

Facebook Messenger Platform

Exercises

Introduction: According to Fig. 1, we require two parts for our chatbot: a conversation/canvas channel for connecting with users and audiences. and on the other hand, an artificial intelligence (AI)/natural language processing (NLP) for making our chatbot more intelligent and practical.

These services allow us using natural language understanding (NLU), dialogue managers and natural language generation (NLG) methods. In general, we are interested in designing or leveraging an existed platform because of the following reasons:

- It is easy to use NLP tools and define our workflows and answers.
- We can add files, figures and emojis to our chatbots easily.
- Different buttons and sliders should be easily designed. Chatbot designing should create an omnichannel experience too.
- It is easy to train the chatbot and change settings of chatbot.
- It is easy to add a chatbot to our website.
- It is easy to integrate chatbot to an analytic tool.
- It increases the conversations with the clients.

Among existed list of conversation channels, we will use the **Facebook messenger platform** (a toolbox for building bots)¹ and **wit.ai** as a platform for chatbot development. Wit.ai² is a free chatbot software

¹The other existed platforms and apps are: Line, Skype, Telegram, Wechat and Slack

²The other existed platforms for chatbot developments are: Chatfuel, Botsify, Flow Xo, KITT.AI, IBM Watson, Reply.ai, ManyChat

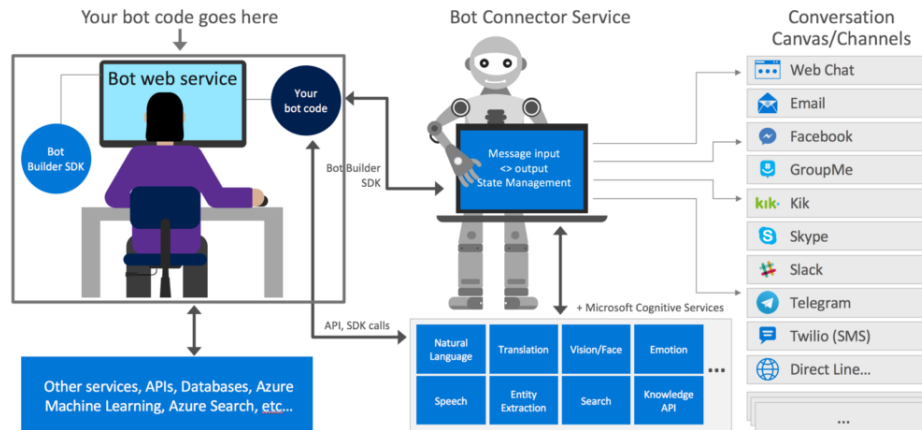


Figure 1: Chatbot in connection with the conversation/canvas channels and NLP/AI services

that lets you easily create text or voice based bots on your preferred messaging platform. Wit.ai learns human language from every interaction, and leverages the community: what is learned is shared across developers.

For Implementing a chatbot with a conversation channel and an AI api, we should follow the following workflow:

Create a Facebook page → create a Facebook app → add the messenger platform to the App → use a service³ → link the chatbot app to the messenger platform (using webhooks⁴) → train and test → submit the chatbot

Let's start with the Facebook messenger platform.

Exe 1 Read this link <https://techcrunch.com/2016/04/12/agents-on-messenger/>, as an introduction on Facebook messenger platform.

Exe 2 Similar to the Vanilla project, design the interactive terminal interface with nodejs. Open a terminal in your computer. Make a directory

³for us it is wit.ai

⁴It will be explained later

namely movieBot⁵. Go to the related directory and run the following command:

```
1 > npm init
```

This command creates a package.json file for your app. Create another file in your folder namely app.js. Check your package.json file and change its "main" parameter to app.js

Exe 3 Similar to the vanilla project test your code using the following command line or Run it from repl.it⁶:

```
1 node app.js
```

Define the app globally using:

```
1 nodemon app.js
```

Exe 4 **Connect our chatbot to the facebook messenger using a server**

It means our chatbot connects to a server which enables it to be connected to the facebook messenger:

our chatbot ↔ server (ex. Express) ↔ Facebook messenger

Notice An existed server for Node.js is **Express**. Express is a web application framework for Node.js that allows you to spin up robust APIs and web servers in a much easier and cleaner way. It is a lightweight package that does not obscure the core Node.js features.

Install Express via npm such as using the following command line⁷

```
1 npm install express --save
```

check the movieBot/package.json file. You see that express has been added as a new dependency. In the movieBot folder make a js file namely server.js. Afterward change your main attribute of the package.json to

```
1 "main": "server.js",
```

this allows us to put the chatbot in contact with the messenger platform.

⁵At the moment choose this name for your bot. We will explain later what is this chatbot and why this name.

⁶This part is just a reminder of what you have done in the Vanilla project

⁷For installing packages and software, google the installation. Because each computer has different characteristics.

In Replit please add a `index.js` in the main folder and write the following line on it:

```
1 require('./server.js');
```

Exe 5 server.js: we should code the `server.js` to design an API for sending and getting messages to the facebook messenger. Now that Express is installed, here's what the most basic server looks like:

```
1 'use strict';
2
3 const express = require('express');
4
5 const server = express();
6 const PORT = process.env.PORT || 3000;
7
8 server.get('/', (req, res) => res.send("hello!!"));
9 server.listen(PORT, () => console.log(`The bot server is
    running on port ${PORT}`));
```

run this script with the nodemon from the inside `movieBot` folder and navigate to `localhost:3000` in your browser. You should see the message `hello!!` in your browser window.

Notice Node.js: In the previous example, line 3 is grabbing the main Express module from the package you installed. This module is a function, which we then run on the line 5 to create our server variable. You can create multiple apps this way, each with their own requests and responses.

The code in line 8 is where we tell our Express server how to handle a GET request to our server. Express includes similar functions for POST, PUT, etc. using `server.post(...)`, `server.put(...)`, etc.

These functions take two main parameters. The first is the URL for this function to act upon. In this case, we are targeting `'/'`, which is the root of our website: in this case, `localhost:3000`.

The second parameter is a function with two arguments: `req`, and `res`. `req` represents the request that was sent to the server; We can use `this` object to read data about what the client is requesting to do. `res` represents the response that we will send back to the client. Here, we are calling a function on `res` to send back a response: `'hello!!'`.

Finally, once we've set up our requests, we must start our server. So `process.env.PORT || 3000` means: whatever is in the environment variable

PORT, or 3000 if there's nothing there. We are passing the PORT variable into the listen function, which tells the server which port to listen on. The function passed-in as the second parameter is optional, and runs when the server starts up. This just gives us some feedback in the console to know that our application is running.

And there we have it, a basic web server. However, we definitely want to send more than just a single line of text back to the client.

Notice Node.js: The `process.env` global variable is injected by the Node at runtime for your application to use and it represents the state of the system environment your application is in when it starts. For example, if the system has a PATH variable set, this will be made accessible to you through `process.env.PATH` which you can use to check where binaries are located and make external calls to them if required.

Exe 6 create a Facebook app: Go to <https://developers.facebook.com/>. After signing in with your FB account create a new app id for instance namely Movie chatbot. After creating the app, you will access to several api and services supported by Facebook. For our part, click on the **setup button for the Facebook messenger**⁸. You will be directed to the setting dashboard for your chatbot.

Our chatbot requires a unique code for communicating with the Facebook messenger. The page access token is the unique code that our chatbot uses for sending back every request that it makes to the messenger platform api.⁹ To get a page access token, you should select a page assigned to your chatbot. For this example either choose an existed page of your FB account or make a new page FB for your chatbot.

The generated token will NOT be saved in the user interface. Each time you select a Page from the drop-down, a new token will be generated. If a new token is generated, previously created tokens will continue to function.

Before continuing to the rest of this course, we need to know about the **webhook**.

⁸it is just close to the messenger logo among the list of existed services in the page

⁹Graph API requires Page access tokens to manage Facebook Pages. They are unique to each Page, admin, and app and have an expiration time. You must own or have a role on the Page to get a Page access token.

WebHook: Webhook is a user-defined HTTP callback which retrieves and stores data from an event, usually from outside of your software application. As opposed to an API which requires you to be constantly polling, webhooks will let you know when information has been received, saving you valuable time. In really simple terms a Webhook is a messenger between your chatbot and a source of information.

How do you install a Webhook? A Webhook is essentially a POST request which is sent to a URL. You will register an http:// or https:// URL which will store this POST request in JSON or XML format before processing it.

notice: JSON is short for JavaScript Object Notation, and is a way to store information in an organized, easy-to-access manner. In a nutshell, it gives us a human-readable collection of data that we can access in a really logical manner.

As a simple example, information about an imaginary person can be written in a example.json file as follows:

```
1 {  
2   {  
3     "name": "Walter White"  
4     "age" : "50",  
5     "hometown" : "New Mexico, US",  
6     "gender" : "male"  
7   }  
8 }
```

This creates an object. By enclosing the values in curly braces, we're indicating that the value is an object. Inside the object, we can declare any number of properties using a "name": "value" pairing, separated by commas.

How is a Webhook different from APIs? In an Application Programming Interface (API), the user must make a direct request to the program for a response. For example, if you create an application which is built on top of Facebook, the user would need a Facebook account to use it. When your application is downloaded the burden is on you to ask the customer to sign in with their Facebook account or create an account.

What can the Webhook be used for? Webhooks are incredibly flexible and can be used for many functions such as:

- . Placing orders

- . Changing prices
- . Invoices
- . Payments
- . Collecting data for data-warehousing
- . Integrating accounting software Disputes
- . Removing customer data from your database when they end their subscription or uninstall an app
- . Filtering order items and informing shippers about the order

Exe 7 manage tokens To register our movieBot on the messenger platform we should configure the access tokens to our bot. First create a folder namely 'config' in movieBot folder and then make a 'development.json' file in the new folder. This file will hold the tokens while we develop the app.

It is recommended that you keep sensitive information like your page access token secure by not hardcoding it into your webhook. To do this:

If you are using replit: create a .env file in the main directory and put the following information:

```
1 NODE_ENV=production
2 pageAccessToken=page-access-token
3 VerifyToken=verify-token
```

Never put your sensitive information in the regular files when you share your code in a public or private repository. Otherwise any one can use your sensitive information. .ENV files are known as environment files and will not be visible for others in replit (only editors can see it).

If you are using your local computer: code the development.json as the following:

```

1 {
2   "FB": {
3     "pageAccessToken": "page-access-token",
4     "VerifyToken": "verify-token"
5   }
6 }
7 }

```

`page-access-token` should be replaced by your page access token coming from the previous exercise.

We create a verify token as a random string of our choosing, hardcoded into the webhook. We will provide the verify token to the Messenger Platform when we subscribe our webhook to receive webhook events for an app¹⁰.

Now `verify-token` should be replaced with a random string. To do so, generate a random verify token using the `randomBytes` in java script. Copy your random verify key and paste it in the code.

————— *Try to find a solution by your self* —————

If you can not find any solution try the following code directly in a terminal. :

```

1 $ node
2 > crypto.randomBytes(64).toString('hex')

```

`randomBytes(64)` gets 64 random bytes. This number can be different according to your preferences.

Exe 8 For the sake of the security, create an `index.js` in the `config` folder for accessing the tokens from the `development.json` file. As writing this code is not obvious, the code is given completely here:

```

1 'use strict';
2
3 if(process.env.NODE_ENV === 'production') {
4   module.exports = {
5     FB: {
6       pageAccessToken: process.env.pageAccessToken,
7       VerifyToken: process.env.VerifyToken
8     }
9   }
10 }

```

¹⁰Necessity of defining this random string will be clear in the rest of this course.

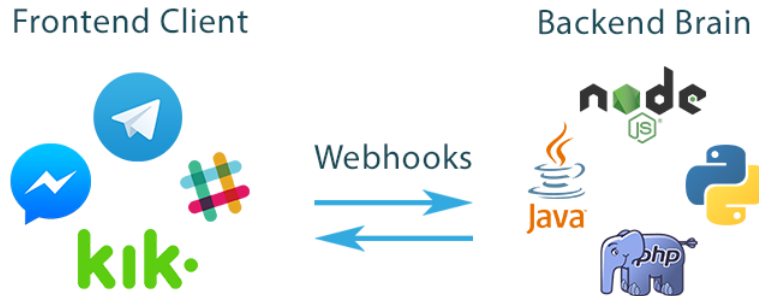


Figure 2: Frontend and backend communicate with the Webhook.

```

9   }
10  } else {
11  //comment next line if you are using replit
12    module.exports = require('./development.json');
13  }

```

Question Import the `./config` in the `server.js` file to make the tokens accessible for your chatbot.

Notice Node.js: Working with environment variables is a great way to configure different aspects of your Node.js application. Many cloud hosts (Heroku, Azure, AWS, now.sh, etc.) and Node.js modules use environment variables. Hosts, for example, will set a `PORT` variable that specifies on which port the server should listen to properly work. Modules might have different behaviors depending on the value of `NODE_ENV` variable.

According to Fig. 2, we require to define a webhook for receiving messages and callbacks from the FB messenger in our chatbot and sending back new callbacks and messages to the FB messenger.

Exe 9 register webhook: For defining a webhook, create a folder namely `fbeamers` in the `movieBot` folder. Create an `index.js` file inside the new folder as well. To define the webhook as a reusable model, define a class namely `'FBeamer'` with a constructor containing a parameter containing `pageAccessToken`, `VerifyToken`¹¹. Notice to verify if the two parameters are given or not. Adding a try catch is appreciated too. Complete the class constructor.

¹¹Notice that the input has the same format as the FB of the `development.json` file.

```

1  'use strict'
2
3  class FBeamer{
4
5      constructor({pageAccessToken, VerifyToken}){
6
7          //complete the constructor here
8
9      }
10 }
11
12
13 module.exports = FBeamer;

```

Notice Node.js: To understand the class definition in javascript, here we present two examples. The class syntax in javascript has two forms:

```

1  function User(name) {
2      this.name = name;
3  }
4
5  User.prototype.sayHi = function() {
6      alert(this.name);
7  }
8
9  let user = new User("John");
10 user.sayHi();

```

And that's the same using class syntax:

```

1  class User {
2
3      constructor(name) {
4          this.name = name;
5      }
6
7      sayHi() {
8          alert(this.name);
9      }
10 }
11
12 let user = new User("John");
13 user.sayHi();

```

The two examples are alike. Just note that methods in a class do not have a comma between them. Novice developers sometimes forget it and put a comma between class methods.

The `class User` ... here actually does two things:

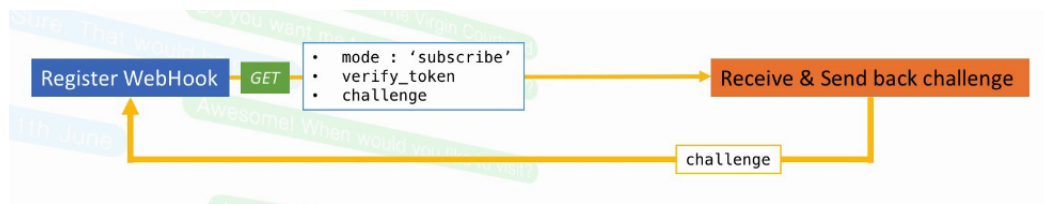
- Declares a variable `User` that references the function named "constructor".
- Puts methods listed in the definition into `User.prototype`. Here, it includes `sayHi` and the `constructor`.

Exe 10 Import the `fbeamer` folder in the `server.js` and get the `fb` parameter by initiating of the `FBeamer` class. *hint:* you can get the FB of the development.json by importing the `./config` as `conf` and using `conf.FB`.

WATCH THIS SHORT VIDEO ON THE WEBHOOK:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=6&v=wUPGUD9_41w&feature=emb_title

Exe 11 `registerHook` function (to be defined later), is a function that allows



us to register the webhook for our chatbot. For registering a webhook for our chatbot, we have to provide Facebook messenger with a secure url. After registering the webhook, Facebook sends an object to our chatbot. Facebook makes a GET call to the chatbot and sends an **object** to our chatbot (see the above figure):

```
1 mode : 'subscribe'
2 verify_token
3 challenge
```

According to the following diagram, facebook sends an object to the chatbot by calling the GET function and finally the chatbot returns back the challenge to the facebook.

Facebook Messenger
webhook → GET → `mode : 'subscribe', verify_token, challenge` → receive and send back challenge for the chatbot → chatbot

Facebook messenger \leftarrow challenge \leftarrow chatbot

There is a key calling hub containing the object for the process as :

```
1 {
2   hub:{
3     mode : 'subscribe'
4     verify_token : <token example>
5     challenge: <challenge example>
6   }
7 }
```

First modify the get function in server.js by calling the `registerHook` function (attention the function has not been implemented yet.):

```
1 const config = require('./config');
2 const f = new FBeamer(config.FB);
3
4 server.get('/fb',(req,res))=>f.registerHook(req, res));
```

Here the request (`req`) refers to the object coming from facebook and response (`res`) is referred to the response sending from the chatbot to facebook.

Once the chatbot receives the `verify_token`, it should checks if this token is the same as the one that we have defined in our setting and it will send back the received challenge code to the facebook.

Exe 12 verify webhook Write a function (`registerHook`) in `fbeamer/index.js`, `FBeamer` class to verify if the webhook has been registered or not. Complete the commented parts of the code by yourself.

```
1   registerHook(req, res) {
2     const params = req.query;
3     const mode = params['hub.mode'],
4     token = params['hub.verify_token'],
5     challenge = params['hub.challenge'];
6     // if mode === 'subscribe' and token ===
7       {verifytoken?find correct variable name}, then
8       send back challenge
9
10    try {
11      if () { //condition should be written in the
12        parentheses
13        //print here that webhook is registered
14        return res.send(challenge);
15      } else {
```

```

12         console.log("Could not register webhook!");
13         return res.sendStatus(200);
14     }
15     } catch(e) {
16         console.log(e);
17     }
18 }

```

Notice that mode, token and challenge are the the webhook parameters and they are retrievable using the code written in lines 7 to 10. The parameter descriptions are as follow:

parameter	sample value	description
hub.mode	subscribe	This value is always set to subscribe.
hub.challenge	1158201444	An int must pass back to FBM ¹² .
hub.verify_token	meatyhamhock	A string that FBM grab from the Verify Token field in your app's App Dashboard. You will set this string when you complete the Webhooks configuration settings steps.

For better understanding of webhooks read:

<https://developers.facebook.com/docs/messenger-platform/webhook/>

Notice: to continue with the following exercise, check your Internet connection. Some secured wifi connections may block the ngrok.

Exe 13 make webhook accessible using an HTTPS connection:

In order to make the webhook (as a connection between FBM and our chatbot) accessible, we need an HTTPS. The HTTPS is located between FBM and the webhook as:

FB messenger ↔ HTTPS ↔ webhook ↔ chatbot

There is several ways to have a HTTPS connection between your chatbot and FB messenger.

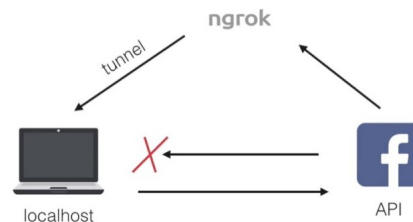
Method 1: Using Replit repl.it is a free, collaborative, in-browser IDE. It automatically creates an https website for your chatbot.

Method 2: Using a software to provide an HTTPS connection to your local computer: In fact this unique and https, receive and tunnel data with our local running node.js app. For generating a private https, you can use one of the following services based on your operating system (windows, linux or mac)¹³

- * Glitch: <https://glitch.com/>
- * PageKite: <http://pagekite.net/>
- * TeleConsole <https://www.teleconsole.com/>
- * GoTTY <https://github.com/yudai/gotty>
- * ngrok <https://ngrok.com/>

Some notes on ngrok: <https://ngrok.com/>

What is Ngrok? Ngrok is multiplatform tunneling, reverse proxy software that establishes secure tunnels from a public endpoint such as internet to a locally running network service while capturing all traffic for detailed inspection and replay (check the following figure).



How to Use it?

- * install: `npm i -g ngrok`
- * usage: `ngrok http [-subdomain myapp] [dstport]`
If you don't have access to the ngrok link using your wifi, switch to your cellphone wifi just for installing and generating an https with ngrok.

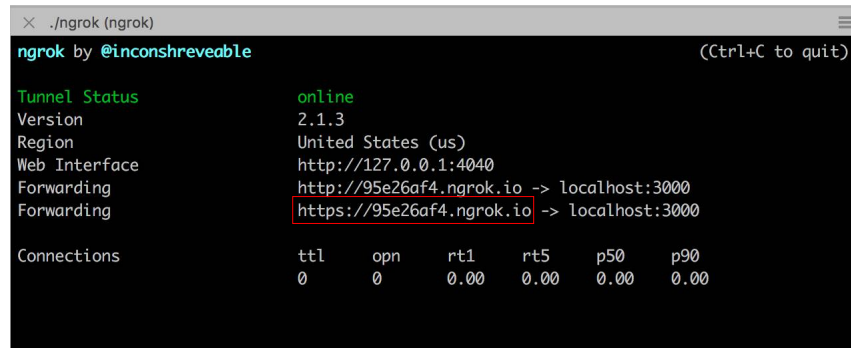
How generate a private https with ngrok:

go to the terminal where the ngrok is installed. Write

¹³Notice that most of these services are free and they will expire your https after a few days. Remind to update them if you want to use your chatbot in the future.

`ngrok http 3000`

in the terminal. You will receive a list of results as:



```
ngrok by @inconshreveable (Ctrl+C to quit)

Tunnel Status      online
Version            2.1.3
Region             United States (us)
Web Interface      http://127.0.0.1:4040
Forwarding          http://95e26af4.ngrok.io -> localhost:3000
Forwarding          https://95e26af4.ngrok.io -> localhost:3000

Connections
  ttl   opn   rt1   rt5   p50   p90
    0     0    0.00  0.00  0.00  0.00
```

The marked https by red is the https generated by ngrok.

Exe 13.2 How to register your WebHook on Facebook? After generating a private https, go to your app dashboard in the facebook developer page. Find the webhooks option and click on the setup webhooks button. Fill the callback URL with your HTTPS coming from one of the above services (for instance, with the URL provided from ngrok) and copy paste your verify token from the development.json file. And click only messages in the subscription fields at the moment. By this way, we authorize the messenger platform to only send messages to our chatbot. If the webhook is valid you will see a green logo in your page.

More explanation on Webhook: For getting more details on the webhook registration and characteristics check this link <https://developers.facebook.com/docs/graph-api/webhooks/getting-started/> // Finally test the registerHook() function in your server.js to see if it has been registered for the chatbot or not.

Exe 14 Securing webhook (optional) Once your webhook is registered, your chatbot is ready to receive messages from facebook. The facebook messenger can send the messages to your chatbot by calling the POST. In this step your chatbot can verify the payload signature sent by facebook. For security reasons, you probably want to limit requests to those coming from facebook. This is optional but recommended for

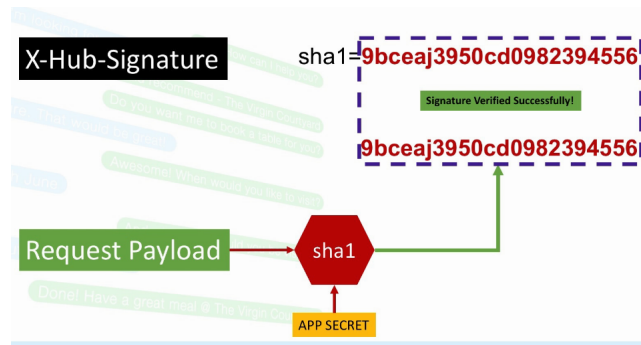


Figure 3:

the webhook security.

facebook → POST → FBeamer ?verify payload signature?

every incoming payload message from Facebook comes with a header namely `x-hub-signature`. This header contain SHA1 equivalent of the payload. SHA1 is a cryptographic hashing algorithm where creating one requires a key. In our case this key used is a unique string key provided by facebook. In the same way as it provides in page access token. According to figure 3, if we take the payload data with the sha1 key generated by appsecret provided by facebook, we should generate the exact same key in our chatbot. If this happens the signature matches the facebook key which verifies the message validation.

To do so, first install the bodyparser package using:

```
npm i body-parser
```

Get an app secret key: Go to your app dashboard on developers.facebook.com, click on settings, go to the basic section, here you will find the app secret key. Copy it and add it to `development.json` or `.env`(if using replit) as `appSecret`. Consequently add it in the `config/index.js`. Add it in FBeamer constructor as well.

import body-parser inside `server.js`. Write a `server.post` function in `server.js`. This is where the incoming messages come first.


```

1 const f = new FBeamer(config.FB);
2 server.post('/fb', bodyparser.json({
3   verify: f.verifySignature.call(f);
4 }));

```

Notice: The reason of defining line 3 as this is because the `verify` property internally invokes the `verifySignature`'s returned function within its class. For this reason, the 'this' context is lost. By binding it to the `FBeamer` instance, we insure the context is preserved. Also, the `.call()` here runs the `verify` method.

where `verifySignature` will be implemented later in the `fbeamer`. We write another `post` function for receiving messages after passing through the signature. Just write the general part of function in your code in `server.js`. The code will be completed later.

```

1 server.post('/fb', (req, res, next) =>{
2   // message will be received here if the signature is
   // verified
3   //the message will be passed to FBeamer for parsing
4 });

```

Write a function namely `verifySignature` in your `fbeamer/index.js` file for verifying if the received payload from the FB is valid or not. For completing this function try to check if the `x-hub-signature` coming from heading request is the same as sha1 hash using the given `appSecret` (we got `appSecret` from facebook messenger). If it is not the case `throw` errors. *Hint: you need `crypto` package for this part.*

The `verifySignature()` can be defined as:

```

1 const crypto = require('crypto');
2 verifySignature(req, res, buf) {
3   return (req, res, buf) => {
4     if(req.method === 'POST') {
5       try {
6         // get x-hub-signature here
7         /*this code generates a hash using the given
           appSecret*/
8         let tempo_hash = crypto.createHmac('sha1', <
           your appSecret>).update(buf, 'utf-8');
9         let hash = hash.digest('hex');
10        // complete the rest of code by yourself
11
12        } catch (e) {

```

```
13         console.log(e);  
14     }  
15 }  
16 }  
17 }
```