User Research

JUMPSTART_UserResearch

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OUR OBJECTIVE

The objective is to create a usable brainstorming aid for screenwriters and film creators with the goal of furthering the conversation surrounding climate change through films and television projects. Our client wants this to be an aid that helps develop that initial spark in the creative writing process with no intention of leading the user down a specific storyline.

RESEARCH GOALS

We conducted user research with two goals in mind. First, to gain an understanding of what an average film/television writer or content creator might experience with existing, comparable platforms, if they exist. Second, we sought to get a sense of what would make our website desirable and useful to our audience.

RESEARCH METHODS

To understand our users, we chose surveys and interviews as our method of research. Surveys provided us with the scalable results and statistics behind our users' experience with features we are interested in implementing. Interviews provided us with more qualitative data and an understanding of users' thoughts and feelings that cannot be covered through written responses.

OUR PARTICIPANTS

Our participants were Matthew Evans and Taylor Potter, both screenwriters to whom Dr. Hamilton recommended us. Matthew Evans is an assistant professor of screenwriting in the department of Entertainment and Media Studies at the University of Georgia and has worked on various notable film and television projects prior to his position at UGA. Taylor Potter is pursuing an MFA in Film, Television, and Digital Media at UGA while also working as the executive assistant to Neil Landau who is the director of the MFA program in which Taylor is enrolled. Both participants are representative of our target audience.

THE SURVEY

For our survey, we wanted to understand what type of people our users were. We also wanted to test how comfortable they would be with a design layout we were considering for the website. The survey consisted of 8 questions with the last three measuring their experience with a video clip that resembles the movement and landscape of our main webpage.
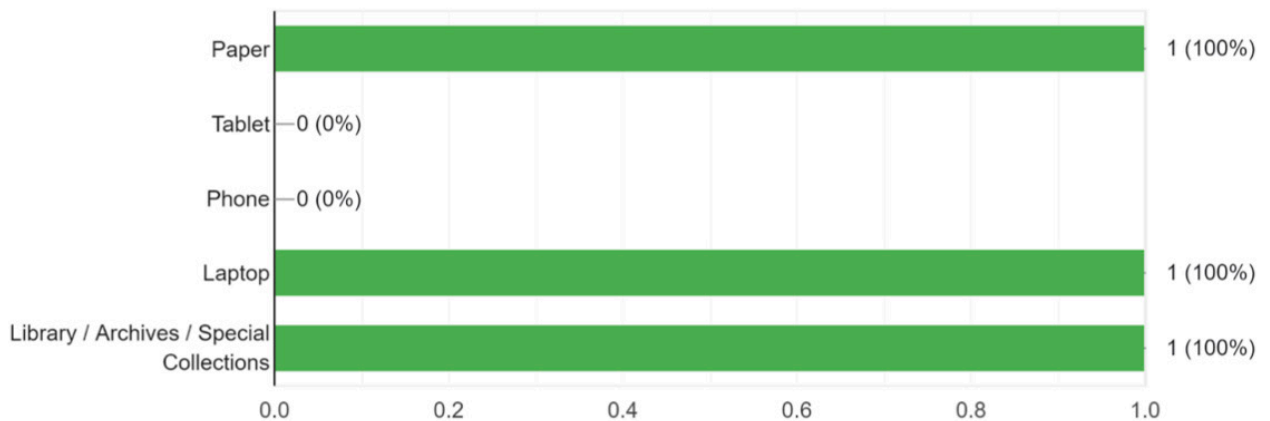
1. Have you used an online platform or mobile app as part of your brainstorming process?
1 response

- Yes
- No

100%
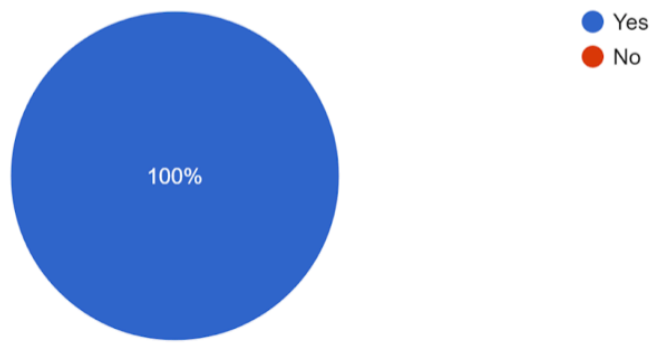
2. What medium(s) have you used in your brainstorming process? Please select all that apply.
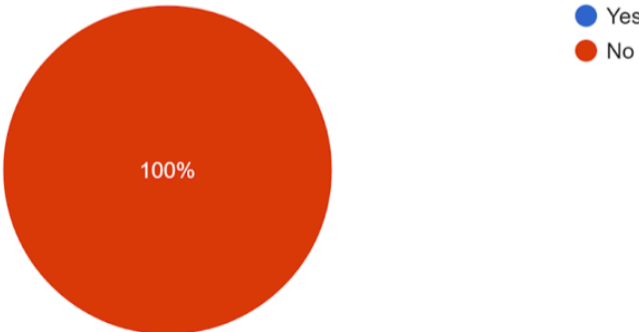1 response

Medium	Count
Paper	1 (100%)
Tablet	0 (0%)
Phone	0 (0%)
Laptop	1 (100%)
Library / Archives / Special Collections	1 (100%)

3. To what extent do you rely on online platforms to aid in your brainstorming process?
1 response

- ● Never
- ● Rarely
- ● Sometimes
- ● Often
- ● Always

100%

4. Have you used 10-second audio clips to help in a brainstorming session before?
1 response

- ● Yes
- ● No

100%

5. How comfortable were you with the movement of the words?
1 response

- ● Very uncomfortable
- ● Uncomfortable
- ● Neutral
- ● Comfortable
- ● Very comfortable

100%
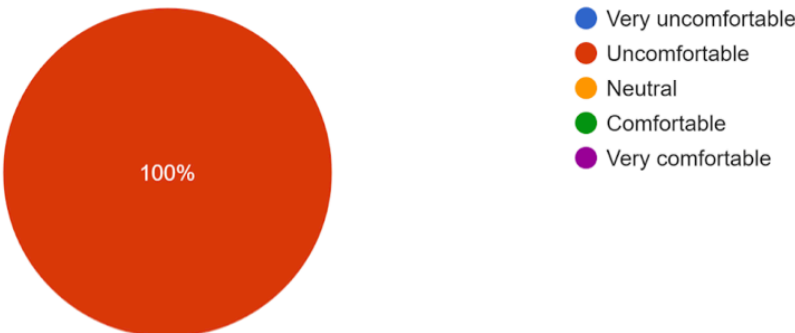
6. Were you able to recall any words from the video?
1 response

- ● Yes
- ● No

100%
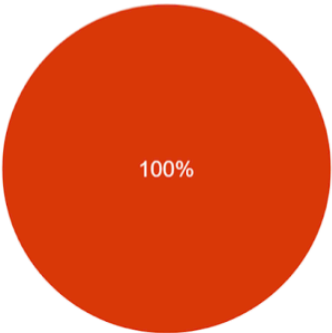
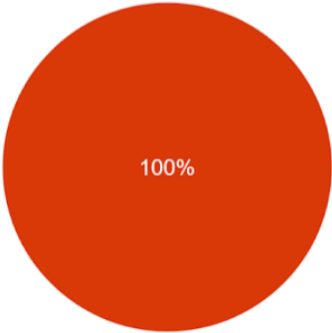## 7. Did you have any thoughts related to any of the words while watching the video?
1 response

- ● Yes
- ● No

100%

THE INTERVIEW

Beyond the survey, interviews were conducted to gain a more nuanced understanding about the current experience of our target audience when it came to finding inspiration for their projects.

Matthew Evans' career as a screenwriter consists of various projects that speak to current issues of today's society, such as eugenics in the U.S. For Matthew, inspiration for such stories is usually found while heavily researching a topic that piques his interest, and he currently writes from a backlog of inspirations and ideas. The research that Matthew conducts as part of his brainstorming process includes watching films and observing how writers develop the story and its characters. Brainstorming is most difficult for Matthew during the early stages of outlining, mapping, and constructing the plot. The process is further complicated in cases in which he goes into a project with a pearl of an idea but is unable to choose a direction to further develop it, leading him to have to "kill his darlings." When asked about his experience with audio files as a source for inspiration during the brainstorming process, Matthew revealed that he had once worked with hours-long recordings of a person's biography which he found to be particularly inspirational. Though fruitful, the experience also showed Matthew the necessity of a good search function that would not require him to listen through hours of recording to relocate a specific soundbite, and this was a feature he felt would be beneficial for an online platform that offers audio files. Other features he mentioned include a good index of the content and images to represent different audio files.

When introduced to our product, Matthew communicated that he had never used a platform like ours; there was no need since he sources his inspiration from his backlog of ideas and personal experiences. To conclude the interview, Matthew first introduced the idea of a generative image, a visual manifestation of what first inspires a writer's project. Finally, he emphasized that many screenwriters are visual people which meant that displays and images are major sources of inspiration.

While still fresh in her career, **Taylor Potter's** experience as a screenwriter has already led her to write an award-winning script that narrativized environmental threats posed to the Coosa River Valley. Taylor does not engage in a formal brainstorming process to form an idea; instead, she relies on what-if questions that arise from her personal experiences. When it comes to developing her ideas, Taylor has a more systematic approach which includes her alternating between digital and physical mediums to modify her written ideas. A few tools she uses during this process include Microsoft Word, whiteboards, and digital beat boards and beat sheets. Taylor mentions that these digital tools all employed skeuomorphic design. While she is flexible with the tools she uses, her one requirement is that there be a tangible element to developing a storyline. Collaboration plays a key role in her story-development process and usually consists of another individual interacting with her script via questions and analysis. For Taylor, the toughest part of the brainstorming process is when she has a beat sheet but does not have enough material to further develop a story. When asked about her experience with audio files as a source of inspiration, Taylor was quick to inform us that she does not like using audio as a source of inspiration since she identifies as being a more visual and tactile person. For this reason, she suggests features such as auto-captioning and skeuomorphic visual displays for an online platform that would utilize audio files. After being introduced to our product, Taylor stated that though she had not used many online platforms like ours, she has used a screenwriting software called Final Draft which she enjoyed for the tactile experience of being able to scroll through her script. At the end of the interview, Taylor shared her thoughts on how pursuing perfection stonewalls screenwriting. Her final suggestion to us was a feature that helps the user generate something at the end of the experience or at least force the user to write something down.

CLOSING INSIGHTS AND FUTURE PLANS

Based on our data for the survey, we learned that as expected, our target population are familiar with using digital technologies when brainstorming. However we noticed that our users were not comfortable with the video of floating words we presented and it did not help them in cultivating thoughts. Since we were interested in implementing that feature into our website, we had to talk with the design team and consider further actions to take.

The participants, though both part of our target audience and therefore share many qualities, revealed to us a noteworthy distinction between them that is important to consider as part of our final product. The three major commonalities we observed between the two subjects were their preference for visual and tactile elements, the liberty they take in the brainstorming processes, and a desire for a generative artifact at the end of brainstorming. We expected individual differences to arise during the interviews. Our initial aim was not to cater to the differences but rather focus on the shared characteristics of our target population to include functions that would be relevant to as many people as possible. We soon realized, however, that such differences actually indicate possible friction points we would not consider otherwise. While Taylor and Matthew both stated that they preferred visual and tactile stimulus, Taylor outrightly stated that she did not enjoy engaging with audio content. Given the fact that our product is founded upon using audio files for inspiration, leaving this difference unaddressed would prevent our product from being used by screenwriters like Taylor. As we transition into the refinement stage of our product, we will continue investigatng both the shared and unique characteristics of potential users to determine which features we will include in our final product.

In the future, we hope to continue doing user research and growing our participant pool in hopes of reaching a true representative population. While we have gained indispensable insight into our target audience's experiences and preferences, we want to connect with more screenwriters from more varying backgrounds/experiences/expertise to uncover more information that we have yet to consider for our product's design and branding. We also plan to continue communicating with our client when developing ideas and insights about the project. With the conclusion of this stage of user research, however, we have enough findings to proceed and create a pleasurable and useful iteration of our product.