on Hackley and Kover's (2007) work on the conflicted identity of creatives in advertising, this study provides valuable insight into how such negotiations manifest in digital self-presentation. The cultural tension between being a commercially driven communicator and a personally expressive creative is not resolved, but rather played out through curated content choices, aesthetic signals, and narrative positioning on Instagram.

5.2.2 Societal Implications

The findings of this study suggest that for advertising creatives, although different audience cohorts (e.g., friends, family, or co-workers) and platform affordances do not play a decisive role in shaping self-presentation, these individuals are nonetheless motivated to display an intersected personal-professional identity in order to gain recognition. As sensibility is often valued more than techniques within the industry and creatives seek to gain approval from industry peers (Hackley & Kover, 2007, p. 70), their presentations of sensible cultural

curators inherently conform to the prevailing industry expectations and norms. As Van Dijck (2013, p. 6) points out, "The construction of platforms and social practices is mutually constitutive." In this light, the dynamics found in the study of how advertising creatives build up personas that meet society norms and industry expectations on the platforms can, in turn, contribute to shaping offline discourse. These individuals— who create advertising content themselves—also participate in reinforcing dominant ideals of identity. As Berger (2011, p. 232) notes, "our sense of ourselves is connected to the way advertising helps us shape our identities and focuses our attention on brands as a way of signifying who we are to others."

The present study also offers an alarming reminder to industry practitioners of the prevalent reference to social media in recruitment that social media presentations are inherently performed, and maintaining an active online presence requires intensive labour is not willingly done but is pressured in many cases. Despite the centrality of self-branding in the work of advertising creatives, skills and talent count more in actual job capacities (Gandini, 2016, p. 131). Therefore, the usefulness of referencing social media profiles is limited and should not be used as the primary method to evaluate a candidate's job capacities.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

5.3.1 Limitations of the Research

The limitations of the study mainly lie in the sampling and the comprehensiveness in consideration of platform affordances.

Firstly, one of my sampling methods is convenience sampling; the sampling employed in this study has limitations that impact the generalizability of the study. Convenience sample resulted in more than half of the participants in the study being Chinese, and most of the non-Chinese that I interviewed have had work experience in China. The cultural background has implications on their understanding as creative as well as the strategy and material that they use in self-presentations with an inevitable influence from the Chinese advertising industry. Additionally, although these candidates all use Instagram frequently, some did express that they put less effort into it because of the inconvenience in logging into Instagram due to China's firewall, and the lack of relevance and applicability to the Chinese market where they work. Notably, patterns of comparing

Instagram to Chinese social media platforms such as WeChat & Rednote frequently emerged. This is not necessarily a bad thing, considering my Chinese background as the researcher and my familiarity with these platforms. However, the data generated by my samples could potentially be more useful in a comparative study between Chinese social media versus Western social media.

Secondly, platform affordances have been crucial elements for social media studies, and is also taken into consideration in this research. However, the affordance that is discussed is limited to imagined audience and context collapse, while many others, such as anonymity, searchability, and persistence, are not deeply delved into. On the other hand, social media platforms constantly alter with user feedback and demands to outperform competitors. For example, Instagram took out the *Guides* feature in 2023 after less than three years of introducing it. Therefore, the feature of *Stories* that was used as an important component analysed in the study is valuable at the time being, but the results might not be relevant anymore in the future.

5.3.2 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research could examine additional affordances and dynamics that affect the identity construction of advertising creatives. Such as other-created content in the form of tags, comments, likes, shares, algorithm and personal messages etc. Researchers can also consider expanding the data pool to include other platforms such as Facebook, Rednote, thereby bringing the research to social media in general. Another interesting and important term to consider is gender, as women do not have equal access to creative work, while masculinities continue to be reproduced in the industry (Finkel et al., 2017, p. 282). By examining the representations of female creative workers on social media, future research could study the impact of social media on the identity construction of women in the industry and potentially the inequalities that exist in a larger context of the industry reality.

The study confirms that expectations of cultural relevance for the professionals are indeed emphasized by social media, another theme that is closely associated with the industry norms is how sociality and hedonism have been written into the DNA of working in advertising. Considering the sociality nature of social media, it would be worthwhile to delve into its role in mediating this existing image related to the industry and potential impact on social discourse.

References

A Widespread Economic Slowdown. (2025, May 28). Morgan Stanley. https://www.morganstanley.com/insights/articles/economic-outlook-midyear-2025

Alam, Md. K. (2024). Does the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee matter in qualitative research? *ICRRD Quality Index Research Journal*, *5*(1). https://doi.org/10.53272/icrrd.v5i1.5

Arafah, B., & Hasyim, M. (2019). The Language of Emoji in Social Media. *KnE Social Sciences*, 494–504. https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v3i19.4880

Bahar, V. S. (2024). Self-Presentation Theory: A review. In S. Papagiannidis (Ed.), *TheoryHub Book*. https://open.ncl.ac.uk /

Baumeister, R. F., & Hutton, D. G. (1987). Self-Presentation Theory: Self-Construction and Audience Pleasing. In *Theories of Group Behavior* (pp. 71–87). Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4612-4634-3_4

Baym, N. K. (2010). *Personal connections in the digital age*. Polity.

Berger, A. A. (2011). The Branded Self: On the Semiotics of Identity. *The American Sociologist*, *42*(2–3), 232–237. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12108-011-9130-5

Bishop, S. (2023). Influencer creep: How artists strategically navigate the platformisation of art worlds. *New Media & Society*, 14614448231206090. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448231206090 Boeije,

H. (2010). *Analysis in Qualitative Research*.

boyd, danah. (2010). Social Network Sites as Networked Publics: Affordances, Dynamics, and Implications. In *A Networked Self*. Routledge.

boyd, danah m., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social Network Sites: Definition, History, and Scholarship. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*(1), 210–230. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x

Bullingham, L., & Vasconcelos, A. C. (2013a). 'The presentation of self in the online world': Goffman and the study of online identities. *Journal of Information Science*, *39*(1), 101–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551512470051

Bullingham, L., & Vasconcelos, A. C. (2013b). 'The presentation of self in the online world': Goffman and the study of online identities. *Journal of Information Science*, *39*(1), 101–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/0165551512470051

Butler, J. (1999). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge. https://books.google.nl/books?id=WDMpngEACAAJ

Cesarato, A. (n.d.). *How and Why You Should Integrate Instagram in Your Digital Portfolio | Blog*. Domestika. Retrieved June 4, 2025, from https://www.domestika.org/en/blog/4491-how-and-why-you-should-integrateinstagram-in-your-digital-portfolio

Cohen, S. A. (2010). Personal identity (de)formation among lifestyle travellers: A doubleedged sword. *Leisure Studies*, *29*(3), 289–301. https://doi.org/10.1080/02614360903434100

Cole, N. (2017, July 20). *Most People Who Call Themselves Creative, Aren't Actually Creative. Here's Why*. LinkedIn. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/most-people-whocall-themselves-creative-arent-actually-mather/

D&AD. (n.d.). *Instagram has changed the portfolio rules – an illustration agent on how to optimise your profile*. D&AD. Retrieved June 4, 2025, from https://www.dandad.org/en/d-ad-instagram-changed-portfolio-rules-featuresopinions/

Dahlén, M., Rosengren ,Sara, & and Törn, F. (2008). Advertising Creativity Matters. *Journal of Advertising Research*, *48*(3), 392–403. https://doi.org/10.2501/S002184990808046X

David Hesmondhalgh & Charles Umney. (2024). Non-labour Platforms and Their Effects on Work in Specific Sectors. *A Major Gap in Recent Research on Work and Employment 1*. https://doi-org.eur.idm.oclc.org/10.4324/9781003327561-13

Derda, I. (2023). *Advertising as a Creative Industry: Regime of Paradoxes* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003263128

Drummond, J. J. (2021). Self-identity and personal identity. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, *20*(2), 235–247. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11097-020-09696-w

Duffy, B. E., Pinch, A., Sannon, S., & Sawey, M. (2021). The Nested Precarities of Creative Labor on Social Media. *Https://Doi.Org/10.1177/20563051211021368*. https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051211021368

Duffy, B. E., Poell, T., & Nieborg, D. B. (2019). Platform Practices in the Cultural Industries: Creativity, Labor, and Citizenship. *Social Media + Society*, *5*(4), 2056305119879672. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119879672

Duffy, B. E., & Wissinger, E. (2017). Mythologies of Creative Work in the Social Media Age: Fun, Free, and "Just Being Me." *International Journal of Communication*, *11*(0), Article 0.

Edelsten, K. (2024, February 28). *What is a creative in advertising?* Creative Lives In Progress. https://creativelivesinprogress.com/articles/what-does-an-advertisingcreative-do

Eikhof, D. R., & and Chudzikowski, K. (2019). 'Creativity is a skill that everyone has': Analysing creative workers' self-presentations. *Creative Industries Journal*, *12*(1), 34–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/17510694.2018.1535731

Eikhof, D. R., & Chudzikowski, K. (2019). 'Creativity is a skill that everyone has': Analysing creative workers' self-presentations. *Creative Industries Journal*, *12*(1), 34–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/17510694.2018.1535731

Endrissat, N., Sergi, V., & Bonneau, C. (2024). Social Media and the Documentation of Creative Work. *New Sites and Insights*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003402688-11

Erikson, E. H. (1968). *Identity: Youth and crisis* (Vol. 68). Norton.

Etikan, I. (2016). Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, *5*(1), 1. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. (2023). *Societal implications of labour market instability.* Publications Office. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2806/570695

Finkel, R., Jones, D., Sang, K., & Stoyanova Russell, D. (2017). Diversifying the creative: Creative work, creative industries, creative identities. *Organization*, *24*(3), 281–288. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508417690167

Frank, T. (1998). *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. University of Chicago Press. https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/C/bo3618721.html

Gandini, A. (2016). Digital work: Self-branding and social capital in the freelance knowledge economy. *Marketing Theory*, *16*(1), 123–141. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470593115607942 Giddens,

A. (1991). *Modernity and Self-Identity*.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life.* Doubleday.

Grabher, G. (2002). The Project Ecology of Advertising: Tasks, Talents and Teams. *Regional Studies*, *36*(3), 245–262. https://doi.org/10.1080/00343400220122052

Gubrium, J., & Holstein, J. (2001). *Handbook of Interview Research*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412973588

Hackley, C., & Kover, A. J. (2007). The trouble with creatives: Negotiating creative identity in advertising agencies. *International Journal of Advertising*, *26*(1), 63–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2007.11072996

Hall, S., & Du Gay, P. (1996). *Questions of cultural identity* (pp. viii, 198). Sage Publications, Inc.

Hitlin, S. (2003). Values as the Core of Personal Identity: Drawing Links between Two Theories of Self. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *66*(2), 118–137. https://doi.org/10.2307/1519843

Hogan, B. (2010). The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online. *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, *30*(6), 377–386. https://doi.org/10.1177/0270467610385893

Hollenbaugh, E. E. (2021). Self-Presentation in Social Media: Review and Research Opportunities. *Review of Communication Research*, *9*. https://www.rcommunicationr.org/index.php/rcr/article/view/15

Hoose, F., & Rosenbohm, S. (2024). Self-representation as platform work: Stories about working as social media content creators. *Convergence*, *30*(1), 625–641. https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565231185863

Is the Era of International 4A Agencies Over? | EqualOcean. (n.d.). Retrieved April 15, 2025, from https://equalocean.com/analysis/2025032721445 Jenkins, R. (2014). *Social Identity* (4th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315887104

Jensen Schau, H., & Gilly, M. C. (2003). We Are What We Post? Self-Presentation in Personal Web Space. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *30*(3), 385–404. https://doi.org/10.1086/378616

Kivisto, P., & Pittman, D. (2013). Goffman's Dramaturgical Sociology: Personal Sales and Service in a Commodified World. In P. Kivisto (Ed.), *Illuminating Social Life: Classical and Contemporary Theory Revisited* (6th ed.). https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506335483

Kuras, E. (Director). (2023). *Lee* [Film]. Sky Original, Brouhaha Entertainment, Juggle Films.

Leary, M. R., & Kowalski, R. M. (1990). Impression management: A literature review and two-component model. *Psychological Bulletin*, *107*(1), 34–47. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.107.1.34

Liu, H. (2007). Social Network Profiles as Taste Performances. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *13*(1), 252–275. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.10836101.2007.00395.x

Lloyd, S., Roodt, G., & Odendaal, A. (2011). Critical elements in defining work-based identity in a post-apartheid South Africa. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *37*(1), Article 1. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v37i1.894

Marwick, A. E. (2013). Online Identity. In *A Companion to New Media Dynamics* (pp. 355–364). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118321607.ch23

Marwick, A. E., & boyd, danah. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society*, *13*(1), 114–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313

McRobbie, A. (2002a). Clubs to Companies: Notes on the Decline of Political Culture in Speeded up Creative Worlds. *Cultural Studies*, *16*(4), 516–531. https://doi.org/10.1080/09502380210139098

McRobbie, A. (2002b). From Holloway to Hollywood: Happiness at Work in the New Cultural Economy? In M. Pryke & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Cultural Economy: Cultural Analysis and Commercial Life* (pp. 97–114). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446218440

McRobbie, A. (2003a). *British Fashion Design: Rag Trade or Image Industry?* Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203168011

McRobbie, A. (2003b). *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203168332

Moor, L. (2008). Branding Consultants as Cultural Intermediaries. *The Sociological Review*, *56*(3), 408–428. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2008.00797.x

Moore, C., Barbour, K., & Lee, K. (2017). Five Dimensions of Online Persona. *Persona Studies*, *3*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.21153/ps2017vol3no1art658

Morgan, G., & Nelligan, P. (2018). *The Creativity Hoax*. Anthem Press; JSTOR. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1z27hwj

Narayanan, A. (2024, December 9). *Advertising Industry To Hit $1 Trillion Led By The New "Big 5."* Investor's Business Daily. https://www.investors.com/news/advertisingindustry-to-hit-1-trillion-dominated-by-the-new-big-5/

Nixon, S. (2003). *Advertising Cultures: Gender, Commerce, Creativity*. 1–184.

Nixon, S., & Crewe, B. (2004). Pleasure at Work? Gender, Consumption and Work-based Identities in the Creative Industries. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, *7*(2), 129–147. https://doi.org/10.1080/1025386042000246197

Olson, E. T. (2002, August 20). *Personal Identity*. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2024/entries/identity-personal/

Papacharissi, Z. (2002). The presentation of self in virtual life: Characteristics of personal home pages. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, *79*(3), 643–660.

Petrides, L., & Vila de Brito, M. (2024). The Impact of Digital Presence on the Careers of Emerging Visual Artists. *Social Sciences*, *13*(6), Article 6. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci13060313

Poell, T., Nieborg, D. B., & Duffy, B. E. (2021). *Platforms and Cultural Production*. Polity. https://www.wiley.com/en-gb/Platforms+and+Cultural+Production-p9781509540501

Roberts, J. A., & and David, M. E. (2020). The Social Media Party: Fear of Missing Out (FoMO), Social Media Intensity, Connection, and Well-Being. *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, *36*(4), 386–392. https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2019.1646517

Romeiro, A. A., & Wood Jr, T. (2015). Bounded creativity: Understanding the restrictions on creative work in advertising agencies. *BAR - Brazilian Administration Review*, *12*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1590/1807-7692bar2015140007

Rusnac, V. (2022, September 3). *Why Do You Need a Marketing Portfolio? - Academy - Webflow HTML Website Template*. https://www.actaschool.co.uk/post/why-doyou-need-a-marketing-portfolio

Savage, M. (2024, August 12). *The Importance of a Portfolio—Digital Marketer's Guide*. https://18.agency/importance-of-a-portfolio-digital-marketers-essential/

Schudson, M. (2000). Advertising as Capitalist Realism. *Advertising & Society Review*, *1*(1). https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/21/article/2956

Schulz, M. (2024, September 9). *Instagram is the new résumé. But not everyone wants to be an influencer*. Vogue Business. https://www.voguebusiness.com/story/fashion/instagram-is-the-new-resume-butnot-everyone-wants-to-be-an-influencer

Scolere, L. (2019). Brand yourself, design your future: Portfolio-building in the social media age. *New Media & Society*, *21*(9), 1891–1909. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444819833066

Scolere, L., Pruchniewska, U., & Duffy, B. E. (2018). Constructing the Platform-Specific Self-Brand: The Labor of Social Media Promotion. *Social Media + Society*, *4*(3), 2056305118784768. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118784768

Sherman, R. (2011). The Production of Distinctions: Class, Gender, and Taste Work in the Lifestyle Management Industry. *Qualitative Sociology*, *34*(1), 201–219. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-010-9178-5

Simpson, E., & Semaan, B. (2023). Rethinking Creative Labor: A Sociotechnical Examination of Creativity & Creative Work on TikTok. *Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1145/3544548.3580649

Smith, B. (2017, March 10). There are no Creatives. *Medium*. https://brndnsmth.medium.com/there-are-no-creatives-aeced77ac990

Soar, M. (2000). Encoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising Production. *Mass Communication & Society*, *3*(4), 412. https://doi.org/10.1207/S15327825MCS0304_05

Stets, J. E., & Serpe, R. T. (Eds.). (2016). *New directions in identity theory and research*. Oxford University Press.

Stuart, H. (1987). Minimal Selves. In *Identity, the Real Me* (Vol. 6, pp. 44–46). ICA Documents, 6.

Tan, J. J. (2014). *Goffman's Presentation of Self Theory*.

Taylor, S., & Littleton, K. (2016). *Contemporary Identities of Creativity and Creative Work*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315573847

Taylor, T. D. (2009). Advertising and the conquest of culture. *Social Semiotics*, *19*(4), 405–425. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330903361091

Terms of Use | Instagram Help Centre. (n.d.). Retrieved June 4, 2025, from https://help.instagram.com/581066165581870?cms_id=581066165581870

Trimble, L. B., & Kmec, J. A. (2011). The Role of Social Networks in Getting a Job. *Sociology Compass*, *5*(2), 165–178. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00353.x

Turow, J. (2018). The development of the modern advertising industry. In *The Advertising Handbook* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Uski, S., & Lampinen, A. (2016). Social norms and self-presentation on social network sites: Profile work in action. *New Media & Society*, *18*(3), 447–464. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444814543164

Valoria, V. M. (2024). *THE DIGITAL CREATIVE PORTFOLIO AS A NEW SPACE FOR PROFESSIONAL INTERACTION*.

Van Dijck, J. (2013). *The culture of connectivity: A critical history of social media*. Oxford University Press.

Woodward, K. (1997). *Identity and Difference*. SAGE Publications. https://books.google.com/books?id=MVZfXdrG7egC

Woodward, K. (2018). Concepts of identity and difference. In *A Museum Studies Approach to Heritage*. Routledge.

Worksome. (2024, June 12). *Advertising Agencies Embrace Freelance Talent: A 40% Surge in Hiring Revealed by Worksome*. https://www.worksome.com/blog/advertisingagencies-embrace-freelance-talent-a-40-surge-in-hiring-revealed-by-worksome

Younger, J. (2020, December 11). *Creative And Experience Economy Freelancers See Growth Ahead For Freelancing In 2021*. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/jonyounger/2020/12/11/creative-and-experienceeconomy-freelancers-forecast-growth-ahead-for-freelancing-in-2021/

Youngs, I. (2025, June 17). *Social media now main source of news in US, research suggests*. BBC. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c93lzyxkklpo

Zinkhan, G. M. (1993). From the Editor: Creativity in Advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, *22*(2), 1–3.

Appendix

List of Interview Questions

Catgory	Interview Questions
General Questions	Can you briefly introduce yourself and your creative career? How many Instagram accounts do you have? What do you post on your account(s)? What labels would you give yourself?
Self-Presentation (Performance)	How you decide what to post on your Instagram? Is there a tonality/style for your Instagram? How do you post your personal life & your work?
Affordance (Front-Stage)	Do you use stories/reels outside of the grid? Did your posts on grid change over time? Would you archive or edit previous posts? If so , why?"
Affordance (Back-Stage)	How do you curate/prepare your posts? Do you share more what you want to post or more what you think people wants to see?
Context Collapse (Audience**)**	When you post, do you think of who your audience will be? Have you ever felt conflicted about who might see a post—like clients vs friends? Would you say that the (participant's name) on Instagram is close to you in real-life? Why? Who do you share your Instagram account with?
Social media & Life	Do you have a metaphor for your Instagram account (e.g portfolio, diary)? Why? Do you want to have more views/followers? Why? Have you ever been recruited through social media? Have you look for people to work with on social media? How do you feel about social media in general, given the opportunities it provides?

List of Abbreviations

MAGA: Make America Great Again

FoMO: Fear-of-missing-out