Instagram Case Study

Adding a new hashtag feature

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What are hashtags?

Hashtags on Instagram are keywords that organize and spread awareness of a user's content while giving them the opportunity to get discovered by new audiences. In short, they help recommendation/suggestion algorithms bring similar content together that start conversations and grow audiences.

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Current uses for hashtags

1. Promoting content
2. Engaging with audience
3. Growing creator following
4. Building relationships with followers
5. Improving search results
6. Making creator content easier to discover
7. Finding competitors and collaborators
8. Social justice campaigns

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The Problem

How might we help Instagram (IG) creators efficiently hashtag their posts and save time?

The Solution pt.1

Core hashtags (optional): Most content creators have a few hashtags that they always use for each post and want to be associated with. They typically identify the creator, their content, and interests. Creators will input up to 30 hashtags that will automatically appear in each post and serve as the baseline for the recommendation tool to generate hashtags from.

Tagged Profiles List: Creators can select up to 30 favorite creators that are in their niche and tag their profile. For these 30 tags, an AI-algorithm will find the commonalities among them and analyze the most used hashtags with the highest number of impressions and followers and generate a common shared hashtag list. This list will be what the recommendation tool uses and all other related hashtags to automatically recommend creators hashtags based on their favorite creators who share the same target audience.

The Solution pt.2

Hashtag Recommendation Tool: In order to reduce time spent researching trendy hashtags or what hashtags popular creators use, this AI-powered recommendation algorithm will give users groups of relevant hashtags based on frequently used hashtags among the creators in the tagged profiles list and the user's core hashtags. To help users diversify their hashtags, the generated hashtag groups will be separated into three different competition levels: popular (1M+), medium (500k+), and niche (200k and below). The tool will only present hashtags that have not been banned.

Goals

1) Create a new hashtag feature that is easy for users to understand, expedites the time it takes to finish hashtagging a post, and integrates into Instagram's current UI.
2) Use Instagram's UI

Process Overview

1. Empathize

Research:

Secondary Research

Competitive Analysis

User interviews

Empathy Map

Persona

2. Define

Information Architecture:

Sketches

3. Ideate

Interaction Design:

Task Flow

Wireframes

4. Prototype

UI Design:

Prototype

5. Test

Iteration and Implementation:

Usability Testing

Affinity Map

Empathize- Secondary Research

- Instagram has more than **TWO billion** users using the app every month.
- **More than 50% of IG accounts use "Explore"** to discover new content and new accounts to follow. **Thus, hashtags are still very relevant and important.**
- Business accounts post an average of 1.71 feed posts a day
- If you use more than 11 hashtags on a post, it's going to have 79% more interaction than no hashtags.
- Longer hashtags typically between 21-24 characters do better than shorter hashtags.
- Posts with at least one hashtag get about 12.5% higher engagement.

578

1K

5K

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Empathize - Research Goals

1) Understand creator sentiments, needs, pain points, and motivations.
2) Understand and observe the hashtagging process for different types of creators ranging from casual (but regular) to professionals.

Empathize - Competitive Analyses

Two competitive analyses were performed: one to research what competitors Instagram has and how they hashtag, and the other analysis looked at the strengths and weaknesses of current third-party hashtagging apps/websites.

Competitive Analysis – IG Competitors

	Our Company	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3
Product name	Instagram (IG)	Twitter	TikTok	YouTube
Target Customers	Photographers, creatives, businesses, celebrities, young adults, beauty, fashion	Microbloggers, publishers, journalists, businesses, celebrities, politicians, young adults, creators, etc.	Teenagers, young adults, Gen Z, businesses, entertainers, creators, dancers, beauty, fashion	Everyone -- creators, entertainers, educators, journalists, financial advisors, businesses, etc.
Services/Features	Insights: IG analytics to understand audience, when they're most active, and what type of content they're engaging with. Also, IG impressions - number of times content was shown to users. Post: still photos to showcase a body of work ie: photos, products, personal life updates, ads, memes, artwork, etc. Reels: short videos for mini vlogs, life updates, reactions, dances, product advertisements, etc. Shop: purchase products from favorite creators/ businesses Explore: recommended videos/photos based on past likes, comments, and engagement Search: search by keyword to explore topics, hashtags, and find creators	Twitter Analytics: breaks down the behaviors and actions of your audience, clicks, likes, etc. In here, users can see "Twitter Trends" and view "Hashtags Frequently Mentioned" to track keywords and hashtag performance over time. Trend For You: feature that detects trending hashtags, but sometimes doesn't work as you'd expect. But doesn't give you specific hashtags related to your keyword. So not considered a good social listening tool. It's mainly for users to discover trends that might interest them. What's trending: feature to see the most popular trends of the day. Tweet: 140-character messages/posts that can contain photos/videos	TikTok Analytics: track follower growth and video performance, extended data and analytics for each video ie: total views, shares, comments, etc. Duets: videos with split screen with the original content on the left and the new video on the right Stitches: like duets but with the original video playing for a few seconds before the new video does Stories: like Snapchat's disappearing videos Video reply: long-press a comment to reply to and create a short video Discover: AI-powered recommended videos Ads Manager: drive business with ads Creator Marketplace: easy to connect to influencers	YouTube Analytics: Track subscriber growth and video performance, extended data and analytics for each video ie: total views, shares, comments, etc. Video: longer form content for vlogging, education, entertainment, etc, Shorts: short recommended videos Recommended videos: AI-powered recommended videos based on likes, shares, comments, subscribed channels Youtube premium: downloads, ad-free content, youtube music
Strengths	Easy to find like-minded creators Organic growth (however, note: it's relatively harder than it was before for smaller accounts to grow) Users can follow hashtags in addition to creators A google-search like predictive list of hashtags are revealed as the user types in a hashtag with the number of times the hashtag has been used	Trends are based on who you follow, your interests, and your location. Messages are short and thus not as labor-intensive Excellent for quick free speech and self-expression A google-search like predictive list of hashtags are revealed as the user types in a hashtag with the number of times the hashtag has been used	Extremely enthusiastic Gen Z audience, easy engagement Seemingly easier to go viral since it doesn't recommend content based on follower count or history of high-performing videos → everyone has the chance to go viral A google-search like predictive list of hashtags are revealed as the user types in a hashtag with the number of times the hashtag has been used	Solid source of income Connect with the largest audience with the most diverse content: tech, fitness, gaming, makeup, etc. Every niche is welcome with no cap on video length A google-search like predictive list of hashtags are revealed as the user types in a hashtag with the number of times the hashtag has been used
Weaknesses	30 hashtag limit per post Users aren't notified of repeat hashtags in the same post Overwhelming number of ads	Marketing & hashtagging is limited to character limit. Longer messages are broken down to individual tweets. Lots of spam and fake accounts	Only videos allowed, 2200-character limit including hashtags TikTok Ads Manager minimum spends are pricey Highly addictive	Limit of 15 hashtags per video description, doesn't tell user if they go over limit or if there are repeats Inappropriate content & scammers Difficult to start earning real income Lots of rules to follow

Conducting a SWOT analysis is a powerful way to evaluate your company or project, whether you're two people or 500 people. In this video, you'll learn what a SWOT analysis is, what each letter stands for, and how you can use one in your company or product evaluation.

#swotanalysis #marketing

767/5000

#marketing
471K videos • 106K channels

#marketingdigital
206K videos • 39K channels

#marketingtips
35K videos • 5.8K channels

#marketingstrategy
37K videos • 7.3K channels

#marketingonline
26K videos • 3.5K channels

Thumbnail

Select or upload a picture that sh viewers' attention. Learn more

Marianne
@MarianneDeNo

Tweets 38 Following 26 Followers 18

Trends for you · Change

#Bite2WinSweepstakes
Bite, Snap, and Share for a chance to win.
Promoted by NABISCO

#MondayMotivation
146K Tweets

Check out this amazing chandelier in out Shanghai hotel. You would never guess that just outside, there is a nasty fish market. #Travel

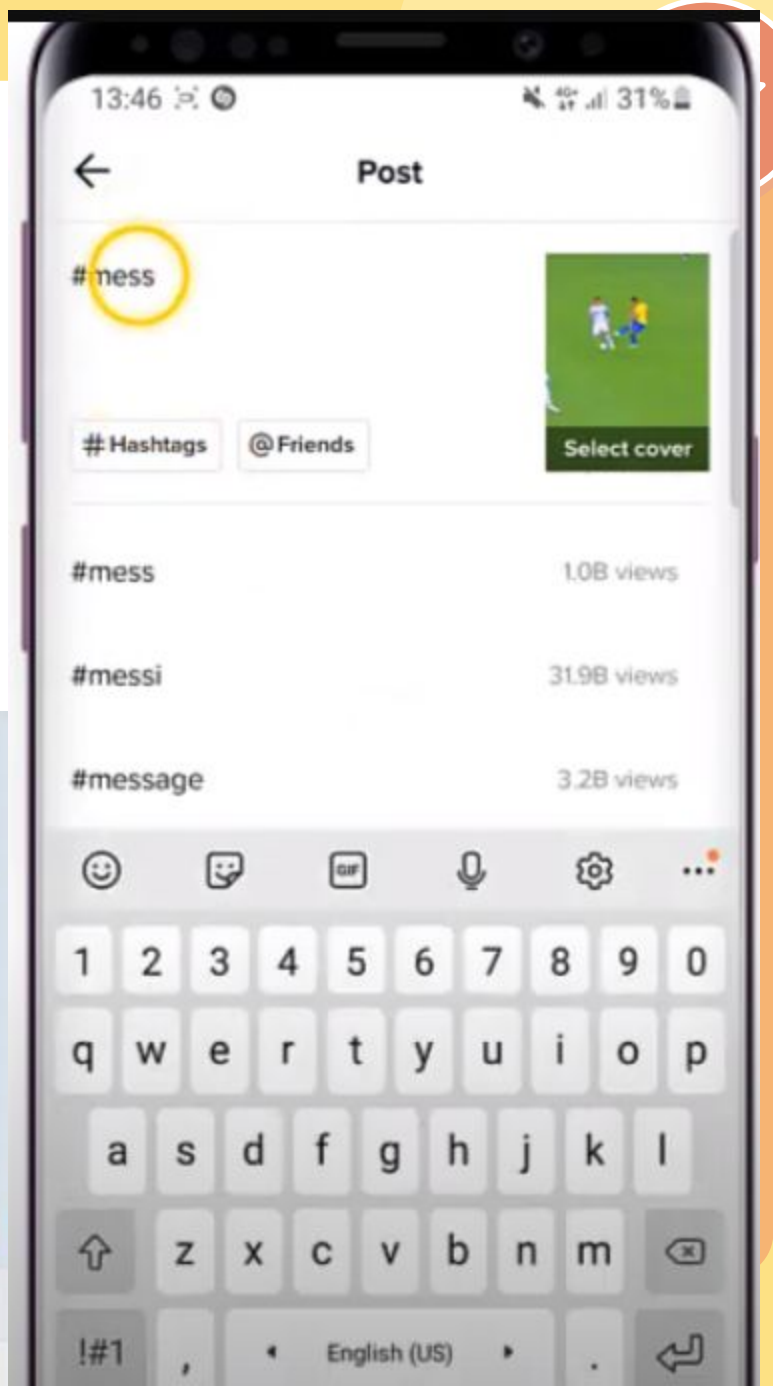
#travel
#travelpics
#travelgram
#travelexpo18

photo?

Tweet

See 1 new Tweet

LDS Messages @LDSMessages · 37m



Competitive Analysis - Hashtagging companies

	Company 1	Company 2	Company 3	Company 4
Product name	Influencer MarketingHub	FOR DISPLAY PURPOSES ONLY	#IQ Hashtags	Hashtag Expert
Pros	Free desktop version Easy to use, just upload an image and hashtags are generated Mobile app is available	Free desktop version Easy to use, type in one or a few hashtags in the search bar and relevant hashtags will appear Site gives users data on the top countries/cities of the hashtag, demographics, and most used languages of the hashtag for more targeted hashtagging	Free 7-day trial Easy to use, provides lists of trending hashtags and banned hashtags Provides reels metrics, user is able to check hashtag performance Up to 72 hashtags collections/hashtag lists organized by subject/category ie: product/service, niche, seasonal, daily, location, etc. User can search hashtags relevant to theme of profile Able to view audience demographics and interests as well as number of likes and comments based on which hashtags were used	Free 3-day trial Easy to use, generates different groups of hashtags that users can choose from that they think best suits their target audience Grades hashtags on performance and gives predictions on hashtag performance Search for the hashtag you want and the app generates relevant and trendy hashtags within various categories ie: dancing, photography, cooking, etc. Able to post directly into IG using mobile app Talk with other members to discuss strategy, give feedback, etc. Avoids banned hashtags for the user
Cons	No option to save hashtag group or make lists based on categories Still requires some manual input for generator to generate hashtags Some hashtags are too generic or not relevant to post/ photo content Mobile app reviews state that it's glitchy Requires copying and pasting into IG	No mobile app Requires individual manual input into IG	No mobile app Costs money for the full version, from reviews users seem to feel like they've been overcharged for the services provided Still requires copying and pasting into IG	No desktop version Most expensive option, after 3 days users will have to pay $90 a year Unable to scan image/video/post to generate more specific hashtags, generated hashtags are dependent on user's initial hashtag input Grades hashtag groups (A, B, C, D, and F) to have a "balanced" hashtag group but leaves users unsure of how the grades are broken down and how effective the grading system is

Empathize - User Research

Participants: 10

Background: Active content creators with some using Instagram as their main marketing tool for their small businesses

Age: 23- 40

Sample questions

1) On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being extremely easy, how would you rate the hashtagging process?
2) On a scale of 1-5 with 5 being extremely important to you, how would you rate the importance of hashtagging?
3) Can you describe and walk me through your hashtagging process please? (ie: 1. Research hashtags 2. Look at my photo and see what content is in there 3. Think of relevant hashtags 4. Look at other creator's hashtags and see which i can adopt 5. Copy and paste my hashtag group etc.)
4) If there was an ideal way to hashtag, what would that look like?

Empathize - User Research - General Findings

Needs

- Simple, fast, easy, and effective way to hashtag
- Suggestions on hashtags that are relevant to the post, location, and the content within the post, not just predictive hashtags that are currently being provided based on what the user types in
- Notify user or prevent user from repeating the same hashtag in a post
- A way to use popular/trending multilingual tags quickly without switching keyboards
- A way to see the common hashtags that favorite creators are using and/or a way to see the most followed hashtags of the user's followers
- A way to select recommended hashtags from a trending/popular list specific to user needs/ interests/ target audience
- A way to select hashtags from different competition levels ranging from trending (>1M) to niche (>50k) for more diverse posts
- Autocorrect incorrect spelling

Frustrations

- Hashtagging takes time away from content creation, "one more thing I HAVE to do"
- Requires trial and error to learn what hashtags to use to appeal to target audience
- Takes time to find the right hashtag group in notes app
- Annoying to copy and paste hashtag groups onto the post and then individually delete a few hashtags and replace them
- Takes time to think of relevant hashtags, have to do research for "good" hashtags, can be boring
- No idea what the trending hashtags are
- "I have no idea what hashtags my followers follow."
- Popular hashtags are oversaturated
- Hashtagging is different from what it used to be. "Before, using popular hashtags guaranteed impressions, but now it's a shot in the dark."
- Don't know if hashtag is shadowbanned
- Aesthetically unpleasing seeing hashtag groups in post
- Requires help of third-party websites for "good"/ effective/trendy hashtags

Motivations

- It's required to have (some) reach
- Essential for small businesses/creators to grow
- Reach target/niche audiences
- Find similar, like-minded creators
- Find community to draw inspiration and ideas from
- Follow hashtags and view more content of interest(s)
- Catalog and categorize posts

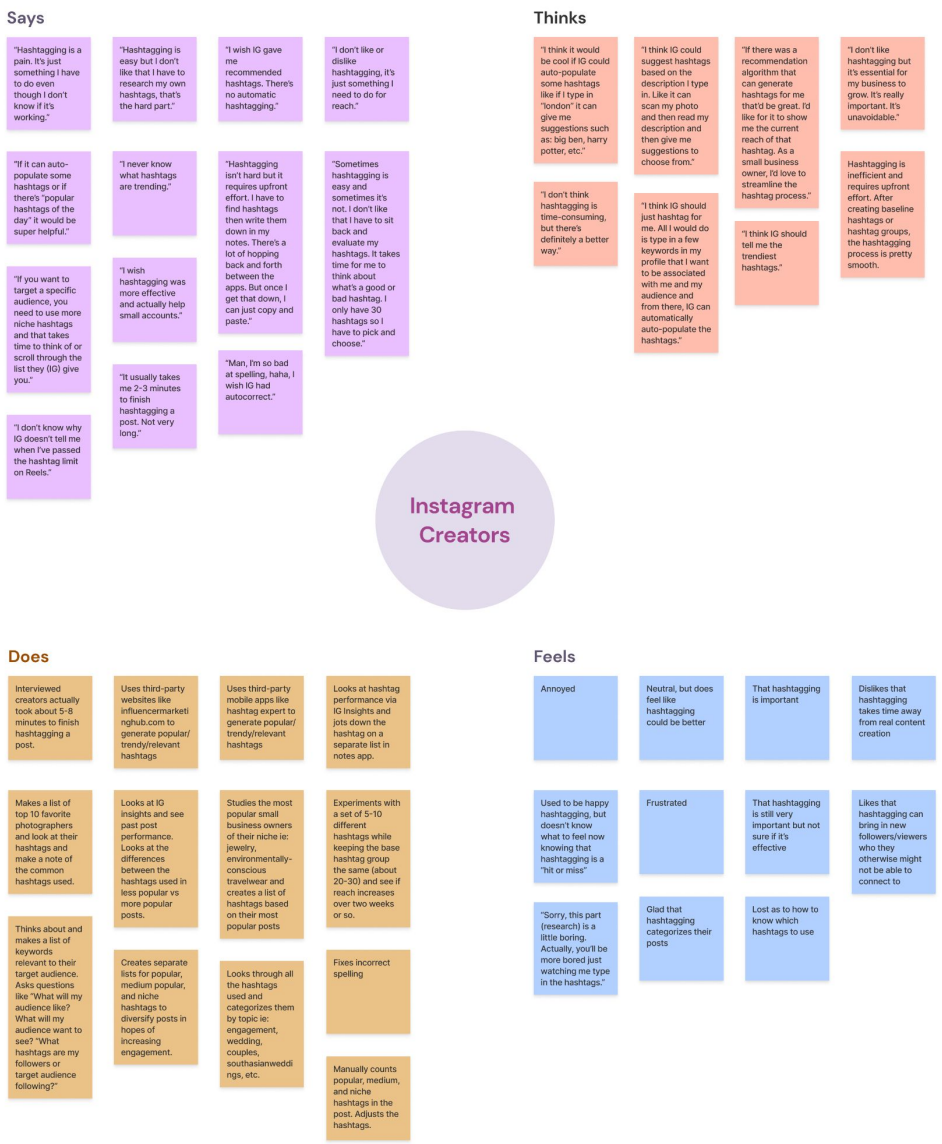
Empathize - User Research - General Findings

- Even casual creators did some prior research before posting, such as looking at their favorite creators' most used hashtags.
- Everyone used their notes app to copy and paste hashtag groups to expedite the hashtagging process, no participant manually typed in all 30 hashtags individually.
- I noticed that the small business owners I interviewed tended to use at least one third-party hashtag generator websites/apps.

Empathize - User Research - General Findings

- The sentiments around hashtagging ranged from annoyed and frustrated to neutral with an average “Easy” score of **3.3 - neither hard nor easy.**
- Everyone agreed that hashtagging is very important with the average score of **4.2 - Very Important** (5 was explained as “Extremely Important”).
- The creators I interviewed stated that they take 2-3 minutes to finish hashtagging a post after doing some research. However, my observations revealed that **they take 5-8 minutes.**

Empathize - Empathy Map



Empathize - Persona

Santi Madrigal

AGE	33
EDUCATION	PhD
STATUS	Open relationship
OCCUPATION	Small business owner/Artist
LOCATION	Oxford, UK

Personality

Introvert · Thinker · Philosopher · Neurotic · Empathetic · Loyal

> "As a small business owner, I prioritize time. Anything that can save me even a few minutes is precious."

Brief story

Santi grew up in a loving family of pharmacists in a small, charming village in southern Spain. He's worked hard his whole life to get a PhD in Philosophy from Oxford on a full-ride scholarship. Constantly seeking the truth, he expresses himself through both contemporary dance and abstract art. He teaches dance at his academy that doubles as his art studio. Santi values his time, the quality of his relationships, self-expression, and freedom. He relies on Instagram to grow his business, share his passions, connect to his audience, and attract sponsors (and brand deals). Ultimately, he hopes Instagram will help him gain financial freedom and the power to bring dance and art to his village and inspire the village youth to explore alternative careers to farming.

Needs

- Financial security
- Reliable metrics and systems
- Consistency and efficiency
- Streamlined processes
- Time for actual content creation
- Marketing assistance

Pains

- Changing algorithms
- Lack of customer support
- Trial and error
- Lost time for inconsistent or small gains
- Overthinking
- Tedious but necessary processes

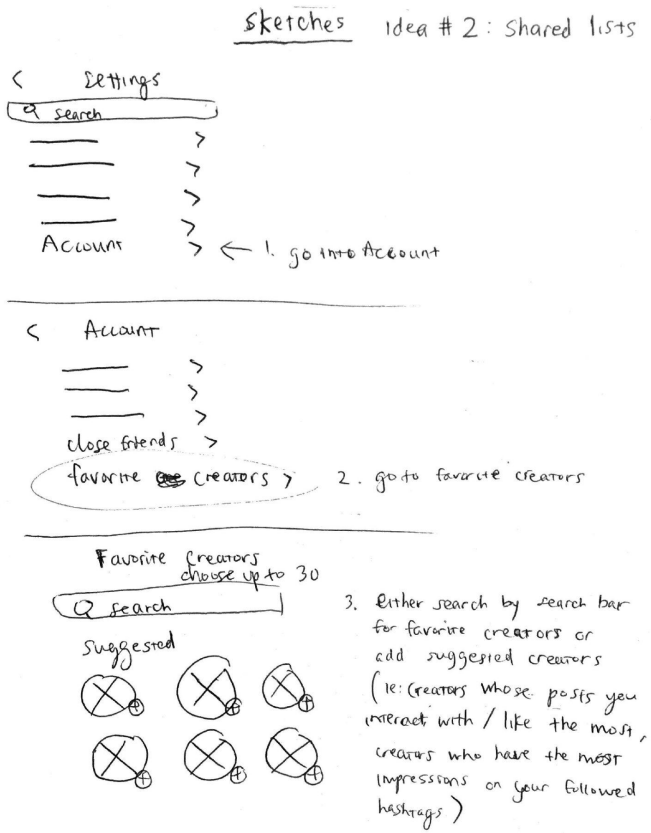
Motivations

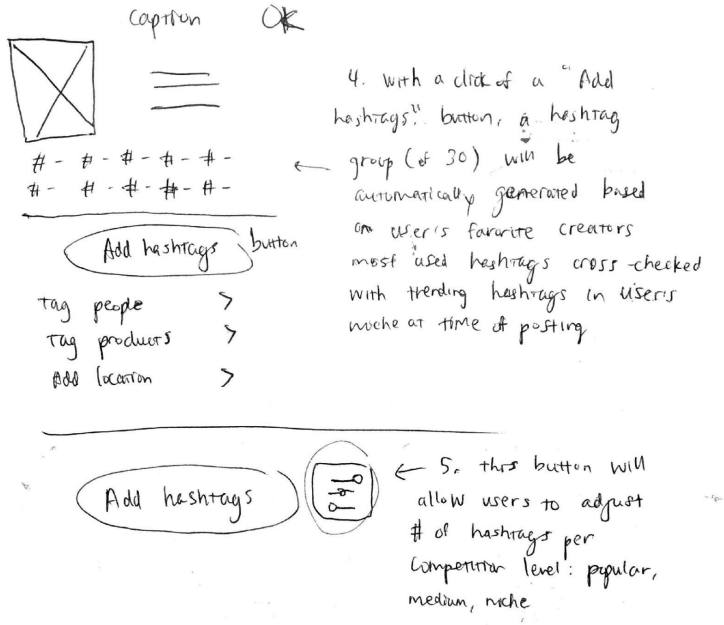
- Financial freedom and security
- Positive customer/client reviews
- Effective outcomes
- Village youth
- Self-expression

Brands

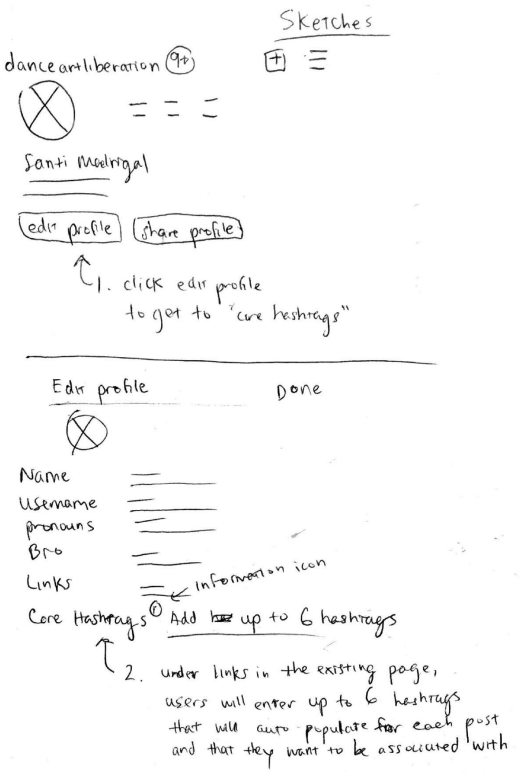
adidas · ZARA · La Mallorquina · MILLENNIUM DANCE COMPLEX LOS ANGELES

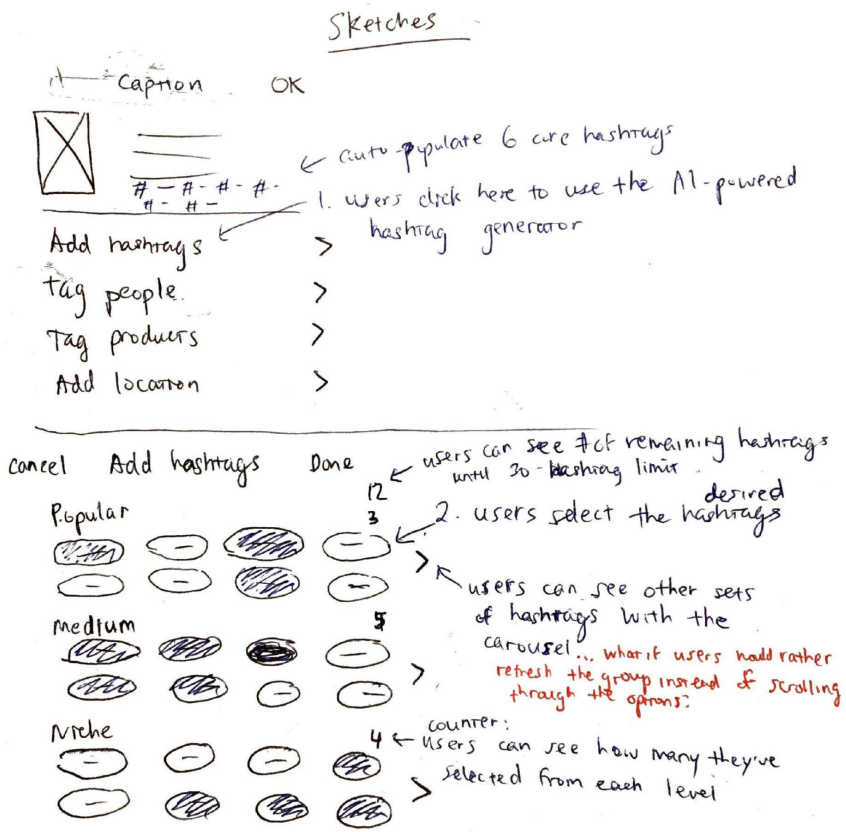
Define - Sketches



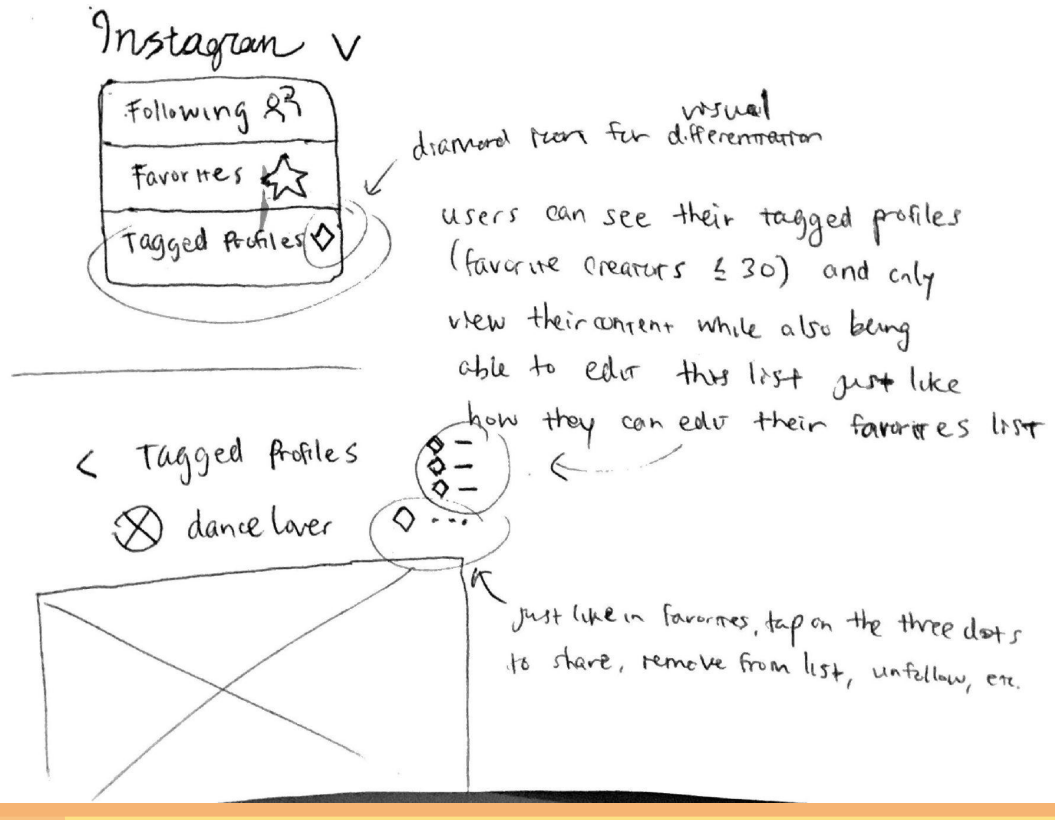


Define - Sketches





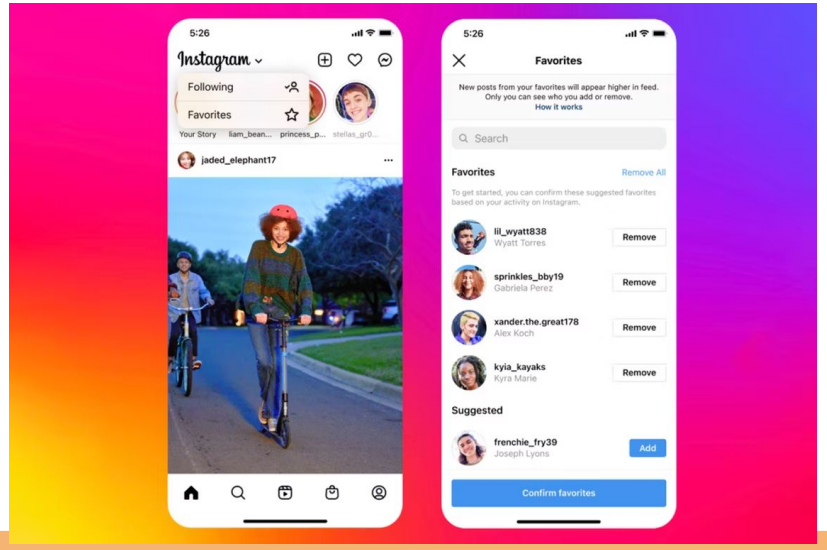
Define - Sketches



More Research!

Last march of 2022, IG created a following and favorites list to give users more control over their feed. These two feeds don't have suggested posts or ads and places content in chronological order, much like the way it used to back then.

Following: see the latest posts from all accounts that a user follows in the order they were posted
Favorites: star up to 50 accounts so their posts show up higher in the main default feed. These posts have their own "favorites feed" starting with the most recent post.



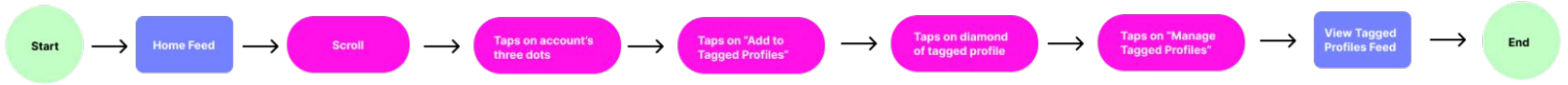
More Research Findings

- 3 interviewees said that they know of the favorites feed/list but don't use it much.
- 3 interviewees said that they use the "favorites" as their "close friends" list to only see content from their close friends while t
- **4 interviewees said that they use “favorites” for close friends, celebrities they like, and favorite creators.**
- The majority of them use the "following" list if they get too tired of seeing ads and suggested posts.
- Of the 7 interviewees who do use “favorites”, when asked if they would be interested in a “third feed for creators whose hashtags they want to borrow from, **5 said that they would be interested.**
- Of the 4 business accounts, a half said that they don’t care about having a third feed since they already have two separate IG accounts , one for personal and the other for business. The other half said that since they have one IG for both personal and business, it would be nice to have **different lists to separate the personal and business feeds.**

Ideate - Task Flow - Task 1

Task flow 1a: As a small business owner, Santi wants to tag other (favorite) small business owners in his niche to follow their content and frequently used hashtags.

Task flow 1b: As a small business owner, Santi wants to tag other (favorite) small business owners in his niche to follow their content and frequently used hashtags.

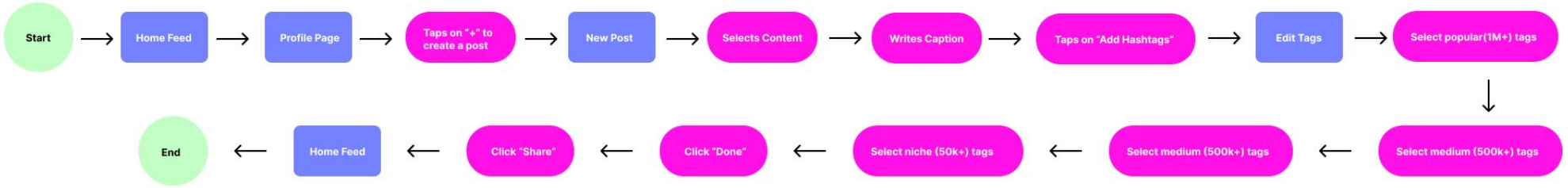


Task flow 1c: As a small business owner, Santi wants to tag other (favorite) small business owners in his niche to follow their content and frequently used hashtags.

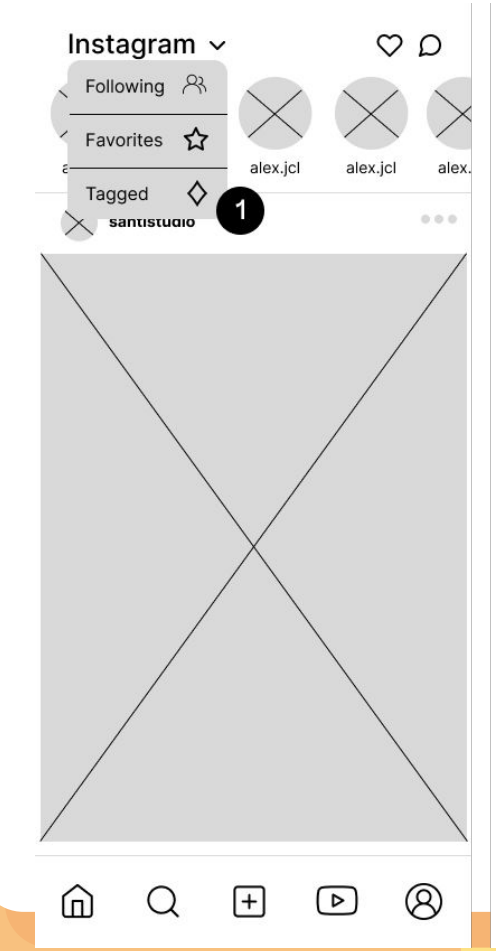
Ideate - Task Flow - Task 2 and 3

Task flow 2: As a content creator, Santi wants to use a set of "core hashtags" that he repeatedly uses specific to his brand and niche and that he wants to be associated with.

Task flow 3: As a busy, small business owner, Santi wants to decrease the time it take for him to complete the hashtagging process so that he can spend more time on actual content creation.

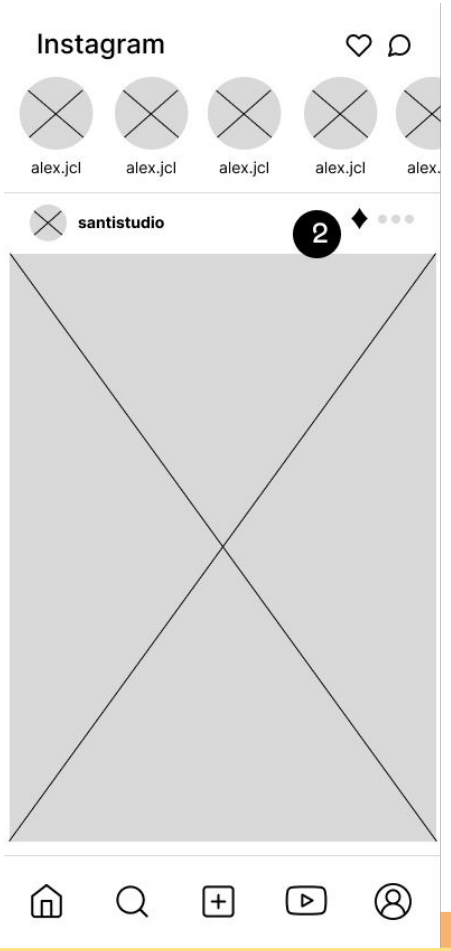


Ideate - Wireframes - Task 1



1 Tagged Profiles List

Users will access this tertiary list just like how they access their "Favorites" list via Instagram's logo on the home screen.

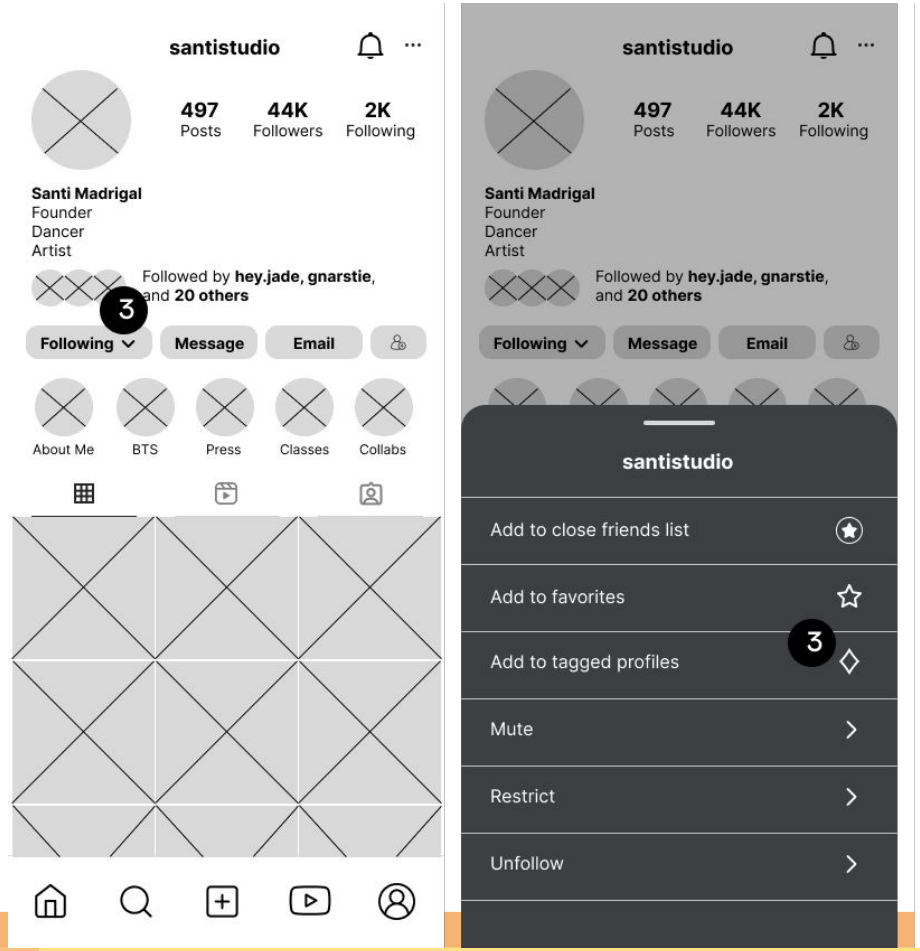


2 Purple Diamond

To respect IG's current UI, the diamond will light up purple once users add the creator to their tagged profiles list much like how the orange star appears next to the creator's name when they are favorited.

Also, similar to the "Favorites" star, this diamond is clickable and will direct users to their "Tagged Profiles" list. The flow mimics the exact flow that "Favorites" has in viewing/editing creators to the list.

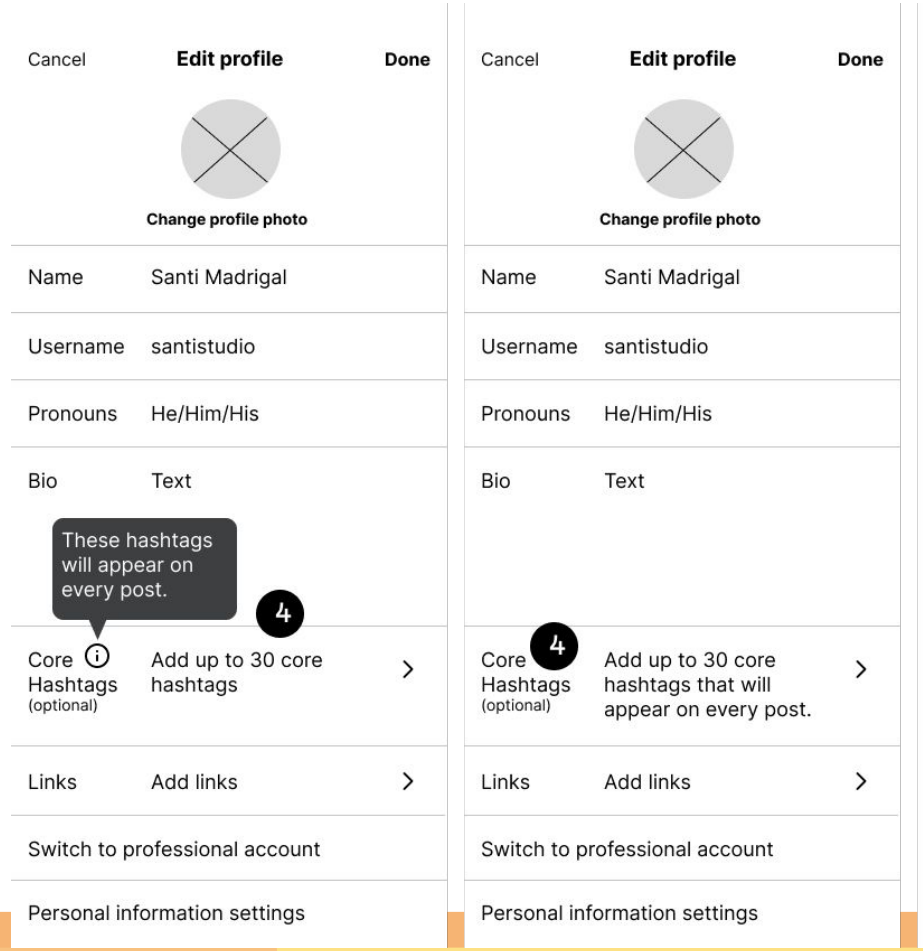
Ideate - Wireframes - Task 1

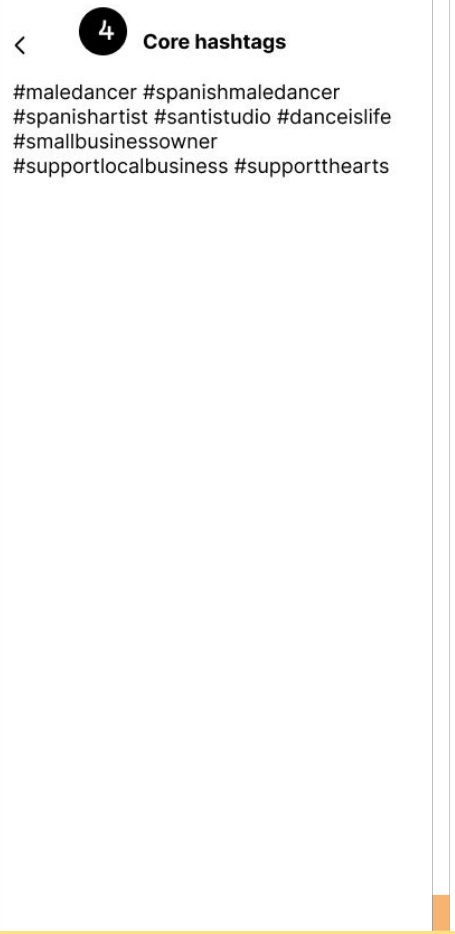


3 Adding to the Tagged Profile List

To respect IG's current IA, the tagged profiles list will also be accessible via "Following" in the creator's profile right under the "Add to Favorites" option.

Ideate – Wireframes – Task 2





4 Core Hashtags

To make this feature easily accessible, I placed it in the "Edit profile" screen much like how a user would edit the text in their "Bio". This flow mimics the "Bio" flow.

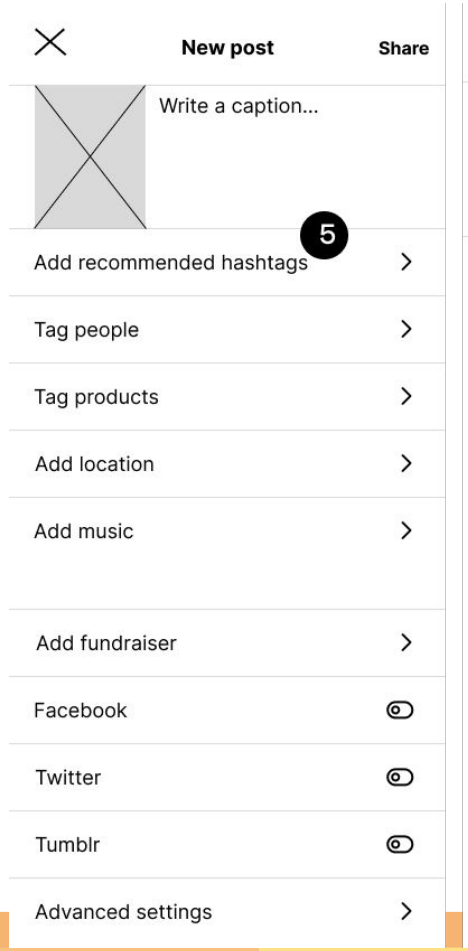
From my research, I learned that the repeat hashtags creators use were most likely hashtags that described their identity, their brand (ie: niche of photography, product category, etc.), and were generally keywords they wanted to become associated with. To strengthen this tie to a creator's identity, I placed this group of repetitive hashtags in the creator's "Edit profile".

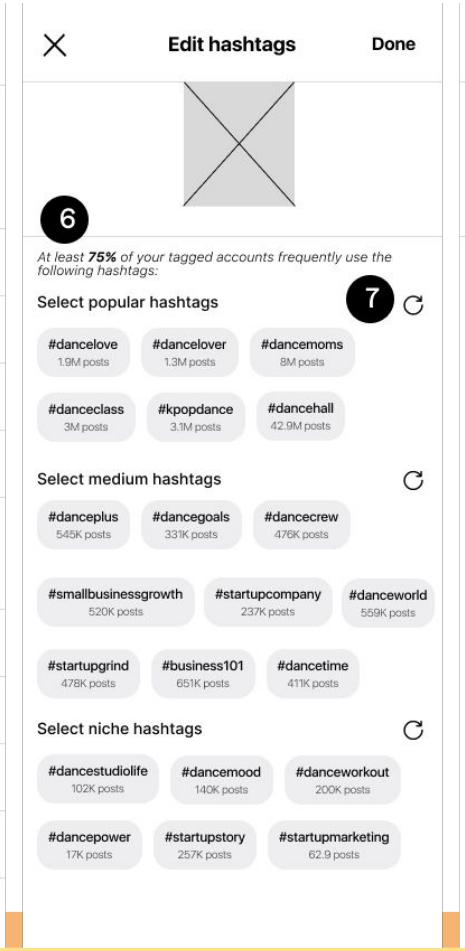
I also named this group of hashtags "Core hashtags" since it not only served as the baseline for the hashtag recommendation tool, but are keywords that summarize a creator's brand.

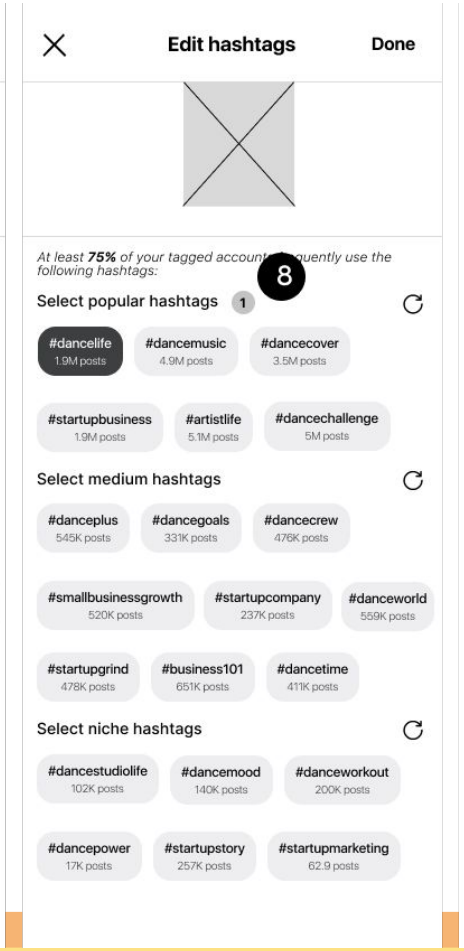
Even if a creator didn't want to spend any time typing in hashtags, they can still have these core hashtags automatically populate in their posts.

Realizing that IG doesn't use the information icon, I later got rid of it and added that text into the description.

Ideate - Wireframes - Task 3







5 Recommendation Tool

Just like adding location, users have the option to add recommended hashtags from an AI-powered algorithm that finds relevant hashtags based on frequently used hashtags by the creators in the tagged profiles list.

6 Data

This statement hopes to clarify where the recommended hashtags come from.

7 Refresh

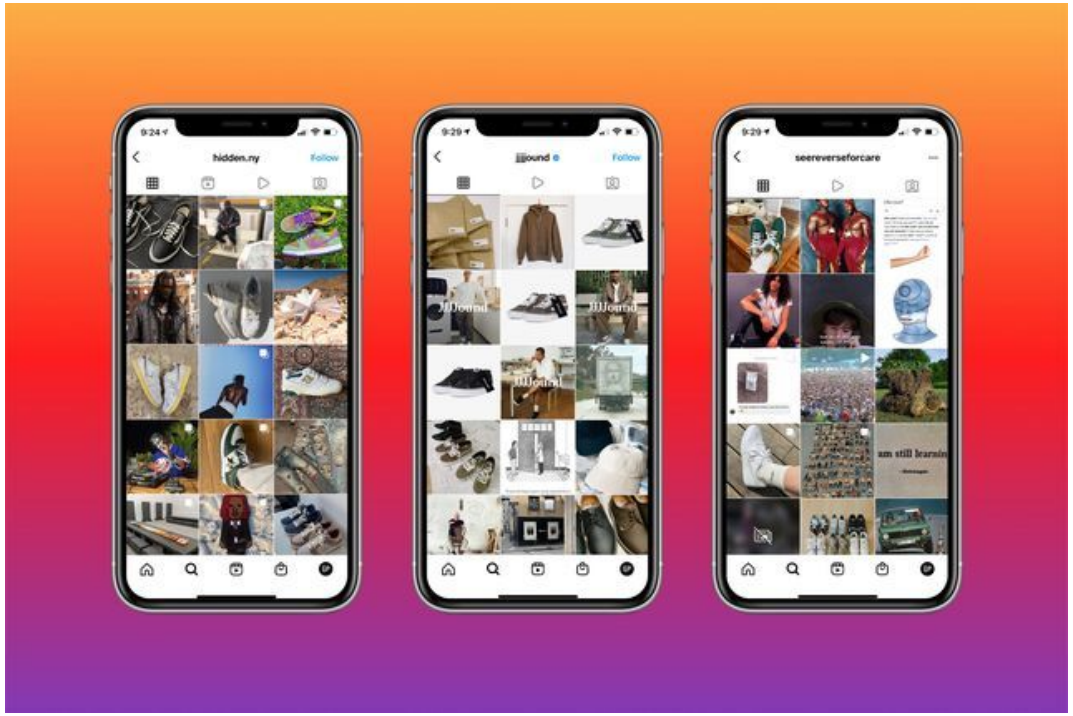
This icon allows users to get a different set of recommended hashtags until they are satisfied.

8 Counter

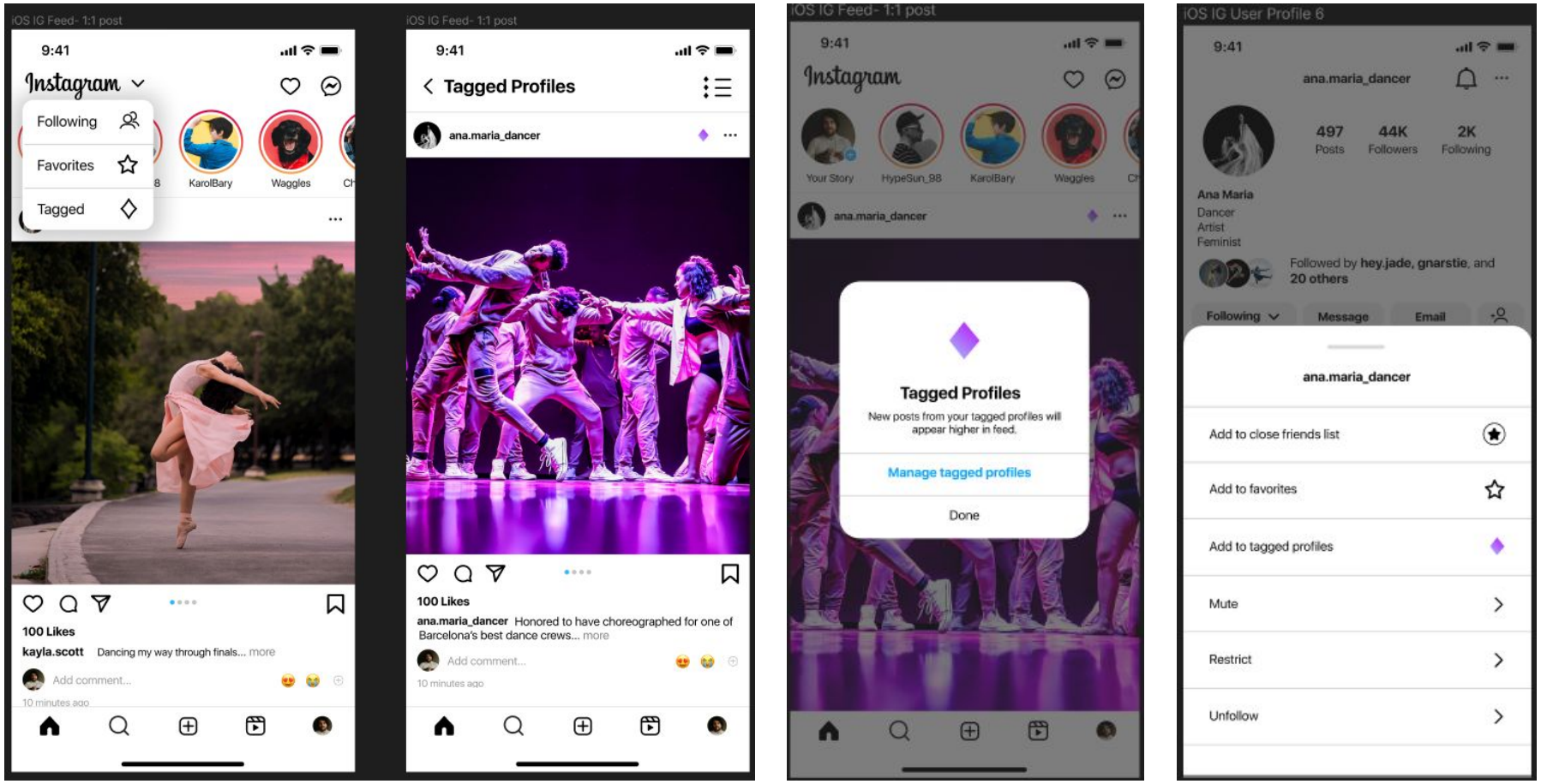
This icon tells the user how many hashtags they have selected from each competition level to help users keep track and diversify their hashtags for more targeted hashtagging.

Prototype - UI Design

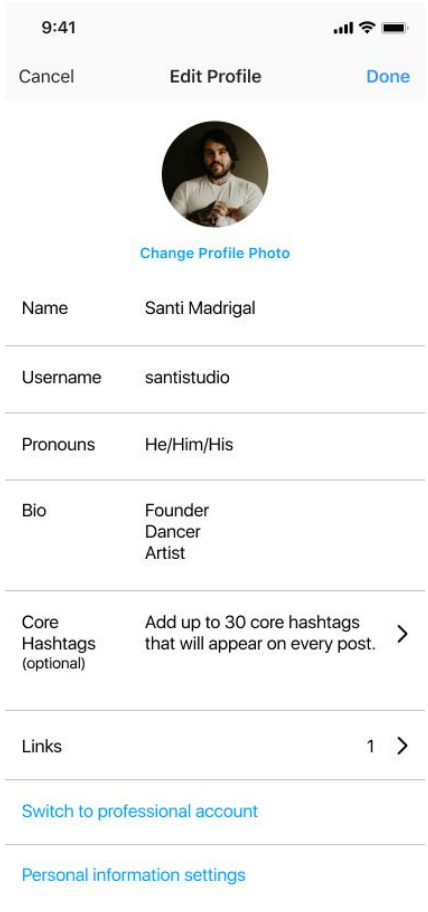
To respect the UI of IG, I did some digging on their brand philosophy and typography. Their purple, hot pink, orange, and yellow all represent IG's friendliness, boldness, and creativity. The logo is modern and friendly while the typography, SF UI Diplay, , is casual and modern.

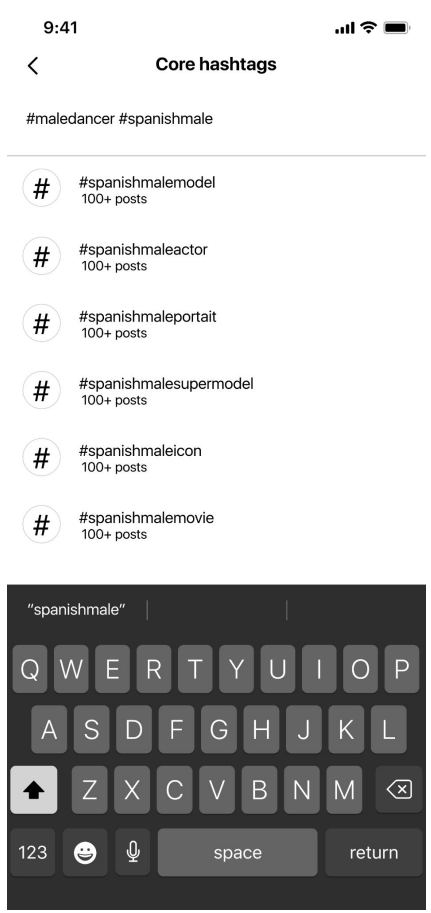


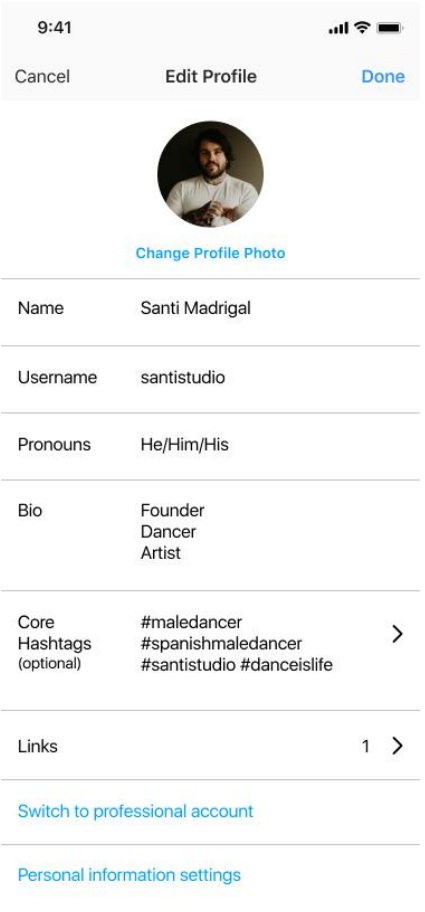
UI Design Highlights – Tagged Profiles



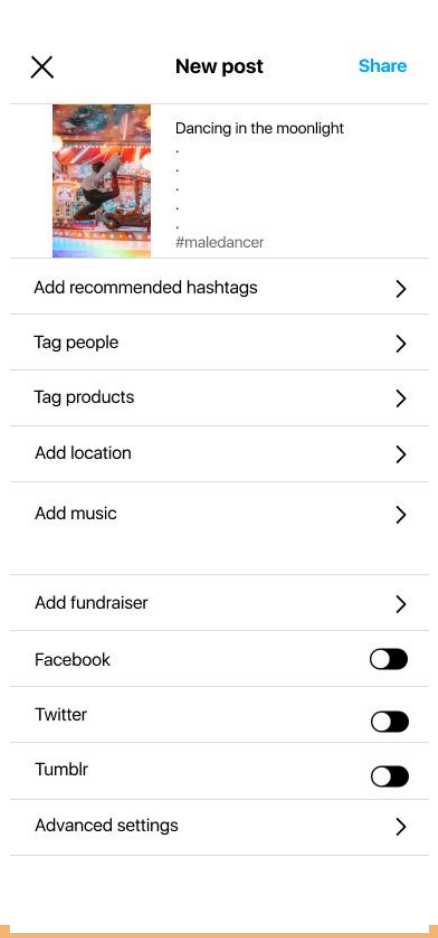
UI Design Highlights – Core Hashtags

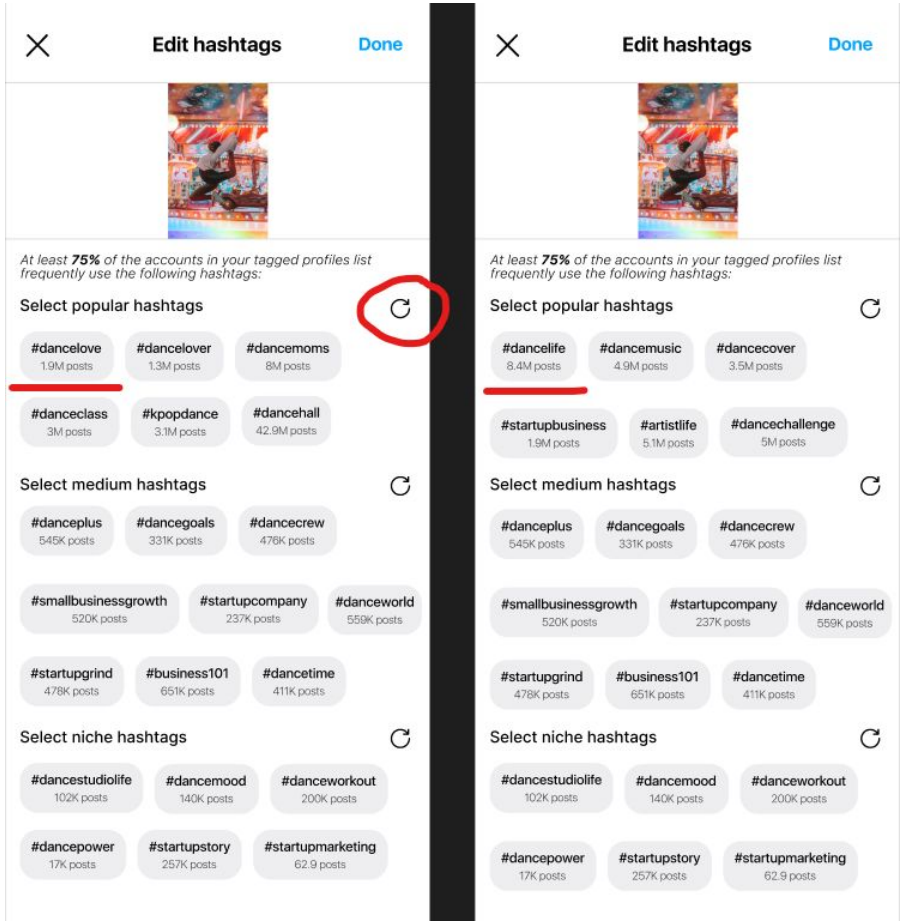




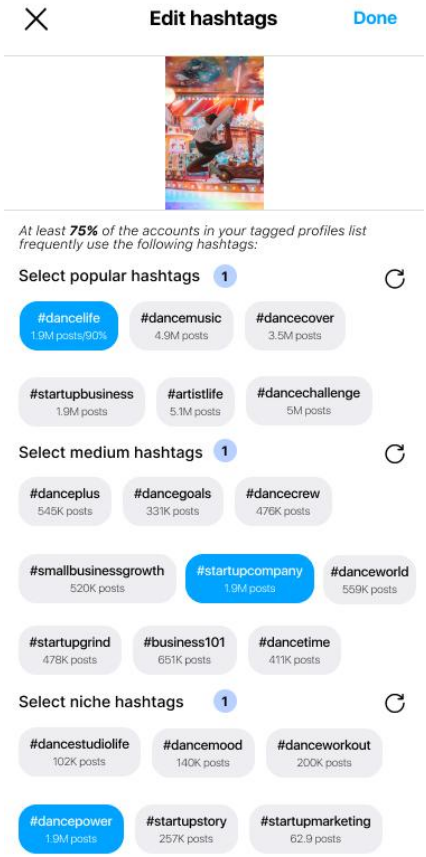


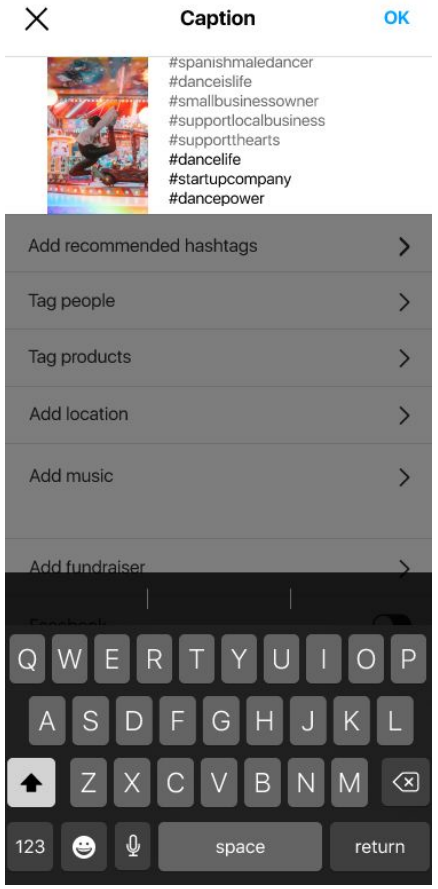
UI Design Highlights – Recommendation Tool





UI Design Highlights – Recommendation Tool





Let’s view the prototype!

Test - Usability Testing

Objectives:

- Test the three task flows and navigation of the recommendation tool for ease of use.
- Observe points of difficulty/confusion.

Goals:

- Identify current pain points (ie: CTA design, placement, wording, etc.)
- Identify current successes of the navigation of tagged profiles, core hashtags, and recommendation tool
- Observe user interactions

Usability Testing

Participants: 10

Background: Active content creators with some using Instagram as their main marketing tool for their small businesses

Age: 23- 40

Questions asked during usability testing:

- At what point(s) of this process (ie: navigating to tagged profiles, tagging a profile, etc.) needs clarification or support?
- What do you like or dislike about this process? Ie: tagging profiles, inputting core hashtags, etc.
- On a scale of 1-5 with 5 being extremely difficult, how would you rate your experience of using the hashtag recommendation tool? For inputting core hashtags? For tagging profiles?
- On a scale of 1-5 with 5 being extremely difficult, how would you rate your overall experience using this new hashtagging feature? May I ask you to elaborate on your rating, please?

Usability Testing Findings

Good:	Needs improvement:
UI design - consistent with Instagram, clear iconography (10/10 liked and noticed the purple diamond instantly and knew what it represented), flows made sense	Wording - "How it Works" text still doesn't make it clear on how the tagged profiles list is connected to the recommendation tool. Also, 7/10 participants were confused by the text above (75%) the recommended hashtags and were unsure of where the recommended hashtags came from. Lastly, 3/10 were confused what "medium" in medium hashtags meant.
Idea - 10/10 participants stated that they would use the features if IG rolled it out tomorrow ("Can you send this prototype to Instagram? I really wish IG had these features already.")	Placement - 7/10 were confused on how to add creators to the tagged profiles list from the creator's profile. They thought it was either from the three dots or the plus person icon on the right. One participant stated that he wished the core hashtags were located in the settings and not "Edit Profile".
Usability - All three tasks were easy to complete (average rating of 1.5) "Very intuitive", "Integrated well into IG"	Hierarchy - 6/10 completely missed the 75% text above the recommended hashtags and noticed the different levels of hashtags right away
Core Hashtags - 8/10 participants stated that this feature was the easiest to understand, use, and a feature they definitely want IG to have	Tagged Profiles List - 5/10 stated that they need the connection to the recommendation tool to be clearer

Test - Affinity Map

THE GOOD

UI

- UI is consistent with Instagram, fun, and integrates well into current app
- Clear iconography (ie: diamond, refresh icon)

User Flow

- Flows were easy to figure out (average rating of 1.5), no one had issues completing the three tasks, easy to navigate among the three different features
- Core hashtags - 8/10 stated that this is a feature they definitely want IG to have

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT

Text

- "How it Works" text doesn't make it clear on how the tagged profiles list is connected to the recommendation tool
- "75%" text caused 7/10 participants to be unsure of where the recommended hashtags came from
- "Medium" was confusing for 3/10 participants, they stated that they didn't know what it meant

Placement

- From the creator's profile, 7/10 participants didn't know to click on "Following" to add the creator to the tagged profiles list, they thought it was either through the three dots or the plus person icon on the right
- One participant wanted the core hashtags to be located in Settings, not in "Edit Profile" and another participant wanted the core hashtags to be located as a tab right just like where grids, reels, and guides are

Hierarchy

- 6/10 participants didn't notice the 75% text upon landing on the screen and instead noticed the different levels of recommended hashtags right away

Design

- 5/10 stated that the connection between the tagged profiles list and the recommendation tool to be clearer
- 1/10 stated that he probably wouldn't use the tagged profiles list because if IG had the recommendation tool generate hashtags from the favorites list, he'd treat the favorites list like he would for the tagged profiles list and only add his favorite creators to the favorites list

Next Steps

1. **Make adjustments**

   Implement wording and design adjustments from user feedback. This includes clarifying text, improving placement of core hashtags/how to add creator to tagged profiles list when on the creator's profile.

2. **Feature clarity**

   Clarify and strengthen the connection between the tagged profiles list and the recommendation tool. Clarify the function and features of the tagged profiles list so that users do not need to read about it to understand it or see how it's different from the favorites list.

3. **Data**

   Add more metrics in hashtag audience, reach, and effectiveness. Expand capabilities of the hashtag recommendation tool to include location and caption.

4. **Test**

   With the edits, conduct more usability tests, and gather feedback for further improvements.