

# Research Question

How can branding be used to cultivate and sustain meaningful media engagement in an era of fragmented attention?



## Aim

To use brand design to reframe attention as a cultural value and foster more intentional, meaningful media engagement in resistance to the attention economy.

## Target Audience

Like I said earlier, my audience is **attention-deprived people**, especially GenZ.

## Methodolgy

My research is practice-led, interpretive, and constructivist, using design-making as a method of inquiry. Knowledge emerges through iterative making and reflection, allowing insights to develop in dialogue with materials, interactions, and contexts while developing narratives from them. This approach ensures that research is both generative and reflective, directly informing design decisions while deepening understanding of the themes and audiences explored in this project. My methods include:

- Survey and Findings
- Action research
- Literature review (theories)
- Case Study
- Peer review and user testing
- Design experimentation
- Secondary Visual Research
- Use of metaphor and analogy
- Speculative Design and Narrative Branding

# Defining Meaningful Media Engagement

Drawing from my undergraduate studies in communication, I understand meaningful media engagement as active media consumption. It involves approaching media with depth and a critical mindset, meanwhile reflecting on what we consume. This contrasts sharply with passive consumption, where audiences absorb content without sustained thought. In practice, it means moving beyond doomscrolling or mindless scrolling—choosing instead to read a book, watch a film, or listen to a long-form podcast: media that invites learning, reflection, and personal growth.

**Long-form media**, in particular, exemplifies this approach. It prioritizes quality over quantity, depth over superficiality, and sustained focus over fleeting attention (Lange, 2023). Only through long-form content can audiences truly engage—experiencing the richness of storytelling, the nuance of ideas, and the layered insights that foster understanding, critical thinking, and meaningful reflection.

This understanding shapes my project, which focuses on **designing experiences and tools that encourage long-form media consumption**.

## Key Research Question

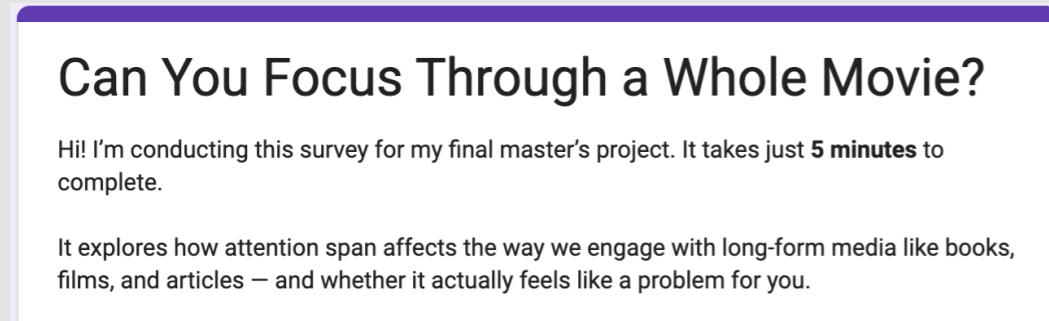
### ? Key Research Questions

1. **Why are people getting distracted during prolonged media consumption?**
2. **What are the common 'enemies' of attention span today?**
3. **How can long-form media experiences be designed to encourage engagement and critical reflection?**
4. **Can multi-sensory rituals (e.g., snacks, apps, ambient design) enhance focus?**

*Listing Out Key Research Questions*

# Survey

I decided to begin by speaking with my target audiences. To explore the phenomenon more systematically, I conducted a survey to investigate my target audience's media habits, attention spans, and engagement with long-form content. The aim was to understand why people struggle to focus, what distracts them, and how sustained engagement might be encouraged.



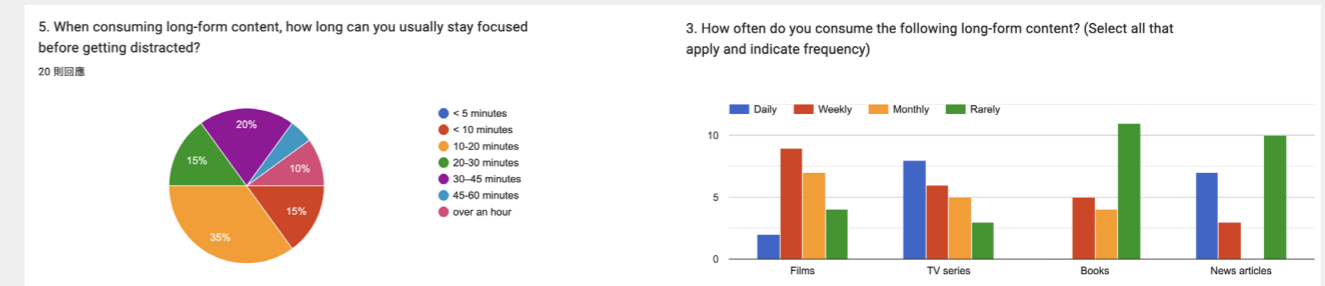
My survey on attention habit

The survey was completed by 20 respondents, primarily aged 18–24, who represent my target audience.

Key areas of inquiry included:

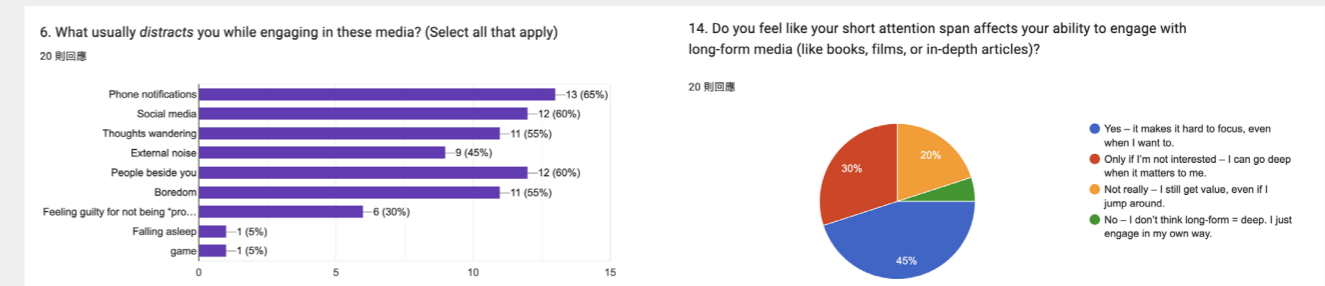
- Media consumption habits
- Attention span and focus challenges
- “Ideal” media self: how participants envision their optimal media habits and what prevents them from achieving it.
- Their focus strategies

## Media consumption habits



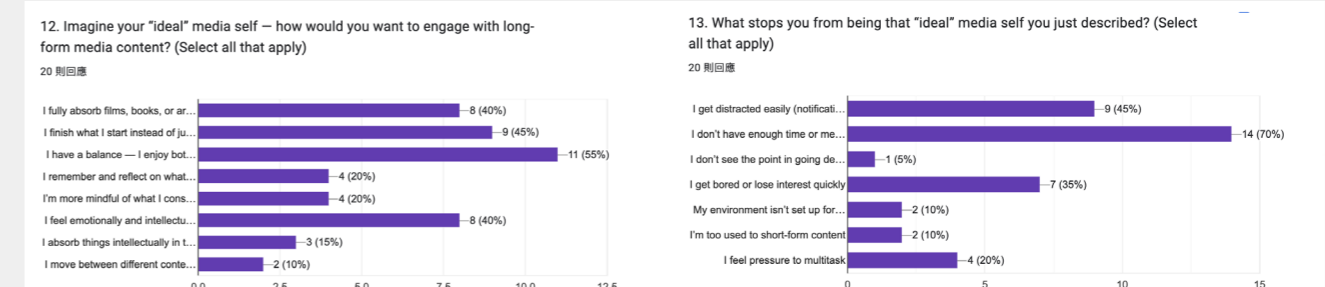
Survey question about media consumption habits

## Attention span and focus challenges



Survey question about attention span and focus challenges

## Ideal Media Self



Survey questions about respondents' "ideal media self"

## Strategies to Stay Focused



Participants shared practical, self-created rituals and focus habits in the survey.

# Key Insights

- Respondents enjoy both long-form and short-form content and aim for **balance**.
- **Lack of time or mental energy** often prevents engagement with long-form media.
- Respondents can typically maintain focus for **10–20 minutes** on long-form content; distractions include phones, social media, noise, and wandering thoughts.
- Short attention spans can help multitasking but hinder deep focus; **interest drives engagement**.
- Long-Form Media is seen as essential for **learning, critical thinking, and emotional depth**. Preferred ways to consume long-form: speed up, right mood, one full setting, multitasking.
- Ideal Media Self – Respondents aspire to **absorb content fully, reflect meaningfully, and engage mindfully**.

**I have a balance — I enjoy both deep content and fun, short stuff without guilt.**  
數量: 11

**I don't have enough time or mental energy**  
數量: 14

**I get distracted easily (notifications, noise, wandering thoughts)**  
數量: 9

Yes – it's essential for learning, critical thinking, and emotional depth.  
**11 (55%)**

**Inspired – “It sparked new thoughts, feelings, or ideas.”**  
數量: 10

**I feel emotionally and intellectually connected to what I'm watching or reading.**  
數量: 8

**I fully absorb films, books, or articles without distraction.**  
數量: 8

*Key Responses in the survey*



The survey revealed a gap between aspiration and reality: participants value long-form media for depth and reflection but struggle to sustain it due to time, energy, and distraction, which lead them to fall back on short-form for convenience, multitasking, or quick stimulation. This highlighted the need for a design solution that **makes long-form engagement more accessible**.

# Speculative Design and Narrative Branding

Since my project is about imagining more sustainable futures of attention, speculative design formed a key part of my methodology. As Dunne and Raby note, “if we are interested in shifting design’s focus from designing for how the world is now to designing for how things could be—we will need to turn to speculative culture and what Lubomír Doležel has called an ‘experimental laboratory of the world-constructing enterprise’” (Dunne and Raby, 2013). I began by developing scenarios that extrapolated from present behaviours of doomscrolling and short-form saturation to envision dystopian futures of media depletion and distraction.

Later, I employed narrative branding to frame a compelling brand story, introducing the concept of the **Media Self** — the version of us shaped by what we consume — and the metaphor of a “**media diet.**” Through storytelling, I translated intangible behaviours into tangible terms: doomscrolling as junk food and empty calories, long-form media as nourishing, nutrient-rich food.

To test and extend these ideas, I developed speculative artefacts that could exist in such a future, experimenting with ways of materialising attention culture in visible form. Together, speculative design and narrative branding provided the conceptual foundation on which my final project was built, building systems that make abstract ideas both communicable and emotionally resonant.

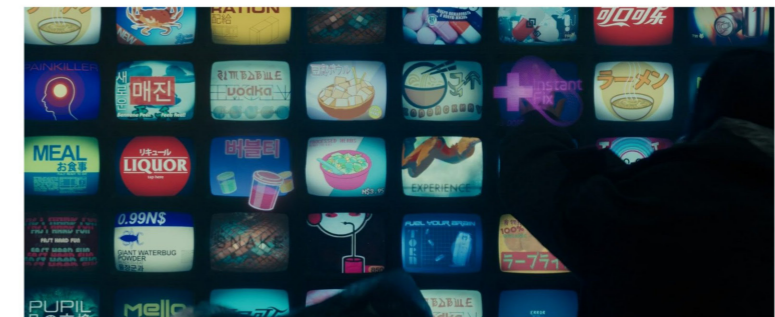
## WORLD-BUILDING

a **near-future scenario** where attention is even more fragmented — and society has begun to **treat memory, thought, and reflection as endangered capacities.**

In 2035, people can't remember what they saw yesterday

### Example Scenarios:

- In 2035, people can't remember what they saw yesterday — so a Ministry of Media Memory is established.
- Reels are illegal after 10PM to protect public mental health.
- Personal memory is taxed — people pay to preserve deep thoughts.
- A new law bans untracked screen time — so everyone turns to “slow media sanctuaries.”



branding in blade runner 2049: a wall of screens (marketplace)

↓  
media diet that shows your media consumption???

*My world-building process*



# Literature Review

## Integrating Behavioral Change Theory into Long-Form Engagement

Encouraging long-form media engagement requires behavioral change, making habit-formation a useful framework. Habits form when behaviors are repeated in the presence of contextual cues, reinforced with positive outcomes, and eventually become automatic, cue-contingent, and goal-oriented rather than effortful (Orbell and Verplanken, 2020).

In this sense, **environmental cues** (e.g., dedicated spaces, fixed times, reminders and planners, multisensory rituals) can trigger focus, while **rewards** such as enjoyment, satisfaction, or progress strengthen the routine (Carden and Wood, 2018). Over time, these practices may allow long-form engagement to become habitual, motivational and aligned with personal goals, rather than reliant on constant willpower.

The attention economy exploits behavioral science to encourage distraction, rewarding clicks and endless scrolling. Hence, a critical alternative is **to design a reward system that reinforces self-control and depth.**

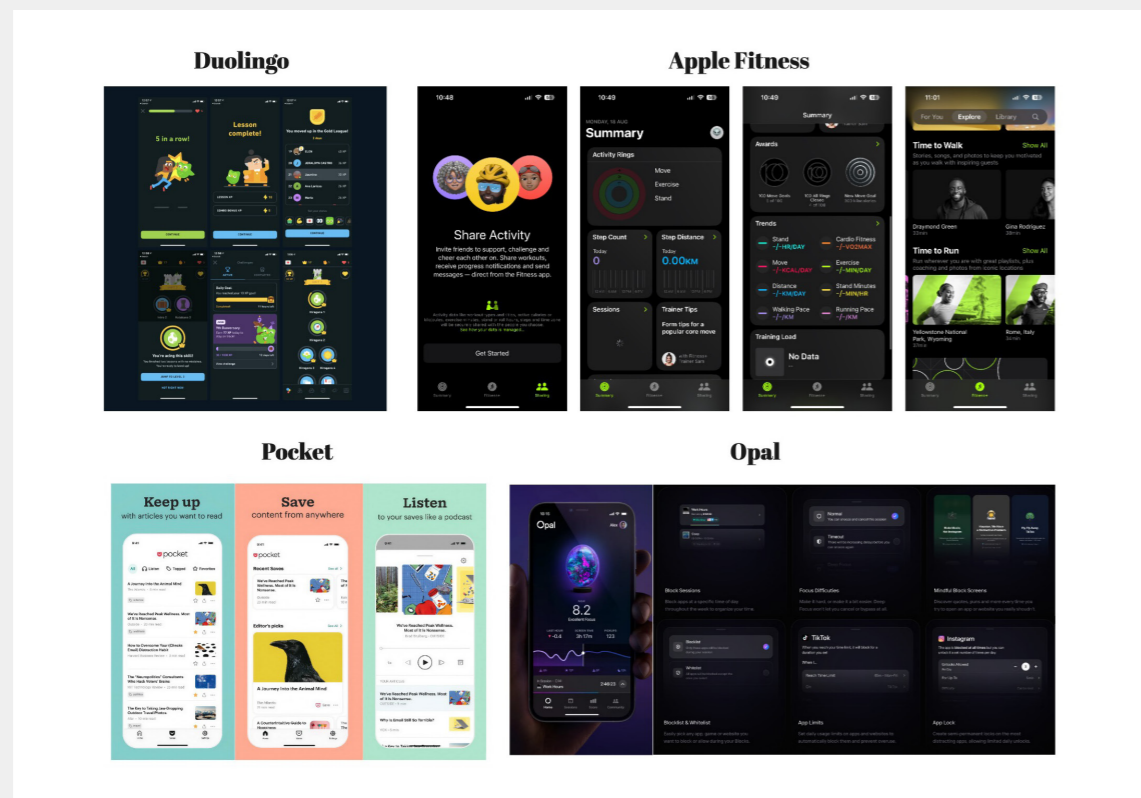
## Applying Uses and Gratification Theory

Uses & Gratifications Theory emphasises that audiences are active media users who deliberately select media to satisfy specific needs (Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch, 1973). These needs can be grouped into five key motivations: information/education (knowledge and learning), entertainment (pleasure and relaxation), social interaction (connection and belonging), personal identity (self-reflection and values), and escapism (distraction and relief).

While short-form media primarily hooks users through instant, low-commitment gratification — for example, studies of TikTok show that 24.2% of motivations are driven by entertainment (Falgoust et al., 2022) — I decide to use this framework to **position long-form media as fulfilling deeper needs: information, identity, and emotional depth**, which short-form rarely satisfies.

# Case Study

To inform my design, I analysed four brands that demonstrate different approaches to **habit formation and media engagement**. This comparison revealed both effective strategies and critical gaps that my project could address.



Case Studies (Detail in Design Resolution)

**Duolingo**, a language learning app, uses short, structured lessons alongside **gamified** triggers like notifications, streaks, and badges to make daily language practice habitual and rewarding. It's my major case study on how **gamified language** (Bilham, 2021) and **emotion design** can hook users.

**Apple Fitness+** employs similar mechanisms in the fitness context, combining daily reminders, progress tracking, and awards with personalised plans and motivational content, showing how **visualising growth and setting achievable goals** can sustain long-term engagement.

**Pocket**, branded as “the place to absorb great content”, enables users to save and organise long-form articles, supporting reading habits through accessibility, but it relies on self-motivation.

**Opal**, a focus app, takes a different approach by reducing distraction through tools like screen-time tracking, app blocking, and timed sessions, positioning itself as a wellness brand focused on awareness and self-regulation.

From my market analysis, I found no brands that reward long-form engagement as effectively as Duolingo or Apple Fitness+ reward language or fitness. Apps like Pocket or Instapaper prioritise accessibility but lack motive, while focus apps like Opal emphasise self-regulation but not the hooks that drive return. This gap highlights an opportunity to **combine habit-forming mechanisms with a strong brand narrative, creating a system that actively rewards long-form engagement and positions it as both motivating and culturally sustainable**. This paves the way for my future conceptual development.