# IMPROVING THE EDUCATION EXPERIENCE IN A DESIGN HISTORY COURSE USING CANVA, INSTAGRAM AND LINKEDIN

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## ABSTRACT
The History of Product Design course at Brigham Young University has successfully implemented Instagram into its curriculum over previous years, and these efforts have been studied, documented, and published at past E&PDE conferences. This study aims to re-evaluate this course's presentation tools, improve the current use of social media, and enhance the overall learning experience. First, we assessed the value of using Instagram as an educational tool. Second, we evaluated the differences between Adobe InDesign and Canva as a presentation tool. Canva's advantages over Adobe Suite products include a shorter learning curve, spell-checking, video integration and built-in compatibility with social media products. Third, we assessed the impact of incorporating LinkedIn in our posts to extend the reach of student presentations. The results indicate that Canva decreases presentation building time, focuses student content decisions and increases visual quality. We also demonstrate that using Instagram and LinkedIn as education tools somewhat increases interaction with the larger design community and student attention to content quality.

*Keywords: Design education, classroom social media, Adobe InDesign, design student presentations, design dissemination*

## 1 INTRODUCTION
With the prominence and breadth of social media, exploring how these tools are used in the classroom and their impact on student learning warrants exploration. Student familiarity with social media applications like Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok enable young designers to share ideas, questions, and concepts with like-minded people outside the classroom, school and country. As social media gains popularity in educational settings, it is important to investigate the methods and technologies that effectively support meaningful learning experiences in design education [1]. Specifically, the practices for implementing social media sharing should be assessed beyond the current research [2].
Adobe suite products are prevalent in design education settings and reflect contemporary industry standards. Unfortunately, these tools are challenging to learn. New online software tools like Canva have emerged in response to these pains. Canva is a growing online application bridging the gap between creative presentation creation and a thoughtful interface, thus impacting how students formulate and disseminate class assignments [3]. Canva's advantages over Adobe Suite products include a shorter learning curve, spell-checking, video integration and built-in compatibility with social media products. Instagram provides a comfortable avenue for expressing and connecting with design information for students who grew up with social media. Students commonly engage with Instagram and TikTok for contemporary cultural information and often follow established designers' accounts to gather design insights. LinkedIn is the social media standard for industry professionals; however, students have typically not embraced it as a career-building tool. Introducing LinkedIn to students in a course structure can expand their learning opportunities and increase their network as they establish their careers in design.
This paper represents the latest learnings incorporating social media tools in a classroom and extends the learning found in this same course researched, published, and presented at previous E&PDE conferences in 2018 [4] and 2019 [5].

## 2    METHOD

### 2.1  Participants

Nineteen students, eight females and eleven males participated in the study. Seventeen students were industrial designers, and two (one female and one male) were graphic designers. Participants were informed that the tools they used to create, present, and disseminate their work would be switched for their final class presentation, and their experience with the new tools would be evaluated. All participants were undergraduate students at Brigham Young University (BYU). Participants received no extra credit or compensation and were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

### 2.2  Stimuli Study One - Adobe and Instagram

Students were assigned to conduct research on assigned historical or contemporary designers and create a 10–15-minute class presentation that included facts about the designer's life and training, images of their work, an explanation of their design philosophy, a video link if available and examples of how the designer influenced contemporary design, as applicable.

Students were provided with a 10-page Adobe InDesign template, as seen in Fig. 1, formatted for use on Instagram. Since January 2018, students have posted their presentations on the course Instagram account @byudesignhistory. The template, presentation content, and posting details are explained in Howell et al., 2019 [5].



*Figure 1. Previous InDesign Instagram template*

For the study, the course Instagram account was converted from a general account to a corporate account between study one and study two. This change allowed researchers and students to use Instagram's analytics tools which show total accounts reached, engagement, top cities and countries, quantified post engagement and the audience's age and gender.

### 2.3  Stimuli Study Two - Canva and LinkedIn

The content expectations for study two were identical to those in study one. Most design students are immersed in Adobe's ecosystem and are unaware of Canva as a simple-to-use presentation tool. Canva's interface is optimised for presentation and social media use, helping students easily organise and disseminate their information. To introduce Canva to the class, instructors demonstrated two of its key benefits: 1- Canva includes video and GIF capabilities that are not available in InDesign, and 2- Canva is significantly easier to load and manipulate photos and type. Utilising Canva to create student presentations should save time and aid in audience engagement and learning. As in the previous study, all students received a 10-page Canva template optimised for Instagram use, as seen in Fig. 2. The Canva template instructions, including video tutorials, were embedded within the template.



*Figure 2. Canva Instagram template*

LinkedIn is a design industry standard for seasoned professionals. It is a living résumé, with employers frequently studying candidates before scheduling an interview or hiring. Students were expected to have a personal LinkedIn account; they were asked to create one if they did not. Instructors gave demonstrations and directions on posting students' presentations directly to LinkedIn and linking their Instagram presentation post to LinkedIn. Additionally, students received instructions on accessing LinkedIn analytics tools that display profile views, post views, and search appearances.

## 2.4 Procedure

Students were required to research, build, and present five different presentations roughly two weeks apart over the semester. The first four presentations were created in InDesign and posted on Instagram (Study 1). For the fifth presentation, students learned Canva and either linked to or posted their presentation on their LinkedIn account (Study 2). Researchers administered a digital survey via Google forms for the first and second studies. The first survey occurred during the fourth set of presentations and covered InDesign and Instagram. The survey took 15 minutes to complete. The second survey was administered on the last day of class and took about 15 minutes to complete; and covered Canva and LinkedIn. All participants had used Canva for their final presentation, and most had shared their presentation on LinkedIn.

### 2.4.1 Study 1 - InDesign and Instagram as Education Tools

Survey one was divided into three sections: Instagram use, InDesign as a presentation tool, and social media content dissemination. Students were asked about their experience using Instagram, how likely they were to reference the class's information, and if they view Instagram as a learning and education tool. Regarding InDesign, students were asked to evaluate the current templates, rank their presentation creation and assembly priorities, and express any changes they would like to make to the existing template. Respecting content dissemination, students were asked how they felt about engagement on the account, how familiar they are with social media management tools and how they felt about analytics for our account.

### 2.4.2 Study 2 - Canva and LinkedIn as Education Tools

We modified two components of the class organisation after considering the findings from Study 1. For the second study, Canva replaced InDesign, and LinkedIn was used along with Instagram to disseminate content. The Instagram analytics tools were used to evaluate what made previous posts effective, and the 10-page InDesign template was modified and replaced with a Canva template. Students were provided with the new Canva templates and instructed to download Grammarly, a free grammar check program, to help avoid spelling errors in their presentations. Students were asked to post or link their presentations to their LinkedIn accounts, enabling a second method of content dissemination with an alternative audience and format. Students were taught about hashtags, tagging and post analytics in both Instagram and LinkedIn, and they were encouraged to respond to and comment on their peers' posts.

Survey two also contained three sections: LinkedIn use, Canva as a presentation tool, and LinkedIn as a dissemination tool. Students were asked about their experience with LinkedIn, how often they interacted with it, and which tool Instagram, or LinkedIn, they considered more valuable to their future career. Regarding Canva, students were asked about their experience with the tool, the comparison of Canva to InDesign and which program they would recommend for future classes. Respecting content dissemination, students were asked; what value they place on knowing how to disseminate their work, how utilising social media strategies has changed their view of sharing content, and how the quality of their presentations changed after discovering they had a worldwide audience.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

The results of these two surveys were assessed to understand the impact of the changes made and the overall influence of the course and its structure on the student learning experience.

## 3 RESULTS

The sections below will discuss the quantifiable data and shared comments on social media use, class presentation tools, and material dissemination from the two surveys. Numeric responses are given based on a 5-point scale.

## 3.1 Study 1

When asked about the experience of Instagram as a course tool, students responded positively with an average of 3.76 and recorded referring to the Instagram page more than five times during the semester. Students responded with an identical 3.76 when asked how likely they were to reference the Instagram material in the coming two semesters. Lastly, students replied with an average of 3.06 when asked about the likelihood of referencing the material in the next five years. When asked about Instagram as an education tool, most students agreed that it was undoubtedly a resource for learning, inspiration, and

exposure. Some qualified that by saying it was not always reliable, nor could it be easily referenced. A few students even said that they actively try to avoid using social media to inform themselves. However, this contrasted with the majority.

When asked about the most important elements of presentation creation, the majority said researched content was a priority and that classroom discussion questions were last on the list. When asked about Adobe InDesign as a presentation tool, students replied with an average of 3.41 and 3.59 regarding the experience with templates. It is worth noting that only three scores of 5 were submitted between these two questions, implying a less than optimal experience. Over one-third of students also recorded spending under 50% of their time researching, with the rest spent using InDesign to assemble the presentation. Lastly, when asked about the most and least important purposes of a template, most students suggested that fewer decisions were a priority and that unity with the other presentations mattered the least.

One question asked for suggestions for a future template or problems with the current template. A prominent request was for the template to include an easy way to embed and display different media (e.g., audio, GIF, video, etc.). Other minor suggestions addressed the aesthetic direction or branding and a wider variety of layout options. One individual stated that the template was "fine". Comments about issues within Adobe InDesign were similar to the previous question but with additional qualms surrounding editability, exporting files, scaling text and inserting motion media.

Regarding engagement with their posts, students scored just below indifferent at 2.81. In contrast, students recorded an average of 4.06 when asked to state their familiarity with personal social media usage. The last question for this section regarded student familiarity with social media analytic tools, which received an average response of 2.88.

One question informed the students how international the scope of our Instagram account was, of which they had previously been unaware. They were informed that 77% of viewers were from outside the BYU community. The average number of account impressions per month was 4,000 (roughly 40,000 total for the previous 12 months). When asked what this meant to students, the majority suggested they would strive to make better presentations, and many had a more positive attitude towards this method of sharing. It should be noted that a few students did not alter their opinion after seeing this information.

## 3.2 Study 2

In contrast to Survey 1, when asked about the implementation of LinkedIn as a course tool, the average response was 4.1 (vs 3.76 for Instagram only). One question also inquired which of the two, Instagram or LinkedIn, students plan on investing more time in as they enter their careers. The heavy majority favoured LinkedIn. When asked to comment on LinkedIn as an education tool, around a third said it was helpful in learning, but the majority assigned the program as a tool for networking, connecting, and meeting individuals outside of their current sphere. Students said they were insecure when posting on LinkedIn essentially because it connected more directly to their emerging professional identities. Most respondents said they would use hashtags and review analytics in the future. As some final questions, students responded with an average of 4.19 when asked about their insecurity when posting for the class on Instagram, and a 3.25 with respect to LinkedIn (5 was most secure).

The overall response to using Canva as a presentation tool was 4.81 on average, with a 4.75 when asked about the template (compared to the 3.41 and 3.59 regarding InDesign). The new template did not alter opinions regarding the priority of researched content in the presentation, but it did increase and unify the average time students spent researching versus assembling. Most students spent 60%-80% researching and the rest assembling. When asked overall, which program, InDesign or Canva, was easier to learn, every student responded with Canva, and many admitted they wished they had used it for their portfolios.

Regarding Canva, most of the suggestions for template changes were minor (e.g., colour, alignment, text). Additionally, learning Canva through videos and instructions within the template improved the tool learning experience. All students suggested using Canva for future classes due to its flexibility, simplicity, and interface.

### 3.2.1 Material Dissemination

When asked about content dissemination for the second time, the average response was 4.5 regarding the value of sharing work through social media (compared to 2.81 for Instagram). Students also shared

that the content displayed in class enhanced class conversation but did not necessarily increase their discussions outside of their current design community.

Upon analysing the social media analytics, we discovered our shared Instagram account had 14,478 impressions during study two, representing a 66% increase compared to the previous month of the semester and Study 1 (4,760 impressions). In terms of engagements, the account received 869 engagements, representing a 65.5% increase over the previous month (263 engagements). Most of our impressions (77%) came from outside of BYU. The United States, Malaysia, Germany, and Italy are the leading countries for impressions. Several factors contribute to these significant improvements, including the use of hashtags and in-post tagging by students and the additional visual interest offered by the Canva templates.

A few students shared the analytic results of their posts with the class. One student used hashtags and tagging on Instagram and linked to LinkedIn, and her post garnered 1,182 impressions and 321 impressions on Instagram. A second student used the identical social media methods as the previous student mentioned and obtained only 83 Instagram impressions yet gained 2,144 impressions on LinkedIn. These results demonstrate that students can effectively disseminate information on both Instagram and LinkedIn, and individual posts can perform differently on each platform. For successful dissemination and increased social media reach, students should practice communicating their information succinctly.

Lastly, when asked to comment on this class's effect on personal design philosophy, all students agreed that it helped them explore and place their design work in the broader design ecosystem. Students also expressed increased empathy, understanding and knowledge from course participation.

## 4   DISCUSSIONS

### 4.1  Adobe InDesign and Canva

The overall attitude and experience of presentation creation and dissemination improved after the transition from InDesign to Canva (Study 2). Design students were familiar with Illustrator and Photoshop before this class, but not with InDesign. InDesign is a standard for the design industry but proved to be a steep learning curve for the course. Students prioritised research in preparing their presentations, and the percentage of time spent researching rather than building the presentation increased between Survey 1 and Survey 2. The implications of these results encourage the use of simpler, newer presentation tools to help students enhance their learning experiences.

### 4.2  Instagram and LinkedIn

Instagram and LinkedIn occupy different realms of content dissemination. Based on the responses, students feel more comfortable sharing content through Instagram because it is less tied to their professional identities, but also say that they plan to rely more on LinkedIn in the future for that same reason. To encourage the dissemination of knowledge through social media, it seems that Instagram provided a safe and encouraging place to practice, particularly once instructed on social media strategies and outcomes. For both Instagram and LinkedIn, those who engaged in sharing contributed to an impressive number of interactions from across the world, expanding their network within design. It is also worth acknowledging that many said they would take more pride in their work if they planned to share it on Instagram and LinkedIn.

Interestingly, students replied to the survey by saying that LinkedIn was a resource for connecting and networking, but not for learning, while Instagram was the opposite. In looking to the future, making a better connection between content dissemination and personal identity might encourage more students to share their work more often.

### 4.3  Impact of Dissemination

A better connection between content dissemination and personal identity might encourage more students to share their work through social media. The purpose of introducing Instagram and LinkedIn into the course was to expose students to the different resources for sharing their knowledge and work while also encouraging connections with others interested in design. In consequence of the account being linked to the school and class, students made it less a part of their identity but maintained its viability and enjoyed discussions with various individuals across the world, particularly after hashtags and tagging were reinforced. Similarly, the minority of students that posted effectively on LinkedIn enjoyed a significant

increase in connections and interactions regarding their work and ideas. The largest problem revealed from the survey was the perceived difference between education and business contexts. Students were willing to accept Instagram as a place to openly share their work, while LinkedIn maintained a feeling of business, deterring students from openly sharing. Moving forward, we will include more class discussions about the impact social media can have on their professional growth.

## 4.4 Dynamic Class Content

One criticism that follows the format of this course is that because most instruction and content is taught by students, with the instructor guiding the discussion, content is inconsistent, and some key points might be missed. Some students perform much better than others in researching and presenting their findings. However, students in their responses from Survey 2 indicated an unanimously positive experience with the class, with personal philosophies expanded and greater knowledge of how the history of design impacts them here and now. We believe it is beneficial for students to explore and discuss what they are curious about. If significant ideas or projects are left out of a presentation, the instructor makes additions or corrections.

## 5  CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the outcome of the course can be expressed through two student course ratings:

> *"This class also helped me to see the power of sharing my knowledge on social media and how much social media can be a tool for gathering information and data."*
> *"The class was organised well and provided plenty of opportunities to evaluate one's personal perspective and philosophy. The emphasis on posting presentations online to gain exposure and possibly international recognition was interesting. Using LinkedIn is a better platform for professional exposure, but I would only post presentations associated with my account about designers I agree with."*

Disrupting the current standards for design presentation tools, like Adobe or PowerPoint type products, with tools like Canva and encouraging broader dissemination of content by using Instagram and LinkedIn expands any design course's implications and enhances student learning experiences. As content dissemination continues to evolve within the world of design, eventually, the culture and process of the classroom will commonly reflect those changes.

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