

Optimization of Illustration Content on Raraaef's Instagram Account by Using the Design Thinking Method

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Abstract. Technological advancements have made social media an important platform for illustrators to publish their work, build a creative identity, and reach a wider audience. However, Raraaef's Instagram account still faces the challenge of low audience engagement, as evidenced by relatively low numbers of likes and comments. This study aims to optimize the illustration content on Raraaef's Instagram account to make it more engaging, informative, and capable of increasing audience engagement. The method used is Design Thinking, which includes the stages of Empathize, Define, Ideate, Prototype, and Test. Data was collected through interviews, questionnaires, Instagram Insights, and evaluations using a Likert scale. The results of the study show that the designed Instagram Reels content was able to increase audience engagement. The evaluation results showed a feasibility percentage of 89% for the first piece of content, 87% for the second, and 89% for the third, all of which fall into the "highly feasible" category. Additionally, an analysis of the implementation of engagement strategies revealed that relevant, authentic, and interactive content contributed to increased audience engagement. Thus, the Design Thinking method proved effective in optimizing the illustrated content on the Raraaef Instagram account.

Keywords: Content Optimization, Design Thinking, Illustration Content, Instagram

1 Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology has transformed the way individuals communicate, interact, and establish relationships with audiences. Technology can be understood as a system developed by humans through the application of knowledge and organizational processes to achieve specific objectives [1]. One of the most significant consequences of this development is the increasing use of social media as a communication platform that enables interaction without limitations of time and geographical distance.

Social media refers to internet-based applications that facilitate users in creating, curating, and sharing user-generated content individually or collaboratively [2]. Beyond functioning as communication tools, social media platforms have evolved into important channels for marketing, branding, and audience engagement in various industries, including the creative sector [3]. Among these platforms, Instagram has become one of the most influential visual-based social media applications due to its ability to support image and video sharing, interactive features, and continuous accessibility [4]. Instagram also enables users to build social networks and communicate through visual interactions, making it particularly relevant for artists and creative practitioners [5]. Consequently, Instagram has become an essential medium for artists, illustrators, and content creators to showcase their work, build personal brands, and establish relationships with audiences.

In the context of the creative industry, the success of Instagram content is no longer determined solely by artistic quality but also by its ability to generate audience engagement. Engagement indicators such as likes, comments, shares, and saves reflect audience participation and influence content visibility within Instagram's algorithm. Higher engagement levels contribute to broader audience reach, stronger creator–audience relationships, and enhanced personal branding opportunities [6]. Therefore, content strategies that emphasize audience preferences, experiences, and interaction have become increasingly important for creative practitioners seeking to strengthen their digital presence [7].

Raraaef is an Indonesian illustrator specializing in watercolor and gouache artworks who utilizes Instagram as the primary platform for publishing creative works and developing professional identity. Watercolor and gouache illustrations are widely recognized for their distinctive visual characteristics and their ability to convey artistic expression effectively [8]. Despite possessing distinctive artistic characteristics, the account experienced relatively low audience engagement. In 2025, the account recorded 726 followers with an average of 13 likes and approximately one comment per post. In addition, audience interactions in the form of comments and content saves remained limited, indicating that the published content had not fully encouraged active audience participation or achieved optimal audience reach.

The content creation process currently implemented by Raraaef consists of illustration production, photography of artworks with supporting visual elements, image editing, caption preparation, hashtag utilization, content publication, and redistribution through Instagram Stories. Although these activities have been conducted consistently, engagement outcomes remain relatively low. Previous studies have shown that content quality, consistency, storytelling, audience interaction, and the use of strategic hashtags significantly contribute to engagement performance on social media platforms [7][9]. This condition suggests that the existing strategy is primarily focused on aesthetic presentation rather than audience-centered experiences and preferences. Consequently, there is a need for a more systematic and user-oriented approach to content development in order to improve audience interaction and content performance. However, previous studies have primarily focused on commercial brands, small businesses, or general digital marketing contexts, with limited attention to illustration content developed by independent visual creators. In addition, few studies have integrated the Design

Thinking process with Engagement Theory to systematically translate audience insights into illustration content strategies and evaluate their effectiveness on Instagram.

Design Thinking offers a human-centered and iterative approach that can be utilized to address this challenge. According to the Interaction Design Foundation, Design Thinking is a non-linear process consisting of five stages: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test [10]. The approach enables researchers and practitioners to understand users' needs, redefine problems from users' perspectives, generate innovative ideas, develop prototypes, and evaluate proposed solutions through user feedback [11]. In the context of social media content development, Design Thinking provides a framework for creating content strategies that align more closely with audience expectations and behaviors.

Previous studies have investigated the application of Design Thinking in digital marketing and social media optimization across various sectors, including cafés, fashion brands, textile businesses, and small and medium enterprises [12][13][14]. Existing studies have demonstrated that audience-centered content strategies can improve engagement and strengthen brand awareness [15]. Research has also shown that social media plays a significant role in promoting artistic works and strengthening artists' visibility in digital environments [16][17]. However, research specifically examining the optimization of illustration content for independent illustrators on Instagram remains limited. Furthermore, previous studies have predominantly focused on static Instagram posts and broader marketing strategies rather than short-form video content such as Instagram Reels, which currently receives greater algorithmic visibility and audience attention [18].

Although previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of Design Thinking for digital marketing and social media optimization, they primarily focused on commercial brands, SMEs, or general marketing contexts. Few studies have examined how Design Thinking can be systematically integrated with Engagement Theory to optimize illustration content for independent illustrators on Instagram. Furthermore, existing studies generally emphasize content production outcomes without explicitly demonstrating how audience insights obtained through User Personas, Empathy Maps, Point of View (POV), and How Might We (HMW) statements can be translated into audience-centered Instagram Reels prototypes and evaluated using both Instagram Insights and audience-based feasibility assessments. Therefore, this study extends previous research by proposing an integrated framework that combines Design Thinking and Engagement Theory to bridge audience analysis, creative content development, and engagement evaluation within the context of independent visual creators.

Therefore, this study aims to identify audience needs and preferences toward illustration content on the Instagram account of Raraaef, develop audience-centered content strategies through the Design Thinking approach, and evaluate the effectiveness of the resulting content prototypes in improving audience engagement. The findings are expected to contribute to the literature on digital engagement and creative content strategies by demonstrating the application of an integrated Design Thinking and Engagement Theory framework for illustration content optimization. In addition, the study provides practical recommendations for illustrators, content creators, and creative

businesses seeking to strengthen audience interaction and personal branding through Instagram.

2 Material and Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study approach to explore audience preferences toward illustration content and to develop audience-centered content optimization strategies for the Instagram account of Raraaef using the Design Thinking framework. The Design Thinking process consisted of five stages: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test, enabling the systematic translation of audience insights into Instagram Reels content prototypes. Furthermore, Engagement Theory was applied as the analytical framework to interpret audience responses based on the principles of Relate, Create, and Donate. The research focused on the Instagram account of Raraaef, an Indonesian illustrator specializing in watercolor and gouache illustrations, as a single case study to examine the applicability of the proposed framework in the context of independent visual creators.

2.2 Data Collection

Data were collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and a literature review. Observation was conducted by examining the existing illustration content on the Raraaef Instagram account, including visual characteristics, content concepts, posting patterns, and audience engagement performance. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the account owner to obtain information regarding content creation processes, publication strategies, and challenges in increasing audience engagement.

Questionnaires were distributed to Instagram users aged 17–35 years who actively use Instagram and have an interest in illustration or visual content. The initial questionnaire involved 50–60 respondents and aimed to identify audience needs, preferences, and perceptions regarding illustration content. Furthermore, a second questionnaire involving 15–20 purposively selected respondents was administered during the testing stage to evaluate the developed content prototypes using a five-point Likert scale. The respondents were selected because they represented the characteristics of the target audience and were able to provide relevant feedback on the proposed content. This sample size was considered appropriate for the formative prototype testing stage within the Design Thinking framework, where the primary objective was to obtain user feedback for evaluating and refining design solutions rather than to produce statistically generalizable findings. Therefore, no formal sample size calculation or statistical power analysis was conducted.

The questionnaire was developed based on the study objectives and the evaluation criteria for Instagram content, including visual attractiveness, clarity of information, educational value, and audience engagement. As the instrument was designed to provide formative feedback during the prototype testing stage, it was used as an evaluation tool rather than as a standardized psychometric instrument. Consequently, formal

validity and reliability testing, such as construct validity and Cronbach's alpha, was not performed. To minimize response bias, the questionnaire was administered anonymously, and respondents were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and that all responses would remain confidential.

Secondary data were obtained from books, journal articles, and previous studies related to social media marketing, Instagram engagement, illustration content strategies, Design Thinking, and Engagement Theory.

2.3 Research Procedure

This study adopted the Design Thinking framework proposed by the Interaction Design Foundation, which consists of five iterative stages: empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test [10]. The activities and outputs generated at each stage are summarized in Table 1

Table 1. Research Procedure Based on the Design Thinking Framework

Stage	Activities	Output
Empathize	Observation, interviews, questionnaires, and Instagram Insight analysis to understand audience preferences and content-related problems	User Persona and Empathy Map
Define	Synthesis of findings from the empathize stage to identify audience needs and formulate problem statements	Point of View (POV) and How Might We (HMW)
Ideate	Brainstorming and development of content strategies and concepts	Moodboard and Storyboard
Prototype	Development and publication of Instagram Reels content prototypes	Instagram Reels content prototypes
Test	Evaluation using Instagram Insights and audience questionnaires	Engagement metrics and feasibility score

The empathize stage focused on understanding audience needs and identifying problems related to the existing illustration content through questionnaires and interviews. The outputs of this stage were User Persona and Empathy Map.

The define stage synthesized the findings from the previous stage to formulate the core problems and audience needs, resulting in Point of View (POV) statements and How Might We (HMW) questions. The ideate stage generated various content strategies and creative solutions through brainstorming sessions, including the development of content themes, visual concepts, captions, and audience interaction strategies. The outputs of this stage were moodboards and storyboards. The prototype stage transformed the proposed ideas into Instagram Reels content prototypes by designing visual elements, layouts, color compositions, typography, and supporting captions.

Finally, the test stage evaluated the effectiveness of the developed content after publication on Instagram by analyzing engagement metrics, including views, likes, and comments obtained through Instagram Insights.

2.4 Data Analysis

The collected qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns, audience preferences, and content-related issues. Questionnaire responses were analyzed descriptively by calculating percentage scores to evaluate the feasibility of the developed content prototypes. Because the testing stage was designed as a formative evaluation within the Design Thinking framework rather than a hypothesis-testing study, inferential statistical analyses, such as paired t-tests, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests, ANOVA, or regression analysis, were not performed. Instead, the findings were interpreted by integrating descriptive questionnaire results with Instagram Insights to assess the relevance and potential effectiveness of the proposed content strategy.

The effectiveness of the developed content was evaluated using descriptive percentage analysis based on the following formula:

$$P = \frac{\text{Obtained Score}}{\text{Ideal Score}} \times 100\%$$

The resulting percentages were interpreted according to feasibility criteria ranging from Very Unsuitable to Highly Suitable. The findings were subsequently interpreted using Engagement Theory, particularly the principles of Relate, Create, and Donate, to explain how the optimized content addressed audience needs, encouraged participation, and delivered educational value.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Empathize Stage

The empathize stage aimed to understand audience characteristics, preferences, and expectations regarding illustration content on Instagram. Data were collected through observations, interviews with the account owner, and questionnaires distributed to Instagram users interested in illustration content.

The findings revealed that audiences preferred content that not only showcased final artworks but also provided insights into the creative process, educational information, and opportunities for interaction. Furthermore, four distinct audience segments were identified based on their motivations, content preferences, and engagement behaviors.

Table 2. User Personas

Persona	Characteristics
Persona 1	Beginner illustrator seeking learning content
Persona 2	Art enthusiast looking for inspiration
Persona 3	Creative professional interested in artistic processes
Persona 4	Casual Instagram user attracted by aesthetic content

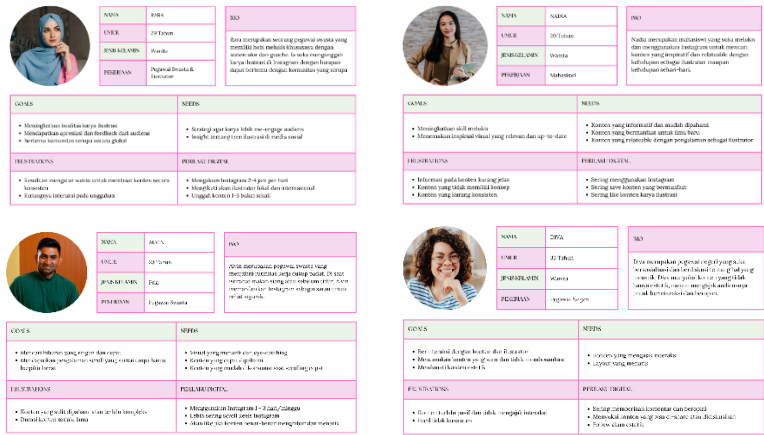


Fig. 1. User Personas of Raraeaf's Target Audience

The four personas represented beginner illustrators, art enthusiasts, fellow creative practitioners, and casual Instagram users who were primarily attracted to visually appealing content. Despite their different backgrounds and motivations, all personas demonstrated a preference for educational, process-oriented, and interactive content formats, particularly short-form videos such as Instagram Reels.

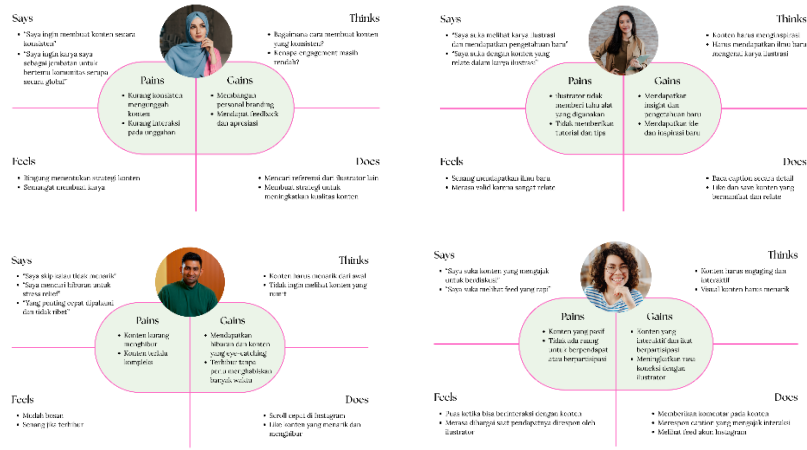


Fig. 2. Empathy Map of Raraeaf's Target Audience

The empathy map further indicated that audiences valued authenticity, creative insights, and opportunities to engage directly with illustrators. These findings became the foundation for defining audience needs and formulating content strategies during the subsequent define stage.

3.2 Define Stage

The define stage aimed to synthesize the findings obtained during the empathize stage in order to formulate the core problem faced by the Instagram account of Raraaef.

The analysis revealed that the existing content strategy focused primarily on displaying the final illustration results and aesthetic presentation, while audience preferences indicated a stronger interest in process-oriented and interactive content. Consequently, the following Point of View (POV) statement was developed:

"Instagram audiences interested in illustration content need engaging and informative content that provides insights into the creative process because they seek inspiration, learning opportunities, and authentic interactions with creators."

Based on the POV statement, the following How Might We (HMW) question was formulated:

"How might we create Instagram illustration content that is visually attractive, informative, and capable of encouraging active audience participation?"

			
How Might We • Membuat konten yang konsisten dengan mudah • Meningkatkan engagement konten karya ilustrasi • Memancing atensi konten karya ilustrasi yang dapat memberikan informasi yang berguna	How Might We • Membuat konten yang dapat memberikan pengetahuan baru mengenai karya ilustrasi • Mengajak konten yang relate dengan dunia berkarya	How Might We • Membuat konten karya ilustrasi yang beragam sesuai kebutuhan dan minat audiens • Mengajak konten karya ilustrasi yang menarik dan tidak membosankan	How Might We • Membuat konten ilustrasi yang dapat mendorong audiens untuk berinteraksi secara aktif • Mengajak konten yang dapat memicu diskusi dan audiens melalui konten ilustrasi
How Might We Mengoptimalkan konten karya ilustrasi pada Instagram Raraaef agar lebih menarik, konsisten, komunikatif, dan mampu meningkatkan interaksi terhadap audiens?			

Fig. 3. How Might We

3.3 Ideate Stage

The ideate stage focused on generating potential solutions to address the audience needs identified during the empathize and define stages. Based on the findings, several content strategies were developed to improve audience engagement and enhance the visibility of illustration content on Instagram.

The proposed strategy emphasized four main aspects: storytelling, process visualization, educational value, and audience interaction. Storytelling was incorporated to create emotional connections between the illustrator and the audience, while process visualization aimed to increase audience curiosity by showcasing the creation process behind each artwork, as storytelling and behind-the-scenes content have been shown to strengthen audience engagement and emotional attachment in social media environments [19] [20].

Educational elements were introduced to provide practical insights related to creative challenges frequently experienced by illustrators, while interactive features were designed to encourage audience participation through comments and discussions.

Based on these considerations, five content concepts were developed:

- 1. Illustration process videos.
- 2. Time-lapse drawing videos.

- 3. Visual entertainment content related to illustration.
- 4. Educational tips for overcoming art block and maintaining creative motivation.
- 5. Interactive captions encouraging audience responses.

These concepts were subsequently translated into visual references and content scenarios through the development of a moodboard and storyboard for Instagram Reels content production.



Fig. 4. Moodboard for Instagram Reels Content Development

The moodboard was designed to establish visual consistency in terms of color palette, composition, typography, and artistic atmosphere that reflected the identity of the Raraeef brand and audience preferences identified during the empathize stage.

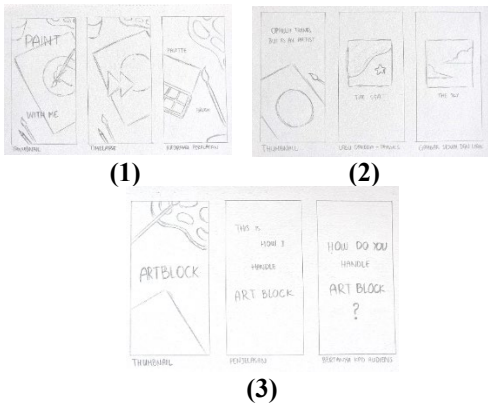


Fig. 5. Storyboards for Content 1, Content 2, and Content 3

The storyboard illustrated the sequence of scenes, transitions, text overlays, and interaction points within the Instagram Reels content, ensuring that the final content aligned with both storytelling objectives and engagement strategies.

3.4 Prototype Stage

The prototype stage involved transforming the content concepts generated during the ideate phase into tangible Instagram Reels content prototypes. The development process included the production of illustration process videos, the arrangement of visual compositions, the addition of text overlays, the selection of background music, and the preparation of audience-oriented captions designed to enhance audience interaction.

The resulting prototypes were designed to reflect audience preferences identified during the empathize stage, particularly the demand for process-oriented, educational, and interactive content. Each Reels video was structured to combine storytelling elements with visual demonstrations of watercolor and gouache illustration techniques to increase audience interest and retention, consistent with previous findings highlighting the effectiveness of educational and process-oriented content in digital engagement strategies [21].

Furthermore, the content design was guided by the principles of Engagement Theory proposed by Kearsley and Shneiderman, namely Relate, Create, and Donate. The Relate principle was implemented by presenting content themes and visual narratives relevant to audience interests and experiences [6]. The Create principle encouraged active audience participation through interactive captions, discussion prompts, and calls to action in the comment section. Meanwhile, the Donate principle was applied by providing educational information and practical insights related to illustration techniques and creative processes, thereby creating value for the audience beyond mere visual appreciation.



Fig. 6. Instagram Reels Prototypes Developed for the Raraeef Account

Figure 6 presents the final Instagram Reels prototype developed during this study. The prototype integrates visual storytelling, illustration process demonstrations, educational information, and interactive components to create a more engaging audience experience. This prototype subsequently became the object of evaluation during the testing stage to assess its effectiveness in improving audience engagement indicators, including views, likes, comments, and saves

3.5 Testing Stage

The testing stage aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Instagram Reels prototypes after publication on the Raraeef Instagram account. Evaluation was conducted using

two approaches: analysis of Instagram Insights data and audience assessment through questionnaires. This stage sought to determine whether the audience-centered content developed through the Design Thinking process was capable of improving audience engagement.

The engagement indicators analyzed consisted of views, likes, and comments, as these metrics were considered appropriate for evaluating audience exposure and interaction during the formative prototype testing stage. Views represented content visibility, while likes and comments reflected audience responses and participation in the published content. Other Instagram analytics, such as reach, impressions, saves, shares, profile visits, audience retention, click-through rates, and Reel completion rates, were not included because the study focused on the preliminary evaluation of prototype performance rather than a comprehensive assessment of digital marketing effectiveness. Future studies are encouraged to incorporate these additional indicators to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of content optimization outcomes.

Table 3. Engagement Performance of Instagram Reels Prototypes

Content Type	Views	Likes	Comments
Content 1	713	55	17
Content 2	682	47	19
Content 3	486	40	11

As presented in Table 3, Content 1 achieved the highest number of views (713) and likes (55), indicating that it attracted greater audience attention than the other prototypes. Meanwhile, Content 2 generated the highest number of comments (19), suggesting stronger audience participation through discussion and interaction. Although Content 3 produced relatively lower engagement metrics, it continued to generate audience responses across all measured indicators. These findings provide descriptive evidence that the optimized Instagram Reels prototypes were positively received within the context of this study.

Furthermore, the incorporation of storytelling elements, creative process demonstrations, educational information, and interactive features appeared to encourage audience participation, consistent with previous studies reporting that informative and engaging content contributes to stronger online engagement behavior [20] [22].

Table 4. Feasibility Assessment Results of Instagram Reels Prototypes

Content Prototype	Feasibility Score (%)	Category
Content 1	89	Highly Feasible
Content 2	87	Highly Feasible
Content 3	89	Highly Feasible

The audience evaluation results indicated that the three content prototypes achieved feasibility scores ranging from 87% to 89%, all of which were categorized as Highly Feasible. These findings suggest that the developed content was perceived as attractive, informative, and relevant by the respondents.

The findings can also be interpreted through the three principles of Engagement Theory. The Relate principle was reflected in the development of content based on audience needs identified during the empathize stage, including process-oriented videos, storytelling, and educational topics relevant to the target audience. The Create principle was implemented through interactive captions and discussion prompts that encouraged audiences to share opinions and participate in discussions, as reflected in the observed comment interactions. Meanwhile, the Donate principle was demonstrated by providing educational illustration techniques, creative process demonstrations, and practical artistic insights that enabled audiences to gain knowledge beyond visual appreciation, consistent with the principles of Engagement Theory proposed by Kearsley and Shneiderman [6]. Taken together, these findings suggest that integrating Design Thinking with Engagement Theory provides a systematic and audience-centered framework for developing illustration content within the context of this case study. However, because this study did not compare Design Thinking with alternative content development approaches or employ inferential statistical analyses, the findings should be interpreted as descriptive evidence of prototype performance rather than conclusive evidence of the superiority of Design Thinking over other approaches.

3.6 Research Implications

The findings of this study provide both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature on digital engagement and creative content strategy by demonstrating how the principles of Engagement Theory can be operationalized through the Design Thinking process in developing audience-centered illustration content. Specifically, the Relate principle was reflected in the identification of audience needs during the empathize stage, resulting in content themes that aligned with the interests of beginner illustrators, art enthusiasts, and creative practitioners. The Create principle was implemented through interactive captions and discussion prompts that encouraged audience participation, as reflected in the observed audience interactions. Meanwhile, the Donate principle was demonstrated by integrating educational illustration techniques, creative processes, and practical artistic insights into the content, enabling audiences to gain knowledge beyond visual appreciation. These findings suggest that integrating Design Thinking with Engagement Theory provides a systematic framework for translating audience insights into audience-centered content strategies within the context of independent illustrators.

Practically, the findings provide recommendations for illustrators, content creators, and creative entrepreneurs regarding the importance of understanding audience preferences before developing content strategies. The proposed Design Thinking framework may serve as a practical reference for developing audience-centered illustration content and strengthening audience engagement. However, because this study did not compare Design Thinking with alternative content development approaches, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that it is the most effective approach. Instead, the results demonstrate its applicability within the context of this case study.

The findings also highlight opportunities for future research. Further studies are encouraged to compare Design Thinking with alternative content development

approaches, involve multiple creator accounts and different creative sectors, conduct longitudinal evaluations of audience engagement, and incorporate more comprehensive digital analytics and cross-platform comparisons. The integration of advanced analytical approaches, such as AI-assisted content generation, sentiment analysis, social network analysis, and eye-tracking techniques, may also provide stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness of Design Thinking for digital content optimization.

4 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Design Thinking approach provided a systematic framework for identifying audience needs and developing audience-centered illustration content strategies for the Instagram account of Raraaef. Through the empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test stages, the study identified audience preferences for informative, interactive, and process-oriented illustration content. These insights were translated into Instagram Reels that integrated storytelling, educational value, and audience interaction. The prototype evaluation showed improvements in views, likes, and comments compared with previous content, while the three prototypes achieved feasibility scores of 89%, 87%, and 89%, indicating positive audience acceptance within the context of this study.

The findings also demonstrate how Design Thinking can be integrated with Engagement Theory in developing illustration content. The Relate principle was reflected in identifying audience needs and interests, Create was implemented through interactive content and discussion prompts that encouraged participation, and Donate was demonstrated by providing educational illustration techniques and creative insights. These findings suggest that integrating Design Thinking with Engagement Theory provides a structured framework for developing audience-centered content for independent illustrators.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The research focused on a single independent illustrator account and evaluated only Instagram Reels, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other creators, creative sectors, or social media platforms. In addition, the study did not compare Design Thinking with alternative content development approaches, such as A/B testing, User-Centered Design, content marketing frameworks, or data-driven optimization strategies. The prototype evaluation also relied on a relatively small purposive sample, descriptive analysis, and selected Instagram Insights indicators (views, likes, and comments), while other performance metrics, including reach, impressions, saves, shares, audience retention, and profile visits, were not analyzed.

Future research is encouraged to involve multiple creator accounts, larger and more diverse participant groups, and longitudinal evaluation to examine the sustainability of audience engagement. Comparative studies across different content development approaches and digital platforms, together with advanced analytical techniques such as AI-assisted content generation, sentiment analysis, social network analysis, eye-tracking, and more comprehensive Instagram analytics, may provide stronger evidence regarding the effectiveness of Design Thinking for digital content optimization.

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