KARMA: Design for Social Impact Toolkit

Vineet Mishra
KARMA
Design for Social Impact Toolkit

Vineet Mishra

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Fine Arts in Visual Communication Design
School of Design
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
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KARMA
Design for Social Impact Toolkit

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Abstract

My thesis explores the field of Social Impact Design and determines a methodology that designers can leverage to design with better impact.

Addressing highly complex issues requires a multidisciplinary approach. When design is incorporated into the problem-solving process, its human-centered principles and methodologies lead to stronger solutions. Social issues such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, caste system, sexual harassment, and gender inequality are associated with Wicked Problems. These Wicked Problems—like economic, environmental, political, and bureaucratic issues—create even more intricate global dilemmas. Understanding these extremely complex issues and applying design thought process, allows for even greater strides toward making an impact.

Design needs to be practiced not just in form, function, and aesthetics but also with an added sense of responsibility and purpose. This concept of design with a social conscience and an intent to make an impact, is something that needs to be recognized more by design students.

Through extensive research, I have identified a methodology that allows designers to efficiently implement the principles of Social Impact Design, and design solutions with better impact.

One of the tangible outcomes of my thesis is a framework of a mobile application for designers. Through the use of interaction and user experience design, the app will enable designers to: access a curated list of creative processes; experience social issues and associated wicked problems through a challenging activity; showcase and discuss their design strategy, plan, and ideation; connect with like-minded individuals and execute their solutions; lead by example and inspire others to get involved.

My thesis aims to be effective in mobilizing and collating information about social impact design and to help improve community strength. Whether or not my thesis produces the desired effect, the knowledge and experience derived, is extremely valuable in my pursuit of Design for Social Impact.

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Thesis Statement

Design Inquiry
How can design students leverage the principles of Social Impact Design more efficiently and design with better impact?

Personal Stance
Comprehensive resources can help prepare future generations of designers to have design cognition for social impact. We can also translate the momentum of a social media message into a tangible action for better social impact by sharing experiences.

Proof of Concept
The concept of design with a social conscience and an intent to make an impact, is something that needs to be recognized more by design students. Impact is complex, hard to create, and even more difficult to measure. Social Impact, as a matter of fact, comes with added complexities and challenges. But design has the power and ability to create an impact, rather social impact.

Through extensive research, I have identified a methodology that allows designers to efficiently implement the principles of Social Impact Design, and design solutions with better impact.

One of the tangible outcomes of my thesis is a framework of a mobile application for designers. Through the use of interaction and user experience design, the app will enable designers to: learn about the principles; experience social issues and associated wicked problems through a challenging activity; showcase and discuss their design strategy, plan and ideation; connect with like-minded individuals and execute their solutions; lead by example and inspire others to get involved.

Goals
My design inquiry aims to be effective in mobilizing and collating information about social impact design and to help improve community strength.

Objectives
- Research design topics
- Increase awareness
- Showcase social conscience
- Provide resources
- Visualize process
- Identify a methodology
- Curate creative processes
- Generate implicit intent
- Conceptualize an app
- Design toolkit
Design Research
Defining Concepts
Review of Literature
Defining Concepts
Research Approach

I understand the gravity of a heavily research driven thesis for a designer and also realize the onus of doing justice to the subject matter and to the field of design. The quest to understand the concept of Design for Social Impact, led me to a good initial research. I read through several books, articles, white papers, browsed websites, and tried several apps. This research opened up numerous avenues of design and motivated me to better understand the factors that may help design students.

Taking the lead from initial research, I approached several design professionals, educationists, social entrepreneurs, strategists, and other design and non-design experts. This helped me understand the scope and validity of my design inquiry. In this process, I got to meet and get insights from some incredible people that made me realize the vastness and power of the field of design. The primary focus was to understand the methodologies and concepts that are in practice but nascent or feeble amongst design students.

Social Impact Design


Social issues such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, caste system, sexual harassment, and gender inequality are complex and are associated with Wicked Problems. These Wicked Problems, like economic, environmental, political, and bureaucratic issues, create even more intricate global dilemmas.

“A ‘Wicked Problem’ is not a ‘thing’ but a social construct. It is a particular way of looking at the world, of framing the challenges we are currently facing.” –Philippe Vandenbroeck, shiftN.

Today, the human-centered principles and methodologies within design are applied to every field, and have been effective in better problem-solving. When design theories and methodologies are applied to address these complex issues and create a social impact, it is termed as Social Impact Design.

The field of Social Impact Design is also known as Social Design, Public-Interest Design, Socially Responsive Design, Transformation Design, and Humanitarian Design. There is a plethora of information about this field of design, but it faces a dearth of accepted standards, guidelines and heuristics. The extensive amount of work done in this field needs to be consolidated to determine what does and does not work.
"Shared understanding means that the stakeholders understand each other’s positions well enough to have intelligent dialogue about their different interpretations of the problem, and to exercise collective intelligence about how to solve it.”

Social Impact Design addresses complex and global issues. Shared Understanding becomes even more important for the effectiveness of any effort made for a better solution for these issues. Efforts have been made to provide available resources, to any and all who are dealing with these complex issues, but it still lacks an effective knowledge sharing. Social Impact Design is a nascent field with a lack of proper definition, parameters, and guidelines. This poses a barrier for shared understanding.

“In the Age of Design, getting something done depends on your social skills and your network, both formal and informal.”

Social Media provides an opportunity to bring people together and exchange information and views in a way that can address these complex problems. But, mostly the efforts are limited to sharing content and doesn’t always translate in a tangible action.

“a cross-disciplinary initiative that engages students in ongoing social impact design projects—not only helps train future humanitarian designers but also works with them to improve global welfare and jump-start social innovation ventures now.” –Mariana Amatullo of Designmatters at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, Social Impact Design Summit, Feb 2012.

“There is need to document and publicize promising, innovative, socially responsible design projects around the globe so that others can contextualize and replicate them in the socio-cultural environment.” –Dr. Richie Moalosi, Senior Lecturer in Industrial Design at the University of Botswana, Social Impact Design Summit, Feb 2012.
“Designing for behavior change requires embracing the quirky ways in which our minds work, and how we interact with our environment, to better understand how products can help us change our behavior.” –Stephen Wendel, Principal Scientist at Hello Wallet, Designing for Behavior Change, 2014.

The book Designing for Behavior Change, is a good source to understand the basics of human behavior and its relation to design, without getting too deep in the field of psychology. In his book, Stephen Wendel mentions four phases to lead a product design and development.

1. Understand how the mind decides to act and what that means for behavior change.

2. Discover the right behaviors to change, given your goals and your users’ goals.

3. Design the product itself around that behavior.

4. Refine the product’s impact based on careful measurement and analysis.”

We design by observing users and make things usable based on their behavior. But when it comes to make an impact, design should be the mode of persuasion and not just the other way round. Design has an impact when it is usable and implicitly translates the desired change in users’ behavior.

“Design for Social Impact is no different than any other design process. It is the ‘Strategic Intent’ that makes the difference.” –Udaya Patnaik, founder and principal of Jump Associates.

Taking lead from the secondary sources, I approached a lot of professionals to share their insights around the topic of Social Impact. I was fortunate to get response from many of them. Udaya Patnaik, the founder and principal of Jump Associates, is one of the incredible people with whom I got to interact. Udaya played a very important and 'strategic' role in validating my design inquiry and provided a unique perspective that I held on to and imbibed in my methodology.

Udaya framed three questions to approach a design solution:

- How has it looked like?
- How does it look like?
- How might it look like?

Design has always been instrumental as a tool to communicate a point of view, to make an impact, and to drive change. History is filled with examples where every form of design has been instrumental in creating an impact. On a deeper analysis it appears that 'Intent' is the common theme.

“Social Impact as a strategic intent is often not part of the equation for a design solution.” –Udaya Patnaik

“changing the typeface, a small change for some but a strategic intent for the designer, may convey a different social impact.” –Udaya Patnaik

“It is important to assess 'how much the idea of social impact has moved in the process of design'. Setting up the strategic intent is not enough. Creating an impact requires deep level of investigation and it should be a deliberative process. It need not be explicit as much it needs to be implicit.” –Udaya Patnaik
“biggest thing about user experience design is that its focus really is empathy. It's essentially trying to understand how somebody uses something, does something, needs to execute something” –Tanarra Schneider, Senior Interaction Design Director at FJORD, Design for Others in the Moment, Insight Labs, 2011

“it really is all about humanity. It is about trying to take the human perspective first, as opposed to being so focused on technology or making things beautiful but not useful.” –Tanarra Schneider

Social Impact Design derives from the basics of User Experience Design. It needs an extra edge—a more human perspective—set in the context of the users to bear the weight of challenges added by the users’ ecosystem.

“There is a part of the UX world, more in interaction design, that is all about patterns and relying on those patterns to create consistent experiences. That can be a really good practice, but it can dehumanize what we're doing. We don't spend a lot of time investigating if there is something else we could be doing to solve the problem better. We become focused on the pattern libraries or best practices and don’t always investigate whether those best practices actually are the most human. We start to do the same thing that other people do, which is to make assumptions about the people we are serving. Sometimes we need to remove the practices of interaction design from UX because we often start with interaction design instead of putting the user first.”

–Tanarra Schneider

The thought process resonated with my findings from the initial research and interviews with design students. Any design project requires to consider the users—persona—before we begin to design, but often it doesn't translate completely in the design solution. The focus shifts to solution through the intermediate steps and does not always translate the user needs or intent.

“We need to become more comfortable with smaller-scale—but maybe greater impact—designs. Not everything needs to be scaled across a thousand units. We've got this grandiose notion that everything we design needs to be monolithic.”

–Tanarra Schneider

Design evolves just like everything else. It is difficult to identify 'best possible' for something grand but relatively easier for something small. It is important to keep in mind the big picture but is more important to have a finite scope. Evolve with others. Design for others but not just for others. It is important to have a vested interest in the challenge to make a better impact.
“If you want to go big, stay small and stay connected” – Kit Miller, director of M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, Guest Lecture at RIT, 2014

The guest lecture by Kit Miller, director of M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence, facilitated my association with the institute as a pro bono designer. During my short stint of six months, I realized how a non-designer-social-entrepreneur believes and practices design. Kit introduced me to her idea of ‘design’ and the practical aspect of Systems Design.

“I see design in everything. Systems Design or as I call it Non-violent Design System, is nurturing an ecosystem with all the entities involved. It is important to create an 'Edge Effect' to get the maximum productivity while retaining the individual identity” – Kit Miller

It is important to constantly seek and draw inspiration from different fields. Kit mentioned, one of her source of inspiration is 'Permaculture', a system of agricultural and social design, from which comes the concept of 'Edge Effect'. In the quest to understand 'Edge Effect', I explored Permaculture and could draw parallels from a lot of principles to the field of design.

“Social entrepreneurs are people with triple bottom line responsibility but you cannot solve it all on your own. You need to stay connected. Connection is important to create a better impact. Talking and discussing with others brings out ideas and leads to a better solution.” – Kit Miller

Triple bottom line, a responsibility that defines any social entrepreneur, is important for designers alike. Design has the power to create an impact and impact should be accounted for social, environmental, and economic aspects. Understanding the users' ecosystem and considering the Systems Design in a design project, affords for better impact. It is important to run ideas through the stakeholders and get their response and feedback.
**Human-Centered Design**

“It’s a process that starts with the people you’re designing for and ends with new solutions that are tailor made to suit their needs. Human-centered design is all about building a deep empathy with the people you’re designing for; generating tons of ideas; building a bunch of prototypes; sharing what you’ve made with the people you’re designing for; and eventually putting your innovative new solution out in the world.” –IDEO.org

Human-centered design (HCD) is a creative approach of problem solving based on the principles of user-centered design. It supports the notion of empathizing with the users and understanding their needs and limitations. A human-centered design solution overlaps the three lenses: Desirability, Feasibility, and Viability.

On a surface-level these processes appear similar to user experience design. But what makes them different is that the users are the epicenter of the design throughout the process. Designing a better user experience is different than designing for and with the user.

In the scope of social impact, it becomes important to place the users first but not alone. The users' context and ecosystem plays a major role in creating the desired impact. There are numerous factors that affect a user's response and reaction to a solution. These factors are not internal but mostly external that we term as wicked problems. The social construct adds another level of complexity which can be tackled by adopting a human approach.
“it is easy for designers to underestimate the gaps that exist between prototype and implementation, and in the case of wicked problems, these gaps are particularly daunting”


Implementation is a very important and mostly neglected aspect—particularly amongst design students—in design. As designers, creating design solutions appear as the final product or end result. Implementation is seldom part of the equation.

This neglect not only poses real life challenges but also hides the flaws that the design solutions have in actual implementation. A simple example is delivering designs to developers. As design students, design document is mostly limited to design brief. Design document in a format that the developers can understand and implement is a missing piece. Considering technological challenges and efforts of development is mostly surface-level in the design process.

On deeper examination of the article, it becomes evident how important it is for designers to consider the four gaps in order to achieve scale in social innovation. The four gaps are

1. The System Gap
2. The Discipline Gap
3. The Evidence Gap
4. The Solution Gap

“Design can play a critical role in opening up new ways of approaching wicked problems. But as we turn our attention to problems of scale, we must acknowledge that design is but one ingredient in an overall strategy.”—Robert Fabricant
Review of Literature
**Review of Literature**

Learning is never ending. Different perspectives on the design inquiry, allows for a better understanding of the subject matter. A more extensive examination of available resources strengthens the understanding of the complexities involved. This review of literature covers a subset of the research to validate the design inquiry into the subject matter relating to social impact. It is divided up into sections based on the source of information.

### Books

**Design for the Real World**  
*Human Ecology and Social Change*  
Victor Papanek  
Pantheon Books

The book by the pioneer and initial proponent of 'Socially and Ecologically Responsible Design', gives a thought provoking perspective to the field of Design. He also envisioned that design as field has a potential to assimilate multiple disciplines and be applied to solve complex issues. This book strengthens my notion of practicing design not just in form, function and aesthetics but with an added sense of responsibility and meaning.

**Design for Society**  
Nigel Whiteley  
Reaktion Books Ltd

This book is an extension to the idea strengthened by Victor Papanek in his book 'Design for the real World'. The book gives an insight on evolution of Socially Responsible Design, led by radical designs and designers. It also introduces the Third World's idea of design with a sense of responsibility, which opens up the avenue to utilize local knowledge when dealing with complex issues.

**Designing for Behavior Change**  
*Applying Psychology and Behavioral Economics*  
Stephen Wendel  
O'Reilly Media, 2013

The book is a good source to understand the basics of human behavior and its relation to design, without getting too deep in the field of psychology. Skimming through the chapters, gave me a better understanding of factors to consider in design which can nudge user's behavior to do a specific task. The learning from this book would be helpful not just for my thesis, but for any design project.
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<td><strong>How To Change The World</strong></td>
<td>Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas</td>
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<td>David Bornstein</td>
<td>Oxford University Press, 2004</td>
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<td>This book is about the success stories of social entrepreneurs,</td>
<td>who worked against odds to bring the change and positive impact</td>
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<td><strong>Social Entrepreneurship</strong></td>
<td>What Everyone Needs to Know</td>
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<td>David Bornstein and Susan Davis</td>
<td>Oxford University Press, 2010</td>
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<td>social entrepreneurship means and then gradually moves toward</td>
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<td><strong>Working With Wicked Problems</strong></td>
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<td>Philippe Vandenbroeck</td>
<td>the King Baudouin Foundation publication, November 2012</td>
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<td>When dealing with social issues, wicked problems are one</td>
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Articles, Journals, and White Papers

*Design And Social Impact*
A Cross-Sectoral Agenda for Design Education, Research, and Practice
The Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts and The Lemelson Foundation

The white paper based on the “Social Impact Design Summit,” is one of the key elements of my preliminary research. The concepts, ideas and strategies discussed in the summit by leaders and pioneers in the field of social impact design, helped me strengthen my understanding and find direction for my thesis. The white paper focuses on areas, ranging from lack of common understanding to the need for promotion of social impact design.

*Design Thinking for Social Innovation*
Tim Brown & Jocelyn Wyatt
Stanford Social Innovation Review Winter 2010

This article on Design Thinking very well explains the three overlapping but not necessarily sequential spaces of Inspiration, Ideation and Implementation in any design project. It made me better understand the importance of observing the user behavior and embedding oneself in the system to get the actual needs and goals of user. As a designer, we need to set aside inhibitions and confined thoughts and should explore all the possibilities with a free mind. Of course one needs to be conscious of the know how to spring board upon, but it shouldn’t be a constraint. It incorporates the idea of T-shaped personality and designing solutions with inter-disciplinary mindset, which I think aligns to the approach needed to solve complex issues.

*The Journal of Design strategies: Change Design*
Vol. 4, No. 1 I Spring 2010
The New School in association with the School of Design Strategies at Parsons The New School for Design

The journal has an argument from Ezio Manzini, in which he talks about the concept of SLOC-small, local, open and connected. He mentions social innovation, sustainability and design for social innovation and sustainability. Arjun Appadurai gives an interesting insight, not as a counter argument, but as an aid to the terms which Ezio mentions. What I find interesting is the idea of counting on small steps, utilizing local knowledge and connecting with community for better impact. Also, the relational idea of openness and connectivity is something to feed off from.
### Articles, Journals, and White Papers

**Human-Centered Design Toolkit**  
IDEO  
[www.ideo.com/by-ideo/human-centered-design-toolkit](http://www.ideo.com/by-ideo/human-centered-design-toolkit)

This toolkit designed specifically for NGOs and social enterprises has been extremely instrumental in shaping my design inquiry. My thesis is heavily inspired and derived from the HCD toolkit. It is impressive in the way it is structured and also how it narrates a common language of design thinking to be used by organizations across the globe.

**Design For Social Impact: HOW-TO GUIDE**  
IDEO for The Rockefeller Foundation  

This is a great resource to refer. The toolkit efficiently formulates dos and don'ts, for design firms, when dealing with social issues and social entrepreneurs.

**Design For Others In The moment**  
Andrew Benedict-Nelson, Insight Labs  
Tanarra Schneider, Manifest Digital  
[www.theinsightlabs.org/research/design-for-the-user-design-for-the-moment/](http://www.theinsightlabs.org/research/design-for-the-user-design-for-the-moment/)  
accessed October 18, 2014

The interview, helped me realize that User Experience Design when practiced in its true form, aligns with design for social impact. The principles and methodologies of user experience design can be taken as reference point in formulating the principles for social impact design. Definitely, there are differences, but I am focusing on taking the best and applying the difference for a unique set of practices.

**Social Interaction Design White Papers**  
[www.gravity7.com/articles_whitepapers.html](http://www.gravity7.com/articles_whitepapers.html)  
accessed October 18, 2014

Website with articles on social interaction design, communication technology, impact of internet on interpersonal communication, and other human factors of computer mediated interaction. It gives a lateral thinking approach to my design inquiry.
| Articles, Journals, and White Papers | **Building Shared Understanding of Wicked Problems**  
CogNexus Institute founder Jeff Conklin  
Interviewed by Karen Christensen  
www.cognexus.org/Rotman-interview_SharedUnderstanding.pdf |
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<tr>
<td>Jeff Conklin explains the issues of social complexity and wicked problems in an effective manner. His idea of shared understanding, strengthens my belief and I feel is worth considering in the context of solving any complex issue. His idea of this era being the era of design and success depending on social skills, is a real take away.</td>
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|                                                                                              | **Mind the Gaps:**  
*The Challenges of Using Design to Scale Wicked Problems*  
Design Impact Group (DIG) Co-Founder Robert Fabricant  
http://www.slideshare.net/geoffreydorne/end-of-yearbook |
| Robert Fabricant shares a first-hand experience of challenges and limitations of design in the space of social impact. He explains four gaps that designers easily underestimate between prototype and implementation. The article shares a very interesting and important perspectives on implementation, that can very well appear as one of the wicked problems when it comes to scaling solutions for social impact. |
Websites

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**Creative For A Cause**
A Resource for Visual Communications Educators
www.creativeforacause.org/index.html
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**Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability**
Parsons DESIS Lab
www.newschool.edu/desis/
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**Designmatters**
Art Center College of Design
www.designmattersatartcenter.org/
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**d. School**
Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford
www.dschool.stanford.edu/
accessed October 18, 2014

**Impact Design Hub**
www.impactdesignhub.org/
accessed October 18, 2014
Process
Ideation
Development
Ideation
Synthesis of research and information collected is crucial in idea generation. It is important to use different perspectives to synthesize the insights. Mind-mapping, paper-prototyping, sketching, and post-it notes were some of the techniques used at different stages throughout the project to set a context within the design. These processes were iterative and the end results evolved through constant feedback and critiques.
Methodology Creation

Based on the research I identified that designers need to realize the intent for their design, select context appropriate tools and translate the intent into their design solution. But this idea was too vague. This wasn’t a method to help designers identify processes that they may use. So I started to define a methodology by putting terms around the creative criterion of ‘Intention’, ‘Selection’, and ‘Translation’. This allowed me to identify the methodology but then more specifically to define the phases and add more complex or detailed processes under each of the identified phases.

Figure 2: Post It Notes
Visual Representation of KARMA

After identifying the creative criterion, defining the methodology and breaking it into phases, identifying the steps for the phases, and curating the processes for these steps, the next step was to create an appropriate visual representation of KARMA. The five defining phases of KARMA appeared to be as a simple five-point diagram. On deeper exploration it was realized that 'Assess' is a key factor to create impact and needs to be practiced at each and every step. It is a pervasive phase overlapping all the other phases. The first four phases–Know, Act, Reflect, Make–are recursive. This led to the creation of the final process diagram.

Figure 3: Diagram Sketches
Figure 4: App Workflow

- **User**
  - Mobile App
    - Toolkit
      - Methodologies
        - Sharing and Discuss
          - Share Experience
            - Document Experience
              - Challenge enables users to:
                - identify
                - investigate
                - empathize
                - connect
                - experience
                - ideate
                - promote
                - contribute
                - volunteer
            - Share and Discuss:
              - Findings
              - insight
              - ideation
              - perspective
              - plan
              - facts
              - statistics
              - activities
              - progress
            - Be the Change
              - Get a visual representation of your impact
              - Connect with like-minded individuals
              - Identify opportunities to implement and execute ideas
    - Social Aspect
      - Share and Discuss
        - Connect and Implement
          - Flash Tags
          - Random Challenge
        - Hash Tags
          - Curated List of Methods
          - Know
          - Act
          - Perfect
          - Make
          - Assess
          - 1st
          - Last
Figure 5: App Paper Prototype
Development
Development Process

The biggest challenge for the project was to take a stance on the research and synthesize the information. In the ideation stage, the synthesis of the insights generated the base structure of the methodology. The next crucial aspect was the process to create a clear and concise content for the toolkit. The extensive amount of research and insight was difficult to compile in a concise and non-verbose language. The toolkit started with text heavy sections but laying out the content facilitated the refinement of content. Keeping the target audience in focus, the content was trimmed to provide a non-exhaustive experience yet retain the essence of the research. Before the digital exploration could begin, the content was reviewed and refined iteratively.

KARMA

KARMA—A toolkit developed by combining learnings and inputs from preachers and practitioners.

These sources range from designers to design strategists; white papers to design toolkits; decision makers to urban farmers; peace activists to educators; and many more.
Design has always been instrumental as a tool to communicate a point of view, to make an impact, and to drive change.

History is filled with examples where every form of design has been instrumental in creating an impact. Be it the role of posters during World War I and World War II; graphic designs used to drive social change during Russian Constructivism; the iconic poster of Woodstock; or the Obama presidential campaign; design had an impact. The role that design plays can be understood by the absence of design.

Pick any of the posters and ask these questions:

What was the intent behind the poster?

Did the impact supplement the intent?

Even if these were designed differently, they would have made an impact. Why? Because there was a purpose—a strategic intent—to trigger the change and create an impact.

Design is a balance of different components: semantics, syntactics, and pragmatics; desirability, feasibility, and viability; ethos, pathos, and logos; form, function, and aesthetics; This concept has been taught, prophesied, and promoted by designers over the years. In recent decades, design has evolved not just as a tool but as a thought process. When design is incorporated into the problem-solving process, its human-centered principles and methodologies lead to stronger solutions.

Design needs to be practiced not just in form, function, and aesthetics but also with an added sense of responsibility and purpose. This concept of design with a social conscience is something that needs to be recognized more by design students.

Impact is complex, hard to create, and even more difficult to measure. Social Impact, as a matter of fact, comes with added complexities and challenges. But design has the power and ability to create an impact, rather social impact.

How do we design with better impact?

What makes design for social impact any different than a regular design project?
Design is extrapolation of thoughts; thoughts that are solution to a problem; problem that is understood by empathizing with users.

Design for Social Impact (DESI) is a process and methodology that helps strengthen the solution, to bear the weight of challenges added by the users' ecosystem. It drives a solution that leverages the power and ability of design to create an impact.

DESI is no different than any other design process in a traditional sense, but it surely has a different criterion (Fig. 6). We need to validate every step in the process with these criterions:

**INTENTION**  
Set a strategic intent

**SELECTION**  
Select appropriate tool in the context

**TRANSLATION**  
Translate the intent into the design
Intention
Persuasion through design needs a strategic intent. Mostly, setting that intent is not a priority. When we design for Social Impact, we need to strategize the ‘Why’ and ‘What’ we need to accomplish. The intent needs to be clear and may refine over the course of the project when the complexities increase and the strategy needs to be changed.

Selection
There are always multiple options available to accomplish any thing. But not all the options are effective in every context. Taking the available tools and choosing the right ones, sets apart the design solution.

Translation
We design by observing users and make things usable based on their behavior. But when it comes to make an impact, design should be the mode of persuasion and not the other way round. We need to translate the intent into a design solution.

Key Points
*Do not just rely on design patterns.*
It is important to focus on patterns and best practices but relying just on them dehumanizes the design solution. We need to step back, sink-in, observe what is needed, understand, and then use them in our solution to enhance the impact.

*Change in context changes the strategic intent and the appropriate tools and methodologies.*
Think of a project using a particular font and a color. Now imagine the project with a radically different font and color. Now imagine using the same project but in a radically different context. Did it change your perception?

*Impact can be both positive and negative.*
Behavior can change either in a good way or a bad way. That is why assessment and iteration is vital for better impact. Proper translation feeds the intention to the next iteration.
The process of Design for Social Impact or DESI, goes through five phases:

KNOW • ACT • REFLECT • MAKE • ASSESS

The first four phases of KARMA are linear but recursive. Assess is a phase that is pervasive and overlaps all the other phases (Fig. 7).

Figure 7: Phases of DESI
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Know</td>
<td>In the Know phase, we understand the larger scope of the project to get a clear idea of the challenge at hand. We also recognize the users and their ecosystem. The motive is to define the challenge statement and get the basics right before going out into the field.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act</td>
<td>With the basics in sight, it is then time to Act. In this phase we collect user stories and inspiration out in the field. This phase involves a lot of interaction with the users and observation of their ecosystem. The key is, not to filter out but to extract.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect</td>
<td>No information is useless but not every information is relevant. With enough data collected in the ‘Act’ phase, the next phase is to brain dump and reflect. In this phase we use different perspectives to synthesize the insights. We focus on relevant information and generate ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Make</td>
<td>Synthesis of information generates ideas. What we do with those ideas makes them worthy or not. In this phase we get our hands dirty, not literally, or may be. We create tangible design solutions. Don’t fall for perfection in the first pass. It is important to iterate and improve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess</td>
<td>Learning from failure is as important as getting things right. This phase is pervasive and overlaps all the other phases at all times. Have confidence in the design decisions but assess them against the set intent at every step.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Visual Language

A consistent visual language is vital for an effective delivery of the design solution. It is also important to balance the elements while retaining their differences to create a cohesive solution.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color Selection</th>
<th>The goal was to identify an identity for each of the phases to clearly and distinctively convey the intent. A color scheme was identified based on the characteristics of the phases.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KNOW</td>
<td>This phase is about getting the basics right and setting a solid ground for the project.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>An earthen shade was chosen to identify this intent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>This phase is about getting the stories and insights from the users without any prejudices, assumptions, and biases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A silver-gray color was chosen to convey the neutral mindset and unbiased approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REFLECT</td>
<td>This phase focuses on reflecting on the stories and insights to synthesize the information and generate ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A shade of blue was chosen to signify reflection.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAKE</td>
<td>This phase is about transforming ideas into tangible design solutions. The key is to iterate and refine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A shade of red was chosen to convey the passion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSESS</td>
<td>This phase is about constant validation and assurance that the intent is translated at each step.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A shade of green was chosen to convey assurance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The medium of this project is print as well as digital so I wanted to incorporate the elegance of a serif typeface combined with the modern look of a sans serif typeface.

The other characteristic taken into consideration was the target audience—designers. I wanted to depict the creativity of designers through the thick and thin strokes in a single typeface.

Baskerville and Proxima Nova were the combination for typeface that stood out and validated the desired visual language.

Baskerville was used for title and symbols.

Proxima Nova works great for print and digital alike. It was used for the toolkit and for the mobile app design.

KARMA
Design for Social Impact Toolkit
Icon Development

The goal was to keep the visual language consistent across medium. To create a set of icons for the app using minimal elements while retaining the visual language was interesting. The icon set was created using the base elements derived from the process diagram of the methodology.
App Design Iterations

The content of the app is intended to be visually strong. The goal was to design the app not to compete with the content or create visual noise while maintaining the visual language consistency.

Figure 9: Screen Iterations
Project Deliverables

Toolkit
App
Toolkit
Figure 11: KARMA Phases + How To

**KARMA.**

The first four phases of KARMA are linear but recursive. Assess is a phase that is perservative and overlaps all the other phases.

**KNOW**

In the Know phase, we understand the larger scope of the project to get a clear idea of the challenge at hand. We also recognize the users and their ecosystem. The motive is to define the challenge statement and get the basics right before going out into the field.

**ACT**

With the basics in sight, it is then time to Act. In this phase, we collect user stories and inspiration out in the field. This phase involves a lot of interaction with the users and observation of their ecosystem. The key is, not to filter out but to extract.

**REFLECT**

No information is useless but not every information is relevant. With enough data collected in the Act phase, the next phase is to brain dump and reflect. In this phase, we use different perspectives to synthesize the insights. We focus on relevant information and generate ideas.

**MAKE**

Synthesis of information generates ideas. What we do with those ideas makes them worthy or not. In this phase, we get our hands dirty, not literally, or may be. We create tangible design solutions. Don’t fall for perfection in the first pass. It is important to iterate and improve.

**ASSESS**

Learning from failure is as important as getting things right. This phase is perservative and overlaps all the other phases at all times. Have confidence in the design decisions but assess them against the set intent at every step.

---

**HOW TO PRACTICE KARMA**

The toolkit explains the five phases of KARMA. These phases are recursive and so, the loop can begin at any stage. Where to begin the project depends on:

- **Design challenge at hand**
- **Current stage of the project**
- **Time-frame of the project**

The toolkit lists the theory and various methods that are practiced across the spectrum to achieve DESI. If you have a method or a tool that helps you in a particular phase, feel free to use it. It is encouraged to imbibe what works, irrespective of the field or industry it is inspired from. But be mindful of the three defining criterion of DESI: Intention; Selection; Translation.

---

**KARMA—A toolkit developed by combining learnings and inputs from preachers and practitioners.**

These sources range from designers to design strategists; white papers to design toolkits; decision makers to urban farmers; peace activists to educators; and many more.
In the Know phase, we understand the larger scope of the project to get a clearer idea of the challenge at hand.

We also recognize the users and their ecosystem. The motive is to define the challenge statement and prepare the right questions in order to get the right answers.
Figure 13: KNOW Selection + Translation

**Step 1: WHY**

Why is the primary step to set our overall intent. We need to understand the value of the challenge to the business—even if it is a class project—and to the users. It is also important to identify the ecosystem of the challenge, where we exist, and what is the network we effect by creating an impact.

Why are we doing this project?
What do we want to achieve?
These are pretty vague statements and answer to these might give us the big picture but not a finite scope. In this step, we intend to define a challenge statement that has following properties:

- framed in human-centered terms
- broad enough to allow exploration
- narrow enough to manage and assess

**Know: Selection**

We choose methods to answer four basic questions:

*Why, What, Who, and How?*

The answers to these questions translate into the output for the Know phase and feed the next phase.

**Know: Translation**

After we carefully choose methods and answer the four basic questions:

*Why, What, Who, and How?*

we are ready with output for the Know phase and with the artifacts and deliverables that now feed into the next phase.

**Artifacts**

- **Challenge Statement**: A refined challenge statement that is framed in human-centered terms, is broad enough to allow exploration, and narrow enough to manage and assess.
- **Project Proposal**: Proposal for the project that lays out the business requirements, existing knowledge, identified limitations and areas of exploration.
- **User Profile**: Identified stakeholders for the project, target profiles and user/setting for user research.
- **Interview Question**: Questionnaires and survey sheets to be used for user research.
Figure 14: ACT Phase + Intention

**ACT**
GO OUT
GET STORIES
TOUCH EVERY
ASPECT

**ACT: INTENTION**

With the basics in sight, it is time to Act.

In this phase we collect user stories and inspiration, preferably in the users’ context. This phase involves a lot of interaction with the users and observation of their ecosystem.

The key is, not to filter out but to extract.
Figure 15: ACT Selection + Translation

**ACT: SELECTION**

Act is a phase which involves interaction with users and stakeholders, preferably in the desired context. We implement the methods identified in the Know phase, to extract stories and inspiration from the users.

Irrespective of the method used, the effectiveness depends on the mindset and approach that we take towards the user and their stories. We also need to capture these user stories to help us proceed with the next phase.

**ACT: TRANSLATION**

After we extract stories and inspiration from the users, we need to collate them into a tangible and comprehensible format.

At this stage we need a high-level overview without getting into the details. We need to translate them into highlights that now feed into the next phase.

---

**HIGHLIGHTS**

**Stories and Insights**
Make sure you have documented all the relevant stories and insights from the users and their constituency

**User Persona**
Interacting with different user profiles affords a better understanding of the user personas that we need to focus on

**Wicked Problems and Social Complexities**
Interaction with users’ constituency exposes the hidden social complexities and associated wicked problems

**New Challenges, Constraints, and Limitations**
Observing the users in context, highlights the challenges and constraints that otherwise remain hidden as they become part of users’ routine
REFLECT

TRANSLATE STORIES TO SOLUTIONS

Figure 16: REFLECT Phase + Intention

REFLECT:
INTENTION

No information is useless but not every information is relevant.

With enough data collected, in this phase we brainstorm and reflect on those information. We use different perspectives to synthesize the insights. We focus on relevant information and generate ideas to be implemented.
Reflect: Selection

Select methodologies to extract what is relevant and satisfies the intent.

Begin by synthesizing the information into actual needs and requirements. Then generate ideas for possible solutions. Finally, choose a concept and proceed to the next phase where we create a tangible solution.

Reflect: Translation

After we synthesize stories and insights into ideas, and choose a design concept to proceed with, we need to refine and document the findings.

Make sure the intent is translated into these deliverables that feed the next phase.

Step 1
Synthesize

In this step we translate the user stories, documented in the previous phase, into actual needs and touch points.

The synthesis of the information helps us identify the real challenges, limitations, user needs, and requirements.

There are numerous ways to accomplish this task. Choose a method or combination of methods that suits you and your project.

We will discuss two of the methods:

- Empathy Mapping
- User Journey Map

Highlights

Information Architecture
The information architecture is the basic structure defining the flow and exchange of information. It also includes the actual content, if any, that needs to be presented to the users.

Design Concepts
Document your design concept in any desired format that can help you take it to the next step of prototyping. You can sketch, create low fidelity prototypes, or storyboard your concept.

Interaction Model
Interaction model is a description of how the users will interact with the solution. This includes identifying the right patterns, accessibility challenges, and task flow.
Figure 18: MAKE Phase + Intention

MAKE
CREATE
ITERATE
DELIVER

MAKE:
INTENTION

Synthesis of information generates ideas. What we do with those ideas makes them worthy or not.

In this phase we get our hands dirty, not literally, or may be. We create tangible design solutions from the ideas generated in the previous phase. Don’t fail for perfection in the first pass. It is important to iterate and improve.
MAKE: SELECTION

Choose any methodology that suits your work. The focus is to create tangible solutions that translate the intent through design.

It is important to translate the intent into design solutions, but it is equally important to deliver those solutions appropriately. Choose methods to deliver your solution, based on your target audience and the available resources.

MAKE: TRANSLATION

This is the final phase in the loop of KARMA that is followed by the pervasive phase "ASSESS".

We translate the intent into the artifacts and these are the first tangible solutions to the challenge.

In this phase, we also prepare to deliver it to the stakeholders and lead the path to implementation.

**STEP 1**

CREATE

In this step, we shape the concepts chosen in the previous phase and bring it to form as a tangible design solution.

It is important to visually represent the idea and verify that it reflects user needs.

Choose a method or combination of methods that suits you and your project to quickly create prototypes and mockups.

We will discuss two of the methods:

- Paper Prototyping
- Wireframing

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- **Wireframe**
  - Wireframes are the blueprint and skeletal structure of the actual design solution.
  - Document the final wireframe to proceed with the visual design and as a reminder of the incorporated features.

- **Visual Design**
  - Document the visual design in a format that is easy to handover for production or development.

- **Interactive Prototype**
  - Interactive mockup for the design solution can be easily conveyed to the stakeholders through an interactive prototype.

- **Presentation**
  - It is important to present the design solution to the stakeholders in an appropriate and comprehensible format. One delivery method might not be suitable for all.
Figure 20: ASSESS Phase + Intention

ASSESS
BE MINDFUL
RELATE
REASON

ASSESS: INTENTION

Learning from failure is as important as getting things right.

This phase is pervasive and overlaps all the other phases at all times. Have confidence in the design decisions but assess them against the set intent at every step.
ASSESS: SELECTION

Assess the outcome at each step and validate it with the intent.

The key to design for social impact or nonetheless impact is to have an implicit yet constant intent to create an impact.

The intent will translate into the design with self-regulation, regular feedback, and with a thorough evaluation.

ASSESS: TRANSLATION

Assess is a pervasive phase that overlaps all the other phases at all times.

It is important to document the assessments of the artifacts at each phase. This helps to recognize the effectiveness of the project.

METHOD 1

SELF REGULATION

This is the most effective and hard to practice method of assessment.

It is important to stay focused during the project assessment and consciously implement intent.

It is easy to let personal biases and favorites influence your designs, but design is about solving problems of others. We need to design for others.

But also, we very well can be part of the other half that needs a design solution. Maintain a balance between these two.

Let your ideas clash, as that will create the edge effect which yields maximum productivity.

HIGHLIGHTS

- User Feedback
  - User feedbacks are important for the effectiveness of the project. Document them to be used as insights for the next iterations or future projects.

- Failure Report
  - Document your failures with proper analysis of the situation. These are vital in forming future strategies.

- Usability Report
  - Usability reports provide learnings on visual, cognitive, and social accessibility. It also provides basis for universal design and inclusion.

- Impact Assessment
  - Impact assessment requires a set criteria for both, success and failure. Identify them before you deliver the design solution.
App
Figure 22: App Screens A–B
Figure 23: App Screens C–D
Figure 24: App Screens E–F
Figure 25: App Screens G–H
Summary
Evaluation
Dissemination
Assess, an integral part of my methodology, was also a pervasive phenomenon of my project. The project was reviewed, critiqued, discussed, and challenged by academic advisors, peers, and professionals throughout the inception, proposal, research, ideation, and creation of the project. Each committee member brought a different perspective to the project and posed questions that led to further refinement of the scope and validity of my design inquiry. The full-committee meeting created an 'Edge Effect' that resulted in utmost productivity. Even though constant research posed a challenge to my project, it also led me to constantly question my hypothesis, and in the pursuit to answer those questions I explored various facets of design and related study from other experts. I was also fortunate to share my design inquiry and proposal, meet, discuss, and interview other stakeholders who were instrumental in guiding this project. The primary stakeholders and target audience of the project being design students, offered me to connect with peers for their valuable feedback and suggestion.

This project was started with the primary focus on social impact, but during the course of the project it surfaced that the design inquiry very well sufficed 'impact' through design in general. Through continuous dialog with various stakeholders it was evident that the cognition of design for and with an impact, need to be addressed and prophesied amongst design students.

After assessment of the initial structure for the methodology, the 'Assess' phase was recognized by the academic advisors and other design experts to be a pervasive phase that overlaps all the other phases, and that led to the final version of the diagram for the methodology. Similarly, when the first draft of the toolkit was shared with peers and design students, it became evident that the content needed to be trimmed and made concise for better understanding and retention.

During the course of this project, I was working as a UX & UI Designer at Ahold USA (Quincy, MA). Being the only designer in a team that was heavily technology driven with a pre-existing design methodology, lent me a perfect testing ground. It was challenging to mold the design process for an agile development environment and to build a new design process for the team. In my first six months of the co-op, I was successful in bridging the gap between business, technology, and the users. The more human approach brought visibility to the team and we could assess the impact of the design process. In my second half of the co-op I was also mentoring a recent design graduate. It proved to be another great opportunity to test my methodology successfully.
Developing Design Process

When I started my co-op as a UX & UI Designer at Ahold USA (Quincy, MA), I was the only designer in a team that was heavily technology driven, and it lent me a perfect testing ground. The existing understanding of design was a bit stereotypical—design makes things pretty. The existing process for design was:

- Requirements were given to a designer
- Specifics about features were predefined
- Actual users were not part of the design process
- No integration of design with business and development
- Feedbacks were mostly from supervisors
- Lack of design thinking

The good part was that the team and my manager were very open and supportive to new methodologies. It was challenging for me too, to understand the business-value aspect that my manager had to share and to modify my design methods to suit the agile development process. It was a good example of Edge Effect. The team had implemented an iPad application in the bakery department of a pilot store. When I joined the team, I started with the Heuristic Evaluation of the existing application and that uncovered a lot of other factors which were hindering a buy-in from the actual users. I then gathered the previous requirement documents and studied the known and unknown. Multiple visits were made to the pilot store where the proof-of-concept was implemented. I also made visits to other stores to gather different perspectives from a wider user spectrum. I was practicing KARMA in smaller steps. These methods created impact and were appreciated by my manager. I was asked to document them to define a structure for design and development in the team.

After modifications to the existing design and implementing a more simplified solution, there was still not much traction from the users. After couple of failures I realized that the intent with which the team was driving the project was 'Make the Stores Digital'. The qualitative assessment revealed the fact that the associates were considering this app being imposed on them as opposed to being something that will make their work easier. I started the process again but this time only to involve the associates from the very beginning of the design process and also include developers and leads in the brainstorming sessions. This helped build trust and validated the benefits of a user-centric approach to not just design but development. The new version of the application was much more simplified and human. That led the team to roll out the project successfully to forty-eight stores. This led to a project for another department and eventually into a bigger project to design and develop a custom-order management system.
Case Study B  

**KARMA: Practiced by a Recent Graduate**

In the second term of my co-op as a UX & UI Designer at Ahold USA (Quincy, MA), I was asked to mentor a new co-op who was a recent design graduate from Penn State University’s College of Arts and Architecture, with a degree in Integrative Arts. After the initial assessment of his skill set and understanding of the design process and approach, it became evident that he was a perfect fit as the target user for my thesis. This provided me another great opportunity to test my methodology. As KARMA was already the design methodology of the team–phrased in different terms to honor the Non Disclosure Agreement (NDA)–it was easier to mentor without defying the now usual work culture driven by a dialog around KARMA.

After practicing the methodology for over a period of five months, the mentee realized the difference in the design thought process and that was also evident in the design solutions. I was honored to get a written assessment from the mentee.

“Starting my UX/UI Design career as a Co-op for Ahold USA, I didn’t have the thought process of designing for the user, but I was rather designing for visual appeal. Taking that into point, my design process was limited to acquiring the specs, then going straight into designing the visuals. With this being my approach to tackling interface design, I missed out on an array of factors that are essential in creating a respectable interface that is not only visually appealing but more importantly usable and effective for the user.

After being mentored by Vineet, I learned the process and the methods that were helpful to me in creating a more effective design solution. I found the necessity in understanding the challenge at hand, gathering and structuring the information and creating effective workflows that make the user’s experience seamless. I had at my discretion, a defined methodology that helped me identify various processes that I could choose based on the challenge and context in which I was designing.

The experience and knowledge I have gained while working under Vineet has been irreplaceable. My UX/UI career has only begun but this revised understanding and perspective of design has giving me a head start in becoming the designer I strive to become. With that being said, I still have a lot to learn, but now I have a persistent appetite for design treatments and reasoning for every design decision I make.”
Dissemination

Part of this project, the methodology, is currently implemented at Ahold USA (Quincy, MA). The methodology was modified and phrased differently to honor the NDA signed with the company. The methodology is also shared with industry experts to share their thoughts and feedback for future improvements. The toolkit is also practiced by some peers in different locations and settings to further measure its effectiveness. It was also a part of a formal Thesis Show for the Visual Communication Design MFA 2016. Upon completion this documentation was published to ProQuest and archived at the Wallace Library. After publication, this project will be submitted to a variety of competitions and publications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awards &amp; Conference</th>
<th>C77DA – Core77 Design Awards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Design Ignites Change – Student Innovation Awards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ADAA – Adobe Design Achievement Awards</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fast Co. Innovation By Design Awards &amp; Conference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AIGA Design Conference 2016</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion
Current Impact
Future Implications
Personal Analysis
Current Impact

The design inquiry that started with identifying how can design students leverage the principles of Social Impact Design more efficiently and design with better impact, evolved into how we can have designers use better methods more frequently to create designs with better impact.

In its current implemented form in an agile development setting, it is a creative process to help identify the expectations from each design phase—or rather the entire project life cycle—and the appropriate tools to select and then translate the intent into the designs that eventually translates into the end product. It has helped foster a dialog of design and idea of design thinking between different stakeholders including and not limited to designers, developers, managers, business, and most importantly actual users. Such a qualitative feedback from a non-design and technology focused environment, motivates and strengthens the idea that it is possible to foster a dialog of design with a purpose within the design community.

It is also implemented and practiced by designers in varied context. It is definitely a positive sign to get a testimony of a more evolved design thought process from a designer who practiced KARMA for about 5 months. This gives me hope to take this further and give time for it to grow and evolve into a system that leverages the dialog of KARMA.

This research led into an increased understanding of design, the field of social impact, design education, social entrepreneurship, impact design, human-centered design, and numerous other design and non-design fields that can lend themselves to us as a way to design better with better impact.
Future Implications

The goal of my thesis was to identify a creative criteria that helps designers become better at what they do through frequent application of a repeatable methodology aided by appropriate tools curated for each phase of the project life cycle. Within the scope of the thesis, the goal has been achieved and to an extent been successful in validating my design inquiry. It is not the end, but it is the beginning to explore different avenues that were exposed during my research and curate a even better and exhaustive resource that may help designers in their pursuit of design for better impact.

The future goal is also to develop and build upon the concept of the mobile application that will enable designers to: access the toolkit; experience social issues and associated wicked problems through a challenging activity; showcase and discuss their design strategy, plan and ideation; foster a dialog around KARMA; connect with like-minded individuals and execute their solutions; and lead by example and inspire others to get involved.
Personal Analysis

I started this thesis project keeping in mind the Social Impact as a key factor. But during the course of this project I acquired a better understanding of the challenge being the lack of an implicit intent, selection of appropriate tools, and translation of the purpose into the design solution. The challenge was no more a niche of Social Impact through design but Impact itself.

This project has been instrumental in opening up new avenues of design and other fields that I would surely want to explore in the near future and beyond. Design, as rich and diverse is the field, leverages methods and processes form various other fields and that fascinates me as a designer. I started my academic career as an Engineer and moved on to work as a Software Professional before deciding to pursue my masters in the field of design. I am finishing my MFA in Visual Communication Design while writing this document. I believe that the methodical and logical approach derived from my engineering background balances my free flowing and creative thought process as a designer. The technical skills derived from my experiences at RIT, allow me to remain pragmatic with content creation while simultaneously considering the semantics and syntactics of design. This developed sensitivity helps create a better user experience through artifact that not only speaks to the mind but touches the heart. With this approach, I started this thesis and have attained a stage that sets the ground for further learning and growth as a designer and a better member of the society.

I definitely feel matured as a designer today than I was at the beginning of my masters program. The deeper understanding about design and user experience that I have acquired during the course of my thesis, has led me to stand firm in front of design professionals of over twenty years of experience. Today, I can confidently hold a dialog about the principles and basics of design with these experts and garner the finer details they have to share. This deeper understanding has led me to get job offers from corporations that are well known and established in their respective fields. I can only see my passion to know and learn about design and its implementation growing further.
Appendix
Copy of Proposal
IRB Approval
Copy of Proposal
Vineet Mishra
Rochester Institute of Technology
College of Imaging Arts & Science
School of Design
Visual Communication Design
Fall 2014
Thesis Proposal for the Master of Fine Arts Degree

Rochester Institute of Technology
College of Imaging Arts and Sciences
School of Design
MFA Visual Communication Design

DESİ KARMA: A Resource for designers to design with Social Impact
Submitted by: Vineet Mishra
Date: October 16, 2014

Thesis Committee Approval:

Chief Thesis Adviser
Chris Jackson, Professor, Graduate Director, School of Design

Signature of Chief Thesis Adviser

Date

Associate Thesis Adviser
Adam Smith, Associate Professor, Program Chair, School of Design

Signature of Associate Thesis Adviser

Date

Associate Thesis Adviser
Shaun Foster, Assistant Professor, School of Design

Signature of Associate Thesis Adviser

Date

Associate Thesis Adviser
Mindy Magyar, Assistant Professor, School of Design

Signature of Associate Thesis Adviser

Date

MFA Thesis Candidate
Vineet Mishra

Signature of MFA Thesis Candidate

Date
And here they say that a person consists of desires,  
and as is his desire, so is his will;  
and as is his will, so is his deed;  
and whatever deed he does, that he will reap.

—Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, 7th Century BC
Abstract

My thesis explores the field of Social Impact Design and determines a set of principles that designers can leverage through a social app, to design with better social impact.

Addressing highly complex issues requires a multidisciplinary approach. When design is incorporated into the problem-solving process, its human-centered principles and methodologies lead to stronger solutions. Social issues such as poverty, unemployment, homelessness, caste system, sexual harassment, and gender inequality are associated with Wicked Problems. These wicked problems, like economic, environmental, political and bureaucratic issues, create even more intricate global dilemmas. Understanding these extremely complex issues and applying design thought process, allows for even greater strides toward Social Impact.

The field of Social Impact Design is also known as Social Design, Public-Interest Design, Socially Responsive Design, Transformation Design, and Humanitarian Design. There is a plethora of information about this field of design, but it faces a dearth of accepted standards, guidelines and heuristics. The extensive amount of work done in this field needs to be consolidated to determine what does and does not work. Designers can incorporate this information in their design practices which enables them to design with better social impact.

Through extensive research and case studies, I will identify a set of practices and guidelines for designers, that allows them to efficiently implement the principles of Social Impact Design.

One of the tangible outcomes of my thesis will be a framework of a social app for designers. Through the use of interaction and user experience design, the app will enable designers to learn about the principles; experience social issues and associated wicked problems through a challenging activity; showcase and discuss their design strategy, plan and ideation; connect with like-minded individuals to execute their solutions; lead by example and inspire others to get involved.

My thesis will be effective in mobilizing and collating information about social impact design and will help improve community strength. Whether or not my thesis produces the desired effect, the knowledge and experience derived, will be extremely valuable in my pursuit of design for social impact.
Problem Statement

Can we translate the momentum of a social media message into a tangible action for better social impact? Can designers more efficiently leverage the principles of social impact design through social media? Are comprehensive resources in place to prepare future generations of designers to have social impact design cognition?

The answer to these questions is yes and no.

Social Issues are complex and are assisted by Wicked Problems. “A 'wicked problem' is not a 'thing' but a social construct. It is a particular way of looking at the world, of framing the challenges we are currently facing.”—Philippe Vandenbroeck, shiftN.

Today, the human-centered principles and methodologies within design are applied to every field, and have been effective in better problem-solving. When design theories and methodologies are applied for Social Impact, it addresses even more complex and global issues. Shared Understanding becomes even more important for the effectiveness of any effort made for a better solution for these issues. Efforts have been made to provide available resources, to any and all who are dealing with these complex issues, but it still lacks an effective knowledge sharing. Social Impact Design is a nascent field with a lack of proper definition, parameters, and guidelines. This poses a barrier for shared understanding.

“In the Age of Design, getting something done depends on your social skills and your network, both formal and informal.”—Jeff Conklin, founder of the CogNexus Institute.

Social Media provides an opportunity to bring people together and exchange information and views in a way that can address these complex problems. But, mostly the efforts are limited to sharing content and doesn’t always translate in a tangible action.

“a cross-disciplinary initiative that engages students in ongoing social impact design projects—not only helps train future humanitarian designers but also works with them to improve global welfare and jump-start social innovation ventures now.”—Mariana Amatullo of Designmatters at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, Social Impact Design Summit, Feb 2012.

“There is need to document and publicize promising, innovative, socially responsible design projects around the globe so that others can contextualize and replicate them in the socio-cultural environment.”—Dr. Richie Molosi, Senior Lecturer in Industrial Design at the University of Botswana, Social Impact Design Summit, Feb 2012.
Problem Statement

Through extensive research and case studies, I will identify a set of practices and guidelines for designers that allows them to efficiently leverage the principles of Social Impact Design. In collaboration with students and faculty, I plan to test the effectiveness and acceptance of these principles. The students would incorporate these principles in a class project that addresses a social issue. Based on real-time feedback, analysis, and revisions, I plan to create the final set of practices and guidelines in the form of a guidebook which then feeds into the social app as a primary content.

One of the tangible outcomes of my thesis will be a framework of a social app for designers. Through the use of interaction and user experience design, the app will enable designers to: learn about the principles; experience social issues and associated wicked problems through a challenging activity; showcase and discuss their design strategy, plan and ideation; connect with like-minded individuals to execute their solutions; lead by example and inspire others to get involved.

Survey of Literature

The quest to understand the concept of Design for Social Impact, led me to a good initial research, which helped me to decide my thesis topic. I understand the gravity of a heavily research driven thesis and also realize the onus of doing justice to the subject matter and to the field of design. I have read through several books, articles, white papers, browsed websites and tried several Apps closely related to my topic, and the design and technical aspects. This helped me understand the scope and validity of my thesis topic. Considering the complex nature of my subject matter, I have tried to research from varied perspectives.

Subject Matter + Design

BOOKS

*Design for the Real World*
*Human Ecology and Social Change*
*Victor Papanek*
*Pantheon Books*

The book by the pioneer and initial proponent of ‘Socially and Ecologically Responsible Design’, gives a thought provoking perspective to the field of Design. He also envisioned that design as field has a potential to assimilate multiple disciplines and be applied to solve complex issues. This book strengthens my notion of practicing design not just in form, function and aesthetics but with an added sense of responsibility and meaning.

*Design for Society*
*Nigel Whiteley*
*Reaktion Books Ltd*

This book is an extension to the idea strengthened by Victor Papanek in his book ’Design for the real World’. The book gives an insight about evolution of Socially Responsible Design, led by radical designs and designers. It also introduces the Third World’s idea of design with a sense of responsibility, which opens up the avenue to utilize local knowledge when dealing with complex issues.

*Designing for Behavior Change*
*Applying Psychology and Behavioral Economics*
*Stephen Wendel*
*O’Reilly Media, 2013*

The book is a good source to understand the basics of human behavior and its relation to design, without getting too deep in the field of psychology. Skimming through the chapters, gave me a better understanding of factors to consider in design which can nudge user’s behavior to do a specific task. The learning from this book would be helpful not just for my thesis, but for any design project.
Survey of Literature

BOOKS

How To Change The World
Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas
David Bornstein
Oxford University Press, 2004
This book is about the success stories of social entrepreneurs, who worked against odds to bring the change and positive impact in the society. The methodologies each of the change agents have used to cater to different issues in different context, is inspiring and a good learning to feed into my research topic.

Social Entrepreneurship
What Everyone Needs to Know
David Bornstein and Susan Davis
Oxford University press, 2010
The author clearly starts with giving a better picture of what social entrepreneurship means and then gradually moves toward challenges faced. He also mentions the about evaluation of impact, which I think is an important area of study and needs better understanding. The author questions the involvement of different sectors, like education, business, government, et al.

Working With Wicked Problems
Philippe Vandenbroeck
the King Baudouin Foundation publication, November 2012
When dealing with social issues, wicked problems are one wicked things that needs to be addressed and accounted for to make solutions better. The book gives a good idea about wicked problems and also, methods to deal with complex issues and things to be considered while dealing with wicked problems. The author mentions about role of design and design thinking in formulating solutions for these complex natured problems. This book will be a good resource to feed in for my design inquiry.
Survey of Literature

ARTICLES, JOURNALS AND WHITE PAPERS

*Design And Social Impact*
A Cross-Sectoral Agenda for Design Education, Research, and Practice
*The Smithsonian’s Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, in conjunction with the National Endowment for the Arts and The Lemelson Foundation*

The white paper based on the “Social Impact Design Summit,” is one of the key elements of my preliminary research. The concepts, ideas and strategies discussed in the summit by leaders and pioneers in the field of social impact design, helped me strengthen my understanding and find direction for my thesis. The white paper focuses on areas, ranging from lack of common understanding to the need for promotion of social impact design.

*Design Thinking for Social Innovation*
*Tim Brown & Jocelyn Wyatt*
*Stanford Social Innovation Review Winter 2010*

This article on Design Thinking very well explains the three overlapping but not necessarily sequential spaces of Inspiration, Ideation and Implementation in any design project. It made me better understand the importance of observing the user behavior and embedding oneself in the system to get the actual needs and goals of user. As a designer, we need to set aside inhibitions and confined thoughts and should explore all the possibilities with a free mind. Of course one needs to be conscious of the know how to spring board upon, but it shouldn’t be a constraint. It incorporates the idea of T-shaped personality and designing solutions with inter-disciplinary mindset, which I think aligns to the approach needed to solve complex issues.

*The Journal of Design strategies: Change Design*
*Vol. 4, No. 1 | Spring 2010*

*The New School in association with the School of Design Strategies at Parsons The New School for Design*

The journal has an argument from Ezio Manzini, in which he talks about the concept of SLOC-small, local, open and connected. He mentions social innovation, sustainability and design for social innovation and sustainability. Arjun Appadurai gives an interesting insight, not as a counter argument, but as an aid to the terms which Ezio mentions. What I find interesting is the idea of counting on small steps, utilizing local knowledge and connecting with community for better impact. Also, the relational idea of openness and connectivity is something to feed off from.
Survey of Literature

ARTICLES, JOURNALS AND WHITE PAPERS

*Design For Social Impact: HOW-TO GUIDE*
IDEO for The Rockefeller Foundation
www.ideo.com/work/design-for-social-impact-workbook-and-toolkit/
This is a great resource to refer. The toolkit efficiently formulates do’s and don'ts, for design firms, when dealing with social issues and social entrepreneurs. This will be a good resource for me to spring board upon.

*Design For Others In The moment*
Andrew Benedict-Nelson, Insight Labs
Tanarra Schneider, Manifest Digital
www.theinsightlabs.org/research/design-for-the-user-design-for-the-moment/
accessed October 18, 2014
The interview, helped me realize that User Experience Design when practiced in its true form, aligns with design for social impact. The principles and methodologies of user experience design can be taken as reference point in formulating the principles for social impact design. Definitely, there are differences, but I am focusing on taking the best and applying the difference for a unique set of practices.

*Social Interaction Design White Papers*
www.gravity7.com/articles_whitepapers.html
accessed October 18, 2014
Website with articles on social interaction design, communication technology, impact of internet on interpersonal communication, and other human factors of computer mediated interaction. It gives a lateral thinking approach to my area of focus.

*Building Shared Understanding of Wicked Problems*
CogNexus Institute founder Jeff Conklin
Interviewed by Karen Christensen
www.cognexus.org/Rotman-interview_SharedUnderstanding.pdf
Jeff Conklin explains the issues of social complexity and wicked problems in an effective manner. His idea of shared understanding, totally makes sense and I feel is worth considering in the context of solving any complex issue. His idea of this era being the era of design and success depending on social skills, is a real take away.
Survey of Literature

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www.newschool.edu/desis/
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www.designmattersatartcenter.org/
accessed October 18, 2014

*d. School*
Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford
www.dschool.stanford.edu/
accessed October 18, 2014

*LEAP Symposium*
leapsymposium.org/
accessed October 18, 2014

*Social Design Pathways*
www.socialdesignpathways.com/
accessed October 18, 2014

*Impact Design Hub*
www.impactdesignhub.org/
accessed October 18, 2014
Design Methodology

Process

Design Inquiry
Can we translate the momentum of a social media message into a tangible action for better social impact? Can designers more efficiently leverage the principles of social impact design through social media? Are comprehensive resources in place to prepare future generations of designers to have social impact design cognition?

Concept

[Diagram of Design Methodology process]

Social Issues
- Change
- Impact
- Action
- Individual & Collective Responsibility
- Community Local Issues
  - Experience
  - Understanding
  - Empathize, Design Thinking
- Design Students
  - Learn:
    - Social Design Principles
  - Inspire:
    - Lead by Example
  - Motivation:
    - Recognition
- Future Generations of Designers and Social Entrepreneurs
  - Projects:
    - Social Impact
    - Design Cognition
- Good Samaritans
- Positive Social Structure

Pioneers
- Social Designers
- Case Studies
- Network
- Awareness
- Media:
  - Print, Digital, Social

[Diagram highlights the flow of design impact from social issues to positive social structure through various stages and resources]
Design Methodology

Process

Target Audience
Design Students
- Undergraduate
- Graduate

Stakeholders
Design Professionals
Educators
Social Entrepreneurs
Community-at-large

Research & Analysis
Research on Social Design
- What? Why? How?
- General Perception
- Common Grounds
- Affecting Factors
- Case Studies
- Pioneers and Proponents
- Efforts Invested

Analyze
- Definition and scope
- Existing State
- Goals and Values
- Principles
- Methodologies
- Best Practices
- Influence and Impact
Design Methodology

Process

Hardware Component

Camera
- To capture images and video during research

Mobile Phone
- To capture audio of interview, if video not permitted

Laptop
- For storage and online interviews

Software Component

Adobe Creative Cloud
- Illustrator
- Photoshop
- After Effects
- InDesign
- Audition
- Premiere Pro

Skype
- For online interviews

Google Forms
- For online surveys and data collection
Design Methodology

Process

Workflow
Stage 1: Research and Creation of Guidebook
Design Methodology

Process

Workflow
Stage 2: Mock-up of Online Instructional tool for the guidebook, embedded in a mobile app framework
Implementation

Strategy

For Research

- Research articles, white papers, journals, research papers
- Reach out to pioneers and forerunners of Social Impact Design
- Collect information through interviews and surveys
- Study existing measures for promotion and awareness
- Identify and compile existing principles and practices
- Analyze past case studies
- Perform new case studies
- Based on understanding, identify and define
  - Social Issues
  - Wicked Problems
  - Social Impact Design
  - Cause and Effect
  - Bystander Effect
  - Value proposition for designers
  - Social media and Social Recognition
  - Shareable and Viral content
- Draw correlation between parameters
- Draft principles and or guidelines for design students
- Introduce principles to undergrad Graphic Design students to implement it in one project for Design Systems & Methodologies
- Collect realtime usability feedback from students
- Collect comparative analysis from faculties, measuring effectiveness of principles
- Refine principles and get subject matter expert and peer reviews
- Create Guidebook–Electronic Document

For Mobile App Framework

- User Research
- Process Flowchart
- Information Architecture
- Task Flow – 2 Tasks
- Mock-ups – Identified Task Flows
Implementation

Process

Inspiration
Implementation

Process

Personal Style

Principles of IxD
the building blocks

Principles
These underlying principles of Interaction Design–IxD are fundamental to the design and implementation of effective interfaces.

They hold true for traditional GUI, the web, mobile devices, wearables or Internet-connected smart devices.

- Fitts’s Law
- Make it obvious
- Let it be known
- Anticipate
- Do not confuse
- Encourage user control
- Use the known
- Make it faster
- Avoid mistakes
- Look good feel good
Evaluation

Plan

Methods
- Peer Reviews
- SME Reviews
- Usability Evaluation
- Outcome Evaluation
- Impact Evaluation

Focus
- Clarity and brevity
- Value proposition assessment
- Impact on existing practices
- Ease of use
- Derived cognition
- Overall experience

Success Criteria
- User able to understand and implement principles with ease
- User identifies a value proposition
- Easy to incorporate without much change in existing methodology
- Level of understanding about social impact design increase
Dissemination

Out In The World

@RIT

• Thesis Show 2015
• Imagine RIT

Awards + Conference

• C77DA – Core77 Design Awards
• Design Ignites Change – Student Innovation Awards
• ADEA – Adobe Design Achievement Awards
• Fast Co. Innovation By Design Awards & Conference
• AIGA Design Conference 2015

Budget

Travel

• Interviews in California $900
• Interviews in New York City $400

Print

• Guidebook $100
Pragmatic Considerations

Budget

Travel
- Interviews in California $900
- Interviews in New York City $300

Print
- Guidebook $100

Dissemination
- Submissions $200

*Numbers are an estimation of what I expect to spend throughout my thesis. All expenses are subject to change*
Time to play the game…

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<td>Survey of literature</td>
<td>Proposal</td>
<td>Project documentation and blog</td>
<td>Research and analysis, including interviews and surveys</td>
<td>Synthesis of research</td>
<td>Evaluation of proposed principles</td>
<td>creation of guidebook</td>
<td>Ideation for app</td>
<td>Implementation of app</td>
</tr>
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Bibliography


IRB Approval
Form C

IRB Decision Form

TO: Vinay Mishra

FROM: RIT Institutional Review Board

DATE: February 21, 2015

RE: Decision of the RIT Institutional Review Board

Project Title - DESIKARMA: Design for Social Impact-Know, Act, Reflect, Make

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has taken the following action on your project named above.

- Exempt 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)

Now that your project is approved, you may proceed as you described in the Form A.

You are required to submit to the IRB any:
- Proposed modifications and wait for approval before implementing them,
- Unanticipated risks, and
- Actual injury to human subjects.

Heather Fort, MPH
Associate Director
Office of Human Subjects Research

Revised 10-18-06
Bibliography


Bibliography


