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Instagram: Building a Following in Niche Audiences and Captivating Strangers Utilizing Visual Social Media

Maia Henderson
Syracuse University

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Instagram: Building a Following in Niche Audiences and Captivating Strangers Utilizing Visual Social Media

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

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May 2015

Honors Capstone Project in Advertising
Capstone Project Advisor: Dr. Carla Lloyd, Professor and Director of the Fashion and Beauty Communications Milestone

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Date: April 20, 2015
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Abstract

Social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, are used by advertisers to create brand identity and connect with consumers on a personal level. With the invention of Instagram however, fashion enthusiasts have been able to create their own visual accounts and build a following within a niche community. They don’t have to represent a specific brand or be sponsored, yet they are followed by many because of the quality of their content and by utilizing certain Instagram conventions. There is no known formula about how these accounts become so popular. These “Instafamous” accounts resonate deeply with their followers and are trusted, something that large brands on Instagram are lacking. I set out to discover the process that a creative social media platform, like an Instagram account, takes in building an engaged following.

My capstone Instagram account, MaiTakeOnStyle, was constantly a work in progress and evolved and changed through both creativity and trial and error. I continually worked to adapt my social media account in an attempt to be found in a sea of over 300 million users. Social media was a unique medium to utilize because my creativity was immediately judged by my following, which in turn was reflected in likes and comments. The medium is unusual in the sense that creative success can quickly be reflected in numerical data and can guide the account holder in making different creative decisions in order to gain popularity. Through my account, I produced over 80 images and learned more about the challenges and time commitment needed in order to captivate strangers and build a following.

My project can be viewed in these two locations:

https://instagram.com/maitakeonstyle/

(Image posts only, original Instagram medium)

http://maitakeonstyle.tumblr.com/

(Posts and blog posts)
Executive Summary

In the year of 2015, social media is ever-present. Big corporations utilize social media in attempts to connect with consumers on a relatable scale, while the average person utilizes social media to share their thoughts instantly on a global scale. We take our social media with us wherever we go. Social media is relatively new though, originating in the early 2000’s through platforms strictly intended for computers. In fact, the smart phone was introduced to the general public in 2003, bringing communication to the world’s fingertips in multiple forms and changing our sharing behaviors. Applications were developed for these smart phones so that consumers could individualize their devices. With this, social media became an entirely new animal. Applications like the Facebook app and Twitter allowed social media to take place whenever and wherever.

Instagram was released initially on October 6th, 2010. Now owned by Facebook, the social media platform is used for, “Fast beautiful photo sharing.” The app allows users to seamlessly import photographs and edit them on smart phones. With the push of a button, these photos are shared with the world. As of March 2015, the company has announced there are 300 million monthly active users – 75 million of this population uses the app daily.

Advertisers use social media in efforts to create a strong brand identity and connect with consumers. With the invention of Instagram, enthusiasts of specific niches have been able to create their own accounts and build a following within the community. These users don’t have to represent a specific brand, be sponsored, or having celebrity standing – yet some are still followed by many and become so popular that they are considered “Instafamous” accounts. The interesting part is that no one knows how these accounts
become so popular in the first place. These Instafamous accounts have a developed trust and relationship with their followers - engaging them in ways that brands on Instagram have often failed to do.

I set out to discover the journey that an Instagram account takes in building an active and engaged following through producing creative content. Currently, there are no books or research that break down the science of Instagram popularity within niche accounts or how consumer behavior takes place within Instagram because the platform is relatively new. I wanted to understand what hashtags work well, what images get the most attention, and most importantly how an account can be found in a sea of over 300 million users. It was important to understand what type of creativity was attractive to Instagram account holders in order for my images and posts to evolve.

As an advertising major with specialty in design and the fashion and beauty industries, I decided to immerse myself into the trends of the fashion and beauty world. I went out and shot photographs of the trends and edited them utilizing different iPhone applications such as VSCO and Afterlight. I then uploaded these photos on to my Instagram account “MaiTakeOnStyle” with captions and hashtags. My account was targeted towards the millennial audience that has an interest in all things beauty, style, and fashion related. These posts, over 80 in total, are creative productions. They involved photography, editing, copywriting, and publication.

My Instagram account was constantly a work in progress. It evolved and changed through both trial and error as well as growth of knowledge. Research was done in a few unique ways – but mostly by first hand experience. Weekly discussions with Dr. Carla Lloyd about trends and visuals aided in what content I created and the reasoning behind it.
I read blogs by popular Instagram accounts holders and picked through books like *Instagram Power: Build Your Brand and Reach More Customers with the Power Of Pictures*, *Likeable Social Media*, and visited digitaltrends.com regularly. The most important thing for my research was to keep up to date with both fashion and Instagram account trends. I posted frequently and wrote blog posts on the progress of my account with a numerical breakdown as well. It was important to see hard data on the evolution of followers, likes, comments, and shares. I wanted to harness the advantage of having numerical data feedback on my creative posts to improve and get insight on my followers.

The end goal? To have a respectable Instagram following on an account that is not personal, instead embodying the interests of the fashion and beauty world visually. More importantly, the goal is to not have a specific number of followers but instead a refined grasp upon the evolution of an Instagram account and how creativity is perceived and changes on the platform.

My project can be viewed in these two locations:

https://instagram.com/maitakeonstyle/

(Image posts only, original Instagram medium)

http://maitakeonstyle.tumblr.com/

(Posts and blog posts)
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To view the full original, digital form of this capstone project visit: maitakeonstyle.tumblr.com and Instagram.com/maitakeonstyle
Stage 0:

What’s in a name? More importantly...whats in a social media name?

These two questions taunted me over the past week. I drove all of my family and friends mad as I blurted possible social media names out mid-conversation. Your name has to be personable, but also have authority. It needs to tell the masses what your intentions are and how you intent to go about accomplishing them. It needs to be a little flirty, a little puny, and completely perfect. After all, creating this account is the creation of a brand. My findings aren’t shocking. The most popular Instagram handles have a personal aspect to them while tying the account to a purpose (i.e. Aimee Song’s SongofStyle). They play with alliteration and cultural references.

After the list of potential names had been narrowed down to about 30, the more tedious work set in. I went on all social media platforms to see which of the names were already taken (girlmeetsstyle), which were too similar to something popular (freshlysqueezedstyle compared to the popular freshlysqueezedfashion), and which names seemed to not fit into the Instagam/Social Media fashion realm.

After much deliberation, and I’m sure to my friend’s joy, I have settled on a name. MaiTakeOnStyle.

Intended to sound like My Take On Style, I utilized my nickname (Mai) to establish this social media handle. This account will reflect this perfectly. It is my take on the style, fashion, and trends that are occurring constantly around me. This stage will be full of preparations, designing, and lots of photo shoots. I’ll be designing a logo and my blog.

A little bit humorous, here are my Stage 0 stats:

Following: 38
Followers: 2

Notes: No Instagram description or posts on my account. No comment or likes on other accounts. I followed 38 popular fashion accounts. My two followers are not on this list of 38. I guess some people just follow to follow.
When the temperatures start to drop, #sweaters come out to play. Dress them up with #bold statement #necklaces. #fashion #trendy #ootd #jewelry #fall

_ helene rn

_ whooworeitbest vote

mysecretlookbook

Love this! 😊

Leave a comment...

How great are these studded #converse? They transition well from #girly to #edgy. Wear them with a cute floral dress or channel your inner rock star and put on some leather leggings! #fashion #trendy #shoes #ootd #style

megan_dodge_ sarahkinston, maquigley18 and 17 others like this.

belles2593

#floral

Leave a comment...
maitakeonstyle
6 months ago
No white after Labor Day?! Not when you have a great white fur vest like this one! Rules are meant to be broken! #fashion #trendy #clothes #ootd #follow #fall

sjobeck_malibu, _fashionblogg_, annadille and 29 others like this.

maitakeonstyle
6 months ago
Picked up this unique printed @jcrew sweater online for $25! Happy Friday!!! #sale #fashion #style #jcrew #follow

morganmcm93, sarahrkingston, tawamcq and 21 others like this.

ellydailyy
👏👏

brookie13cookie
Jcrew though 😊
maitakeonstyle
6 months ago
Officially plaid season

So glad to finally be able to wear my leggings and oversized shirts. #plaid #fashion #trends #ootd #follow

❤️ dr_ink93, sarahrkingston, thefashionableeye and 21 others like this.

thefashionableeye
Love your scarf

maitakeonstyle
@thefashionableeye it's a @soulscarf! The best 😊

❤️ Leave a comment...

maitakeonstyle
6 months ago · @ Syracuse University
Such a cool #ring my friend wore today. Big statement stones are a great way to make your neutral outfit unique. #fashion #style #trend #jewelry #follow #trendy #ootd

❤️ hilmakeo, sarahrkingston, orangebias and 14 others like this.

❤️ Leave a comment...
I like to call these the "mature ripped jean." #jeans #fashion #style #trends #ootd #follow
Stage 1:

At the end of stage 1, I was feeling a bit defeated. I have over a thousand Facebook followers and around 500 Instagram followers on my personal accounts...yet my pleas for people to engage with my capstone left me with under one hundred followers.

My main hashtags I utilized were: #fashion #style #trendy #trends #ootd #fall and then I hash tagged the brand (if needed) and the type of item featured (like #necklace).

My last few posts, I added #follow. This actually worked! I gained a few anonymous followers. I also added 30 more people onto the list of people that I follow. Not even half have followed back. On Tumblr, I followed around 20 people. While my project is not about building a Tumblr following, it will be interesting to see if they react.

I added a description to my Tumblr and Instagram account. I’m also working on “business” cards to hand out to people when I approach them to take photos. In the following stage, I want to reach out to my classmates and make announcements in person. I will also be posting again on my personal social media platforms.

Stage 1 Stats:

Total Posts: 7
Following: 34
Followers: 72
Followers that I know: 71

For this stage's posts:

Total Likes: 22+17+26+16+18+13+22 = 134
Likes From People I Know: 14+14+21+13+15+8+12= 97
Likes From Randoms: 8+3+5+3+7+8= 37
Average Likes Per Post: 19.14
Total Comments (People I Know/Randoms/Total): (2/4/6)
maitakeonstyle
6 months ago - @Syracuse University
Brrrr!! It's getting cold! #knit headbands and are a stylish way to keep warm while keeping your hair intact. I got these ones from @target #fashion #style #trends #accessories #headband #follow #target

ajtamilla, sarahrkingston, thefashionableeye and 20 others like this.

maitakeonstyle
6 months ago - @Syracuse University
Caught up in a web of festivities this weekend.
#spooky #fashion #halloween #style #trend

morganmcm93, famous_fmarlo_1994, sarahrkingston and 12 others like this.
maitakeonstyle
6 months ago · @Syracuse University
I think we can official break out the #fur #vests now. Mine's reversible 😊 #fashion #style #trendy #ootd #follow #furvest #Nordstrom

ajtamila_james_x_horne sarahrkingston and 18 others like this.

vinacheccopenhagen
Nice 😊

shopwithnikki
👍😊🌟

dawrnrez
WHERE do I get this

maitakeonstyle
6 months ago · @Sephora - Destiny USA
Just got this new #contour #makeup at @sephora 😊
BONUS: It smells like #chocolate!!! @toofaced #fashion #beauty #toofaced #contouring #follow

themakeupology justaprimer pumalie and 19 others like this.
Things to keep you motivated this Monday: printed tights and skirts, together. #fashion #trendy #ootd #tights #skirt #follow #style #like

morganmcm93, sarahrkingston, maquigley18 and 26 others like this.
Stage 2:

Well... stage 2 wasn't my best.

If there is one lesson to be learned from all of this...it is that you must be prepared. This stage was filled with chaos. I had so much to do, so I missed a few days of posting. You may say, “Maia, posting only takes 3 minutes!” But that isn't true. I have to find what I want to take a picture of, take the picture, and then edit it and write a caption. All in all, it is about a 30 minute process. When you have multiple exams and projects due in a week, that can be hard to fit in. I wonder what the lives of people who Instagram for a living are like?

My plan going forward is to take multiple pictures on my “non-busy” days so I have content that I can pull from at all times.

I have noticed that while my following has only grown by 4 (Uh oh...), my likes per picture have increased greatly. I'm a bit disappointed in my performance, yet I guess we learn from our greatest mistakes. I've refocused and am ready to hit the ground running!

Stage 2 Stats:

Total Posts: 14
Following: 40
Followers: 76
Followers that I know: 73

For this stage's posts:

Total Likes: 22+14+18+18+24+24+24 = 144
Likes From People I Know: 19+13+13+13+19+17+24= 118
Likes From Randoms: 3+1+5+5+7+0= 26
Average Likes Per Post: 20.57
Total Comments (People I Know/Randoms/Total): (0/2/2)
Today is Veterans Day. 🇺🇸 🇺🇸 🇺🇸 Please take the time to thank all of those that have served our country. Finish off your ponytail with a red, white, and blue bandana to showcase your USA pride. #veteransday #usa #fashion #style #follow #patriotic #headband #hairstyles #hair #america #ponytail #trendy

❤️ phonegizmo_dr_ink93 mayagracie and 37 others like this.

Leave a comment...

maitakeonstyle
5 months ago · Syracuse University
“I want all of you forever. You and me. Everyday.” - what went through my head when I saw this necklace...and it was on sale. #thenotebook #necklace #jewelry #fashion #style #trend #follow #jcrew #notebook #bling

❤️ m.zamminewyork catdogcavs blocksbrand and 31 others like this.

Leave a comment...
maitakeonstyle
5 months ago · @Syracuse University
So many #textures going on in my outfit! And yes... That's 🧣 on my #scarf. A unique pattern #sweater can help your cold weather outfit stand out. #fashion #style #ootd #snow #trendy #follow #outfit #like #fur #knit

❤️ chadderpillar, elipickett, britt_stafford04 and 43 others like this.

maitakeonstyle
5 months ago · @Syracuse University
If you know me at all, you know I have an affinity for floral. Winter florals, summer florals, big florals, small florals. Pair your winter florals with opaque tights and a chunky sweater. #floral #skirt #sweaters #fashion #trendy #follow #ootd #like #clothes #outfit

❤️ sarahrkingston, maquigley18, catdogcavs and 25 others like this.
Surprise!!! Just kidding, this isn’t me. That being said, I’ve always admired people that are willing to take a risk with their hair. Check out this soft lavender bun my friend is rocking. #hair #lavender #style #fashion #trendy #beauty #follow #like

ro_bass
Haha is that Michelle?

maitakeonstyle
@ro_bass yes!!

ro_bass
istencia last semester and she got me into the JERK mag feature on tattoos, haha

maitakeonstyle
@ro_bass the reindeer/deer/elk tattoo!!! (Sorry I can’t remember exactly)

ro_bass
Yup! Reindeer 😊

Spotted this outfit at a mixer today. These killer deep purple heels perfectly compliment the black and white patterned pant... I’m in love. ❤️💃 #fashion #style #ootd #follow #trendy #prints #outfit #like #clothes #shoes #heels #pants

sarahrkington, thefashionableeye, lexaabdalla and 20 others like this.
In honor of going home for the holidays, throw on your favorite comfy sweatshirt (this is mine!) for traveling. Who knows... Maybe you'll sit next to an alum on the plane! #travel #fashion #Cuse #trendy #ootd #sweater #syracuse #style #follow #like #college

shan12paige, chadderpilar, catdogcavs and 37 others like this.
Stage 3:

This stage was an interesting stage for me, and it was reflected statistically.

I networked in all of my classes and extracurriculars on campus so my following grew by 58 people!!! I plan to continue to do this because it was a personal way to bring people to my Instagram account. I believe this personal connection aided in my likes per image growing drastically as well.

The stage in general had events that I could connect my posts to. On November 11th, it was Veteran's Day. I posted a bandanna with a red/white/blue pattern on it. This post received the most “random” likes. Also, the “Americana” culture is very prevalent with the millennial generation right now. We want everything to have “made in the U.S.A.” on it and it to be the colors of our flag.

Most of my followers are in college, so I posted a picture of a college sweatshirt and wrote copy that mentioned traveling home in comfortable clothing. This resonated well with my audience.

Ironically, the post that got the most likes was the single one in which I included myself. I think this was because right now, most of my followers know me and could recognize me, so it was nice for them to see this personal element. Perhaps in the future, I will make things more personal and include more human elements.

Comment wise, I didn’t do well. I’m wondering if I should start trying to engage my followers through questions in my posts. Things I’m going to try next stage!

Stage 3 Stats:
Total Posts: 21
Following: 39
Followers: 134
Followers that I know: 124

For this stage’s posts:
Total Likes: 37+33+44+27+28+23+36 =228
Likes From People I Know: 28+27+43+27+27+20+33= 205
Likes From Randoms: 9+6+1+0+1+3+3=23
Average Likes Per Post: 32.57
Total Comments (People I Know/Randoms/Total): (1/0/1)
maitakeonstyle
5 months ago
If shoes could be spirit animals, these would be mine. Too bad they didn’t have my size 😞 What’s your fashion spirit animal? #shoes #style #fashion #trends #print #aztec #follow #like #shopping #clothes #chill #followers #ootd

❤️ ddiane5, sarahrkingston, britt_stafford04 and 19 others like this.

maitakeonstyle
5 months ago · nail heaven
Ready for Thanksgiving yet!? Take a break from the chaos and treat yourself to #manicure using this deep cranberry-colored nail polish. Nail polish: "William Tell Me About O.P.I." #nails #nail #polish #nailpolish #fashion #style #trend #thanksgiving #follow #like #festive #opi_products

❤️ ajtamilla, sarahrkingston, pumalie and 23 others like this.
maitakeonstyle
5 months ago · fashion land
This quote is one of my absolute favorites. It took me so long to realize that I could break rules and still have confidence in what I was wearing. If you like it, wear it!
#quote #fashion #style #clothes #trendy #lights #follow #like #pinterest #rules photocred: Pinterest.

morganmcm93, sarahrkingston, catdogcavs and 33 others like this.

maitakeonstyle
5 months ago · #thanksgiving
HAPPY THANKSGIVING🍁 On the style side of things, I'm thankful for this grey corduroy dress (that I can eat as much as I want in) and big chunky knits. #fashion #ootd #style #thanksgiving #outfit #thanksgivingoutfit #like #follow #trendy #urbanoutfitters #urban #forever21 #dress #sweater #knit #corduroy #tumblr #blog #lookbook #ootdflash

shan12paige, sarahrkingston, catdogcavs and 26 others like this.
Don't forget your gloves. It's cold out! #collage #gloves #fashion #style #jcrew #hands #artsy #blog #fashionblogger #sorryididntpostforaweekitswasfinals #follow #like #14f #beautiful #pattern #trend

❤️ erinanncullen, sarahkingston, el/pickett and 23 others like this.

tom_mercha
@mitakeonstyle Grow your merchandising reach with this easy-to-use tool @tom_mercha
Stage 4:

Finals, Finals, Finals. I took a week long break in the middle of this set of 7 because I was swamped with finals. I laughed, realizing that most successful Instagrammers don't do this...but grades come first!

I found out this stage that people are very protective of their social media accounts. They won't follow something unless they are extremely interested, even if they know the person. I stood in front of my diversity class and begged for followers, handed out my business card, and explained my project. Out of 50 females, I gained 2 new followers - which you can imagine was disappointing. I need to find a way to intrigue people and make them want to see what I'll post next.

I found that pictures that feature more of the human body get more likes, I guess people must relate more. Ainstagrammed a photo of a well-known friend, and the photo received the most likes I've ever received. A guy friend came up to me and asked why I haven't done any men's wear. I'm not sure that is a direction I want to go in, but it is something to think about.

My comments went up this stage, but were all done by people I know.

I also instagrammed a fashion quote this stage. It was popular with my followers, so I think I will start doing one a stage.

My goal this upcoming stage is to attract more followers that I don't know. I read about the most popular hashtags and am going to try to utilize at least three of them in each post this stage. Here they are:

#love, #instagood, #me, #tbt, #cute, #photooftheday, #instamood, #iphones, #picoftheday, #igers, #girl, #tweegram, #beautiful, #instadaily, #summer, #instagramhub, #follow, #iphoneonly, #igdaily, #bestoftheday

I also read that Instagrammers prefer comments over “liking” something. Everyday, I am going to comment on 10 other fashion blogger posts and see what happens. (Quicksprout.com) I'm home in Colorado with no classes to distract me. I'm hoping this allows my content to flow better and for me to keep creating more images and copy for when I return to school.

Stage 4 Stats:

- Total Posts: 28
- Following: 46
- Followers: 134
- Followers that I know: 118
- Followers that I don't know: 15

For this stage's posts:

- Total Likes: 20 + 23 + 32 + 25 + 56 + 27 + 20 = 203
- Likes From People I Know: 19 + 23 + 31 + 25 + 53 + 25 + 19 = 195
- Likes From Randoms: 1 + 0 + 1 + 0 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 8 (uh-oh!)
- Average Likes Per Post: 29
- Total Comments (People I Know/Randoms/Total): (6/0/6)
maitakeonstyle
4 months ago · 9 colorado
I live in these @hm acid wash leggings. They add an edgy touch to my staple closet items, like this denim shirt. #fashion #style #edgy #trend #leggings #coold #trendy #trends #outfit #styleblogger #fashionista #follow #like #clothes #denim #shirt #lookbook #hm #instafashion #love #me #cute #girl

❤️ rachellockhart maquigley18 kayrayseg and 26 others like this.

maitakeonstyle
4 months ago · 9 animal house
After a long weekend of admiring everyone's winter fur on the streets of NYC, I was elated when I received this gift! They scarf is warm, fun, and goes great with lipstick! 🎁🎄桁. #fashion #fashionista #faux #fur #style #trendy #follow #like #love #photooftheday #amazing #smile #follow4follow #like4like #look #instalike #igers #picoftheday #instadaily #instafollow #followme #girl #iphoneonly

❤️ ajtamilla maquigley18 catdogcavs and 23 others like this.

bolllusio
👩‍🎨 @aisheisheii

❤️ Leave a comment...

Leave a comment...
maitakeonstyle
4 months ago · Follow
My great grandma Rose was a button hoarder. Over time, we've given most of them away but hold on to our favorites. These foggy green ones are mine. I'm saving them for something special.

erinann,cullen, pumalie, catdogcaws and 22 others liked this.

maitakeonstyle
4 months ago
These shoes are killer. Going to be posting some men's stuff soon to see how that goes... Cross your fingers.

rachelllockhart, morganmcm93, lexabdalala and 26 others liked this.

kayleeskleton
Where are these from?? 💙

maitakeonstyle
@kayleeskleton They are Charles Philip Shanghai shoes!

maitakeonstyle
@tpruden hope you read the caption of this one...
maitakeonstyle 4 months ago · leather lounge
Black on black on black...on grey. #fashion #black #leather #skirt #purse #style #ootd #fashionista #blogger #grunge #tights #jeffreycampbell #heels #follow #like #love #cute #iphone #me #girl #instafashion #instagood #inspiration #ootdfash #ootdenvy #ootd #fashionlivesoneoctl #fashionland #denver #colorado #milehigh

my_irreplaceable_self, carolinaadurantequerra, ferchocobos_94 and 95 others like this.

maitakeonstyle 4 months ago · 9 flowers in her hair
No matter how girly I dress, my grandma always wants more! I'm throwing these big gold flowers in my hair for our gathering tonight so that she can't say anything. #fashion #style #hair #trend #flower #beauty #follow4follow #like #follow #cute #love #me #iphone #floral #accessories #gold #family #christmas #cute #denver #colorado #mountains #milehigh

maitakeonstyle, erinannncullen, maquigley18 and 38 others like this.

pddinn  Location 📍

Leave a comment...
Today, my dad told me I look like a lumberjack. That aside, I love hanging around in big flannels, beanies, and combat boots. I am so fortunate to live in Colorado.

#fashion #style #trend #beanie #flannel #plaid #leggings #boots #combat #scenery #landscape #beautiful #colorado #nature #winter #love #beautiful #life #good #moments #follow #like #wow #instafashion #instagood #iphone #ootdenvy
Stage 5:

This stage I learned that you can be blocked from commenting on Instagram. Any self-promotion or tagging of yourself, even words like “follow” gets you blocked for 48 hours. Needless to say…it took me awhile to figure this out and therefore I was blocked most of this stage. Live and learn.

I've been adding more personality to my posts. Telling stories, being human. I haven't seen a great increase in likes, but I've had individuals text me saying that they love it.

I also emailed around 10 “famous” instagrammers asking if they had time for an interview. EVERY SINGLE ONE of them said yes!!! I was elated. I sent out my interview and told them that there was no rush, being as we are in the middle of the holiday season. I have received one response email that was thorough and beautiful. Before I do anything drastic though, I am going to wait for more responses to see if there are common trends. I am amazed at how relatively easy it was to access these people and how open they were to helping me and my project.

Cons of being at home: my parents aren't the best at helping me take photographers...but they try!

I'm taking a few days off for the holidays: Christmas Eve, Christmas, New Year’s Eve, New Year’s Day...maybe.

Stage 5 Stats:

Total Posts: 35
Following: 139
Followers: 172
Followers that I know: 147
Followers that I don't know: 25

For this stage's posts:

Total Likes: 27+23+23+28+28+37+46 = 212 (up)
Likes From People I Know: 25+22+21+26+26+36+45= 201
Likes From Randoms: 2+1+2+2+1+1= 11 (better but not great...)
Average Likes Per Post: 30.285
Total Comments (People I Know/Randoms/Total): (3/½) (comments are up!)
life's too short
to wear boring clothes

No, You Hang Up First
maitakeonstyle
4 months ago · 🌟 christmas
And to all a goodnight. #christmas

❤️ smashkins19, jbingzz, mvelaz13 and 36 others like this.

maitakeonstyle
4 months ago
This purple "lip lube" (I'm not making this up—that's what it is called!) is made by Laqa&Co. and stays on forever and ever. Plus it's fun...duh. 😱 💫 #style #beauty #makeup #lips #lipstick #birchbox #gold #purple #follow #like #productreview #fashion #love #pretty #instacool #instamood #fashionista #shopping #instafashion #popular #me #like @laqaandco #colorado #denver #milehigh

❤️ maitakeonstyle, smashkins19, maquigley18 and 48 others like this.

Leave a comment...
maitakeonstyle
4 months ago · 5 degrees and snowing
I'm a sucker for anything that has antlers, it reminds me of home when I'm far away. Also, I may or may not have frozen my hands off while taking this photo outside.
#colorado #jewelry #fashion #style #necklace #love #followme #girl #iphoneonly #swag #instagood #instacool #amazing #like #look #tumblr #colorful #gold #tree #evergreen #colorado #denver #milehigh

❤️ maitakeonstyle, pumalie, mvelaz13 and 23 others like this.

maitakeonstyle
4 months ago · The Streets at SouthGlenn
Layers on layers today! If I could own a thousand Madewell utility shirts...I would. They're the best!
#Madewell #fashion #knit #clothing #love #iphone #instagood #like #follow #me #girl #ootd #shopping #blogger #instafashion #iphone6 #followme @madewell1937 #jcrew #layers #colorado #instacool #milehigh #denver

❤️ maitakeonstyle, shan12paige, smashkins19 and 36 others like this.

❤️ Leave a comment...
New year, same leather jacket. #fashion #style #ootd #instafashion #leather #jacket #clothes #love #iphone #cool #follow #me #girl #awesome #like #followme #shopping #photoshoot #rayban #jcrew #steve #madden #nye #newyear #2015 #2014 #ootd #fashion #daily #ootd #ootdeny #fashionlivesonootd #fashionland #denver

marilis0n, claudiousb smashkins19 and 103 others like this.
Stage 6:

This stage reminded me how nice it was to be at school. Being home, it is hard to take the photos because the only model I have is myself. My mom helps take some of the photos (I art direct) but it isn't the same. I don't have the large pool of millennials to pull from for modeling.

This stage I also wanted to try a few of the apps out that promote getting “likes” and followers. I used it only for the last post, but noticed an increase! Next stage, I will use these applications more heavily. I am worried though that while my followers and likes increase, my followers won't be from the right target or as engaged.

Using the top hashtags hasn't given me a huge response. I think that because they are so massively used that my posts get lost in a sea.

Ironically, I helped my mom set up an Instagram post during this stage. She posted a picture of our bulldog and used three hashtags. Within minutes, 5 random people liked her photo. I think that because she posted to a specific niche, it got more attention. The bulldog-loving world is very loyal. The hashtags style, beauty, fashion and the other words that surround my niche are very popular on the web.

My most popular post before using the apps was a “selfie” of a smirk and a lipstick. I felt self conscious posting it, but all my friends seemed to love it. Looking back, it is one of my favorite pictures. This social media project has taught me to be more confident.

I've also been tagging brands in almost all of my pictures this stage. I haven't seen a huge impact from that either (even though the Internet says it helps!)

My picture with 104 likes is one of my favorites. I think the artistic side of it helped it get tons of likes. For this one, I only used the app for “25 likes” but received many more.

Stage 6 Stats: For this stage's posts:

Total Posts: 42 Total Likes: 30+32+38+49+25+38+104 = 316 (WAY up)
Following: 114 Likes From People I Know: 27+30+35+44+23+29+35= 223
Followers: 188 Likes From Randoms: 3+2+3+5+2+9+69= 93 (up!)
Followers that I know: 147 Average Likes Per Post: 45.14
Followers that I don't know: 41 Total Comments (People I Know/Randoms/Total): (0/0/0)
maitakeonstyle
3 months ago - Denver, Colorado
Splurged yesterday for this @madewell1937 transport tote bag. I've been looking at it for a year and finally gave in... And I can confirm that it was totally worth all my Christmas money. 🐐 #madewell #tote #bag #purse #fashion #style #love #iphone #me #cute #leather #shopping #winter #camel #colorado #denver #milehigh #follow #like #fff #fl #blogger #college #nyc #newyork

❤️ patricaixaans, smashkins19, lavenderandvine and 91 others like this.

madelinemkelly
so, I got this for my birthday in black 🐰

cremedemichelle

maitakeonstyle
3 months ago - Syracuse University
Best part about getting back to school? Having my friends' clothes to admire! This @jcrew vest is the perfect way to bring in color to your dark winter outfits. #fashion #style #love #instagood #cute #follow #followme #happy #girl #like #fun #winter #vest #plaid #friends #igers #installike #blogger #fashionblogger #jcrew #vsco #vsccam

❤️ amandaesebringg, apicwithus_official, kat_sid_sr and 127 others like this.
3 months ago · @Syracuse University
If you don't have a @birchbox subscription...you're missing out! Every month, a personalized box is delivered to your door filled with the best goodies!!! 💥🎁❤️ #fashion #style #birchbox #beauty #makeup #hair #products #lipstick #packaging #january #2015 #pink #love #instagood #iphone #follow #like #colorful #cute #followme

❤️ schizophrenia4_1, b_ebtial, eyyub_eliev and 83 others like this.

Leave a comment...

3 months ago · @Syracuse University
Story of my life... #clean #dirty #fashion #outfit #quote #ootd #love #pinterest #tumblr #iphone #girl #college #follow #like #141 #awesome #funny #teenagers #young #messy #chaos

❤️ gc0a1l. fandoms_are_eudite_swiftie_tribute and 109 others like this.

Ha ha ha yup😊❤️

Leave a comment...
maitakeonstyle
3 months ago · Syracuse University
Breaking out the @llbean boots! #winter #cold #boots #fashion #style #beanboots #syracuse #love #instagood #cute #girl #happy #snow #iphoneonly #newyork #like #follow #awesome #college #school #shoes #shoegram #bootgram #snowgram #llbean

♥ nequinn... smashkins19... high80s and 108 others like this.

wangfee
nice @joee4u

maitakeonstyle
3 months ago · Destiny USA
Forever21: where college savings go to die...even when you're 22. #forever21 #22 #shopping #mall #fashion #style #beauty #follow #love #clothes #awesome #broke #iphone #instagood #like #colorful #21 #girl @forever21

♥ pierotris... smashkins19... michael.effiom and 65 others like this.

upachevaradislavaf1d
Follow @juliancamarena 😊

Leave a comment...
I literally do not care at all.
Stage 7:

If there is one thing I've learned this stage, it is that the more liked your pictures has…the more likes it gets. I think people get nervous about being one of the first 11 “likes” in which their name is shown under the picture. After 11, they just are added to the number count.

I've been using the “like” app to test this theory. Every time I post a photo, I give it a half hour to see which of my friends like it. Then, I go and use the app to get around 25 likes per picture (you do so by liking others posts in return). After the 25 likes have been added to my post total, my friends and followers start liking my photos more. It has gotten to the point where I no longer will divide my likers/comments/followers by relationship because there are too many.

Someone also copied my photo and used it on their Instagram. While I was in shock at first, apparently this is a form of flattery in the world of Instagram (as long as they give you credit). I also figured out that geotagging photos can have a very positive result. This is how I was copied, because I used the geotag “DENVER” and then the Denver Hair Salon copied it...even though the photo was taken in Syracuse. I am curious if location changes how often your pictures get seen...I'm assuming it does. In a few weeks when I go to NYC, I will test this theory out some more.

I've also realized that my followers love sass. Really. I posted two pictures with text. One said “My room was clean but then I had to get dress” and the other was a picture of a shirt that said “I literally do not care at all.” I received many comments on both of these. The room picture got attention from locals that I consider “Instafamous” like a photographer I know on campus that has 4,000 followers. He liked the photo, which I am assuming he found through my geotag of “Syracuse University.”

My random comments are up though! This is a good thing to see. As much as I love my friends commenting on my stuff, having a larger audience is better. This is the first time I've had 4 comments from random people on my photos! It was equal to my friend comments, so I feel like I am reaching the right audience. I also changed my avatar. I was wondering if the text-only logo avatar made my profile impersonal and intimidating. We shall see!

Things I'm annoyed with: Instagram history doesn't let you go back very far. I wanted to see my conversations with other accounts via comments in my history and now it is forever lost. I will have to take many screen shots on my phone now so that I can have it all.

Stage 7 Stats:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stat</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Following</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
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<td>Followers</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Likes</td>
<td>92+129+84+112+106+67+94= 684 (DOUBLE last stage!!!!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Likes Per Post</td>
<td>97.714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Comments (People I Know/Randoms/Total)</td>
<td>(4/4/8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
maitakeonstyle
3 months ago · Syracuse University
If you're not using this urbandecaycosmetics makeup setting spray...you're missing out! It's called "All Nighter" for a reason! 😍😍😍 (this size is only $14 at @sephora) #urban #decay #urbandecay #makeup #fashion #style #trend #follow #like #advice #product #review #sephora #ulta #love #instagood #followme #girl #beauty #pinterest

❤️ lamjorgeasante, smashkins19, bngsmld and 56 others like this.

maitakeonstyle
3 months ago · Syracuse University
1. I've always been jealous of people with red hair. 2. A simple fishtail braid is the best way to keep your hair from becoming a knotty mess in this winter weather...I know from experience 😥😥😥 #hair #hairstyle #winter #style #fashion #cold #redhead #red #colorful #cold #fishtail #followme #follow #like #brrr #beanie #purple #redhair #british #syracuse #newyork #ny

❤️ imagine_crazy2, taif_assiri, smashkins19 and 95 others like this.

belles2593
❤️

Leave a comment...
maitakeonstyle
3 months ago · @Syracuse University
Sparkly flats + crazy patterned rug = can't lose. #flats #pattern #shoes #fashion #style #follow #like #followme #black #sparkle #glitter #crazy #rug #blogger #saturday #love #girl #iphone

❤️ scorpio_x.o_. o.nly.sh, smashkins19 and 87 others like this.

maitakeonstyle
3 months ago · @Syracuse University
So much tea, so little time. ☕️ davidstea #tea #style #blogger #tumblr #greentea #looseleaf #coffee #winter #colorful #artsy #love #instagood #iphone #cafe #davidstea #newyork #nyc #cute #favorite #yum #instadrink #instafood #like #follow #followme #popular #cool #photography

❤️ maitakeonstyle, smashkins19, teascentive and 80 others like this.

reese1231
😊

❤️ Leave a comment...
"All it takes is 20 seconds of insane courage and great things will happen, I promise" - Benjamin Mee. This Sunday, take time to relax but also channel your inner courage for the week ahead! #lifestyle #quote #blog #like #follow #followme #awesome #brave #inspiring #inspiration #floral #love #instaquote #sunday
Stage 8:

This stage has been filled with funny encounters. My personal favorites (in the Instagram world):

1. Someone liked four of my photos, then unfollowed me. WHAT DOES THAT EVEN MEAN?!? I'm yet to understand.
2. I sent a request through Honors that a listserv went out asking people to follow my capstone project. I did some research, and there are approximately 850 honors students right now that received that email. Making a blanket assumption that half are females, that would leave me with 425 that the message would be relevant to. How many new followers did I get after that email? 44!!! A little over 10% of the assumed female population chose to follow me. I'm not sure if that is a good number or not. I can't assume that fashion and style are important things to 425 women who are busy with their own honors requirements. I am so happy to have reached 300 followers though! I also looked at the SU Honors' Instagram and it currently has around 100 followers so I think my account insights could help them!

I installed an app that shows you who follows you / unfollows you. I have lost about 25 followers since starting my account. Most of these were ones I gained when I tested out the "get followers" app...which proves that although you can do many things to easily get followers, they are not loyal nor do they have interest in your actual account. I am glad to be rid of them. I've also found my research last stage to be true: the more likes you have, the more likes you'll get. I think people want to think that by liking something that is already popular...they are agreeing with their peers and sharing an interest. I use an app to help my posts get their first 25 likes, and then leave the rest to my followers. I count these 25 likes into my final totals.

I've been a little behind on producing content. The snow storm and grey atmosphere made it hard to shoot. I got a new lens that attaches to my iPhone! It does macro shots, fisheye, and wide angle. I definitely want to test it out this stage on some of my posts.

More than ever, I am realizing that social media is a very personal thing to people...even though they share it for all to see. The things people post, and like, need to be a direct representation of how they see their lives - or more importantly what they want their lives to be like. I read an article on the popularity of "rich kid instagrams" and how making others jealous gets you more followers. Perhaps this next stage, I'll try to evoke some jealousy and see how that works. Side note: No one cares about makeup.

My favorite post this stage was my business casual outfit with the Aztec necklace. I felt awesome in this outfit and it was cool to see that my followers liked it too. This is the first stage I've really loved every single post. The tea one and carpet one also are my favorites. Note: One of my friends didn't comment, but wanted to know more about a product. She texted me and ended up buying it!

Stage 8 Stats:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Posts:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Following:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Followers:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Likes:</td>
<td>58+97+88+81+104+107+97= 632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Likes Per Post:</td>
<td>90.285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Comments (People I Know/Randoms/Total):</td>
<td>(2/0/2) (down)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
maitakeonstyle
2 months ago · Syracuse University
A week full of food poisoning and exams left me out of commission! Back in action with one of my favorite outfits - a floral body con skirt and grid texture crop top.

ución #style #trend #trendy #clothes #college #blogger #floral #shopping #ootd #tsm #cool #follow #like #love #iphone #instafashion #skirt #black #vsccam #vsco #instagood #trending #urban #target #shopping #outfit

❤️ celebritytray_smashkins19 ssozier_ and 98 others like this.

maitakeonstyle
2 months ago · Syracuse University
A girl can never have too many hair bows. #hair #now #fashion #style #tsm #girlly #blogger #college #follow #like #instafashion #instahair #instabeauty #iphone #forever21 #black #mint #pink #teal #girl #vsco #vsccam

❤️ christine_lives_wild smashkins19 xoxo.taty and 96 others like this.

Leave a comment...
maitakeonstyle
2 months ago - New York, New York
My best friend killin' it in the workforce with these olive
green trousers from @Zara (they even have a black silk
stripe on the inside). #fashion #style #blogger
#trousers #zara #trend #trendy #love #ootd #clothes
#shopping #silk #nyc #newyork #instafashion

_vale0362 marykimsalon, smashkins19 and 104 others
like this.

maitakeonstyle
2 months ago - Syracuse University
I'm a sucker for blue, anything blue. #earings #blue
#stone #fashion #style #jewelry #unique #trend
#trendy #gold #ear #winter #follow #like #followme
#instajewelry #instyle #iphone

immosilla, smashkins19, 1000kmawny and 39 others like
this.

belles2593
I want these

miadizzledulude
😌

ro_bass
Check out @sweetfarmjewelry - she's local and makes
stuff that might be up your alley!

truebhatt
@belles2593 Francesca's

belles2593
@truebhatt 💫💫💫
"Whether you need a refresher course about which is the salad fork, or a crash course in how to keep your top on at a party, this book is for you." This book is one of my absolute favorites and gets better with each page turn. #style #fashion #classy #book #read #favorite #reading #blogger #tumblr #derekblasberg #nyt #nyc #newyork #derekblasberg #bestseller #like #follow #manners #trashy #lady #teamfollowback
Stage 9:

So, I feel a little behind on the project. I think that one of the most important things I have learned through this project, and it pains me to say this, is:

Social media isn’t always fun.

In fact, I often feel like I am carrying around a ball and chain that begs me to post every single day and comment on other posts and like things and campaign for followers. Becoming Instagram famous is not easy.

It is not an excuse, but I did have food poisoning. That kicked me out of commission for a least four days. I do not recommend you get it. I also had mid terms. I am constantly asking myself: “How do people do this?!?”

This was one of my worst stages as far as numbers go. I did not do the best that I could.

On that note…

Stage 9 Stats:

Total Posts: 63

Following: 102 (I have slowly been unfollowing accounts)

Followers: 310 (I only gained 5 followers…)

For this stage’s posts:

Total Likes: 77+85+100+98+105+39+55 = 559

Average Likes Per Post: 79.857

Total Comments (People I Know/Randoms/Total): (4/3/7) (THIS IS UP!!! This is especially exciting because there are many comments from people I do not know)
DRESS HOW YOU WANT TO BE ADDRESSED
IS BUTTER A CARB?

maitakeonstyle
2 months ago · Syracuse University
A question I ask myself daily...now available in T-shirt form at @vspink 😂智能化 #fashion #style #quote #funny #meangirls #pink #vspink #victoriassecret #shirt #shopping #follow #like #lol #iphone #ootd #healthy #instafashion #teamfollowback

❤️ malaalmahall. smashkins19. maquigley18 and 37 others like this.

maitakeonstyle
1 month ago · Syracuse University
#SPRINGBREAK #finally #warmth #sun #domican #tan #sb2k15 #bikini #swimsuit #fashion #style #cheetah #victoriassecret #pink #cobalt #blue #travel #fit #bend #like #follow #blogger #instafashion #teamfollowback

❤️ malaalmahall. barimargolis. smashkins19 and 44 others like this.

Katrinaasot

Emily

I approve

fallonnortinez2

SO CUTEEEE
These @urbandecaycosmetics eyeliners are the best way to pump up your eyes. The rich colors stay on without smudging - all of your wildest dreams come true! #makeup #eyeliner #urbandecay #fashion #beauty #style #colorful #trendy #follow #like #iphone #instabeauty #blogger #empire #love #followme

ajtamilisarahkingston.smashkins19 and 21 others like this.
Stage 10:

Another frustrating stage.

I was gone on Spring Break for 9 days without cellular service or Wifi, so the project took a break. Over the break though, I concluded that I need to step up my game.

Next stage, I will be asking the Milestone Program to send out an email regarding my project.

I also noticed that my profile was set to “Private.” I have no idea how this happened, as it originally was set to Public. I'm guessing an update may have reset it. This is frustrating because it means my content and utilization of hashtags was not reaching non-followers. I think this is a reason I lost 4 followers and did not make up the difference. Usually, I will lose 4 but gain 8. Obviously, I reset my account to "Public."

Something I have been noticing is how other Instagrammers use popular hashtags to get into the “Popular” stream. They utilize hashtags that have NOTHING to do with the actual image or account, but that they know will get them noticed. I can’t decide if this is an “ethical” way to get followers or likes. Are there ethics in social media?

I haven’t been using my like app this stage, but I am going to start again for stage 11.

Stage 10 Stats:

Total Posts: 70

Following: 102 (I have slowly been unfollowing accounts)

Followers: 310 (the second time ever my numbers did not increase)

For this stage’s posts:

Total Likes: 39+26+38+45+28+36+105 = 210 (significantly down)

Average Likes Per Post: 44.285

Total Comments (People I Know/Randoms/Total): (4/1/5)
Colors of the seasons

There are few things harder to walk away from than an Essie polish display.

iammosilla, heyitsmadison___, smashkins19 and 105 others like this.

Tried on a $300 Adrianna Papell dress today because I feel like it. 😏 #treatyoself #fashion #style #dress #fancy #colorful #expensive #floral #gorgeous #want #shopping #prom #adriannapapell #dreamdress #trends #bright #iphone #selfie #wishlist #mirrorpic #follow #like #lindsaytaylor #lindsaytaylor #teamfollowback

emmarosevivian

Beautiful dress! I used to work at L&T in that very department! Looks like they finally got rid of the horrific old carpeting.

maitakeonstyle

😊 yes, much better flooring now @ro_bass

Leave a comment...
IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE IN LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT, YOU'VE BEEN SHOPPING AT ALL THE WRONG PLACES.
maitakeonstyle
2 weeks ago · 9 Syracuse University
What's black, white, and red all over? @michaelkors
#michaelkors #fashion #purse #trendy #follow #like
#style #shopping #kors #clutch #red #black #white
#floral #instagood #instafashion #teamfollowback

smashkins19, maquigley18, catdogcavs and 39 others like this.

ddiane5
Am I famous yet?

maitakeonstyle
2 weeks ago · 9 New York, New York
On this episode of "Maia Tries On Expensive Clothing She Can't Afford" - a two piece ensemble that replicates what Sarah Hyland wore for the 2014 Emmys 😊 #fancy #expensive #sarahhyland #emmys #emmy #fashion #style #blogger #like #follow #instafashion
#lordandtaylor #prom #promseason #coral #white #shopping #ootd #formal #followme @lordandtaylor
@therealsarahhyland #emmys2014 #teamfollowback

i10na95, smashkins19, britt_stafford04 and 45 others like this.

emmacunnington
Omg yes. Recognized this dress immediately hahah so pretty

uhohitzhannah
This is beautiful!!
new york city bitch.
Stage 11:

This stage I learned that the Internet, although an alternative universe, can have your back at times. I posted to Reddit (a popular Online forum) looking for followers that would be interesting in my fashion blog and my followers SKYROCKETED! Woohoo!

Also, I think I’ve come across my biggest insight yet: People like expensive things. This may not be an actual shocking insight, but it has proved to peak my followers and likes on each photo. I’ve made a habit of strolling through the mall and trying to find the most expensive things possible to try on and take photos of. I think people like living vicariously through these pictures and seeing the unattainable. I also recently read an article about jealousy and Instagram that confirms my notions. (http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/15/fashion/instagram.html?_r=0).

I’m wrapping up my capstone project and do more of the writing portion now more than ever. It is amazing to see how far this account has come in 80 images.

Stage 11 Stats:

Total Posts: 77
Following: 104
Followers: 350

For this stage posts:

Total Likes: 108+51+42+32+41+48+32 = 354  (way up again!)
Average Likes Per Post: 50.57
Total Comments (People I Know/Randoms/Total): (3/3/6)
be beautiful
be yourself
Overall Growth

Follower Growth

Number of Followers

Stage 0  Stage 1  Stage 2  Stage 3  Stage 4  Stage 5  Stage 6  Stage 7  Stage 8  Stage 9  Stage 10  Stage 11  As of April 20

28.57  38  72  76  134  134  172  186  261  305  310  310  350  369

Overall Growth
For comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Account Name</th>
<th>Age of Account</th>
<th>Posts</th>
<th>Followers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>@SyracuseU</td>
<td>171 weeks</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>29,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@NewhouseSU</td>
<td>117 weeks</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>372</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@MaiTakeOnStyle</td>
<td>25 weeks</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>369</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>@SUHonors</td>
<td>173 weeks</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- @MaiaCollette is my personal Instagram account
To be continued...
Reflective Essay

BEEEEEEP. BEEEEEEEEP. My alarm goes off. I scramble to find my iPhone and turn the alarm off while trying to keep the sheets as close to my body as possible. I’m not ready to leave the warm bliss of my bed yet. I don’t want to feel my feet hit the cold wooden floor, and I’m definitely not ready to think about what the weather means for my outfit decision. As I try to come to terms with the fact that I will have to get out of bed, I type my password into my phone. I go through all possible forms of smartphone communication, as I do every morning: text messages, emails, Facebook, Twitter, and then Instagram. Each of these apps is on the main home screen of my iPhone because they are utilized so often.

I start from the top of my Instagram feed, viewing the most recent posted picture. I meticulously scroll down, seeing who is in the pictures and reading the captions. Where were they? Why? Where is that dress from? My fingers tap the screen to like a photo of my best friend. I keep going through the posts until I catch up to where I left off the last time I utilized the app, usually right before I went to bed the night before. I laugh at the irony of this. Technology, phones in particular, has replaced everything from our alarms to our cameras, our yellow page books, and phone calls. Platforms like Instagram even change what we speak about. We no longer have to ask what our friends did last night, because we have seen the proof via social media. And I’m not alone. My roommate calls over from her bed: “Mai – did you see Jason went to Chuck’s last night?! Alex posted a picture of them on Instagram!” Before we have consumed our morning coffee, the millennial generation has communicated via social media everything we need to know about each other’s life in the last twenty-four hours.

Technology, by definition, is “the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry (Webster.com).” We align technology with the left-brain and
often choose to separate its innovativeness from the description of creative. So, I wondered – is technology creative? Daily, technology acts as a sidekick to creativity. It allows us to take pictures of a sunset, film our friends doing a new skateboarding trick, and pumps music into our heads through ear buds. In the year 2015, increasingly more forms of visual creative communication are using technology as their backbone – whether it be through the Adobe Suite or social media. Concert posters that used to be wheat pasted on to city walls across the country are now being shared via social media instead. Most consider technology a means of communication, but ignore the creativity it ignites. Instagram in particular utilizes many forms of creativity, from copywriting to photo editing. To use Instagram, one must decide first an image to broadcast to their network. Then, they adjust the image to make it look “perfect” by adjusting aspects like brightness and contrast. They write copy to make sure the image is portrayed correctly to the right audience. Individuals utilize Instagram in a unique way to fulfill their expectation of the “perfect post.” By this process alone, I have determined that social media is not just simply creative; it is the millennial generation’s creative.

Confirmation that social media is creative can be seen through all types of Instagram accounts, but those who refine their craft especially well become “Instafamous” on the platform. These accounts are usually not personal accounts, but instead target a niche audience with impactful visuals and copy utilizing a persona. Their content is followed by thousands of interacting accounts that “like” and comment on the daily photos these accounts post. The time and effort put into these posts attracts people to Instagram accounts, just as a beautiful painting attracts a buyer. Brands fail to surpass Instafamous accounts because Instafamous account content is more personal and trustworthy. Instafamous content is more authentically creative. Knowing that certain Instagram accounts are more successful than others at this creatively
targeting an audience and producing content, I wanted to explore the path an account takes in order to gain followers and popularity.

How does one captivate an audience of strangers by utilizing a visual social media platform? Why do people who are not famous, nor sponsored, have loyal followers – most of which have never seen the account holder in person. Most importantly, how does one replicate this? Is it even replicable? These are the questions I asked myself before diving in.

Ever since I can remember, I’ve replicated the styles and fashions I saw on television. If D.J. Tanner from Full House was wearing floral pants and a blue turtleneck, I wanted floral pants and a blue turtleneck. I received my fashion cues from the media, not being restricted to a particular form. As I grew older, I turned to magazines and online forums to learn about fashion from insiders, or self-proclaimed experts, in the fashion and beauty realm. With the invention of Instagram, I began following these niche fashion and style accounts that are considered “Instafamous.” I get inspiration for my personal look and style from these accounts that I admire. I know the in’s and out’s of the account holders’ lives, even though I have no idea who these people actually are because I am exposed to them daily through social media. I comment on their pictures, like their pictures – fully knowing that I am a drop of water in an ocean of their followers. Their personal stories and anecdotes about fashion are compelling and keep me a loyal follower.

Instead of sitting down and gawking at others’ Instagram famousness, I wanted to try my own social media savvy-ness out. Could I use my love for art direction and graphic design to collaborate with social media in an effective way? There is no research done on how niche Instagram accounts grow or personal testimonies on the expansion of a following so I would
have to forge my own path. Books exists like *Instagram for Dummies* but they lacked insight into what makes a niche Instagram successful, instead just offering how-to’s of making a personal account and so forth. Reading through blogs, some users offered suggestions but didn’t remember the exact steps taken or by how much these steps improved their following. I wanted numerical data to back my intuition and wanted to have a strict yes/no answer on what worked and what didn’t – all while creating beautiful images.

The main problem is that no one understands the cycle that an Instagram account goes through to increase followers and gain popularity, so advertisers and brands alike are not using the platform in the most efficient way to reach a target audience. Instead, they are throwing money into the application as sponsored content in hopes that it is successful. If Instagram famousness can be understood and broken down into a series of creative and strategic steps, there will be more success for brands. I set out to, on a smaller scale, build a following using a fashion-based niche account in order to solve these problems and create unique fashion images along the way.

First, my account needed a name – as all accounts do. I realized that the most popular Instagram accounts I followed were often catchy or included puns in their names. I came up with a list of about twenty possible names that could allude to the fact that my account was fashion-based but also not just an unknown brand account. After much deliberation and checking account name availability, I decided on MaiTakeOnStyle. My name is Maia, pronounced like Maya, so by removing the ending “a” of my name the Mai acted phonetically as “my.” I originally had my heart set on MaiStyle, but that account was taken by someone who had not posted content in over 40 weeks. I tried to contact the account holder to see if they would sell me the name, but
received no response. MaiTakeOnStyle became my identity. This account would be my take on things, style in particular. The content would be filtered through a college female’s eyes. I would not just pull my content from Vogue or ELLE. I needed this account to reflect how I perceived the fashion and beauty that was occurring around me, not replicating large-scale magazine campaigns and opinions.

The next important thing to do was the give my account a brand. I needed to decide what type of photos I was going to post, what mood I wanted to set, and whom I wanted to target. How did I want to be known in the world of Instagram?

Artistically, I chose to do what I am attracted to. I wanted to have images that embraced color yet did not overpower the viewer. My images needed to have strong composition that attracted the viewer quickly in a sea of related photos. Most importantly, I wanted all my images to be relatable to the millennial girl. (Define your audience.) I wasn’t going to post toddler clothing or boy’s clothing, I had to stick to my target. I wanted my account to embrace the fashionable and trendy, but not be preppy. I wanted to show my love for the unique yet functional fashion that exists. I have not come across a famous fashion Instagram account that encompasses all types of fashion successfully. To be successful, you must choose a genre and stick with it to attract the target audience effectively. Before each post, I would ask myself: Would I like this picture if this wasn’t my account? If the answer was no, I didn’t post it. My copywriting for the images had to have personality to engage the viewer and make them want to comment and like the images. I wasn’t sure what would work though, as I saw successful accounts that took both analytical approaches and personal approaches in order to reach their target. I went into the capstone project knowing that my copywriting would have to evolve quickly. Most importantly, the combination of all of the assets needed to make me, an unknown
account, appealing to follow. I dug deep into the Internet and scoured for any information that
could help me become Instafamous – and in large I left frustrated realizing that not much
information exists about the subject.

Next, I had to start creating content. For a week, I started taking photos of anything and
everything that was fashionable in front of my eyes. I only took photos with my iPhone because I
wanted to remain true to the original medium of Instagram. Some accounts choose to utilize
photos taken utilizing a DSLR camera but this process is lengthy and does not stay true to the
original function of Instagram. The photos that I took before I started posting to my account did
last for a while, but I ending up having to produce much more content than I could have ever
imagined. Producing content was one of the most difficult aspects of this project, as I needed to
have an image that was relevant and worthy of being shown to followers every single day. Your
account can lose many followers each day if the people that follow you are not enjoying your
content.

After I had an image ready to publish, the copy needed to be written. This evolved greatly
during the process, as at first I was writing more analytically and stating places and prices but
near the end I was telling stories and making jokes. I thought the journalistic approach might be
attractive to the millennial audience because they could quickly find out where an item was sold
and how much it cost, but this wasn’t a successful approach. I changed my copywriting direction
one week into my capstone. I both wanted and needed to show my personality through the posts
and gain followers who were interested in my specific opinions and stories, I needed to bring
forth emotion. I realized that there are literally thousands, if not millions, of fashion Instagram
accounts, so mine had to be more than just the fashion. I started posting content that was tied to
memories, like my great grandma’s old buttons and a purse I fell in love with in Italy. The
account was a window into why I wore what I wore, and proof that appearance isn’t the only facet to fashion. People want to know the “why” of fashion and beauty.

After my caption for the post was written, I needed to use hashtags (#). A hashtag acts as a link so that content can become connected to similar items on a social media platform. Hashtags are the only part that is “clickable” in a photo description on Instagram. Hashtags can range from brand names to funny phrases, for example I often used #Forever21 and #LoveThisOutfit. If one of my followers clicked on #Forever21, they would be lead to a mosaic of photos that all utilized that same hashtags. This is how your account can be found by other accounts, and therefore gain followers and attention. Before I posted, I did a Google search of the top trending hashtags. These hashtags change daily and often correlate to trending news topics. I sought out which ones were relevant to use with my account. I then added brand hashtags and hashtags that encouraged others to follow me. Lastly, I would “tag” the brand. Tagging allows you to click on your photo and link your content to the account of the brand. If someone were to go to Forever21’s Instagram account and click on their “tagged photos” link, a few of my photos would be there. If people are passionate about a brand, they often look at these tagged photos and will follow accounts that show their preferred brand often.

A touch of a finger published my content to Instagram after the hashtag and tagging process. The process usually took anywhere from ten minutes to two hours from start to finish. I also linked my Instagram account with a Tumblr I created so that I could intertwine my weekly updates with the visuals. When the content was posted to Instagram, it was also posted to my Tumblr page. This Tumblr was an easy way to track my progress and write down numerical data on my account. The numerical data allowed me to know what worked, and how effectively if so. The posts, by themselves, are as equally creative as the images. I attempted to be as honest
and real as possible – even when admitting failure. I wanted others to be able to pick the brain of someone with an Instagram account.

My next step was to campaign for followers. I did not want my following to only be friends though. I needed to make sure my account was getting attention from strangers that were interested in the topic. To kick-start my capstone, I sent out mass messages to my friends. Throughout the time period, I utilized different techniques to intrigue people and encourage them to follow my account. I even sent out a message through the Reneé Crown Honors Program email list! I interviewed Instafamous accounts and read blogs that claimed to have all the answers (surprise: They didn’t). After each of these steps, I watched my account evolve and I was able to receive insights from the results.

I can’t believe I’m about to say this, but I have to: I’m sick of Instagram. There – I did it! Creating content, writing copy, and researching hashtags everyday became tedious. I only missed posting on days that I was extremely sick, during exam periods, and when I did not have Internet (travel in foreign countries). I didn’t enjoy the feeling of waking up everyday and knowing I had to post something. It seems as though I was the epitome of the stereotypical millennial female - glued to my phone. I noticed that a majority of the Instafamous accounts consist of multiple people behind the persona on the account. There is a photographer, a stylist, a copywriter, and a social media savvy specialist. I, on the other hand, attempted to do it all. I wish I could have made this capstone project a collaborative effort in order to produce more content and be more efficient. To be truly successful at Instagram in the long term, I believe you need more than one person on an account team. Millennials are used to seeing mass amounts of content per day, so they could easily get restless and bored with me if I was not posting enough. I considered
utilizing Hootsuite, a social media tool that lets you schedule your posts in advance so that you do not physically have to post the day of. Hootsuite currently does not support Instagram though, so I could not plan out my posts for months in advance. They are currently testing a beta version, but users report multiple problems and do not trust the app completely yet.

I noticed that almost all of the most popular Instagram accounts had a gimmick, or highly unique factor, that made them stand out above all the rest. For example, one popular account is done by a pair of blonde twins from the south. Another popular makeup account is done by a female that had two different eye colors. I wish I had refined my gimmick better to attract followers out of intrigue alone. I originally intended my gimmick to be that I was a young, college female who intended to share fashion and beauty trends that were attainable and real, but I don’t think that was enough for long term success. I still don’t know something extremely unique that I could have utilized for this, but I do think it would have made my account gain popularity quicker.

Another change I would make, looking back, would be to possibly do men’s fashion. It would be hard to keep the content relevant for both sexes, but I think I could have increased my followers overall. I had requests from male friends to start adding in content specifically for them, but I decided not to because I wanted to stick to my original target audience of female millennials so that I would not have a third variable in my data. I do think that a specific male-target fashion account would do better than a female Instagram account because simply there are not as many accounts to compete with for attention. There is a large portion of male account holders on Instagram, so the need for a men’s fashion account definitely exists.

I started using quotes as a part of my Instagram content. I found that this worked well for days that I was not fond of the content I originally had prepared, and it resonated well with my
audience. These quotes helped me build a stronger persona and connect. Graphic design is one of my hobbies, so I would make these all in Indesign and send them out. The typographic treatment of these quotes helped establish exactly what mood I wanted my Instagram to embody. I wish I had started to do this sooner in my project because the quotes always got a lot of attention and the hashtag #quote is extremely popular. Visually, these quotes added variety to the collection of posts.

I also wonder if I had utilized a better camera, such as a DSLR digital camera, if my account would have had even more success. I wanted to stay true to the original Instagram format, but I think that many famous accounts invest in high quality images to differentiate themselves from other posts. There is an undeniable clarity with DSLR photos verses iPhone photos, no matter how advanced our phones may be. My phone allowed me to take pictures of myself to put up on the Instagram though, whereas I could not do that with a DSLR camera. When the iPhone 6 came out, the photos became even clearer because of the upgraded camera. I often borrowed friends’ iPhone 6’s (I have an iPhone 5) to take better quality photos while staying true to the Instagram application’s original intentions of utilizing cell phone images.

Going abroad during the planning stage of this capstone was a foreseen difficulty. I came back and felt behind schedule, even though our dates had been adjusted a little bit. It would have been nice to bounce my capstone ideas off of more people in a conversational manner than through email so that I felt fully prepared to start the project. I wish there could have been capstone project forums abroad. While the fashion in London is fantastic, it is much different than American fashion. I knew my target would be mostly American millennials (from geo tagging and select hashtags I was utilizing), so it was harder to create content while abroad unless I strictly used the students within the abroad program.
Understanding that little failures are also successes would have been nice to know earlier on. As my reader, Mr. Jason Kohlbrenner said, “Even if your account doesn’t grow, at least you will know what doesn’t work.” I became frustrated when my numbers wouldn’t raise as much as I had expected or when I only gained two followers in comparison to the 15 the week before. Not only were these failures a reflection of my strategy, but they were also a reflection of my creativity that week. As my project progressed, I learned to interpret these numbers to lead to successes in the following weeks.

I don’t remember being taught how to Instagram, and based on a round-table discussion with my peers, most of the millennial generation does not either. We remember vaguely when we got our accounts but not actually learning how to use them. We don’t remember how we got followers or how we learned about hashtags. To us, we grew up with social media so it seemed like second nature. In general though, we all got Instagram accounts in late high school or early college and they naturally developed over time. When we joined new groups or came to college, our following automatically grew. We personally knew most of our followers, so getting likes or comments on our pictures wasn’t an issue. Throughout this process, I learned for the first time how new users must feel as they are introduced to social media. Trying to do something that you didn’t grow up with learning is frustrating, especially if there are no books written about it.

As cliché as it sounds, I was influenced by everything around me. I constantly was observing the fashion on campus, the fashion in New York City while I was visiting there, the fashion online, and the fashion of celebrities. I scanned display windows at Destiny USA to see what was a common theme in the upcoming fashion and how it could be transferred to the millennial female. I looked at Pinterest and Tumblr for trends and what was being pushed by
other fashion and style lovers. There was a conscious choice about what my content was going to look like and where it was going to go next. I needed my images to be current and with the trends, but also able to forecast what the masses have been looking at but not sure if they are ready to try out for themselves.

I admire accounts that focus on the product as being the hero instead of skewing them with photo editing. I hate going online to purchase a product I saw via Instagram and then seeing it was a totally different color or size than previously pictured. My Instagram account needed to earn the viewer’s trust and keep it by not over-editing the photos. A lot of famous Instagram accounts gain followers by using stunning, supermodel-like females to place the product on. I realized that while people say they want to see real looking models, the general public takes pleasure in seeing the unattainable because it is fascinating and subliminally makes us jealous. While these images look beautiful and are fun to look at, I wanted my account to be more real. I was inspired by the site CollegeFashionista.com, a site that features females of all sizes showcasing their fashion at a college level. I love the honesty of showing the different sizes and colors that humans are instead of feeding into the unrealistic ideal of the female human body. Logistically, it was easier to utilize average women because I was constantly surrounded by them.

What does this all mean? Who cares about social media? It seems daunting that creative social media could have such a big impact, but if used correctly by advertisers, new target audiences could be reached and brand strength and sales would grow. Currently, advertisers and brands use money for their Instagrams to get attention. They pay for their content to be placed into account holder’s Instagram feeds, no matter if the account actually follows them or not.
Above the content, there is blue text that reads “Sponsored Content” so that the average account user knows that they are being advertised to. While at first the Instagram sponsored content did well, it now annoys users and many report it as spam. To users, Instagram is personal and these advertisers are intruding. My base outline for Instagram success could grow into a widely accepted model that brands use as an aid to gain brand recognition. With this formula, they could organically spread content, increase awareness, increase brand loyalty and recognition, as well as eventually increase revenue. Their money would not be lost on paying for Instagram advertising that isn’t pleasing the consumer, instead they would have followers that would actively choose to engage with brand. A sociologist’s and psychologist’s input could be helpful in understanding the deeper reasoning behind Instagram users’ likes and dislikes, as well as how they choose to communicate this. I have found a main factor in people “liking” an Instagram post is in relation to how jealous they are of the post. If the post seems like something the Instagram user would want for themselves, it gets more attention. Social media behavior is not a category that is fully developed and it is still rapidly changing.

I have not come across any other creative strategy experiment occurring like this right now. I want others to see that my project was innovative in the sense that it linked creative social media with numerical data, and the combination is creative in itself. There is a connection between the creative and the sciences. I think the average person thinks social media is nothing but a young person’s hobby, so I want people to view my project and understand that Instagram isn’t just pretty pictures. Instagram, when used correctly, use has the potential to change advertising and how advertising money is spent.

It is very rare to get numerical data back on a creative project. On top of that, it is even more rare that the data can be used to reflect how well an image was perceived. If you have an
art exhibit, you may have a total count of who went to the show, but you do not fully know how many people enjoyed the paintings within the show. Likewise, if you have ads on billboards or wraps on buses, you don’t have substantial numerical data to know how the public is reacting. On Instagram, your images get likes and comments to show immediately when viewers think. The total count of people following your account ebbs and flows depending on your content for the week. By analyzing my numerical data of what was getting positive feedback, I could adjust my creativity and content to be viewed more positively by more accounts. Utilizing Instagram to produce creative content allows many opinions to come into play and for the creative to evolve.

I would like to thank my advisors Dr. Carla Lloyd and my reader Prof. Jason Kohlbrenner. Both were endlessly instrumental in my work and content production. Prof. Jason Kohlbrenner constantly offered words of wisdom and ideas for content creation. He also is extremely intelligent in the marriage of technology and creativity. I took his course Interactive Fashion Communications which greatly inspired my capstone project. His understanding of content creation was crucial in helping me plan out my posts and how to link them to a Tumblr to track successes. His knowledge of the platform and vocabulary utilized made it easy to discuss my capstone at length and recover from any bumps I was hitting. Dr. Lloyd’s unwavering confidence in this project was wonderful. She discussed weekly with me the current trends in the fashion and beauty industry so that I knew my content was headed in the right direction. Being a Teacher’s Assistant in her Fashion Advertising and Promotion course aid in me understanding how fashion advertising and promotion is different from other industries and how the target responds to specifically formulated messages. Her critical analysis of the industry and attention to detail truly helped my project succeed. I cannot thank these two enough for their guidance as I developed and worked on this capstone project.
My project can be viewed in these two locations:

https://instagram.com/maitakeonstyle/

(Image posts only, original Instagram medium)

http://maitakeonstyle.tumblr.com/

(Posts and blog posts)
Sources


Terms Utilized

Active users: Users that log in and utilize their account on a regular basis. Active users participate in the social media platform by logging in, posting content, or liking and commenting on the content of others.

Afterlight: A photo editing application that I utilized for my photos

Application: Better known as an “app.” A self-contained program or piece of software designed to fulfill a particular purpose; an application, especially as downloaded by a user to a mobile device.

Caption: A written description of the photo that utilizes hashtags. This description usually has to do directly with the photo it is being posted with, but often on Instagram users use quotes as their captions as well.

Editing: A process used to change the way a picture originally appeared. Brightness, contrast, saturation, and hue are a few of the many elements that can be changed in the editing process.

Filters: Within the editing process, filters add specific visual elements formulaically to an image. For example, the “X-Pro” filter increases the contrast and saturation of photos to make them appear more vibrant and bold.

Follower: An active Instagram user who has an account, and by choice has chosen to subscribe to your account to see your content. Followers can act on a post by liking or commenting on it. They can also unfollow an account if they no longer enjoy the content.

Followers: The amount of people that actively choose to follow an Instagram account. This number is represented in the top of an account home page on Instagram.
**Hashtags**: Utilizing the # symbol followed by text, users can link their photos and content to similar photos and content. The hashtag works as an identifier for a specific topic and makes the content easily found.

**Instafamous**: A person or account that has thousands of followers on Instagram.

**Like**: An action taken by an Instagram user that indicated that they have positive feelings towards a post. They double tap their fingers on the picture and then a heart appears, showing that their “like” has been taken into account. Likes are represented numerically under the photo.

**Post**: The final product including photos, hashtags, tagging, and copywriting that is published to Instagram

**Smart phone**: A cellular phone that performs many of the functions of a computer, typically having a touchscreen interface, Internet access, and an operating system capable of running downloaded applications.

**Social media**: Websites and applications that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking.

**Tag/Tagged/Tagging**: A tag links Instagram content to another account, usually one affiliated or mentioned in the original post.

**Tumbr**: A website used for blogs or image posts. I utilized this website to make link my Instagram content with my blog posts.

**Visco**: A photo editing application that I utilized for my photos