Social Media as a Source of Creative Inspiration for Design: Students' Use of Instagram and Pinterest in Idea Generation for Interior Design at a University in USA

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Abstract

Today, social media has turned into a source of inspiration for design students and influences them to explore ideas and develop creative concepts. Indeed, eventually, once they graduate, they will employ similar approaches to the design of built-environments: architecture, interior design and landscape architecture. However, the extent to which social media is currently influencing the generation of ideas in the design studios is not well known. As an emerging phenomenon, this issue has hardly been examined. In this context, this study assesses whether browsing a visual platform actually increases creativity. It aims to determine whether Pinterest or Instagram better supports creative processes in design and to provide insight into the role of social media in design education.

The research examines social media sites and looks closely at two of them: Instagram and Pinterest, using a 'between-subjects' experimental design with 12 students. The experiment involves two groups of students from the department of design and merchandising at a Midwestern University in the United States. The students participated in two creative design tasks; the first task involved assessing their creativity using expert scoring informed by the Wallach–Kogan criteria, which measures fluency, originality, and flexibility. The second task involved the Alternate Use Test (AUT), which assesses divergent thinking.

The results of this study did not reveal statistically significant differences between the participants exposed to either Instagram or Pinterest, as indicated by surveys and creative tasks. The average survey ratings of approximately 3.7 to 4.8 out of 5 were similar on both platforms. However, Pinterest users had somewhat higher averages on the design task, while performance on the AUT was similar across both the platforms. Overall, the results show that both platforms supported creative thinking in a similar way. It thus concludes that both these platforms support the creative processes.

Keywords: Design process, creativity, Instagram, Pinterest, design ideas, interior design.

Introduction

Social media has become one of the primary sources of inspiration for students, especially in creative fields. Research shows that platforms such as Pinterest enable the Generation Z learners to explore visual ideas, organize concepts, and broaden their creative skills (Saputra, 2024). Thanks to social media platforms like Instagram and Pinterest, users can share ideas, inspiration, and spread global trends. For design and merchandising students, this is especially important because their study programs are based on creativity and the creation of new designs. What they see online can influence the way they think, making it essential to understand how platforms influence creativity. Understanding this is crucial for both the teachers and the students striving to develop their creativity skills.

The research gap in this area is very noticeable. While past research has explored whether social media influences creativity, the topic remains underexplored. It is known that social media can serve as a source of inspiration, and it might often be assumed that browsing it enhances their creativity (Wang & Kamal, 2024). However, this is rarely verified in controlled settings. Furthermore, the question of which type of social media might be more effective in stimulating creative thinking and generating new ideas also remains open for further exploration. This gap is particularly significant for design and merchandising students who draw inspiration from visual media in their projects and assignments.

In this context, this research examines how the social media influences creative thinking among the students following a design program at the University of Oklahoma, USA. Its aim is to examine how social media influences the creativity of design and merchandising students. Its objectives are as follows.

1. To comparing the impact of using Instagram and Pinterest on students' creative performance.
2. To evaluate the fluency, originality, and flexibility of ideas produced after exposure to each platform.

The research also poses the following research questions.

1. Does browsing Instagram versus Pinterest before a creative task lead to differences in design students' perceived creativity?
2. How do expert ratings of fluency, originality, and flexibility of ideas vary between students exposed to Instagram versus Pinterest before a creative task?

Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, this research involves dealing with three significant theoretical concepts: stimulus, response and creative thinking. A stimulus is any agent, change, or event that provokes a functional, physical, or behavioral reaction. In fact, according to Wikipedia, it is an internal or external change in an environment (such as light, heat, sound, touch, or a chemical signal) that is detected by a sensory receptor and triggers a reflex, cellular action, or behavioral response. Maryam Webster dictionary defines it as “an agent (such as an environmental change) that directly influences the activity of a living organism or one of its parts (as by exciting a sensory organ or evoking muscular contraction or glandular secretion).”

A response on the other hand, is something said or done as a reaction to something that has been said or done; an answer or reaction: an answer to a question, letter, email, etc. Creative thinking is the cognitive process of looking at problems, situations, or challenges from a fresh perspective to generate original, innovative, and useful solutions. It moves beyond traditional, memorized, or routine methods of problem-solving. Creative thinking can indeed be a response to a stimulus and in this case a computer program.

This study employs the widely recognized stimulus-organism-response (S-O-R) model developed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974). The S-O-R model of environment (S) stimulates cognitive states (O) that lead to behaviors or responses (R) and is often used in research on environments.

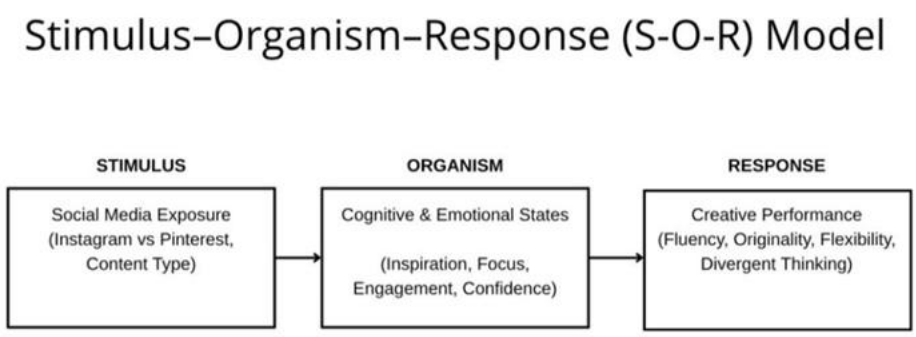


Fig. 01: A theoretical Model of S-O-R
Source: Mehrabian and Russel, 1974

Using this theoretical model, the study gains insights into how different social media platforms contribute to creative thinking among the students engaged in conceptualizing ideas for design.

Social Media Platforms

Visual Stimulation of Instagram

Social media refers to internet-based websites, apps, and digital technologies that let people create, share, and exchange content (such as text posts, photos, videos, and ideas) within virtual communities and networks. The are made available to public in terms of 'platforms' and among them Pinterest and Instagram are popular and stand out. These two platforms differ in how they present and organize visual content.

The Pinterest platform has a specific structure on both its website www.pinterest.com and app, resembling boards and pins. This structure facilitates the systematic discovery of design inspirations. Saputra (2024) describes Pinterest as a platform built around visual organization. On the other hand, Instagram (www.instagram.com) in some educational settings has been shown to support the creation of new products and stimulation through the visual media it offers (Saputra, 2024; Salehudin et al., 2021). Salehudin et al. (2021) explain that rapid visual exposure increases creative stimulation.

Generation Z students frequently use Pinterest as a source of inspiration, where they can save, organize, and share visual ideas that support both their academic and personal projects. Saputra (2024) also highlights the role of Pinterest as a creative reference tool.

According to Chai & Fan (2017), Instagram is a social media platform full of highly dynamic visual content. It allows the users to browse design-related media, interact with the creators, and follow the current trends. They also note that Instagram plays a role in visual learning. In the context of design and education, this platform fosters creativity and inspires the students to develop their own ideas. Research shows that students who used Instagram as part of creative learning activities achieved better design outcomes than those who participated in the traditional classes, indicating that the platform does indeed support the development of ideas. The findings also show strong creative performance among the students using Instagram in the learning activity. For example, they achieved an average planning score of 88.03 and a producing score of 88.17, as presented in the Table 2 (Salehudin et al., 2021).

Social media platforms-Pinterest and Instagram-will serve as the stimulus while the organism component will represent the students' cognitive and emotional states, including their perceptions of creativity, inspiration, and self-confidence. The response will be an observable creative outcome, measured by fluency, originality, flexibility, and divergent thinking.

Literature Review

Despite the fact that social media has been around for some time, research looking into their contribution to creative thinking however is somewhat rare. Nevertheless, some research does exist. For example, according to Salehudin et al. (2021), visual engagement encourages idea development. In their recent research, students have reported improved product creation skills and expressed high stimulation when using social media. Since most students often search for external inspiration online (Vilarinho-Pereira et al., 2021; Chai & Fan, 2017), these platform characteristics are particularly important.

Sigala and Chalkiti (2014) have found that social media can support creativity by expanding access to diverse knowledge. Using social media to search, share, and create information strengthens cognitive processes and stimulates idea generation. Although their research have focused on employees in the hospitality industry, the findings can be extended to the educational context, as both involve knowledge sharing and collaborative idea generation. This demonstrates how online social media platforms can function as creative environments.

In fact, according to Vilarinho-Pereira et al. (2021), social media can support student creativity through factors such as visibility, associations, and feedback, which encourage self-expression and collaboration. In design education, students' creative expression increases when they actively use social media, especially when they find it valuable and easy to navigate. However, excessive use of this method may limit creativity by distracting the students from the real-world experiences (Chai & Fan, 2017). Abdelfattah et al. (2022) emphasize that social media can also enhance students' perceived creativity, which is crucial for generating original ideas. Together, these studies indicate that the purposeful use of social media can deepen students' sense of creativity, and this supports the need to examine and compare its role in creative tasks.

Some research have revealed that social media acts as a tool for creative learning. In this connection, Sigala and Chalkiti (2014) have found that social media can support creativity by expanding access to diverse knowledge. Using social media to search, share, and create information strengthens cognitive processes and stimulates idea generation. Although their research has focused on employees in the hospitality industry, the findings can be extended to the educational context, as both involve knowledge sharing and collaborative idea generation. This demonstrates how online social media platforms can function as creative environments. According to Vilarinho-Pereira et al. (2021), social media can support student creativity through factors such as visibility, associations, and feedback, which encourage self-expression and collaboration.

In design education, students' creative expression increases when they actively use social media, especially when they find it valuable and easy to navigate. However, excessive use of this method may limit creativity by distracting students from real-world experiences (Chai & Fan, 2017). Abdelfattah et al. (2022) emphasize that social media can also enhance students' perceived creativity, which is crucial for generating original ideas. Together, these studies indicate that the purposeful use of social media can deepen students' sense of creativity, and this supports the need to examine and compare its role in creative tasks. Platform Design and Creative Behavior.

Because students often search for external inspiration online (Vilarinho-Pereira et al., 2021; Chai & Fan, 2017), these platform characteristics are particularly important. Taken together, these studies highlight the differences between Pinterest and Instagram. Pinterest supports structured organization and idea discovery (Saputra, 2024; Linder et al., 2014), while Instagram offers dynamic visual stimulation (Salehudin et al., 2021; Baten et al., 2021). Baten et al. (2021) caution that repeated exposure may reduce originality.

These studies suggest that intentional use of social media can enhance students' ability to generate new ideas. Inner Motivation and the Role of Purposeful Engagement. Gulzar et al. (2021) conducted a study on students, highlighting the role of inner motivation. They identify motivation as a key factor influencing creativity. They have focused on the students from Chinese universities and have found that social media use can increase not only creativity but also overall student engagement. The reason for this is that social media stimulates curiosity,

which leads to enjoyment and motivation to learn and create. Research confirms that social media can also have a positive impact on education. Importantly, research has demonstrated that negative online experiences, such as cyberbullying, weaken the positive effects of social media.

This directly indicates that emotions play a significant role in student engagement. For design and merchandising students, this highlights the need to develop a mindful and intentional approach to using visual platforms as creative tools, not solely as social spaces (Gulzar et al., 2021). While Gulzar et al. (2021) emphasize motivation and engagement, Baten et al. (2021) show that excessive visibility and algorithm-driven repetition may limit originality. Creative Potential of Pinterest A study done in 2013 on how users use Pinterest in their daily lives has shown that this platform can support creative thinking.

Linder et al. (2014) describe Pinterest as an environment that enables creative engagement. Pinterest is a platform that, through small user interactions like selecting, organizing, and combining images into inspiration boards, allows users to feel like they are doing something meaningful. Put simply, instead of passively browsing a feed, they can create something with purpose by combining content. The authors argue that this encourages intentional creativity. Furthermore, Linder et al. (2014) has called this 'mini-creativity', meaning small, everyday actions that have creative value. They have included twenty participants who reported using Pinterest between one and thirteen hours per week, showing that this creativity-supporting activity was part of their regular routines (Table 1).

That being said, Pinterest can serve as a studio for ideas, or even a digital environment, where users not only view others' projects but also create their own inspirations and boards. In this connection, Linder et al. (2014) describe Pinterest as an active creative workspace. They argue that this supports ideation through exploration. Consequently, for students of design and merchandising fields, this can be a valuable resource. Pinterest can be not only a source of inspiration but also a tool for developing their own ideas, as well as organizing and planning designs.

In this sense, Pinterest fills the gap between digital inspiration and active creative engagement. Visual Stimulation of Instagram Instagram is a social media platform full of highly dynamic visual content. It allows users to browse design-related media, interact with creators, and follow current trends (Chai & Fan, 2017).

Chai and Fan (2017) note that Instagram plays a role in visual learning. In the context of design and education, this platform fosters creativity and inspires students to develop their ideas. Research shows that students who used Instagram as part of creative learning activities achieved better design outcomes than those who participated in traditional classes, indicating that the platform does indeed support the development of ideas. They also show strong creative performance among the students using Instagram in the learning activities.

For example, they achieved an average planning score of 88.03 and a producing score of 88.17, as presented in the Table 2 (Salehudin et al., 2021). Salehudin et al. (2021) highlight the importance of visual sensitivity in creativity. In their study, students also rated their experience with Instagram's visual tasks very positively, especially on the "Stimulation" dimension of the User Experience Questionnaire, which suggests that the platform's fast and engaging visuals help motivate creative thinking. However, specific characteristics of Instagram, such as its dynamic nature and scrolling speed, mean that it can also lead to a saturation of creativity. Instagram not only displays sought-after content, as the platform's algorithm often promotes repetitive, popular content, which can limit access to unique ideas (Baten et al., 2021). Baten et al. (2021) describe this as a risk to creative originality.

This tendency is particularly pronounced among the design students, who may unconsciously create similar visuals. Overall, Instagram is both a source of inspiration and a potential constraint on creativity in educational settings. When used intentionally, for example, for research, reflection, and documentation purposes, it can foster motivation and visual learning (Gulzar et al., 2021). However, passive use of Instagram can reinforce imitation and undermine originality (Baten et al., 2021; Flake et al., 2025). Creative Expression, Self-Perception, and Emotional Well-Being Psychological research done by Flake et al. (2025)

shows that creativity on social media is also linked to users' emotions and well-being. Sharing creativity online can influence the students' self-confidence and self-esteem. Posting one's own work often strengthens a sense of belonging, and it can positively influence self-assessment.

Nevertheless, it may also increase the pressure to compare oneself with others and the need to meet some expectations. Students who respond positively to comments and feedback are more likely to feel confident in their abilities, while those who react negatively may experience a loss of self-esteem and motivation (Flake et al., 2025). Flake et al. (2025) discuss feedback as a moderator of creative confidence. That said, beyond visual stimulation, social media creativity also involves emotional processes such as confidence, self-evaluation, and belonging.

Considered together, aforesaid studies reveal that the role of social media in creativity is multi-dimensional and can be shaped by intrinsic motivation, social media visibility, emotional responses, and levels of active engagement. Therefore, rather than viewing social media platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest as beneficial or detrimental, existing literature suggests that their impact depends on how they are used. Structured content and moderate exposure to others' ideas seem to foster originality, and on the other hand, unfiltered exposure and excessive use can limit it. Even though there is extant literature in the area of social media's influence on creativity, further research is necessary to fully understand how it affects students' thinking processes. As shown, there are a few studies comparing platforms, leaving a gap in the literature to fill. However, findings from all the explored research provide a theoretical framework for this study, which aims to examine how controlled exposure to these two distinct visual environments affects the creativity of design and merchandising students.

Research Methods

This study evaluates two groups of students: one using Instagram and the other using the Pinterest platform. These two platforms were chosen because they are highly visual and are widely used by the students in creative fields as sources of design inspiration and idea development (Pourahmad Ghalejough et al., 2021; Saputra, 2024). By directly comparing the impact of Instagram and Pinterest, the study aims to clarify whether specific types of visual content lead to distinct creative outputs.

The participants of this study included undergraduate and graduate students currently enrolled in classes that specialize in design and merchandising at the University of Oklahoma in the United States. The study utilizes a two-condition (Instagram vs. Pinterest) between-subjects experimental design, and a total of 12 participants were recruited. They had to meet the inclusion criteria, such as being at least 18 years of age and enrolled in classes at the Design and Merchandising Department. They were recruited using a voluntary, through-class announcements and personal outreach. Before the study began, participants completed a consent form and a pre-study survey that collected demographic data (age and field of study) and basic self-assessment measures of creativity.

The study session took place inside the lab of the department, under controlled conditions. Data collection was done between October 29th and November 6th, 2025, between 12 and 4 in the afternoon. All the participants received the same creative tasks: first, they browsed Pinterest or Instagram, depending on which group they were assigned to, for 10 minutes. Then, they moved on to design tasks, which involved designing a bag for design and merchandising students at their university.

1. Task 1 – Design Task

To carry out the first design task, the students were instructed as follows.

> "You will now create a design for a bag intended for the students in the Department of Design and Merchandising at Oklahoma State University. Your goal is to make the design both functional and visually appealing for college students. Please sketch your idea and include any brief notes about materials, features, or style if you wish. The focus is on creativity, not

> drawing skill. You may use any of the ideas or inspiration you remember from browsing social media earlier, but avoid directly copying designs. Try to make your design as original and meaningful as possible."

To avoid unequal exposure to unrelated content, personal preferences or variance that could influence outcomes, participants were asked to use only the following phrases in the search tab: "college bag," "college bag design," "creative bag," "OSU campus style," "creative tote," "campus lifestyle bag," and "fashionable school bag".

After completing the first design task, participants had an additional 5 minutes for the Alternative Use Test (AUT), where they were asked to come up with as many creative uses for the bag as possible. They were instructed to:

2. Task 2 – AUT

To carry out the first design task, the students were instructed as follows.

> "List as many creative uses as possible for a student's bag."

These two tasks allowed both applied design thinking and divergent idea generation to be evaluated, combining multiple dimensions of creativity relevant in this educational field. Both platforms were selected because they represent two distinct yet visually-based social media platforms that are popular among the design students. The chosen time frame gives sufficient exposure to different content without leading to fatigue or distraction. It was also chosen to allow each participant to complete all the activities, which include browsing, designing, and reflecting, in approximately 30 minutes. Keeping the total session duration within this time frame was considered convenient and realistic to facilitate planning, participant recruitment, and maintaining focus during the study.

Creativity was assessed using expert ratings informed by Wallach–Kogan creativity dimensions like fluency, originality, and flexibility. Fluency reflects the number of unique ideas generated, originality measures the novelty of these ideas, and flexibility assesses the range of categories or perspectives included in the responses. For this study, an expert in the design field was asked to provide an opinion on the final projects. To ensure objectivity and eliminate bias in the evaluation, the expert was not informed of the participants' group assignments. All the submitted work was collected on paper and numerically coded before grading.

All the participants completed the study in the same classroom environment, under identical conditions, to minimize variability. After completing both the creative tasks, participants completed a short online evaluation survey created using Google Forms, summarizing their experience. This section included questions about their perceptions of inspiration, focus, engagement, and confidence using a Likert scale (Likert, 1932). This provided additional qualitative insights into the impact of both social media platforms.

Statistical analysis included a two-sample equal variance t-test with a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ to determine whether Instagram or Pinterest exposure influenced creativity scores. Descriptive statistics were also used to summarize the demographics of the participants and to self-evaluate their creativity. Moreover, thematic analysis was conducted to identify the recurring patterns in the participants' reflections. Combining quantitative and qualitative results allowed for a more comprehensive interpretation of the findings.

Findings and the Discussion

The data for this study consisted of Likert-scale survey responses and open-ended questions completed immediately after the creative design task. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests. Qualitative responses were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify shared patterns across participants. Figures 2 through 7 present visual summaries of group means for each survey variable.

Quantitative Findings

Self-perceived creativity was slightly higher in the Pinterest group (M = 4.17, SD = 0.75) compared to the Instagram group (M = 3.83, SD = 0.98), but this difference was not statistically significant, t(10) = 0.65, p = .526. The effect size was small (Cohen's d = 0.37), indicating minimal practical difference between groups (see Figure 2).

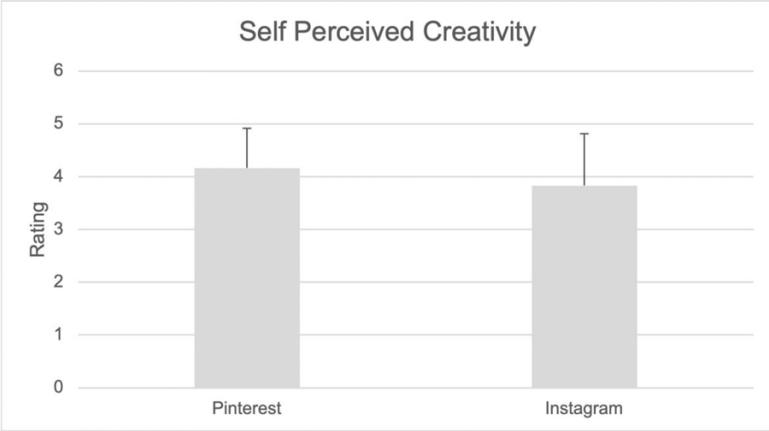


Fig. 02: Mean Ratings of Self-Perceived Creativity by Platform

Participants in both the groups reported nearly identical levels of inspiration. Pinterest users (M = 4.67, SD = 0.52) and Instagram users (M = 4.67, SD = 0.52) showed no difference at all, t (10) = 0.00, p = 1.000, d = 0.00 (see Figure 3).

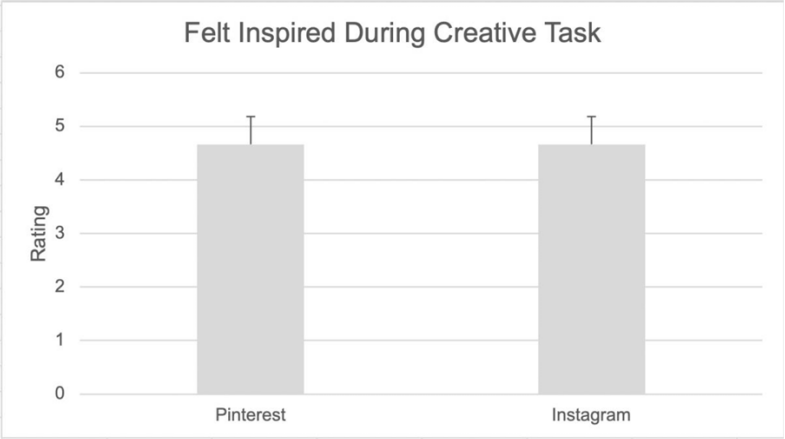


Fig. 03: Mean Ratings of Feeling Inspired During the Creative Task by Platform

Pinterest users reported slightly higher confidence (M = 4.50, SD = 0.55) than Instagram users (M = 3.67, SD = 1.21), but the difference did not reach statistical significance, t(10) = 1.23, p = .248. Effect size was moderate (d = 0.71), though the small sample size limits interpretation (Figure 4).

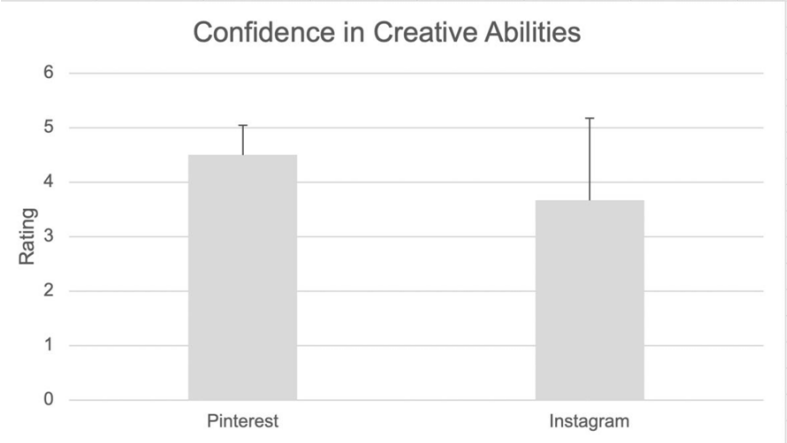


Fig. 04: Mean Ratings of Confidence in Creative Abilities by Platform

Focus and engagement ratings were comparable between groups, Pinterest (M = 4.33, SD = 1.21) and Instagram (M = 4.67, SD = 0.52), with no significant difference, t(10) = 0.46, p = .650, d = -0.26 (Figure 5).

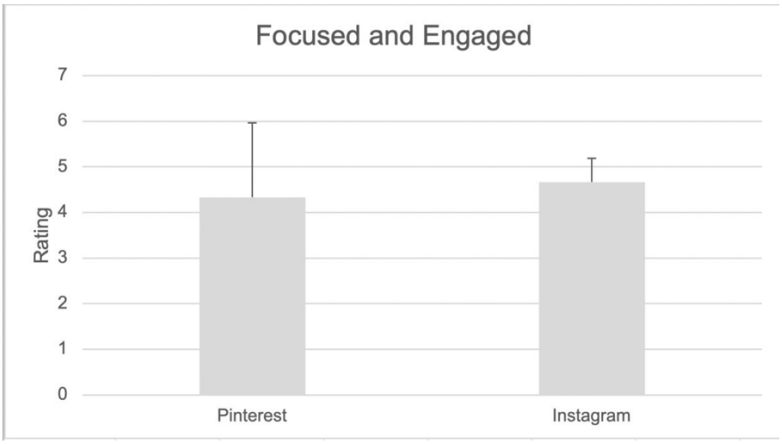


Fig. 05: Mean Ratings of Focus and Engagement by Platform

Pinterest users reported slightly greater enjoyment (M = 4.83, SD = 0.41) compared to Instagram users (M = 4.50, SD = 1.05), but again this difference was not statistically significant, t(10) = 0.63, p = .550, d = 0.35 (Figure 6).

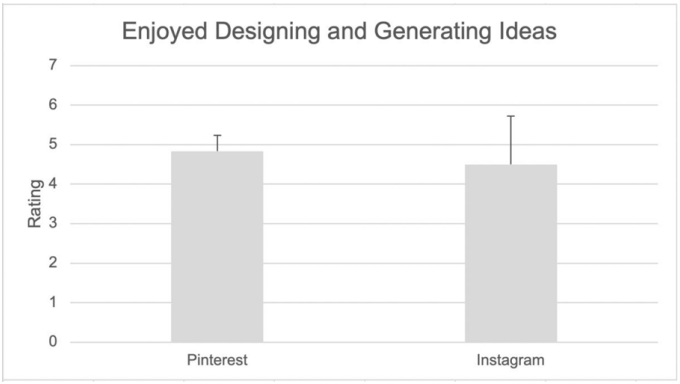


Fig. 06: Mean Ratings of Enjoyment of Designing and Generating Ideas by Platform

Ratings for how much the platform influenced participants' ideas were similar, Pinterest (M = 4.17, SD = 0.75) and Instagram (M = 4.50, SD = 0.55), with no significant difference, t (10) = -0.88, p = .403, d = -0.51 (Figure 7).

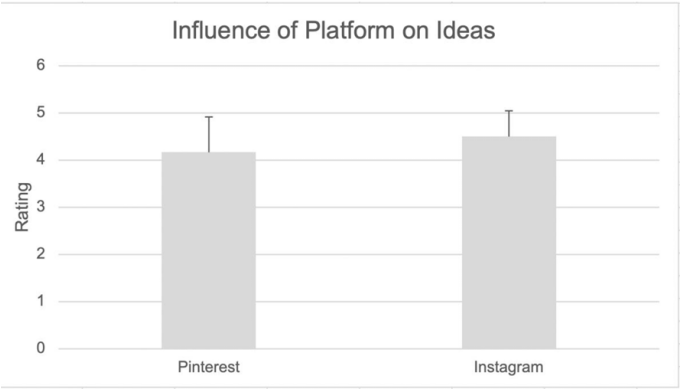


Fig. 07: Mean Ratings of Platform Influence on the Ideas

Expert-Rated Creativity Scores

Task 1 Design Task (Wallach–Kogan Assessment)

The expert provided a creativity rating (1–5) for each participant's sketch. Pinterest users (M = 3.67, SD = 1.49) scored higher on creativity than Instagram users (M = 2.50, SD = 0.84). However, this difference was not statistically significant, t (10) = -1.83, p = .094. The effect size was moderate (Cohen's d = 0.79), suggesting a trend favoring Pinterest, although the small sample size limits definitive conclusions.

Task 2 AUT

Pinterest users (M = 2.67, SD = 0.82) scored slightly higher on divergent thinking than Instagram users (M = 2.50, SD = 0.55), but this difference was very small and not statistically significant, t (10) = -0.44, p = .699, d = 0.20.

Although Pinterest users tended to receive slightly higher creativity ratings on both tasks, none of the differences reached statistical significance. This suggests that browsing Instagram or Pinterest before completing a design task did not meaningfully alter expert-rated creativity outcomes.

Summary of the Quantitative Findings

In summary, no statistically significant differences were found between participants using Pinterest and Instagram. The quantitative results show similar data for both the survey and expert-assessed creativity scores. For creativity tasks 1 and 2, Pinterest users scored slightly higher than Instagram users. However, it's worth taking a closer look at the differences that are small, and the sample size limits the validity and statistical significance. Collectively, these results suggest that both platforms fostered similar levels of inspiration, engagement, and creativity. This is consistent with previous research, which has shown that creative outcomes depend more on how users interact with visual content than on the specific platform used (Linder et al., 2014; Gulzar et al., 2021).

Qualitative Findings

A thematic analysis of open-ended responses revealed four overarching themes with corresponding subthemes. These themes help explain participants' experiences during the creative task and provide insight into how each platform supported their idea generation. The qualitative responses reflected clear patterns in how participants approached the task. These themes and their subthemes are outlined in the Table 3.

Table 3: Themes, Subthemes, Descriptions, and Sample Quotes from Open-Ended Surveys
Source: Author

Theme	Subtheme	Description	Sample Quote
Theme 1: Platform as a Creative Guide	1A. Helping Users Generate Ideas	Both platforms helped participants to begin the creative process by providing direction and idea starters.	"It helped me picture different designs and helped guide my creative thinking."
	1B. Offering Structured Inspiration	Pinterest was perceived as more organized and structured for browsing design ideas.	"It kept me on track and focused on features I wanted to include."
Theme 2: Engagement Through Visual Exploration	2A. Visual Variety Stimulated Ideas	Participants felt that a wide range of visuals promoted comparison and creative thinking.	"Seeing different options helped me compare ideas and think more creatively."
	2B. Familiarity Supported Engagement	Students felt more engaged when using the platforms they already knew well.	"It felt similar to how I normally look for inspiration online."
Theme 3: Challenges and ognitive Overload	3A. Time Pressure	Participants felt they needed more time to explore ideas fully.	"I could've used more time to explore the designs."
	3B. Decision Difficulty	Some struggled to decide which design direction to take.	"I felt a bit stuck choosing which direction to go."
Theme 4: Platform Usability and Preferences	4A. Ease of Navigation	Pinterest was often viewed as straightforward and easy to use for design tasks.	"Pinterest was very easy and straight to the point."
	4B. Instagram Felt Less Structured	Instagram inspired ideas but was described as more casual and less organized.	"It helped with ideas but felt more scattered."

As can be seen, the qualitative data support these quantitative results, showing that both the platforms provided similar levels of creative support. While the users did point to some differences in the structure (Pinterest) and the pace (Instagram), these did not show any measurable differences.

Conclusion

This study examined whether browsing Pinterest or Instagram impacts creativity and which platform performs better as a source of inspiration. Although the Pinterest users had a slightly higher average on many of the measures, none are large enough to be statistically significant, leading to the conclusion of 'no true difference.' Average scores across all the survey measures ranged from approximately 3.7 to 4.8 on a 5-point scale for both the groups, and none of the statistical tests reached significance (p-values ranged from .094 to 1.000).

These results indicate that both environments enable similar levels of creativity, engagement, and confidence. Furthermore, even though none of the differences reached statistical significance, it does seem that both the platforms support creative thinking. The quantitative results supported the qualitative themes that participants relied on visual exploration, idea guidance, and platform familiarity regardless of which platform they used. Expert ratings from the design task also showed a similar pattern, with Pinterest users scoring slightly higher on the sketch task (M = 3.67) than Instagram users (M = 2.50), while scores on the Alternate Uses Task were very close between Pinterest (M = 2.67) and Instagram (M = 2.50).

Overall, findings suggest that the specific social media platform may be less important than how the users interact with the visual content. Future research using larger, more diverse samples could provide deeper insights into how visual sources of inspiration shape the creative process.

Despite its clear guidelines and objectives, this study has several limitations. When interpreting the results, it's worth considering, firstly, the small sample size of only 12 participants. This limitation depended mostly on recruitment opportunities at that time of the year, but it certainly limited statistical power and the ability to detect bigger differences. The second limitation is the time it took the participants to complete the task. Perhaps if they had been free to spend as much time as they wanted on Pinterest or Instagram, the results would have been different. The third limitation is that all the students came from the same university, which may limit the generalizability of the results to broader populations. Furthermore, the expert's ratings of creativity in the design tasks were based on a single score from a single person, not multiple opinions from different experts. Finally, participants' familiarity with one platform versus another may have influenced their comfort level and perceived creativity during the task.

Indeed, these limitations suggest that, to strengthen the validity of the results, future studies should include larger samples, participants from diverse backgrounds, longer or any duration of platform use, and the opinions of more experts in assessing creativity.

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Statement of Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in carrying out this research.

Ethical Practice: This research followed accepted ethical practices. It involved specifically chosen human participants, and interviews yet did not collect any personal data. Nevertheless, it followed the accepted ethical standards. The participants were made to understand the nature of the research, were assured that participation would not affect their academic performance and they were taking part voluntarily and willingly. They also had the freedom to leave the research any time they wanted to.

The study was conducted in compliance with ethical research standards and submitted for review to the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was approved on the 30th of September. All the participants provided informed consent before the study began, and their responses remain confidential. While the risks of this study are minimal, the IRB was to be notified as soon as possible if any complications arise. Participation in the study was voluntary, and the students could withdraw at any time without any penalty.

Availability of Data: This study does possess a lot of original primary data. However, all the data is available for scrutiny if officially requested.

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