Friend-Making App Case Study

Project Type

Personal Project for SI 422: Needs Assessment and Usability Evaluation

Role

UX Researcher

Design Tools

Figma
Canva

Research Methods

Interviews
Photo Elicitation
Affinity Diagramming
Personas
Journey Mapping

Duration

March - April 2024

SUMMARY

Discovery and needs assessment stage of product development for a friend-making app for undergraduate college students

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What social experiences do college students prefer based on their personality type and needs?

What struggles do college students face when making friends and what do they need to face these struggles?

What are college student's preferences when utilizing online platforms to make friends?

RESEARCH PROCESS

Conducting User Interviews

After identifying the research questions and creating an interview guide, I conducted five user interviews to learn from a variety of college students about their personality type and social experiences. I aimed to understand their social challenges and identify their needs in addressing them. Additionally, the interviews provided insights into college student's preferences when utilizing online platforms like friend-making apps. The interview included a photo elicitation activity with pictures of college students in a variety of settings designed to encourage conversation and get more insights from the interviewee. I then transcribed the collected data.

Analyzing Interview Data

With all the data collected, I coded the transcripts and used affinity diagramming to perform thematic analysis and identify key themes within the data.

Themes Identified:

- Personality Types and Social Preferences

- Social Struggles and Solutions

- Online Social Interaction

- Building Connections Through Similarities

Developing User Personas and Journey Mapping

After thematic analysis, I developed two user personas to articulate the unique experiences that different college students go through when making friends. Each one representing a different personality type (extrovert and introvert).

JACOB
Extrovert

Background
Jacob is a very social college student, he likes to make plans with friends a couple of times a week and go out on weekends. He is open to meet new people and prefers to surround himself with people with similar interests and values, but sees the benefits of having differences in his friendships. He is studious but his social life is a big priority.

Age: 20

LSA Student

University of Michigan

Building Friendships

- Being involved in outdoor activities
- Studying together with friends
- Parties and large social gatherings
- Clubs and college related activities

Core Needs

- Keeping contact after meeting someone
- Wants to approach more people
- Extending his core group of friends
- Finding people who reciprocate his feelings

Online preferences

- Balance between superficial and deep interactions
- Enhancing an already existing in-person connection
- Genuine engagement through text
- Safety and verification

Personality Traits

Confidence:
★★★★
Outgoing:
★★★☆
Open-minded:
★★☆☆
Charismatic:
★★★☆
Empathetic:
★★★☆

Scale:
★ Emerging ★ Developing ★ Moderate ★ Advanced

OLIVIA
Introvert

Background
Olivia is a shy college student, she really values her alone time and needs time to recharge her social battery after making plans with friends. She enjoys small group settings with a calmer ambiance. She is looking to meet more people and build lasting friendships with her peers.

Age: 19

Engineering student

University of Michigan

Building Friendships

- Getting food one on one
- Small social gatherings
- Having open conversations with close friends
- School clubs and college related activities

Core Needs

- Meeting and approaching more people
- Keeping contact after meeting someone
- Feeling safe when opening up to others
- Finding people who reciprocate her feelings
- Balance between alone and social time

Online preferences

- Safety and verification
- Meeting new people
- Enhancing an already existing in-person connection
- Genuine engagement through text

Personality Traits

Confidence:
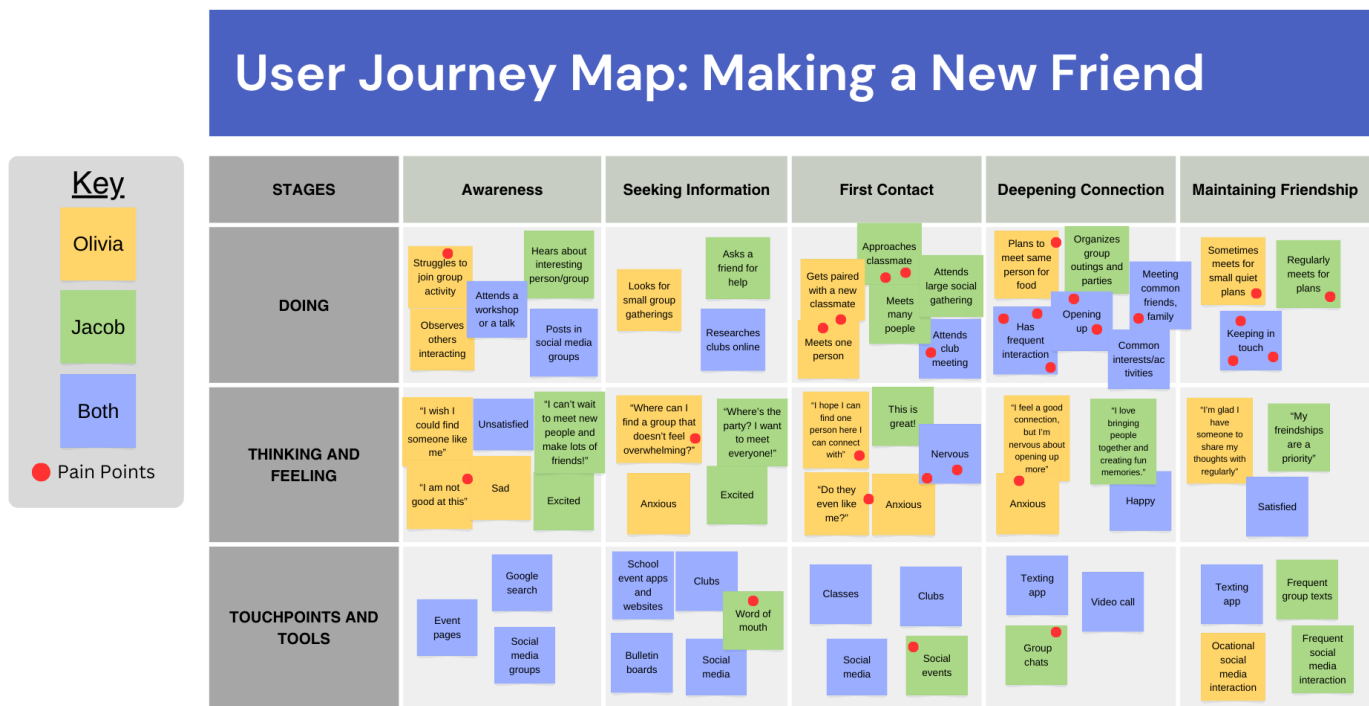★★☆☆
Outgoing:
★☆☆☆
Open-minded:
★★★☆
Charismatic:
★★☆☆
Empathetic:
★★★★

Scale:
★ Emerging ★ Developing ★ Moderate ★ Advanced

With the personas done, I created a journey map that compares the experiences of introverted and extroverted college students across various stages, marking where pain points occur along the friend-making process for each personality type. I used the personas as a reference for the personality types.

User Journey Map: Making a New Friend

Key

- Olivia
- Jacob
- Both
- 🔴 Pain Points

STAGES	Awareness	Seeking Information	First Contact	Deepening Connection	Maintaining Friendship
DOING	Struggles to join group activity · Attends a workshop or a talk · Observes others interacting · Hears about interesting person/group · Posts in social media groups	Looks for small group gatherings · Asks a friend for help · Researches clubs online	Gets paired with a new classmate · Approaches classmate · Meets many people · Attends large social gathering · Meets one person · Attends club meeting	Plans to meet same person for food · Organizes group outings and parties · Has frequent interaction · Opening up · Meeting common friends, family · Common interests/activities	Sometimes meets for small quiet plans · Regularly meets for plans · Keeping in touch
THINKING AND FEELING	"I wish I could find someone like me" · Unsatisfied · "I can't wait to meet new people and make lots of friends!" · "I am not good at this" · Sad · Excited	"Where can I find a group that doesn't feel overwhelming?" · "Where's the party? I want to meet everyone!" · Anxious · Excited	"I hope I can find one person here I can connect with" · This is great! · "Do they even like me?" · Nervous · Anxious	"I feel a good connection, but I'm nervous about opening up more" · "I love bringing people together and creating fun memories." · Anxious · Happy	"I'm glad I have someone to share my thoughts with regularly" · "My friendships are a priority" · Satisfied
TOUCHPOINTS AND TOOLS	Event pages · Google search · Social media groups	School event apps and websites · Clubs · Word of mouth · Bulletin boards · Social media	Classes · Clubs · Social media · Social events	Texting app · Video call · Group chats	Texting app · Frequent group texts · Ocational social media interaction · Frequent social media interaction

Insigths

The journey map shows that introverted college students encounter greater difficulty initiating contact compared to extroverts. Therefore, the app must offer tailored strategies for approaching others. Additionally, both personality types have challenges in maintaining connections after first meeting, emphasizing the need for features like notification reminders to engage with new friends and suggestions for future activities to deepen friendships. These will be based on user's common values and interests.

Introverts particularly face challenges when initiating interactions and sustaining communication. In contrast, extroverts struggle primarily with maintaining contact and fostering deeper connections. Therefore, the app should prioritize features addressing these specific pain points, including personalized icebreakers, prompts for following-up, and suggestions for group activities based on common interests. To address the personas' online preferences, the inclusion of a verification feature within the app would ensure authenticity, fostering a trustworthy environment where users can safely connect with each other.

Limitations

Although I interviewed a variety of personality types, only conducting five interviews restricts how well the insights can be applied to others or if they represent the experiences of the larger college student population. Additionally, even though these participants were not all personal friends, I handled the selection process which could have introduced selection bias. It's also possible that some interviewees may not have fully disclosed their experiences due to discomfort or distrust, which could limit the depth and authenticity of the data collected. Given more resources and time, I would expand the participant pool and use strategies to increase participant trust and comfort during data collection. Further research should include exploring specific scenarios such as how students with different majors or international students navigate social challenges. This would allow the app to address more specific needs