CUTTING ACROSS:

Identities and Digital Marketing

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ABSTRACT

This Major Research Project (MRP) looks at the intersection of digital marketing and identities, amongst liminal persons and those who have multiple identities. In *Les Rites de Passage*, 1909, Arnold van Gennep introduced the concept of liminality as the transition between two social states, such as entering a new life stage. My research also builds upon Victor Turner's concepts of liminality, identity transformation, and multiple personas. In digital worlds, liminality and *identity play* are common practices. As the internet faces further commercialization and transformation (e.g., regulation, data management, new social platforms), marketers need to better understand identity management.

Marketing and communications platforms shape identity and influence behaviour. Marketers track personas, which lay the basis of assumptions and decision-making. Digital marketing has transformed our ideas of self and individual representation, often serving corporate goals. Those who are marginalized are often over surveilled or completely unaccounted for, creating misrepresented customer profiles.

Research with marginalized individuals in Canada was conducted to understand their multiple identities, digital lives, and liminality. Interviews, digital diaries, and foresight scenarios illuminated influences on how digital identities are formed and managed. Marginalized groups are more vulnerable to the negative impacts of digital marketing, such as discrimination, highlighting pertinent ethical concerns and leverage points for improvement.

This MRP's insights inform digital marketing and market segmentation to ensure ethical and human-centred practices that respects the individual. The recommendations address how digital marketing can adequately account for the plurality of individuals, and how people undergo constant identity change. The most desirable future of identities is one that is transformational, exhibiting sovereignty over one's multiple identities. This includes three key themes — identity construction, social relationships, and financial and transactional implications — to reach a more equitable identity ecosystem.

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There's nothing like starting a new chapter in your life like doing it in 2020.

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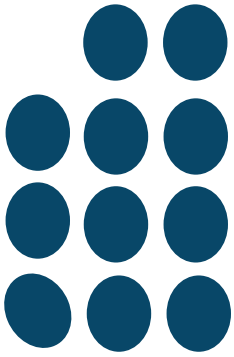

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INTRO-DUCTION

MY MARKETING JOURNEY

I didn't critically look at my own identity and how it was formed until well into my adulthood. Upon reflection, my identity almost feels assigned to me, influenced by where I am, how I look, and my relationships to others. Some aspects of my identity conflicted with each other and threw me into confusion. Depending on the context, I was a different person. Online and in-person, my identity is subject to social expectations, balancing the needs of different people.

On the other hand, as a marketer, I use many tools and technologies to get into the minds of consumers. Throughout my time at non-profits and growing small businesses, I found that understanding customers and building relationships with them was rewarding. Technology's growing ability to manipulate individuals has put me in a conflicting position. The tools that we use and the internet that we helped built have become extremely potent and inequitable. There is more awareness of how platforms extract personal data to feed into algorithms to make decisions and assumptions about individuals. Increasingly, people fear the omnipresence and invasiveness of organizations, advertising, and digital communications.

Marketing categorizes people into segments when identities are everchanging and numerous. When identities are in flux, individuals may succumb to or subvert commercial forces. Specifically marginalized individuals experience a heightened sense liminality and multiple identities. Marketers can influence consumer behaviors and identities through database marketing. However, a consequent result is discriminating between groups and targeting vulnerable or undecided consumers. The internet can be a freeing space where we can create ourselves and discover who we are. The future of digital marketing will need to consider how online and digital spaces impact our identities as fluid beings.

If marketing guides digital experiences, what role do marketers play as stewards of communications? Can marketing exist outside of current exploitative data systems? If it cannot, how can it change the system?

Marketing has the potential lead a new ecosystem where identities and communities have a higher level on self-determination. It can amplify unheard voices, break stigmas, and nurture individual growth. I look to the future and the power of digital media where I can realize many parts of myself and participate fully in communities. This brings me to my primary and secondary research questions:

How might we develop more ethical, human-centred digital marketing by understanding its impact on liminal persons and those with multiple identities?

- What is the experience of digital liminality or having multiple identities?
- How might we rethink market segmentation and audience creation to ensure individuals have authority to develop their identities without manipulation?
- How do we maintain or create our digital identities in a state of liminality?
- How does one transition between spaces and personas? What is the effect on individuals?
- How do we create safer and more resilient digital and online communities?

Market segmentation, audience development, liminality, and identity formation overlap frequently. Segmentation and audience development have many consequences. They can manoeuvre people into in-between, marginal spaces (i.e., not included in the market entirely), hinder rites of passage, and create barriers to other identities and social states. Segmentation's influence on identity alters how we see ourselves and interact with others. And as I expand in the literature review, marketing systems may lead to discrimination and marginalization. The remainder of this chapter explores the identity industry and its growth in the digital age. I also provide a background and history of liminality and related identity theories.

LIFE IN BETWEEN: DIGITAL LIMINALITY AND MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

Liminality

Ethnographer, Arnold van Gennep introduced the concept of liminality in 1909 in *Les Rites de Passage*. In his book, liminality is the transition between two social states or identities. These states may be formed socially, legally, physically, and by other structures. His work documents the behaviours of individuals and collectives, specifically rites of passages. This may be observed as entering a new life stage, such as adolescence or motherhood. Across various rites of passage are three distinct phases: the separation, liminal, and incorporation phases. In the separation phase, individuals are removed from everyday experiences and often accompanied by feelings and events of detachment and anxiety. Incorporation, the final stage, is the movement into the next social state. This is a new stable phase is unlike the first phase (Gairola et al., 2021; Söderlund & Borg, 2017; van Gennep, 1960).

The middle liminal phase is ambiguous, uncertain, and uneasy. It is a time of readjustment and finding oneself, making it a critical period of development. Thomassen suggests understanding this phase, helps us derive insights about a person's past and future (Thomassen, 2015, as cited in Söderlund & Borg, 2017). During this time, a person does not exist in a recognizable category, and their visibility is reduced (Gairola et al., 2021).

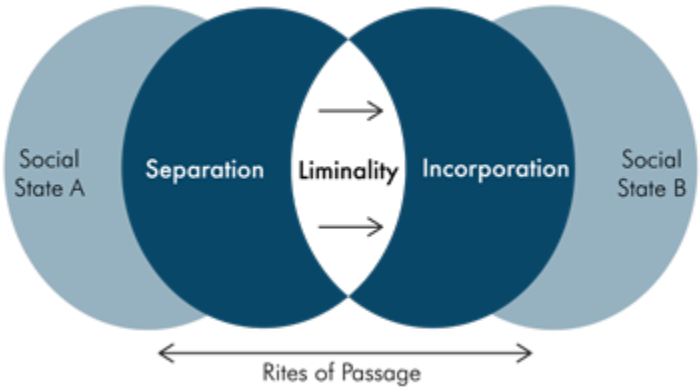


Figure 1: Liminality
This figure is a simplistic visual representation of liminality. Moving from left to right, we move from one social state, or identity, to another. We first separate ourselves from our current state, enter liminality, and then we are incorporated into the next state. Parts of our old selves do not necessarily disappear, and the timing of each phase may vary. This process and rites of passage reoccur throughout our lives across all cultures. We constantly enter and exit social spaces (Söderlund & Borg, 2017; van Gennep, 1960).

In the 1960's, Victor Turner resurfaced liminality. He expanded on the voluntary nature of liminality. These moments may be short and momentary, such as a dance recital. Turner describes these individuals as *betwixt and between*. They are in flux and undefinable. Those in liminality are referred to as *liminars*. While in this phase, a person's being is removed from the past and future states, but they are interlinked and can unearth how identities are constructed (Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar, 2021).

Liminality takes on various forms. Not only can a person be in a liminal position, but liminality applies to spaces, time, and physicality (Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar, 2021). Liminality has broad applications in sociology, political science, religion, and marketing. This MRP looks at individual liminality and liminality as it relates to one's position, as opposed to place or time.

The Extended and Multiple Self

Russell W. Belk proposes that one has an extended self through possessions (Kerrigan & Hart, 2016). He revisits the extended self in the digital world and identifies five new factors: dematerialization, re-embodiment, sharing, co-construction of self, and distributed memory. In the digital world, we have multiple selves. Our avatars may represent our physical selves, but also our ideal, experimental, or taboo selves. They may also be assigned to us, and as such, we embody those identities by proxy (Belk, 2013).

Frontstage and Backstage Personas

Erving Goffman takes on a theatrical and dramaturgical perspective of identity, whereby individuals have front and backstage personas. Like actors, individuals have an audience and conform to audience expectations. At the frontstage, people may don masks, hiding and accentuating different personal features. Contrarily, the backstage is private, and people can simply be themselves. There is no one true self, but we are an amalgam of our multiple identities (Kerrigan & Hart, 2016).

By exploring liminality, we consider overlapping concepts of identities. We may experience liminality, as well as multiple identities that are managed and reformulated in digital spaces.

Opportunity Space

Independently, the fields of marketing, liminality, and multiple identities are well-reviewed; however, their intersection presents gaps and fragmented knowledge. Consumer behaviour dominates research and applications of liminality on marketing, and lesser so digital marketing. Organizations have developed and sold products for those in liminal transition. Organizations may encourage *consumption-caused liminality* and *liminality-caused consumption* (Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar, 2021). Liminal products assist the experience of transitions, enhance or alleviate liminality. However, a study looking at the transitional state of motherhood showed consumption rarely reduces anxiety, but actually heightens it (Voice Group, 2010, as cited in Cappellini & Yen, 2016). Liminars are often viewed as incomplete and not fully understood (Cody, 2012). Similarly, there is little market research on how to manage those who have multiple identities.

Marketplace discrimination, whether based on race, gender, age, or other demographic factors, is a research opportunity for managing multiple identities and examining the implications of marketplace liminality and multiple identities. Research on liminality is expected to grow as transformational events increase and our lives continue to be digitized. Disruptions, crises, and changing environments are impacting how we behave, and as such, we are thrown into more states of liminality. The movement of people and integration of cultures will be areas of constant tension and opportunities, including diasporic individuals and immigrants, who inherently adopt multiple identities. There is already evidence for the ability to test and control different versions of ourselves. Digital and online spaces can amplify the above: discrimination, fluidity, behavioural targeting, and liminality. Addressing liminality and embracing its importance reveals a fluidity of identities (Darveau & Cheikh-Ammar, 2021).

THE IDENTITY INDUSTRY

Marketing and advertising hinge on identities and audiences. Marketers want to know who their target market is exactly. What do they enjoy? What makes them tick? Identity is a key factor in decision-marketing and available choices. Our personalities, upbringing, and social groups inform our decisions and prescribed norms. Choices about our identity certainly entangle our economic circumstances (Akerloff & Kranton, 2010). Likewise, marketers make decisions about based on constructions of our online presence. Online, identities are easily trackable and formed. We are constantly creating and representing ourselves in media. Media, marketing, and ourselves are blurring. We are the media we produce (Deuze, 2016).

Social technologies are developed with marketing in mind and play a large role in identity formation, especially as communications allows us to express ourselves, facilitate relationships, and share ideas. Marketing actively mediates the digital world. It curates what content is shown, how its delivered, and for how long. Because of the deep relationship between advertising and publications, much of culture has been commercialized. The surveillance and crafting of audiences is key to consumption, marketing, and even cultural production (Turow, 2005). Media agencies have fused with ad agencies, many owned by the same parent company (Turow, 2006). Specific media is created and preferred, leaving some cultural production ignored because of its perceived economic value. Professor and author, Joseph Turow presents a dichotomy of media, *segment-making* and *society-making media*. Segment-making media divides society, whereas society-making media encourages different segments to mingle. Both can infuse societal biases, but currently, there is an imbalance between the two to enable a diverse, knowledge-sharing society (Turow, 2012). When we understand more about how media and advertising companies organize and construct their audiences, we reveal their biases and agendas. Mass communications should be looked at with a critical eye due to it scale and reach (Turow, 2005).

Digital marketing centres on customer profiling. Advertisers want a complete view of an individual, scouring disparate parts of you into one recognizable unit. Yet, digital marketing is being shaken up as regulations and consumers attempt to break up ubiquitous tracking, data collection, and invasion of personal privacy. Pop-up blockers and video recording devices, like personal video recorders (PVRs), give consumers control over media (Turow, 2005). Even with these barriers and new regulations, market segmentation and audience creation has become more sophisticated. New ways of profiling and tracking include machine learning, artificial intelligence, and neuromarketing. Traditional ideas of identity are shedding, which is both liberating and restrictive. One thing we know is that participating digitally means our bodies, minds, and souls will be continually transformed into reconfigurable data (Zwick & Dholakia, 2004).

Audiences are vital commodities for the survival of corporations (Sylvia IV, 2016). They are treated abstractly, and technology has made their construction simple. Audiences correlate with a corporation's advertising worth, overall valuation, and bargaining power. They can be developed and moderated by organizations, either explicitly or behind the scenes. Audience size, demographics, and behaviour matter are metrics of success. Audience measurement and evaluation are critical to the ability to control and monitor. This dynamic has pros and cons. To have your preferences, tastes, and culture documented also means they are commodified and exploited. Fans and *elite customers* are often the focal points of targeting. Consumers are willing to be tracked in exchange for personalized rewards. Companies and brands award certain forms of expression and aesthetics with increased attention, discounts, and access to special services. This reward system trains us to become variations of ourselves, performing in ways that fit pre-determined personas. Those targeted often have conflicting feelings. On one hand, they are visible; on the other, they have lost control and are mass-marketed (Jenkins, 2006).

Identities and group membership are evaluated for their commercial success, which equates to how much attention is given (boyd, 2008). These external representations have become *corporate identities* and not our true selves. Marketers impose corporate goals that restrict individual independence and characteristics (Smith, 2020). Unfortunately, those who bring in little corporate or commercial value are pushed aside. People of colour are often not considered and left out of the market entirely (boyd, 2008). The hard part is much of this is invisible to the naked eye. Discrimination online, such as price discrimination, occurs in a black box. Price discrimination occurs when one person is shown a different price compared to another, often based on behaviour or demographics. Some people may may much more unbeknownst to them (Turow, 2006). It may occur at an online grocery store or with credit cards. Accountability is difficult to enforce, and consumers are left unaware.

WHY DOES THIS MATTER

Liminality and multiple identities are opportunities for self-discovery and formative experiences. It is in these spaces and roles where we activate different parts of ourselves. Digital platforms create liminal, temporary spaces, apt for participation and experimentation. Yet, the omnipresence of marketing has transformed our ideas of ourselves, how we are represented, and our internal identities. The traceability of digital personas and ubiquity of networked platforms allow organizations to easily engage with consumers and craft their personas (Kerrigan & Hart, 2016). Organizations view people as aggregated data, from which they can develop narratives and personas. Liminars experience a spectrum of tension, and a push and pull of values between states, negatively impacting their well-being. These liminal, dynamic spaces are playful, but can be uncomfortable (Kerrigan & Hart, 2016). As our lives become more digitized, segmentation and tracking technologies will follow suit, and may have immense repercussions on our identities.

As the speed of technology and innovation races forward and their impact increases, it is imperative to consider the ethical consequences of digital marketing, market segmentation, identity management. Futurist Tracey Follows stresses the importance and urgency of determining the future of our identities. If we relinquish our identities, how will they be controlled and by whom (Follows, 2021)? Ethics in marketing strategy and regulation have lagged. The industry is self-regulating, and governments are slow to enforce breaches. Ethics and social responsibility have often been thought to be outside of marketing strategic planning (Robin & Reidenbach, 1987). If tensions persist, permanent liminality may be induced (Söderlund & Borg, 2017). How then do we maintain the sense of self during times of upheaval, change, and destruction? What can marketers do to uphold high standards of ethics and respect their communities' best interests?

This MRP explores how marketing and digital communications can better account for liminal individuals and spaces, individual plurality, and how people undergo constant change.


LITERATURE
REVIEW

IDENTITIES IN DIGITAL SPACES

Social media unveils how we create our identities, behaviours, and norms. Much can be gleaned from user profiles embedded in social networking platforms. Different identities emerge according to the audience and situation. For example, youth conduct "identity experiments" on their personal websites and blogs. Their profiles reflect how they view themselves and want to be seen, and test various sides of themselves. They communicate tastes and interests and seek peer validation through text, image, and sound. They rearrange characteristics of themselves to try out present, future, possible, and ideal selves (Stern, 2008, p. 108). Teenagers may create profiles more suitable for their peers versus their parents. Maintaining boundaries and multiple personas requires attention. It becomes even more difficult if the audience is not visible or "lurking." According to a study by danah boyd on MySpace and teenagers, the perceived audience informs the framing. Creating a profile can be highly involved and time-consuming to achieve perfection (boyd, 2008). The simple selfie symbolizes how we see ourselves and how we want others to see ourselves (Follows, 2021). Identity creation is a critical life step. In the physical world, the body is used to communicate one's identity and performs publicly. The body is dressed up, is groomed, moves, and speaks. But in the digital world, our identities need to be written into existence. Almost all digital platforms include a "bio" section demanding who we are and our role in the community. This is our autobiography. Identity creation takes on a whole different methodology that is intentional, continually sensing, and skilled (boyd, 2008).

Impression management, a term by Goffman, describes how one manages their identity as it is perceived by others. Identities are constantly considering feedback and adjusting to external environments and crowds. Diasporic identities teeter from one identity to another, one of their past or ancestral culture and one of their new homes. They enter liminality and juggle multiple selves. As a third culture kid, I embody all the places I grew up and, but simultaneously feel the absence of cultural or national identity. Finola Kerrigan's study of social media lives showed people attempted to balance the private and personal and the different roles they play. She noted the difficulty of bounding one's identity, but through social media, one has an opportunity to display themselves and in multiple forms. As we age, we try out different identities, take on new ones, and discard ones that are no longer appropriate. With data living perpetually online, discarding former selves is complicated. We also face with conflicting audiences. Who is watching and who we think is watching cause tensions as we manage expectations and impressions. One way to circumvent this is only posting or acting online in a way that appeases everyone (Marwick and boyd, 2011a, p. 11, as cited in Kerrigan & Hart, 2016).

We have as many personas as there are social situations, and no persona alone is superior or the true self (Belk, 2013). Our digital identities are performances and we are *identity tourists*, embodying different personas in different places (Nakamura, 2002, as cited in Zwick & Dholakia, 2004). Likewise, according to Herminia Ibarra, *identity play* is "crafting and provisional trial of immature (i.e., as yet unelaborated) possible selves," (Ibarra, 2010, as cited in Ghaempanah & Khapova, 2020). This play can also be work. Identity management is a learned social skill and demanding work (boyd, 2008). Social contexts are hidden from sight, not knowing who we are projecting to and how we are received.

IDENTITY AND MARGINALIZATION

Identities are formed throughout our lives, attempting to unify our past, present, and future. Tension arises as we negotiate with ourselves and others about who we were and want to be. How we are in relation with others impacts our identities. Others let us know cultural norms – what is acceptable, or unacceptable. What sets us apart are what others notice, often differences and otherness. "Otherness" can be expressed through race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, and physical or mental ability – within each are dominant and inferior classifications. Dominant groups and attributes are taken for granted and treated as the default. Many of us have a combination of advantaged and disadvantaged identities. Some we play up and some we suppress. Dominant identities set the frame for the others (Tatum, 2000). Not only do individuals make these judgments, but they are embedded in organizations and communication platforms (Baldauf et al., 2017). Otherness hinders self-realization and bleeds into how segments are formed. Digital communications perpetuate discrimination and silence minority or inferior voices. Those who experience abuse or discrimination may voluntarily withdraw and put up walls (Suzor, 2019). This is notably documented by those who are intersectional and liminars who do not fit into established or dominant identity classifications, limiting their pride of identity and participation in digital spaces.

Through the creation of audiences, consumers are subjected to market discrimination, whereby some products and services are shown to a select group and excluded from others (Turow, 2006). Consumers may experience being othered and forced into a liminal, or fringe state. They may attempt to escape targeting by voluntarily positioning themselves into liminality. Some may not be able to fully express themselves due to technical infrastructure design (e.g., profiles offering the option of the binary female or male sex). Without being fully able to integrate into their desired social state, they may remain in a state of liminality or take on different identities. Acceptance and validation play huge roles in the passage through liminality and embodying new identities (Mitra & Evansluong, 2019). Hard-lined consumer segmentation fails to address the temporal, ever-changing plurality of identity and intersectionality. Those on the margins or who embody multiple identities may want to enhance or diminish aspects of their identities. They change their identities according to the situation.

Disadvantaged identities are stigmatized, which impacts opportunities, self-expression, and privileges. Minorities face challenges fully forming their identities and potential selves, in part due to the lack of representation. Advertisers often follow what platforms prioritize, influencing image and copy choices. These stereotypes and lack of intersectionality in segmentation further impede personhood. Awareness of one's stigma or stereotype influences the spaces one enters. Avoiding certain spaces altogether is a primary way to reduce exposure to stereotyping (Pinel, 1999, as cited in Slay & Smith, 2011). Akerloff and Kranton call this occurrence *identity utility*. In economic terms, we gain and lose depending on our identities and adherence to that identity's norms (2010, p. 18). We make trade-offs between who we are and what we can do.

Those living on the margins are often heavily tracked or not at all. In an individualistic society, people assume that marginal and liminal people choose to be hidden or to remain in the circumstances that they are in. They lack control of their personal information and availability to access and interact with various organizations. This problem extends beyond marketing and commercial settings, and persists in cases with those experiencing homelessness, undocumented immigrants, day labourers, and those with criminal records (Green & Gilman, 2018). Liminal and marginalized groups exist in precarity (Gairola et al., 2021), and are closely monitored and controlled. On the other hand, organizations may perceive them as having

less social or financial capital, which leave them not worthwhile of tracking.

Dominant and colonial narratives have extended into online spaces. The internet has made our connections and understanding more global. Yet not all are afforded the same treatment. Under 25% of Wikipedia biographies are of women and only 20% have images. Of 70,000 Wikipedia authors, only 1,000 are from Africa (Holev, 2020). The work and visibility of women's contributions are hidden. Whose Knowledge's #VisibleWikiWomen campaign aims to address this by writing and uploading women into existence. They have collected over thousands of images of women, especially Indigenous, Black, brown individuals, to be used towards Wikipedia ("#VisibleWikiWomen 2021," n.d.).

The power to determine social categories and who belongs where rests in the hands of a few. This is seen in colonial histories and present day to create national identities and determine how certain people should behave in society (Chiang, 2010). Race and national identity have roots in colonialism. Those with multiple identities feel intensified tension managing and compromising who they are.

Those in liminal spaces or positions for an extended period encounter an intensified boundary between worlds. A social construct, these boundaries are useful in categorization, marketing, and segmentation. Boundaries affect how resources are distributed, status, and hierarchy. They make people easy to compare. Crossing identity and social boundaries, much like physical ones, can be a stressful event (Chu et al., 2018) and many minority groups are forced to assimilate. Dominant groups often assume the assimilation always takes place, which should not be the case (Sheehan, 2013). People may also want to cope with the transition, escape, or even prolong their experience.

There are many instances of the internet providing safe and expressive spaces. The internet for migrants, diasporas, and marginalized populations facilitates connection across borders, maintains relationships, and gives them a voice. It is an opportunity to participate, take ownership of how they are represented, and contribute to their communities (Madianou, 2011). The networked infrastructure aids connection, sharing, democratized participation, and individual and group empowerment (Kissau & Hunger, 2010). One consideration is boundaries need not always be porous. Maintaining distinct social groups can protect members and ensure the adherence to shared values and codes of conduct.

Still, the internet subtly extends colonialism, hierarchies, and inequities into the digital spaces. Digital marketing and advertising technologies inherit these social constructs intentionally. It is important to consider diversity and inclusion when designing communication strategies and marketing technologies.

MARKET SEGMENTATION AND PROFILING ISSUES

Marketing and technology move in tandem. We have moved from traditional marketing, which has been primarily one-to-many communication, like billboards, to hyper-personalized one-to-one communications (Yakob, 2015), like personal devices. Marketers are less reliant on focus groups and surveys to understand audiences. They can extract enough affordable data from websites and social media. No longer are we all seeing the same mass message, but personalized content in our most intimate spaces. Along with the expansion of brand marketing in the 1980s, came the branded platforms, where customers congregate based on similar attributes (Arvidsson, 2011, p. 280). This progression in audience development indicates an active role that organizations and advertisers have in media and communication technologies. Advertising has influenced the design of the internet today: customized content, walled gardens, privatized, and siloed media spaces. Turow calls this *reputation silos*. Each segment, and even each person, have their own media and advertising ecosystem, further removing ourselves from each other (Turow, 2012).

Not only does marketing run into the problem of typecasting, but it can also propel consumers to change identities. Corporations can create and shape these social identities by reinforcing attributes, characteristics, values, and assigning roles. The goal is to strengthen consumer's affinity to a brand. People in one social group tend to adopt similar characteristics. In fact, several studies show that identities can be created quickly and effortlessly, such as the 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment. In a simpler experiment involving social identities about a smoothie brand, participants adopted new identities and behaviours in 20 minutes after being put in groups (Champniss et al., 2015). How people behave depends on their position and social status (Akerloff & Kranton, 2010). Identities are formed by numerous factors and some aspects may be more malleable than others. Still, this example underscores how one can engender a predetermined social group identity. Jaron Lanier asserts platforms like Facebook and Google are behavior-modification empires, fueled by an over-reliance on the ad-funded business model (TED, 2018). Who we are told to be becomes instilled in us.

Issues

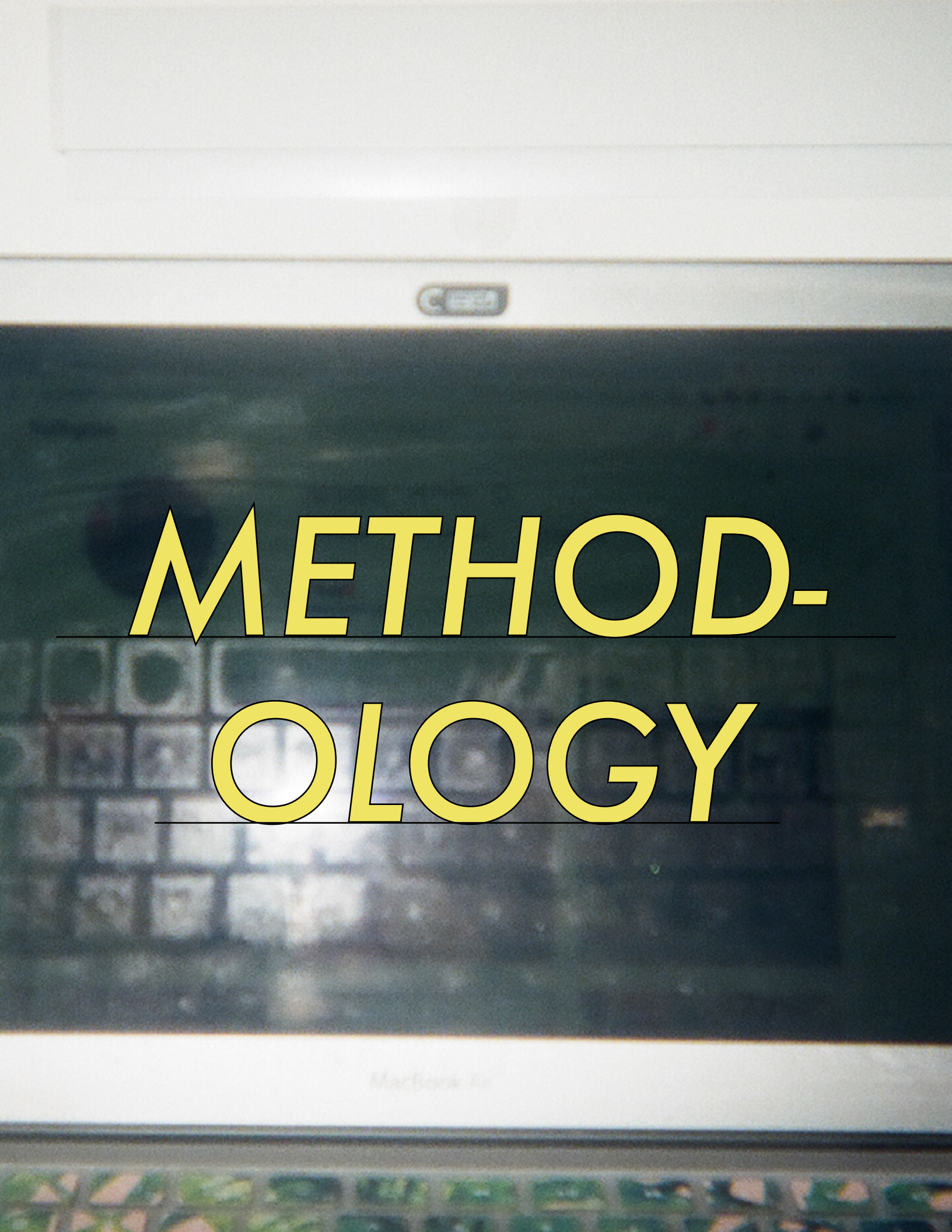
Current marketing segmentation practices do not mesh well with how identities are managed and formed, especially for liminars and those with multiple identities.

1. **Evolving Identities:** With our external environment in constant change (e.g., politically, economically, and technologically), digital identities do not remain static. Internally, people's attitudes and behaviours change rapidly (Yankelovich & Meer, 2006). People migrate from one to another, segments grow and shrink. *Segment instability* occurs as members shift and needs change (Blocker & Flint, 2006). Traditional segmentation cannot capture, in full, evolving identities. Identity data is in continuous movement and negotiation, which causes consistency complications for tracking algorithms.
2. **Commercial Prioritization:** These mechanics have financial goals, thus limiting their view and homing in on profitable personas (Smith, 2020).
3. **Experimental, Temporal Personas:** Profiles and personas are not perfectly created nor interpreted. Digital identities have elements of performance and experimentation (Robinson, 2018). People may exaggerate or omit different parts of themselves (Stern, 2008).
4. **Inaccurate Data:** Data is not accurate and does not capture complete human experience. Data form assumptions and is not exhaustive, as such representations should be understood with caution.

CONCLUSION

The intersection of liminars, multiple identities, and marketing presents several concerns, especially for vulnerable and under-represented groups. Segmentation is a social technology that manages populations (Cody, 2012) and seeks to control behaviours and extract human data to maximize corporate goals. Because liminars and those with multiple identities contradict standard marketing segmentation and classification, they often are excluded or misunderstood. They are often deemed unprofitable and underrepresented (Cody & Lawlor, 2011). This *surveillance gap* creates a void in data, understanding, and inclusion (Green & Gilman, 2018). The data is not equal. Organizations value customer representations that are traceable, measurable, and made for easy comparison, over capture authentic identities (Zwick & Dholakia, 2004). Marketers' crafted personas do not exhibit a comprehensive view of the consumer and are created without their knowledge, leaving their narratives in others' hands. Consumers no longer have full control of their identities (Zwick & Dholakia, 2004).

The *data doppelgänger,* coined by Sandra Robinson, are multiples of ourselves opaquely created by organizations. Organizations exert control over populations through databases and reducing us to aggregate data (Kerrigan & Hart, 2016). Database marketing enables hyper-targeting, zooming in on smaller groups and individuals (Turow, 2005). From the data collected, a persona is created to encompass the characteristics of the market segment. Consumers must put in effort to regain control over their personal data and re-establish their autonomy. Tactics adopted include identifiability, anonymity, and pseudonymity (i.e., having alternative personas), confidentiality, and secrecy. People face over-profiling and have difficulty maintaining their own boundaries and privacy. Personal information can be unintentionally "leaked" and repurposed (Kerrigan & Hart, 2016). Digital marketing's role in identity management fragmented communities, and pushed people into liminal positions and pre-determined segments (Cody, 2012). The codifying of an individual enables comparison and objectification. Based on their databased digital personas, consumers may be denied certain products, shown irrelevant services, and access different prices compared to their peers. The interrelatedness of identity and segmentation warrant further investigation (Onwezen, 2018). Business repercussions include strategy misalignment, misdistribution of resources, and not accurately addressing consumers' needs (Blocker & Flint, 2006). The incorporation of other, possible, temporal, in-between selves can aid marketers to better communicate and develop inclusive practices (Schouten, 1991). Access to our data doppelgängers and manifestations would improve transparency and give people more agency over their identities (Robinson, 2018). There is growing awareness of both identity's fluidity and segmentation's potential for discrimination. What is the next step forward?



METHOD-OLOGY

METHODOLOGY

This phenomenological study investigates a narrow group of individuals through their personal experiences about liminality and multiple identities in digital spaces. It aims to materialize universal experiences of liminality, as well as any variations of digital identity management and creation. Multiple data sources, surveying the past, present, and future, created composite and aggregate understanding and descriptions of this phenomenon. It attempts to interpret and make meaning from lived experiences, as outlined in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* by John. W. Creswell (2007). This study primarily captures qualitative data to participants' contexts and situations.

To understand how identities change, we must look across time and in different scenarios. This research embodies elements of identity play, whereby participants are encouraged to see themselves in different contexts (Ghaempanah & Khapova, 2020). Digital diaries gave insights into past and present identities, and practising foresight unveiled future circumstances for identities. The shared foresight scenarios workshop is an opportunity to find that collective vision and find relationships with one another. **Below are the following research activities:**

Participants

While many have access to digital platforms and manage their identities, this research looks at those who may experience a heightened sense of liminality and impression management. As such, eligibility is limited to those who identify as marginalized and are moderately to highly active on a range of social and digital platforms. Participants must be part of at least three online communities (e.g., forum, Slack group, formal or informal). Participants may interpret marginalization in many ways, whether based on race, ability, gender, or sexual orientation. Understanding there is a large range of diversity within the group, the goal is to find similarities and differences in digital liminal experiences and identity management within this sub-group. They must have experience creating personas and conducting identity play online.

This study had five adult participants across Canada.

Diaries

The first research activity required participants to complete a short diary exercise, individually and asynchronously. Each person created one to three diaries on separate days from December 1, 2021 to January 31, 2022, outlining their digital behaviours, interactions, what platforms they use, identity characteristics, how they feel, and what they experience. Creating diaries revealed nuances and creates an in-situ and event-contingent activity log. It transported them to the contexts and situations of their digital experiences.

Participants identified which of the days is most exemplary of their digital lives and gave it a title. Participants also had the option to craft a past digital diary, if none of the days feel representative. After the diaries were completed, participants wrote a reflection and a description of their digital identities.

This diary activity was somewhat challenging as the participants were continuously online throughout the whole day, however they noted their more important interactions.

Interviews

Next, individual interviews captured qualitative and quantitative information about each participant's digital experiences. The interviews had 24 questions and were 30 to 45 minutes long. The goal is to gain explicit insights into how they manage their identities and experience liminality. Interviews allowed participants to further explain their digital diaries and gain feedback. Interviews were semi-structured and conversational. Although flexible in nature, a pool of questions was asked for comparison, to find any patterns and differences.

See Appendix A for interview questions.

Foresight Scenarios

Identities are a composition of our past, present, and future selves. The last activity was a generative, group foresight workshop (90 minutes) to imagine the futures of identity, digital spaces, and marketing communications. Inspired by identity play, participants were invited to create different versions of themselves and craft their own narratives in this exploratory and generative workshop. Not only did participants consider temporal changes, but also external events and environment.

An approachable method of scenario creation is Jim Dator's Four Generic Archetypes, which required participants to incast into four distinct futures (Continued Growth, Transformational, Disciplined, Collapsed). The output is wide-ranging scenarios and a shared vision of the future. Looking forward to the year 2060 helped our present selves envision potential risks and opportunities. It was also meant to empower the individual in the design of their own narratives. The group indicated a preferred future, which informed recommendations and intervention points.

The reflection period was the most valuable section. This time allowed participants to share, discuss, provide their reasonings for each scenario, highlighting their concerns, projects, and aspirations for themselves and the identity ecosystem.

Analysis

Following John W. Creswell's Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design, I used phenomenological methods and analysis (Creswell, 2007).

Interviews were thematically analyzed and digital diaries put into affinity groups. First, data points were codified, then grouped them into emerging themes. Through horizontalization, significant statements were reviewed removing data that was repetitive or irrelevant to this study. Research activities were triangulated to find overlaps, similarities, and differences. Content analysis was conducted for qualitative data. The Foresight workshop using Dator's Four Generic Scenario Archetypes generated distinct scenarios, on which the prior themes identified were elaborated.

See Appendix B for codification.

LIMITATIONS

The digital experience and online identity construction is vast and even though the participants were from a narrow group of individuals, many other factors made them diverse. A couple of participants were not able to complete the studies, and as such, there is limited data. Participants also found it challenging to document their digital diaries in entirety due to the large number of online interactions that happened throughout the day. Many captured the most important or convenient moments. As the workshop time was limited, an extension of this study would include designing a plan and backcasting from the preferred future scenario, *Transformational*.

FINDINGS

FINDINGS

The diary exercise, interviews, and foresight workshop provided the basis for the textural description of how liminal identities exist in digital spaces. While the findings and results incorporated aspects of marketing and advertising, they were not the focal point when it came to the digital experience. Further research is needed to map the direct relationship between marketing and identity play and engage with multiple stakeholders. However, the following findings are relevant considerations for marketers, as marketing is a prominent element in the digital ecosystem.

THE EXPERIENCE OF LIMINALITY AND MULTIPLE IDENTITIES

The online and digital spaces faced a duality of experiences. Participants both felt free and creative, but also conflicted and guilty about being online too much. Content can feel both invigorating and angering. A source of the polarizing experiences was dependant on the community, which may include everyone between distant voyeurs to close friends. Participants felt monitored, which made them act on high alert, especially for discriminated or "othered" identities. Many negotiated space within the community or decided to move onto other platforms, often more private messaging services.

Participants changed identities frequently, many daily, some hourly. Most transitioned with ease, unless the identity was work-related or if they faced a broad or unfamiliar audience. Participants moved fluidly between identities when they felt they were authentic to themselves. There was some stress involved with managing and keeping them separate. There were not many places that could support multiple identities, especially intersectional ones. Similarly, participants value their past selves immensely. None ever discarded a past identity, rather they archived it to reflect on or evolved it into their current identities. The past self becomes private, but not gone.

> **"I notice too that with my intersectional identity that I'm always shifting who I am dependent on which space I'm in, because there is no one place that holds all of my identities where I can truly be myself. I feel like with most people, I can only relate to at the most one or two of my identities but never any more than that."**
> - Participant quote

Participants were always plugged in, whether it be for work or relaxation. They felt as though they were required or forced to be online. The online world is stressful when we are so reliant on it. It becomes addictive and can exacerbate issues faced in offline worlds, which is commonly felt for those who are marginalized and with multiple identities. Participants stated, while the online space provided a creative space, they felt stressed, brainwashed, and unable to trust platforms and others. They experienced extreme guilt for spending most of their time online. The integration of online and offline worlds produced a real and perceived environment of being monitored, which incited fear and prevented participants to be themselves. Online spaces produced physical and financial repercussions. As such, they further foresee the convergence of the digital and physical self.

Identities were challenged when platforms served advertising and content that did not align with them. This felt jarring, controlling, and led some to question who they are, asking themselves, "Why did the platform think they would like this post?"

Online and digital spaces have a plethora of pros and cons. The negative impacts are often felt intensely by marginalized groups and those with distinct multiple identities. Participants experienced a range of emotions throughout the day, from one identity to another. There is a clear vision of what's working and what is not. The following results of the foresight activity continue to illuminate this.

THE FOUR SCENARIOS

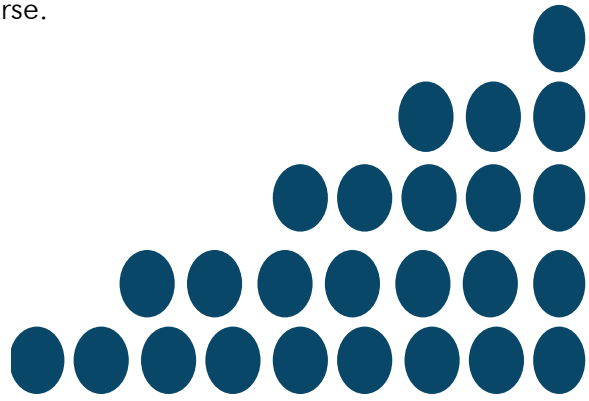
The four future worlds participants developed were disctinct and showed clear preferences between them. The preferred world is one we most work towards in this MRP's recommendations.

Digital Embodiment
Continued Growth (Most Likely)

In this scenario, digital trends we see today are amplified and ubiquitous. Our physical forms converge with the digital world, and everyone is online. Most people interact through digital realities, like metaverses, and newly build digital cities, which outpace their offline counterparts. All social media and digital platforms are connected, creating a volatile, non-diversified marketplace. There are thriving and active communities. The economy peaks, but it continues. The technology industry booms, notably due to the digital privacy and management field, offering services like digital detoxes.

Digital literacy is at an all-time high and leads individuals to have more control of their online identities, which take on a variety of forms, like NFTs. Our digital identities become distinct, recognized legally, and take prominence over other forms of identification. Biotechnology advances and technologies, like neural implants, enhance the human body. We can easily download knowledge into our minds.

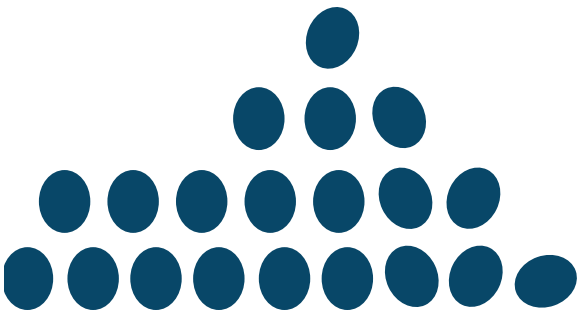
In the background, environmental catastrophes, information overload and misinformation reign. However, diversity and equity are core to how organizations operate. Governments are more diverse.



Identities Abound
Transformational (Preferred)

A transformational scenario exhibits a variety of identities and ways to co-exist. Biological and digital life intertwine and progress, so that human and animal mortality are extended. Not only can people live on in the digital afterlife, but the living can also participate in multiple places simultaneously. People can activate their identities through holograms. Extinct animal and plant life live on digitally. AI organisms and non-human identities live side by side with humanity and are granted an adaptation of human rights. All beings hold a digital collective consciousness and cooperation that transcends borders. Technology has enabled this new life and it becomes a core part of religion. Identities are in abundance. People can sell and trade them. Although there is immense personal control over their identities, unwanted surveillance still occurs.

Equality touches each corner of the world. Youth have a large say in their destiny and control over society. They are more educated, have access to technologies, and have sufficient resources to succeed. They encourage progressive discourse about identity issues, such as race. Representation in media is diverse in this post-racist world. People are encouraged to stand out from the crowd.



Control by Community
Disciplined
(Least Preferred)

This scenario prominently features high levels of regulation designed by the community at large. Regulations are representative of the population and their interests. Reliable systems vet online identities. The balance of powers has shifted, which impacts the technology industry. Systems and rules incorporate JEDI (justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion) perspectives. There are more restrictions contested online and offline, yet anyone can create digital identities and communities accessible and easily. All it takes is one click.

AI systems and moderators govern digital spaces with many positives and negatives. Our interactions and time spent online are monitored to prevent false information or mental fatigue from being constantly plugged in. New digital identity systems can identify discrimination. Punishment may include digital house arrest and restraining orders.

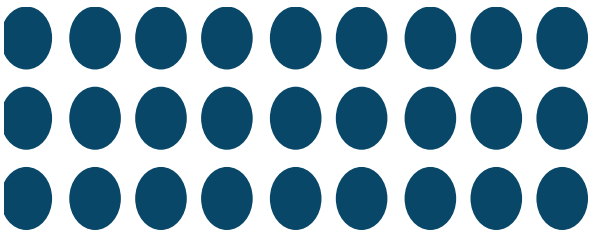
The amount of policing and digital reliance does elicit a digital revolt. People remove their digital presences, which disrupts the system. To enforce order in this digital world, martial law is imposed to bring people back online.

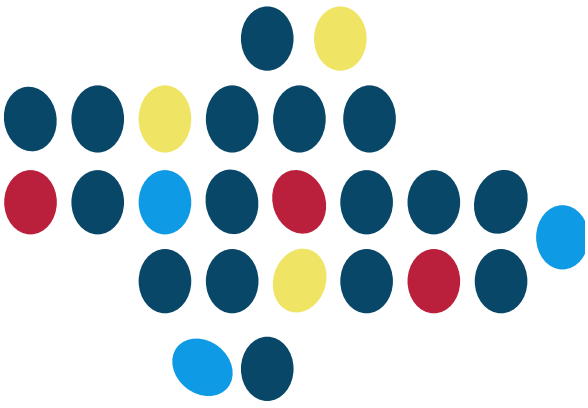
Unstable Grounds
Collapse
(Least Preferred)

The collapsed scenario sees the destruction of multiple systems simultaneously. Capitalism, the current day economy, racism, white supremacy, and social media collapse. Conspiracy theories about privacy and surveillance spur an overwhelming fear of technology, and as such, many social media platforms are eliminated. Digital identities are not regulated nor standardized. Many people opt for anonymity and sell their digital identities.

Climate change catastrophes are so potent that they disrupt internet access. People then retreat from the digital worlds and explore new forms of society. New forms of currencies also emerge, including physical currencies. However, due to the environmental destruction, usable land availability is at a minimum. Animals start to overtake the human world.

In absence of the systems that have collapsed, new religions also emerge, such as bot and AI reverence. People find safety in gated communities.





MAJOR THEMES

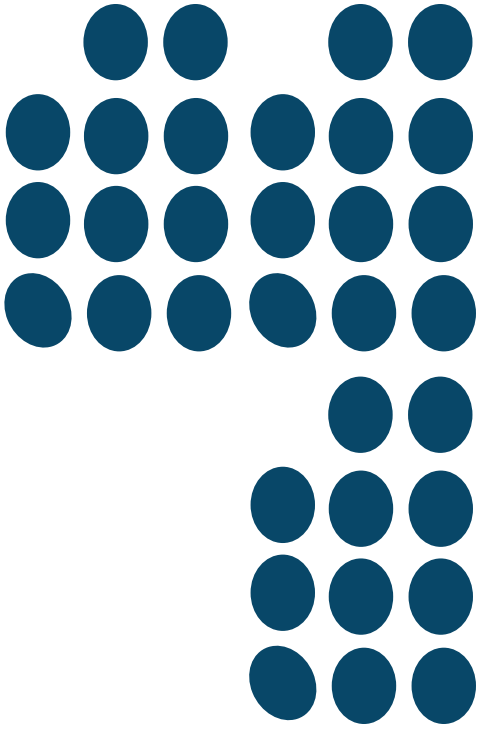
Identity Construction

The most remarkable finding was that switching between identities online was seamless. The act often involved some mental exhaustion to go from one state of mind to another, but that was primarily for those who managed multiple identities for work. Social media managers experienced the most tension and liminality between identities. Some went through a "neutral" state to clear their minds prior to embodying a foreign identity. Many had to come to terms with value and belief differences. Switching between one's own identities was easy, as they were all part of the authentic self. Transitioning between online and offline identities posed more challenges. Participants were more adventurous online, exploring various sides of themselves, while being more restrained in person. Being online allowed people to more actively chose what communities and interests they belonged to, and ways to present and express themselves than offline.

The community and one's immediate audience are key influences of one's identities, rather than technical or commercial reasons. Participants found platforms offered a range of options and tools to play with their identities. How well you know your audience impacted how much identity play would be exercised; established relationships, such as family and childhood friends, often hinder identity play. However, participants found that they are more themselves when the audience is narrow, like-minded, or if they knew them in person. Being online aids access to communities and provides multiple ways to connect. Exposure and entry into new communities may influence one's speech and dress. Having more personas with focused interests allowed participants to gain more access to different, separate groups. The content one sees in each persona's view is curated and specific, which helps individuals dive deeply into and feel immersed in each separate community. This may include work, personal, or interest-based personas.

Community members establish social norms online. Posts and comments that may counter the group or other public members' opinion were considerations that impacted online behaviour. This includes when one should speak up about an issue or risk being *cancelled*. As such, many experienced uncertainty after their online contributions, and sometimes deleting past posts completely. Participants also posted and interacted in ways that suited the platform's preference, such as positive and frequent posts. They spent ample time editing their photos and storing content for a future date.

> **"I didn't realize I was unconsciously content planning even during my spare time."**
> - Participant quote



Social Relationships

Social factors were key influences on identity and self-expression. Communities, from close friends to the larger public, regulate and inform identities. The more one knows their audience or has a more responsive following (i.e., receiving many likes on posts), the more confident and safer participants felt. However loud personalities can dominate spaces and limit room for others to express themselves, sometimes leading to feelings of self-doubt. One's communities are often divided by platform type (e.g., Facebook is for family). Both consuming and creating content are methods to activate and validate your digital existence.

Unless one knows another community member in-person, there was considerable doubt, assumptions, and speculation about each other. Participants perceived others as not "real" and used profiles for vetting. Some kept their profiles public, so that others can vet them and get to know them more intimately.

Communities where participants flourished were ones based on shared interests, facilitated positive feedback, and had multidirectional dialogue. They were both educational and playful. They enjoyed spaces where their thoughts about platform design were valued and had a high level of control over their content (e.g., deleting and editing posts).

"I think having different personas allows me to see more on the internet. A lot of platforms cater to your perspectives and what your preferences are, but with my different personas I am able to see a range of things that enter my feed."
- Participant quote

Financial and Transactional Implications

One of the most striking themes was financial and transactional implications. Participants were very aware about how their perceived identities impacted their careers and work opportunities. They viewed many platforms as transactional (e.g., Facebook groups and marketplace) and did not encourage identity play. Participants added or removed identity factors, like language, to fit in or earn more. Public-sector workers were much more reserved online as the risks and weight of information is much higher than some other professions. The findings showed a direct link between identity, person life, and work.

Identities also acted as an entry ticket to certain groups and services, specifically Facebook. Participants were dependent on them to perform critical life activities, such as viewing housing listings, buying and selling in marketplaces. They also felt pressure to act in the way the platform preferred. They were driven to be a creator versus a consumer, in exchange for more engagement and visibility. Liking, commenting, and posting became daily transactional maintenance activities.

"I looked at my screen time and saw that I picked up my phone 154 times today. 46 times for TikTok, 31 for messages, 23 for Instagram, and 8 for Spotify."
- Participant quote

RECOM-MENDA-TIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

Marketing has many existing technologies it can leverage to make digital spaces equitable and support dynamic individuals. It is a matter of redirecting focus. Online spaces, even branded platforms, can be built upon a foundation of inclusion and distributed power. There are pathways to ethical, human-centred digital marketing. We must be explicit about balancing privacy, corporate, and customer goals. One way to achieve this is to give consumers more choice, tilting the shift of power. When thinking about design, we should ensure those who are most vulnerable are accounted for and actively included. The recommendations below are based on the participants lived digital and online experiences, and their preferred foresight scenario. This transformational scenario exhibited immense community control, abundance and ease of creating identities, and equitable treatment amongst them. Based on the scenarios, diaries, and interviews, I developed recommendations following the three main themes (identity construction, social relationships, and financial and transactional implications). The recommendations include leverage points as outlined in Donella Meadow's *Leverage points: Places to intervene in a system* (Meadows, 1999). Not only do the following recommendations reflect those who are marginalized and embody different identities, either out of necessity or pleasure, but they can also be applied broadly.

See Table 1 for a summary of leverage points.

INSIGHTS FOR IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Understanding how we come into our own and participate in different online spaces impacts our well-being. The role of experimentation, rites of passage, and autonomy can help us traverse states of liminality and multiple identities. Community and social factors inform self-expression and self-authorization. Online and digital spaces can be a strong conduit for self-realization, however many barriers are present.

If all parts of our existence are wrapped up in one profile or platform, there is an over reliance on it, and we lose more of what we can control. As marketers and community managers, we must provide choices to participation and access to services. One should not feel obligated to participate or be "active" to be included in communities or marketplaces, and burdened to constantly post and be online. They should have the choice to develop their own identities and how they use them (e.g., a personal versus a work-oriented identity).

Communication platforms need safeguards in the event of potential harm by other community members or by the platform itself. Enmeshing equity principles and the lived experiences of vulnerable and liminal users in the design of communications reduces discrimination.

Because of unknown community members and online surveillance, users do not feel safe to conduct identity play or engage in experimental behaviour. They constantly felt judged. Moderation, active community managers, and explicit community guidelines are key to foster welcoming relationships and environments.

Communication platforms need to focus on

education and transparency. Information flows need to be updated, timely, and more accessible. In the 2003 and 2005 Annenberg Public Policy Center survey of American internet users, most think behavioural targeting and price customization are illegal (Turow, 2006). Most consumers disagree with this level of personalization and are also unaware of the inner workings of media platforms (Nightingale, 2011). Databases are making copies and recombinations of us; however, we are uninformed of these are constructed nor do we have control over them (Robinson, 2018). Turow suggests a dashboard that would allow users to see what information is collected and used for advertising and marketing (2012).

We write ourselves into the world, even more so online. We are in charge of our identities and take this chance to be our own biographers. During liminal phases and switching between identities, we are more attuned to boundaries and may need strategies to manage these states. Creating our own boundaries can help expand our range of identities. Continual advocacy for marginalized people and awareness of the effects of liminality is needed to assert their stake in online and digital spaces (Green & Gilman, 2018).

INSIGHTS FOR SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

The community and users should be in the direct line of communication with marketers and communication systems designers. Iterative feedback and a participatory communications model can help guide how identities are created and protected. A person's multiple identities, including past ones, are valuable, and require intentional care. An individual not only needs control and visibility over their identities, but also of those of their peers. They need to know who else is in their audience or segment. As there is much skepticism of who is watching and recording on the other side of the screen, additional methods to verify their peers can support a safe and more comfortable online environment. Additionally, dominant individuals can overwhelm spaces, so allowing adequate space for all individuals enhances participation and identity play.

Participants felt shock and self-doubt when they were served content misaligned with their logged-in identity. Their data doppelgängers did not line up with who they were. Often this content suggested that their behaviours were not the norm or was to entice them to engage in a certain way. Communities and systems should reduce the pressure to become an elite identity or preferred participant. Diversity of content discovery is important to break down information and reputation silos. However marginalized individuals need some ability to curate their feeds and decide with whom they interact. Many preferred numerous and varied groupings.

In a community space, the community should be an active stakeholder in its design and creation. Community members, especially those from marginalized groups, should have the power to self-organize which groups they would like to belong to, to develop their own audiences, and to have input on community guidelines. Instead of segment-making and society-making media, communities should have more self-determination to decide what groups that would like to belong to and what groups of people they feel most safe around. Desirable features that enable identity and community governance, as seen on Instagram, include simple tools to edit, delete profile, and archive content, as well as, features that specify which content is private, public, or for certain audiences.

Agency over how one is perceived and behaves in digital spaces is pinnacle for those who may be subject to harassment and have multiple identities. Individuals do their best to protect their authentic selves. Spaces where they are contested and questioned create tension and the desire to exist only in the background. Not only does this prevent full self-expression, but seeds more doubt and assumptions of one another.

INSIGHTS FOR FINANCIAL AND TRANSACTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

An unanticipated finding was financial and transactional considerations. Many participants "used" their identities as a form of payment or means of entry. They naturally thought of their identity utility. They had to create, participate, and give data to be included in services and communities, which led to mental and emotional exhaustion. If they did not engage frequently and consistently, they felt more disconnected. Offering a non-profile option to participate or decrease favourability for active users will create a more equitable and less consuming way to engage.

Because marketing and communications technologies prioritize growth and commerce, we need to be mindful of their impacts. A paradigm shift is required to see identities as more than commercial and transactional units. Commerce can be inclusive, whereby everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed. Organizations can make money and serve those who need their products rather than who can pay or interact the most. Marketers need to be clear about what are the financial and non-financial implications of their strategies and how they may impact career, and product or service offerings.

Table 1: Summary of Leverage Points

Below is an overview of Meadow's twelve systems leverage points in order from most impactful to least. This framework aids in understanding how we can change systems and where we need to focus efforts. Strategies lower in the ladder are often simpler to accomplish, and multiple leverage points may have to work simultaneously. Points higher up are much more rooted in culture, values, and beliefs, and therefore require persistence. Most recommendations concentrate on the design and governance of the digital ecosystem, and information transparency. Marketing practices are best suited to adopt and implement information flow and educational recommendations, row six, but may support other areas.

	Leverage Point	Identity Construction	Social Relationships	Financial & Transactional Implications
1	The power to transcend paradigms			
2	The mindset or paradigm out of which the system—its goals, structure, rules, delays, parameters—arises	• Involve community, equity, and inclusive practices in communication designs (shifting who holds power)		
3	The goals of the system			• Non-profile option to participate, so people don't feel pressure to "use" their identities
4	The power to add, change, evolve, or self-organize system structure		• Participatory communications model. Community input in system rules/guidelines • Individual power to control their identities and curate content they view	
5	The rules of the system (such as incentives, punishments, constraints)			
6	The structure of information flows (who does and does not have access to what kinds of information)	• Transparency into data use, marketing personal creation • Consumer education and digital literacy	• Community feedback • Audience transparency and verification	• Transparency of financial and non-financial implications
7	The gain around driving positive feedback loops			
8	The strength of negative feedback loops, relative to the impacts they are trying to correct against	• Safeguards against discrimination		
9	The lengths of delays, relative to the rate of system change			
10	The structure of material stocks and flows (such as transport networks, population age structures)	• Increase choices and platform diversification	• Provide sufficient space for identity play/ expression, not just for dominant individuals • Platform ability to allow editing, changes, archiving	
11	The sizes of buffers and other stabilizing stocks, relative to their flows			
12	Constants, parameters, numbers (such as subsidies, taxes, standards)			

CONCLU-SION

CONCLUSION

Despite benefits for personalization and relevancy, market segmentation and audience creation have led to numerous ethical and social concerns. Customer-centric marketing entails the development of customer profiles, proprietary audiences, and exhaustively analyzing the individual. The relationship between consumer and marketer has become closer sometimes with the best intentions. Digital media has evolved our perception of identity and relationships with one another.

Learning from those who have multiple identities and experience liminality exposed the nuances and thought processes behind identity creating and management. While the experience of liminality was not the most salient finding, this MRP uncovered the elements and circumstances of identity development and balancing many identities. Moving from one identity to another was rather seamless, and as such liminality was not a focus. This MRP revealed considerable findings about identity maintenance and social interactions in digital spaces.

Returning to the original primary research question — how might we develop more ethical, human-centred digital marketing by understanding its impact on liminal persons and those with multiple identities — the research insights went beyond digital marketing and segmentation, but also community management and systems design. The three major themes were identity construction, social relationships, and financial and transactional implications. These themes were in line with the preferred foresight scenario, *transformational*. Participants imagined a world where their expressed tensions were reduced, replaced by factors they found beneficial for personal growth and establishing authentic relationships.

Digital marketing's progression for more equitable participation should include increased community management, transparency, and collaboration with customers and audiences. Market segmentation and personalization are still applicable, but marketers should be aware that people flip through many versions of themselves, some blended and some distinct. And those who are marginalized strongly feel identity criticism in online spaces, overwhelmingly on social media. Individual and community safety consideration is needed when marketing assists platforms of connection.

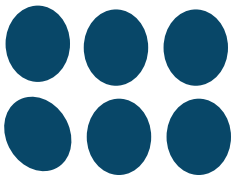
Digital and online spaces provide numerous opportunities for self-expression, self-exploration, discovery, and finding one's tribe. With consideration of people's identities and community spaces, marketing can champion a more equitable future of who we are.

Validation

The study's findings and recommendations did not find strong evidence of the experience of liminality amongst participants. However, identity play and having multiple identities were apparent and consistent. Participants found it rather easy to transition between different identities and online spaces. They preferred narrow segments, where they may know some of their followers and community members well and embracing multiple versions of themselves. Separating their different identities was natural if they were authentic to who they were.

A theory that also rang true was *impression management*, how audience and community members were a key factor of self-validation and feedback. Who was also in their group or niche impacted how individuals behaved, online and offline. Participants also showed multiple identities suited for various social situations.

Participant data agreed with each other, such as their online experiences and future scenarios. There were nuanced differences in online experiences depending on the nature of the communities the participants were in, such as public, work, and interest-based groups. There was a unanimous consensus of what each of the four future scenarios looked like and which was most preferred.



Future Research

During the research activities, there were three surprising findings that are worth exploring.

- **Lives of social media workers**
  Two of the participants work in or manage social media accounts. They often felt an increased or more frequent points of tension, having to personify different organizations and brands. They very much become actors, transitioning between their frontstage and backstage personas. They were also highly aware of their identities and have a high level of digital literacy. An extension of this research may include perspectives of marketers in dialogue with their consumers or branded audience to further investigate the link between marketing and identities.
- **The environmental costs of the identity industry**
  Most of the participants were highly concerned about climate change and its impact on identities and digital life. In some future scenarios, identities may live on, even past death. However, participants were concerned about the energy required to maintain and extend these lives.
- **Community-specific research**
  Even though my participant group was narrow, each person's digital and online experiences were influenced by their platforms, communities, and careers. Further research into the various types of community groups would highlight any detailed experiences and generalizations that can be made across groups (e.g., marginalized versus not marginalized).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions

	Questions Part 1
1	What were your general thoughts on the digital diary exercise?
2	What did you learn about yourself? What did you already know?
3	Did the activity change anything about you or your online activities?
4	What did you like and not like?
5	Do you have any other feedback about your digital diary experience?
	Questions Part 2
1	Tell me about yourself. Where you grew up, age, work?
2	Tell me about the online communities you are a part of?
2b	What digital spaces do you like to be a part of?
3	Tell me about your experience with identity play online? Identity play is the process of creating possible selves. People may craft, test, experiment with different identities.
4	How would you describe your different digital identities? What is different or similar between them?
5	Do any of the digital identities conflict? If so, please describe.
6	How would you rate yourself in your awareness of your digital personas? When did you become more aware?
7	How has having multiple/different digital personas affected how you use the internet, online services, or communications technologies?
8	What do you consider when you create or manage digital personas? What have been major influences in your identity creation?
9	Do you think your online personas are different from in-person?
10	How do you create, discard, or manage your online identities? Have you created new personas when facing new situations?
11	What do you enjoy and dislike about being in the state of liminality or having multiple personas?
12	Do you feel you are more restricted or more able to explore different aspects of your identity online/digitally?
13	Do you wish to have less, the same, or more personas? Please elaborate.
14	What identity characteristics are most important to manage? Do you change or alter your appearance, communication style etc.?
15	Do you feel like your self-identity has changed because of your participation in any of the communities or platforms you are part of? Do you think this change in your self-identity would have happened anyway if you had not participated in the group?

16	How are your digital personas impacted by marketing or digital platforms (e.g., Have you tried to confuse marketing/algorithms to change how you are perceived)? Do you feel certain platforms or digital spaces are unable to accommodate the identity you want to present?
17	What spaces do you think are most welcoming or conducive to identity play or managing your identities?
18	Do you encounter any problems and tensions when transitioning from one state and identity to another?
19	Anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B: Coding

Category	Code	Definition	Sub Codes
Experience	Mental	Thoughts, planning, analyzing, intellectual experiences	Exhaustion
			Planning
			Stress
			Creative
	Emotions	Feelings related to online or digital experiences	Existential
			Fear
			Conflicted
	Physiological	Bodily manifestations	
Financial	Career	Current and future work	
	Transactional	Exchange whether it be monetary or non-monetary	
	Marketing	Related to consumers, promotion, sales, advertising, and brand relationships	
Identity Construction	Profiles	Profile creation, management, and interpretation of other profiles	
	Management	Management of identities and online assets, includes content creation and posting	
	Transition	Movement between identities, platforms, and different states of being	
	Ecosystem	General micro and macro influences on identities	
Community	Audiences	Relationships and perceptions of others in their close or extended networks	
	Beneficial Spaces	Online and digital spaces that have a positive influence on the participants	
	Participation	Activities related to being and engaging in the community	
	Constructed	Perceptions that participants cannot believe what they see and who other people are and vice versa	

Category	Code	Definition	Sub Codes
Offline	Unplug	The desire to be offline and feelings of guilt when they are online	
	Convergence	The idea that the online and offline worlds are converging and working in unison	
	Separation	Divergence of experiences online and offline	