

ATMOS *sphere*

ATMOS Sphere: fun, atmospheric, easy to use, open source chat and hang out platform

Introduction

The unexpected sweep of the COVID-19 pandemic has driven an invisible barrier between friends, families and loved ones as widely dreaded curfews, quarantines and other social distancing procedures are slowly integrated into our daily lives. Subsequently, social gatherings have become a rare luxury, and as social beings, humanity's need for basic human interaction grows exponentially as people spend increasing amounts of time in isolation and loneliness. A need which if suppressed, may lead to a steady decline in mental health.

Related Work

In Debra Umberson studies, it was demonstrated that socializing and human health have a strong correlation and that interactions with others have positive benefits on mental health.^[2] We are fortunate enough to have multitudes of applications that allow interactions remotely where people can interact with their loved ones across the globe.

As of 2021, the leaders in social messaging, voice and video interaction are WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, WeChat, Telegram, Snapchat, discord, etc.^[3] ^[4] Among all these choices the users intuitively make selections based on their pros and cons of application usability.

Most of the applications mentioned above allow users to create group chats where the members can communicate via text, voice messages or/and video, but none of these let the users create their personalized environment. An example of a personalized environment is having a group chat with animated wallpapers and personalized themes and having background music while being in the group chat. Whatsapp provides a feature similar to this however, only static images can be selected as a background picture, Discord has an addition to this feature where, by using extensions, a user can add a GIF as background for the chat. This is not included in the default version of the application. Note that none of the applications mentioned allow the option of adding a live wallpaper as a background in the chats.

Atmos-Sphere has many music streaming applications and that makes the whole difference. The industry leaders such as Spotify, Apple Music, amazon music, Tencent, YouTube music, etc. All the music streaming applications allow users to create, edit and delete playlist and most of the apps comes with a variety of default playlist. None of the social networking application integrate any of the music streaming applications on their platform, therefore, the user can't have a group chat while listening to music, from any of the mentioned applications.

Problem Statement

Based on an [article](#) regarding suicide risk and prevention during the pandemic, suicide rates during the covid 19 pandemic are expected to rise due to a decline in mental health cause by fear, self-isolation, and physical distancing, leading to mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder(PTSD).^[1]

An application for social interactions in a virtual platform may prove imperative in improving mental health for its users in not just during the COVID 19 pandemic, but during regular times as well by providing users with an option to connect and interact with other humans, preventing more people from being deprived of their social needs by a virtual form of human interaction and by doing so elevate moods and potentially distract users from ssnegative emotions.

Hypothesis

To investigate the impact of Atmos-Sphere on users mental health and wellbeing, the Atmos team has engineered a solution to gather data in order to prove its impact on users daily life. The team hypothesise that the driven music and background animations will stimulate users brains positively and improves their general mood based on colors and sound frequencies. Moreover, the live chat will bring a remarkable support for users to release and outsource their accumulated daily stress.

Project Description

Project Atmos' main directive is to provide it's users with a comfortable, virtual space to socialize with friends or other Atmos users. This will be delivered in the form of musical, themed channels called 'Spheres', each with customizable animated backgrounds and music playlist.

A sphere represents a dedicated venue for a group of Atmos users to socialize in, either via the integrated text chat, voice chat, or video chat channel in a similar manner to widely used video chatting applications such as discord or zoom. Each sphere features a customizable animated background, which can be selected from the default backgrounds, which is a wide plethora of suggested high-definition backgrounds (e.g., A livestream of Niagara Falls, fishy aquariums,

fireplace, snowy mountains, mystical forest, coffee shop, etc.), and additional backgrounds added regularly by the dev team. Backgrounds can also be custom made with the user's video of choice (provided either by file upload, or a link to a video such as a YouTube link) using the in-application video editor, offering basic video editing functions and certain video customization features such as adding different ambient filters or borders, allowing the user to produce a looping animated background to suit their desires.

A sphere can be interconnected with a series of different spheres, allowing spheres of similar / relevant themes to exist in close proximity to each other. Relevant or nearby spheres can appear in as recommendations when in a user sphere, and are available to be visited easily in a graph-node style navigation.

If a user does not wish to go through the process of customizing a sphere and only wishes to quickly create a session, a "Quick Start" feature will enable a user to generate a randomized sphere with relevant music genres and themes, needing the user to only input a music genre of their choice.

In terms of music, full Spotify integration and syncing will also be available in the Atmos applications, allowing users to select a playlist of their choice from the Spotify platform which already hosts a multitude of music tracks of varying genres. However, additional audio effects and filters may be applied in the Sphere audio settings, adding certain effects such as dampening, echoing, muffling or even integration with other audio effects (e.g., adding a raining ambient soundtrack to sad music can create a melancholic atmosphere).

Furthermore, instead of operating as individual sessions for private groups, a life cycle of a Sphere can be extended as dedicated spheres can be maintained indefinitely for public joining and use, similar to live stream music channels on YouTube. Dedicated spheres operate similarly to services such as radio stations, and are public for all users to join. Owners/Administrators of a dedicated Sphere may offer a range of content in addition to music streaming, such as news broadcasting (e.g., the CBC news sphere would be available to the public to join and view live news being reported), podcasts, or live performances and concerts, providing the application a secondary function similar to that of a social media platform.

System Design

Mechanics and Design Philosophy

The goal of ATMOS is to be ***atmospheric***.

ATMOS will be designed from the ground up to support both long-lived and short-lived chat room sessions ("Spheres"). Spheres are bound to an owner, who is the user that created the Sphere. Any number of users can be invited to join a Sphere and become a member of the chat room. The owner of a sphere has full admin privileges over his/her Sphere, but may designate another member of the Sphere as an admin, granting them extra rights to manage the Sphere.

There are 3 central gimmicks that make a Sphere unique:

1. Music

- Each sphere has its own music.
- A Sphere admin can manage the music component of a Sphere, adding new soundtracks, looping over of a track, connecting to an external third-party music service such as Spotify or Apple Music, and more.

2. Environment

- Spheres also have an environment.
- The environment mainly consists of the background imagery and chat room decorations.
- Environment can also be extended, for more advanced client apps, to include any visual or auditory imagery such as a VR environment.

3. Users

- The members of the Sphere are the most unique part!

As a social media platform, ATMOS provides more than just an *atmospheric* vibe.

System Architecture

The ATMOS architecture is composed of two parts:

1. ATMOS Core
2. Client Apps

ATMOS Core

The ATMOS Core represents the core API of ATMOS, encompassing all the web services for the ATMOS organization and all the publicly exposed APIs, including the RESTful, GraphQL, and WebSockets APIs exposed by the core ATMOS services.

APIs Targeted:

- REST
- GraphQL
- WebSockets

Client Applications

Platforms Targeted:

- Web
- Desktop
- Mobile

Tech Stack:

- ReactJS: JavaScript framework for making
 - React-Native for the mobile app
- Material-UI: provides base React components from which to build the app

Study Design

As per the hypothesis, the idea is that the music, calm background and a platform for socializing will positively affect a user's mental health. To test whether such activities in fact have a discernible impact on mental health, we shall conduct a study involving 70 participants.

The 70 participants will be split in 7 groups of 10 participants each. The groups will have each be subjected to a different form of activity, and its impact will be evaluated based on the users' evolution of mood through and at the end of the activity.

At the beginning of the study, all participants will be given a questionnaire in order to determine their mental state, and each given a *happiness level* based on their results.

The 7 groups will have the following activities they will be a part of:

	Animated Background	Chill Beats	Live Chat
Group 1	X		
Group 2		X	
Group 3			X
Group 4	X	X	
Group 5		X	X
Group 6	X		X
Group 7	X	X	X

After the designated acitivity of 30 minute, the moods or *happiness levels* of the 70 participants will be evaluated. If our hypothesis is correct, there should be a statistically significant enhancement of the participants' moods after the activity, with the highest effect in group G.

Biggest Risks

Risk 1: Copyright Strikes

One of the primary features of Atmos is that it is supposed to be a location to chill and play music. An obvious risk that will arise with this is that if users can choose what songs they would like in their sphere, they might choose copyrighted music and backgrounds if they are to choose external music which are not featured on the spotify platform. This isn't necessarily bad since spheres aren't monetized, but corporations will still want money for letting people listen to their music or use their content as backgrounds. There will need to be ads added somewhere for when copyrighted songs/backgrounds play to appease to the big corporations. This might be harder to handle for when video chat is implemented since that will add more legality issues when people start streaming movies.

Risk 2: Explicit Content

There is a risk that malicious users may pose a threat which can ruin the experience for other users through inappropriate content. An example of this maybe be if spheres with content not suitable of children are created. Atmos will need clear rules in the terms and conditions stating that either the site cannot be used for this 18+ content or if explicit content is allowed, then there will need to be rules on what is acceptable and the restrictions required to ensure users under the age of 18 do not see this explicit content. Regardless of which of the 2 rules are chosen, extreme explicit content like real life blood, gore, and death, as well as illegal pornography like child porn will be banned and handled with harsher consequences.

Risk 3: Distribution of Illegal Content

Connecting with the past 2 risks listen above, other illegal content can cause risks to Atmos. This includes:

- Distribution of pirated games, movies, and other medias or the use of pirated media on any sphere.
- Distribution of content that is illegal according to Canadian and International Laws or the use of this content on any sphere.
- Distribution of illegal hacking software such as trojans, malware, or other viruses that are cybercrimes.

Risk 4: Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) Attacks

There might be a possibility that someone might want to take down the Atmos servers by causing DDoS attacks. This can be devastating and will need to be handled as soon as possible when it happens since it will cause enough network trafficking that it'd be impossible for users to use Atmos.