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Fall 2020 Independent Study Final Report

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### **Abstract**

The education market has a distinct need for out-of-the-box, innovative digital products to bring neurodivergent and special needs learners into higher education. Many students, even those who perform well in the classroom, are entering the modern world not only with outdated ideas about science and technology, but also lacking both the drive and the skills necessary to assess the world around them in a scientific manner.<sup>1</sup> In Spring and Fall 2020, Hypostatic Studios engaged in a comprehensive customer discovery process under the supervision of the Rochester Institute of Technology's Simon Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship and the Rutgers School of Communication and Information. The research conducted found a clear and present need in college classrooms and the online sphere for alternative methods of instruction beyond traditional formats. Both professors and students expressed a clear interest in using open-source video games as a method of instruction in high-level STEM and liberal arts studies<sup>4</sup>. Hypostatic Studio has created several gaming experiences that meet these needs under a sustainable method of production and distribution. Hypostatic Studios has undertaken a massive creative and economic endeavour to bring game-based digital education to students around the world. Our flagship products include open-world role-playing games, 2D shooters and puzzles for mobile web use, and even an experimental form of gaming known as augmented reality. The purpose of this project was to develop a social media strategy for a start-up educational gaming

company, build on the open education movement, and ultimately provide a method of non-traditional instruction in advanced topics for non-traditional learners. The goal of this paper is to provide a final report on this endeavour and an updated overview of the market position and outlook for Hypostatic Studios, which is currently in production of its flagship products and seeking a second round of investor seed funding.

## **Background**

One possible explanation for the failures of education in the 21st century is that the education industry lags far behind other industries such as healthcare in that only 3% of the overall market is represented in the digital sphere.<sup>2</sup> Gaming is an incredibly useful mechanism for breaking down and explaining scientific and academic processes to neurodivergent students. Many students and professors attribute the inaccessibility and inefficiency of higher education to the rigid and inflexible nature of classroom-based instruction. The highest-grossing sectors of the education market include the acclimation and distribution of knowledge, the open research movement that seeks to make higher education more affordable and accessible to the general public, and creating an open and free marketplace of ideas and resources for building 21st century curriculum and educational resources<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, data from experiments done on the popular video game *World of Warcraft* finds that players tend to perform better on benchmarks of scientific literacy compared to their peers who only received science instruction in the classroom<sup>1</sup>. The researchers in this experiment went on to propose that correlating the real world with the information represented in the game world helps students develop skills that not only introduce them to science as a field of study, but help them rewire their brains in order to view

the world in a more scientifically literate manner. The push to digitize education represents a potential 300 billion dollar investment, including investments in augmented and virtual reality from venture capital groups<sup>3</sup>, due to data from as far back as 2007 indicating the future of education lies in Internet-connected personal devices<sup>1</sup>. However, many educational games on the market today lack the ingenuity or production value that places them alongside industry mainstays such as *The Legend of Zelda* or *Fortnite* in terms of recognition and gross profit margins. Hypostatic Studios has developed several games that translate peer-reviewed research into immersive, playable experiences. The synthesis of gaming ingenuity with low-cost production methods makes Hypostatic Studios a unique and powerful player in the educational gaming industry that can address the problems that the need for alternative learning presents. Hypostatic Studios was founded in 2017 by Robert Santiago, a student of physics and game design at the Rochester Institute of Technology. After winning a \$10,000 grant from the MAGIC Center Game Studio, Hypostatic was able to develop a trailer and over 50 gigabytes worth of code for its flagship product, *A Perfect Year*. In its current state, *A Perfect Year* consists of several trailers and pilot epsidoes. After developing these initial base products from 2017-2019, Hypostatic Studios began a comprehensive customer discovery and marketing campaign to garner interest for the finished version of *A Perfect Year*. A full demo of *A Perfect Year* is expected to be completed in June 2021, while the Ego Eggs are expected to be fully released in 2022. The company's current goal while in the production phase, and subsequently the goal of this independent study, is to maintain and engage the company's fan base with exciting, new social media content. The methodology and results of this campaign in relation to the products they are marketing will be the focus of the rest of this paper.

## Methodology

The project is utilizing an episodic and open-source approach to provide creative expandability as well as financial sustainability. The main storyline of *A Perfect Year* explores the intersections of psychology and physics using research performed at the Rochester Institute of Technology. In order to progress with the primary storyline beyond the free-to-play multiplayer hub world, the user will buy “Ego Eggs”, which are essentially episodes containing new content to explore. Hypostatic Studios has also already put several episodic Ego Eggs into production, including:

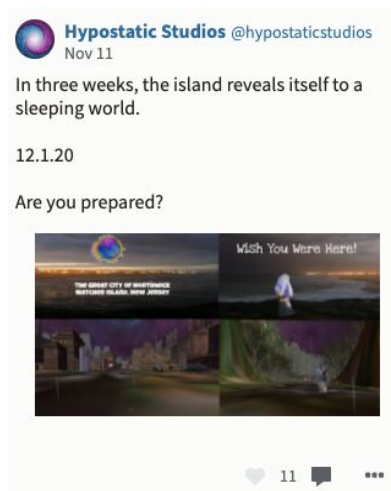
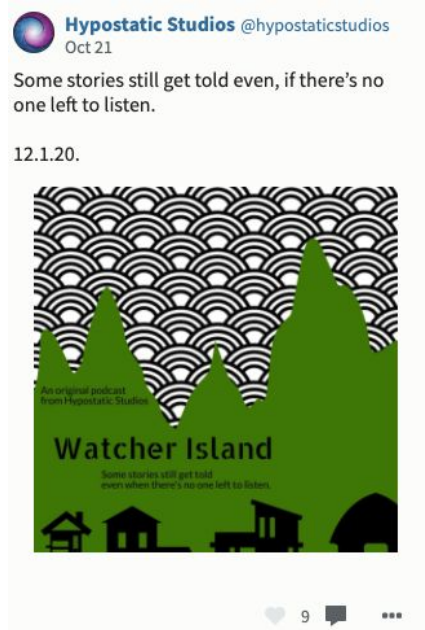
- *The Dream Sequence*: An open-world physics engine that explains the physical systems of the Universe using “programmable electron simulation theory” as its guiding framework. The theory allows users to visualize how physical laws can be derived from simple mathematical models, building knowledge holistically the bottom-up. The engine allows the user to employ a custom-built mathematical language to build the Universe from scratch.
- *For You and Me*: This narrative experience and lecture focuses largely on the most recent and controversial theories in physics including the Alcubierre metric (FTL travel), superfluidity, and string-based models of the Universe. It also explores the future of sociology as biologically-networked technology, artificial intelligence, and the colonization of the Solar System re-shape humanity’s identity.
- *Watcher Island*: This action-packed thriller introduces students to the subjects of war and economics in a dystopian, altered near-future. The game follows an “augmented reality

format” in which elements of the story are told through real-world media such as social media posts and video uploads. This format of storytelling has grown a small but loyal fanbase on YouTube and Twitter, creating a kind of online puzzling-solving community that has proven invaluable for marketers. The goal of the actual game (which is still in production) is to create a space to engage with issues of war, weaponry, and the associated sociological and psychological trauma that war creates. Furthermore, the game explores the economic and social roots of conflict and migration, while encouraging the player to explore their own feelings on the subject material. The podcast can be found here: [youtube.com/watch?v=1USgWZomiqI&t=4s&ab\\_channel=HypostaticStudios](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1USgWZomiqI&t=4s&ab_channel=HypostaticStudios) (This podcast is intended for a mature audience. Listener discretion advised.)

- *LifeWriter*: In the far future, human beings can create living organisms from scratch using technology known as LifeWriters. By typing out nucleotide sequences, the player gets to design custom creatures to fight against an army of invading machines.

The initial customer discovery process began in Spring 2020 under the supervision of the Rochester Institute of Technology’s Simone Center for Entrepreneurship. This phase of customer discovery was conducted in-person by Robert Santiago. Santiago is the founder, studio lead, and lead designer of Hypostatic Studios. The actual research took place at the New Brunswick campus of Rutgers University. Santiago completed a total of 40 interviews with students and professors in different public spaces on Rutgers campus, finding “most participants conveyed the need for educational entertainment software outside of what is currently available” (4.). Santiago concluded in his research that both students and professors would like to see entertainment software that is engaging, cooperative, and most importantly, educational. The idea of “play

games to earn credit,” which is the main business initiative of Hypostatic Studios, resonated with a diverse, multidisciplinary group of students and professors. The next phase of research took place in Fall 2020, and was supervised by John Pavlik, a faculty member at the Rutgers School of Communication and Information. Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and subsequent shutdown of most public spaces, this research phase consisted of an online marketing campaign aimed at engaging and building on Hypostatic’s current user base. The campaign included social media promotion for a new podcast, which is part of the *Watcher Island* Ego Egg series. While *Watcher Island* will eventually be a full mini-game within *A Perfect Year*, the podcast was produced for marketing purposes and to keep the current fanbase engaged.




The posts were drafted using Hootsuite, an automated social media scheduling and posting software. The monthly subscription fees for Hootsuite, as well as the fees for maintaining website hosting space, represents Hypostatic’s limited advertising budget of >\$100 per month. The initial posts were meant to develop the “augmented reality” and “magical realism” aspects of

*Watcher Island* while also building excitement for the release of the podcast. Typical of the augmented reality format, the posts focused more on building the world and lore of the podcast using real-world elements rather than marketing the product itself. Hashtags were also introduced in some posts to increase reach and engagement. While the primary campaign was focused on the release of the *Watcher Island* podcast, a few other accomplishments such as storyboards, game UX, and other new releases were also featured to keep the posts varied and interesting.

 **Hypostatic Studios** @hypostaticstudios  
Nov 30

Some WIP Pics of the "Water Memory World" Menu System used to select the level you want to dive headfirst into from the Cognitive Dissonance Chamber,...

[Read more](#)



 **Hypostatic Studios** @hypostaticstudios  
Nov 6

Utopia awaits, for you and me.

Preview and demos available now!  
<https://www.hypostaticstudios.com/for-you-and-me>

#videogames #games #gamer #gaming  
#instagaming

[Read more](#)



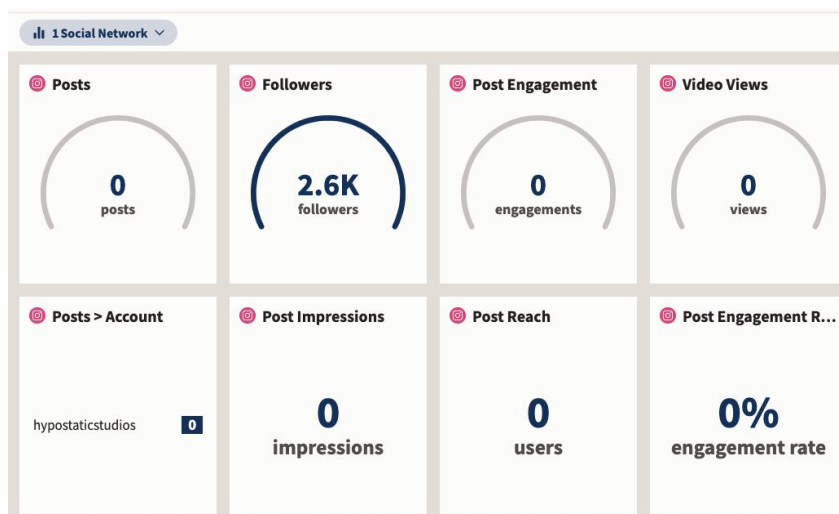
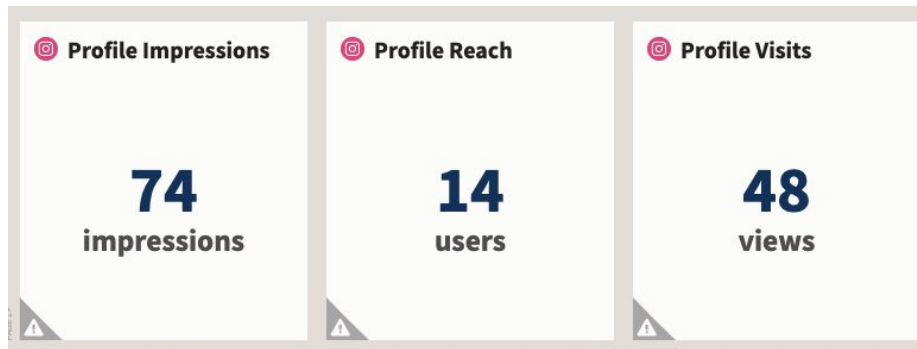


Some posts were written in more traditional, formal (but still creative) social media copy as well.

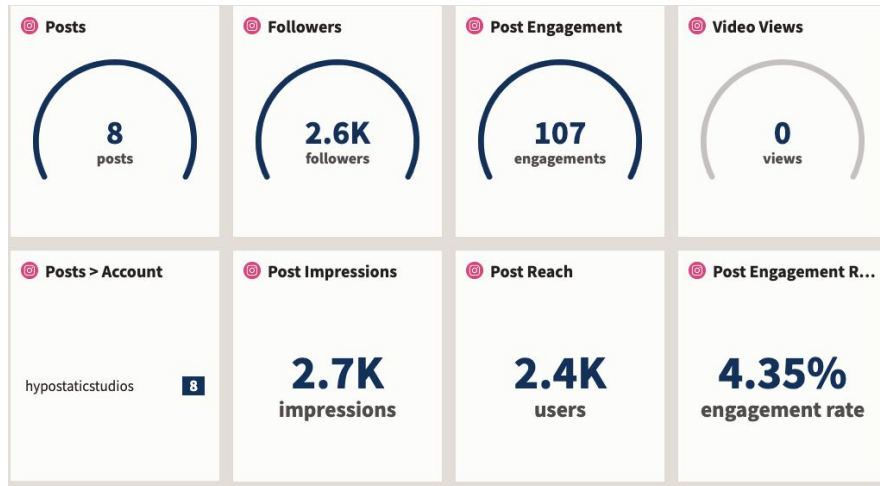
Thanks to support from Professor Pavlik, both the social media campaign and the podcast were released within the Fall 2020 semester. The results for these efforts will be reviewed below.



## Results



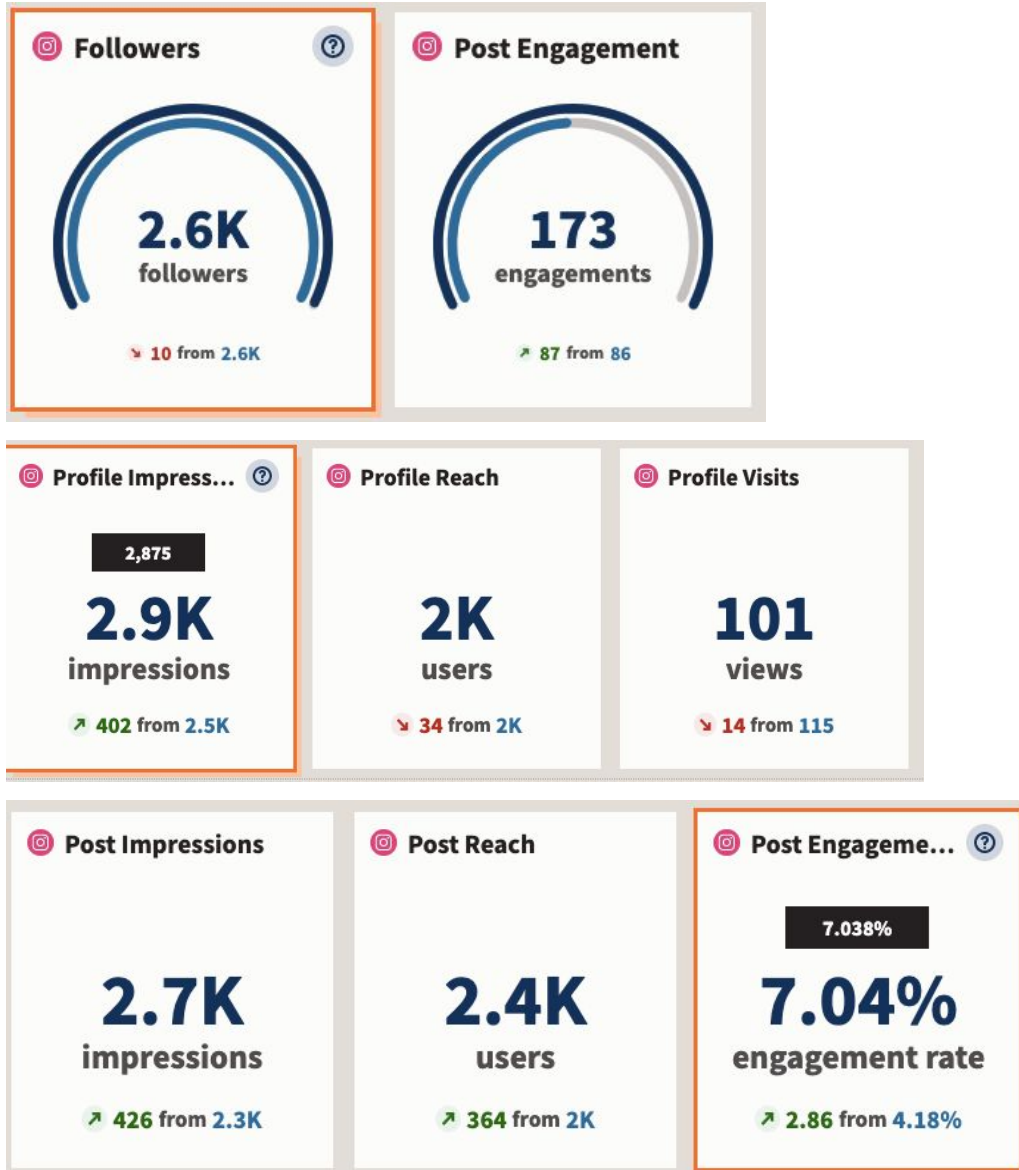
The analytics above show activity on Hypostatic Studios' Instagram page during the month of September 2020. Before the fall campaign began, Hypostatic saw little to no engagement on Instagram despite a sizable 2,600 followers. The Instagram has been largely inactive due to production difficulties after the first prototype build of *A Perfect Year* was completed in 2019. The goal of the 2020 campaign, therefore, was two-pronged: firstly, to engage with the users already following the account, and secondly, to grow the Instagram account into the incredibly active gaming community on the app.



During the first month of the campaign, the account saw a phoenix-like rebirth. Users enthusiastically engaged with our content, leading to post and profile impressions (a metric that measures the amount of users who had Hypostatic content appear on their feed) both outpacing the actual follower count. This means that more users were seeing the content than actually following the account, a positive indicator for the profile's reach. However, this also indicated an issue with user retention and bounce rates.



The second month of the two-month campaign saw similar numbers in terms of post impressions, meaning that roughly the same number of users were being exposed to Hypostatic content. However, this second month saw an increase in user engagement and profile impressions, meaning more users were engaging with Hypostatic's content. More user impressions meant that the content was reproduced more times in Instagram's timeline algorithm, continuing the trend of a skewed impressions-vs-followers ratio.



Overall, the campaign resulted in a net-loss of followers, but a net-gain of post impressions, post reach, profile impressions, and post engagement. The significance of these results will be discussed below.

## **Discussion**

The success of this social media campaign was mixed, although it had an overall positive effect on the market position of Hypostatic Studios. An increase in impressions, reach, and engagement implies that the current user base following Hypostatic Studios are enthusiastic about the content being produced. The fall campaign resulted in more people having Hypostatic content delivered to their feed, and most users interacted with this content. The decrease in followers can be attributed to the “follow-unfollow” paradigm, in which users only follow an account to receive a follow in return, but have no real interest in the account's content. It is also possible that these users were once engaged, but lost interest in Hypostatic content during the Instagram hiatus between 2018-2019. Despite this, however, the fall campaign had the overall effect of increasing the presence of Hypostatic Studios on Instagram, and re-engaging its 2,600-strong follower base. The release of the podcast was met with excitement on Instagram, and translated into roughly the same number of “likes” per Instagram post within two weeks of release (>20.) This is similar to results of a previous attempt at a Hypostatic podcast in 2018 known as “A Perfect Podcast. The results from these two experiments in content delivery imply that the studio can use Instagram analytics as an indicator for user engagement with the actual product. Users were excited to see what the studio was working on, but the number of those who expressed this enthusiasm through “liking” translated to a similar number of views on the most recently released product. Since the account is primarily marketed towards gamers, it is possible that the numbers will continue to stall until an actual game demo, rather than supplementary marketing material, is released. Ideally, continued interactions from Hypostatic’s Instagram followers will be translated into sales for the main product when it is finished in 2021. However, the fall campaign exposed

several holes in Hypostatic's marketing strategy which need to be addressed, including growing the account's fan base and translating user interaction into actual downloads of new releases.

## **Works Cited**

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