Project research documentation

Team: Trust&Launch

Concept: connectYall

GitLab: https://git.fhict.nl/I478947/m3-cb-02-trust-and-launch.git

Author's note: this document covers the research our team did for the project, namely working on discovering issues in the real world that we could then transpose into the digital environment. It contains research methods, methodologies applied and different techniques we used for understanding our users better, as well as draw lines around the concepts that we will implement in our application.

Table of contents

SUMMARY

Wishing to provide users with **better socializing solutions,** Trust&Launch agreed on choosing the second case, the digital substitute for a real-life activity.

The goal of our research for this project was to define 1) if our difficulties with socialization post COVID-19 were the case for other people too, and if so 2) identify a target audience for which we were able to 3) identify their goals and needs.

We came up with this idea based on our personal experience, as international students post COVID-19. As we are social beings, it is mandatory that we experience some form of human interaction as often as possible. Not doing so, might result in facing with depression, especially common when moving abroad. This term was defined by specialty literature as "*expat depression*", as The Daily Sabah mentions.

Having conducted in-depth research for issues people faced in the real world, the main problem we identified is the lack of social interaction post COVID-19. We observed that due to lockdowns and restrictions, people became more isolated, and many previously common activities started to feel out of place.

Another issue that occurred to us when researching into the problem, was that people who moved abroad experienced different difficulties while trying to make new connections.

However, our aim is to build a web application accessible for everyone, to provide a meeting point for people from various backgrounds and encourage inclusivity.

Because we are all social beings that require interaction with one another, our company aimed to fill this hole in people's lives, by taking care of all safety measures to make users feel at ease.

To assist our users with their needs and provide them with a digital substitute for this social issue, we came up with the concept of a platform where people can interact with each other and make new acquaintances who share the same interests and hobbies. **connectYall** is on a mission to end loneliness by encouraging individuals to engage in offline social connection on a daily basis.

PRIMARY RESEARCH

The first step in developing our product was to conduct research and clarify which issue needed our attention. Since most of our team is formed out of international students, we knew that the hardest experience, but also the
one that brought a lot of fulfilment in our lives, was moving abroad for university. It was a good starting point, but we wanted to see if others encountered it too and in what way. The easiest way to see that, was by asking fellow students how was moving abroad for them; the most common answer was, as expected, the difficulty in finding friends and keeping people with whom you interacted close. And there, we had our problem, **difficulty in finding friends and people with whom you share interests with**.

To reach a larger audience, we did brainstorm sessions in which we tried to find other situations in which people might have felt socially isolated. This was done to broaden our target audience, not only aimed at international students or people who move abroad (for work). COVID-19 was the most common situation in which people felt like they had no one to talk to, this situation being even harder for anxious people. However, after the pandemic ended people still felt that something was missing, namely the social gatherings, who were not the same as before.

Having identified our problems, the team moved on with more specific research topics, user surveys, interviews, and identifying goals and needs through personas and user journeys.

The result was that sharing mutual interests was the thing that brought most people together, which is why we chose to develop an application focused at finding friends through shared interests.

Survey

The survey's scope was to identify demographics and set up a more specific target audience.

This helped us in better understanding our users' needs based on personal experiences (**Question**: "What would have helped you to overcome the isolation you were feeling [at a moment mentioned above]"), as well as establishing if an application targeted at connecting people with the same interests would help them in moments of loneliness and isolation.

More specific survey insights and results can be found in the GitLab repository, at the link: https://git.fhict.nl/I478947/m3-cb-02-trust-and- launch.git

User interviews

Empathizing with our audience is one of the most important steps in understanding their needs and this is what we aimed at with this session of interviews. We chose our users based on the demographics revealed in the surveys and formed the questions in such a way that they would explain to us moments when they encountered feelings of loneliness and isolation.

It helped us to have a clearer idea on what features we should focus on when developing the prototype, as well as gave us new perspective on designing the concept.

More specific interview insights and answers can be found in the GitLab repository, at the link: https://git.fhict.nl/I478947/m3-cb-02-trust-and- launch.git

User's goals and needs (through personas and user journey)

Having clear insights in mind, we were able to portray our ideal target user. The most revealing and organized way to do that, was by creating personas and a user journey. This provided us with sufficient material to start the ideation process.

More specific information about how we identified and approached each user's goals and needs can be found in the GitLab repository, at the link: https://git.fhict.nl/I478947/m3-cb-02-trust-and-launch.git

HMW & POV

How might we question helped us coming up with an actual design challenge, to create an app aimed at connecting people with the same interests and hobbies. Some HMW questions that we came up with:

1. How might we reintroduce people in the 'real world' after the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How might we design something to help people who struggle with social anxiety make friends with the same interests as them?
3. How might we design something to help people who move to a new country make friends?
4. How might we include people into a community?
5. How might we gather people with the same interests in one place?
6. How might we make people feel safe online?
7. How might we dig deeper into anxiety issues?
8. How might we make people want to open up to one another?
9. How might we evaluate the level of compatibility between 2 people?
10. How might we bring back activities that were normal before COVID-19?

The POVs:

A young adult who just moved to a new country in order to pursue higher education needs to create connections because if he ends up staying isolated, he might feel isolated and become depressive.

People who used to have an active social life before COVID-19 need to socialize through different platforms because they would rather spend time with people than alone.

We ended up coming up with solutions for the first three of the HMW, can be accessed at: https://git.fhict.nl/I478947/m3-cb-02-trust-and-launch.git

Feedback

After the pitch presentation at the LiveWall headquarters, we received some feedback from our teachers as well as the company's representatives.
The main point of the feedback was that our presentation was focused a bit too much on the research part, and by the time we were closing up with the concepts, we were already rushed. However, our idea is good and now we need to make sure we plan everything right so we can "make it our own".

We plan on listening to this feedback to make the best as possible from our concept.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

The scope of the secondary research was to solidify the information we obtained on field, with documented resources. We were able to find a multitude of online resources that explained how people who move abroad have a hard time finding people with the same interests as them, as well as how they can be more predisposed at forming depression, if they do not manage to form a new social life in the new country. There is also evidence on how most people's social life was affected by the pandemic. Some people developed social anxiety when having to re-enter society; this happens when one spends time alone and lets their mind wander, creating different fictional scenarios, that can facilitate social anxiety.

Library research
Article 1 summary - nia.nih.gov

According to studies, social isolation and loneliness raise the chance of developing conditions like heart disease, depression, and cognitive decline. Due of health concerns and the requirement for physical distance, the coronavirus outbreak in 2020 introduced further difficulties. A person is more likely to experience loneliness and social isolation if they become suddenly alone because of a loved one's illness, being away from friends or family, losing their mobility, developing eyesight or hearing issues, being disabled, or not having access to transportation. Social isolation and loneliness are distinct but connected. Being alone or apart from others causes the agonizing experience of loneliness. Lack of social connections and having few people to routinely communicate with constitute social isolation. You can be socially isolated or lonely when living alone, and you can also feel lonely when you're around other people.

Article 2 summary – AKPAÇA, G. (2020)
The hushed-up dark side of living abroad: expat depression. Daily Sabah

Moving to a foreign country is one of the most adventurous life choices you can make, but it also comes with a lot of pressure. Along with dealing with cultural differences and language barriers, expats frequently have to rely heavily on locals to guide them through even the most basic tasks, such as signing a lease or buying prescription medicines at the pharmacy. Over time, this can undermine one's confidence in their own abilities. Moving internationally demands a lot of energy, optimism, self-assurance, and independence, which is possibly why individuals with the courage to do so initially try to brush off the signs of depression or anxiety. 42.8% of the 5,000 expatriates surveyed in a study by Dr. Mitesh Patel, medical director of the American health insurance company Aetna, listed the lack of a support system as their main source of stress. "As our clinical experts have provided support to our members, they

have found that the absence of the friend and family network compounds stress and anxiety suffered by expatriates on foreign soil," the study said. "Taken together, these findings suggest that the experience of living overseas is a difficult and demanding one and that if things begin to degrade for individuals emotionally, a cascade of problems can be expected to accompany the emotional shift," it added.

Article 3 summary: Dudys, V. (2017)
Moving abroad and expat depression.theskinny.co.uk

The Skinny article shares the story of Victoria Dudys, who moved abroad and suffered from expat depression. According to her, living in a new country is a phenomenal experience, but with adapting to new cultures, she felt out of place and alone. Vitoria was thrilled to be starting over and remaking herself in a new country, but after about five months, she felt stuck. Life was not only becoming less exciting for her but also absolutely overwhelming and unbearable. She realised that she had made virtually no friends since she worked alone and had an almost non-existent support system. She would wake up, cry, go to work, cry in the bathroom, cry on the bus home, and cry before going to sleep. Expat depression is incredibly common. Depression is like this little goblin that lives in the deep corners of your mind who tells you you're not good enough for friends and makes you feel insecure. When she finally decided she wanted to get past her depression she knew she would have to find someone to speak to.

Article 4 summary: Epps, T. (2021)
Struggling with Social Anxiety as we prepare for re-entry post-covid? Anxiety expert shares how to cope. Penn Medicine

People are experiencing social anxiety as they prepare for re-entry after COVID, according to PennMedicine news. The COVID-19 pandemic increased causes of stress for many people, as well as changes in how we connect with others — from preventing COVID-19 to spending less in-person time with loved ones and friends. While some anticipated this and look forward to a "return to normal", others enjoy the more isolated lifestyle experienced during the epidemic. those who deal with social anxiety have found remote learning, work, and socialisation to be ideal. Re-entry, on the other hand, may be difficult for someone suffering from social anxiety, an anxiety disorder that causes extreme fear in social situations. The past two years have allowed them to avoid the everyday tasks that come along with socialising, which they may have found difficult. Some may have felt their anxiety significantly decrease during this period of time, but it's likely their anxiety did not go away, Ammon explains. They have been paused due to the pandemic and it is likely that those social worries are beginning to return. But people can prepare for their return to in-person activities to help manage their anxieties.

TESTING & VAILDATION

User testing is a crucial step in the product development process, as it allows us to gather valuable feedback from real users. Our product, like many others, has gone through several rounds of user testing, which has greatly impacted its development. By gathering feedback from a group of people from our target audience, we were able to identify areas where the product was lacking, as well as areas where it excelled. This feedback has helped us make informed decisions on how to improve the product, resulting in a more user-friendly and effective final product. User testing has played a vital role in the development of our product, and we believe it will continue to do so in the future, as we continue to strive for excellence in the user experience.

Wireframe testing

Before we began creating the high-fidelity prototype of our product, we conducted several rounds of user testing on the wireframes. These wireframes served as a rough outline of the product's layout and functionality and allowed us to gather valuable feedback from users on the overall design and usability of the product.

We each conducted this test with one possible user, so in total we had 4 tests with 4 possible users. These tests resulted in us being told that the overall design looked nice but that we should be really careful with the icons we use as we chose to use simple icons these could make things harder to understand or confusing to some users, so we had to change that or at least make it less confusing and more obvious. The most important feedback we received from suers was about what made us different than all the other apps with a similar concept and asked us to really focus on that.

The wireframe testing also helped us to validate our design choices and make sure that the product was intuitive and easy to use before moving on to the high-fidelity prototype. By testing the wireframes, we were able to identify and fix potential issues early in the development process, which saved us time and resources in the long run.

Overall, testing the wireframes before creating the high-fidelity prototype was an essential step in the development process, as it allowed us to create a more user-friendly and effective final product.

Hi-fi prototype testing

Before starting 'coding' the final version of our product, we again did a few rounds of user testing on the high-fidelity prototype. The high-fidelity prototype is a realistic and detailed representation of the final product.

This time we decided to go with just 2 test as we already had a general idea of what was good and what was bad due to the wireframes. Since the wireframes are the fundamental base of our hi-fi prototype. We decided to use the think out loud and task-based testing method to get as much of the feeling our product gives as possible. We also recorded our participants and the screen; these recordings can be found in our git repository.

The feedback we received were really positive, both of our users liked the overall design, the placements of everything and the concept of our product. The confusion we had with the icons in the wireframes were resolved if we look back at the feedback we got. After the feedback we started with making the final version of our product using mainly HTML, CSS, and JavaScript.

Final testing

The final user testing for our web application was a crucial step in the development process. It provided valuable insights and feedback from real users, allowing us to fine-tune the product and ensure it met the needs and expectations of our target audience. The results of the testing were overwhelmingly positive, with users praising the application's ease of use and functionality.

Our team worked tirelessly to address any issues identified during the testing, resulting in a polished and user-friendly final product. The testing also helped us to identify new features and improvements that will be implemented in future updates.

We are confident that the web application will be well-received by its users, and we are excited to see it being used in the wild. The final user testing was a powerful testament to the value of user-centred design and its ability to create products that truly meet the needs of real users.

We tested the final product with each one user. We in total tested it with 4 people. We again decided to use the task-based testing method, sadly the participants didn't want to get recorded. All of the users liked the concept and design like the previous test. There was one instance where the website was not responsive which has been resolved. In another instance the user told us that we really managed to differ ourselves from the other 'socialising' apps.