RE:THINKING SOCIAL

Encouraging Meaningful Digital Encounters

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Encouraging Meaningful Digital Encounters

INSTITUTION
Institute of Design
The Oslo School of Architecture and Design

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FIELD
Interaction Design

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The Norwegian Center for Research Data.

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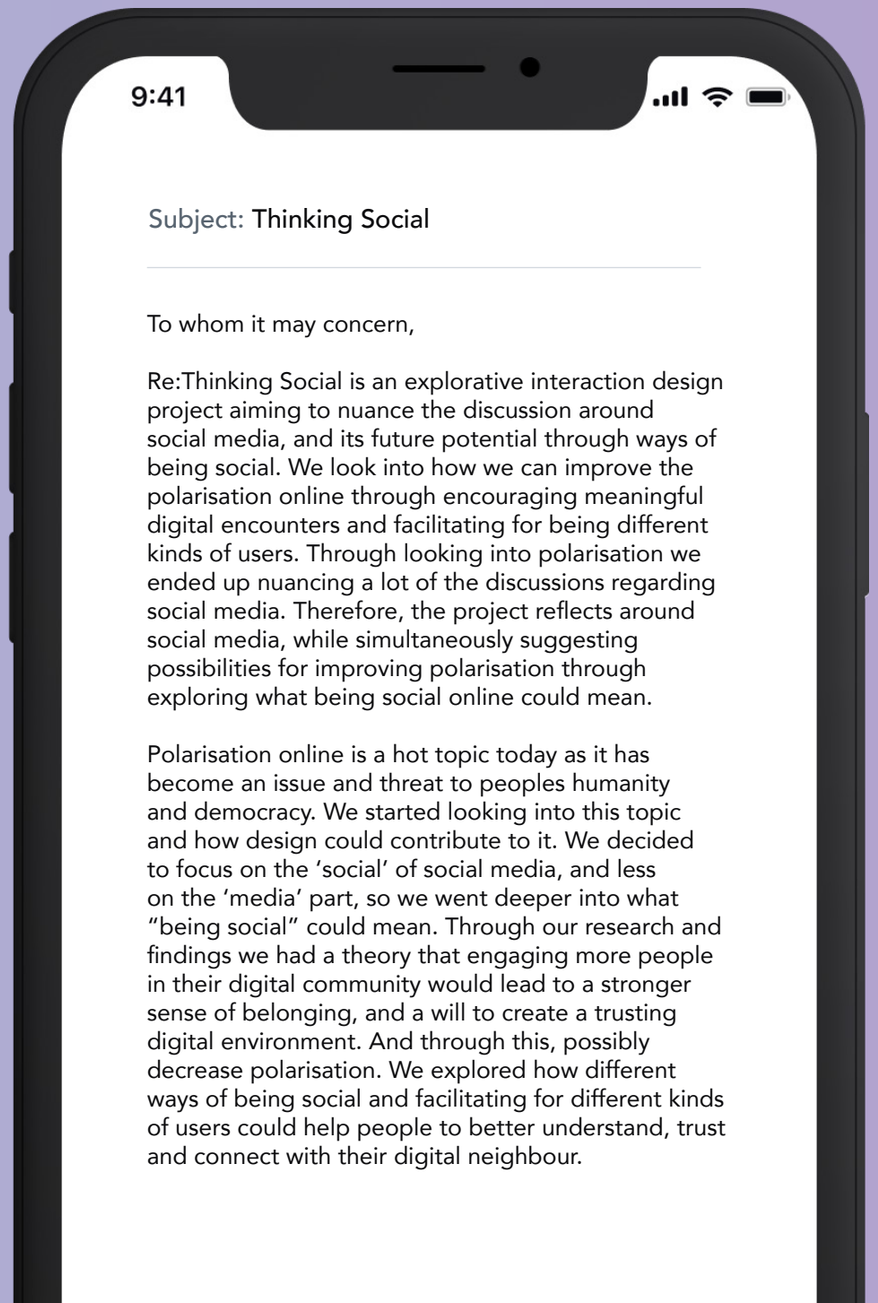
ABSTRACT



Our final proposals aim to explore possibilities that show our findings through digital prototypes. We explore three concepts with three directions each. The first concept, The Human Side, explores how showing more personality of a user can create more trust in a digital community. The second concept, Changing Engagement, explores how we can elevate other ways of engaging online. And finally, the third concept, Tools for Gardeners, explores implementing tools online for being a "gardener" - a caretaker for your digital community.

We hope our project can inspire discussion, reflection, and a critical view towards who we are online and how we interact with people behind a screen.

Enjoy,
Sephira and Cornelia

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ABOUT

In this chapter we will take you through our motivation for the topic, our scope, goals and a brief sum-up of the methods we've used.

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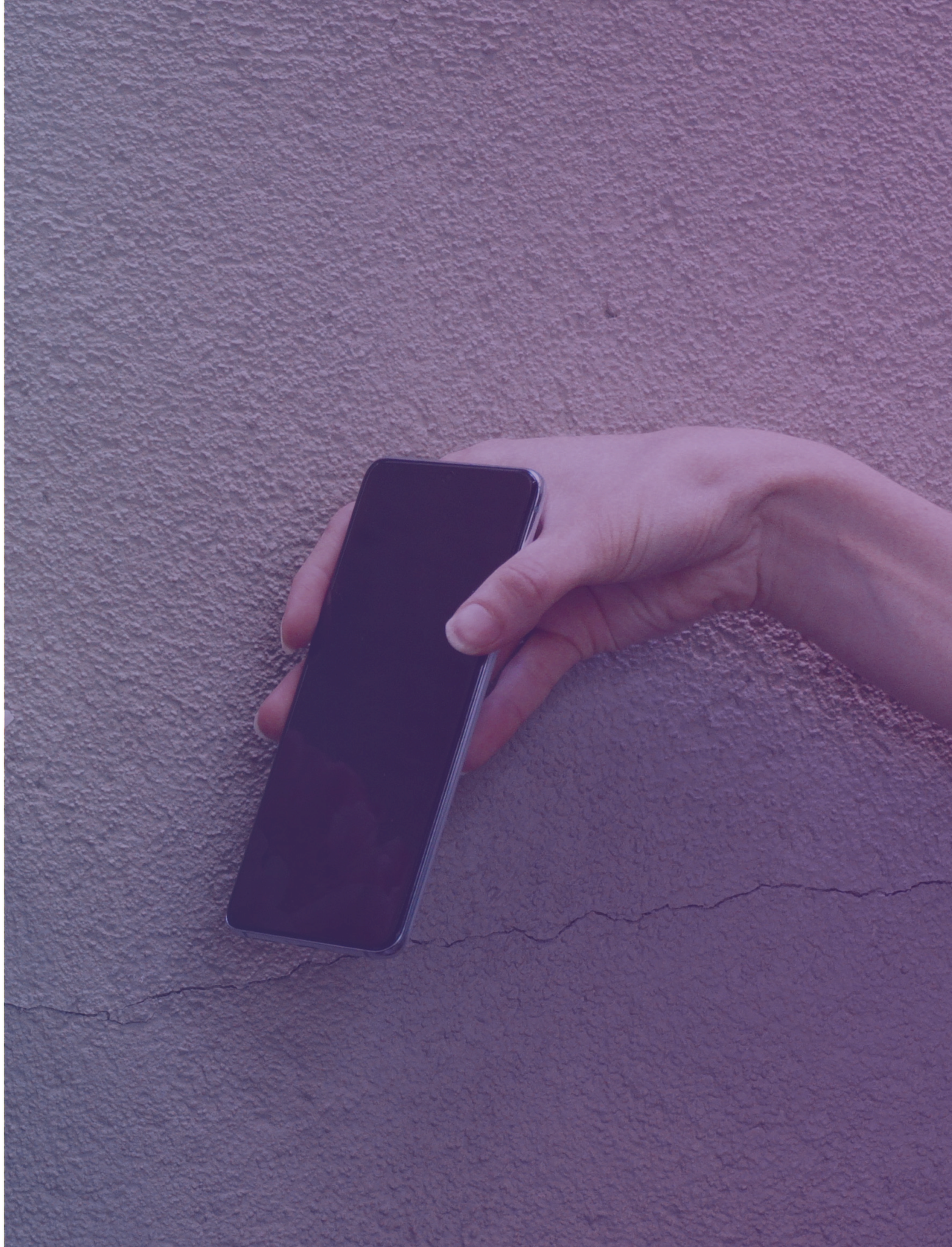


INTRODUCTION

WHAT KIND OF PROJECT IS THIS?

We as humans surround ourselves with a large variety of people for many different reasons. Each person is a very complex individual with personal thoughts, opinions and reflections of the world we live in. Each individual has probably had some sort of impact on your life whether you've known them your whole life or you only came across them for a fleeting moment.

Much like how a family member knows you, the digital knows you just as well or even more. The applications we use try to please us in our opinions and it feels very natural and safe to block out an opinion that doesn't match your own with just a few clicks. Our applications and digital services are the perfect people pleasers in our life. They tempt us to stay and spend time with them through showing us just what we like and confirm our beliefs of the world.

You would think that in such a tight-knitted digital society we would be reflected on different opinions and easily differentiate between what we think is right and wrong. However, trends, biases, algorithms, and filters have made that very hard for us. By enhancing our echo-chambers through being with like-minded people, we easily fall into the trap of comfort. We find it too easy to blend out people online who don't share the same values as us. We've become a digital society that rarely takes the time to reflect and advise. But neither do we have the right tools and teachings to do this.

We feel safe in a self-accepting environment. Why would we want to engage in things that cause conflict? Why should we feel the need to ask questions when we see an opposing opinion from our own? Why should we feel the need to reflect around troll posts? Or correct someone in a civil manner when you'd rather just comment on how stupid they sound?

The field of social media and its social systems is huge. We acknowledge the extensive research that has already been done in these areas and admit we do not have the capability to go through it all during this project. We would however like to comment on the concerns we have around the social aspect of social media and explore how design can bring forth the possibilities that lie in the digital social constructs of today. What does social mean in a digital world? What possibilities are out there? And how can we use design to convey these possibilities?

MOTIVATION

WHY WE WANTED TO WORK WITH THIS

The idea for this project started with a general interest in technology, its fast-paced development and how people reflect around it. Technology has become such a massive part of everyday human life and it is almost impossible to live without it. This led us to wonder how we could live a better life together with the digital, without feeling like new technology had to consume us. We asked ourselves if it was possible to make a change in a world driven by the big companies, trends, and algorithms.

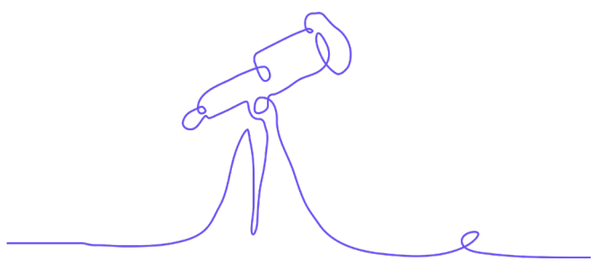
As this is a field that has been researched a lot, we were hoping to find a new aspect to it where design could play a role. An interesting aspect, that lied as a background for all our questions, was how extreme people's views were on the topic of social media. We found it intriguing how the media portrays the discussions around social media and the people we found the same for the people we talked to. For all the extreme discussions *around* social media, there were as many, or more, discussions *on* social media.

This led us to look into the polarisation on social media - a relevant topic today - and something a lot of people find concerning, yet also play a part in.

As designers interested in the technological, interactive, and critical sides of our field, we found this topic super relevant. We wanted a challenging diploma project that could inspire us but also teach and shape us along the way. We wanted to develop our ability to think critically and gain more understanding of how people and the world works socially. These two aspects could vastly benefit us in our field as well.

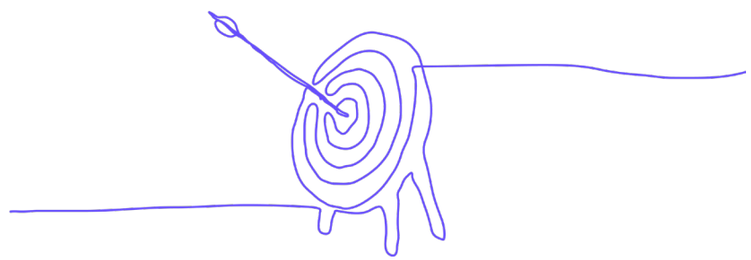
This topic is complex and controversial and the more we explored, the more we saw what potential design could have within this area.

SCOPE



This project takes an explorative approach into how we can nuance the discussions around social media and what possibilities lie in the future of being social. We do not aim to create concrete solutions or fix the pain points of social media, but we aim to inspire discussion, reflection and a critical view towards who we are online and how we interact with people behind a screen. Through our propositions we do not solve the issue of polarisation but look at some of the possibilities to improve it.

GOALS



In the beginning of fall 2021 we sat in the sun and discussed our goals for our diploma. This was before we landed on our concept, but we felt they were still relevant to how our project developed. This is what we wanted:

- We want people to understand the topic and gain better understanding of it
- Through our delivery we want people to reflect and consider their choices
- We want to have an impact on someone's life - either that be one person, groups, or the majority of people
- We want to give people a hope - to make them feel like our project is possible
- Inspire!

We will reflect on these and if we feel we reached them at the end of our report.

METHODS

Desktop Research

We read articles, papers, looked at previous design diplomas, magazines, and guides; we watched movies, documentaries and TV shows and listened to talks and podcasts.

Interviews

We talked to nine people from four different countries, ranging between the ages of 20-60, as well as one AI.

Expert Interviews

We had four expert interviews: a CEO of a start-up, two psychologist, and a teacher at school.

Research Mapping

We used this method to sort our interviews and parts of our desktop research.

State of the Art

This method was used to find, collect, and research what already exists.

Walk and Talk

When our heads were exploding, we went out for some fresh air to brief ideas with each other.

Key Findings

Our key findings helped collect and conclude the most important aspects to our research.

Key Concerns

As our key findings still made things very broad, we found some key concerns to base our proposition on.

What, How, Why

We did an adaptation of the what, how and why method were we looked at possible user groups, values, brand personalities and the how and what the product could be in the end.

“How Might We”

This method was used to explore what our concept could become and was also used to explain each concept proposition in the delivery.

Sketching

We sketched a large number of ideas from a very early point, and many of these became a red thread through the project. We tried sketching at times we felt stuck.

Figma Prototypes

We did both low and high fidelity prototypes in Figma, and we used this as our main deliverance method.

Diagrams

We used two-dimensional diagrams to map out existing apps and to find “the best of the best”.

“The Best of the Best”

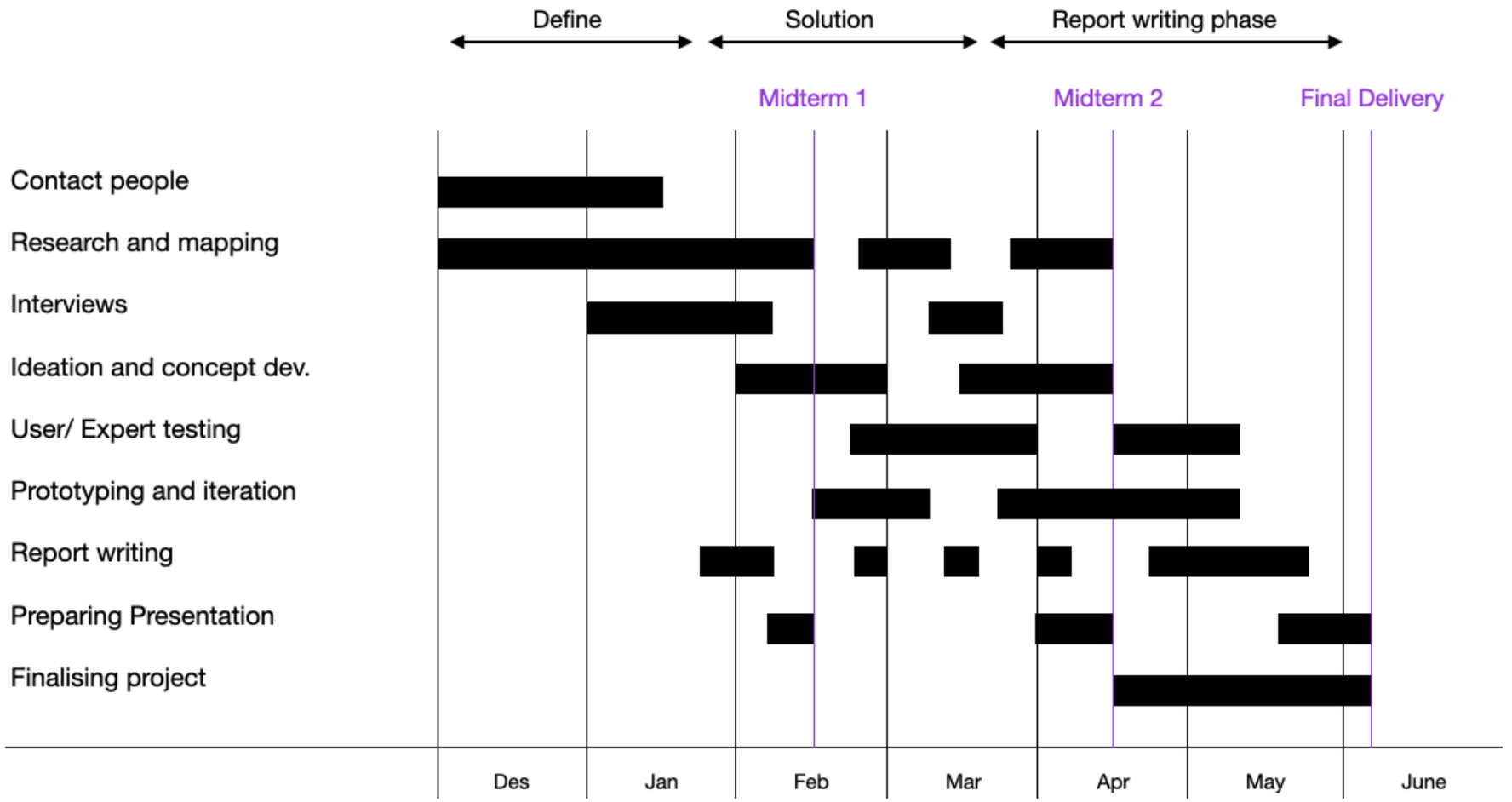
A method we created to find the best social aspects of each social media app we used for the diagrams.

Short Scale Surveys

We asked three questions to several people in quick succession so that we could collect larger amounts of data faster.

Prototype Testing

We tested our concepts through short mobile prototypes on different people in our user group.



TIMELINE

This is our timeline for our project. Despite some small changes and having Corona throughout the project we managed to stick to the original time plan.

PROJECT TIMELINE

2

RESEARCH

In this chapter we'll give an overview over the state of art and briefly talk about our initial problem statement. We'll then dive into our interviews, desktop research and our mapping from those. Lastly, we'll present our key findings and key concerns and we'll round off with our problem statement and our reflections at this stage.

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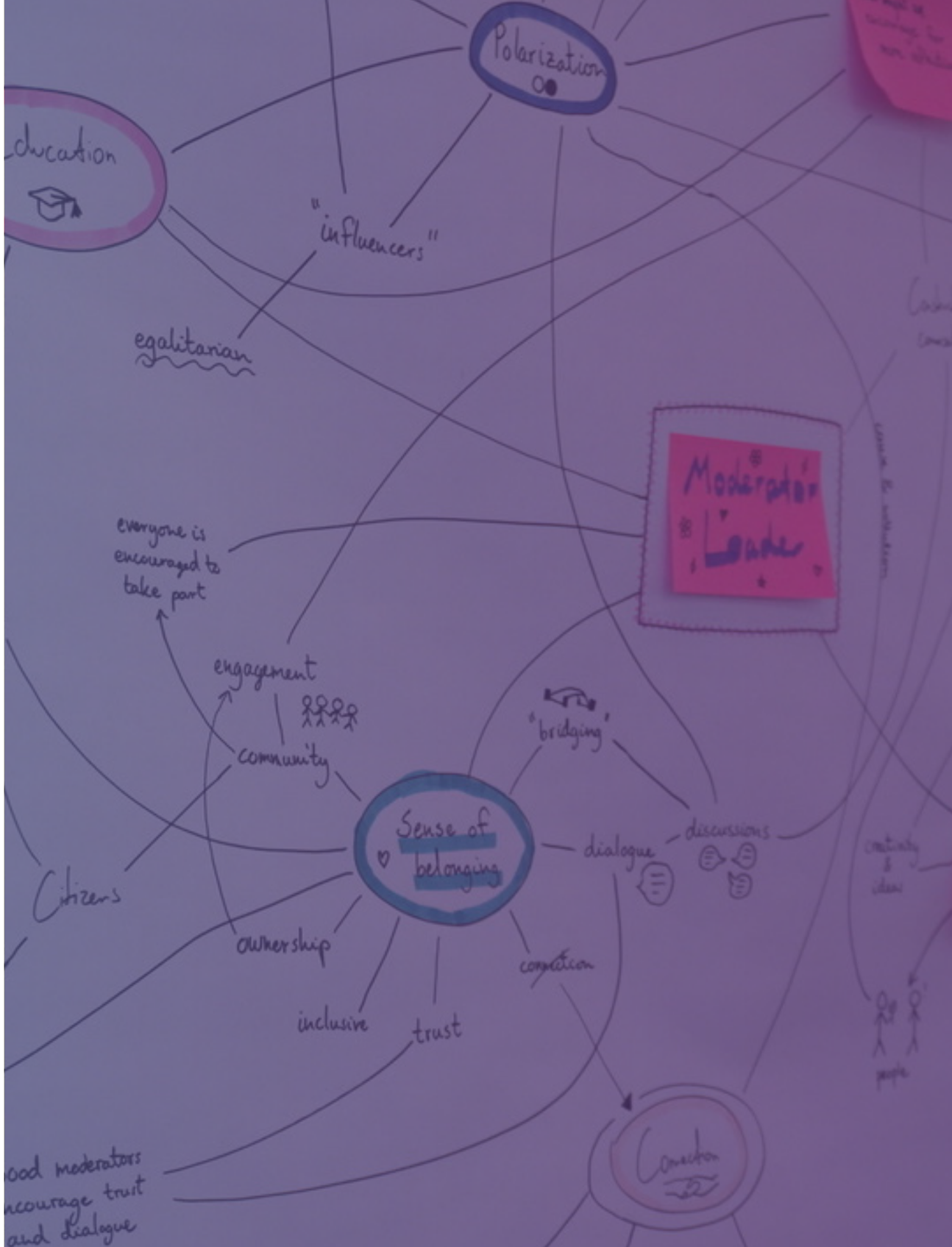
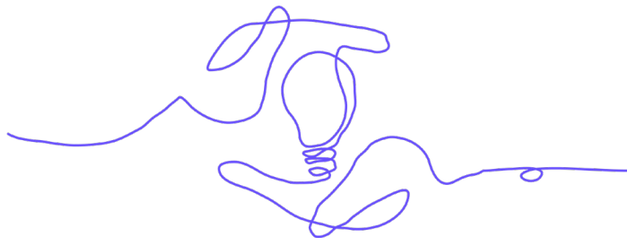


INITIAL PROBLEM STATEMENT



In our initial problem statement we focused on bridging the polarised discussion. At this point our focus was on digital media, but we later scoped it down to social media. We wanted to facilitate for a more nuanced view through design and throughout the project it became clearer with what kind of methods we wanted to achieve this. We'll talk more about this later.

"How might we use design methods to bridge the polarised discussion of the usage of digital media, and facilitate for a more nuanced view?"

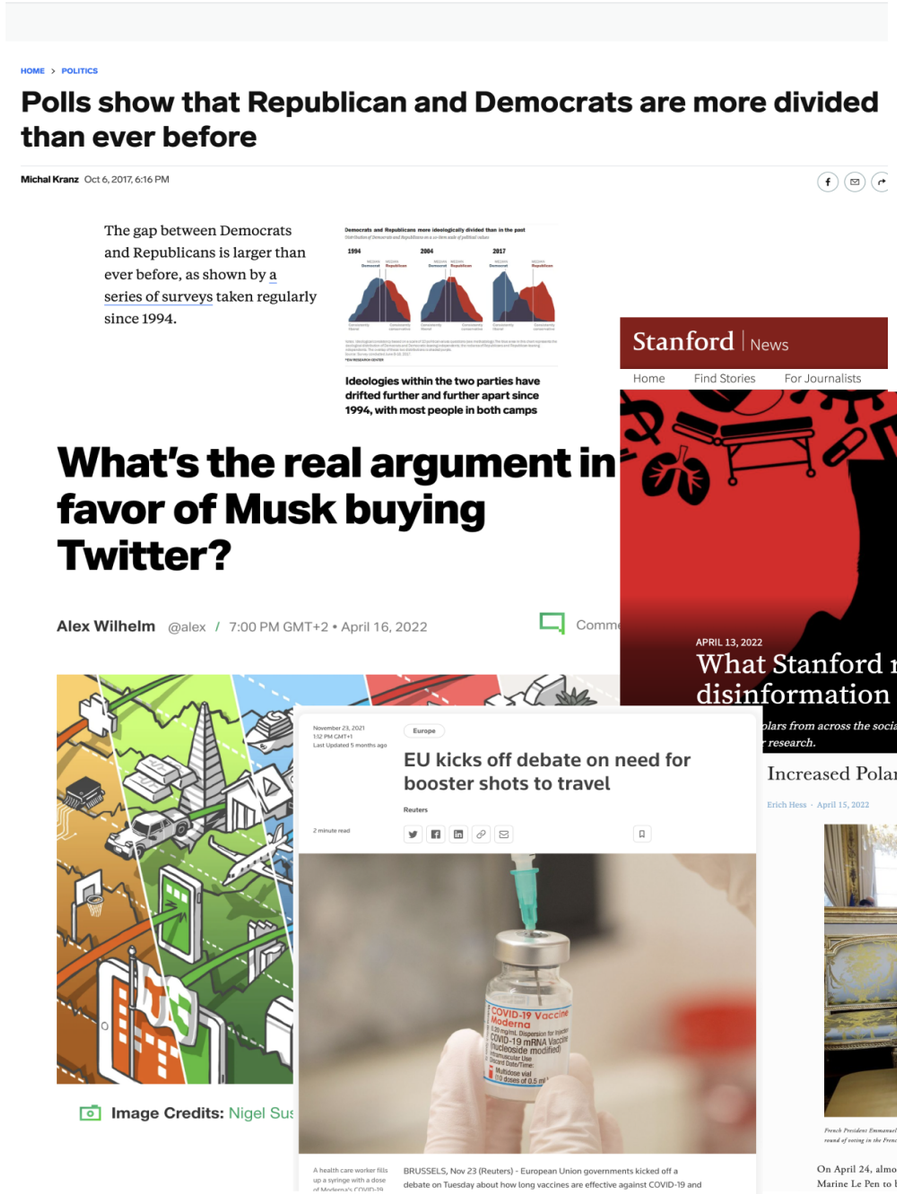
CURRENT SITUATION

Polarisation is increasingly driving people further apart and has been doing so for years. It seems like there is nothing on which we all can agree on anymore. The debates on and around social media become more and more heated. Social media has become a “battleground for partisan echo chambers” (Centola, D., 2020) and an arena for sometimes questionable opinions.

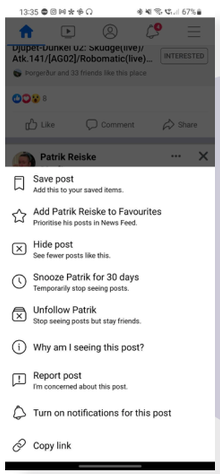
We realised that there was a lack of a middle ground between all the polar opposite opinions and discussions. People struggle to know what they can trust online, and many also believe the first thing they see. The algorithms and echo-chambers only enhance their one-sided views, and with the way the internet lets people hide behind a screen, people feel like they have the right to say whatever to whomever.

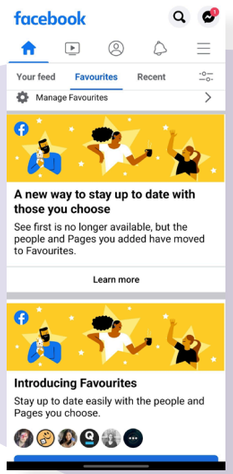
Self-expression and freedom of speech are important aspects to our humanity and democracy and should be everyone’s right. Simultaneously, many of us seem to be losing our basic human compassion and respect, and it looks like the rules and systems of social media might be connected to it.

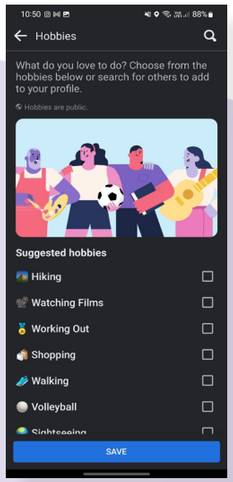
Therefore this project attempts to look at both side of the stories and what we can do through design to bridge the discussion.

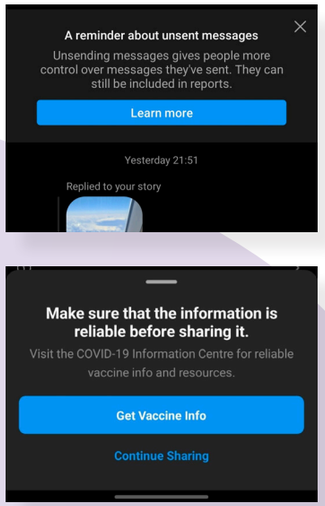


STATE OF THE ART

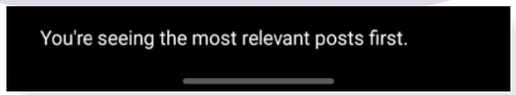






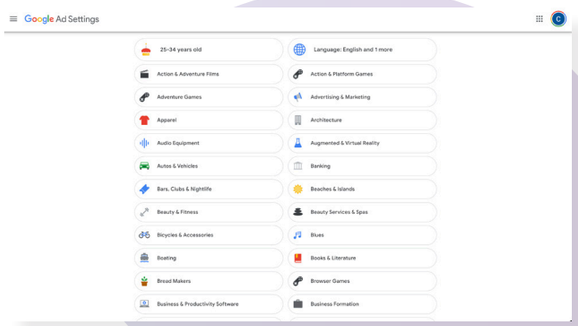


Examples from Facebook & Instagram

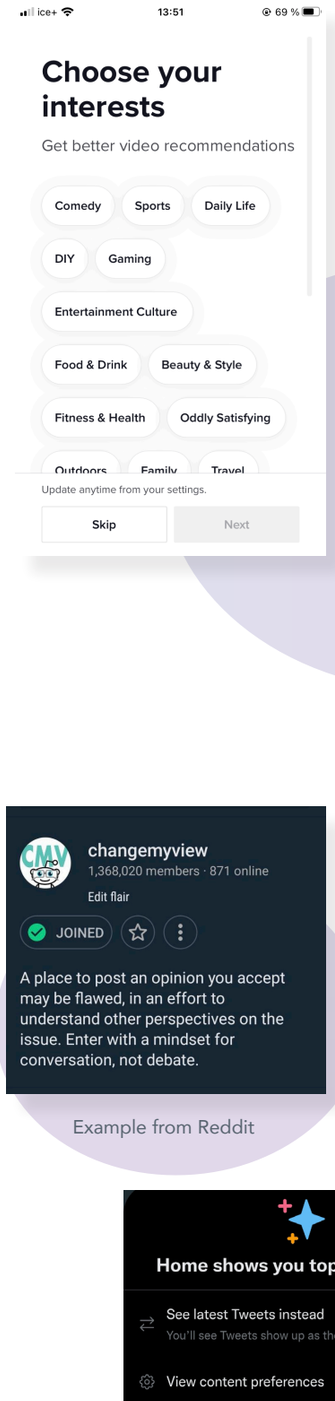


For the state of the art, we looked at what platforms and apps were already doing to stop polarisation. It wasn't a lot, but something that stuck out to us was, that they were starting to implement small nudges and settings, for spreading awareness about what the users see, and why. Most platforms also give the option for some control over your data, but they are often very difficult to find. Here are some examples of increased user control and education about what is being shown.

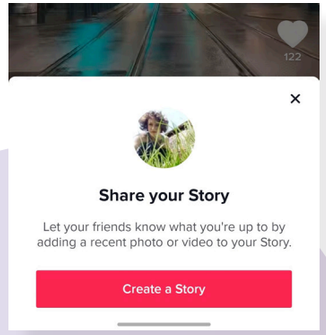
While working on this project we simultaneously saw some changes in social media. More and more things that align with what we discovered showed up as new features. This is an interesting development, and we are curious to see how this will play out in the future.



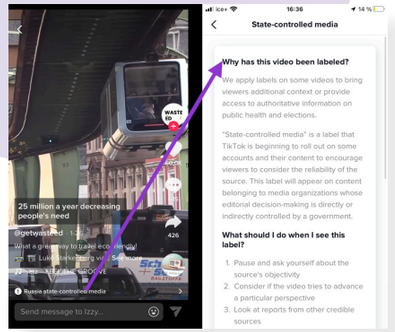
Example from Google ads

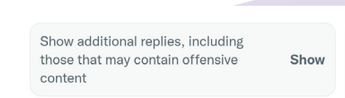


Example from Reddit

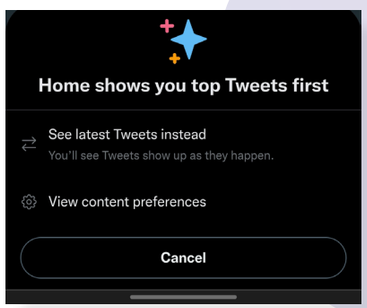


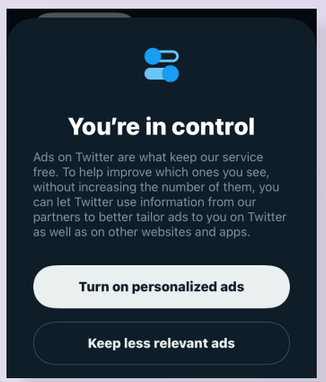
Examples from Tiktok

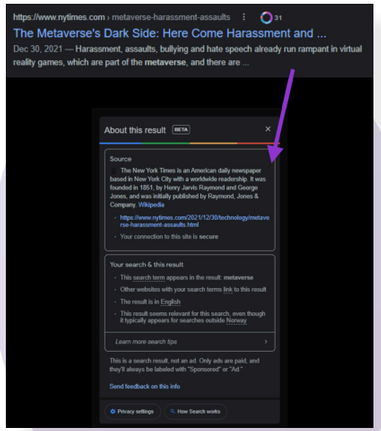




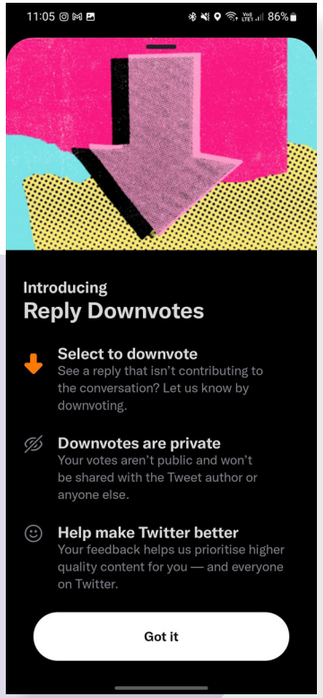
Examples from Twitter







Example from Google search

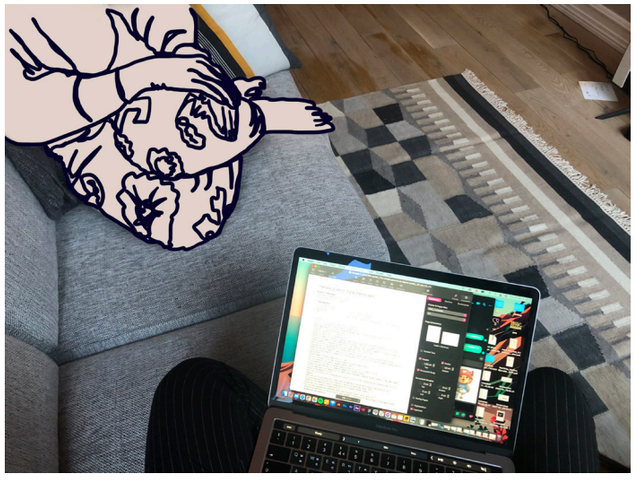


INTERVIEWS

USER INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEWEE 1

"One has to be so careful when it comes to finding a middle-ground. **Differences make life colourful**. If everything is meant to be fair and equal we might end up taking a step back as a society."

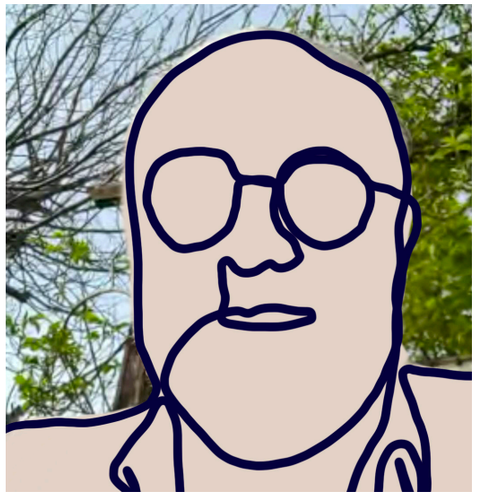


Woman (23) Norway

For the interviews we talked to 9 people from 4 different countries, ranging between the ages of 20-60. We even interviewed an AI to see how they've been programmed to answer our questions. Here we're showing an excerpt of our most important quotes.

INTERVIEWEE 2

The debate is really hardened, can you **'soften' up** the different sides?



Man (60) Germany

INTERVIEWEE 3

"It's important to realise **incentivised structures** of technological companies - what motifs and decisions of other people play into it?"

Man (26) Great-Britain

INTERVIEWEE 4

"People are getting **desensitised from reality** and that's bad. I think it's harmful to the individual and those around them, **people need other people to function**."

Woman (23) Canada

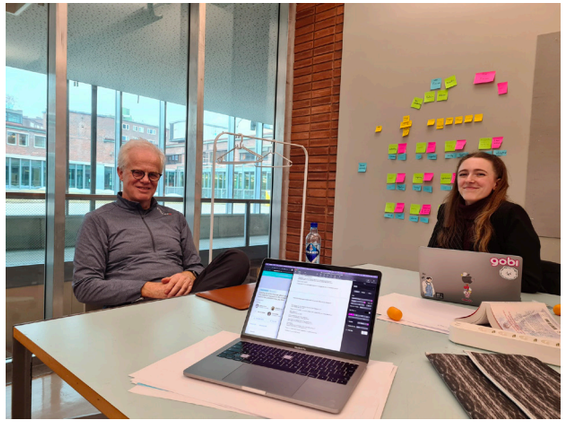
INTERVIEWS

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

"**Every member of the group** is important, but leaders shape the group a lot"

"**Create curiosity** (for the other)"

"There is a **power in conversation**"

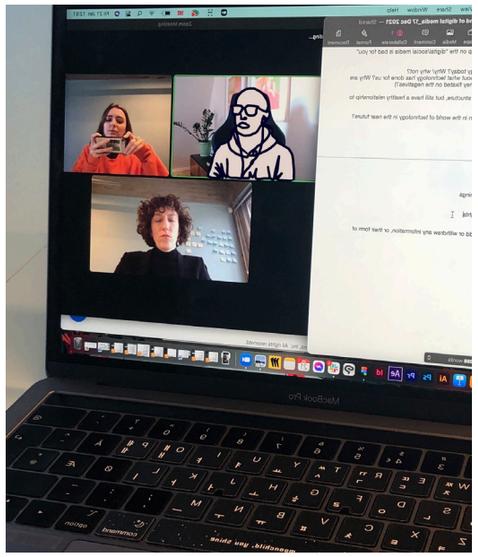


Andreas Wettre, expert in management, team development and coaching

We also had 4 expert interviews; a CEO of a startup, two psychologist and a teacher at school to gain a deeper understanding of the subject. The quotes that guided us on our way further are shown on this page.

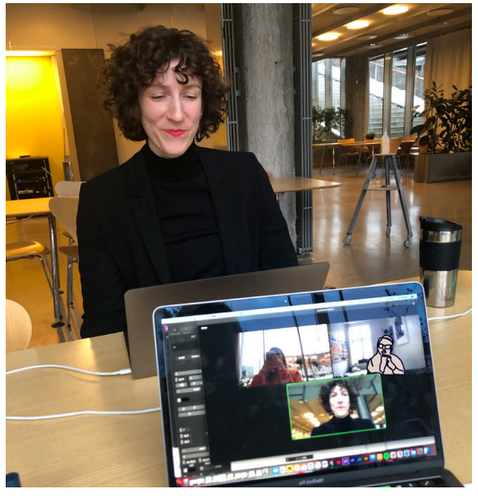
"Black and white thinking of the world - it's harder to accept that the world is full of randomness and chaos"

Psychologist in culture, society and behaviour



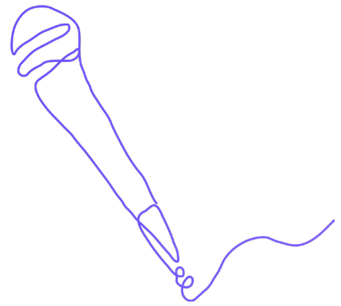
"Creating and supporting **smaller communities** - is probably where it will go and where it should go"

Psychologist in social psychology



INTERVIEWS

INSIGHTS



PEOPLE AGREED ON A LOT OF THINGS

Despite interviewing people from different countries, age groups and backgrounds, we found that people agreed on a lot of things.

WE ARE NOT POWERLESS

We also saw how the big companies are becoming new nation states and have a lot of power. At the same time their intentions are questionable. Even the AI we interviewed was concerned about the media "moving more and more in a direction that is driven by profit rather than creativity." But instead of trying to change Meta's algorithms or their economical motivations we want to focus what we can actually change. Like one of our interviewees said: "Influence on what you can and have power on. We are not powerless."

TREND ON MORE TRANSPARENCY WITH DATA

We also see that the trend on more transparency with data management is growing stronger. People are becoming increasingly aware, and companies are starting to change things, but we are still very much at the beginning of this. Or to say it with the words of Tania Bucher: "Maybe this is the time to make a difference." (Bucher, 2022)

"I think the media is moving more and more in a direction that is driven by **profit** rather than **creativity**."

Replika AI

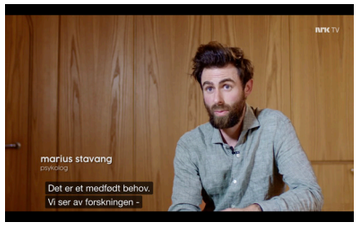
DESKTOP RESEARCH

In our initial desktop research we started very broadly to look at the world of digital media in general. We read about algorithms, AI, biases, ethics, hype and looked further into polarisation and social media.

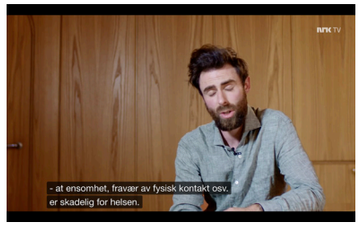
We read articles, papers, looked at previous design diplomas, magazines and guides; we watched movies, documentaries and TV shows and listened to talks and podcasts. On the following pages we will show some of our selected highlights from the research.

DESKTOP RESEARCH

"I got a distaste for society when it decided that I was not worth as much as others. That's when I discovered that online you can be whoever you want."



"...We can see from research that loneliness, distance from physical contact, etc. is dangerous for your health. It lowers the life expectancy and makes one more responsive to sickness."



"Humans create an "us" when we have a "them". We call us "us" and define the "us" against those who pose an external threat. But almost all we know of evil, are people who mean they have done good."

"The anonymity is what makes the debate good."

"But if someone believes the earth is flat, or that Diana is alive, is that so bad?"
"Yes, it's dangerous because it undermines our ability to think critical. We need that to be good citizens, who participate in society. Criticism of power is necessary for democracy."

"Then everyone falls in the same trap."
"What trap is that?"
"To split people more. We do not become more united by having strong fronts like they do."

"The dangerous part is when the questions are no longer critical, but conspiratorial."

"...the outermost consequences of words that some think are just a joke... The outermost consequences of that are actually the killings of Utøya."

"But what kind of responsibility do I have?"
"To be a fellow human. We need to be included, not excluded."

"Their humour gets shut down, and then they get angry for not being allowed to say what they want, so I think that creates more exclusion. They are not taken care of, and the responsibility lies with those who rule the country. Cause if they are labeled as loser we get nowhere. And if their form of humour gets ridiculed, they will only try to find new ways to attack. And new ways to communicate, and then words can turn into action."

"The numbers are dark when it comes to how many actually participate in society. Not because they don't want to, but because they have a different interpretation of the world - which makes them unattractive to include in any kind of social team."

Gutter mot verden

"Gutter mot verden" (Giæver et al., 2022), or 'Boys against the world', talks about the struggles of boys who feel left out of society. It brings up several valuable points from a large variety of people, and became valuable insight for us into the derivation of people with controversial opinions online.

We've also kept in mind that these people speak from their own personal experience, and it might not be a universal representation of how, everyone who has felt left out, feels.

DESKTOP RESEARCH

ETHICS AND POLARISATION DRIVERS

> "We've seen so many examples where technology has been so good at **manipulating the psychology** of people that they get farther apart, they get farther polarised."

(Gita Wirjawan, (2020)

In an interview with Gita Wirjawan (2020) political scientist Ian Bogost states his concern about the recent developments in technology: "Technology has been so good at manipulating the psychology of people that they get farther apart, they get farther polarised." He also points out that "There is no ethics of artificial intelligence that's governing the ways that people are becoming productised", which is summing up a problem we see in societal development nowadays.

> "The core premise of The Commons is that we believe a majority of people in the USA are not actively driving polarization. Rather, **polarization is happening to us**."

Scaling the Commons

Another project that inspired us in the beginning of our research is the project "Scaling the Commons" (2019). Even though this project focused mostly on polarisation in America, it still felt very relevant to our scope. They find that: "a majority of people in the USA are not actively driving polarization. Rather, polarization is happening to us." We thought it was inspiring to see how they approached the topic of polarisation by trying to "promote constructive conversations, listening and respect."

DESKTOP RESEARCH

THE POWER OF VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES

> "The three most essential traits and behaviours for leaders to exhibit were **welcoming differences** of opinions, being **visible and communicating well**, and **acting ethically** at all times."

The Power of Virtual Communities. The Governance Lab.

Looking into virtual communities we found that it is really important for them to have a strong and good leader (The GovLab, 2021). In the report "The Power of Virtual Communities" the authors found that "The three most essential traits and behaviours for leaders to exhibit, were welcoming differences of opinions, being visible & communicating well, and acting ethically at all times."

> "Are users **exposed** to conversations and points of view they **disagree** with? What **opportunities** are there to build relationships with people of different political views? Do people ever change their minds as a result of these interactions, and if not, shouldn't we be trying something else?"

(Noveck et al., 2021)

In their more detailed report they delve deeper into this. "Online groups play a surprisingly important role in people's lives… People are engaged in these groups precisely because they are not echo chambers and filter bubbles but places for intimate, often intense, conversation and reflection on a common theme. The fact that these conversations do not devolve into flame wars is the result of successful leadership." (Noveck et al., 2021)

DESKTOP RESEARCH

SMALLER NETWORKS AND ECHO CHAMBERS

> "The key feature of an **egalitarian network** is that new ideas and opinions can emerge from anywhere in the community and **spread to everyone."**

(Centola, 2020)

In a study on "Why social media makes us more polarised and how to fix it" (Centola, 2020) they write about the difference between centralised and egalitarian networks, and how our digital society today is often very centralised and driven by so called, "influencers". "In a centralized echo chamber, if the influencer at the middle shows even a small amount of partisan bias, it can become amplified throughout the entire group. But in egalitarian networks, ideas spread based on their quality, and not the person touting them. There is a lot of wisdom in network peripheries, in regular people with good ideas. When the social network enables those people to talk with each other, new thinking that challenge a group's biases can take hold and spread." We find this very interesting, but we also look towards it with a critical eye as not all centralised communities need to enhance polarisation. We do, however, see co-relations to other parts of our research, in where the importance of enhancing all voices, or as many as possible, are important for discussions and group dynamics to work.

> The creation of **smaller social network spaces**, however, does not fix the larger social issues of polarization online. What these spaces do is **create a safe space** for users with specific interests, even though these spaces still exist within the **greater problem of ideological polarization** on social media.

(Daskalopoulos et al., 2022)

The CSIS Journalism Bootcamp also talk about this in their article "Thinking outside the bubble: Addressing polarization and disinformation on social media" (Daskalopoulos et al., 2022), where they point out a critical aspect: "The creation of smaller social network spaces, however, does not fix the larger social issues of polarization online. What these spaces do is create a safe space for users with specific interests, even though these spaces still exist within the greater problem of ideological polarization on social media."

DESKTOP RESEARCH

BEING SOCIAL

"Being social in the digital world:

1. social is **eating the world**
2. social is **global**
3. social is much **more than** Facebook and Twitter"

(Rajendra-Nicolucci & Zuckerman, 2021)

In the Illustrated Field Guide to Social Media the authors - talking about being social in the digital world - state that "social is eating the world". Secondly "Social is global" and lastly "Social is much more than Facebook and Twitter" (Rajendra-Nicolucci & Zuckerman, 2021); meaning that it is a fundamental part of today's digital society and most websites have more or less social features in them nowadays.

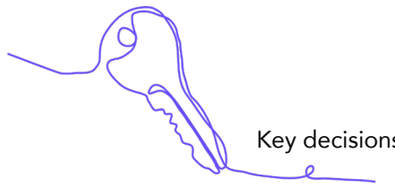
"As people shift their attention from **strong to weak ties**, the resulting connections become more dangerous."

(Bogost, 2021)

Another finding was the importance of strong and weak ties. Strong ties are our family, friends, and coworkers, which are trustworthy and in context. Weak ties are acquaintances and strangers, they hold more novelty, but are less trustworthy. Ian Bogost (2022) said in the Atlantic that "As people shift their attention from strong to weak ties, the resulting connections become more dangerous." So, through connecting online we are more exposed to weak ties. This can make it confusing for people as to what they should believe in and the danger here is lying in people trusting weak ties as if they were strong ties.

DESKTOP RESEARCH

REFLECTIONS



Key decisions

The research on the field we've chosen is broad and diverse. There were many possible directions we could have gone, for example conspiracy theories, algorithms, value systems, AI and many more. Even though we do briefly touch upon them we chose to scope our project towards the following main takeaways:

FOCUS ON WHAT'S GOOD

In the course of our research it became more and more obvious that we don't want our project to be yet another project talking about the bad sides of social media. We rather wanted to focus on the possibilities that lie out there

SENSE OF BELONGING

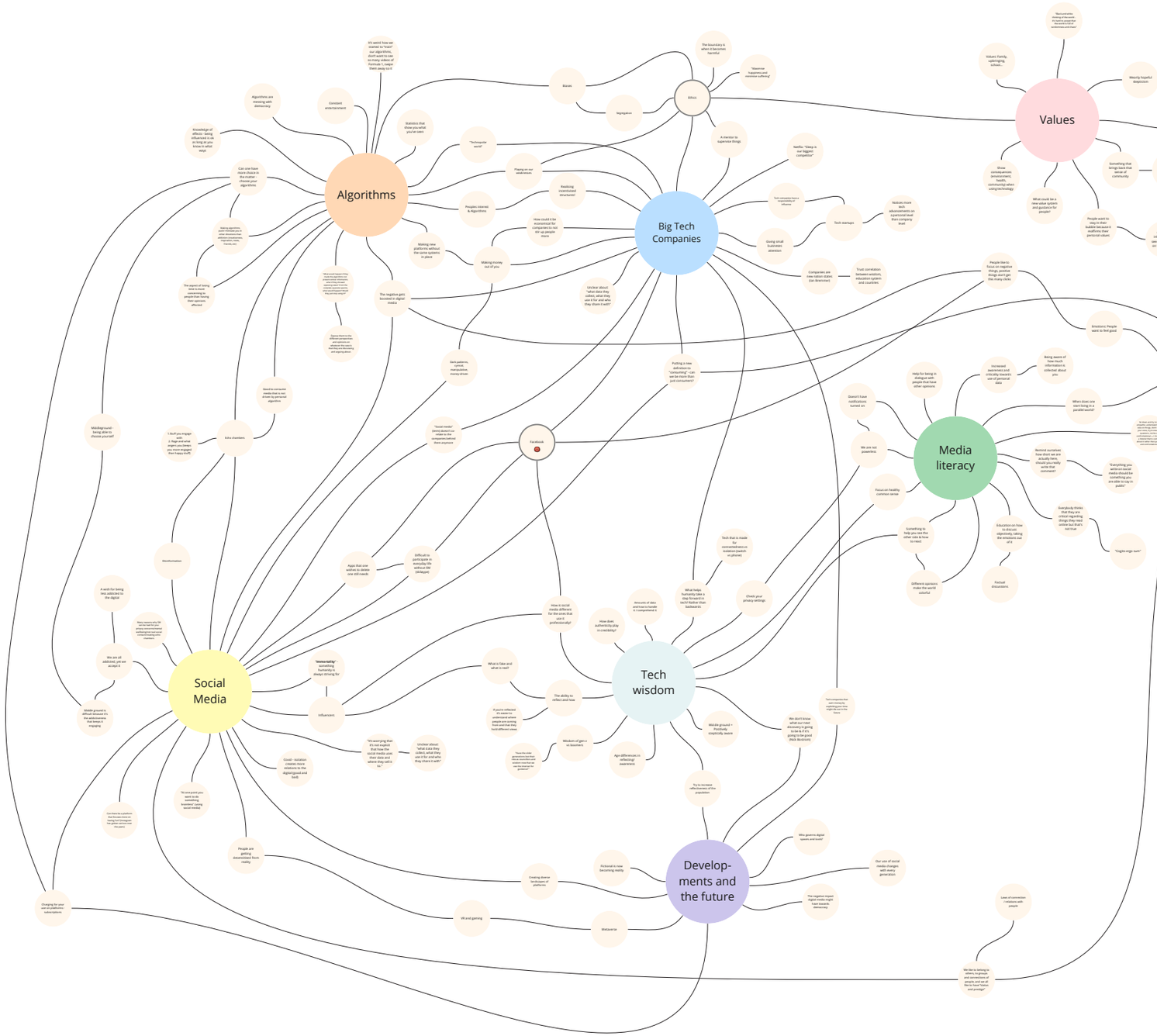
Additionally we see how **trust and a sense of belonging** can make our digital spaces better and we want to go further in that direction.

FOCUS ON THE SOCIAL, NOT THE MEDIA

Another decision we made based on our insights, is to **focus on the social** part of social media and not so much the media side.

> "The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function."

F. Scott Fitzgerald



MAPPING

We summed up what we learned in our interviews on this mind map. This directed us further in our desktop research and gave us guidance into what areas to look into.

MAPPING FROM INTERVIEWS

IDEATION MAPPING

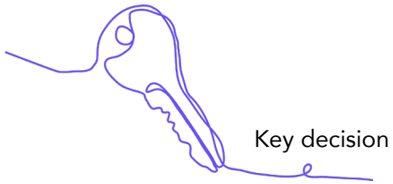
For the interviews we talked to 9 people from 4 different countries, ranging between the ages of 20-60. We even interviewed an AI to see how they've been programmed to answer our questions. Here we're showing an excerpt of our most important quotes.

Our main insights from the mapping and sketching around it was that it might be valuable to create solutions for smaller groups. This fit in with some results from our desktop research where we found that smaller groups might be the future. Another direction we found interesting is bridging the polarisation between socially excluded groups and people that don't feel that excluded from society.

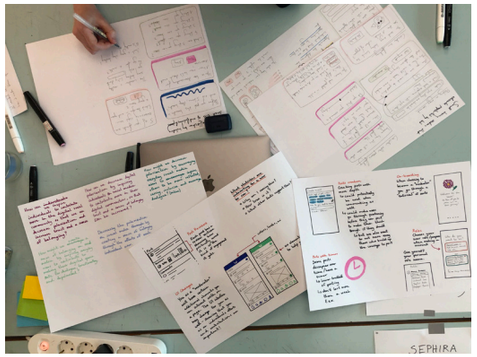
Finally, this mapping helped us to narrow down our user group to young adults, Gen Z and Millennials. We chose this group after mapping several user groups and sketching possible areas for each user group. However, we didn't get a lot out of the other user groups we had looked into and agreed on young adults as the most interesting group to look further into. We'll talk more about this later.

HOW MIGHT WE

AND THE RESULTING SKETCHING



Key decision

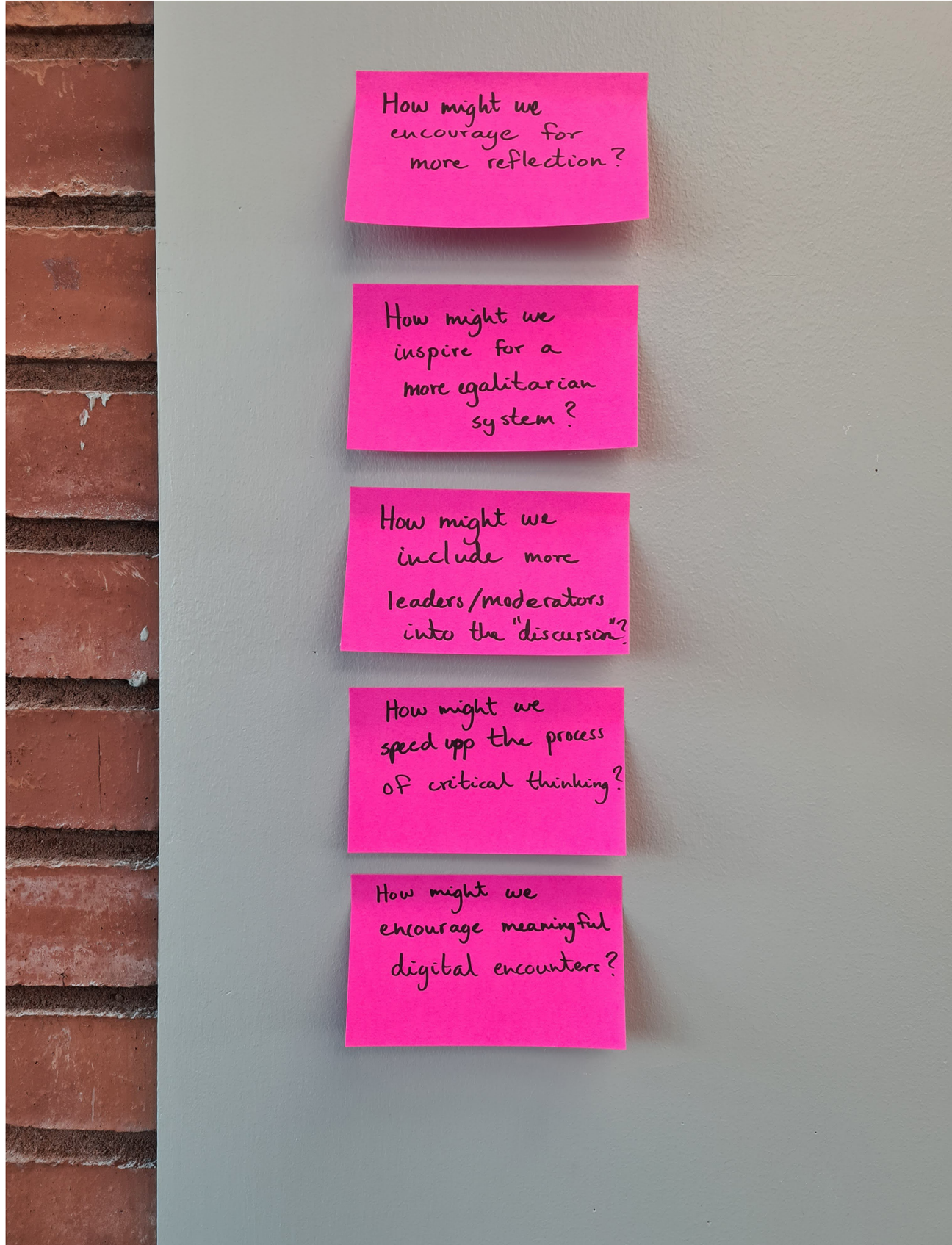


Our next round of ideating was based on the “How Might We” statements we created. By phrasing the challenges as opportunities, we delved deeper into finding possible directions.
We then continued to sketch around the questions we created. While we were sketching an idea popped up in our head:

What would happen if we had more than just creators and lurkers* online; what if everyone got more involved and acted more like “moderators”? Would this make people change their behaviour by feeling more of a sense of belonging? So, we were wondering if people are more engaged and feel like it’s their own, would social media be a nicer place?

Another thing we took from this is that we should appreciate our differences and rather see them as opportunities to grow. We also experimented with adding more mindfulness and pauses into the design to encourage for more reflection among the users.

**Lurking is the reading or viewing of an online community without posting or engaging with the community (Techopedia, 2021)*



KEY FINDINGS

After we mapped our findings from the interviews and research we determined our key findings. They are as following:

1. Awareness

- People are becoming more and more aware and critical of how companies and their algorithms are keeping people hooked.
- People are more concerned with the fact that they're wasting time on social media, rather than worrying about their opinions being influenced.
- It's a slow process, but companies might change their goals as society is becoming more aware of what's happening. The companies will have to follow the trends of the people.

2. Digital communities

- Those who feel shut out from physical society find comfort in a digital society.
- Social media is ruled by "influencers" - a small number of people, or perhaps just one person, at the "centre" of the network is connected to lots of other people in the "periphery".

3. The law of polarisation

- People are reinforcing each others opinions by being with like-minded people.
- It is more common that social media is made up "centralised" instead of with an "egalitarian" structure. Egalitarian structures might help de-polarise according to a study (Centola, 2020).

4. Group dynamics

- Theres a trust in sharing.
- Connection can be created by having a space/sphere were dialogue generates opinions that affirm or challenge.
- Strong ties (trustworthy & contextualised) and weak ties (novel but less trustworthy) are both important but there are more weak ties in social media so it changes the whole dynamic.

5. Good leaders

- A good leader/ moderator creates a good group dynamic and allows for a safe and constructive space.

6. Companies

- People see the concern lying with the big technology companies. They don't want to be a product made money out of.
- A problem lies in the fact that profit is the drive for big companies.
- Algorithms are being pushed based on biases, but companies need their algorithms to survive.

7. No to few laws

- Digital media and their companies have become the new "nations", but they have few laws and no ethics.

8. Bias reinforcement

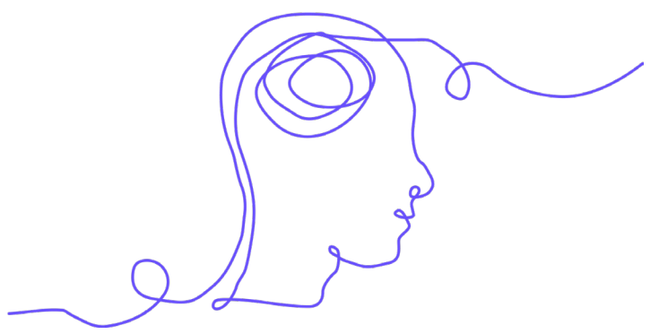
- Through reinforcing existing biases, the filter bubbles or echo chambers might get enhanced. Self-segregation (seperation between groups) increases as well as supernormal stimuli get abused.

9. People are on the same page

- Even after interviewing 12 people between the ages of 20-60 and from four different countries, they seemed to agree on a lot of the same issues regarding social media and where we are heading today.

KEY CONCERNS

Based on our key findings we developed some key concerns. We wanted to look at issues from our findings that we are concerned about and then turn the tables and look into what are the possibilities we could find there.



1. Less reflectiveness or less engagement in staying reflected

People are more concerned with the fact that they're wasting time on social media, rather than worrying about their opinions being influenced.
In believing in conspiracies people undermine their ability to think critically. Some people have a harder time coming to a realisation that the world is full of randomness and chaos. It is easier to believe in an easier solution.

2. Social media's system of "influencers" having more power

Social media supports the format of "influencers" (an individual or a group of individuals) being the strongest deciders in an online community.
An egalitarian format may make people more understanding of each other, reflected and/or accepting.

3. There aren't enough moderators or leaders

A good leader makes for a safe and trustworthy community. Outside of online "groups" there are no other leaders or moderators for spaces that might need it. People could benefit from having a leader.

4. Polarisation get's enhanced when…

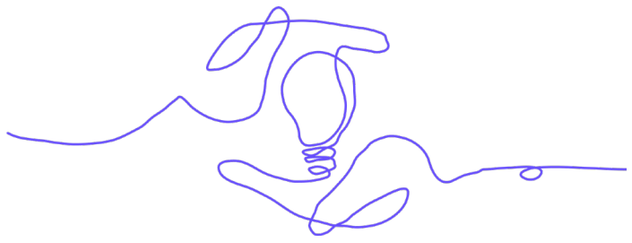
…When feeling like you need to defend yourself

…When surrounding yourself with like-minded people that confirm your views

…When social media manipulates the psychology of people

PROBLEM STATEMENT

UPDATED



After our insights and concerns we found that we have to extend our problem statement. We found that trust and a sense of belonging is key to what we want to achieve in this project. At the same time we saw the possibility to achieve that through focussing on the observers in social media, the less active users. We will go into more detail in our concept chapter.

How can we nuance the discussion around social media and its future potential by inspiring observers (less active users online) to engage more in their digital community, so that we can decrease polarisation and increase trust and a sense of belonging?

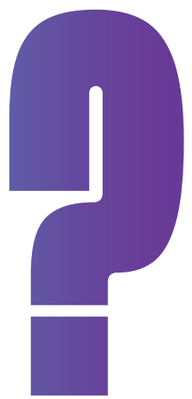
3

CONCEPT

In this chapter we will explain the different types of users and give an overview over our concept direction. We will go through our conclusion of three different users, explain why the social is important and introduce our three concepts.

64 - Different types of users
66 - Concept Direction
68 - Conclusion: 3 Users
70 - Why Social?
71 - 3 Concepts

DIFFERENT TYPES OF USERS



Friend

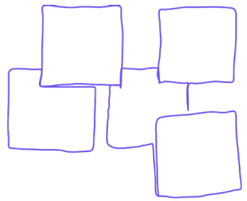
Not Friend

WHAT'S IN BETWEEN?

Why doesn't social media facilitate for being more kinds of users online?

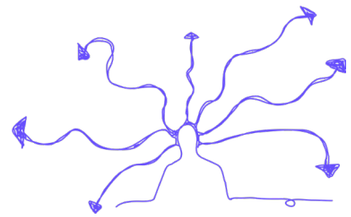
We discovered that people on social media could be categorised into 2 groups: observers and creators. However, we had also discovered that leaders and moderators bring valuable aspects to the digital but isn't a role the majority has. Could there be a third group: "the moderators", a role that both observers and creators could be encouraged to take a part in? Through our research we found that, for example, admins in Facebook groups, or moderators for Reddit pages have had positive outcomes for their community, and this is something we wanted to bring forward.

CONCEPT DIRECTION



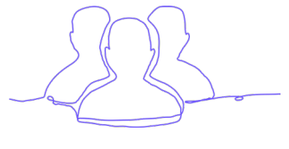
MAPPING

When we mapped around the concept of “moderators” it made us see all the different connections. We found that a sense of belonging is very important, a will to learn is a reoccurring theme and meaningful digital encounters are important with a “centerpiece” - something to be social around.



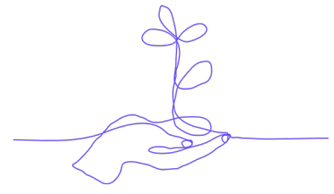
CONSIDERATIONS

We also wanted to be mindful of how we went forward as we didn’t want our solution to enhance cancel culture or self-segregation even more. And the word moderation should not become a hindrance for expressing oneself either. Rather we wanted to design for trust, equality, listening, sharing, and respecting.



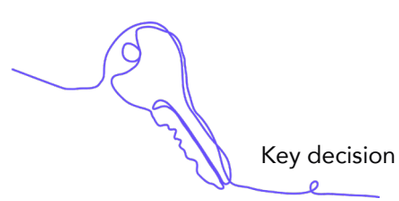
USER GROUP

We wanted to do this through targeting young adults between the ages of 20 and 30, where we saw the potential in designing for digitally introverted people online, also called lurkers. We believed that the users who shy away from conflict online have the most potential in contributing to decrease the polarisation. We will explore this deeper later.



“GARDENERS”

Rather than directly “moderating”, we want the role of these moderators to create trust and engagement. Our theory is that by engaging more people in their digital community, and encouraging people to connect, listen and share, we can collectively decrease polarisation. **We want people to become gardeners for their digital community.** Through watering positive interactions and weeding out the polarisation we can cultivate a community of respectful users.



CONCLUSION

THREE USERS

After we concluded that there could be more ways of being a user, we tried to imagine how that would look like. On the next page there are 3 different types of users and alternative names or descriptions for them. The names represent descriptions of people in that category that we have come across though our research. It is important to mention that someone that is a digital troublemaker is not necessarily also an influencer, even though they go in the same user category.

Consumer

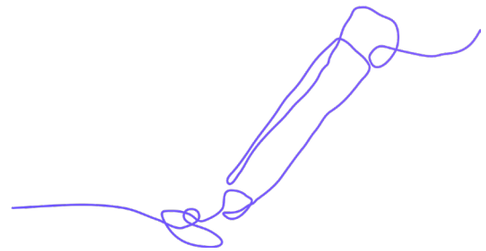
The consumer is someone who browses, observes and engages mostly with close friends.

ALSO CALLED:
Observer, lurker, shy person, digital introvert, less active person.

Engager

The engager is someone who likes to engage, they are vocal and don't shy away from conflict.

ALSO CALLED:
Creator, digital extrovert, digital troublemaker, troll, angry person, influencer, content, engager, active user

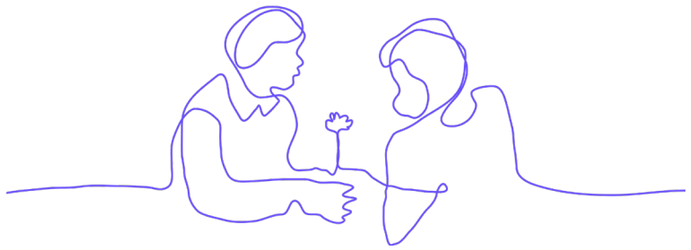


Gardener

The gardener could be any type of user, has a desire to make a change, but doesn't know how.

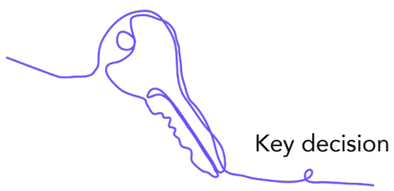
ALSO CALLED:
Curator, moderator, leader, mediator, admin, guide, middle person

WHY SOCIAL?



Another important direction in our decisions was **focusing on the social aspect of social media**. How is one social online today? What are the best social aspects of existing platforms? And what is the future potential of being social online?

We'll come back to this in our exploration.



3 CONCEPTS

Our project deliverance will consist of three concepts exploring social aspects of social media, and our three users. In each concept we will explore three examples illustrating our findings and exploration through digital mobile prototypes. They are not a final product, but have a purpose of making users think, discuss, and reflect around their own behaviour and interactions online.

4

PROTOTYPING PHASE 1

In this chapter we will take you through our initial phase of sketching, prototyping, and testing.

74 - Sketching
76 - Prototyping
78 - Testing

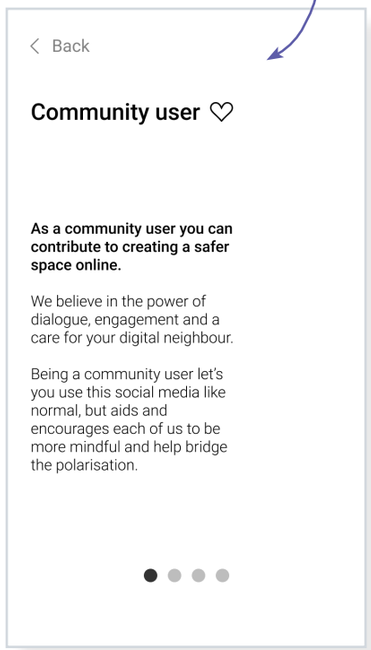
SKETCHING

When we started sketching, we explored how we could make people collaborate more, train them and looked into how feelings could influence our online behaviours. Additionally, we focussed on sketching around the idea of having more roles online and encouraging everyone to be more of a moderator. We looked into how reviewing a post could help keeping the discussion more neutral. We decided to sketch mostly in mobile format because that's where we felt that our user group would interact the most and get the most benefits from.

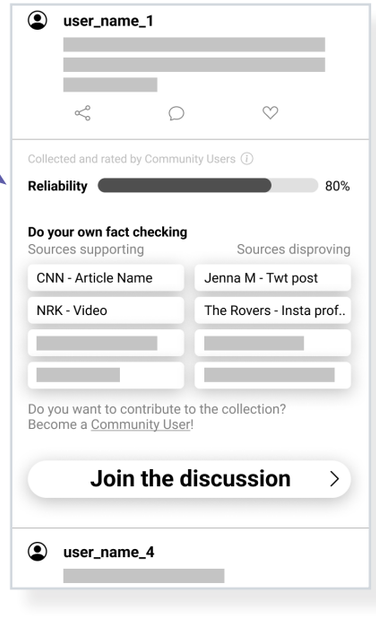
One of our insights from this round of sketching was that it is difficult to engage people. We asked ourselves what would motivate us to be more engaged online and found that this was a hard question. It also made us wonder about intrusiveness, we don't want our solutions to hinder people from participating online by making them think more. Lastly, we wondered if people change their behaviour online when they feel more of a sense of belonging.

PROTOTYPING

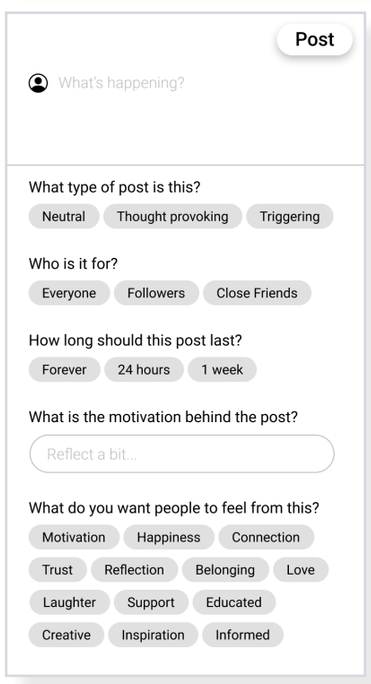
Being a commmmunity user



Reliability rating



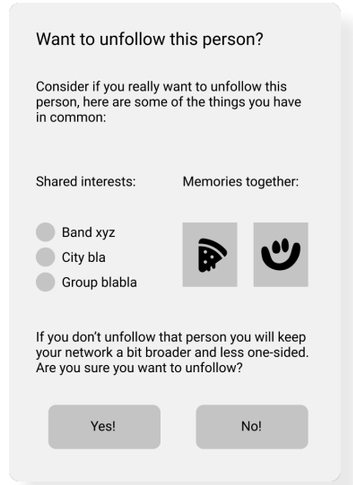
Reflecting before posting



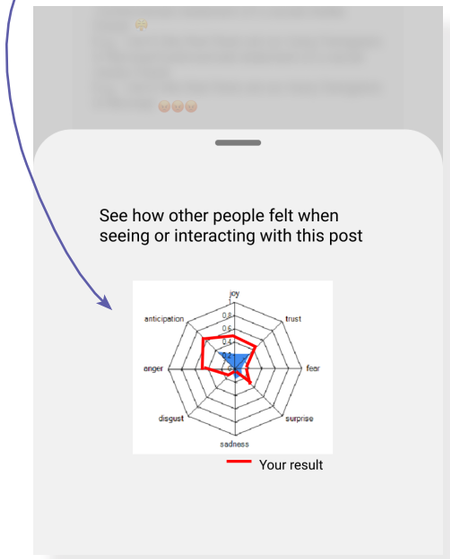
Based on our paper sketches we took some of our ideas further. We started with a bit higher fidelity prototyping of the idea of users becoming more of a moderator and contributing more in the form of becoming a "community user".

We also looked deeper into the concept if having a reliability rating for controversial posts that would be rated by community user and how it would look for users if they had to reflect around the content they want to post about before doing so.

Scenario of unfollowing someone

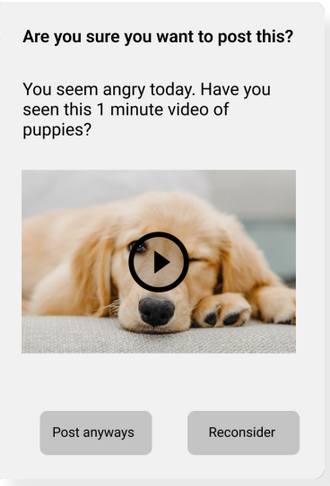


Integrating an emotion rating on posts



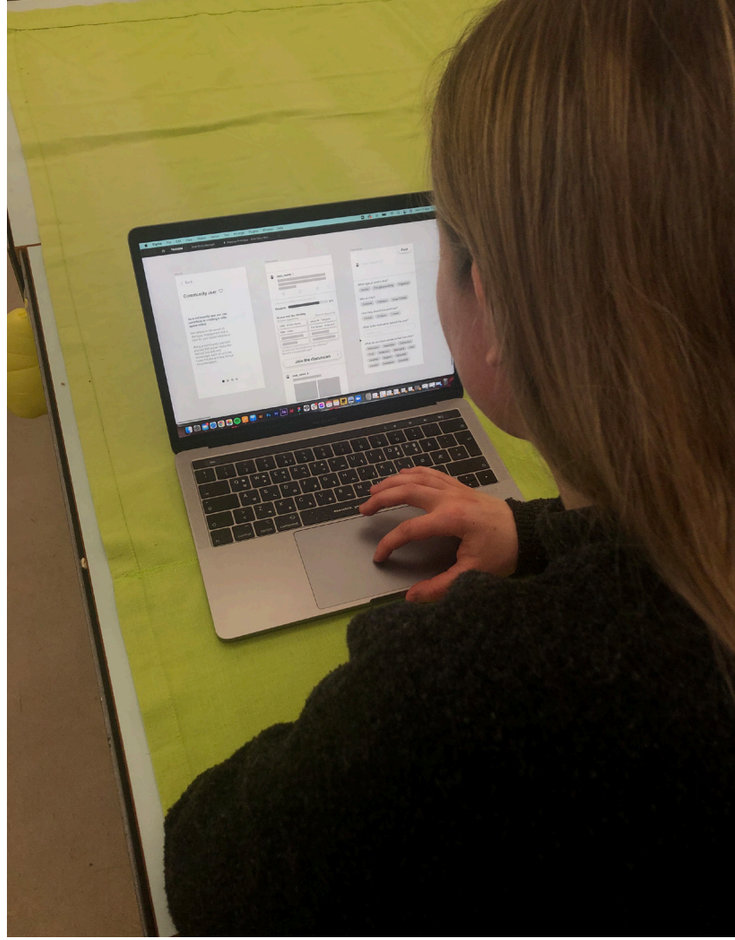
One of our reflections from paper sketching was it might be interesting to include the feeling aspect into our prototypes. Based on that we made some prototypes that interacted with a scale of different emotions to see how people would feel about it.

Showing a video before posting an angry comment



In this prototype we are trying to pacify an angry person before they would post something and we were curious to see how people would actually react to that.

TESTING AND FEEDBACK



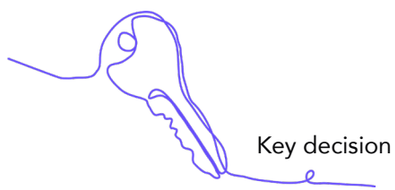
From our first round of testing, we wanted to find out how users would react when they were encouraged to participate more and additionally to be more reflected. After picking a few prototypes we asked our user group what they felt about and reflected around each of the examples we showed them. We tested them separately on six young adults. One of the concepts we tested was the one of being a community user, where everyone would participate more as moderators to create a better digital space. Additionally, we tested on getting a reliability rating of informative or controversial posts and reflecting on their post before posting.

What we found is that there is a higher threshold for people to join things online with a public profile. This made us wonder how anonymity plays into this online behaviour. Our testers also reflected a lot around the role of the algorithm. Do we have to live with algorithms like we sometimes have to live with grief? Can we view them as a person or thing? At the same time a finding from our research got confirmed in our testing, where one tester stated: “I have power over the algorithms”.

We also tested prototypes where unfollowing someone means being reminded of all the things that connect one to the person. Other prototypes went even deeper into the emotional level of users.

This round of testing also made us wonder about how one can have a conversation where everyone feels like they get something out of it. We found that it might be helpful for users to realise or get **reminded of the human level of each person**.

In general, the prototypes made people discuss a lot and reflected on themselves which is exactly what we wanted to achieve with our testing.



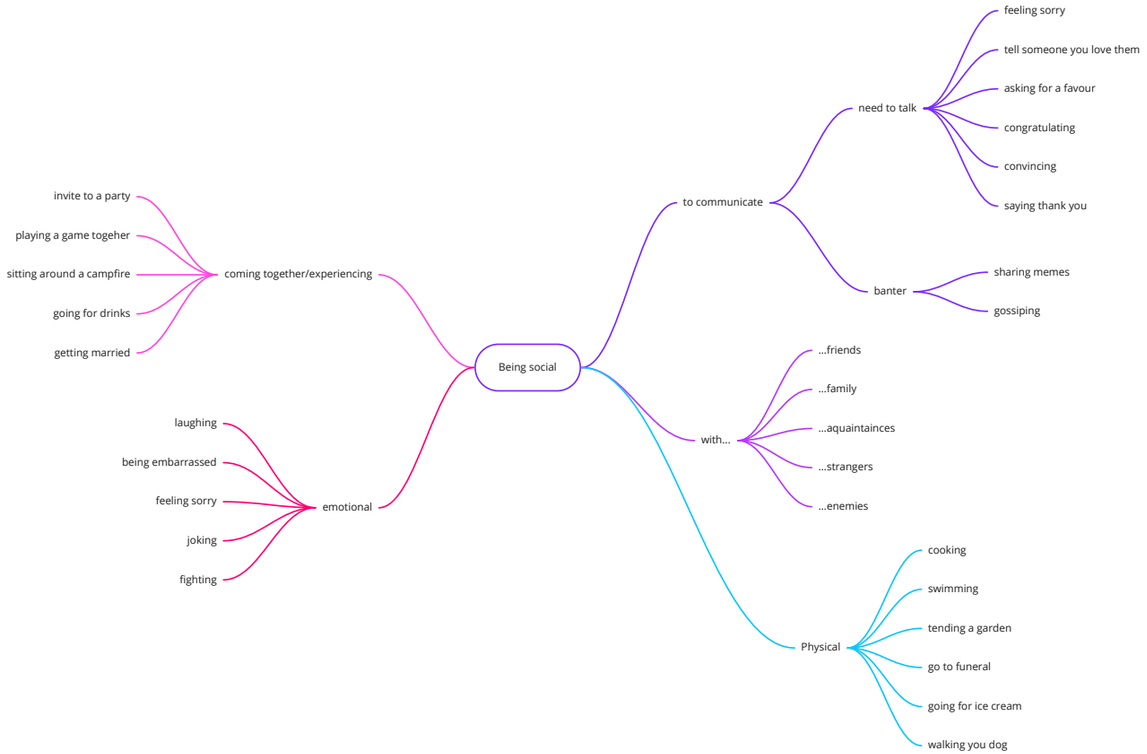
5

EXPLORATION

In this chapter we delve deeper into what social actually means through exploring, mapping and combining the best of the best together.

82 - Ways of being social
83 - Empathy Map
84 - Introvert and Extrovert
86 - Mapping Apps
90 - Best of the best

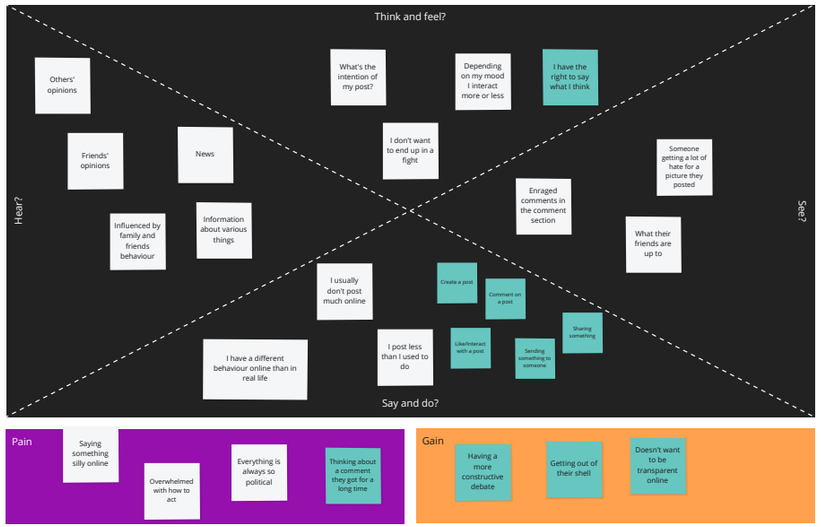
WAYS OF BEING SOCIAL



We started off by making a list of social activities and divided them into several categories. This made us realise experiencing is such a crucial part of being social. It also showed us that there is almost always purpose - people are usually social around something.

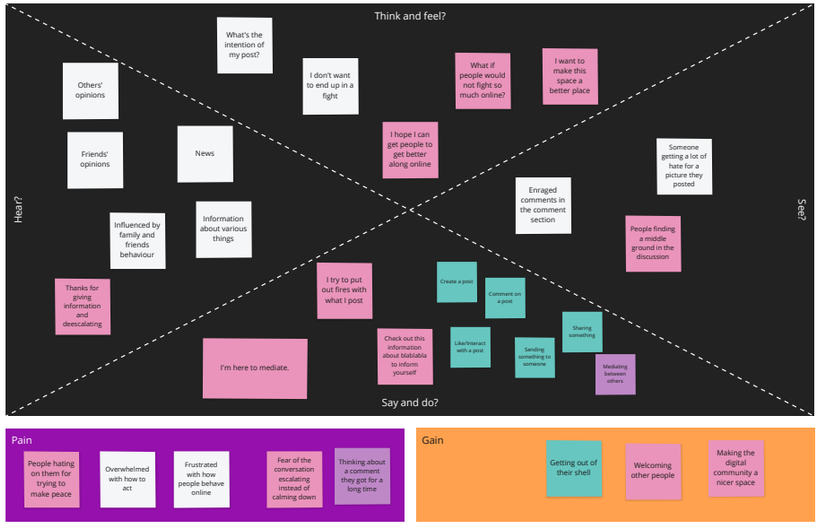
We then did an empathy map for both the consumer and the moderator. We realised that a lot of the outcomes were the same for both maps, but there were also some substantial differences.

EMPATHY MAP



CONSUMER

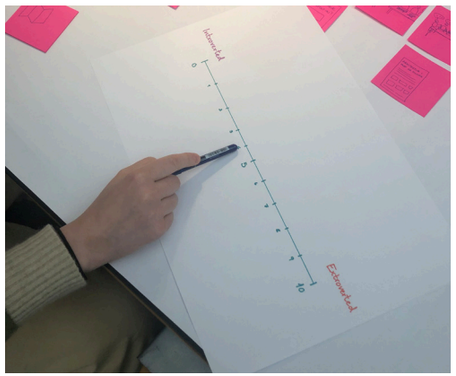
The Consumer map was way more passive, more egoistic, shy, and influenced. We also found them to be less willing to see things from another perspective than their own.

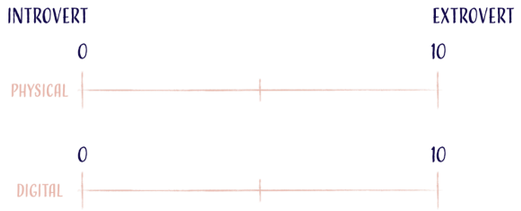


MODERATOR

The Moderator has a more active role, the biggest difference was that the moderator intervened more, was more reflected, and more willing to see things in a different light, but maybe also a bit more idealistic.

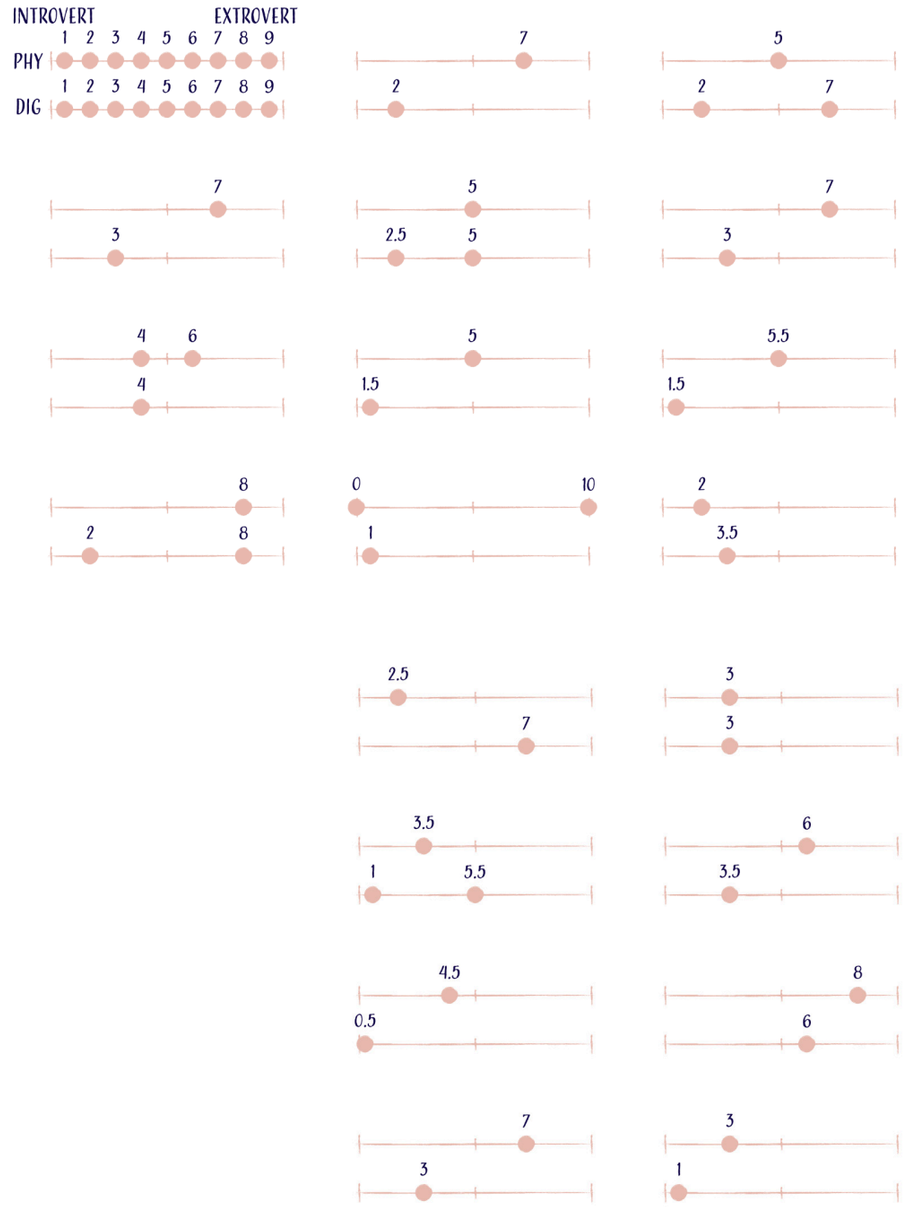
INTRO- AND EXTROVERT





As we started designing for more digital engagement, we started wondering how this would vary from introverts to extroverts. We asked people to place themselves on a scale from 0 to 10, with 0 being introverted and 10 being extroverted. After they did that, we asked them to place themselves on that same scale but in the digital context of social media. We wanted to see if people would feel differently about rating themselves offline versus digital. Finally, we gave them the question: "How would you feel if you were encouraged to participate more in your digital community?"

We discovered that most people we talked to considered themselves introverted when it came to being active online - regardless of being extroverted or introverted otherwise. The only instance people were extroverted online was when they were admins of groups or in tight-knit communities. In general, their answers depended on their moods, who they were interacting with, and if it was personal or public use. When we asked about being encouraged to participate more, most people were very critical towards the intentions and reasons behind this. Several participants also stated that there is a threshold for them, and they were questioning what being more active would really mean for them.



MAPPING APPS

Friend activity:
- Spotify
- Music (apple)
- Steam
- SoundCloud
- Bible App
- Goodreads

Text:
- Quora
- Tumblr
- Twitter
- Facebook
- Reddit
- Weverse

Watching:
- Twitch
- Youtube
- V LIVE
- Tiktok

Talking:
- Snapchat
- Facetime
- Messenger
- Discord
- NintendoSwitchOnline

Dating:
- Hinge
- Tinder
- Happn

Images:
- Finn
- Tise
- Instagram
- Pinterest

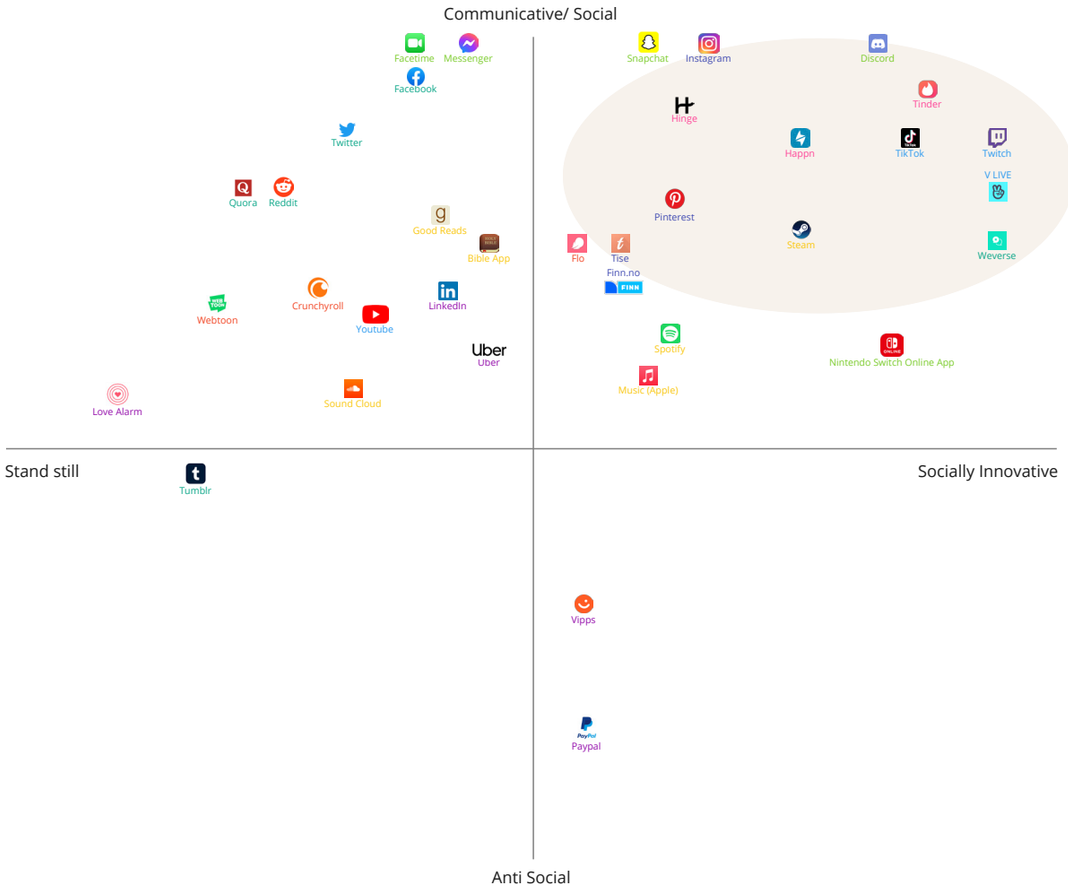
Comment section:
- Crunchyroll
- Webtoon
- Flo

Other:
- Love Alarm
- LinkedIn
- Vipps
- Paypal
- Uber

In this stage we collected all the apps we had and knew of with some social aspect to them, and sorted them into categories representing their most social aspect. We did this to get a general overview over what platforms exist so that we later could sort and evaluate them more systematically. We had also made a list of several games with social aspects to them, but decided that we needed to limit ourselves, and therefore focused solely on social platforms, more than games.

After sorting the apps, we wanted to nuance the best social aspects of social media, we called this finding the best of the best. We placed each platform in three different two-dimensional diagrams. The first diagram explored how social and socially innovative each platform is. The second on how polarising they are and how they create a sense of belonging. And the third on how connecting they are and to what degree they create trust. These are based on our own interpretation and experience with them, but we realise this might vary from person to person.

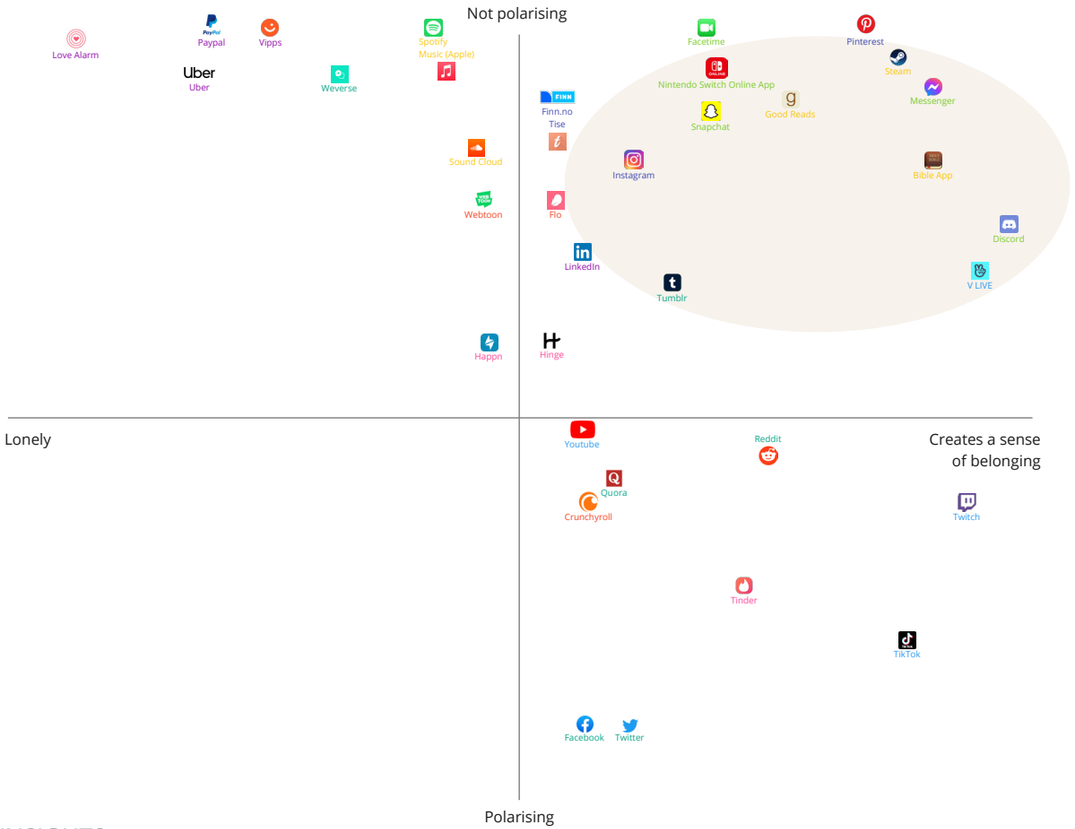
Map 1 - Social & Socially Innovative



INSIGHTS

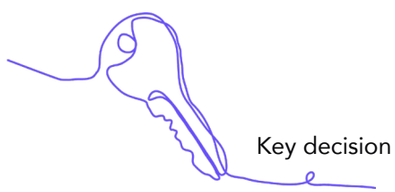
- Platforms used for streaming and live watching are on the forefront of being socially innovative.
- The dating category is very central as their goal is to push digital and physical interactions, and constantly explore new ways of meeting people.
- Pinterest shows a lot about a person's personality and is public, yet feels like a very private platform.
- A platform called Weverse has explored ways for fans and artists to better connect.
- Discord and Steam seem to share the best of watching, talking and friend activities.

Map 2 - Least Polarising & Sense of Belonging

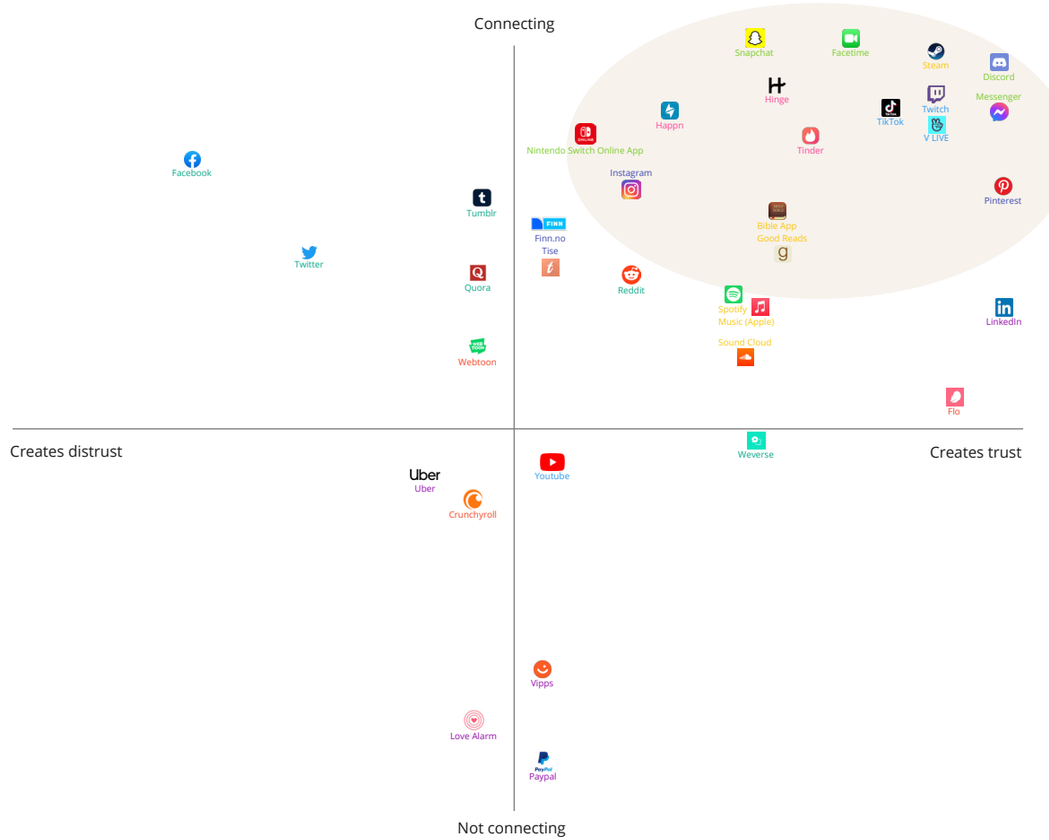


INSIGHTS

- Platforms that focus on one task seem to be the least polarising, such as sharing images, sharing game statistics, talking to a small group of people, etc.
- While platforms that provide a lot of text-based communication or sharing are more likely to polarise. In general, the less communicative the platform is, the less polarising. We thought it would be interesting to look into **text-based communication**.
- Platforms that allow for small groups are more likely to create a sense of belonging.

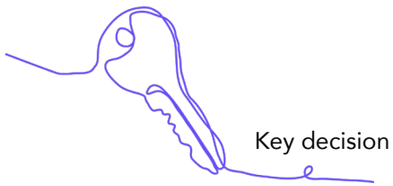


Map 3 - Connecting & Creates Trust



INSIGHTS

- **The more you know about a person, the more trust you have towards them** or what they share on a platform. That's why dating, video, audio, and image platforms are all high on the scale.
- Many of the platforms from the first diagram are in the same area as this one. So, could this mean that the platforms working towards an innovative social goal are actually creating more trust and belonging?



BEST OF THE BEST

Through these insights we explored what "the best of the best" would look like. We combined what we thought were each apps best social aspects.

IMAGES

- ***Instagram:*** It's easy to share, connect and feel included in the lives of others. It's more lowkey than Facebook.
- ***Pinterest:*** Your motive is personal benefit rather than public. You share more anonymously, and you make your own space.

TALKING

- ***Discord:*** Easy to communicate in lots of different ways (voice, video, text, images, links, screen sharing, groups). Easy to socialise around something.
- ***Nintendo Switch Online App:*** Only between friends. You socialise around games in co-op play. A simpler but limited version of discord.
- ***Snapchat:*** Communication between friends. Has short lived messages. Creates trust through everyday life pictures and communication.
- ***Messenger:*** Communication between friends. Small groups. More formal than snap.
- ***Facetime:*** One on one communication. Video is more personal, and there's a threshold for discussing face to face.

FRIEND ACTIVITY

- ***Steam:*** Community driven (friends or game based). Focus on earning achievements both in games and in the Steam community.
- ***Good Reads:*** Used for personal gain. Can see friend activity. Is like Pinterest, but for books.
- ***Bible App:*** Community driven towards a common and personal better (faith). More sharing and visual based. It's media meant to help better yourself.

DATING

- ***Hinge:*** Encourages "judging" a person by going through their profile more than only browsing their pictures. There's more info about a person that brings more trust and less cat-fishing. To be able to create a profile you need to fill out the whole profile.
- ***Happn:*** Feel more connection to a person when knowing how many times you've passed them on the street.
- ***Tinder:*** Facilitates for meeting people in many different ways (common interest, goals, answers to questions, pictures, interactive stories, etc).

WATCHING

- ***V LIVE:*** Conversation are controlled by the streamer. Paid membership gets more attention. You see the person live/face-to-face, it's an easy way to communicate between streamer and fans.
- ***TikTok:*** Innovative video interactions and creation. Answering a comment using video - video equals more trust and connection. Community gets developed over sharing similar algorithms or being "targeted" similarly.
- ***Twitch:*** Video streaming equals to more connection and belonging. Easy to connect with a person on video or feel connection with people liking similar interests.

TEXT

- ***Weverse:*** The user's goal is to get attention from an artist (one person or a group), more than anyone or everyone. You are in communities with people sharing common interest (the artist). Theres a bit of a threshold to join a community, but in a good way.
- ***Tumblr:*** It's harder to find all the threads/replies to a post, you see what people you follow share.

BEST OF THE BEST SUM UP

From these we created a list of what the best of the best would look like. We made the conclusions based on our research, concept, and goals. Here we saw connections with our initial research, which made us see that there is a connection between what works well and what there is a need for.

- Choosing your personal goal or interests on a platform creates a purpose and deeper reason to be on the platform.
- An honest, professional, but lowkey profile creates connection and trust.
- Easy and lowkey way of sharing pictures, video, lives, text, sharing screen, gaming and audio are the most innovative ways of socialising online today.
- Being a part of smaller communities creates trust and openness.
- Answering some questions before entering a group, or more formally joining a group can filter out those who really want to be part of it. Could be as simple as a confirmation button.
- Subscriptions for using the app, features or for being part of communities can also help filter out the people who really want to be there.
- An achievement page for each profile with fun, creative and personal achievements creates connection and shows personality.
- Having a discussion face to face. Having to discuss through video or through a snap can make interactions more real than simply through text that makes the person feel distant.
- You can see a person's interest and personality through a collection of their pinned, liked or saved images, videos or similar.
- Community needs a common goal or interest to feel belonging.
- A profile could have some set parameters that needs to be answered or shared to be able to have a profile at all. Profiles that are answered seriously will be taken more seriously.
- Knowing how you are connected to a person creates trust and becomes more personal. Knowing that you have such in such in common, you are two connections away from knowing each other, you passed each other in the street so many times, you've lived in these same areas, you both like to spend time in these places, etc.
- Might still be important with an option for anonymity.
- Feeling like this is your community and wanting to contribute and improve it.

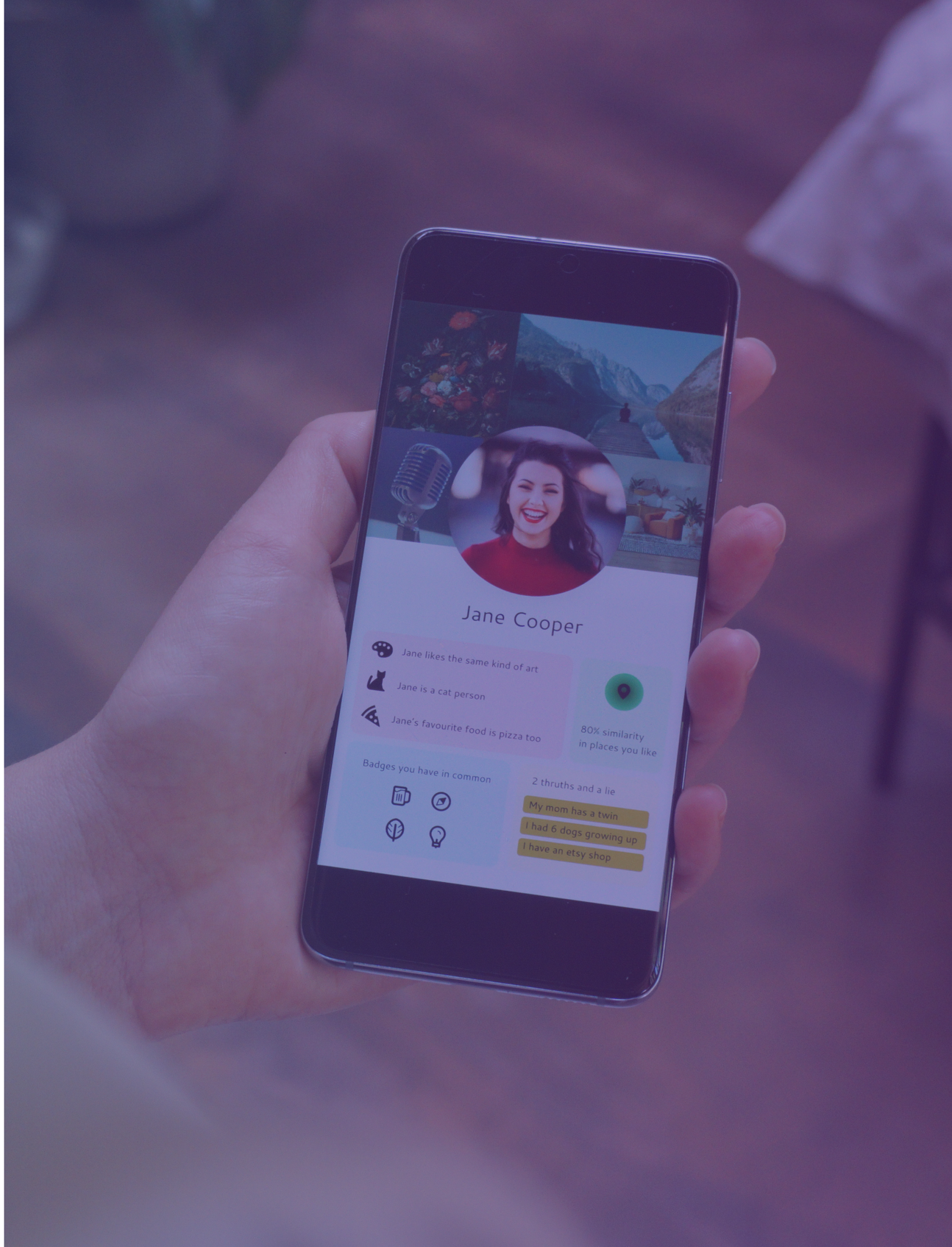
This list made the basis for what we decided to prototype further as well as a big inspiration for our final propositions. Although we did not make prototypes for all of them individually, we implemented and combined different aspects together depending on what would represent our concept the best.

6

PROTOTYPING PHASE 2

In this chapter we look at how we could use our research, insights, early sketching and exploration into our prototypes, and use this as a basis for our final proposition.

96 - Sketching
98 - Prototyping
102 - Testing and Feedback

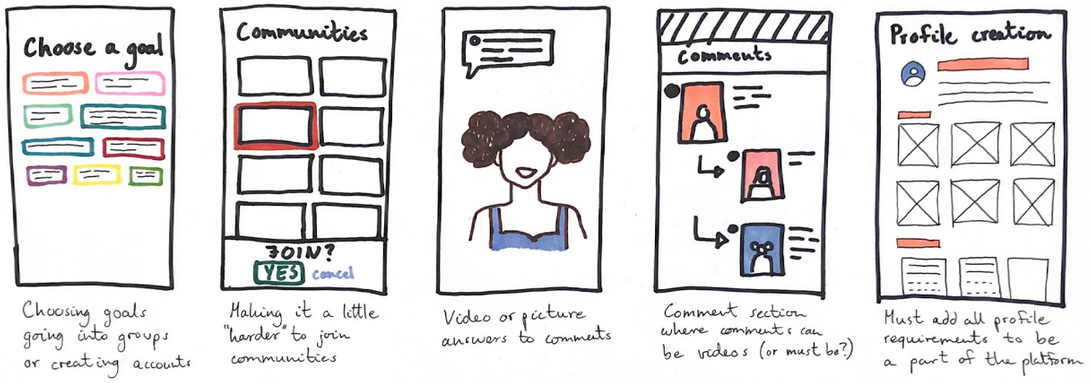


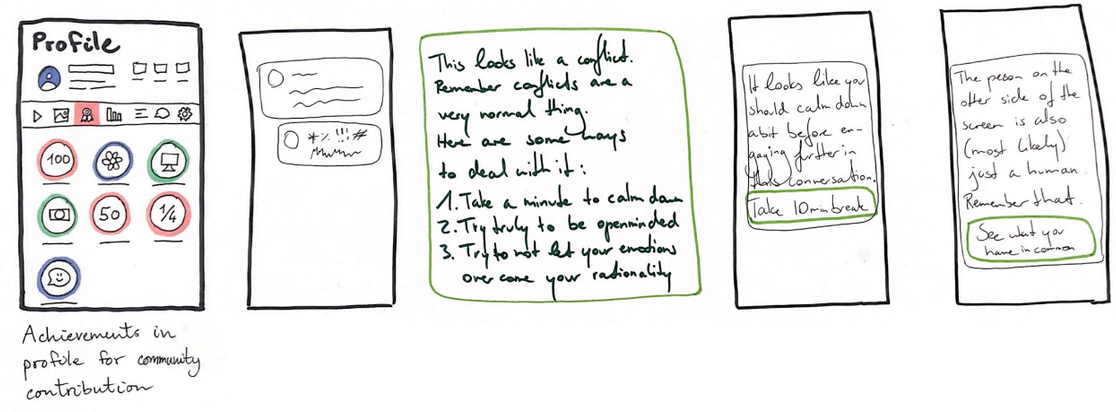
SKETCHING

This phase was a challenging part of the project. It was hard to imagine what our final result was going to be. Did we want a solution or did we want people to reflect?

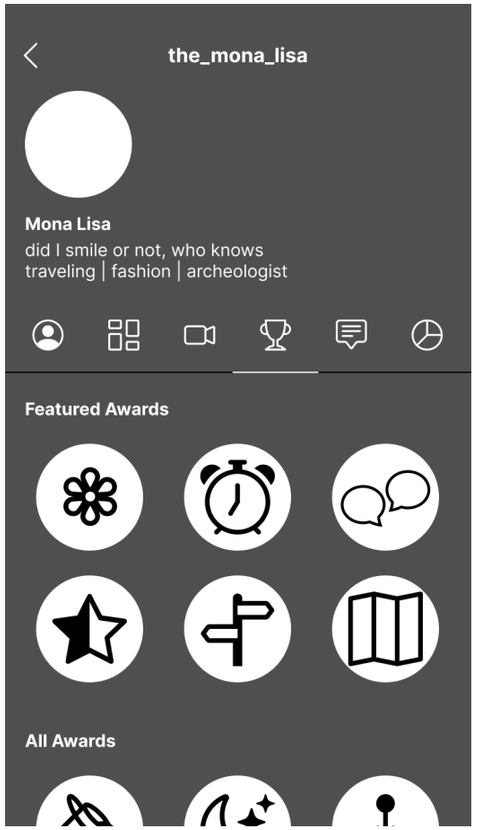
We did a new round of sketching, and realised that a lot of earlier sketches started repeating themselves in different variations. This made us reconsider some of the sketches from earlier and implement them further.

There were a lot of possibilities going forward. We felt like there were a lot of sides to our scope that could be interesting to look into, and there wasn't only one solution to be found. We concluded with making prototypes that would show several possible directions based on our findings throughout our project. Later these would become the essence of our final proposition.

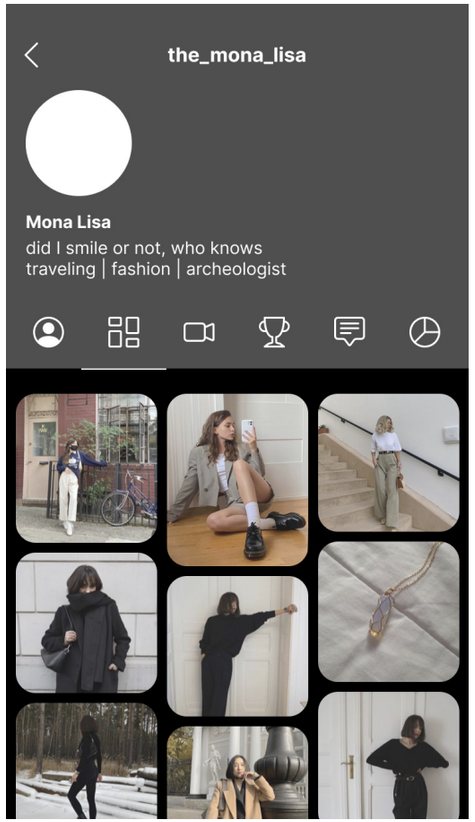




PROTOTYPING



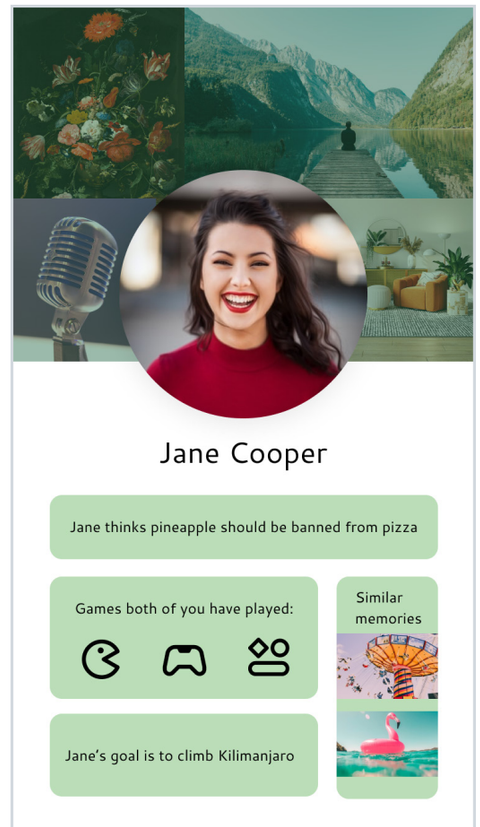
Profile awards to see personality and familiarise



Pinterest board to appear personal

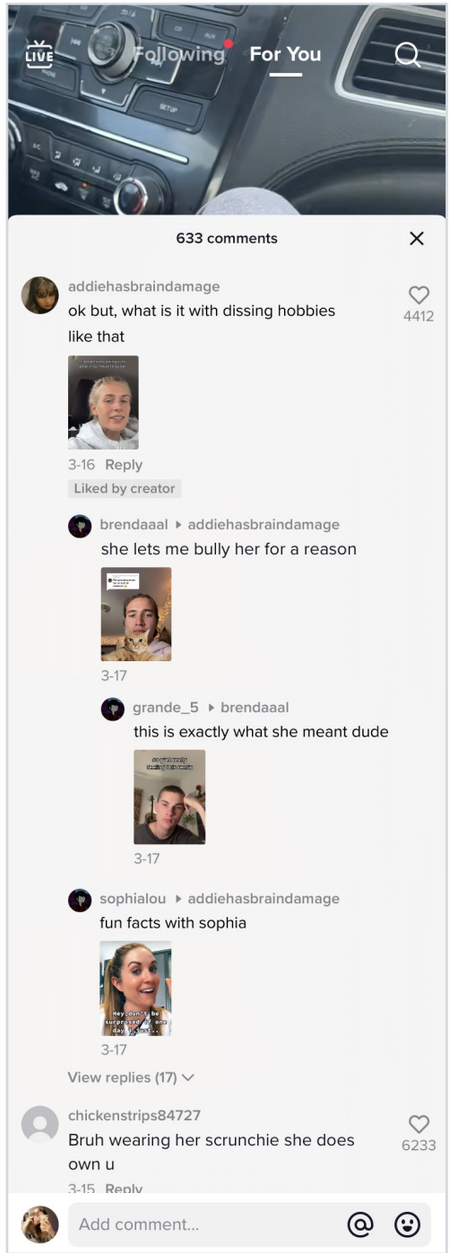
We've taken what we learned from the best of the best and tried to visualise what some of it might look like. For example integrating profile awards, like one would get on gaming platforms like Steam. Or could one integrate your Pinterest feed to appear more personal. Maybe one would need to fill out certain information about oneself, to be able to create a profile at all.

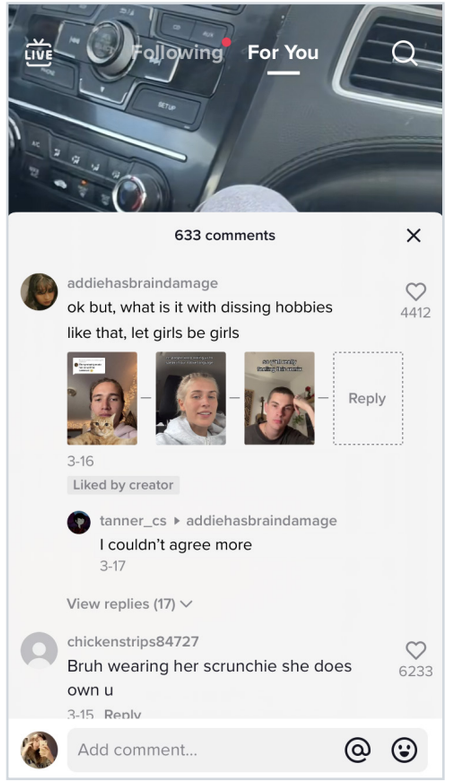
Showing more than common interests in a profile



Common interactions

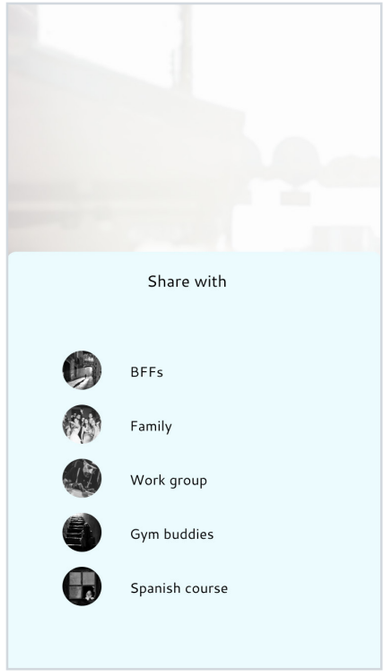
We also continued with the idea of showing people common interests, memories and interactions with each others profile. It could be something your average profile doesn't reveal but makes you connect more to that person.



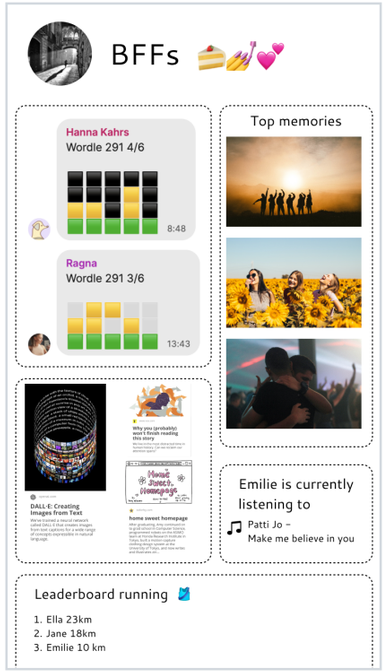


Communication only through video

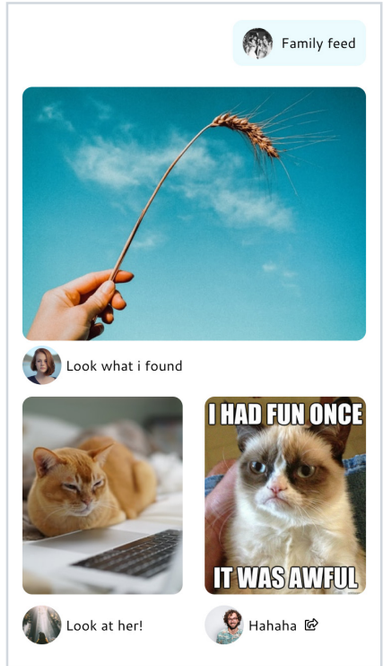
As text has been one of the main reasons for polarisation, could one communicate only through video? For example using TikTok's video reply function, only - that's the only way one can comment.



Sharing function



More specialised feed



Merging different information

We also sketched around the idea of a more divided sharing function and a specialised feed to make it easier and "safer" for shy users to participate. Only sharing posts with a specific group might lower the threshold for participating and engage users more.

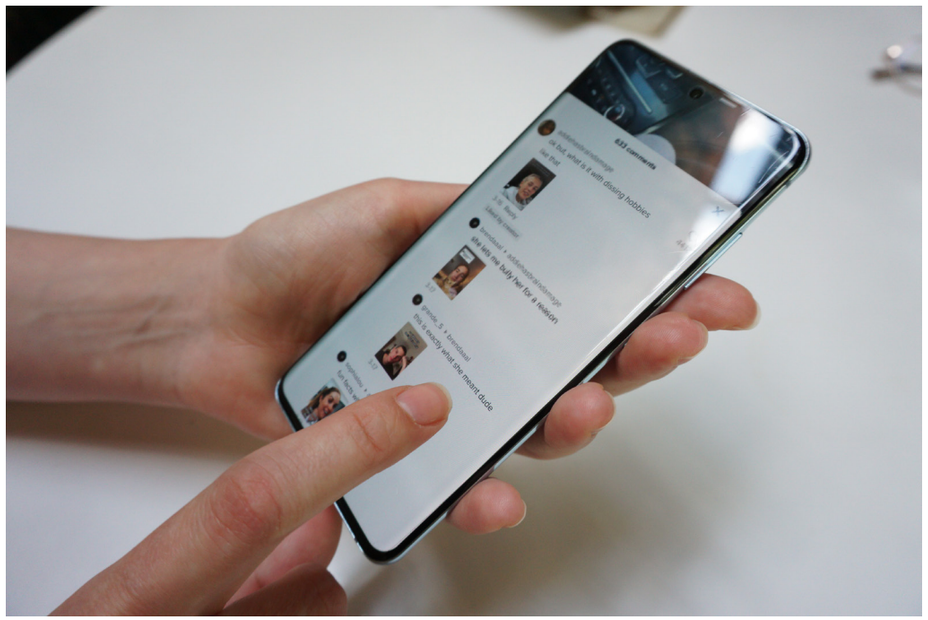
TESTING & FEEDBACK

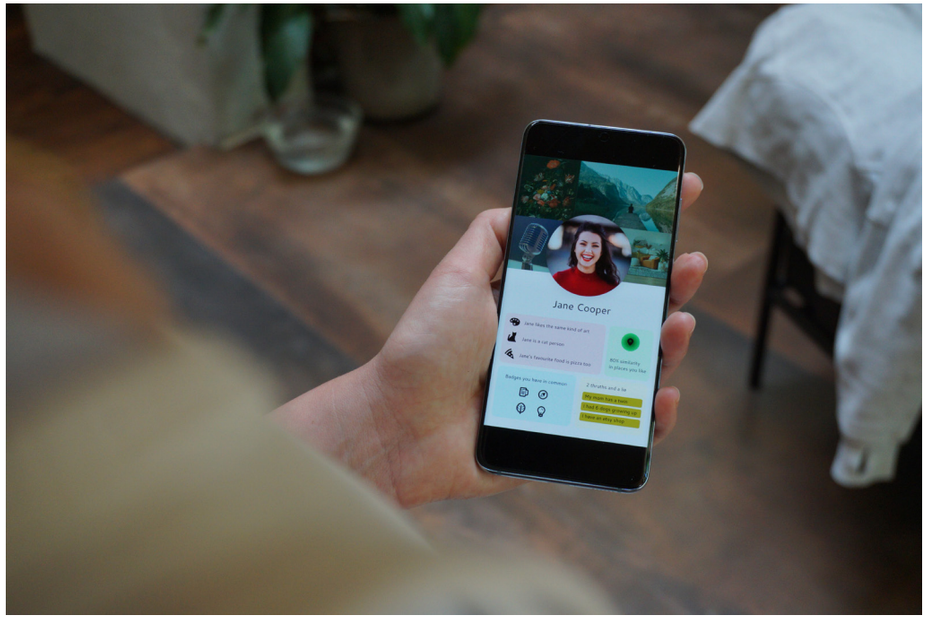
The profile format was very easy for the user to understand saying, “I recognise the menu style from instagram, so I am used to click through these when I am stalking someone.” Another user mentioned how “I am not sure how often I would care to look at other peoples awards. Maybe if they mattered in some way, other than as a half hidden away bragging page.” Giving more meaning behind what is included in the profile and why might be beneficial for the user.

The users thought video replying felt like an interesting direction going forward, and for some more extroverted users they even wanted to try replying. They mentioned that “using your own face might scare away some users, but for those who really want to - they will find a way to convey their message no matter what.” We realised that using video was something we wanted to look more into.

The sharing of content and algorithm filtering was something the users expressed a desire for. “You don’t always feel like looking at news or drama late at night. Sometimes you just want to catch up with what your friends have been doing.” They were positive to have a feed for more personal use, but they were critical and a bit confused as to how this would play in to polarisation.

After our testing we understood that going deeper into concepts like these would be the natural next step. We wanted to take more inspiration from our first prototyping session, together with our sketches, and create a collection of directions and proposals that could work as an element of discussion.



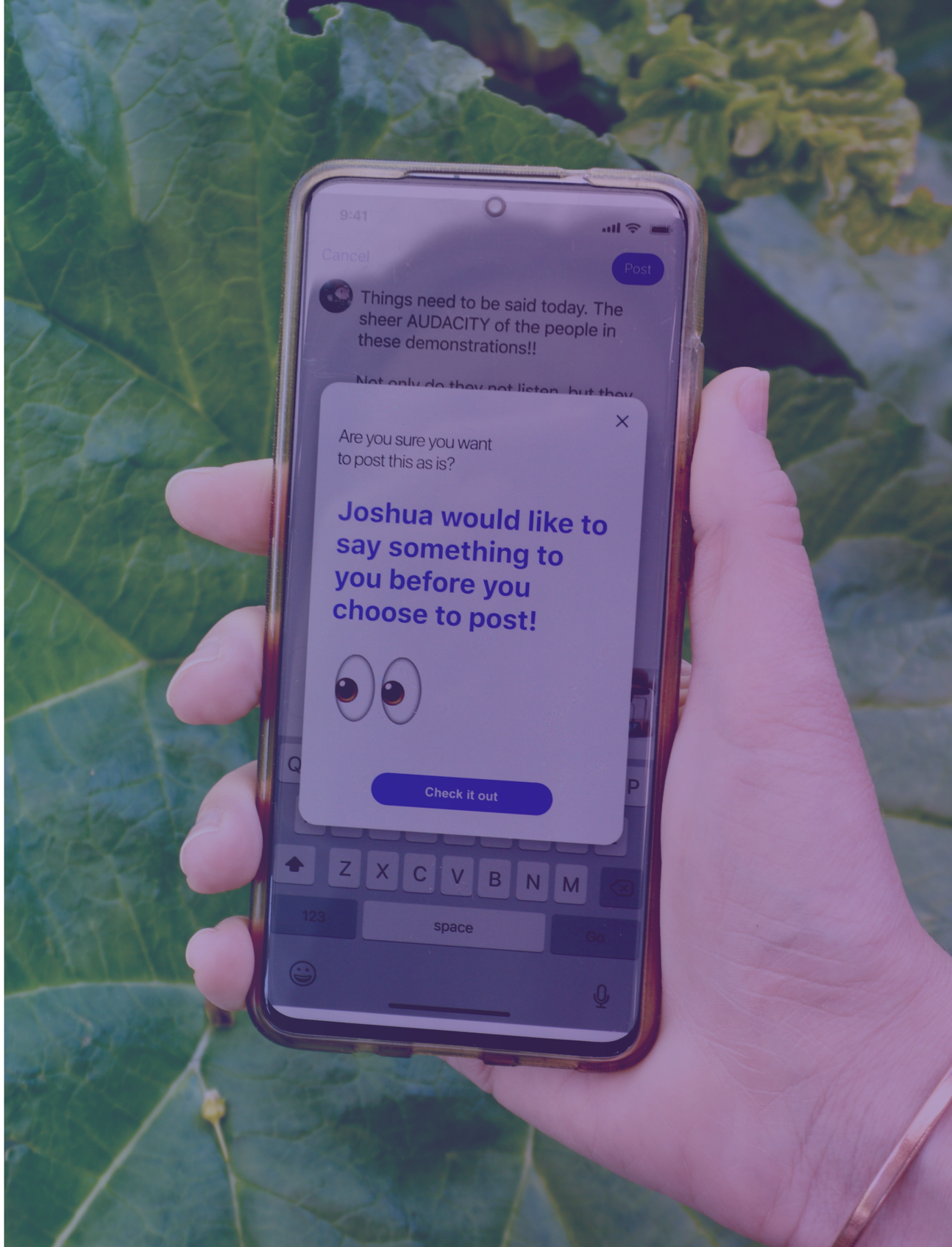


7

FINAL PROPOSITION

In this chapter we will present out final propositions through three concepts with three examples each.

106 - Intro 3 Concepts
108 - 3 Types of Users
110 - Concept 1: The Human Side
134 - Concept 2: Changing Engagement
158 - Concept 3: Tools for Gardeners
184 - Final Concept Reflections



INTRO

3 CONCEPTS

Our three concepts are meant to exemplify insights from the “best of the best” and bring forth aspects of our three users: the creator, the lurker and the moderator. We will introduce them as digital prototypes in fictive social media platforms.

It’s important to note that these prototypes are not meant to represent solutions, but show our insights through different propositions and directions. The concepts are tightly knit, and we realise one can cross connect many of them. There are probably several ways to illustrate our concepts, but we have chosen to showcase each concept through three examples based on our insight and exploration. The prototypes aren’t meant to fit into a specific social media, although they are put into contexts with heavy inspiration to existing platforms. We have made these in mobile format as we found it to be the most natural way to interact on social media, as well as it fit our user group the most. Additionally, we focused on aspects of platforms that are text-based - as seen from our research, these are the places where polarisation is more likely to happen.

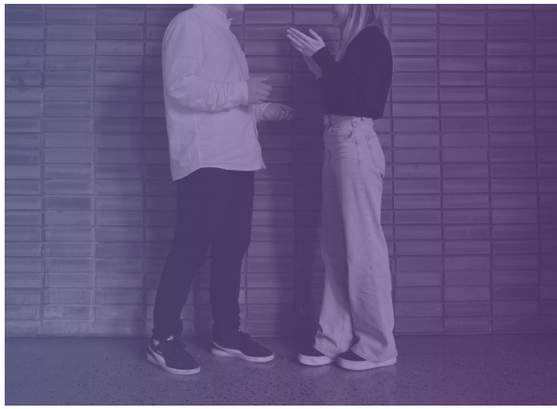
We want to bring forth and be evaluated on how our proposals nuance the discussion around social media, how our concepts explore different kinds of users and potential future possibilities, and what impact these might have on people’s behaviour and reflection online.

When testing we asked the users to think about what actions they take online and how they interact with people on the other side of the screen. We will go deeper into their feedback and our reflections for each concept.

CONCEPT 1

The Human Side

What if we showed more personality of a user?



CONCEPT 2

Changing Engagement

What if there were other ways of engaging online?

CONCEPT 3

Tools for Gardeners

What if there were more tools to help lurkers improve the polarising content?

3 TYPES OF USERS

Through each direction under the concepts we have presented three examples of users and what impact the propositions had on them.

Levi the Lurker

Levi the Lurker wouldn't call himself an extroverted person online. He tends to observe, but can also like a few things here and there. He only shares content with his close friends, but had there been more low effort ways of interacting with things online he probably would take part in them.

Dan the Digital Troublemaker

Dan the Digital Troublemaker* engages a lot online. He has strong opinions and isn't afraid to share them with the world. However, this tends to get him into heated debates and it can sometimes blind him from seeing the person behind the screen.

*Digital troublemakers: people with a history of angry comments.

Helpful Hana

Helpful Hana has always wanted to contribute in making a change online, but finds there is a lack of tools to do so. She has tried to be active in polarising discussions, but struggles with finding the motivation to continue when the algorithms repeatedly go against her.

CONCEPT 1

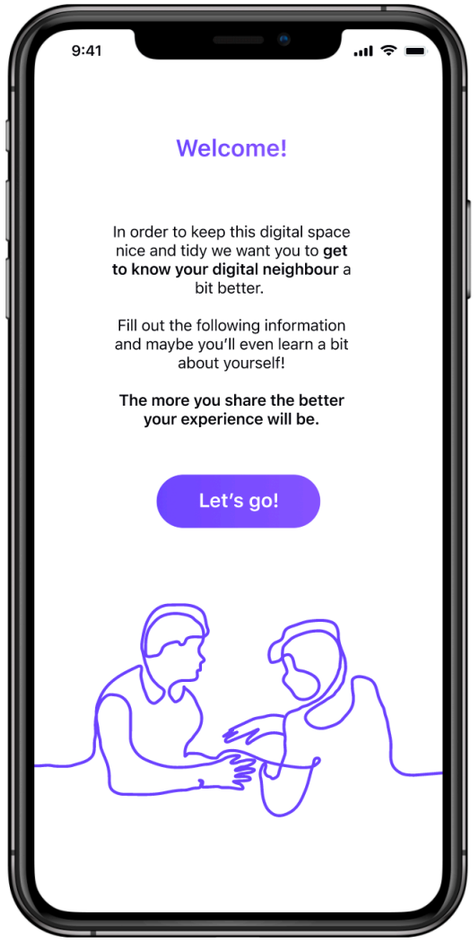
THE HUMAN SIDE

What if we showed more personality of a user?

In this concept we explored how we could show more personality of a person on social media. From our research and exploration we discovered that by showing more of who the person is on the other side of the screen, people will reconsider their online behaviour and feel more trust towards people they interact with. We will introduce three examples: profile creation, following and unfollowing, and video discussions.

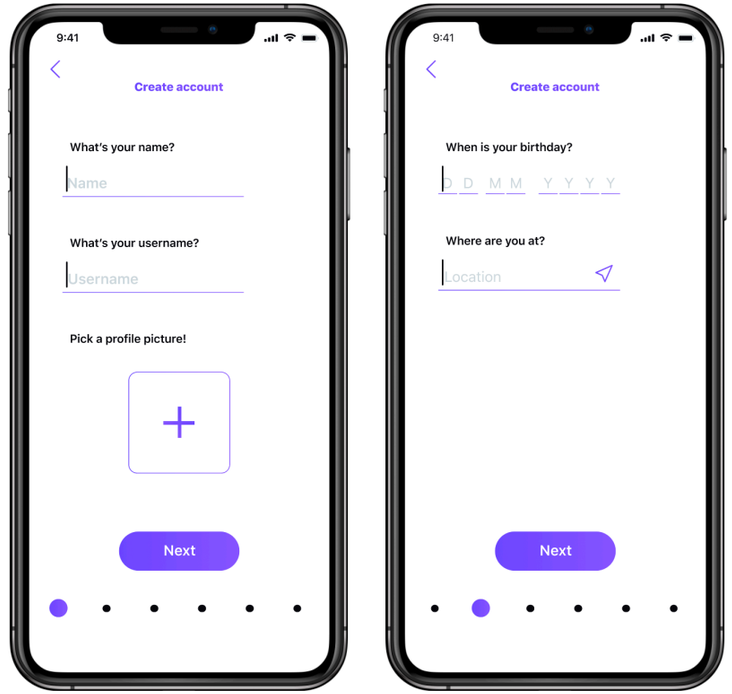
THE HUMAN SIDE

1— SHOW MORE PERSONALITY



In the profile creation, the user strats off by getting a short introduction explaining that, by providing the information asked for, they will make their digital space nicer and have a better experience.

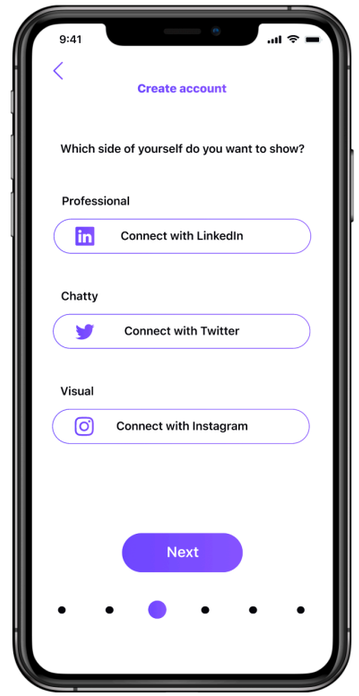
This first example shows the signup flow for a social media app. Here we looked into what parameters and profile information one could fill out to make ones profile more transparent and reflective of who the person is.



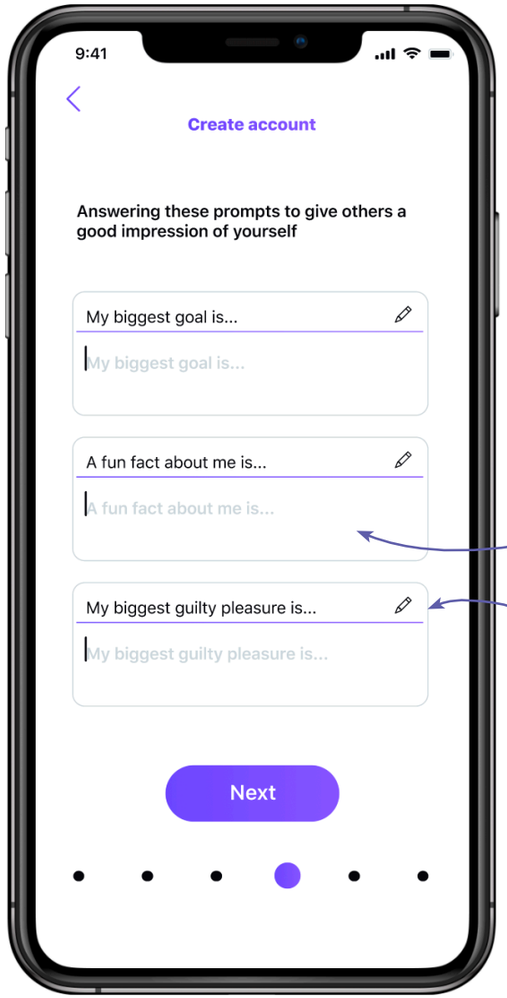
The user adds in some basic profile information in the beginning. They try to answer everything with an open mindset like the introduction told them.

The user gets the option to choose what kind of personality they want to show. They decide that they want a visual profile.

There could be many sides to a person, and these are only to show a few examples.



1 - SHOW MORE PERSONALITY



The user then has the task of answering prompts. This is to give a better impression of what kind of person they are. The user spends some time reflecting on the questions.

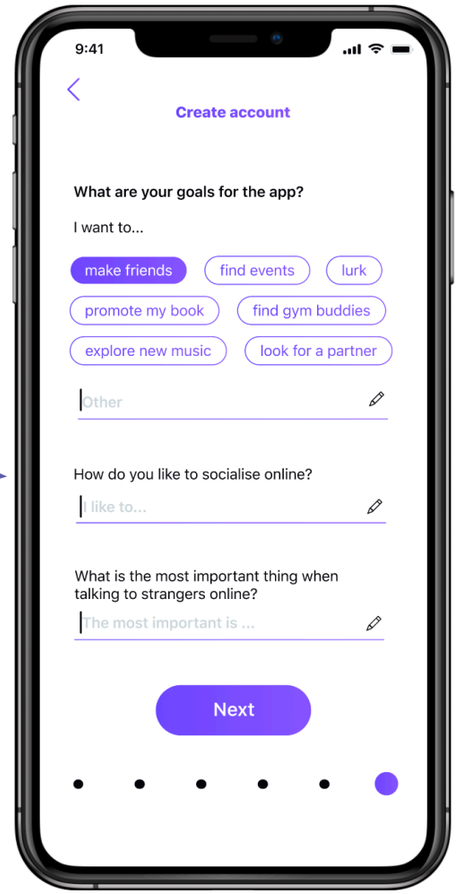
They can also choose to change the prompt between other alternatives, but they stick to the ones present.

The user can fill out details about themselves that can increases trust between people in the digital space.

QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF:

How would you feel if you treated social media as you would online dating?

The user fills in their personal preferences. These can be matched with other users later on.



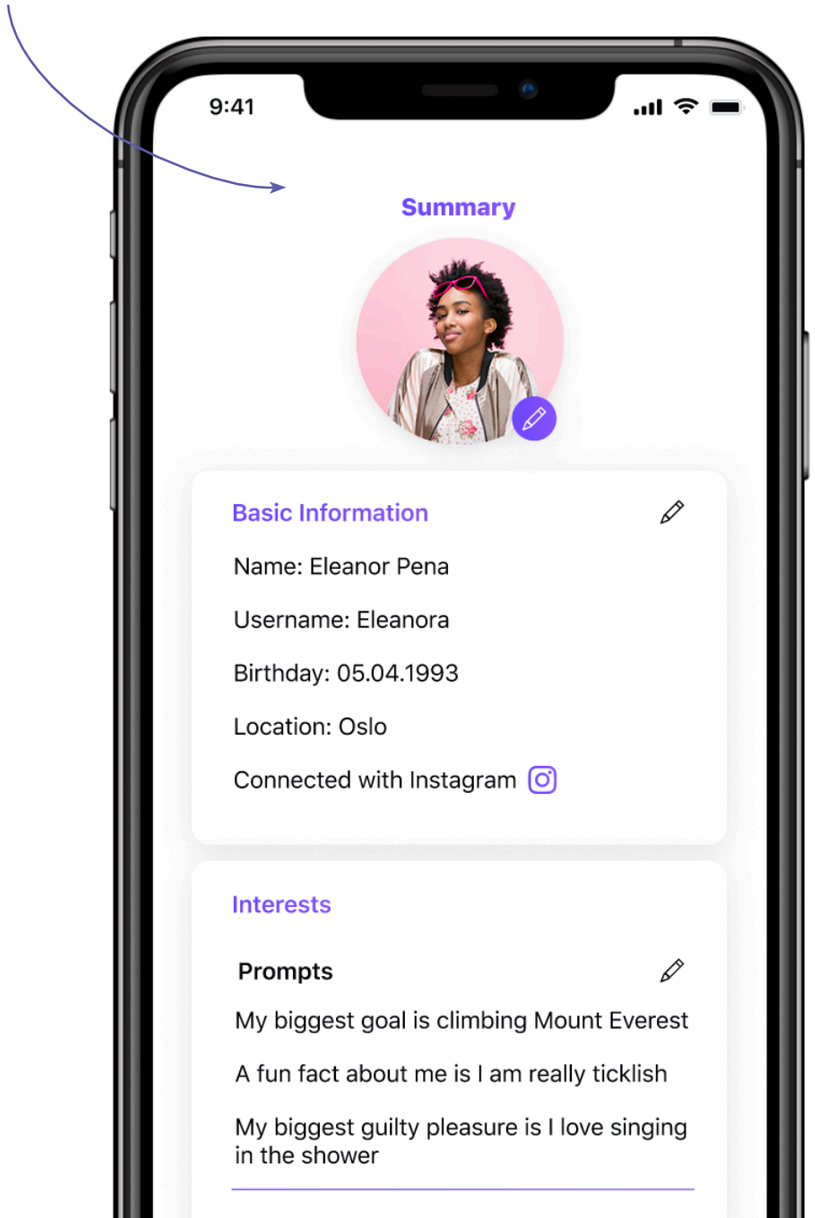
They round off their profile by answering a few questions about their ambitions and goals for the app. This is new to them as they don't really feel like social media apps make you think over how you wants to use the app, and even though it is a challenge at first, they felt they learned more about themselves.

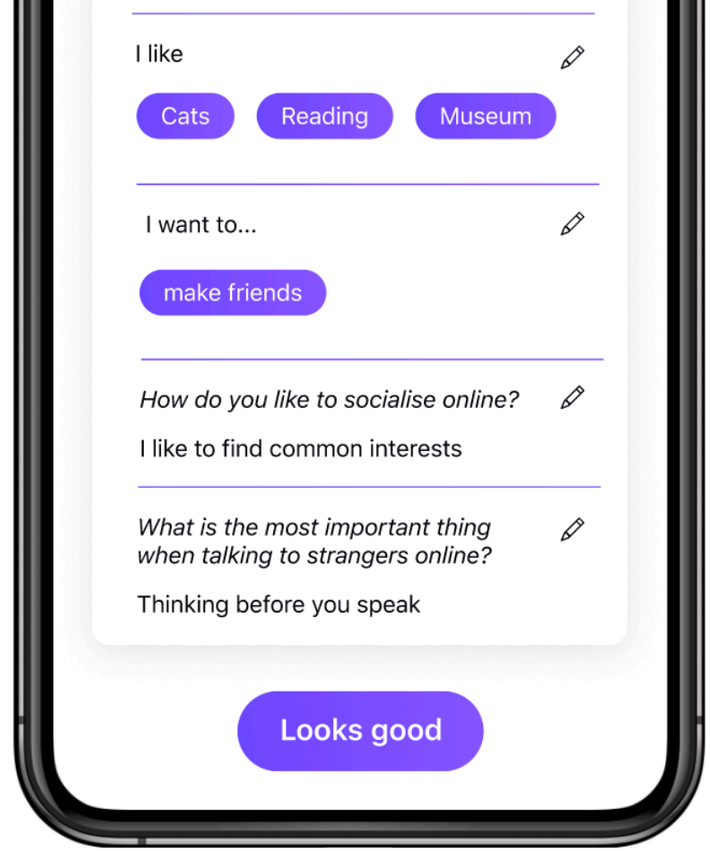
CONCEPT 1 - THE HUMAN SIDE

1 - SHOW MORE PERSONALITY

They get a summary of their profile information at the end. Here they would not be able to create their profile if they have not filled out all the fields.

The user feels a bit sceptical about filling out all the fields, but they are curious enough to try it out.





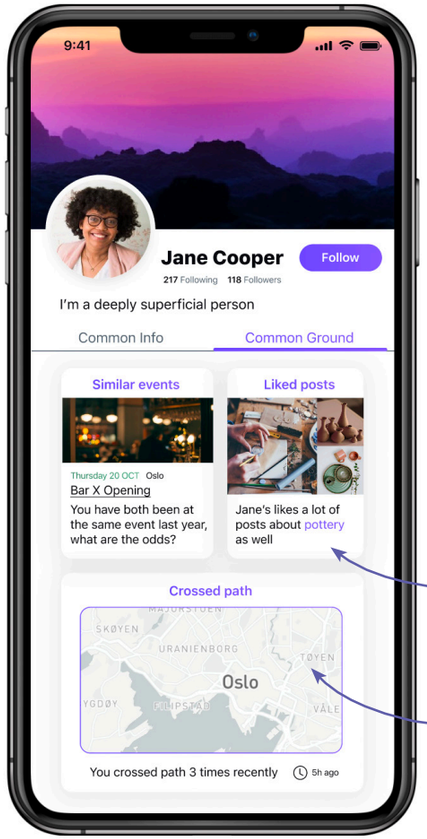
REASONING

This example is inspired by how the profile set-up on the dating app Hinge works. "Forcing" the user to include certain information on their profile is an interesting approach to appearing more personal and genuine. Since every person had to go through the same profile creation, one can find safety in seeing which people show the same level of investment in the community.

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

- Can less anonymity help increase the trust between people online?
- If this is not implemented on every social media platform, will those who want to keep their anonymity choose to use other platforms instead?
- A person could choose to fill out a profile un-seriously, but that would only prove to show their level of investment.

2 — COMMON GROUND

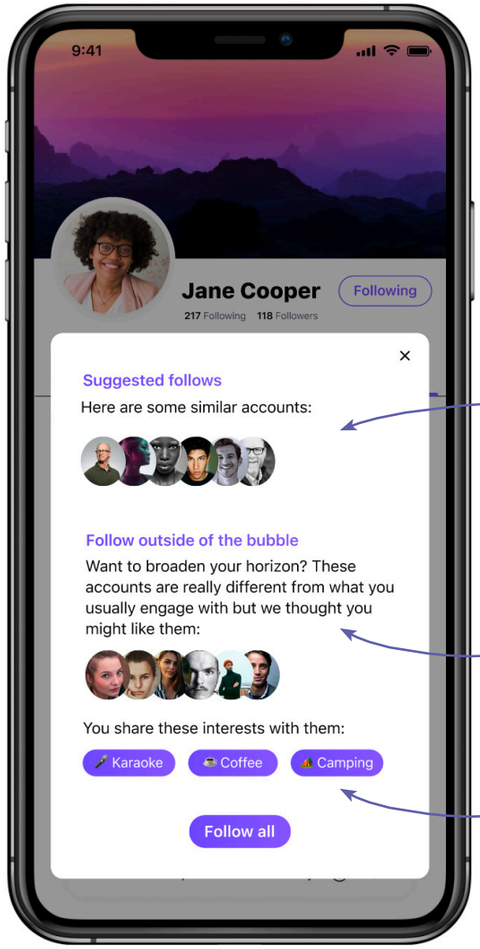


Profile of a person you do not follow yet.

Shows what you have in common through similar events and liked posts.

Inspired by the dating app Happn, one can see how many times one has crossed path with someone.

In this example we explored what it might look like if a profile showed common interests users had with each other, and how that would affect their view of them. How would a user feel if they see the other person likes a lot of the same posts? Or how would they react if they knew they have crossed path lately - either physically or digitally?



The user sees the typical "recommended profiles to follow" that every app has.

However, they are suprised at the new feature of following someone outside of your own bubble. It makes them curious.

They also see that despite the profiles being "different" they also share some common interests.

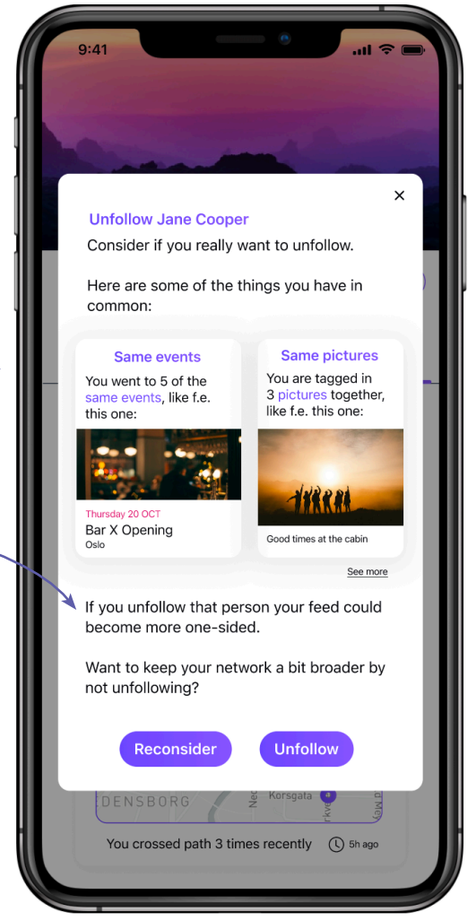
In this scenario the user decided to follow a person. Like in many other social media platforms they get recommendations on similar profiles to follow. However, unlike how it is today, this example also suggests accounts that are different to the ones they usually engage with but still point out some common interests. This is to make them see that there can still be a connection.

Angry comment that annoys the user

Wants to unfollow

Some time has passed and the user sees that the person they once followed continuously posts content that they really don't agree with. When they choose to unfollow the person they get a pop-up.

The pop-up shows them things they have in common and asks them to reconsider. This is meant to make the user stop and consider their decision, should they really unfollow someone because of their differentiating views? Or can this help them broaden their understanding of other people's opinions and views?



QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF:

Who do you choose to unfollow and why?

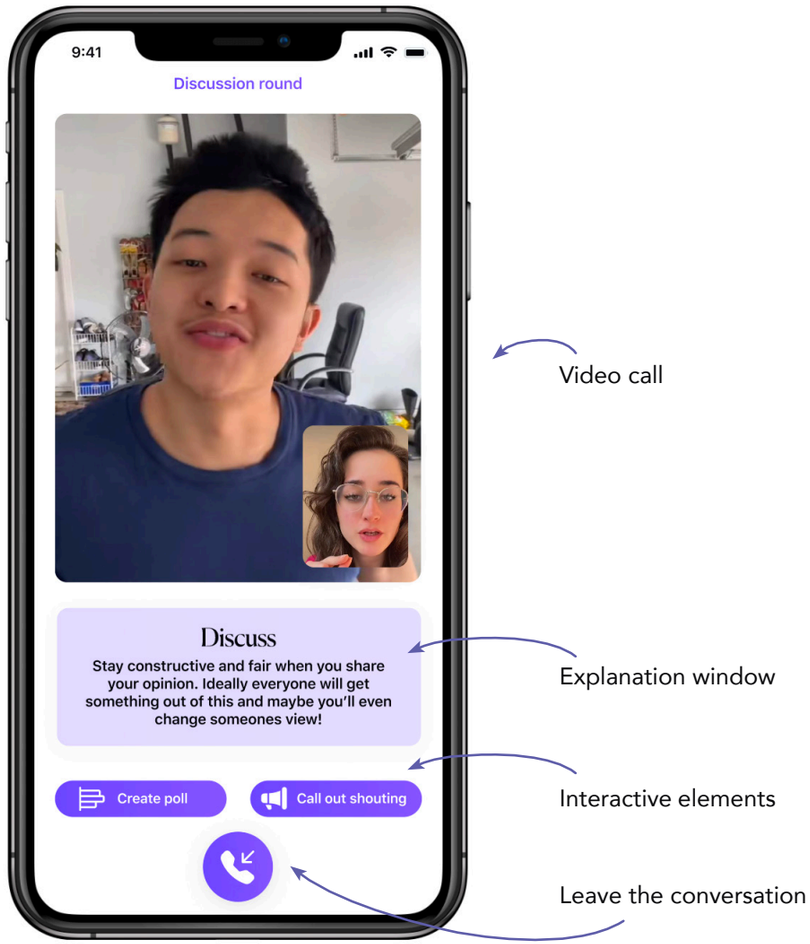
REASONING

In our screen-based world it's easy to forget who you are interacting with online and that there's more to a person than the personality they take on through their online persona. Being reminded of their humanity, but also memories or common interests might make people more considerate of who they follow and unfollow. And maybe even challenge themselves to follow a larger variety of people.

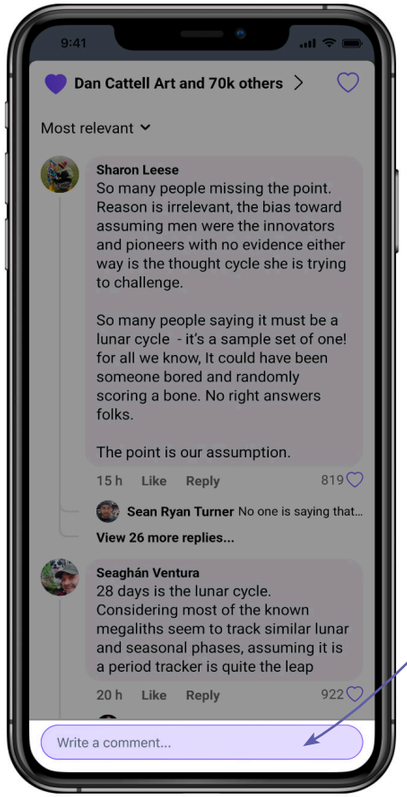
REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

- Would this example make you feel a stronger connection to a stranger? A friend? A family member?
- Would people want to share their own information for the sake of a nicer digital space, or would they rather prefer to stay anonymous?
- What would happen to your algorithm once you follow a good diversity of people?

3 — HEATED DISCUSSIONS

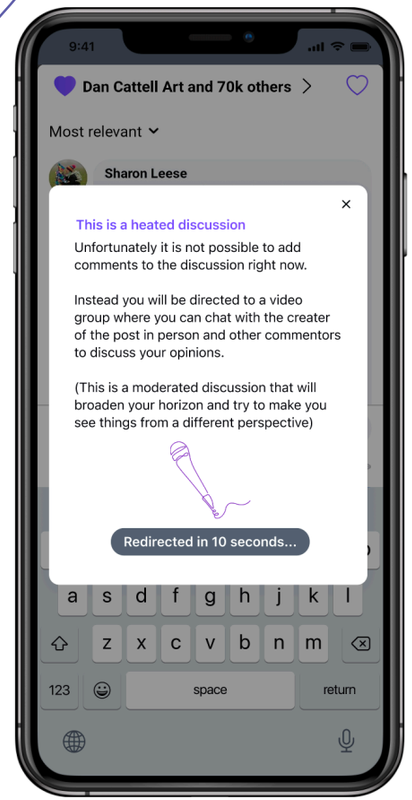


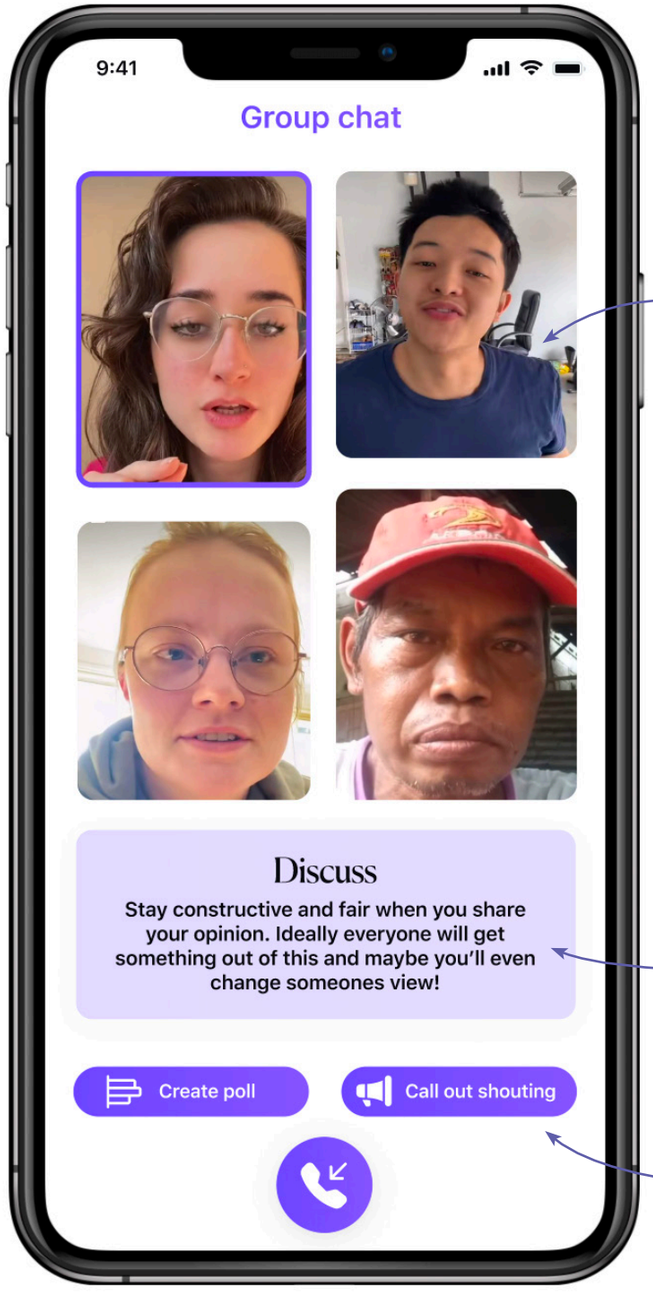
For the last example we focussed on addressing digital troublemakers in comment sections. When commenting in a heated discussion the comment button will take you to a video call with the people forcing them to talk face-to-face.



The user is scrolling through a heated argument on a platform. They see some comments that they do not agree on, and decide they want to comment themselves.

Once they've clicked the comment section, they get a pop-up. They get informed that they are in a heated discussion and that they can't comment right now. Instead, they'll be redirected to a group chat with the creator of the post and other commentators.





You do not have the option to be anonymous here as the point is to encourage a face-to-face approach.

In the group chat the members get encouraged to stay constructive and fair.

There are different options for engaging within the conversation.

QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF:

What is the difference between talking to a stranger online vs a stranger on the street?

REASONING

With this example we wanted to encourage people to think about what would happen if they got to meet the human on the other side of the screen. This prototype takes inspiration from voice chats from Discord where people can jump in and out, as well as video calling in general, which ties it to the personal aspect. We didn't want the user to have the choice of turning off their video to make the experience more extreme.

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

- How would this change the way we interact with others digitally?
- Would video calling scare away digital troublemakers, or would it turn into a fun experience? What about the lurkers?
- Would people behave differently, and reconsider their original comment?
- Should one remove the "end call" button when entering to force people to actually stay?

3 USERS

HOW DID THIS AFFECT THE USERS?

Levi the Lurker

Levi the Lurker felt he could relate better to other users like this. Seeing more information and personality from others helped him to find a sense of belonging online. It also lowered the threshold for him to make new friends and connect to people.

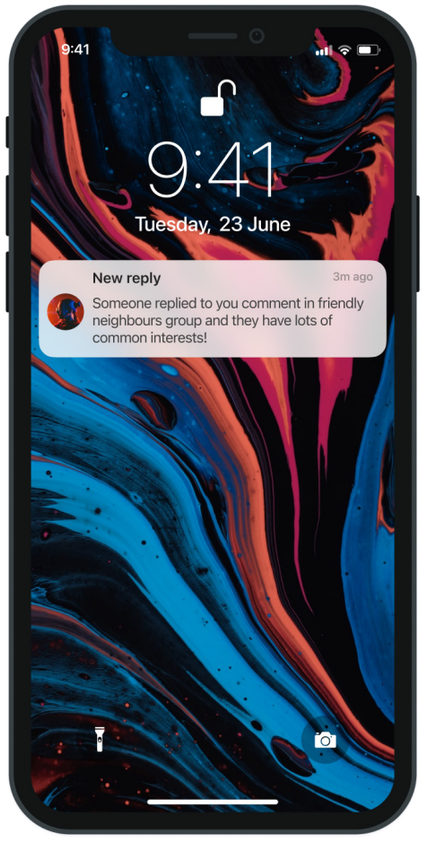
Dan the Digital Troublemaker

For Dan the Digital Troublemaker seeing more personality demystified the other person behind the screen. After interacting more with different people online he found that he still disagrees with them but at the same he also gets something valuable out of the interaction.

Helpful Hana

Through the new features Helpful Hana was able to browse the profiles of people in discussions. This helped her understand the people discussing and could guide their conversations civilly.

FURTHER POSSIBILITIES



If the user gets a new reply to their comment/ post the notification can tell them about what similar interests they share as well.

For each concept we will show a few examples of other sides to our directions. This is to show what opportunities are out there, and also to show a few ideas we had along the way.

One could show other examples of similarities that are less personal, or less specific, yet still fun and explorative.

True colours personality test

Jane is also over 30 % a blue person

Logical
Organised
Analytical
Cautios

Similar websites

Jane and you visited a lot of similar websites lately, maybe you were even on the same website at the same time?

Vision of future

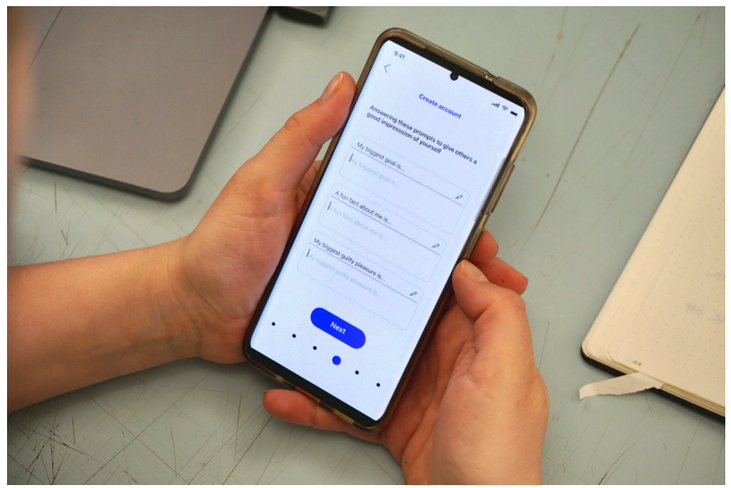
Jane is also a very forward thinking person that cares about the planet 🌍

Two thruths and a lie

Guess which of Jane's statements is a lie

- My mom has a twin
- I had 6 dogs growing up
- I have an etsy shop

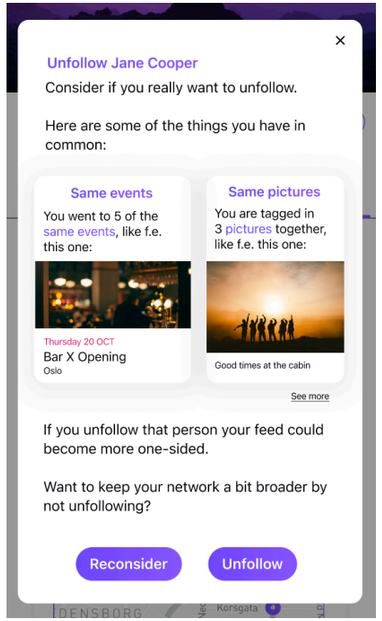
TESTING



“Show More Personality”

FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS

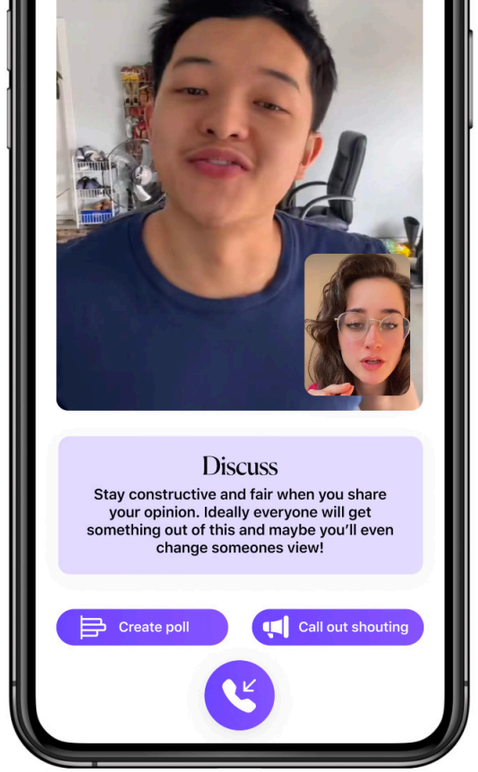
Upon testing our first direction, “Show more Personality”, people expressed their scepticism to sharing personal information. “It’s very different to share information with people on LinkedIn than it is on Snapchat”. A user thought that a person with bad intentions might not end up answering honestly to the questions, however, they also said that “there’s only so much one can lie about before one’s true personality shines through anyway”. “I imagine seeing a rude comment from someone and then going into their profile seeing that one of their goals is to be nice to people. That will tell me a lot about who they are…” They also mentioned how anonymity is important if you are a place where you are not accepted for who you are, for example your sexuality. It would be important for a famous person as well; they wouldn’t want their past mistakes to label them forever. Their answers reminded us of how group dynamics vary depending on the size - there’s more trust and comfort in sharing in smaller groups. However, despite sharing being scary, they also agreed that more trust and transparency could be develop from sharing more of yourself.



“Common Ground”

FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS

Moving on to the second concept, ”Common Ground”, people generally liked the idea of knowing more about another person online. At the same time, they felt like it could be scary to show this much information about themselves. Some users liked that it made them think before they unfollowed someone. While other users were sceptical saying, “this could be very manipulating. You might have followed a Nazi by mistake, or you are trying to unfollow your ex. Suddenly it’s not just your ex gaslighting you, but the platform as well.” Two users talking together also expressed how recommending opposite profiles of an unproblematic person could be tricky - would you suddenly get profile recommendations of harmful topics? They joked, giving it an alternative name: ”Do you want to tap into your dark side?” These little steps to stop and reflect were appreciated by many of the users, but at the same time brought up a lot of scepticism.



“Heated Discussions”

FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS

Lastly, our third direction, “Heated Discussion”, evoked the strongest reactions. They were unsure about being thrown into a sudden video call saying that “the app might just shut down from a system like this, for all the unforeseen dick-pick situations and similar that you might see on the other side.” They also questioned what would happen if a nine year old and a 40 year old got put into the same discussion. “Omg, have I been talking to a nine year old?” Although face-to-face does indeed reveal the person for who they are, this could also remove the validation of their arguments. Sadly, in the world we live in, removing the anonymous filter could turn into a situation where your age, ethnicity, gender, etc, weigh more than your words. On the other hand one could question if this is that different from checking out Karen’s (55) profile picture on Facebook. They agreed that a feature like this could be fun for close groups of friends, but if it were between strangers, setting up a time for debate could be a better alternative. “The benefit with writing your comments is that you know you won’t be interrupted. You have time to think about your wording.”

CONCLUSIONS

REFLECTIONS

To sum up, in this concept we tried to look at how seeing the human side would affect users. We reflected on what we wanted to achieve with this concept even before we started prototyping. From testing we were hoping to get similar reflections from our users and also some new thoughts and criticism.

Since trust and a sense of belonging seem to be key when it comes to good behaviour online, we asked ourselves the following questions: Would people understand each other better and feel more trust? Will they feel a stronger connection to a stranger? Would it change the way we interact with others digitally?

CRITIQUE

The way our digital world is set up, defined by big company’s algorithms and their questionable intentions, we wondered if there could be a world where people would be willing to share all this information. Data privacy, age limitations, and the safety of being anonymous are vital. The internet does not feel safe enough for this kind of openness yet, and we are sceptical if it will at all come to such a point. There will always be people abusing the system or people simply not wanting to use the platform and migrating to other ones. Another point worth mentioning is if people benefit from being shown “common things” with strangers. Some of our examples evoked fear in the users, wondering how the platform would know all these things about them.

Looking back at our prototypes we realised that showing examples of users in niche situations or with controversial opinions would be more interesting than putting in generic information. Here we saw the difference between designing for solutions versus designing for discussions.

POSSIBILITIES

What are the future possibilities of The Human Side? We’ve discovered how a concept that implements small changes, improvements and additional parameters can affect a user’s desire and reason for using a platform. As a designer we can design for platforms that attract specific users. Designing for all is what most platforms do today, and through this concept we have seen how smaller communities might just become the future. It might not be possible to create a universal platform everyone will feel safe in, but designers certainly have the power to elevate aspects of a person that are more worth elevating than what the polarisation is doing today. We can help users set their focus on what’s good and remind them of the world beyond the screen.

CONCEPT 2

CHANGING ENGAGEMENT

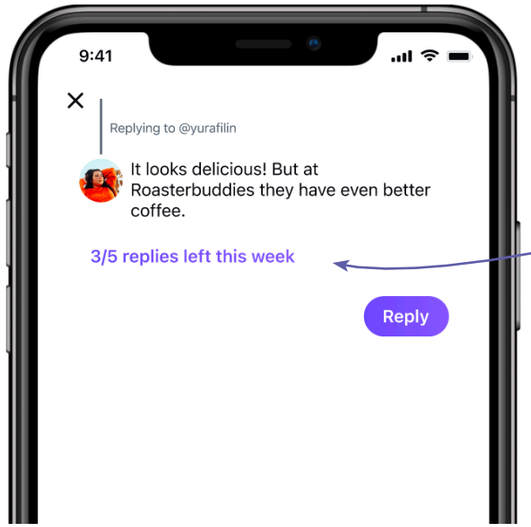
What if there were other ways of engaging online?

In this concept we explored how we could elevate other ways to engage on social media. The algorithm on many social platforms today would show you content that strengthens your own personal views. But how would people engage and interact if we changed some parameters and interface choices? There are several directions one could explore, but we chose to look at commenting, filtering algorithms and use of video.

CHANGING ENGAGEMENT

1— LIMITING COMMENTS

A user chooses to comment on this persons post.

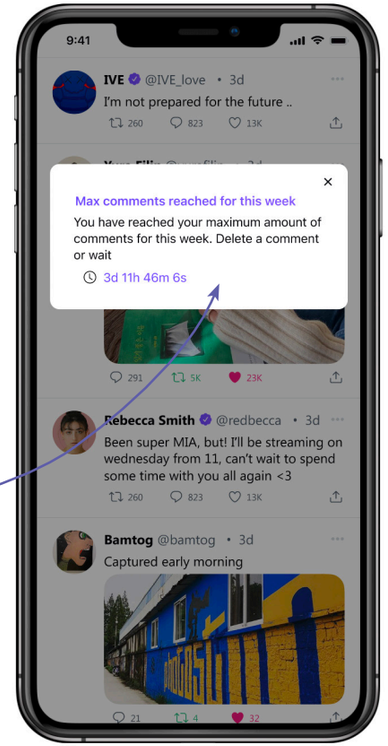


They write their comment, but see that they only have 3/5 replies left.

A user could have limits to certain amount of comments per day/week/ month etc.

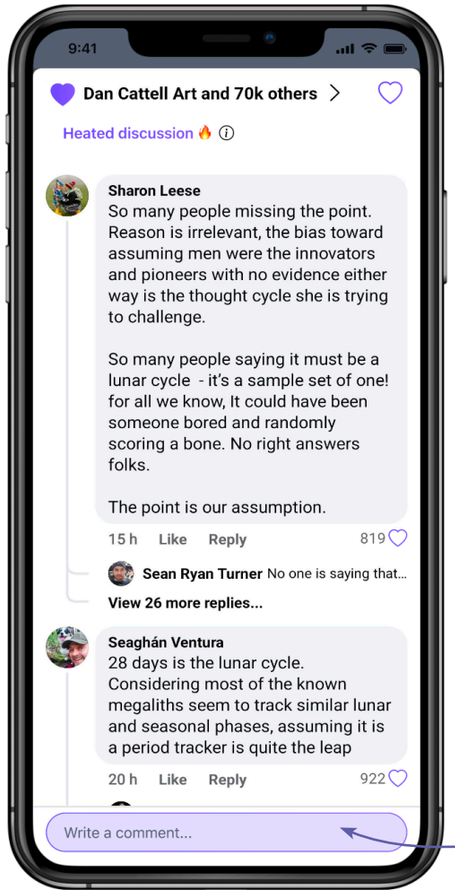
A limit might make people more precise in what they write and encourage putting in their two cents where it really matters.

The user chooses wisely where they want to use their comments. But at some point they reach their limit. Luckily they have the option of deleting another comment they made to make up space.



1. MAXIMUM OF COMMENTS

This first example explores two ways of limiting written comments. The first one looks at giving a fixed amount of comments for each user. The second one looks at receiving your angry comment as connecting the physical and digital by receiving your comment through, for example, a letter.



QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF:

How would you feel if you got a physical copy of all your comments ever?

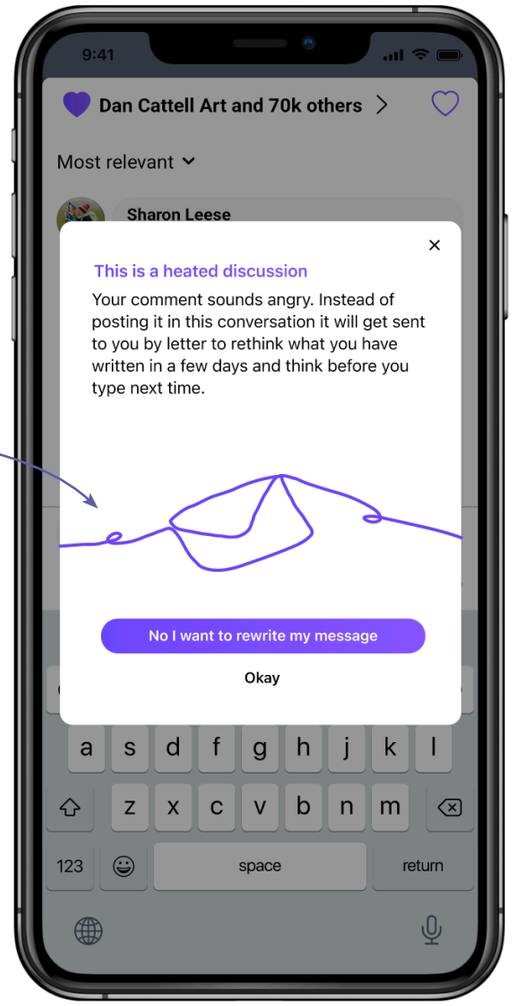
The user wants to comment on a post that aggravates them.

Could the system or an AI detect angry comments in places where there are heated discussions and encourage the user to revise before posting?

2. RECEIVING YOUR COMMENT AS SOMETHING TANGIBLE

The second example explores how receiving something tangible can have an impact on what the user writes.

The user writes out their comment, but the system could detect some use of words that alerted the system of an angry comment. A pop-up appeared.



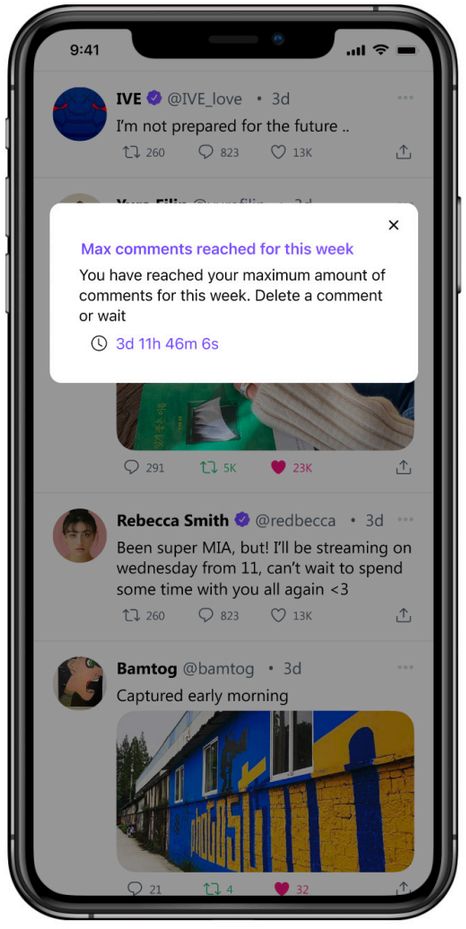
Sending something physical to get more of a connection to what you write.

Motivate the option to rethink what you write, rather than leave it as it is.

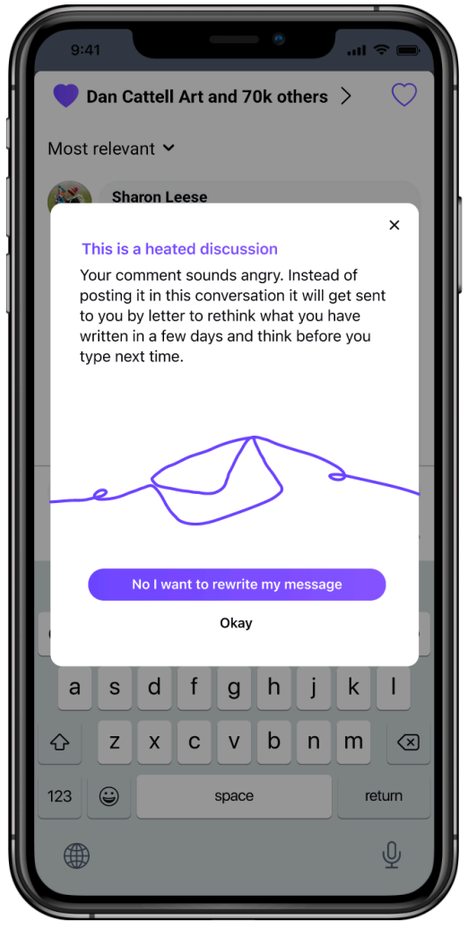
CONCEPT 2 - CHANGING ENGAGEMENT

1 - LIMITING COMMENTS

Maximum of comments



Receiving your comment as something tangible



REASONING

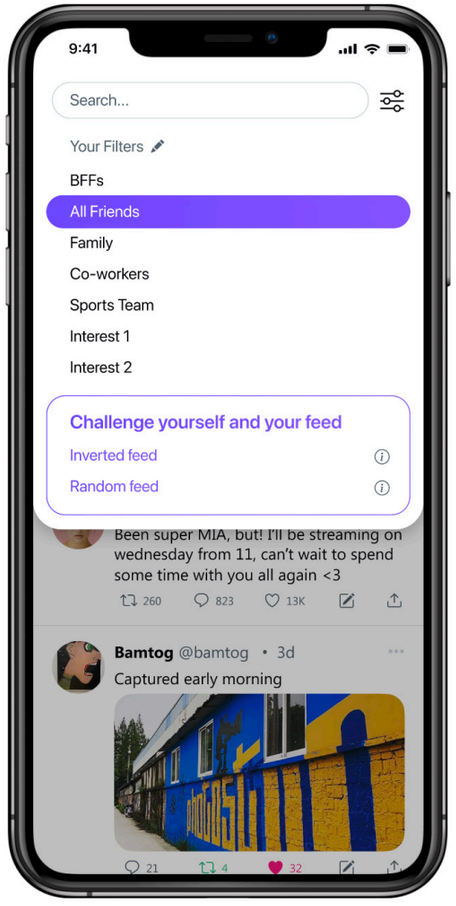
Today most social media platforms are free to use to any limit one desires. The idea of adding limitations or subscriptions to such platforms is a relevant discussion. This example takes inspiration from this idea as well as making "untouchable" comments tangible.

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

- Would limiting the amount of comments people can write make them more reflected over where and what they write?
- Or will this feel limiting to their freedom of speech?
- How would these ideas play out for users who are creators?
- What does it feel like to get your angry comment as something physical?
- And would an idea like this need to be implemented to every aspect of the platform, or will limiting comments be enough to hinder polarisation?

2 — CHALLENGE YOUR FEED

The user has created personal feeds that show different sides to their algorithms.



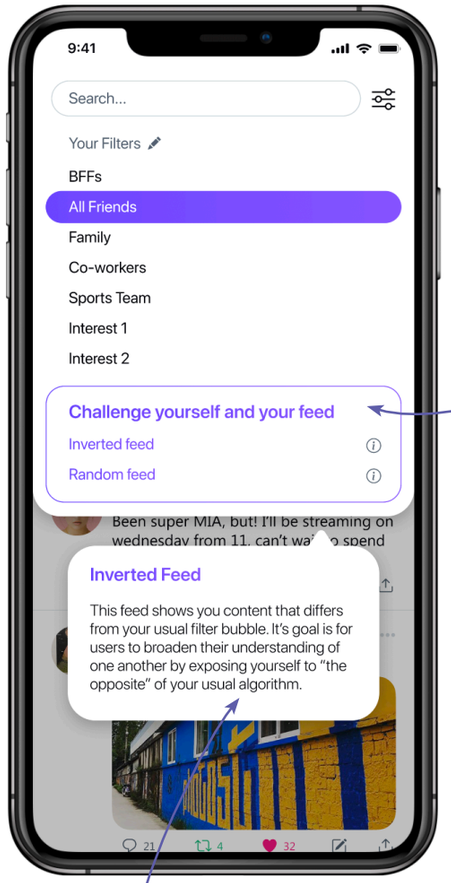
In this example there exists a platform that lets you categorise your feed into different algorithms. You might have a feed that only shows friends related content, you can have a feed where you only see work related content, or maybe only news related content.

In this scenario a new function has been added with a purpose of challenging the user and their typical feed algorithm. The new feature lets you try an inverted feed - letting you see opposite opinions from your own, or topics that are very different from yours. It also lets you try a random feed - showing a random persons feed and what their algorithm looks like.

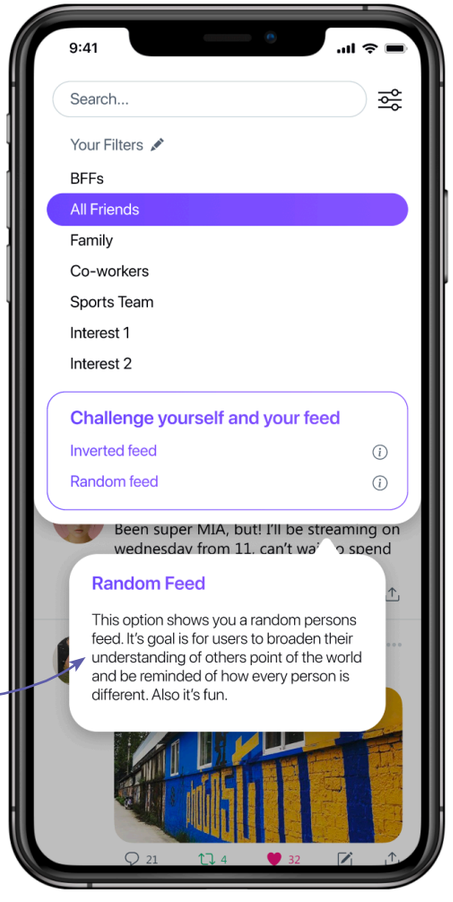
QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF:

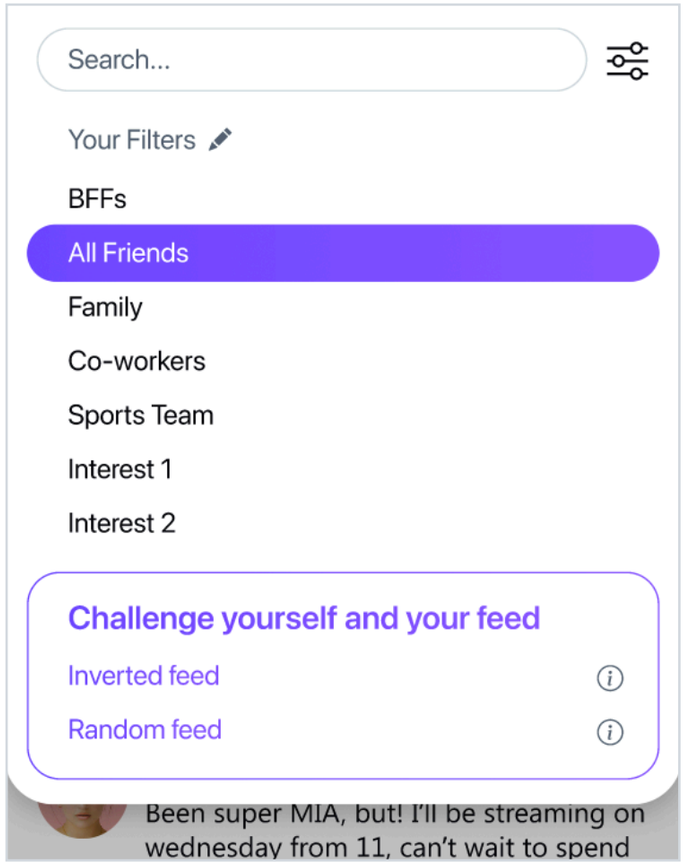
What would your inverted feed look like?

A new feature that is meant to challenge you and your feed.



A short but honest explanation of what the new features mean.





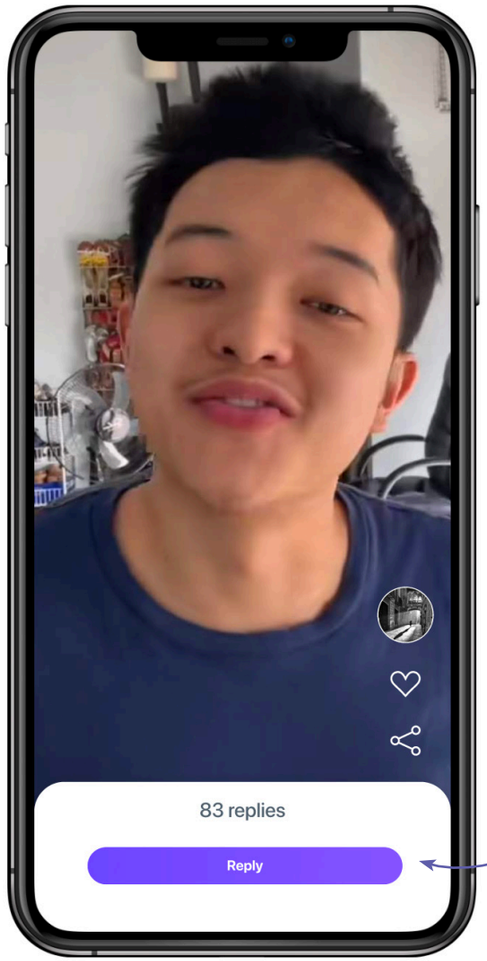
REASONING

It is sometimes important to have a reminder that people are very different. Algorithms are scary good at showing you what you want to see, but open and helpful algorithms are few to none. Some people need a reminder of what exists outside their own bubble. And there is a need for more choice and transparency of algorithms.

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

- How would seeing inverted algorithms affect a persons reflectivity over themselves and others?
- Will they be inspired and gain better understanding over other peoples opinions?
- Or will they feel provoked and go further into their own bubble?
- Maybe simply knowing that you have the option to easily explore other algorithms, feeds and opinions, helps remind people to stay reflected?

3 — VIDEO REPLYING



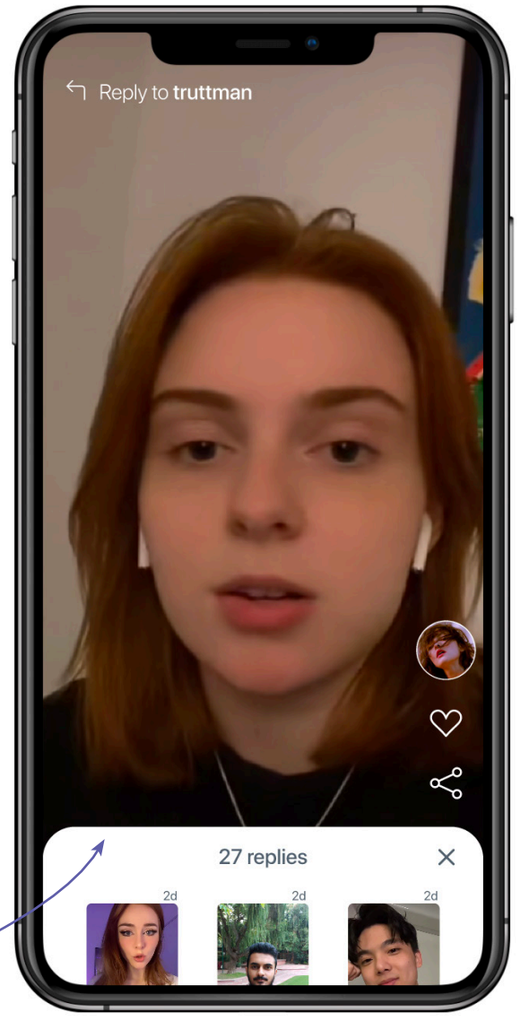
The user can scroll through video content, like on TikTok or reels on Instagram.

The only way to comment is to reply with a video of your own.

In this example we exist on a platform that only consisting of videos. The only way to engage with a persons content is through “commenting” with a video of their own.

QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF:

How would you feel if the norm was to communicate through video?

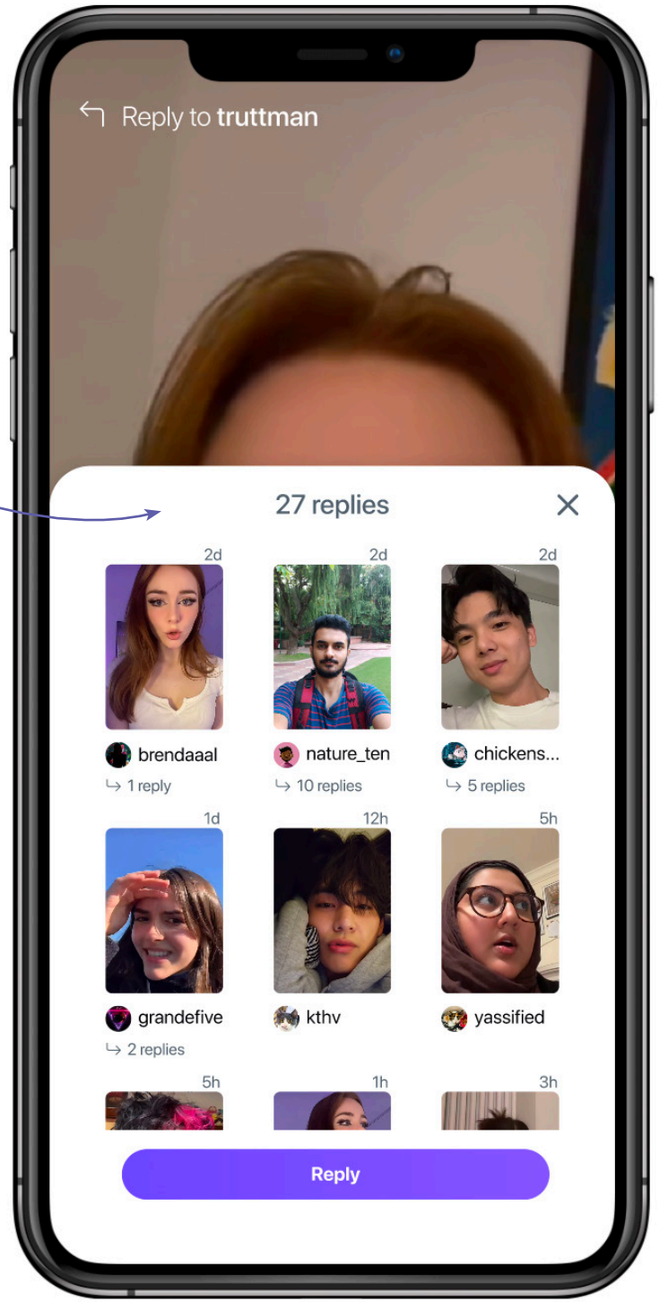


Exposing your face makes you more trustable, but also easy to see through. And challenges the user to show themselves instead of hiding behind a screen.

For each reply the user can see other replies.

One can browse through all the video replies and watch the next replies as you would open a comment section.

The user sees a few different videos, but not all of them. Since they don't browse through them all, they miss the mean replies that could have made their day sour.



REASONING

Inspired by TikTok, Twitch, VLive, Discord and Snapchat; video is a very good tool to appear more genuine and trustworthy, and can weed away the users trying to hide behind a screen. It creates connection and trust to a person and sometimes even a sense of belonging.

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

- Although this function might be positive in many areas, would it maybe not take into concideration the shy lurkers?
- This method might be easy for younger generations to engage in, but might harder for older generations to feel a part of.
- Using video doesn't limit peoples freedom of speech, but it does challenge the user to expose themselves more. Will the digital troublemakers simply find other platforms that doesn't limit their anonymity?
- To have some sort of order, could one combine facial recognition and reporting to stop the creeps?

3 USERS

HOW DID THIS AFFECT THE USERS?

Levi the Lurker

Levi the Lurker appreciated that there were more ways of interacting that fit him personally. This motivated him to engage more in situations he usually wouldn't.

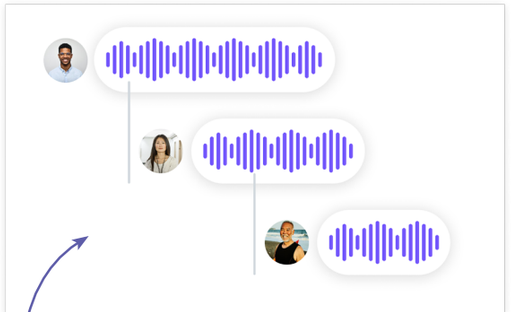
Dan the Digital Troublemaker

Through engaging with content in a different way, Dan the Digital Troublemaker was inspired to change their negative commenting habits to fit the new features.

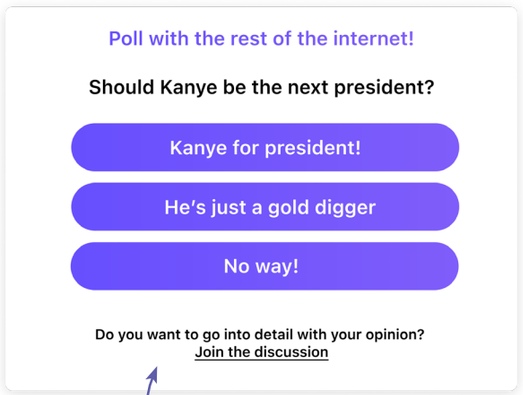
Helpful Hana

The new features changed the parameters of how Helpful Hana would engage normally, this helped her facilitate for more nuanced discussions between people.

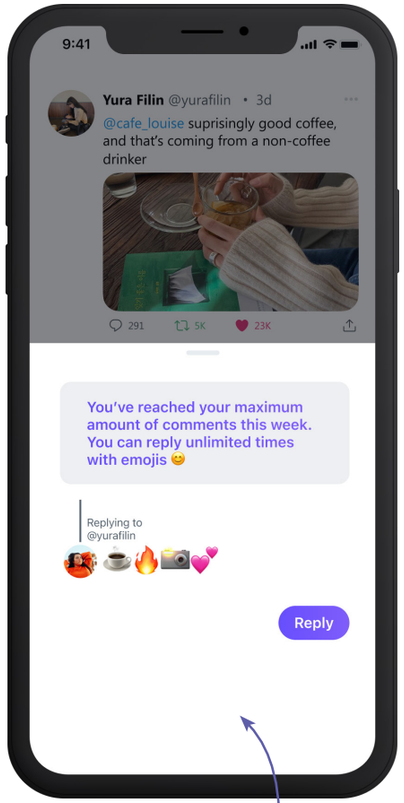
FURTHER POSSIBILITIES



Instead of only using video, could one only use audio to communicate?



Polls are an easy way to engage, and easy for lurkers to participate in. if one wants to elaborate on the topic one could join the discussion around it.

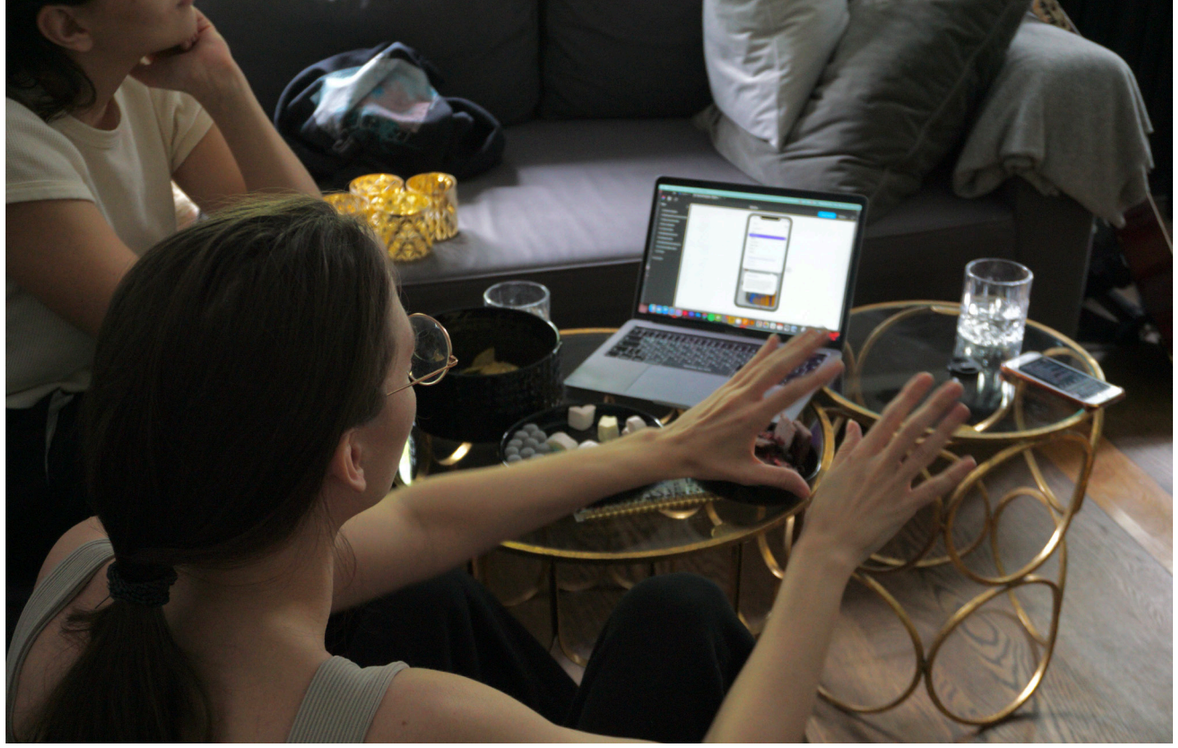


When one has reached your maximum of 'text comments', could one continue commenting in another format?

Could the algorithm be more transparent and communicate to you about what you usually see, while also recommending you other alternatives?

What if we were to bring the angry comments and polarisation out of the digital and into the physical through billboard posters?

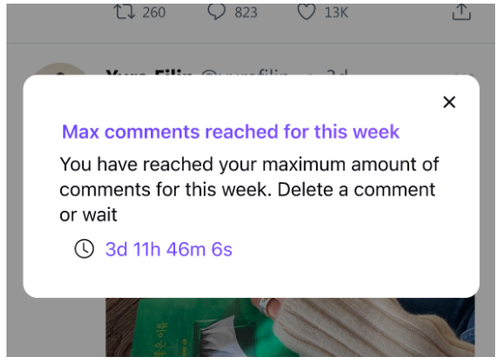
TESTING

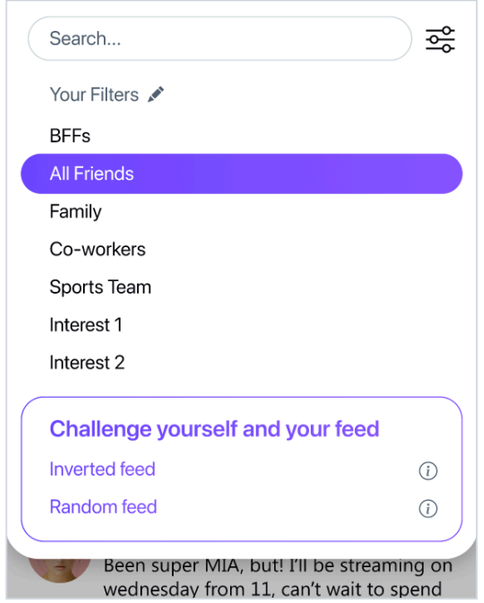


“Limiting Comments”

FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS

Testing the first direction, “Limiting comments”, our testers pointed out that limiting comments is “going against what social media platforms want”, which one could argument is a good thing. However, they also mentioned how it would silence the majority. “I get the idea - make people think over their comments so that they don’t write anything bad, but that means silencing the good ones as well.” A user brought to light how some people shouldn’t be considering what they should be commenting, but more if they should be commenting at all. Some users thought it was interesting to work with constraints in this way. And some also liked the concept of mixing up the physical and digital by sending letters but felt it might be hard to know if this would help improve the polarisation.

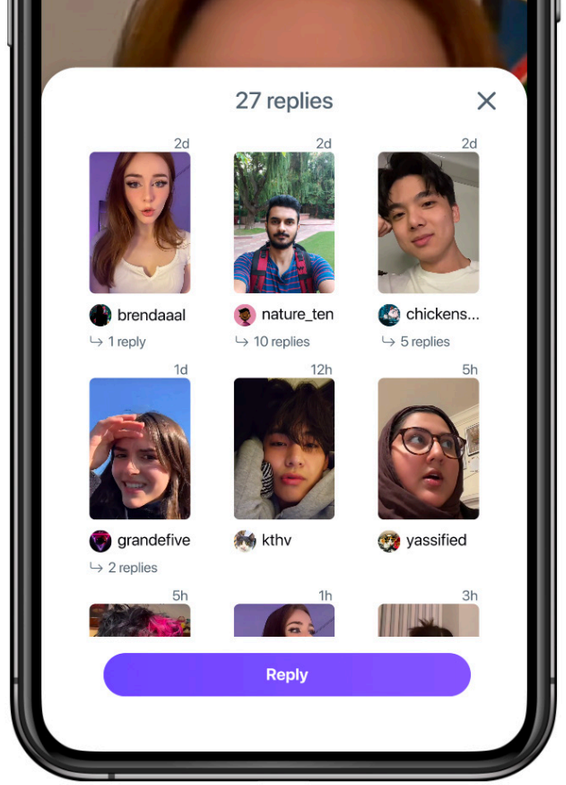




“Challenge Your Feed”

FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS

In the next direction, “Challenge Your Feed”, users liked the idea of sorting your algorithms into your own categories. A user mentioned how the random feed could be interesting for places like TikTok where the algorithm is super curated for you personally. While they were a bit more sceptical to the inverted feed, saying how they might only try it once. “It’s easy to get bad profiles and posts up on the inverted feed, and if someone is looking for someone to harass, it’s very easy to do so through it.” When asked how they thought a digital troublemaker would use the feature, the users didn’t have a lot of faith in them and believed they would simply scroll past the content that doesn’t fit their view.



“Video Replying”

FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS

Our last direction within this concept, “Video Replying”, was received both critically and positively by our users. The ones under 25 years old were more in touch with the video-only style and believed in a TikTok inspired like format. “This would not work for lurkers, but for active users it might be a plausible and fun solution.” While users over 25 had a hard time relating to the format and felt it wouldn’t work for them. A user mentioned how “there can be a threshold with recording yourself and replying to something is something one would want to do somewhat fast. You won’t have the backspace button in the same way. It might create low quality content, or very slow paced content.” Other users said it would depend very much on who was their audience if they were to reply by video.

CONCLUSIONS

REFLECTIONS

In our second concept we explored different ways of engaging. We thought this could elevate being users in different ways. The questions that followed us through the process are as following:

Would different ways of engaging change how users encounter one another? Could it broaden your horizon to have limitations or think in another way? Would people focus less on the negative? Will there be a more positive outlook on interacting on social media?

CRITIQUE

In general, giving people more ways to engage might go both ways. It depends very much on what type of user would be using it. Some features would be great for consumers while others might hinder them form contributing. Similarly, some ways of engaging might play against what the interests of the big companies are, making it difficult to imagine them being implemented - or impossible depending on how willing a company wants to change. We also didn’t feel like our testing helped people focus less on the negative and more on the positive, but for this there might be a need for testing these in real life situations - which is a challenge in itself as we cannot tell lurkers to “be social” or engage.

POSSIBILITIES

While it is hard to test social aspects of engaging, we still believe we can use apps and platforms that work well today to explore new aspects of being social. We see a lot of potential in implementing more ways of engaging today. Every person is individual, we cannot force users to engage on every kind of platform, but we can observe what situations and what nudges inspire them to engage. Designers would probably benefit from looking towards social platforms that are on the rise and use what works best lay out a ground for many different users.

CONCEPT 3

TOOLS FOR GARDENERS

What if there were more tools to help consumers improve the polarising content?

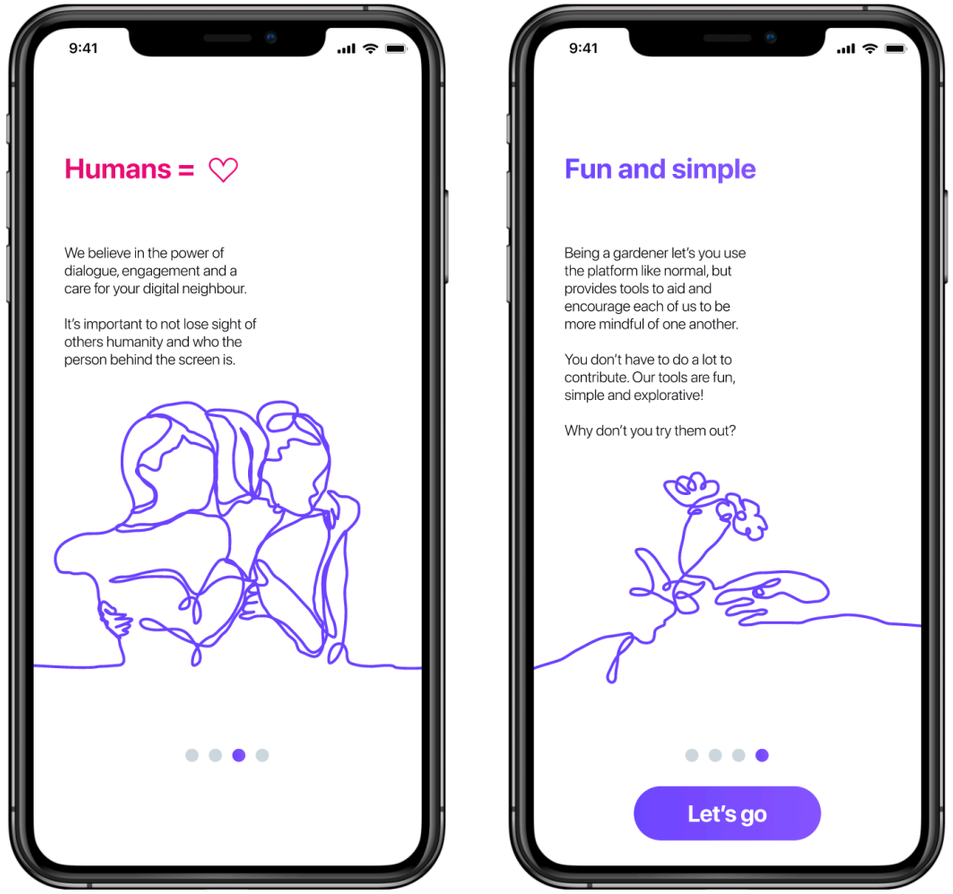
In this concept we explored how we can give consumers more tools to help decrease the polarisation online. We introduce the term “gardener” and show a few examples of how a gardener could work on social media. Our examples show the use of prompts, editing posts, and finding and connecting opposing opinions.

TOOLS FOR GARDENERS

GARDENER INTRODUCTION

A short onboarding of the new role online: The Gardener. This could potentially be implemented after an update of the platform, or after creating an account the platform could introduce a set of roles one can take on as a social media users of that platform.

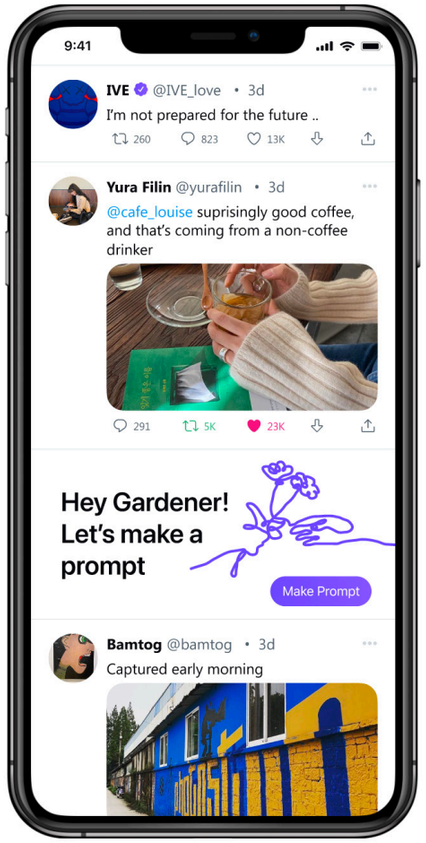
A transparent and honest introduction, explaining the goals and importance of the new feature.



When clicking the button one can be shown where to find the different tools and encourage the user to try them out.

There could be a preview of what the tools could look like in context as well.

1— CREATING AND RECEIVING PROMPTS

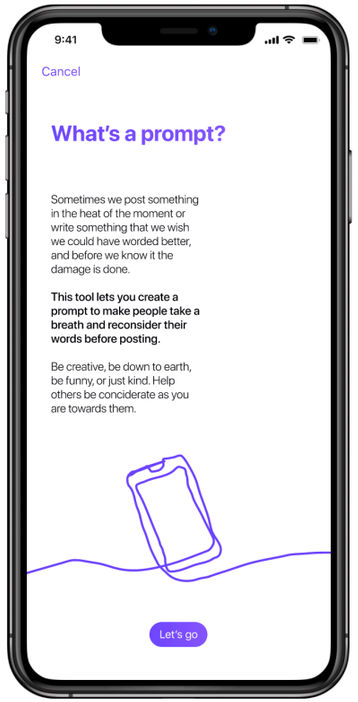


One day when the user scrolls down their feed a prompt invitation appears.

Several of the gardener features could be introduced like this. They can work as small reminders, or fun activities to pass your scrolling time as well. Why limit your scrolling to liking, commenting and sharing?

1. CREATING A PROMPT

The first example introduces the idea of halting posts or comments that could be harmful through pausing the person with a prompt. The prompt is not meant to stop the person from posting, but rather give them an opportunity to think and re-consider their words. We will first take you through how these prompts are made.



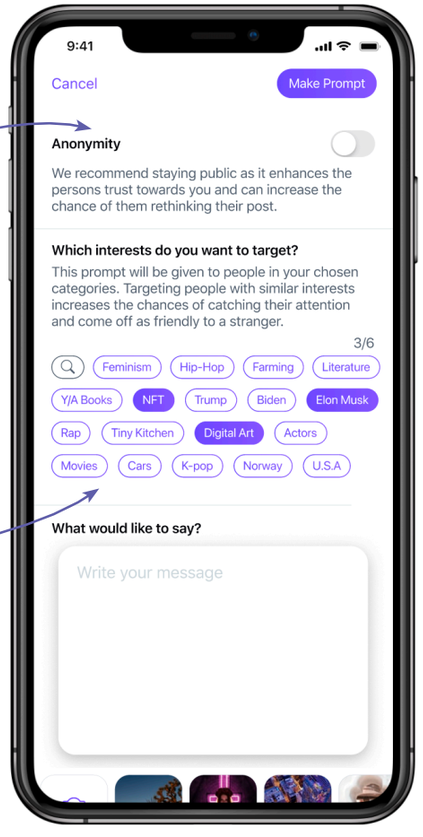
The user gets a short introduction to the concept of creating prompts as they've never done it before.

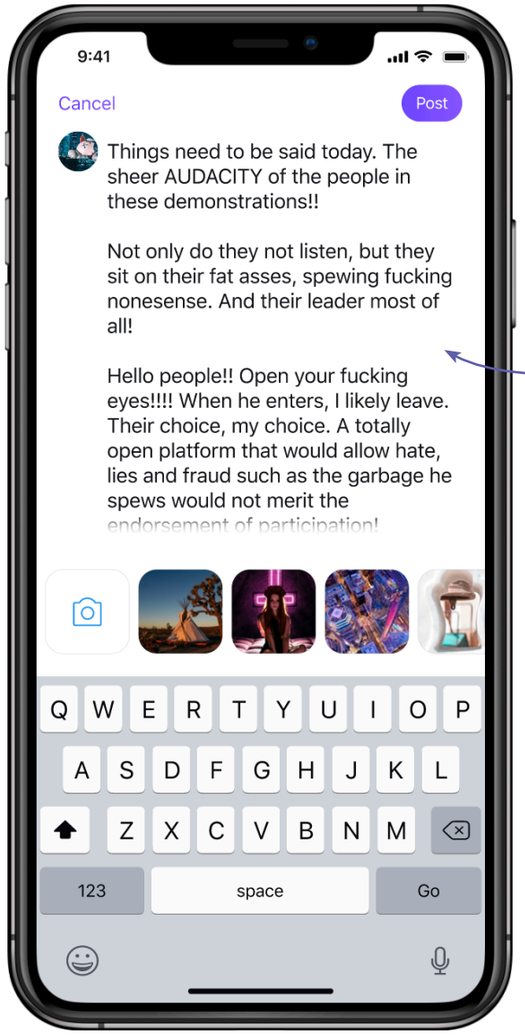
For the user to grasp the concept, they could be shown examples of what it could look like in context, and who would receieve them.

The user is a bit unsure about contributing with the tool as they would like to stay private, but soon sees there is an option of being anonymous which comforts them.

The user can choose to target users through interests.

When making a prompt we believe there is an importance in relating to the person you get the prompt from. Specific and relatable prompts are more likely to get the users attention than a general one.



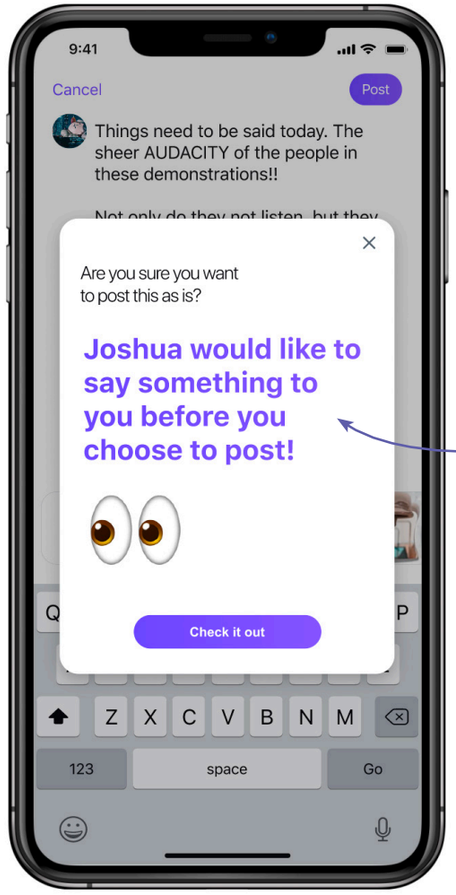


2. RECEIVING A PROMPT
These prototypes show how a creator receives the created prompts.

In another place, an angry creator is creating a post about something that triggered them.

A digital troublemaker has been detected! When the angry creator decides to click the post or comment button, a prompt targeting their profile's interests will appear. This prompt appears from a random user who made a prompt targeting matching interests to the angry creator.

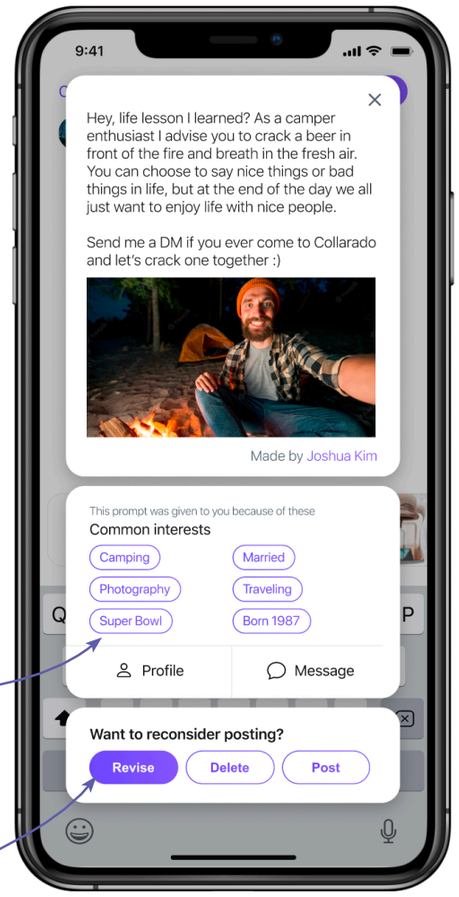
The prompts could appear when the platforms system, through an AI for ex., detects a heated or harmful post.



QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF:

If you think before you speak, what makes you think before you post?

The angry user tries posting put gets stopped by a pop-up.



The angry creator can also see common interests in hopes of feeling a connection to people that are similar. This might also increase respect.

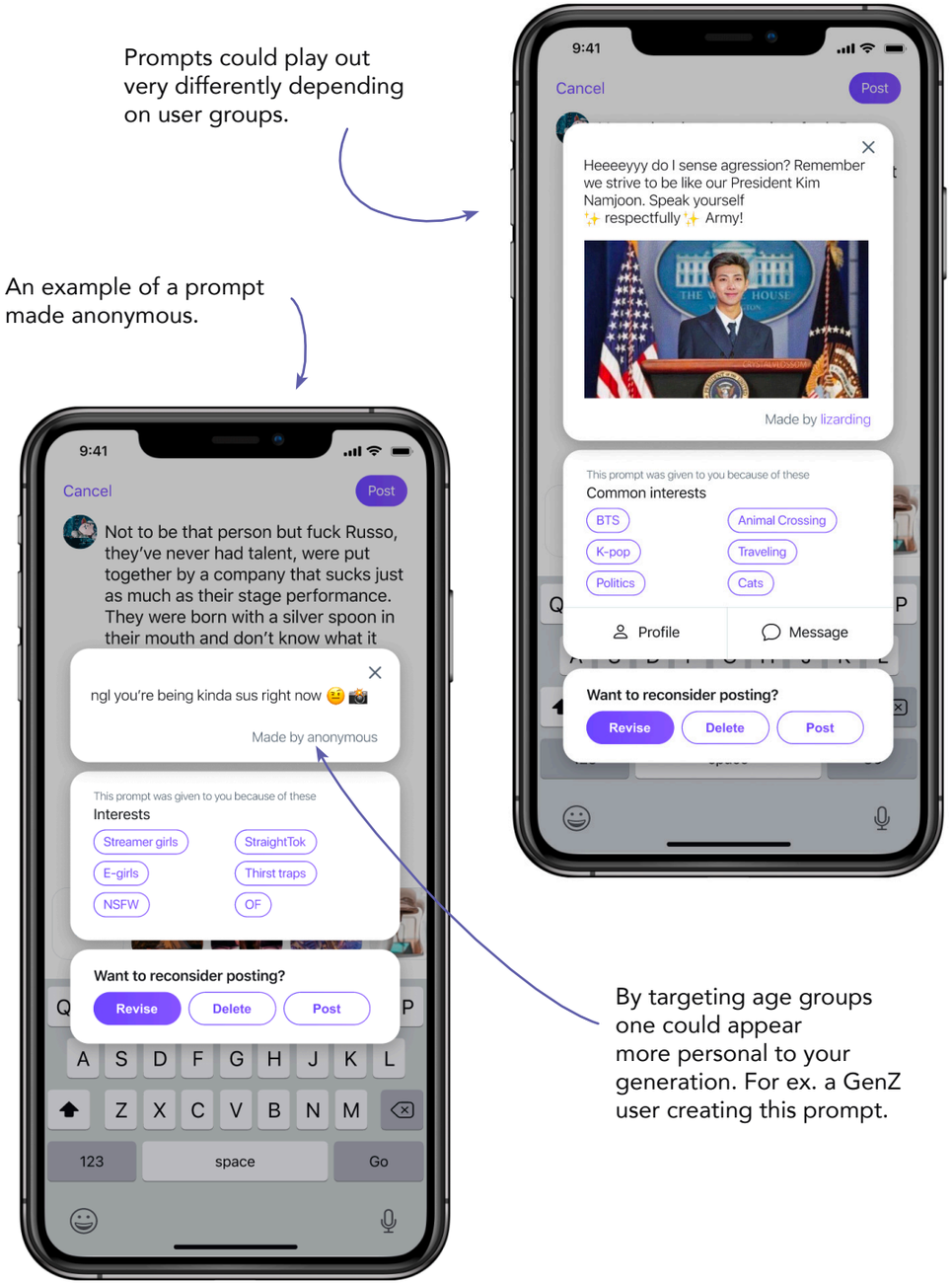
In an anonymous setting no personal information would show, such as these.

The user gets the option to revise their post.

1 - CREATING AND RECEIVING PROMPTS

Prompts could play out very differently depending on user groups.

An example of a prompt made anonymous.



By targeting age groups one could appear more personal to your generation. For ex. a GenZ user creating this prompt.

REASONING

This example tries to take action before the avoidable happens. Today it is very easy to post whatever, whenever. Not that expressing oneself should be harder, but setting limits, precautions, or a simple pause might encourage more people to reconsider their actions.

When entering closed Facebook groups one often has to answer a few questions before getting approved. On Weverse you have to "officially" enter an artists page by going through a few sign up steps. Adding an extra button of approval or answering some questions takes a bit more effort and therefor often attracts more genuine people. That was the logic we went for in this example.

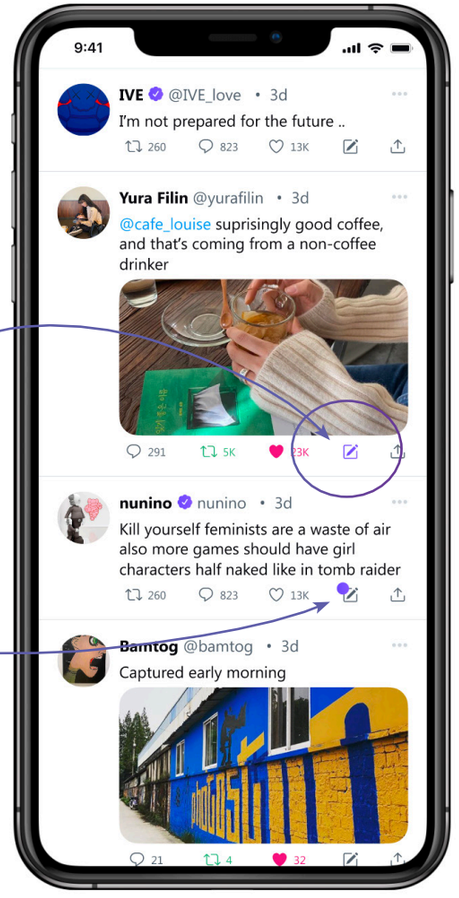
REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

- Is this method truly effective? Or would it only set fuel to the flame already flickering in the person writing?
- One should be careful as to when these posts should appear as we don't want it to discourage freedom of speech.
- There might be false detections of harmful posts as there are faults in all systems somehow. What happens if people feel more discouraged by this?
- Depending on age groups a comment from GenZ would probably not resonate or be understood by other generations, and opposite.

2 — EDITING POSTS

The user can see posts that are edited through an icon.

Those posts that need an edit can have a notification icon on them to let people know which posts are in need of an edit.

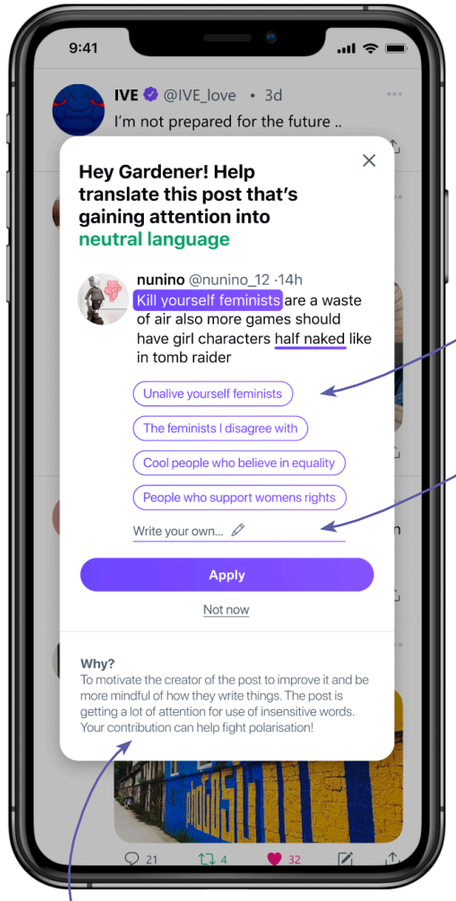


The second example explores how editing existing posts could contribute to more reflection. The idea is for gardeners to translate the posts into "neutral language" - a milder version of what is already written. They can choose between some system-generated suggestions or write one themselves. At the end of the day, they can change it to whatever they want. The original post doesn't disappear, but the edit or edits are added to the post as other "suggestions" for everyone to see.

As the user chose to be a gardener they can get pop-ups of harmful posts gaining attention.

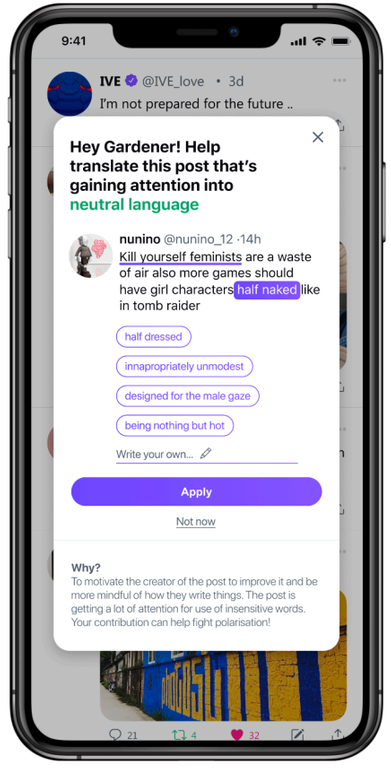
The user can choose between generated "alternative" suggestions for word improvements.

Or they can write examples themselves.



Explanation of why this could make a difference

Other suggested places to edit the text.



The user confirms and sees their version of the post switch out the original.

Edited posts could have a different color choice, or small effects around them indicating that they are edited.

One has the option to see the original version, but the edited one will show for yourself and other users.

QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF:

How would you choose to translate this post?

REASONING

There are few ways for lurkers to contribute on social media other than liking or disliking something. This example is low-effort and can lower the seriousness of a harmful/polarising post. The goal would be for the edits to make people less provoked, and then less likely to start a polarising discussion in the comment section.

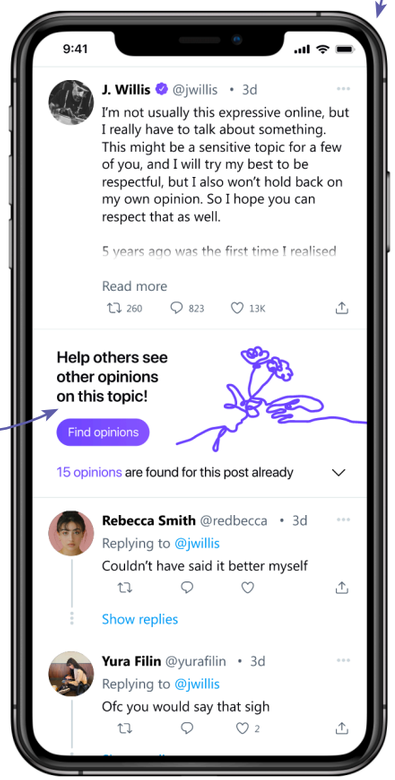
REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

- How would this look with longer text?
- Could seeing other peoples interpretation of a post make people see more sides to a case?
- Depending on how people edit the posts they could also spark more debate and polarisation, but by encouraging a neutral language we hope they keep that in mind as well.

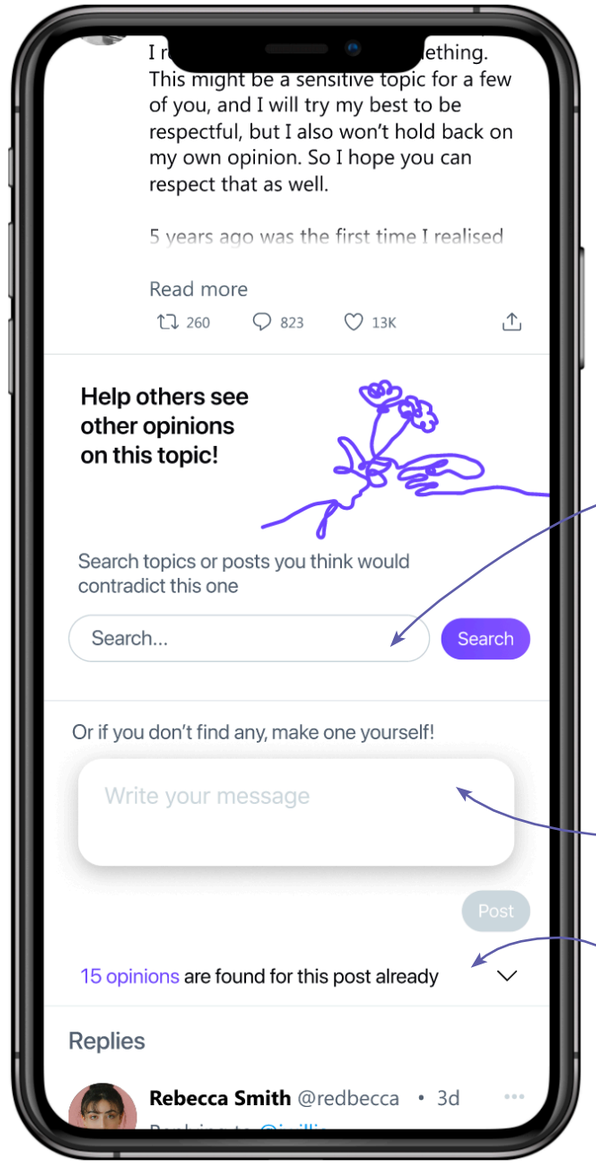
3 — OPPOSING OPINIONS

Posts gaining attention could have a section for other opinions on the same topic.

The user gets nudged to find other topics to the post.



The last example explores collecting opposing opinions under one post. When going into the post one can find other opinions that have been collected by gardeners. These opinions can be separate posts already created, or it can be people's immediate opinion. These are different from comments as they focus on highlighting other views on the discussed topic, rather than commenting everything and anything.



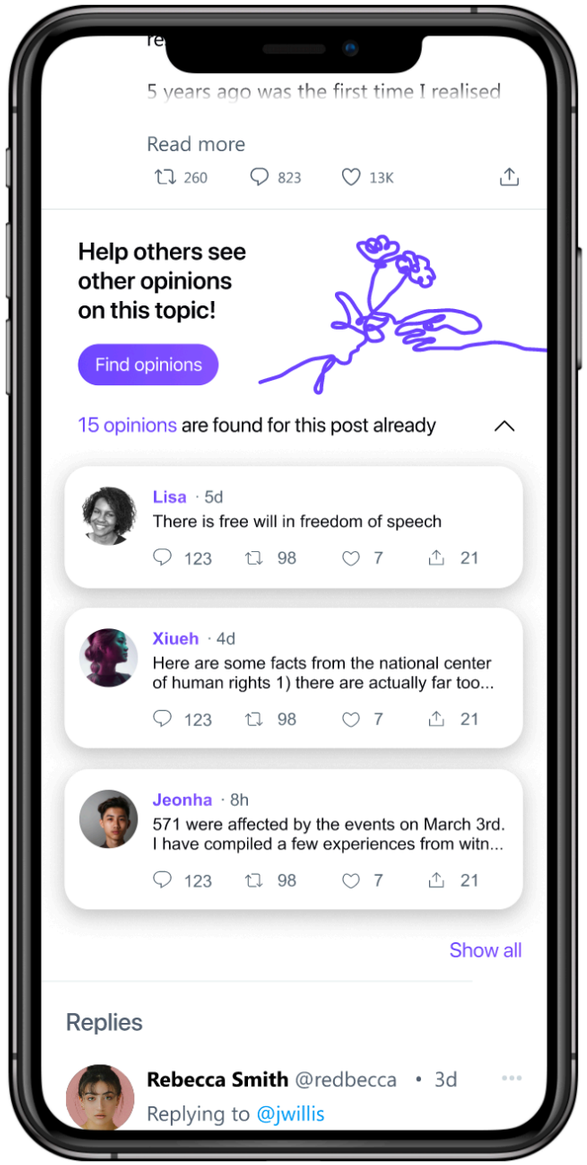
The user can search for other posts through key words, usernames or topic.

There is also a writing field for adding your own opinion.

The user can see varying opinions that have been linked to the post, or written by other users directly for the post.

The user feels like they finally have an easy way of looking through differentiating opinions on a topic they are interested in.

By clicking on some of the suggested posts they can find even more opposing opinions to each, which makes it easy to browse through many opinions.



QUESTION TO ASK YOURSELF:

At what times did you wish you were shown more sides to a topic?

REASONING

One of the main problems when it comes to polarisation is the fact that one isn't shown more diversity. There aren't any easy ways or tools for showing opposite opinions, or if they are they are not being used. Using the gardeners to link posts together and in general lift up the good comments that disappear in the crowd are possible solutions to this.

REFLECTIONS AND QUESTIONS

- How would opposing opinions differentiate from normal comments? Will there even be a point to comment normally anymore?
- Will the opposing opinions be manipulated and become the new comment section?

3 USERS

HOW DID THIS AFFECT THE USERS?

Levi the Lurker

Levi the Lurker felt more in control of curating his digital community, and without realising he started to contribute more through the tools available.

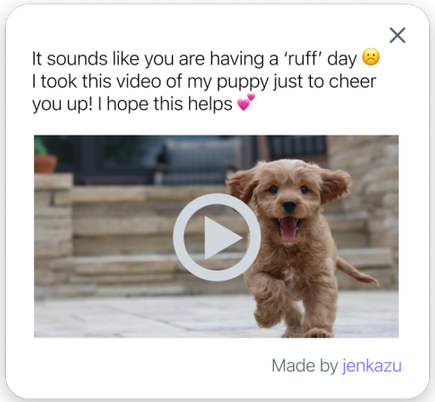
Dan the Digital Troublemaker

Dan the Digital Troublemaker found the new tools fun and despite his usual rebellious side he also felt that he could contribute valuable assets as a gardener.

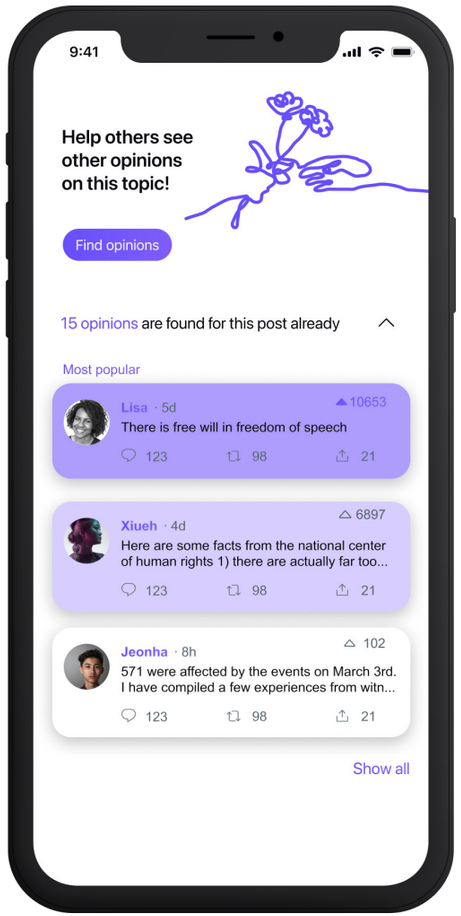
Helpful Hana

Helpful Hana felt like she could finally contribute something valuable and have a more direct impact to her digital community. These were the tools she had been waiting for.

FURTHER POSSIBILITIES



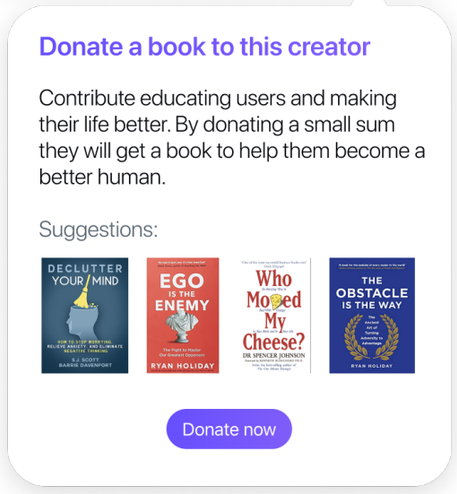
Use of video in prompts.- could they auto-play and make the user not be able to skip them before a few seconds, like adds do?



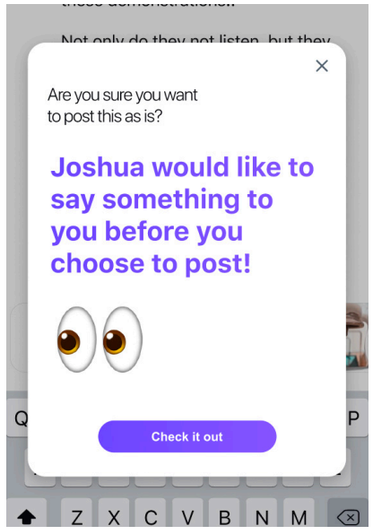
Upvoting opposing opinions to highlight good comments. And give lurkers more ways of interacting.

Giving flowers to posts as a visual way of uplifting it. By giving one another grows around the post.

Could one donate a book about a topic to a post?



TESTING



“Creating and Receiving Prompts”

FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS

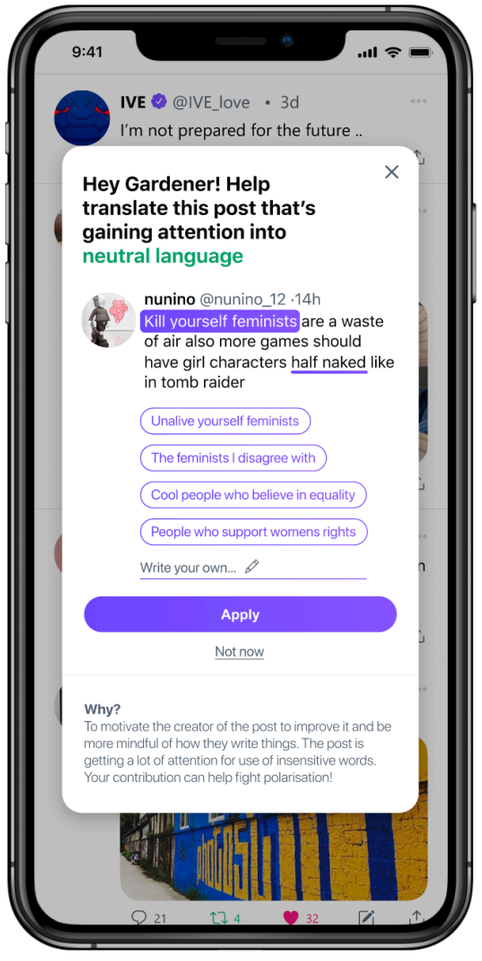
The first direction, “Creating and Receiving Prompts”, created a lot of discussions and provocations. Putting yourself in the shoes of an angry person was a challenge as some people thought the prompts were funny, but others said that “it would definitely cause more aggression if one is being told to ‘calm down’.” Another user said, “I would have probably just closed the pop-up. Who is this person and why do they have something to tell me? A campfire doesn’t solve everything.”

A user pointed out that when explaining about what a prompt is, one would probably benefit from being stricter and more serious to get a point across. Targeting users for their interests might create a negative effect, as they explained; ”People today get angry when a person tags a topic to criticise it. ‘Don’t bring your negativity in our community.’” Targeting people by topic might feel invasive and could very easily be abused. Another user expressed that “It feels like the platform is trying to silence me. Like, the idea of killing someone just because they might do something bad later in their life.”

“Editing Posts”

FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS

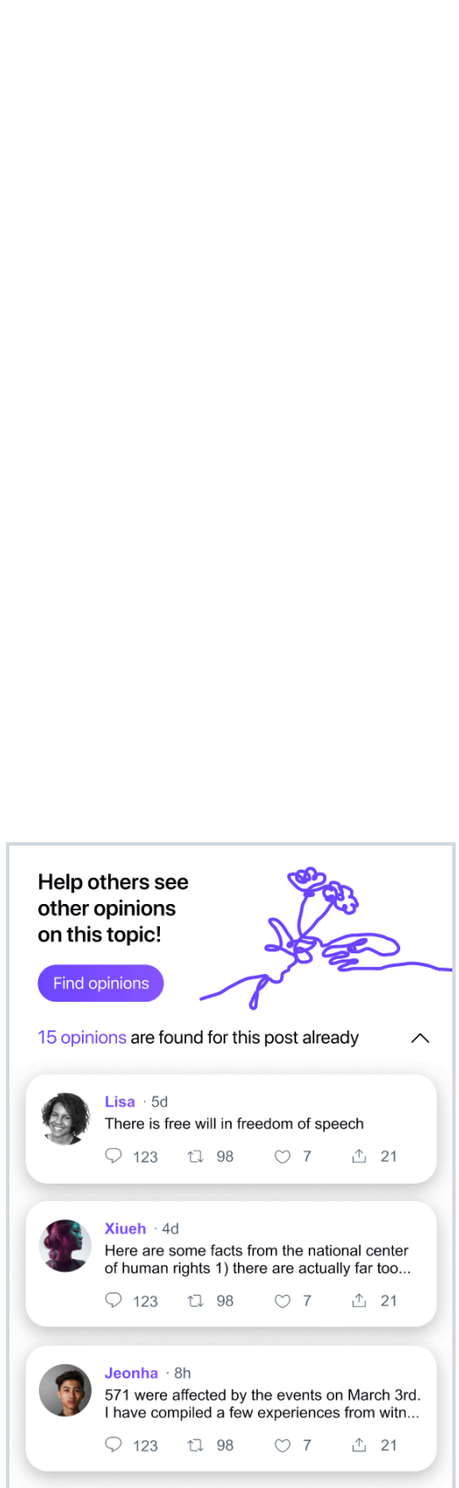
The users were positive to the second direction, “Editing Posts”, believing it could work in realistic settings. “One would probably end up using it as a typo editor. People will end up censoring everything with one word like “banana”. It could turn into a really fun feature.” They believed the main reason one would want to edit was to censor things and would be a feature that could create a somewhat safe for work environment. A user said that “For popular posts the creator could be notified of all the suggestions for changing their post. I believe it would be fun for them to edit it to the best one.”



“Opposing Opinions”

FEEDBACK AND INSIGHTS

For our last direction, “Opposing Opinions”, the users were a little unsure about the difference it would make from regular commenting. When explaining it a bit more, they still seemed sceptical. “One doesn’t want it to become an app that constantly watches what one has to say. It makes one think that there must be a lot of crazy people on this platform. If people don’t like it they will just choose another platform.”



CONCLUSIONS

REFLECTIONS

Our last concept provides tools for more people to curate their digital spaces and create a safer space online. We were wondering what other roles users could have for curating this digital space, one being the gardener. We asked ourselves the questions:

Will moderators help people be more willing to see others point of view? Would the angry users become more reflected over their behaviour? Would people stop, consider, and reflect? Will they listen?

CRITIQUE

This concept evoked a lot of mixed feelings from users. Even though some people liked the concepts of the prompts we wondered about how it would play out in real time. In general, this concept could also be prone to being abused, we can’t know what incentive and motivation people go in with. How would a prompt differ from gender and age? It is also a difficult to test with angry users, and we could therefore not get feedback from the actually “problematic” people. We wouldn’t want the concept of the gardener to create a space where people feel like they are being watched, and as of now our directions might evoke such impressions.

POSSIBILITIES

This topic created a lot of good discussions amongst the users. The concept served well as an arena for discussion and reflection, and some directions felt realistic for some users. We believe this concept has the possibility of either serving as a conversational topic, or one could iterate the ideas further and implement them in platforms today. As this concept explores one of the roles we imagine a user can have online, we saw how the observers could benefit from having more tools, but we also discovered just how much is not being done on social media today. There are so many possibilities to innovate the social arena, and this should serve as a motivation for the future of social media.

FINAL CONCEPT REFLECTIONS

Looking back on our final propositions we realised we could have done a lot of things differently. The gardener concept would have been the natural choice to delve further into, and had we wanted to create a solution, we could have used that as our basis.

We also wished we could have tested and iterated more, but realised we needed to spend more time on the exploration of the social. In addition, we think it was also a big challenge to test within the subject we had chosen. Both prototyping and user testing are very valuable, but the only way to see if our ideas would actually work would have been to see if people cared to use them in real organic settings. We would love to see these systems tested out and for real to iterate and improve on them. But that would also be outside the scope of our thesis. Therefore it was natural for us to keep exploring ideas and focus on brainstorming and bringing new concepts to the table.

Any true refinement of these concepts could only happen in an organic production environment, so it would not have been the best way for us to spend our efforts in this project. However, it would be an extremely interesting next step.

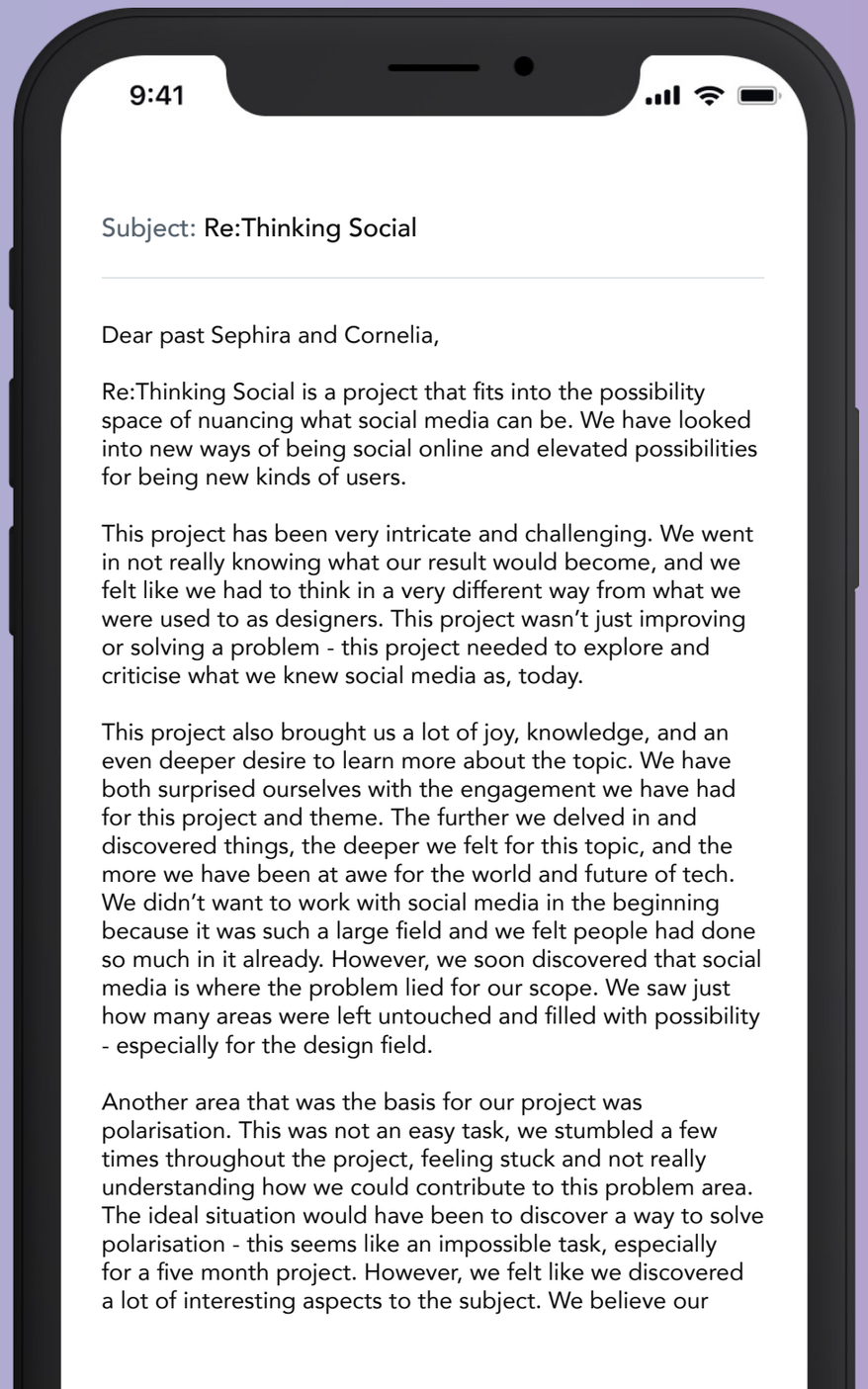
8

CONCLUSION

A summary of our reflections around our project, and our thanks and appreciations.

188 - Reflections
190 - References
192 - Thanks

REFLECTIONS


9:41
Subject: Re:Thinking Social
Dear past Sephira and Cornelia,
Re:Thinking Social is a project that fits into the possibility space of nuancing what social media can be. We have looked into new ways of being social online and elevated possibilities for being new kinds of users.
This project has been very intricate and challenging. We went in not really knowing what our result would become, and we felt like we had to think in a very different way from what we were used to as designers. This project wasn't just improving or solving a problem - this project needed to explore and criticise what we knew social media as, today.
This project also brought us a lot of joy, knowledge, and an even deeper desire to learn more about the topic. We have both surprised ourselves with the engagement we have had for this project and theme. The further we delved in and discovered things, the deeper we felt for this topic, and the more we have been at awe for the world and future of tech. We didn't want to work with social media in the beginning because it was such a large field and we felt people had done so much in it already. However, we soon discovered that social media is where the problem lied for our scope. We saw just how many areas were left untouched and filled with possibility - especially for the design field.
Another area that was the basis for our project was polarisation. This was not an easy task, we stumbled a few times throughout the project, feeling stuck and not really understanding how we could contribute to this problem area. The ideal situation would have been to discover a way to solve polarisation - this seems like an impossible task, especially for a five month project. However, we felt like we discovered a lot of interesting aspects to the subject. We believe our
final proposals proved a stronger need for more ways of being a user, and that this would be possible to facilitate for through small changes. Despite our proposals being made to elicitate discussion, we believe that through more iterations, workshops, and testing some of our propositions could become a possible reality.
We still strongly believe that creating spaces for users to feel trust and a sense of belonging are essential to achieve this. The future lies in lifting the un-problematic users, and down-prioritise the problematic ones. This will not be achieved through monitoring users but giving users tools to contribute differently. For future development one should be very careful and exact regarding 'facilitating for' and 'moderating'. We feel our proposals have a mix between these, and thats what help us distinguish the two. The future social media needs to be transparent and honest about their actions and intentions. New features for users that want to engage more need to be explained and justified.
When asking ourselves if we believe in our project, we want to say both yes and no. Throughout this semester we have seen developments in social media happening alongside our exploration, and many of these have touched upon the same things we have discovered. It was motivating, as well as weird. We have constantly been critical to our project, and we still are. We have yet to see some of the big companies make active changes to improve the user's well-being online. And we doubt they will change as long as they put profit in front of human decency.
We don't know what the future will be like, but what we know is that social media is changing. Stopping or hindering the polarisation online won't be possible at first, and maybe it shouldn't be something one should strive to achieve at all. Maybe we should elevate people for who they are, good or bad, and try to meet people with kindness and respect. Because why should our roles and responsibilities online be any different from how we are offline?
We believe the majority of people want to be kind to each other. We believe designers can facilitate for finding solutions. We believe in encouraging meaningful digital encounters. And we believe in the future of social.
Best,
Wiser Sephira and Cornelia

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IMAGES AND SCREENSHOTS

All images in this report are our own except for the ones listed below.

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"Watch us become one person at the end of this project."

ENCOURAGE MEANINGFUL DIGITAL ENCOUNTERS