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Critical Reflection (SELĀH Magazine)

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

For this dissertation, I created a new print magazine called SELĀH that included a range of written articles, images, photo shoots and photo stories. I chose to create this because I wanted to link my dissertation to my future goals of becoming a magazine editor and to also utilise the fashion journalism skills I already hold.

### 1.1 What is SELĀH?

“SELĀH is much more than an online style magazine – it’s a movement. It’s a collective of minimalist and faith-inspired written and visual stories reflecting on identity, purpose and life, shown through the lens of fashion and culture. The word SELĀH (/’si:lə - lɑ:/) denotes a musical pause, which in turn, helps describe what SELĀH is all about - it is to pause, reflect and share. So every seeker of SELĀH is encouraged to STOP, SELĀH & SAVOUR every moment in life.”

## 2. PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

I chose to produce a print magazine because I am a lover of print and believe that although digital/online magazines are popular, independent print publications are still on a rise, proving that specially curated print projects are still popular with the right demographic. In addition to this, SELĀH is to be slowly digested and savoured and not to be quickly flipped through. So it could be viewed as a coffee table magazine.

The concept was a challenging feat to tackle. However, as previously mentioned, I had created a magazine before (which was fashion and faith-inspired) so I was somewhat confident in developing a magazine with these two elements at its core. But, I knew that, this time, I wanted change the overall concept. So I started to think about the topics that had gripped my interest these past years and started brainstorming. After much research and thought, I decided I wanted to create a publication that incorporated faith and minimalism as I follow these two concepts myself and believe that they marry harmoniously together, offering ample amounts of reflection and thought. But aimed to also use fashion and culture as the output. After that, I thought of several names that could represent this ethos and eventually landed on SELĀH (explained above in section 1.1).

After I had a solid concept, I then researched into who would be SELĀH's target readership. This steered me to speak to several people who read independent style and culture magazines and are interested in fashion and either or both, faith and minimalism. Upon gaining this insight and looking into possible competitors such as Kinfolk, Cereal, Minimalissimo, Oh Comely, Magnify and Delayed Gratification, I found that my target market would be young creatives aged 18 – 30 years old. I decided that these people would be living and working in the world's most cosmopolitan and creative cities such as London, Seoul, Tokyo, Paris and New York. They would also be interested in aesthetics, style and culture and like to journal, blog or vlog. They would also be a mix of students and graduates (interning or working in fashion, earning between minimum wage and £25,000) and freelancers/professionals (working in a creative field such as photography, writing or graphic design, earning between £27,000 - £35,000 annually). They would be thinkers, learners and explorers and be ready to make and share memories, whilst sitting back and relishing life's moments. So after collating all this information, I decided that SELĀH had to be a magazine intended for those who want to take the time out of their day to read and reflect on life's lessons.

Once the concept and target market was honed, I needed to develop a theme for this particular issue. I knew that I wanted the theme to be an introduction to what SELĀH is. So, I chose to centre the issue around the topic of identity, as that can provide an overall explanation of something and is broad enough to cover a range of subjects. However, instead of naming it the identity issue, I chose to use the phrase, 'At Face Value' to give a more raw and stripped back feel and added the tag, 'The B&W Series,' to highlight the B&W photo series, TWO : FIVE (pages 110-119). If further developed, these photo series would also become a permanent feature for SELĀH with the series producing different coloured stories. If SELĀH were to be produced as a print publication, it would be intended for the slow journalism market and would also be published biannually – with issues produced for the autumn/winter (September) and spring/summer (March) seasons. This would in turn, give enough time for the editorial team and contributors to reflect and prepare their stories.

I believe this magazine fits into a gap in the market because in an age where everything is fast-paced and on the go, we see now more than ever many people becoming more interested in slow-paced journalism and reconnecting with concepts such as mindfulness and minimalism. Young adults are now more inclined to read think-based

articles that they can relate to in their everyday lives, sharing their thoughts and life experiences – just like blogging.

Finally, in terms of logistical planning, the main task was to find a printer that could print small batches on-demand. This would not only cut down on printing costs but would also allow me more time to curate. I am pleased to say that this was a success and has proven to be one of the most crucial elements when creating a print publication.

### 3. EDITORIAL

The editorial flow was created in order to lead the reader through each story by finding the content that could relate to one another. I designed several ‘break pages,’ for the layout, to help produce a clear and concise flow for the reader, to allow the reader time to sit, think and reflect on all they had read and to subliminally break the magazine into sections. The main break page is a white double page and has the SELĀH phonics added to it in black. These have been inserted on pages 2-3, 32-33, 86-87 and 132-133. The other break pages are found on pages 50-51 (this page is used to link the ‘DNA’ article and the ‘Elements’ photo shoot together), page 91 (this is used as small break and to merge with the ‘Pride’ article) and pages 108-109 (this break page is used to link the ‘Milestone Moments’ article and the ‘TWO : FIVE’ photo series together).

*\*\* For a more detailed flow of SELĀH Magazine, please refer to the final editorial flat plan in the appendices of this document. \*\**

As this project’s deadline was set for September, I planned this issue to be fit for the autumn/winter season by using appropriate seasonal items on pages like ‘SELĀHstyle’ and through the fashion editorial, ‘Elements: His Masterpiece.’ In addition, mostly every piece in SELĀH includes a quote at the start of the piece because it evokes the storytelling and reflective attitude the magazine holds.

### 3.1 Writing

For the written sections of my magazine, I decided to produce a range of articles such as think pieces, listicles, shopping pages and interviews. I believe the topics covered are relevant to the target audience because they are young creative adults at an age where they would most likely be experiencing these same life lessons. Due to this, the tone of voice is intended to be informal and conversational but well articulate, almost as if the reader was hearing from an honest and wise friend.

*\*\* Below is the full list of each written piece, accompanied by a brief description. \*\**

- **Editor's Letter (page 4)**

I used the editor's letter to firstly explain what the magazine was about and to share a short story about my identity journey and then finish with what they reader can expect to find in that particular issue. In writing this way, I wanted to find a way to connect with the reader and for them to fully grasp the essence of what SELĀH is about straightaway.

- **#SELĀHstories (pages 10 – 11)**

This particular section is one of the interactive features in the magazine that helps push SELĀH's ethos of reflective stories, as it shares a short statement, sent in by a reader, that reflects on a segment of their story or journey in life.

- **SELĀH Q+A: Alexandria Chantiluke (pages 12-15)**

As SELĀH is a fashion/style magazine, I wanted to showcase an upcoming talent in the fashion world and thought a Q&A session would be suitable. However, just like the other articles in the magazine, I did not want the core of this interview to be about Alexandria's work. I wanted to use her work and accomplishments in the fashion industry as an embellishment and for her true and personal story to be the main topic of conversation. This article is also the start of the first section of the magazine that covers mainly fashion/style-related topics.

- **SELĀHstyle (pages 16 – 21)**

I wanted to add a shopping section due to the fact that SELĀH is a style-inspired magazine. And as stated previously, I chose items appropriate for the autumn/winter seasons and also items that are unisex and represent the 'At Face Value' theme.

- **Fashion Thought: The Afro (pages 22 – 25)**

I aimed for 'Fashion Thought' to be another regular feature for SELĀH. In terms of this project, I decided to write about the Afro/black hair, as it is a strong symbol of identity for so many and also fits into more of the lighter style-inspired articles within the first section of the magazine.

- **Personal Brand (pages 26 – 31)**

This article concludes the first section of the magazine and delves deeper into the writers thoughts and allows the reader to be led into the second section with ease. It also covers a topic that is relevant within this image-obsessed generation.

- **#SELĀHsitswith: Linford Davis (pages 34 – 37)**

I wanted to include a feature interview because of SELĀH's reflective story ethos. I wanted to interview someone who not only has an interesting profession but someone who represents this generation well, reflects the magazines spirit and has their own interesting personal story. Through this interview, I wanted to share the person behind the profession and allow the reader to be inspired by what they read. This interview was a challenge, as I did not have the opportunity to conduct it in person, so I had to find ways to add colour to the scene to make the reader feel as though this was a face-to-face meeting. This feature also commences the second section of the magazine, which is filled with content that speaks to the reader on wider scale.

- **Race For Life: A Campaign Of A Lifetime (pages 38 – 43)**

I chose to place this article directly behind the interview as they both hold a link to race and perception and it is a timely article because of the latest Windrush scandal and October's upcoming black history month.

- **DNA: Mind, Body, Soul & Spirit (pages 44 – 49)**

This article is the main feature and accompanies the main fashion editorial found on pages 52 – 85 and is the final article in section two of the magazine. For this article, I wanted to link in the basic thought of identity with the concept of faith that the magazine is inspired by and challenge perceptions of society.

- **Kill Pride Or Die Tryin' (pages 88 – 90)**

This article is the start of the final section of SELĀH. It is one of three listicle-style articles in this section and accompanies the following two articles as a set of shorter think pieces. This final section is also the start of where the black and white/grey scale theme appears in the main articles.

- **White Noise: Learning To Listen In An Age Of Chaos (pages 92 – 95)**

As a short-form article, this piece, along with the previous one, is intended to allow the reader to enjoy and think before delving back into the heavier articles to come. It is also intended to speak to this generation's lack of clarity.

- **The Power Of One: A Season Of Loneliness (pages 96 – 101)**

This piece was written with the intent to speak on a timely topic that affects many young people today and would be something SELĀH readers would be able to relate to, especially those who are students or live in a city such as London. This piece is also set out to help build the reader into the next article, which is a longer feature.

- **Milestone Moments: My thoughts upon turning a quarter of a century (pages 102 – 107)**

As the final article in this section, 'Milestone Moments' is intended to be a round up or overview of the writer's thoughts and feelings and offer encouragement to the reader who most likely would be in the same life cycle. I believe using this, as the final main article is effective, as it seems to bring everything to a close. This feature is also accompanied by the 'TWO : FIVE' photo series that follows behind.



- **#SELĀHshares: Where We Are From... (pages 120 – 125)**

This is the second interactive feature and also one of the reoccurring articles that would become a permanent fixture, if SELĀH were to be published. Created using another interactive hashtag, this article encourages interaction between the reader and the SELĀH team/contributors, with the latter sharing brief introductions from their world.

- **Literary Space (pages 126 – 131)**

'Literary Space' is the final piece of content within the magazine. After analysing many magazines, I found that having supplementary pieces towards the back (such as Q+A's, advice columns etc) to be a light and refreshing way to end the readers experience. I wanted to leave the reader with an intellectual and observational piece of content that they could dwell on and read even after finishing the magazine. I think that having a guest writer contribute content like this to be a great idea as it also creates exposure for many creatives in the writing world. This feature is also complimented by an embroidered illustration interpreted by a student illustrator. I would intend on making 'Literary Space' a permanent fixture in SELĀH magazine.

### **3.2 Imagery/Photo shoot/Photo Series**

- **Elements: His Masterpiece**

This photo shoot was the largest shoot I have ever executed. It was a very overwhelming challenge to complete due to the booking of models, styling, time management and location scouting but overall I am very pleased with how it turned out. However, the only issues I had was the fact that I initially aimed to have coloured smoke/gas edited onto the models faces to further emphasise the elements concept. But this was not fulfilled due to technical difficulties with the image editor. So I decided to add coloured bars instead – which still worked, as elements are not only gas but solids also. The final issue was that I had two models of colour, which personally, was not an issue to me, but as the editor, I realised that a reader could possibly interpret it as a magazine directed at people of colour. However, these were the only suitable models that could work within the timeframe given and it was important to have both a male and female, as this publication is genderless.

- **TWO : FIVE [B&W Photo series]**

This photo series partners alongside the 'Milestone Moments' article. Every shot shown correlates to a point made in the article and would be the start of SELĀH's visual colour series.

- **Other Imagery**

All other images published have been directed and styled by myself with some also being shot and edited by myself. Furthermore, all the imagery created, whether still life or model-based, is intended to be obscure – hiding facial feature, taking shots of hands and back profiles and even omitting people for objects to show the reader that this magazine heavily focuses on sharing and celebrating stories and not specifically the people themselves.

#### **4. ART DIRECTION**

As the sole curator of this project, I not only had to plan, write and direct, I also had to design and lay out the magazine. To do this, I used the Adobe InDesign software. Although I am confident in designing layouts and using this software, I found that designing this particular magazine was extremely challenging, as this is the largest design and layout project I have completed and it required me to intently think on and find a middle ground between the visual identity I wanted to form and the user experience.

The art direction was intended to keep to the magazine's minimalist core by keeping the design linear – with clean lines and shapes and white space. I chose to make the magazine 189mm in width and 246mm in height to give the magazine a personal feeling, as it is small enough to carry around but large enough to give it an artsy feel and to see the full beauty of its imagery. I also chose to print the magazine pages on 160gsm uncoated white paper and the cover on 250gsm. This type of paper was used to reiterate SELĀH's raw and stripped back aesthetic and to give the images a grainier look. Finally, the publication was finished with a perfect bind to make it feel like a book and to keep it a professional and classy. However, to gather more insight into magazine layout and design, I dissected and analysed several magazines that I believed encompassed the design aesthetic I envisioned. These publications were: Cereal,

Kinfolk, The Gentlewoman, Nang, Suitcase, Minimalissimo and COS lookbooks. When looking page to page at these publications, I studied how they used imagery and type together, how they effectively used colour without it being too overpowering, how they used titles, bylines and page tags, the use and amount of full bleed images, where their main article was positioned, how many pages each feature and their main photo editorial occupied, the spacing between and order of different segments, how they used columns and blocks of text and what they included on the spine and how they used advertising. All of these points helped me when it came to curating SELĀH's visuals DNA. I began to use bold typefaces adjacent to regular text to highlight main elements within some content. I also decided to use a sans serif font, Century Gothic – changing the vertical and horizontal scales to make it less rounded. I believe this gave the font an elegant vibe rather than it's original gawky look. I also added grey printing marks throughout and grey scales onto some of the pages to highlight the black and white theme and added greater than symbols and a squared full stops, at the end of paragraphs, to signify the pauses and stops of the reader and to also link it with the logo design.

#### **4.1 Cover Design**

For any print publication, the cover is one of the most important elements. It has the power to draw or repel the reader and instantly sends a message to the reader about what they could find inside. So I wanted to create a cover that would not only stand out on a shelf and incorporate an image from the main photo shoot but would also give a sense of ambiguity as explained in section 3.4. I also created a logo/masthead for the magazine using Adobe Photoshop and decided to stretch this across the top of the cover to make it stand out. I decided to make it gold to signify a new lining (the same way people make reference to silver linings) and I added a squared full stop at the end to reiterate the stopping and pausing of the reader, as stated previously. In terms of the table of contents (pages 8 and 9), I wanted to make it into a clear and simple guide, for the reader to follow, to find the type of content they wanted to read. So I carried it over onto a double-page spread and grouped the content into content types.

## 5. SOCIAL MEDIA & INTERACTIVE ELEMENTS

As SELĀH is a reflective and conversational magazine, social media and interactive elements have been included throughout the print edition to highlight how SELĀH would connect with and market to its audience. I believe this element to be crucial especially when engaging with a target audience such as creative millennials. The main social media and interactive elements are the hashtag page tags. Located on the top of each different editorial piece, they act as a subtle description of what SELĀH is doing.

## 6. ADVERTISING

Throughout the magazine, I have only dedicated four pages (one double-page spread and two single pages) for the use of advertising. The first ad is from Muji – which I designed as it was hard to find a minimalist-style ad with the correct pixels size. I chose to use this company as they are international, they sell a wide range of items that my target audience would buy and they have minimalist design at their core. The second advert I chose was from a small Christian-based stationary company called Design Amos. I felt this was suitable, as I wanted to have a range of large and small companies and ones that also represented this generation as the owner of the company comes from the same demographics as my intended audience. Also, advertisers prefer to have their single page advertisements positioned on the right-hand side pages, as they instantly attract the reader's eye. So in saying this, I decided to put my second advertisement on the right-hand side page adjacent to the editorial/contributors page. The final advertisement I used was an old COS advert located on the back cover. I chose this brand because they are known for their minimalist fashion and are internationally known, just like MUJI, so they would draw be able to provide extensive ad funding. I also decided to this ad on the back cover, as this location is the biggest real estate space for magazines.

## 7. CHALLENGES & CHANGES

Timing was a challenge due to the fact that I was the only writer. Firstly, I had to think about all the lessons I had learnt and then whittle them down to the ones I wanted and felt comfortable to share. This took a large amount of time because I had to be sure that there was a substantial amount to say within each piece (including the photo shoots), which also had to fit the issue's theme and I had to think about the different ways in presenting them to appeal to the audience.

Another challenge I came up against was the fact that I had to wear several professional hats throughout this project. Not only was I the writer but I was also the editor, copywriter, photographer, picture editor, creative director, art director, model/location scout and stylist. This was most definitely not an easy task and required me to utilise my time efficiently and to also exercise my management skills, especially when planning and working on the photo shoots. In addition to my challenges in people management, I came up against many obstacles concerning photographers and models withdrawing from shoots and editing, to having to fill-in as stylist for my fashion shoot due to the actual stylist not being present on the day. Although, I was comfortable with the styling element, as I have styled shoots before, it was the photography and photo editing challenges that forced me to step out of my comfort zone. However, I did take some images and edit many in this magazine and although it veered me a little off schedule, it did help me become more confident in a skill that I was not strong in before.

I also initially had an issue with my body copy. This is because I originally designed it to be set across two columns. However, this made the layout look too compact and overwhelming for the reader. So I looked at magazines such as Cereal and saw they also used single columns and so I changed my copy from two columns to one. And although the word count is the exact same, doing this seemed to create more space and readability. Most of the changes I would make to this project are visual. Firstly, I would change the body copy font from 9pt to 7.5pt. Although at the time of the test print run the font size seemed suitable but after seeing it printed in the magazine I would have preferred it to be a little smaller. I would also make many of the images smaller to create more white space as I think there isn't enough.

## **8. FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS**

If SELĀH were to be continued professionally, there could be opportunities for it to branch out as an online magazine and also as a digital magazine or app. If it was to be made into a digital magazine or an app, I would possibly use a platform such as Issuu and make sure the design encompassed interactive elements such as making the advertisements, shopping pages, social media, email and website links clickable. I would also embed video and audio content. The online platform would be created using Wordpress and include extra content such as exclusives, giveaways and promotional videos.

## **9. FINANCE**

When creating the project, I thought about how it could make money if it was to be officially published and sold and I believe the best way to do this would be through advertisers and by going digital/online first and offering up a subscriber mailing list where readers can pay a small fee to read content and then issuing print editions as the publication gains traction. Other ways that SELĀH could make profits is through the sale of specially curated products and exclusive content and through launching events—where readers and contributors could come together and reflect through a series of mediums. I also decided to add a cover price of £10, as I believe a publication of this quality is worth the price just as other competitors.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

Overall, I am genuinely pleased with the outcome of this project, as it includes the majority of content I envisioned. It has not only pushed my journalistic skills but my editorial skills and also helped me build on the fashion journalism skills I already had – which is what I initially intended to do.