Redefining the Way Users Interact With, and Within, Social Media

THE CONTEXT

The Serious Type is a 501c3 non-profit based out of Colorado for youth that are "serious about their lives and future".

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THE PROBLEM

With less than 50 active users and an average drop-off rate of one to two posts, the platform is struggling to engage and retain its audience.

THE RESEARCH STATEMENT

Understand how social media is currently being used and determine what motivates users to join and stay on social media platforms.

THE HIGH-LEVEL QUESTIONS

1. How do people use social media?

2. How does the current social media model align with the client's vision?
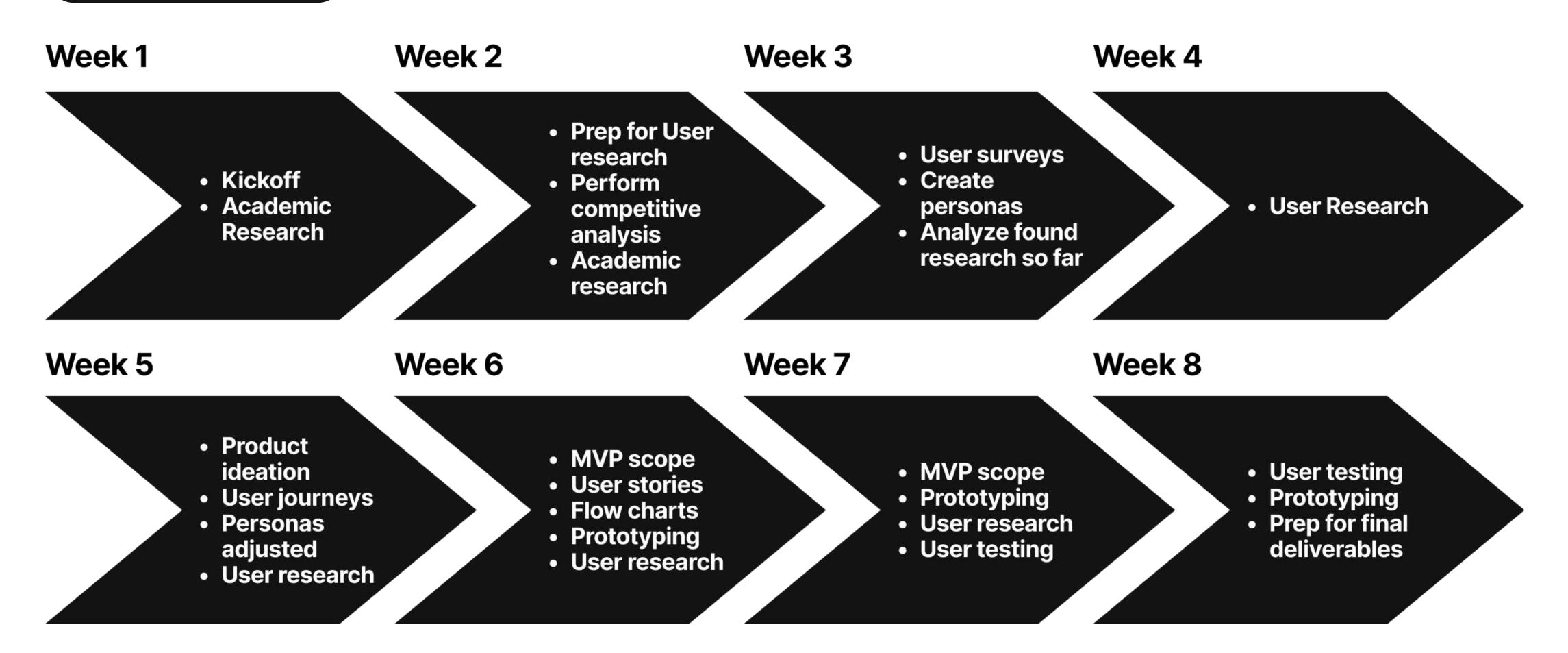
3. How can The Serious Type further its impact?

THE APPROACH

- **Academic Research** to get oriented and explore trends/themes.

- **Competitive Analysis** to better understand the current landscape.

- **Surveys** to gather quantitative insights such as demographics.

- **User Interviews** to gather qualitative insights into social media use.

- **User Testing** to gather feedback based on concepts and prototypes.

THE REQUIREMENTS

- Users currently use or have at some point used a social media platform.

- Language: English

THE TIMELINE

Week 1

- Kickoff
- Academic Research

Week 2

- Prep for User research
- Perform competitive analysis
- Academic research

Week 3

- User surveys
- Create personas
- Analyze found research so far

Week 4

- User Research

Week 5

- Product ideation
- User journeys
- Personas adjusted
- User research

Week 6

- MVP scope
- User stories
- Flow charts
- Prototyping
- User research

Week 7

- MVP scope
- Prototyping
- User research
- User testing

Week 8

- User testing
- Prototyping
- Prep for final deliverables

*Each week is one sprint.

THE ACADEMIC RESEARCH

To ensure a thorough yet manageable research plan, our team listed multiple assumptions and considered their research and project implications.

Findings were affinity mapped to reveal trends and themes.

Question

What does research say about what motivates people to use social media?

Assumption

People feel social pressure from their peers to stay on social media.
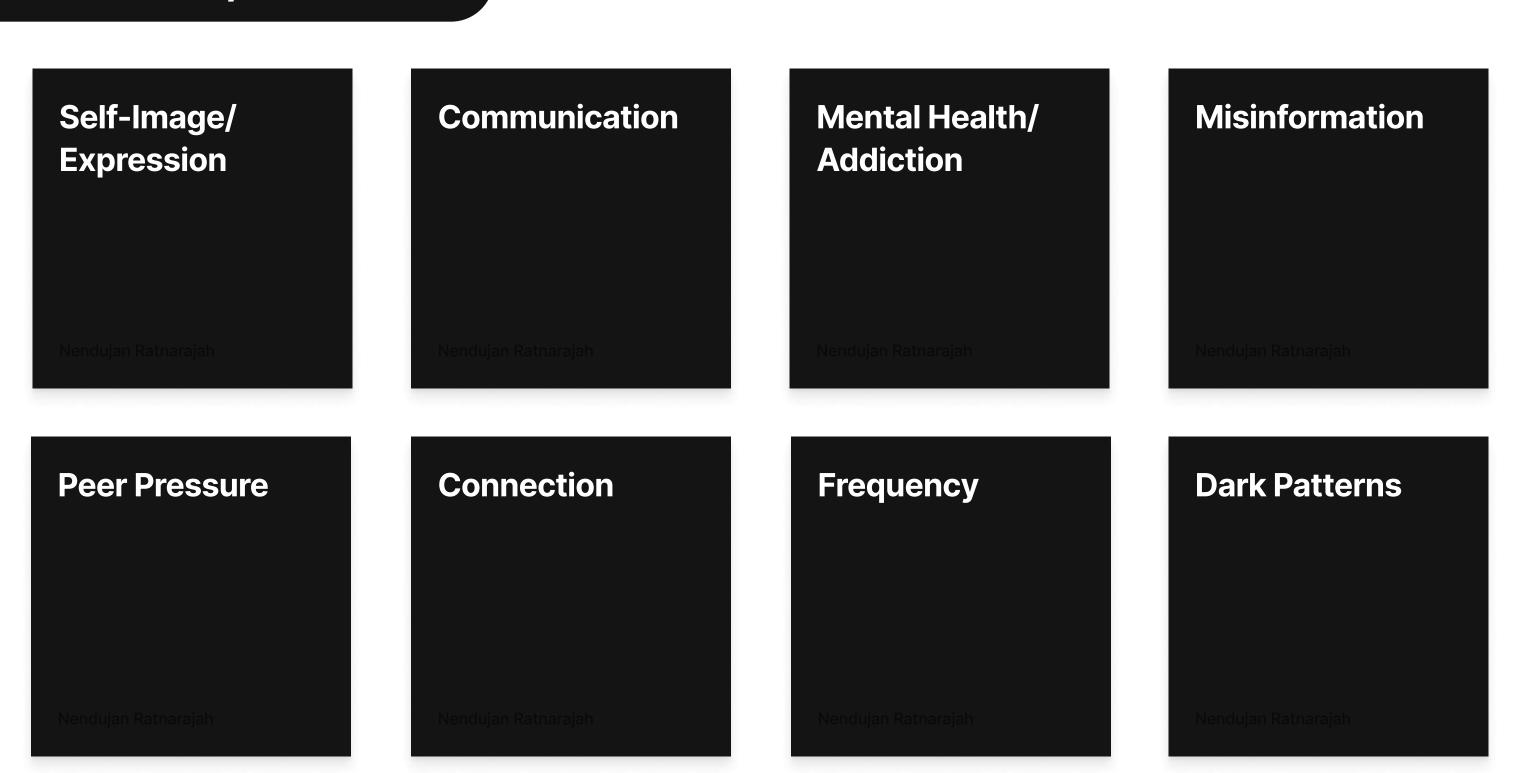
If True/If False

If True: More research would be needed to determine how we should engage users and how often we want them to encourage usage.

If False: More research is needed to determine what does motivate them.

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THE ACADEMIC RESEARCH: THEMES/TRENDS

These areas narrowed our focus during survey creation and interview planning.

Self-Image/ Expression	**Communication**	**Mental Health/ Addiction**	**Misinformation**
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Peer Pressure	**Connection**	**Frequency**	**Dark Patterns**
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THE COMPETITION

SWOT analysis was performed to understand what competitor's models looked like and determine where opportunities that aligned with our client's core values existed.

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THE COMPETITION: KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Content**

   a. TST offers more content options than other platforms. Content can be varied in terms of the type, structure, format and length.

2. **Community**

   a. Users can find and join groups to connect with users of purposefully formed, interest-specific groups.

   b. Opportunity for partnership with educational groups and institutions.

3. **Sustainability**

   a. Through moderation and project prompts, users can learn about new topics and new ways of thinking.

   b. Communities can exist beyond the digital realm.

   c. Focus on mental health can be emphasized.

THE SURVEY

- How many years have you been on social media?

- How often do/did you use social media?

- How do you use social media?

THE QUANTITATIVE

- **98%** have used social media over for over four years

- **68%** use social media several times per day

- **40%** use social media for activism

- **72%** use social media to learn new skills

*The survey, created in Google Forms, was distributed via social media platforms.
*Metrics are based on 102 recorded responses.

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THE INTERVIEW

- When you think of social media, what comes to mind?

- What platforms do you use? Tell me about how you use them.

- Walk me through the last time you used social media.

- Describe a time you didn't have access to social media. How did you feel?

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THE QUALITATIVE

Goals
- Learning/exploring specific interests
- Working towards career progression
- Keeping in touch with friends and family
- Engaging and disengaging when appropriate

Pain Points
- Insecurity
  - Perception/Appearance
  - Imposter Syndrome
  - Comparison
- Distraction/Addiction
- FOMO

THE QUALITATIVE

"Autopilot in my eyes; I don't really think about it —I have some time, I have my phone next to me, I'll just check it."

"I took more of an aviodance strategy, instead of trying to fix the problem" [feeling self conscious on social media]

"I kind of want the world to see what cool science is going on, either a result of my work or someone else's work I retweet."

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THE DELIVERABLES: USER PERSONAS

1. **The Artist**
   a. Serious about their work in every medium. They seek to share their work with the world and gather feedback to improve and expand their abilities.
2. **The Supporter**
   a. May not want to post their own work but is interested in the work of others by engaging and sharing.
3. **The Digital Content Creator**
   a. Wants to create and share digital content and develop a following while meeting other creators in the same space or adjascent spaces.
4. **The Activist**
   a. Supports and works to drive positive change on a community or global scale.
5. **The Mentor**
   a. Has expertise in a particular area and is willing to mentor others who are hoping to acquire more experience and insight in that area.

THE DELIVERABLES: USER STORIES/GOALS

1. **As an Artist I want to...**
    a. connect with people who have similar interests because I want to share my artwork and get feedback from people similar to me.
2. **As a Supporter I want to...**
    a. be able to easily and quickly engage in projects I find interesting because I want people to know that I like their work.
3. **As a Digital Content Creator I want to...**
    a. host live sessions so that I can share my interests with my peers in real-time.
4. **As an Activist I want to...**
    a. connect with mentors who have been a part of movements in the past either related to mine or not so that I can learn from their mistakes and successes.
5. **As a Mentor I want to...**
    a. connect with people who seek my expertise because I know some people can benefit from my input and advice.

THE DELIVERABLES: MORE QUESTIONS

Synthesis with the group involved forming "**how might we**" questions to guide future deep dives.

How might we consider user's privacy when designing?

Andre Oosthuizen

How might we give mentors and mentees the tools they need to create meaningful relationships?

Evan Vockley

How might we encourage participation from users in the app?

Danielle Urban

How might we help users develop daily healthy habits using TST?

Tai Tran

How might we foster discussion around mental health on the platform?

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How might we help users build self confidence and mitigate insecurities?

Anthony Goldin

How might we encourage learning & highlight acomplishments?

Anthony Goldin

How might we design a platform that can help users find others with similar interests easily?

Melissa

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THE IMPACT

- The entire team was grounded in team and business goals and had established direction.

- Designers were able to prioritize personas and build out MVP iterations to be tested in Phase 2

- Stakeholders could move forward and prepare to pitch a platform concept for funding.

THE REFLECTION

What Went Well

- The team's ability to draw useful insights during affinity mapping grew over time.

- The design team was able to quickly build out a first prototype using the guardrails we'd established.

- Stakeholders were interested in and motivated by the insights we provided.

Challenges

- Direction was difficult to determine during the initial stages of research.

- A strategic pivot meant getting everyone on board.

- Some user interview participants were no-shows which led to scrambling and building in safeties down the road.