



PERSONA ECONOMY. ■

THE PUBLIC SELF HAS AN ECONOMY.
THE HUMAN BEING IS NOT FOR SALE.

Original research-informed reading, cultural cases, a
paper-first value map and a one-page reflection worksheet.

CREATOR HOME — OPEN THIS LINK

<https://sahiltayal.com/>

OCTOBER 2026 / SAHIL TAYAL

01 / THE ARGUMENT

The person is larger than the persona

A public identity is an edited signal. The profile, the costume, the verbal rhythm and the repeated argument give strangers something they can remember. That signal may attract attention; repeated experiences may create meaning or trust; and sometimes those relationships support commercial exchange. These outcomes are related, but none guarantees the others.

The word “economy” is used here as a metaphor for scarce attention, social interpretation and unevenly distributed opportunities. It is also literal when a creator sells a ticket, book, performance, workshop or service. It must never be taken to imply that human worth is a financial asset. Visibility is not dignity. Followers are not friends by default. Income is not proof of artistic merit.

There are three separate questions worth asking: Who notices? What do they interpret? And what exchange, if any, is freely and clearly offered? A project can have meaning without much reach, reach without much trust, or trust without any intention to sell.

Six working definitions

Persona. A contextual presentation or constructed character, sometimes openly theatrical. Attention. The chance to be noticed and remembered. Meaning. Associations and interpretations audiences build. Trust. Reliance on particular claims or capabilities. Exchange. Money, time, cooperation or reciprocity. Boundary. A limit that protects the person from the demands of the public role.

Evidence labels in this guide

DOCUMENTED FACT = attributable reporting or published scholarship. **INTERPRETATION** = an argument made by this guide. **HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE** = an invented scenario for learning. **FICTION** = an openly invented character. These labels protect the reader from accidentally treating a creative claim as data.

Key distinction: a persona is a representation of someone or something; it does not authorize strangers to claim they know the entire human being.

02 / THEORIES WORTH KNOWING

How the performance becomes legible

DOCUMENTED FACT — Erving Goffman published *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* in 1959. His dramaturgical metaphor studies how people manage the impressions others form of them in social situations. This is not the same as asserting that every interaction is manipulative.

INTERPRETATION — The digital persona is a portable performance. A costume, phrase, belief or visual mark can travel across an album cover, interview, website and audience conversation. Creators can choose their materials, but cannot fully choose what audiences make of them.

DOCUMENTED FACT — In a 2013 research review, Dan P. McAdams and Kate C. McLean describe narrative identity as an evolving personal story connecting reconstructed pasts and imagined futures. They also identify unanswered questions about causal relationships and cultural context.

INTERPRETATION — The story a person tells publicly may draw on genuine parts of their life and still be partial. It may be emotionally true without giving an audience a right to private facts. Narrative identity research is not a sales manual.

DOCUMENTED FACT — Nancy K. Baym studies musicians' relational labor in contemporary media. Alice Marwick and danah boyd examine how celebrity practice can involve public displays of apparently intimate access. These works illuminate both opportunity and tension in digitally mediated relations.

INTERPRETATION — Audience care does not require continuous availability. A respectful refusal to disclose everything is compatible with an honest public character. Every request for intimacy has an opportunity cost, and sometimes a psychological or privacy cost.

A note about the market metaphor

Susie Khamis, Lawrence Ang and Raymond Welling analyze how self-branding and micro-celebrity intersect with social platforms and neoliberal individualism. The argument here goes further as a value judgment: no one has a duty to commercialize a life, and private excellence is not a failed marketing strategy.

03 / DOCUMENTED CULTURAL CASES

Masks, changes and audiences

CASE A — MF DOOM, THE HIP-HOP SUPERVILLAIN

DOCUMENTED FACT — MF DOOM, Daniel Dumile, used a distinctive metal mask and a comic-inspired supervillain persona. A 2021 NPR interview with collaborator Esoteric discussed the character in superhero and supervillain terms. The source supports the existence of the mask and character; it does not establish which specific artistic or economic outcomes the mask caused.

INTERPRETATION — The mask made the boundary between artist and character visible. It also offered an instantly recognizable graphic symbol. But the craft of music production, lyric writing, collaborations and distribution cannot be inferred from the costume. Symbols acquire associations through repeated works and public participation.

HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE — Suppose another rapper adopts an equally noticeable face covering but has not yet made compelling music. They may be recognizable at a glance. That does not mean they inherit DOOM's history, audience or commercial position.

CASE B — DAVID BOWIE AND CHANGING CHARACTERS

DOCUMENTED FACT — The Victoria and Albert Museum documents David Bowie's varied stage personas, including Ziggy Stardust and the Thin White Duke, and records the importance of costume, design, photography and artistic collaboration. These changes were materially visible, not speculation about his private motives.

INTERPRETATION — An identity can be coherent because it changes according to a recognizable artistic principle. The deeper pattern may be experimentation and reinvention rather than a fixed outward look. An audience remains free to enjoy, ignore or criticize any chapter.

CASE C — A CHARACTER THAT DOES NOT EXIST

FICTION — The Midnight Librarian publishes one carefully sourced note every Friday. The signature is a lantern and a keyhole. Readers enjoy the ritual, but the author declines private-message consultations and publishes corrections visibly.

INTERPRETATION — Recognizable style helps readers identify the work. Public citations and corrections make claims checkable. Any printed notebook this fictional librarian offers would still need a genuine audience demand, clear description, sensible cost and a fair exchange.

04 / THE PERSONA VALUE MAP

A model you can disagree with

The site version uses seven inputs on a zero-to-ten scale: visibility effort (V), distinctive signals (D), narrative continuity (N), audience care (C), demonstrable work (W), paid-offer clarity (O) and privacy boundaries (B). Three outputs are invented interpretive indices, not scientific scores.

Attention potential = $10 \times (0.45V + 0.35D + 0.20N)$. Meaning depth = $10 \times (0.42C + 0.30W + 0.28N)$. Exchange readiness = $10 \times (0.31W + 0.25O + 0.24C + 0.20V)$. Each score is rounded to an integer from zero to one hundred.

Exposure pressure = $\max(0, \min(10, V - B + 3))$. Under 4 is labelled “lower”; 4 to below 7 “moderate”; 7 and above “higher.” Again, these are deliberately authored weights and arbitrary pedagogical bands, not fitted parameters, social-science scales, financial forecasts or diagnoses.

Worked example: The Midnight Librarian

Set $V=5$, $D=6$, $N=5$, $C=7$, $W=6$, $O=3$ and $B=8$. The formula gives attention = 54, meaning = 61 and exchange = 53. Exposure pressure = 0, described as lower in the scenario. These numbers do not indicate how many people will pay, how trusted the librarian actually is, or whether the concept succeeds.

Now vary one input. Increase V to 9 but leave B at 8: attention becomes 72, exchange becomes 61 and exposure pressure becomes 4, described as moderate. This expresses a particular trade-off we chose to highlight; it does not predict that more posting creates more income.

How to use it away from a screen

Draw three overlapping circles on paper, labelled attention, meaning and exchange. Write two or three observable practices beside each. In the margin record the privacy boundary that makes the practice sustainable. Try a second scenario where audience reach is lower and care is higher. Compare the questions that change rather than deciding which person “wins.”

A useful objection: why is care counted toward exchange? One possible reason is that repeat audiences may value respectful communication. But the actual conversion could be zero, and monetization can also damage relationships. An illustrative model earns its value by helping us ask better questions, not by winning an argument through arithmetic.

05 / EVIDENCE, MYTH & ETHICS

Beware the shortcut

Myth: bigger audience means stronger trust. Correction: recognition and credibility differ. A widely recognized person may still be uninformed or unreliable in a particular domain.

Myth: every persona is fake. Correction: theatrical presentation can express genuine themes. There is a moral difference between a declared character and invented credentials.

Myth: strong visibility converts automatically to revenue. Correction: a viable exchange also depends on value offered, actual demand, competition, purchasing power, price, cost, bargaining relationships and luck.

Myth: public reinvention means inconsistency. Correction: reinvention can be consistent with a deeper artistic method while still inviting public scrutiny.

Five ethical tests

1. Accuracy: Are claims about expertise, experience and results materially true? 2. Consent: Are audience transactions explicit and voluntary? 3. Boundaries: Does the person retain the ability to refuse access? 4. Credit: Are collaborators and institutions acknowledged rather than erased by the heroic narrative? 5. Revision: Can the person correct a claim, outgrow a character or leave a platform without being morally blackmailed?

A public character can inspire people without promising intimacy. The more it invites audiences to infer friendship, care, expertise or private access, the greater its obligation to communicate honestly. This does not make popularity intrinsically corrupt, nor does it mean ordinary people should be frightened of sharing their work. It means commercial storytelling works best when the human stakes remain visible.

Three questions before you sell

What does the buyer actually receive? What evidence supports the promised result? What remains outside the transaction? A clear answer can be kinder than endless mysterious access. You are allowed to charge for real work, and also allowed to make work that has no price.

06 / THE ONE-PAGE REFLECTION WORKSHEET

Draw a persona. Protect a person.

Use one specific project, not an inventory of your whole personality. This is a printable thinking exercise and not an assessment.

A. Project / working character name

B. Who is it for, and what real problem or curiosity does it serve?

C. What signal makes it recognizable? What observable work backs the story?

D. One verifiable fact a visitor could check

E. One audience assumption I must not encourage without evidence

F. What do people receive freely? What optional exchange is clearly offered?

G. One privacy / time / relationship boundary that stays mine

H. If revenue were zero for six months, what would still matter?

Circle the aim of the next iteration: REACH / CLARITY / CRAFT / CARE / BOUNDARIES

07 / READING ROUTES

Eight sources. Different kinds of authority.

Scholarly reading

Erving Goffman — The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959), Vintage / Penguin Random House

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/61106/the-presentation-of-self-in-everyday-life-by-erving-goffman/>

Dan P. McAdams and Kate C. McLean — Narrative Identity (2013), Current Directions in Psychological Science

<https://www.psychologicalscience.org/journals/current-directions/0963721413475622/>

Alice Marwick and danah boyd — To See and Be Seen (2011), Convergence

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354856510394539>

Nancy K. Baym — Playing to the Crowd (2018), NYU Press

<https://nyupress.org/9781479896165/playing-to-the-crowd/>

Susie Khamis, Lawrence Ang and Raymond Welling — Self-branding and micro-celebrity (2017), Celebrity Studies

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1218292>

Stuart Hall, Sean Nixon and Jessica Evans (eds.) — Representation, 3rd ed. (2024), SAGE

<https://in.sagepub.com/en-in/ind/representation/book277180>

Documented cultural sources

NPR — Rapper Esoteric On New Album Super What? (2021), interview documenting MF DOOM character

<https://www.wprl.org/npr-music/2021-05-09/rapper-esoteric-on-new-album-super-what>

Victoria and Albert Museum — David Bowie: Images of an Icon (2024)

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/david-bowie-images-of-an-icon>

Links above were checked as reachable source pages while building this guide; journal full text may require access. Interpretations in the guide are independent and not endorsements by these institutions.

08 / EXPLORE MORE

One mind. Many unfinished worlds.

A field guide is useful when it sends you back into the world with better questions. These creator and related-project links have actual clickable PDF annotations. Live-status labels reflect a specific check in October 2026, not a perpetual guarantee.

CREATOR HOME — VERIFIED REACHABLE

Return to the Sahilverse: <https://sahiltayal.com/>

Verified relevant research and editorial worlds

The Human Behaviour Lab: <https://psychology.sahiltayal.online/>

The Reading Room: <https://essays.sahiltayal.online/>

Sahil Tayal Lab: <https://lab.sahiltayal.online/>

Creative studio / services — verified reachable

Sahil Tayal Creative Studio: <https://services.sahiltayal.com/>

Other discovery doors

Verified alternate entrance: <https://sahiltayal.online/>

Discovery door — not independently verified during preparation: <https://sahilverse.online/>

Why are the new sahilwho.online related pages missing?

The proposed Narrative Intelligence Lab, Alter Ego Observatory and Reputation vs Reality destinations could not be independently reached during preparation. They appear on the website as clearly labelled unverified possibilities and are not advertised here as live readings.

Keep the work. Keep your boundaries. Keep the right to change.

CREATOR HOME — CLICKABLE LINK ON THE LAST PAGE

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