BridgeUp

FINAL DOCUMENTATION

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BridgeUp

ABSTRACT

The Applied Research Project A, undertaken as part of the 2024-2025 Master's Programme in **Usability Engineering** at **Rhine-Waal University of Applied Sciences**, aimed at developing a user-centered product. Guided by Professors **Prof. Dr. Kai Essig** and **Frank Feyrer**, the project followed a **Design Thinking approach**, focused on ensuring a high degree of usability.

To thoroughly understand the context of use and address the core challenges faced by users, the project involved a combination of **interviews** and **research**. These insights informed the creation of **personas** and **scenarios**, which helped define **the user requirements**. Subsequently, two prototypes were developed and subjected to usability evaluations: **a low-fidelity prototype** followed by a **high-fidelity prototype.**

The evaluation process involved **usability tests**, which showed a clear need for a tool that helps **academics network and find relevant events** more easily. The result is a smartphone app designed to help academic peers connect and discover events that match their interests. The app includes features like **personalized event recommendations**, **networking opportunities** based on shared research topics, and **a way to find potential research partners.** Based on the positive feedback, this idea has great potential for future growth, especially with the addition of more collaborative features and academic resources in later versions.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In this modern academic world, **collaboration** is key to promoting innovation, **enhancing research quality**, and **improving knowledge**. However, students often face difficulties in finding the right research partners who share similar interests, expertise, and academic goals and with whom their working nature matches.The process of identifying the suitable collaborators is typically informal, depending on word-of-mouth, university bulletin boards, or faculty recommendations, which can be inefficient and limiting.

In addition, students frequently miss out on academic events such as conferences, workshops, and seminars due to a lack of consolidated information. These events play a crucial role in skill development, networking, and exposure to the latest research trends. **Without a structured platform to find and track such opportunities, students may struggle to engage in meaningful academic and professional growth.**

This app is designed to address these issues by providing a **dedicated platform** where students can connect based on their **research interests** and **find academic events** relevant to their field. The platform promotes **a collaborative ecosystem within universities, enhancing the academic experience** and **research productivity of students**.

MOTIVATION

University students have various needs for performing well in academics and having a good learning experience. Very few students get the right guidance on how to solve their academic needs, and hence a platform that resolves their issues is the need of the hour. Research projects, especially at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, often require collaboration among students with diverse skill sets and expertise. However, many students face difficulties in identifying and reaching out to potential collaborators, leading to missed opportunities and incomplete projects.

Some of the major challenges students encounter include limited exposure because students are often unaware of potential research partners outside their immediate peer group or department, mismatch in expertise as finding a partner whose skills complement the needs of a project can be challenging without a structured platform and depending on traditional methods of collaboration may not always provide the best matches.

Academic events play a crucial role in a student's learning and professional development. It is also a practical way of learning for students. They provide opportunities for networking with peers, faculty, and industry experts, gaining exposure to the latest research and technological advancements, and enhancing skills through workshops, training sessions, and hackathons.

However, students often struggle to find the right events due to unorganized sources of information, a lack of real-time updates on upcoming events, and limited awareness of event relevance based on their academic focus. By addressing these challenges, the app aims to improve students' ability to collaborate effectively and stay engaged with the academic community.

PROBLEM / SOLUTION

Problem Area:

The problem we identified through extensive interaction with students as part of our project research is the difficulty they face in finding research partners and accessing academic events. These challenges are mainly due to the inefficiency of traditional collaboration methods and the scattered, unorganized nature of information sources related to academic events. As a result, students struggle to connect with potential research partners and to stay informed about relevant academic opportunities

Solution Area:

Our solution directly tackles the challenges university students face in collaborating on research and staying connected with academic opportunities.

Collaboration: Students can create detailed profiles that showcase their research interests, skills, and past projects, making it easier to find and connect with potential collaborators who share similar goals.

Centralized Research Opportunities: The research posting feature allows users to share topics and ideas, helping to bridge the gap between students looking for project partners and those with complementary interests.

Efficient Communication: With an integrated messaging tool, students can discuss projects and plan collaborations directly within the app, eliminating the need for scattered emails or separate platforms.

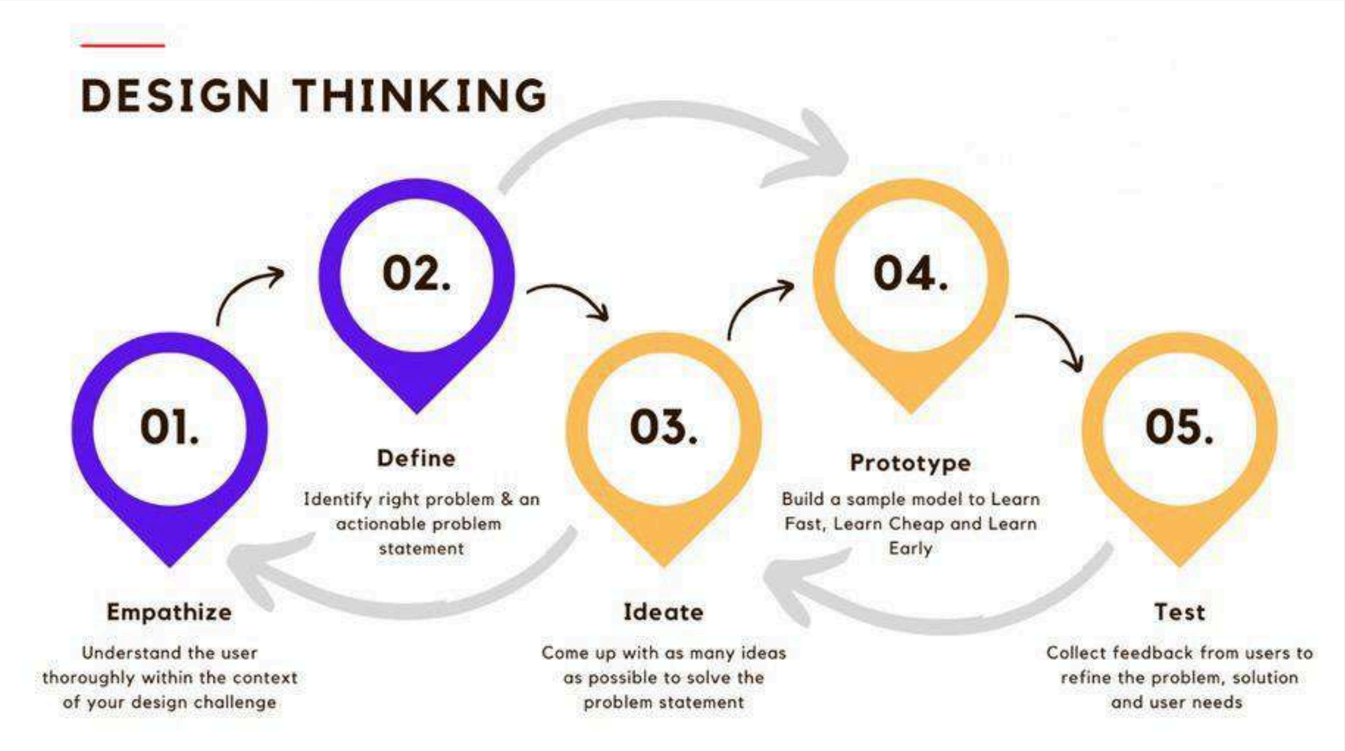
Easy Access to Academic Events: The app's event listings provide a list of relevant workshops, conferences, and other academic events, addressing the issue of disorganized and inaccessible information.

This app is designed specifically for university students, creating a dedicated space that promotes collaboration, enhances access to academic resources, and simplifies communication.

METHODOLOGY

Design Thinking is a user-centered, iterative approach that aligns with our goal of creating a user-friendly application for academics. This method ensured we empathized with users before designing, allowing us to focus on their needs. Through empathy, ideation, prototyping, and continuous iteration, we developed an app that effectively helps students find research partners and academic opportunities.

Design Thinking is fundamentally a human-centered approach that emphasizes collaboration and participatory co-creation. Rather than designing for users, it shifts toward designing with users, ensuring that their needs and insights shape the process. This methodology extends beyond traditional design fields, influencing areas such as corporate innovation by integrating design culture and its problem-solving methods into new domains. As a result, Design Thinking has become a sophisticated approach for conceptualizing innovative solutions and transforming ideas into actionable realities **(Tschimmel, 2012).**



- Depiction of the design thinking approach (Program Strategy.com, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

How Did We Apply The Design Thinking Approach To Our Project?

Empathize – Understanding Student Needs
The first step in the Design Thinking approach was to gain deep insights into the challenges faced by students. We conducted a user research phase to understand how students currently find research partners and academic events.

Define – Identifying the Core Problem
Based on research findings, we understood that university students face significant challenges in finding research collaborators and accessing academic events due to fragmented communication channels and a lack of structured networking tools. This leads to missed opportunities for academic growth and knowledge sharing.

Ideate - Brainstorming Solutions
With a clear problem definition, we moved to the ideation phase, where we explored potential solutions to address student challenges.
We discussed as a team and analyzed various issues and finalized the solutions. As a result of various student interactions which served as a basement for our idea, we moved to research other apps too. After getting an idea about the solutions, later we transformed them into workable features that can be the core of our app. By prioritizing these ideas based on feasibility and impact, we defined the app's main functions which will help the students.

Prototype – Creating the First Version
Once the core features were identified, we built a low-fidelity prototype using Figma. This allowed quick iterations before moving to actual development.

Test – Refining the App Through User Feedback
After refining the prototype, we developed a high-fidelity app and conducted high fidelity testing with students from different universities. This helped us understand the app better and we made some changes based on the feedback received.

TEAM

The project team comprises three members from diverse backgrounds. Each team member was assigned a specific role, but all were expected to provide assistance to one another when needed.

Kübra Aslan: Kübra has a background in Visual Communication Design (B.A.). During the project, she will be mainly responsible for designing the UI of the app and will also be responsible for all visuals, slides, and presentations. She will also support the user research part and the documentation.

Ümmü Gülsüm Ergin: Ümmü Gülsüm has a background in Software engineering and programming (BSc.). During the project, she will be mainly focusing on the technical part of the research. To support her team she is going to be involved in the design process and work with other disciplines.

Vaishnavi Angupillai-Ravichandran: Vaishnavi Ravichandran is a Software Engineer who has done Bachelor's in Computer Science Engineering(B.E). She will be involved in User Research, Planning and Psychology. Her contributions will also be in technical aspects of the design and documentation.

ORGANIZATION

Effective communication and collaboration were crucial in ensuring the smooth development of our app. Our team leveraged various digital tools—WhatsApp, Google Meet, Google Docs, and FigJam—to optimize our workflows, improve efficiency, and maintain clear communication throughout the project.

WhatsApp – Instant Communication

- WhatsApp served as our primary channel for quick updates, informal discussions, and urgent decision-making.
- Created a dedicated WhatsApp group for real-time discussions.
- Used it for quick announcements, reminders, and progress updates.
  Shared meeting links, deadlines, and file updates.

Google Meet – Team Meetings & Collaboration

- Google Meet was used for weekly team meetings, brainstorming sessions, and progress reviews.
- Weekly Sync Meetings – we had a team meeting to discuss progress, challenges, and next steps.
- Design Reviews – designer of the team shared their screens to present prototypes and gather feedback.

FigJam – UI/UX Design & Wireframing

- FigJam was used for UI/UX brainstorming, wireframing, and prototyping.
- Used sticky notes and mind maps for brainstorming UI/UX ideas.
- Conducted design critiques and feedback sessions using comments.

PROJECT PLAN

The Project Plan was developed at the beginning of the project to ensure a structured approach toward achieving the project's goals. The team initially outlined key milestones that were essential to complete the project on time and to a satisfactory standard. From there, we broke down the milestones into smaller, more manageable tasks.

In addition to detailing the tasks, the project plan includes the following components:

Task Type: Specifies the nature of each task (e.g., research, design, testing).

Who is Responsible: Clear assignment of responsibility for each task to a team member.

Status: A status update for each task (e.g., completed, in progress, or pending), allowing for better tracking of progress.

Expected Hours: The estimated time needed to complete each task, helping to ensure proper resource allocation. Actual Working Hours: The actual time spent on each task, providing insights into task efficiency and helping with future planning.

Files and Comments: A section for relevant files and any important comments or notes related to each task, ensuring better documentation and communication within the team.

This structure not only allowed us to stay on track but also provided a detailed record for monitoring and adjusting timelines and responsibilities as needed. The final version of the project plan, which includes updates and adjustments made during the course of the project, is available in **Annex A.1.**

RESEARCH

USER RESEARCH

In our project, we employed a primary user research method, to gather insights into the needs and challenges of our users with interviews. This method provided us with both qualitative and contextual insights, enabling us to design a solution that addresses the real needs of our users.

Purpose:

- To understand user needs, pain points, and expectations for collaboration, mentorship, and event participation.
- To explore challenges in finding collaborators, attending events, and accessing mentorship.
- To gather feedback on desired features for a collaboration platform.

THE METHOD: USER RESEARCH

What is User Research?

User Research is a systematic process of understanding the needs, behaviors, and motivations of users. It is a critical step in designing user-centered products or services. User Research employs various methods (e.g., interviews, surveys, observations) to gather insights into user problems and expectations (Nielsen, 1994; Goodman et al., 2013; Lowdermilk, 2013).

Why is User Research Important?

User Research is crucial for understanding the real needs of users and developing solutions that address those needs. By understanding user behaviors and motivations, designers can create products that are more likely to succeed. Additionally, User Research helps reduce project risks and increases user satisfaction (Clancy, 1995; Sutcliffe, 2009).

INTERVIEWS

How We Conducted Interviews in Our Project
Define Objectives:
We identified the key goals of the interviews, such as understanding user needs, challenges, and expectations for collaboration and event participation.

Recruit Participants:
Participants were chosen based on their academic background, experience, and interest in interdisciplinary collaboration. We interviewed 10 participants.

Develop Interview Questions:
We prepared a set of semi-structured questions to explore topics such as: Interest in interdisciplinary collaboration, challenges in finding collaborators or events, desired features for a collaboration platform.

Conduct Interviews:
We conducted one on one interviews, either in person or virtually, depending on participant availability.
Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes, allowing participants to share detailed insights.
We encouraged participants to provide examples from their experiences.

THE METHOD: INTERVIEWS

What are Interviews?
Interviews are a qualitative research method used to gather detailed insights from participants by asking open-ended or structured questions. They are particularly useful for understanding user needs, motivations, and pain points in depth (King & Horrocks, 2010). Interviews allow researchers to explore complex topics and gather rich, contextual data that may not be captured through other methods, such as surveys or observations **(Braun & Clarke, 2006).**

Why are Interviews Important?
Interviews are crucial for gaining a deep understanding of user experiences and uncovering insights that can guide the design of user-centered solutions. They provide a flexible yet structured way to explore user needs, behaviors, and expectations, making them an essential tool in the User Research process (King & Horrocks, 2010). Additionally, interviews can reveal hidden pain points and opportunities for improvement that might not be apparent through quantitative methods **(Braun & Clarke, 2006).**

KEY INSIGHTS FROM INTERVIEWS

Interdisciplinary Collaboration is Valued:
Participants see collaboration across fields as essential for gaining diverse perspectives and solving complex problems.

Challenges in Finding Collaborators:
Difficulty in identifying reliable partners, misaligned expectations, and communication barriers hinder successful collaborations.

Need for Reliable Collaboration Platforms:
Participants want platforms with verified profiles, advanced filtering (e.g., skills, expertise), and secure communication tools.

Networking Events are Mixed:
While networking events expand professional connections, they are often ineffective for academic collaboration.

Safety and Trust are Concerns:
Existing platforms (e.g., LinkedIn) are seen as unsafe or unreliable. Participants prefer student-focused platforms with robust verification systems.

Desired Features for Collaboration Tools:
Search and Match: Find collaborators based on skills, interests, or research questions.
Transparency: Verified profiles, peer reviews, and endorsements.
Event Integration: Notifications for relevant events, seminars, and job fairs.
Collaborative Tools: Shared workspaces, project templates, and clear role documentation.

Detailed interview questions and responses can be seen from **Annex A.2.**

PERSONAS

In our project, we developed personas based on data collected through interviews and observations with university students. These personas represent the key user groups who face challenges in finding research partners and accessing academic events.

Steps to Create Personas

Data Collection: We conducted interviews to understand students' needs, behaviors, and difficulties related to research collaboration and academic networking.

Identifying Patterns: By analyzing the data, we identified common themes and user behaviors, such as struggles in finding suitable research partners and missing out on academic events due to scattered information.

Creating Personas: Based on these insights, we developed personas that represent different types of students, including their academic background, research interests, goals, and pain points.

These personas were very important in helping us make design decisions, making sure that our platform does a good job of meeting the real needs of university students and improving their experience of working together on research.

THE METHOD: PERSONAS

What are Personas?
Personas are fictional characters created to represent different user types that might use a product or service. They are based on real data collected from User Research and help designers keep the user at the center of the design process (Cooper et al., 2007). Personas typically include demographic information, goals, pain points, and behaviors, making them a powerful tool for understanding and empathizing with users (Pruitt & Adlin, 2006).

Why are Personas Important?
Personas help teams align on who they are designing for and ensure that the product meets the needs of its target users. By giving a face and a story to user data, personas make it easier for designers, developers, and stakeholders to make user-centered decisions (Cooper et al., 2007). They also help prioritize features and functionalities based on the needs of the most important user groups (Pruitt & Adlin, 2006).

EMMA SCHNEIDER

NEEDS

- A platform to connect with like-minded students for research collaboration.
- A structured system to find peers with matching expertise and interests.
- A dedicated academic space to share ideas and build research experience.

BIO

- Emma, a final-year computer science student in Germany specializing in AI and data science, seeks research experience before her master's.
- She struggles to find suitable partners with aligned interests, making it hard to build a strong academic profile.

GOALS

- Find research partners with aligned interests and expertise.
- Gain research experience to strengthen her master's application.
- Build a strong academic profile through collaboration.

FRUSTRATIONS

- Limited opportunities to connect with research partners beyond her university.
- Difficulty finding peers with aligned interests and expertise.
- Struggles to network in the academic community outside structured settings.

ABOUT

Age: 22 Years

Berlin, Germany

Martial Status: Single

Gender: Female

Education: Computer Science Undergraduate Student

PERSONALITY

Introvert

Curiosity

Ambition

Determination

Openness

APPS

Google Scholar

Notion

GitHub

ResearchGate

LUKAS MÜLLER

NEEDS

- A platform to connect with students based on expertise and research interests.
- A streamlined way to recruit and onboard research collaborators.
- Access to a diverse academic community beyond his department.

BIO

- Lukas is PhD researcher working on an interdisciplinary project in engineering. While he has a clear research direction, he struggles to find students with the specific expertise needed to contribute to his project. His network is mostly limited to his department, making it difficult to connect with potential collaborators from other fields.

GOALS

- Find students with the right skills to join his research project.
- Expand his academic network beyond his department.
- Increase collaboration opportunities to strengthen his research.

FRUSTRATIONS

- Difficulty finding skilled collaborators outside his immediate academic circle.
- Limited visibility of students interested in research participation.
- Lack of an efficient platform to recruit contributors for his project.

ABOUT

- Age: 30 Years
- Düsseldorf, Germany
- Martial Status: Married
- Gender: Male
- Education: PhD Researcher in Engineering

PERSONALITY

Analytical Thinking

Pragmatism

Detail-Oriented

Leadership

Skepticism

APPS

Google Docs

XING

A

zotero

inkl

ANNA BECKER

NEEDS

- A platform that centralizes and organizes academic events for her field.
- A comprehensive list of conferences, workshops, and seminars tailored to environmental science.
- Opportunities to connect with professionals and peers at these events for networking.

BIO

- Anna is a master's student in environmental science. She struggles to find centralized information about academic events like conferences, workshops, and seminars relevant to her field, often missing out on valuable opportunities.

GOALS

- Discover and attend academic events like conferences and workshops in her field.
- Stay informed about advancements in environmental science and sustainability.
- Network with experts and fellow students to expand her academic and professional connections.

FRUSTRATIONS

- Difficulty finding centralized information about relevant academic events.
- Misses out on opportunities due to fragmented event listings across platforms.
- Struggles to find events that align with her specific academic focus.

ABOUT

Age: 25 Years

Hamburg, Germany

Martial Status: Single

Gender: Female

Education: Master's Student in Environmental Science

PERSONALITY

Outgoing

Curious

Energetic

Sociable

Motivated

APPS

eventbrite

ticketmaster

Meetup

zoom

SCENARIOS

How We Created Scenarios in Our Project

In our project, we developed scenarios based on the personas we created and the data collected from interviews and observations. These scenarios represent typical use cases for our users. We use our personas Emma Schneider, Lukas Müller, and Anna Backer for creating use case scenarios and referred different aspects of our product.

Steps to Create Scenarios:

Identify User Goals: We identified the key goals of each persona.

Define User Tasks: We outlined the tasks users would need to complete to achieve their goals.

Create Narrative Descriptions: We wrote narrative descriptions of how users would interact with the app to complete these tasks.

THE METHOD: SCENARIOS

What are Scenarios?
Scenarios are narrative descriptions of how users interact with a product or service to achieve specific goals. They provide context for user tasks and help designers understand the user's journey, motivations, and challenges (Carroll, 2000). Scenarios are often used to explore potential use cases and to guide the design of user-centered solutions (Rosson & Carroll, 2002).

Why are Scenarios Important?
Scenarios help designers visualize how users will interact with a product in real-world situations. They provide a clear understanding of user needs, behaviors, and pain points, making it easier to design solutions that address these issues (Carroll, 2000). Additionally, scenarios can be used to test and validate design concepts before implementation, reducing the risk of usability problems (Rosson & Carroll, 2002).

SCENARIOS

Scenario 1:

Emma is a 22 year old Computer Science student in Berlin, passionate about AI and data science. She wants to gain research experience before applying for her master's, but finding the right research partners has been frustrating. Most of her peers have different interests, and connecting with students outside her university isn't easy.

After signing up for the app, Emma creates a profile, adding her research interests and skills. She posts an idea for an AI ethics project and specifies that she's looking for collaborators with expertise in data analysis and programming. At the same time, she explores other projects and applies to join a cybersecurity research group led by students from another university.

Thanks to the app, Emma connects with like minded students without wasting time searching through university forums or social media. She finally feels part of a wider academic network, gaining valuable experience that strengthens her master's applications.

Scenario 2:

Lukas is a 25 year old PhD researcher in Munich, working on an engineering project that requires expertise beyond his own field. He needs collaborators with strong programming and data analysis skills, but his search is frustrating his network is mostly limited to his department, and traditional university forums are inefficient.

After joining the app, Lukas creates a project listing, outlining his research goals and the skills he's looking for. Within days, he receives applications from master's and undergraduate students with relevant expertise, including a computer science student specializing in machine learning.

Through the platform, Lukas not only finds the right people for his project but also expands his academic network beyond his university. Collaboration becomes easier, and he finally gets the interdisciplinary support he needs to take his research further.

SCENARIOS

Scenario 3:

Anna, astudent in environmental science, is eager to attend academic conferences and workshops to stay updated on sustainability trends and connect with experts. However, finding relevant events is a constant struggle she spends hours searching different university websites and social media pages, often missing deadlines or coming across events that are too far away.

After discovering the app, Anna finally has a centralized platform to explore academic events. She customizes her preferences by selecting topics like climate change and renewable energy and sets alerts for new conferences and workshops. The app's filters allow her to find events nearby or online, making her search much more efficient.

One day, she receives a notification about an upcoming sustainability conference in Hamburg. With just a few taps, she registers and creates a reminder for the event. At the conference, she gains valuable insights from industry leaders and connects with researchers who share her interests.

Over time, the app helps Anna expand her network, stay informed about key developments in her field, and build opportunities for future collaborations—all without the frustration of endless searching.

TASKS

At this stage, we had entered the ideation phase of the Design Thinking approach. After defining our personas and scenarios, we began brainstorming and exploring potential solutions to address their needs effectively.

This step helped us identify key features and functionalities to include in our first prototype and serve as a baseline for creation of the prototype.

THE METHOD: TASKS

What are Tasks?
Tasks are specific actions that users need to perform to achieve their goals when interacting with a product or service. They are derived from user needs and scenarios and help designers create intuitive and efficient user interfaces (Hackos & Redish, 1998). Tasks provide a clear framework for understanding how users will interact with a system and what steps they need to take to complete their objectives (Preece et al., 2015).

Why are Tasks Important?
Tasks are essential for designing user-centered systems because they ensure that the product meets the needs of its users. By breaking down user goals into specific tasks, designers can identify potential usability issues and create solutions that are both effective and efficient (Hackos & Redish, 1998). Tasks also help guide the development of user interfaces by providing a clear structure for navigation and interaction (Preece et al., 2015).

TASKS

Tasks for Peers (Idea Sharers):

You want to find a research partner who matches your academic interests and skills.
You want to browse and apply for ongoing research projects that align with your expertise.
You want to share your research idea and invite collaborators to join your project.
You want to check a potential collaborator's academic background and past projects.
You want to explore upcoming academic events, such as conferences and workshops, in your field.
You want to set reminders for events that interest you.
You want to communicate with your research team through the platform.
You want to manage your project timeline and assign tasks to your collaborators.

Tasks for Peers (Idea Joiners):

You want to find students with specific skills to contribute to your research project.
You want to post a research project and specify the expertise you are looking for.
You want to review applications from students interested in joining your project.
You want to check a student's academic background and past collaborations.
You want to manage your research project and assign tasks to your team.
You want to communicate with your research team through the platform.
You want to explore upcoming academic events relevant to your field.
You want to track your project's progress and update team members on deadlines.

TASKS

Tasks for Event Joiners:

You want to find academic events related to your interest and background.
You want to filter events based on location, topic, and format (online/in-person).
You want to receive updates for new conferences and workshops in your field.
You want to register for an academic event directly through the platform.
You want to save events to your personal calendar and receive reminders.
You want to check event details, including speakers, agenda, and location.
You want to browse events easily.
You want to manage your tickets and bookings

REQUIREMENTS

How We Defined Requirements in Our Project ?

In our project, we defined a set of requirements based on the goals and needs identified during our user research. We used insights gained from user interviews, personas, scenarios, and tasks to shape and refine these requirements. These requirements then turned into low fidelity prototype design to validate with users and iterate.

THE METHOD: REQUIREMENTS

What are Requirements?
Requirements are detailed descriptions of the features, functionalities, and constraints that a product or system must fulfill to meet user needs and expectations. They serve as a blueprint for design and development, ensuring that the final product aligns with user goals (Wiegers & Beatty, 2013). Requirements are typically categorized into functional (what the system should do) and non-functional (how the system should perform) (Sommerville, 2016).

Why are Requirements Important?
Requirements are critical for guiding the development process and ensuring that the final product effectively addresses user needs. They help teams prioritize features, avoid scope creep, and reduce the risk of misunderstandings between stakeholders (Wiegers & Beatty, 2013). Well-defined requirements also provide a basis for testing and validation, ensuring the product meets quality standards (Sommerville, 2016).

REQUIREMENTS

Matching Algorithm for Research Partners: Matching algorithm that allows users to find collaborators based on academic interests, skills, and expertise.

Advanced Filtering Options: Provide filters for skills, experience level, availability, and collaboration type.

In-App Communication Tools: Provide integrated messaging and video conferencing options to facilitate seamless collaboration.

Feedback and Rating System: Allow users to rate collaborators based on their contribution and professionalism, helping build trust in future collaborations.

Project Browsing and Application: Browse and apply for ongoing research projects that align with their field and expertise.

Project Listings: Maintain a wide variety of projects in different domains, with clear descriptions and required skills listed.

Role Clarity Features: Include detailed role descriptions and expectations in project listings to avoid ambiguity.

Skill Verification System: Enable users to showcase verified certifications, badges, or endorsements from previous collaborators.

Collaboration History Profiles: Display past projects, contributions, and endorsements on user profiles to help identify reliable collaborators.

Idea Sharing and Collaboration Invitation: Share their research ideas and projects with others, and send invitations for collaboration.

REQUIREMENTS

Event Filters: Filters for location, topics, and event type should be available for easy search.

Personalized Recommendations: Use machine learning to analyze user preferences and suggest events that align with their profile.

Event Dashboard: Include a dashboard where users can track upcoming events, make edits to registrations, and set reminders.

Collaboration with Universities: Partner with universities to ensure updated, relevant events on the platform.

Real-Time Notifications: Notify users about event updates, deadlines, and changes to keep them informed and engaged.

Event Discovery: Centralized event listing where users can browse upcoming academic events such as conferences, workshops, and seminars related to their field.

DEVELOPMENT

LOW FIDELITY PROTOTYPE

Using research foundation, a low-fidelity prototype was developed to represent the platform's core functionality. This prototype allowed us to gather early feedback, allowing for quick refinements before progressing to higher-fidelity designs.The main focus of the low-fidelity prototype is to determine which features should be included in the project and to define its overall scope.

The decision to utilize online tools for this prototype design was primarily driven by the intention to engage a broader and more diverse group of students during the testing phase, ensuring comprehensive feedback from a wide range of participants.

The low-fidelity prototype can be seen in **Annex A.3.**

THE METHOD: LOW FIDELITY PROTOTYPE

Low-fidelity prototypes focus on presenting different design ideas, concepts, and screen arrangements rather than providing an in-depth depiction of system functionality. This type of prototyping is intended to be quick and take place in the early stages of the design process. Typically, a low-fidelity prototype consists of a collection of static layouts that illustrate various scenarios and user flows. **(Rudd et al., 1996)**.

Rudd, Stern, and Isensee (1996) highlight several advantages of low-fidelity prototyping, including lower development costs, the ability to evaluate multiple design concepts, improved communication, addressing screen layout issues, identifying market requirements, and serving as a proof-of-concept.

Walker et al. (2002) found no significant differences between computer and paper prototypes or low- and high-fidelity prototypes in terms of the number, type, and severity of usability issues identified. Their findings align with previous research, supporting the use of low-fidelity prototypes due to their cost-effectiveness, ease of iteration, and focus on interaction design and information architecture. Both paper and computer prototypes were found to be equally valid for usability testing. Paper prototypes facilitate participatory design and enable exploratory, dynamic testing, while computer prototypes allow for automatic recording, electronic distribution, and better documentation. Ultimately, designers can select the most practical prototyping medium without compromising usability testing effectiveness.

LOW FIDELITY TESTING

How We Conducted Formative Usability Testing in Our Project?

After creating the low-fidelity prototype, we needed to get some feedback from users to see if the features and requirements we came up with actually worked. To do this, we decided to run formative usability testing. This type of testing helped us evaluate how well the app functions and made sure the core features were easy for users to interact with.

We chose low-fidelity testing because it allowed us to test the basic structure of the app without worrying about design details. It helped us focus on key aspects like the peer matching system and project sharing features to ensure they worked well before moving to high fidelity prototype.

Plus, by using wireframes instead of a fully designed app, we were able to avoid distractions like colors or complex visuals that might take the user's focus away from the main tasks. This simplified the testing process, making it easier to gather clear feedback on the app's functionality.

Recruitment of participants: A total of 8 university students and researchers participated in the usability test. The participants were from diverse academic backgrounds to ensure comprehensive feedback.

The low-fidelity testing plan and guidelines can be seen in **Annex A.4.**

THE METHOD: FORMATIVE USABILITY TESTING

What is Formative Usability Testing?
Formative usability testing is an iterative evaluation method conducted during the design and development process to identify usability issues and improve the product before its final release. It focuses on gathering feedback from users to refine the design and ensure it meets their needs (Rubin & Chisnell, 2008). Unlike summative testing, which evaluates the final product, formative testing is proactive and aims to guide design decisions (Lewis, 2012).

FINDINGS

The following table depicts the overall analysis of the test results combined with 8 participants. Participant based findings can be seen in **Annex A.5.**

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
Intuitive interface: Simple and easy-to-navigate. Clear purpose: Connecting with peers and finding events. Smooth search: Easy to search for events and peers. Project-sharing feature: Appreciated by the users as a feature Profile page: Familiar, professional like LinkedIn. Smooth sign-in: Generally error-free. Effective peer recommendations: Appreciated by users. Seamless messaging: Easy communication with peers. Event search and registration: Intuitive and user-friendly.	Navigation & Usability: Difficulty locating saved items, no "favorites" or "save for later". Navigation menu placement unclear. Onboarding questions considered excessive. Messaging & Communication: Lack of clarity (no delivery/read indicators). No notification for sent messages. Send message icon poorly positioned. Search & Filtering: Peer search was confusing. Lack of advanced filters for peer and event searches. Some filters limited or unclear, especially for multiple criteria. Project & Idea Sharing: Sharing ideas and collaborating could be improved.	User Experience: Some users found the app simple and useful, while others desired more features. The app was appreciated for being distinct from LinkedIn. Peer Sharing: The peer-sharing form was liked by some but considered too detailed and time-consuming by others. Messaging System: Messaging worked well for some, but others found the sharing options visibility insufficient.

HIGH FIDELITY PROTOTYPE

In this phase, we began to develop our **high-fidelity prototype** based on the insights gained from user testing. **User feedback** from the testing of low fidelity played a crucial role in refining our design decisions. We then proceeded with the development of the high-fidelity prototype.

A key focus during this phase was **the peer search** feature, as it is a core functionality of our application. Our primary goal was to improve its usability, ensuring that users could easily navigate and use this feature to effectively address their needs.

At the same time, we focused on **the visual design** of the application to create an intuitive and aesthetically pleasing interface. By incorporating user feedback, we sought to validate our design choices and make necessary improvements before moving forward with development.

To streamline the prototyping process, we designed a functional flow that captured the application's primary interactions, rather than implementing every possible screen. This approach allowed us to focus on **validating critical features** before moving to full development.

The high fidelity prototype can be viewed in **Appendix A.6.**

THE METHOD: HIGH FIDELITY PROTOTYPE

Prototypes that closely resemble the final product are designated as high-fidelity prototypes, whereas those that exhibit significant deviation are categorised as low-fidelity prototypes. The creation of high-fidelity prototypes typically involves the utilisation of the same techniques as the final product, thereby replicating both its interaction methods and visual design. However, it should be noted that the development of high-fidelity prototypes necessitates a greater investment of time and resources in comparison to low-fidelity prototypes **(Walker, Takayama, & Landay, 2002).**

Nielsen (1989) identifies three methods for simplifying prototypes. Horizontal prototypes, which frequently resemble a simple user interface framework, have all the elements but just a limited amount of functionality. Although vertical prototypes only allow a fraction of the system to be operational, they fully integrate a narrower selection of functions. Last but not least, scenarios simplify the number of features and their operation by merely modeling a predetermined course of action. Nielsen highlights the importance of scenarios in prototyping since they are economical and allow designers to investigate options that might not have been practical otherwise.

Rudd et al. (1996) describe high-fidelity prototypes as fully interactive and user-driven, clearly defining the navigational scheme while serving as a tool for exploration, testing, and marketing.

HIGH FIDELITY TESTING

How We Conducted Formative Usability Testing in Our Project?
After building the high-fidelity prototype, we did formative usability testing to see how well the app worked and if the features were clear. The main focus was on the peer matching section and project sharing features, as well as the overall design and visuals.

By using the full design, we could get a better idea of how users would actually experience the app. This helped us get more accurate feedback on both the functionality and the design.

We had 9 participants from different academic fields participate to get a wide range of feedback.

The low-fidelity testing plan and guidelines can be seen in **Annex A.7.**

THE METHOD: FORMATIVE USABILITY TESTING

Why is Formative Usability Testing Important?
Formative usability testing is crucial for identifying and addressing usability problems early in the design process, reducing the risk of costly changes later. It helps designers understand how users interact with the product, what challenges they face, and how to improve the user experience (Rubin & Chisnell, 2008). By involving users throughout the development process, formative testing ensures that the final product is user-centered and meets their expectations (Lewis, 2012).

FINDINGS

The following table depicts the overall analysis of the test results combined with 9 participants. Participant based findings can be seen in **Annex A.8.**

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
Sign-Up & Navigation: Easy account creation, intuitive sidebar & bottom navigation. Event Registration: Well-organized, smooth registration, clear event details. Messaging: Responsive, clear notifications, smooth sending/receiving. Peer Finding: Fast, goal-oriented, effective filtering for projects. Homepage & Profile: Clean, well-organized, easy to navigate. Visual Design: Modern, user-friendly, good icons, readable text, strong contrast	Funds: Absence of any visible information about available grants or funding opportunities. Messaging Notifications: The messaging system lacked advanced features like typing indicators, "seen" status, and profile pictures in chats. Idea Sharing: The "Share Idea" feature was hard to find in the menu, and users were unable to upload files, images, or links to support their ideas. Visual Appeal: Some users suggested adding a dark mode option for better usability in low-light environments. Event Information: Details on cancellations, refunds, multi-day passes, and student discounts were often missing or unclear.	Notifications & Messaging: Notifications were clear within the messaging section but lacked visibility on the homepage. Delivery/read indicators were also missing. Idea Submission: The submission process was simple but lacked prompts for engagement and support for additional media like files or images. Profile & Homepage: While well-structured, some users suggested additional filtering options and better organization of personal information. Visual Design: The light theme was generally well-received, but some users suggested improving text contrast and icon clarity.

STORYBOARD

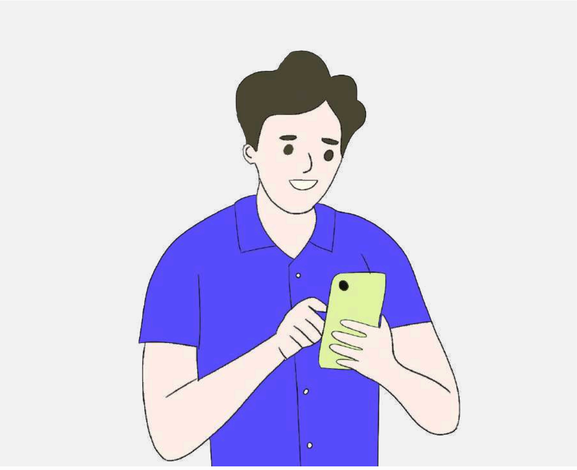
With the defined concept and user scenarios in mind, we created a storyboard to visualize a key interaction flow that could work for all researchers. We used our high fidelity prototype to illustrate how our product will function to the users.

THE METHOD: STORYBOARDING

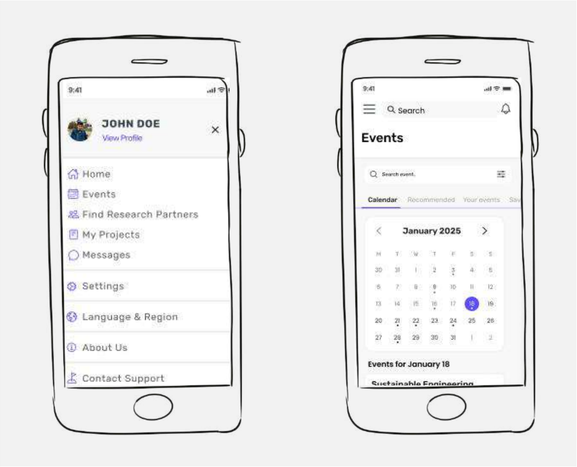
Truong, Hayes, and Abowd (2006) found that, storyboarding is a common technique in HCI and design for demonstrating system interfaces and contexts of use. Despite its recognized benefits, novice designers still encounter challenges in the creation of storyboards. Furthermore, as computing becomes increasingly integrated into the environment, blurring the distinction between the system and its surrounding context, it is imperative to depict context explicitly in storyboards. Experts emphasize that users first need to understand why an application matters. Including people in storyboards can enhance user empathy and highlight motivations.

van der Lelie (2006) discusses the value of storyboards in product design as follows; storyboards help product designers understand context and time by encouraging them to consider multiple factors, integrate insights, and address design implications early on. They offer flexibility, allowing designers to omit details as ideas evolve. Depending on their purpose, storyboards can be rough and open to feedback or detailed and persuasive. By serving as a visual communication tool, storyboards bridge gaps between designers, experts, and future users, fostering collaboration across different perspectives.

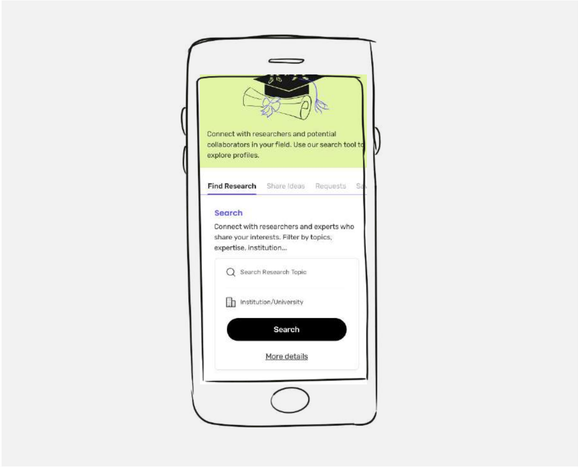
STORYBOARD



Alex Torres **signs up** and enters his research interests focused on Artificial Intelligence, Neural Networks. He selects his institution and fills in his expertise (AI, Machine Learning), **finishing his profile setup.**

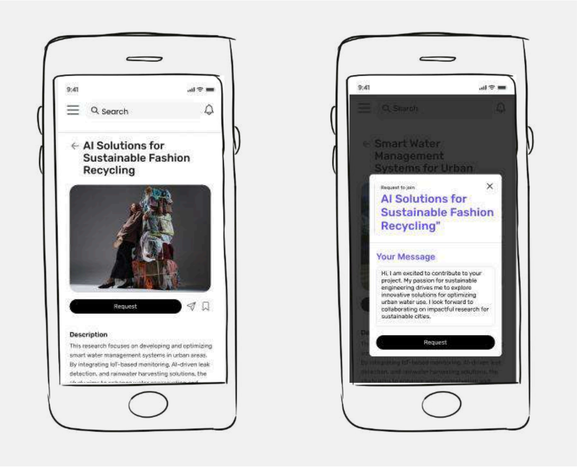


Alex reaches the **home and menu**, where he sees key sections such as homepage, peers, events, messaging, and profile. He **discovers** nearby **events** from the calendar.

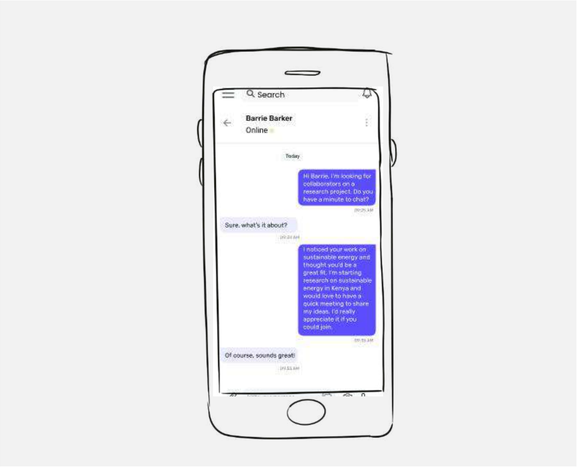


Then, he starts exploring the peer finding function. Torres uses the search bar to find AI researchers, applying filters like location, institution, and expertise to find potential collaborators in areas like AI-driven sustainability.

As a result of his applied filter, he sees projects that are matching with his interests and starts discovering them. He feels a deep sense of satisfaction knowing that he could easily discover and join exciting projects.

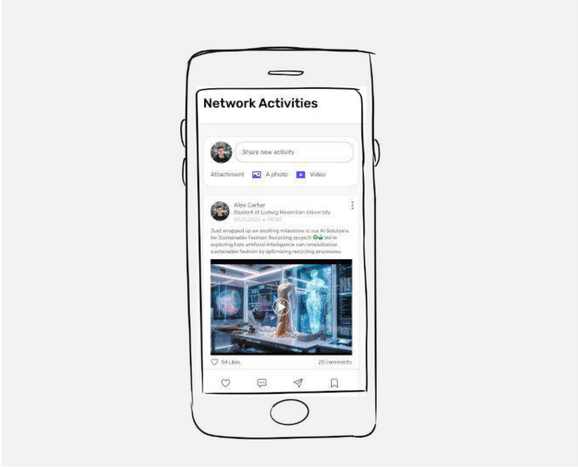


He decides to send a request for the project "AI Solutions for Sustainable Fashion Recycling" and writes a message detailing his expertise and why he's interested in contributing to the project.



He tracks his request status in the app, and a few days later, he receives a message from the project's lead researcher. They begin discussing how they can collaborate on the project.

They arrange a face-to-face meeting to discuss the project in detail. After a productive discussion and aligning their goals, they agree to collaborate and move forward with the project.



After a couple of months of collaboration, they share their progress and excitement about the project. The positive support from the community motivates them to keep going.

BRAND CREATION / UI DESIGN

Brand Research: To develop a compelling high-fidelity prototype, it was essential to establish a strong brand identity for the app, making it recognizable and appealing to university students. The first step in this process involved researching the names and logos of similar platforms. These were categorized into four main groups: academic networking platforms, research collaboration tools, event apps, and general university apps. The collected logos and names were compiled into four categories one for each category, allowing for a clear visual and conceptual analysis which can be reached from **Annex A.9.**

Colors: From this analysis, it was concluded that the app's branding should reflect connectivity, academic engagement, and collaboration. The chosen color scheme incorporates bright purple, green, pink, which are vibrant colors, symbolizing energy, innovation, and dynamic interactions among students.

Name of the App: After extensive brainstorming, the name "BridgeUp" was selected, signifying the app's mission to bridge gaps in academic collaboration and elevate student engagement with research and events. To complete the branding and communication strategy, a compelling tagline was created: **Bridge Up Your Opportunities.**

Visual Identity: To refine the visual identity of BridgeUp, we developed a dedicated mood board that captures the core themes of connectivity, vibrancy, and student engagement. This mood board served as a foundation for designing the logo, color palette, typography, and overall aesthetic of the app, ensuring consistency and alignment with the app's purpose and target audience. Moodboard can be seen from **Annex A.10.**

Logo Design: We designed a logo that visually resembles a bridge, reinforcing the concept of connecting students to research opportunities, academic events, and collaborators. Detailed logo guidelines can be seen from **Annex A.11.**

Type Family: We selected the Rubik type family for its modern, clean, and youthful aesthetic, aligning with BridgeUp's mission to connect students in a dynamic and engaging way. Type Guidelines can be seen from **Annex A.11.**

In a nutshell, BridgeUp's brand identity was crafted through research, categorization, and a mood board to guide design. A vibrant color palette of purple, green, and pink reflects energy and innovation, while the name and bridge-shaped logo emphasize connection and collaboration. This ensures an engaging and recognizable brand aligned with its mission of linking students to academic opportunities.

MARKETING PLAN

COMPETITOR ANALYSIS

Conducting a competitor analysis is essential to understanding how our platform fits into the current market and what unique value it offers. By examining existing solutions such as **LinkedIn, ResearchGate, Meetup, and Academia.edu**, we can identify their strengths and limitations, allowing us to position our product effectively.

The strongest competitors for our platform are LinkedIn, ResearchGate, Meetup, and Academia.edu, each addressing different aspects of academic networking, research collaboration, and event discovery but lacking a comprehensive, **student-focused solution.**

LinkedIn is widely used for professional networking but does not provide dedicated tools for students seeking research partners. Its primary focus is on career development and industry connections rather than facilitating research collaborations between students. Similarly, **ResearchGate** serves as a platform for sharing published research but does not support students in finding collaborators for ongoing projects before publication. It is also more suited to established researchers rather than students who are still building their academic profiles.

Meetup offers a well-structured event discovery system, but it is designed for general networking rather than academic or research-focused events. Students looking for relevant conferences, workshops, or collaboration opportunities often struggle to find them on the platform. Academia.edu, while useful for sharing research papers, does not provide features for research matchmaking or structured event listings tailored to students' needs.

Our platform directly addresses these gaps by focusing specifically on students and early-career researchers. Unlike LinkedIn or ResearchGate, it provides a smart matchmaking system to connect research partners based on shared interests, expertise, and collaboration styles. Additionally, it features a centralized academic event discovery tool, ensuring that students have easy access to relevant opportunities. By creating a structured and safe academic community, our platform enables students to build their research profiles, form meaningful collaborations, and enhance their academic experiences more effectively than existing alternatives.

COMPETITOR ANALYSIS - KEY FEATURE COMPARISON

	OUR SOLUTION	LINKEDIN	MEETUP	ACADEMIA.EDU	RESEARCHGATE
Student-Focused	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Research Partner Matching	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗
Event Discovery	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
In-App Messaging	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Academic Profile Building	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓

MARKETING PLAN

SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT analysis has become a key tool for organizations to assess their market position, commonly used to evaluate both the internal and external factors that impact an organization, especially during periods of uncertainty **(Rozmi et al., 2018).** As a newly developed product, we have decided to apply this technique to inform and guide our marketing strategy.

A SWOT analysis is used to evaluate business factors in terms of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats **(Jackson et al., 2003).** It highlights both internal and external elements that influence the achievement of a company's objectives. Internal elements refer to factors within the organization's control, while external elements are those beyond the organization's control **(Bull et al., 2016).**

The SWOT analysis can assist in the development of alternative business strategies by examining a company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

STRENGTHS

- Targeted towards university students and
- Holistic platform for research collaboration and events
- Focused on academic networking
- Personalized matchmaking for research partners

WEAKNESSES

- Limited user base
- Dependence on user adoption - the academic community's reluctance to use social media platforms
- Privacy issues for projects in ideation project
- Requires strong university partnerships

OPPORTUNITIES

- Partnerships with organizations & event sponsors
- Increasing number of students pursuing master's degrees
- Monetization through premium features

THREATS

- Resistance from universities & institutional bureaucracy
- Retention challenges
- Privacy & data security concerns
- User willingness to pay through the platform for event tickets and credibility concerns

MARKETING PLAN

MARKETING STRATEGY

To market our app we have planned a realistic model which not only attracts the students but also helps them understand how the app is crucial to them.The goal is to drive awareness, user adoption, and engagement while establishing the app as an essential tool for academic networking and research partnerships.

Target Audience

- University students seeking research partners.
- Students interested in academic events, workshops, and conferences.
- Research groups, university departments, and academic organizations.

Strategy Timeline / Steps

Phase 1 - Connecting with students
Timeline: September 2025 - February 2026

University Partnerships
Collaborate with university departments and research groups to test the app. Offer early access to selected students in exchange for feedback.

Student Ambassador Program

- Recruit influential students as brand ambassadors to promote the app in their circles.
- Encourage them to create content (videos, testimonials) about their experience.

Phase 2 - Trend Jacking
Timeline: February 2026 - August 2026

- Social Media & Content Marketing
- Create engaging content
- Success Stories – How students found research partners through the app?
- Event Highlights – Featuring major academic events from the app
- User-Generated Content – Students sharing their experiences
- Platforms to focus on: Instagram, LinkedIn, TikTok, Twitter , Reddit, Discord
- Campus Marketing & Awareness Campaigns
- Organize university roadshows & workshops to demonstrate the app
- Place posters and QR codes in libraries, labs, and research centers
- Distribute branded flyers, stickers, and merchandise (T-shirts, notebooks)

MARKETING PLAN

MARKETING STRATEGY

Phase 3 - Evolution Strategy (User Retention Focused)
Timeline: September 2026 - February 2027

- Referral & Gamification
- Implement a referral program
- Invite a friend & earn rewards
- Gamify the experience with leaderboards, achievement badges, and incentives
- Expansion to Other Universities
  - Start with pilot universities, then scale to multiple institutions.
  - Encourage inter-university collaborations by connecting students from different campuses

Estimated Price:

The app will follow a freemium model, with basic features available for free and premium features offered via a monthly or yearly subscription.

- Basic Free Plan (Limited Access)
- Premium Plan (€5 - €15 per month)
- Institutional Licensing for universities & research institutions (custom pricing)

Sales:

As our product's target audience are young University students we want to collaborate with universities and release as a single product.

Target Groups:

University students looking for research partners.
PhD candidates & early-career researchers seeking collaborations.
Students/researchers who wish to extend their networking.

Target Application Fields:

- Higher Education & Research
- Industry-Academia Collaboration
- Academic Event Discovery & Networking

Market Expansion Plan:

- Initial launch in Germany.
- Expansion to Europe after validation.

Professional Support Plan

Initially, we won't seek professional help due to budget constraints, but as we grow, we plan to collaborate with experts and partners to scale effectively.

CONCLUSION

In this project, we developed a high-fidelity prototype to tackle the challenges students face in finding research collaborators and academic opportunities. Using a design thinking approach, we prioritized user needs through extensive research, including student interviews and observations, ensuring that our solution effectively addresses real-world problems. The app facilitates collaboration by allowing students to create detailed profiles, connect with like-minded peers, and access a centralized hub for academic events.

Through iterative prototyping and multiple rounds of user testing, we continuously refined the platform's features to address usability challenges and enhance the overall user experience. One of the most complex challenges we encountered was designing an effective system for connecting students with research partners and facilitating idea sharing. Given the numerous factors involved such as aligning research interests, expertise, and research objectives developing a matching mechanism that felt both precise and intuitive required careful consideration.

Additionally, ensuring that the platform integrates collaboration tools alongside event discovery, without overwhelming users, posed another design challenge. However, by actively incorporating user feedback throughout the process, we were able to fine tune the interface and improve functionality, ultimately creating a more efficient and user-friendly experience.

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ANNEX

A.1 PROJECT PLAN

Plan Sheet Link: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1KLTSfXGPfP2WZ-me4JU1mK3ACtTuTkdfQ8a6il2k3Jg/edit?gid=0#gid=0

Project Timeline ARPA

Steps	Task	Task Type	Responsible	Status	Start Date	Deadline	Kübra Aslan Expected	Kübra Aslan Actual	Ümmü Gülsüm Ergin Expected	Ümmü Gülsüm Ergin Actual	Vaishnavi Angupillai-Ravichandran Expected	Vaishnavi Angupillai-Ravichandran Actual	Files	Comments
Project Plan		Applied Research Project A		Group 9										
Phase 1 - Planning/ Ideation														
I	Ideating	Ideation	All	Completed	10/10/2024	10/13/2024	5	4	3	3	5	4.5		
II	Presentation of First Ideas	Ideation	All	Completed	10/14/2024	10/16/2024	3	4	3	2	3	3	Presentation Link	
III	Writing ideas document 1 - 2 Page	Documentation	All	Completed	10/16/2024	10/23/2024	2	2	2	2.5	3	3	Document Link	
IV	Project plan	Documentation	All	Completed	10/16/2024	10/30/2024	4	5	3	4	2	2		
V	Writing ideas document 3 - 4 Page	Documentation	All	Completed	10/23/2024	10/30/2024	1	1	5	4	3	3	Document Link	
							15	16	16	15.5	16	15.5		
Milestone 1 - Finishing Ideation														
Phase 2 - User and Concept Research														
I	Concept Research	Research	Ummu Gulsum	Completed	10/31/2024	11/1/2024	1	1	2	3	3	1		
II	Technical Research	Research	Vaishnavi	Completed	10/31/2024	11/1/2024	1	1	2	3	5	2.5		
III	Interview Preparation & planning	User Interview	Kubra	Completed	10/31/2024	11/3/2024	4	3	3	4	2	2		
IV	Preliminary Interviews	User Interview	All	Completed	11/4/2024	11/10/2024	2	2	2.5	3	1	4		
V	Findings Discussion and Analysis	Analysis	All	Completed	11/11/2024	10/12/2024	2	1	2	4	3	2		
VI	Further Interviews Preparation	User Interview	All	Completed	11/13/2024	11/15/2024	2	2	2	2	1	1.5		
VII	Further Interviews	User Interview	All	Completed	11/16/2024	11/17/2024	4	3	3	4	2	5		

A.2 INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Interview Questions

1. Would you be interested in collaborating with researchers from other departments on a project? Do you think teaming up with researchers outside your own area could enhance your findings and lead to more impactful results?
2. Have you ever tried to find a research partner from different departments/universities? If yes, can you describe the process (unsuccessful collaboration)
3. How did you go about identifying potential partners? Do you use any specific platforms or tools to search for collaborators (e.g., LinkedIn, university networks)? If so, how effective are they?
4. What challenges did you encounter when reaching out to people from other departments or universities? Were there any difficulties related to communication, differing methodologies, or varying research perspectives?
5. Imagine you're starting a research project that requires expertise in machine learning and psychology. How would you approach finding collaborators from these fields?
6. If you could design a tool or platform for this purpose, what would it include?
7. Have you ever attended networking events, If yes how beneficial was that for you?
8. Do you ever felt lost managing the University work? Do you think having a guide/mentor would be beneficial? How did collaborating with someone from a different field or institution contribute to your personal growth as a researcher?
9. Do you face any issues that can be resolved by fellow students and communities? How can you and everyone contribute to a healthy and productive learning environment?
10. Do you feel unsafe using social media/other applications, in that case what changes would you expect for you to use platforms like this (students-oriented)?
11. Which one is more challenging to find partners for academic projects or to find events in different cities? Can you rank these problems on a scale from 1 to 5 separately?
12. How do you get to know about Seminars, job fairs, competitions in and around your city ? In what way you think the current situation should change for you to receive personalized updates?

A.2 INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Interview Responses: Ayşe - Psychology Field - Female - 24

1. Yes, I would be interested. I could collaborate with speech therapists as my undergraduate program was focused on that, and in psychology, we don't learn enough about children's speech development. I realized the lack of this knowledge while working in the field.
2. I haven't tried to find a research partner yet. However, I organized a workshop for the Atasehir Municipality, which was successful. There were people from different universities, including child development specialists. Some focused on working with families, and others worked with children.
3. We found each other through the university. Üsküdar University was involved in the process.
4. Psychologists and child development specialists have different perspectives on children. Child development specialists are more rule-oriented and task-focused, while psychologists are more experiential and child-centered. Before meeting, I didn't realize there was such a difference.
5. I wouldn't be able to find collaborators. I would feel hopeless. I would look on LinkedIn and visit the faculty of the relevant departments at my school to speak with the professors.
6. I would want it to have filters such as age, GPA, internships, theses, etc. When entering a location, related people should appear. For example, if I search for "speech therapy," people who have worked in that field should come up.
7. I haven't found them useful. Initially, people meet, but no one contacts each other afterward, and I feel like I wasted my time. I've participated in seminars, workshops, and educational events organized by professors at my school.
8. Yes, I definitely need a mentor. While I wasn't struggling with my courses, I needed someone to guide me in terms of personal development and career planning, but I couldn't find anyone. For example, I was confused for a long time about my specialization. Collaborating with people from different fields has been very helpful. For instance, I now have an idea of which specialists I would direct people to in the future for areas I'm not familiar with, such as speech therapy or occupational therapy.
9. There is an issue with capacity. I often can't find enough spots for workshops or seminars.
10. Yes, I have felt unsafe. I had to interact with many unnecessary people and share too much about my projects before finding a suitable partner. This was uncomfortable.
11. Finding academic partners is more difficult (3.5). Finding events is easier (2).
12. I find out via social media, Instagram, and university/community social media pages. I would prefer to receive personalized updates through messages, as I don't check my emails often. It would be great if an app could recommend events to me.

A.2 INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Interview Responses: Ebru - Civil Engineering - Female - 23

1. I graduated from the Civil Engineering Department, and due to the interdisciplinary nature of my field, collaborating with other departments (e.g., Mechanical Engineering, Materials Engineering, Surveying Engineering) is crucial for creating more effective and safer projects. I believe interdisciplinary studies always push projects forward.
2. During my final year, I completed my thesis in collaboration with Materials Engineering students. Our project involved observing and reporting on the benefits of using stronger steel materials in construction applications and how they performed in designs. Their responsibility was to calculate the necessary parameters and define the properties of the material. My role was to model structures using this material, which was different from traditional construction steel, and determine the differences. Collaborating with individuals from different fields yielded positive results for me.
3. I identified my project partners through my thesis advisor, who brought together students working in the same area. If my advisor hadn't helped, I would have used university networks to find collaborators.
4. Civil Engineering, at its core, addresses universal problems, but it's a discipline open to research in various fields. Therefore, people's working methods and topics can vary significantly. It's not always easy to find project partners working in the same area as you. Identifying people aiming to solve the same problem can facilitate smoother progress. During my collaboration process, I didn't encounter any significant challenges.
5. I would start by reaching out to students at my university studying in these fields, whether at undergraduate or graduate levels. I'd also discuss my ideas with my advisors and ask for their support.
6. The fundamental step in any project is identifying the problem. After that, you can proceed to methods and other stages. I would design a platform that brings together people seeking solutions to the same problem. A system focusing more on connecting questions than providing answers could facilitate interdisciplinary collaboration.
7. Although I don't attend such events frequently, I've participated in fairs held in other cities and conferences related to my field. These helped expand my network in my area of study. Hearing about the experiences of people working in the same field can illuminate your own path, so these events are beneficial for everyone.
8. University life is generally challenging and exhausting, and like everyone else, I needed a mentor during this period. For example, during my internship, I realized that the job field wasn't suitable for me, and I decided to pursue an academic path instead. My mentor at the time helped me make this decision. A mentor's support and insights from their own experiences can contribute to finding the right path.
9. Although I haven't experienced significant issues, like any student, I had challenges during my undergraduate studies, which I resolved directly with my advisors and professors. To maintain a healthy and productive learning environment, it's crucial that questions raised by researchers and students don't go unanswered. Organizing events regularly, such as seminars and conferences, instead of as one-off occurrences, can significantly help.
10. I don't use social media actively. Online platforms don't provide me with complete security. However, in today's world, it's impossible to disconnect entirely from social media and the internet. Knowing that certain platforms are used exclusively by students would feel more secure. I believe allowing everyone to use the same platforms without considering age, location, education level, or interests is not appropriate. Implementing a good filtering system could encourage the use of these platforms.
11. Finding partners for academic projects: 4
    Finding events in different cities: 2
12. I generally learn about events like seminars and job fairs through posters on campus and announcements on university websites. To make access easier and ensure I don't miss out, specific platforms that send notifications could be helpful. Emails can easily get overlooked as they often pile up, but receiving direct notifications through an application would make them more visible.

A.2 INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Interview Responses: Hermann - Computer Science - Male - 24

1. Yes, I would.
2. Yes, we tried a project in university with a group of three software engineers and three people from the tourism department. The topic was a hotel reservation system. However, it was unsuccessful because of communication issues; the expectations of the tourism team did not align with what could be implemented in code. Eventually, the team split, and only the software engineers continued the project
3. I usually find them through friends. If they don't know anyone, I search on LinkedIn by filtering for specific universities like Bahçeşehir University.
4. I use Agile methodologies, but in a collaboration with Özyeğin University, the industry partners were using a V-Model approach, which caused a mismatch in working styles. Before starting, we didn't discuss each other's backgrounds, which I believe contributed to these challenges. Next time, I plan to ask more about the team's expertise to ensure better compatibility and to enhance problem-solving skills.
5. I might reach out through my mother's contacts since she is a psychologist. Otherwise, I recall my friends struggling to find collaborators in school clubs or by directly meeting with people, which consumed a lot of time due to the need to ask about their backgrounds individually.
6. It would include fields like age, GPA, thesis topic, degree (bachelor's, master's), work experience, internships, spoken languages, and a short description of their expertise.
7. Yes, I attended networking events. They were beneficial for socializing and meeting new people, but I didn't gain anything academically; I only expanded my friend circle.
8. No, I had a mentor, but we ended up becoming friends. Our academic areas were too different (I was in cybersecurity, and my mentor was a data engineer), so it didn't help much academically.
9. No, I don't have any issues. I don't think student committees have much relevance to my problems or daily life.
10. Yes, social media feels unsafe because it's a dangerous place. For instance, I once found project collaborators through my school's Instagram page, but the collaboration didn't work because I didn't know their academic backgrounds. I'd prefer an academically focused platform where I could meet suitable researchers. It shouldn't be limited to my university; I'd like to connect with people in different cities for startup projects.
11. Academic projects: 4 Events: 3
12. I follow updates through Instagram and Facebook.I'd like to receive notifi

A.2 INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Interview Responses: Rifayeth - Mechanical Engineer - Male - 29

1. I would definitely collaborate, as now I'm doing my Bachelors thesis. it is important for me to collaborate. My own supervisor is from Chemistry background whereas I'm a mechannical engineer.
2. It is pretty difficult for me not just collaborate but also learn new technologies and skills for my research. I also couldn't find a partner who can help me worth it.
3. I actually prefer working alone as my research is very detailed. But collaborations I do it in person via Universities and also Linkedin
4. There were a lot of difficulties to find like minded individuals. Also a partner who aligns with my academic goals.
5. I don't know about partner but generally getting support and guidance itself is a task. I need to get appointments and also most Professors reply super late to mails.
6. Good question, it would include a researcher's availability and I would want to have a organized and clean application.
7. I've never attended one.
8. A lot times I've felt lost. In those situations I usually get from my classmates or team. but we people always felt like having a mentor who know better because not all the times we can approach a Prof.
9. I would say, fellow students uplifting each other and being helpful and kind is important as I'm a international student doing part time and some days are hectic. I need help in University work at those times.
10. Even in applications like Linkedin I have had issues. I prefer an application where my data is safe and an app that I can rely on.
11. Definitely finding events is very difficult. I would give a 4.6
12. Actually I find them in Facebook and Instagram more through ads, but not on time. I want it to change, I want to receive official updates through moodle or mail.

A.2 INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Interview Responses: Shamiha - Supply chain Engineer - Female - 28

1. I have done it before and it was super beneficial and I learnt a lot. Infact I started doing courses and upskilling after successfull collaborations
2. I have tried but it was very difficult for me to get one. I ended up doing it with a friend
3. There is a WhatsApp group that I use and it's specifically for academics and I found a partner there.
4. When it comes to cross departmental collaborations, there is always going to be difference in methodologies and opinions but it was good learning opportunity for me and I infact performed well in my job with my experiences.
5. I would first search in LinkedIn and infact upskill a lil bit before finding a partner. Then I will also enquire with people I know as I have a lot of friends who are students.
6. It would definitely be handy be help me with my immediate needs. I want quality updates on time and should solve my academic needs
7. I have never attended one and I would love to attend in person, back in my country I attended and it was helpful
8. Guide/Mentor is an amazing concept and having one is helpful and helps me manage my work but I don't have one.
9. I had issues when I was a fresher here, I didn't know how certain things work in University in terms of courses, semester schedules, I also missed out on a lot. Hence I want to be informed and need help at times. There can be a functioning community of students just to help with academic activities.
10. Yes I do, mostly I ignore them as I have to use applications on daily basis.
11. Both are difficult, but finding an event is almost impossible and a partner needs a lot time and patience.
12. I usually get updates from my friends or teammates. But everyone feels like we need a platform to get updates on time and with personalisation.

A.2 INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Interview Responses: Vishwanath - 27- Product Designer

1. Maybe. As a designer it would be nice to collaborate with developers and engineers to work on a project so that I can also understand their perspective.
2. I haven't had the situation yet to find a research partner, but now that I am starting my Master Thesis, I might try to find someone from different department to collaborate with. Apart from that I have collaborated with students from my department on several projects.
3. I mostly found my partners through university networks, or in-person meetings. I need to know a lot about the person before I decide to collaborate with them. I haven't used LinkedIn for finding a research partner.
4. Finding the right partner to work with is always a challenge. People can act differently when it comes to work. I initially work on short-term projects first and then only if I know i can work with them, I will continue with future collaborations.
5. I would first see if there is anyone from my connections in the related field. If not, i would ask my connection if they know someone. If none of this works then i would go about searching for people in LinkedIn or similar platforms.
6. I can think of something like a networking platform that is targeted at specific audience instead of a wider group like LinkedIn. This can be students only platform where, like-minded students collaborate and work on a project. Something like ebay kleinanzeigen for research. Connecting people offering projects with people wanting to work on projects.
7. I haven't attended networking events.
8. I don't have a problem managing university work because the course i am studying is relatively easy. Having a guide/mentor will be particularly useful for me in guiding about thesis and finding a full-time job in current market. I have collaborated with psychologists on a design project, they bring a fresh perspective about the users which was very helpful.
9. I think open communication and transparency will avoid all the major issues that students might face. I have faced my fair share of problems, but I don't expect anyone to solve these issues. We can all contribute to a healthy and productive learning environment by being nice and helpful to one another.
10. I wouldn't say social media is unsafe, but i do see that there is a lot of negativity these days and everyone is showing only the fancy side of their lives. I would expect a platform to promote positivity and show all aspects of life, not just the fancy parts.
11. I would say finding partners for academic projects is more challenging. Because of the fact that there is a lot of marketing that goes behind in promoting a event in a city, which is not the case for finding a academic partner.
12. Academic Project - 5 Events - 2
13. Mostly through social media, like Instagram, LinkedIn. But most of these job fairs do not specifically mention what kind of roles you can expect at these events. If there is specific events for specific job roles it would be great.

A.2 INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Interview Responses: Jira - 21 - UX Designer

Interest in Interdisciplinary Collaboration:
Participants recognize the importance of inter-departmental collaboration for broadening research horizons and making projects interdisciplinary.
Such collaborations are seen as valuable for enhancing the scope and quality of research findings.

Challenges in Finding Research Partners:
Difficulty in assessing potential collaborators' expertise and commitment was a recurring issue.
Some collaborators misrepresented their experience or lacked the necessary technical skills, leading to frustration and workload imbalances.
Most participants relied on informal methods, such as word of mouth or face-to-face networking, to identify collaborators.

Need for Reliable Platforms:
Participants emphasized the need for platforms ensuring credible and secure profiles, showcasing verified publications and work history to avoid misrepresentation.
Key desired features for a collaboration platform include:
Listing of publications and past projects.
Mechanisms to verify the authenticity of listed work (e.g., no drafts or unverified claims).

Preferred Tools and Approaches:
Tools like LinkedIn were commonly used but were limited by their paywalls and restrictions on direct communication.
Participants suggested that platforms should focus on creating accessible communication channels for students and researchers.

Importance of Mentorship:
Participants value mentorship for academic and career development and often seek guidance from professors or experienced professionals.
Outreach efforts for mentorship are conducted through email and LinkedIn, though limited communication options (e.g., paid features) on LinkedIn were noted as barriers.

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A.2 INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Interview Responses: Jira - 21 - UX Designer

Networking and Events:
Finding relevant academic or networking events in other cities was rated as more challenging (4/5) compared to finding collaborators (3/5).
Factors contributing to this challenge include:
Lack of reliable verification about event credibility and content before attendance.
Logistical barriers such as cost, location, and unclear event expectations.

Safety on Platforms:
Platforms like LinkedIn are perceived as safe due to verification features, but paid subscription models create accessibility issues for students.
Participants appreciate tools that offer free, secure communication with robust safety checks.

Suggestions for Improvement:
Enhancements for Event and Collaboration Discovery:
A central platform for events and collaboration opportunities, with:
Credibility indicators for events and collaborators.
Clear cost transparency for events.
Integration of fields of interest to recommend tailored opportunities.
Encouraging Networking:
Creating environments or tools that foster interaction among diverse researchers, such as virtual networking events or AI-driven matchmaking for shared interests.

Introverted Individuals Prefer Digital Tools:
For introverts, applications offering initial digital interaction before face-to-face meetings are highly preferred.
Text-based vetting through digital platforms is seen as a less intimidating and more efficient way to establish compatibility.

Overview: Participants highlighted the need for robust digital tools to improve accessibility to collaboration opportunities, mentorship, and credible events.
Addressing these challenges requires platforms to focus on transparency, safety, and accessibility to cater to diverse research and networking needs.

A.2 INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Interview Responses: Hafsa - 27- UX Designer, Itzi - 28- Psychologist, Nicole, 25, Product Designer, All Female - Focus Group Environment

Collaboration Enthusiasm:
All participants value interdisciplinary collaboration.
They emphasize the importance of gaining diverse perspectives, particularly for projects requiring expertise outside their own field.

Benefits of Collaboration:
They highlighted the value of collaborating with specialists to obtain insights that designers or researchers might not independently acquire.
They zel stressed the importance of a transdisciplinary approach to avoid biases and expand one's thinking beyond the confines of their own field.

Challenges and Success Factors:
Clear communication and defined roles are critical for successful collaboration. For example, Itzel mentioned a project where a coordinator facilitated good communication among contributors across various universities and countries.
Differences within disciplines can hinder collaboration, as people tend to prioritize their own perspectives or develop biases against other fields.
Physical and logistical barriers (e.g., remote vs. in-person collaboration) can impact communication quality and understanding.

Logistics vs. Impact:
Hafsa prefers collaboration within the same university for logistical reasons but is open to working with diverse experts for the benefit of the project.
Itzel appreciates international and interdisciplinary collaborations for broadening perspectives, despite challenges.

User Needs and Preferences:
Users value tools or systems that enhance clear communication, especially in international or interdisciplinary settings.
They require mechanisms to streamline logistical hurdles for cross-university collaborations.

A.2 INTERVIEW RESPONSES

Interview Responses: Hafsa - 27- UX Designer, Itzi - 28- Psychologist, Nicole, 25, Product Designer, All Female - Focus Group Environment

There's a need for access to experts in diverse fields and platforms that foster interdisciplinary learning.
Users prefer having the freedom to collaborate with people from any university or field, though logistical ease is an important consideration.

Clear Communication:
Nicole highlighted the importance of creating clear guidelines (e.g., structured documents) to ensure all team members are aligned without requiring step-by-step instructions.
Documenting tasks in simple terms helps bridge knowledge gaps between team members with varying expertise.

Personal Connection and Compatibility:
Collaboration success depends not only on technical compatibility but also on personal connections and shared interests.
Hafsa emphasized the importance of knowing collaborators' personal interests (e.g., hobbies, values) to foster better teamwork.
Transparency:
Users prefer platforms or tools that allow them to verify potential collaborators' skills, previous work, and reputation.
Nicole expressed the value of testimonials or endorsements (e.g., similar to LinkedIn recommendations) but acknowledged risks of misuse.

Features:
Profile Features:
Comprehensive profiles showcasing:
Previous work and achievements.
Skills and expertise.
Personal interests or hobbies to help gauge compatibility.
Peer reviews or endorsements, though users remain cautious about potential misuse.

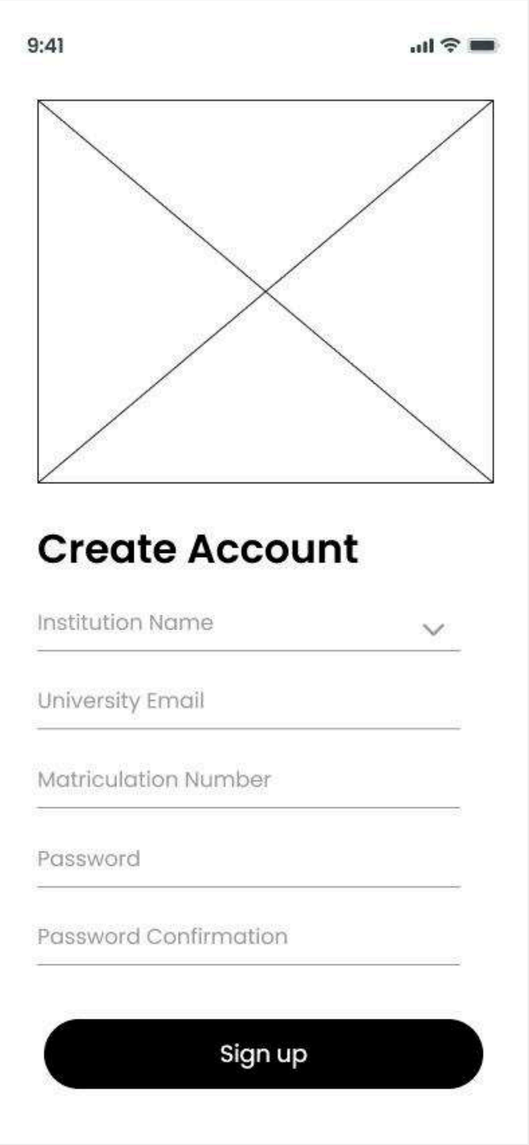
A.2 INTERVIEW RESPONSES

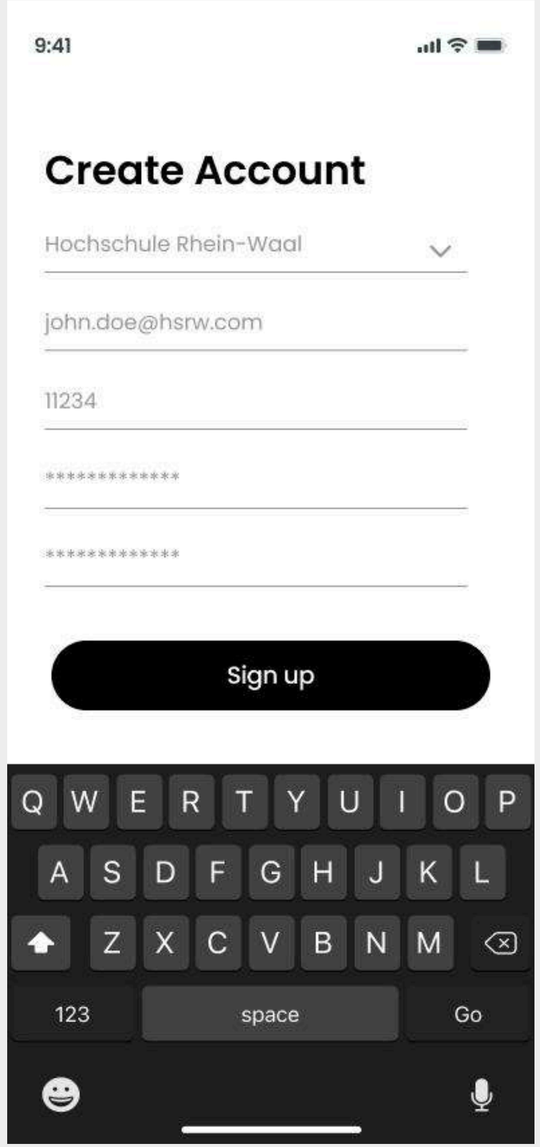
Interview Responses: Hafsa - 27- UX Designer, Itzi - 28- Psychologist, Nicole, 25, Product Designer, All Female - Focus Group Environment

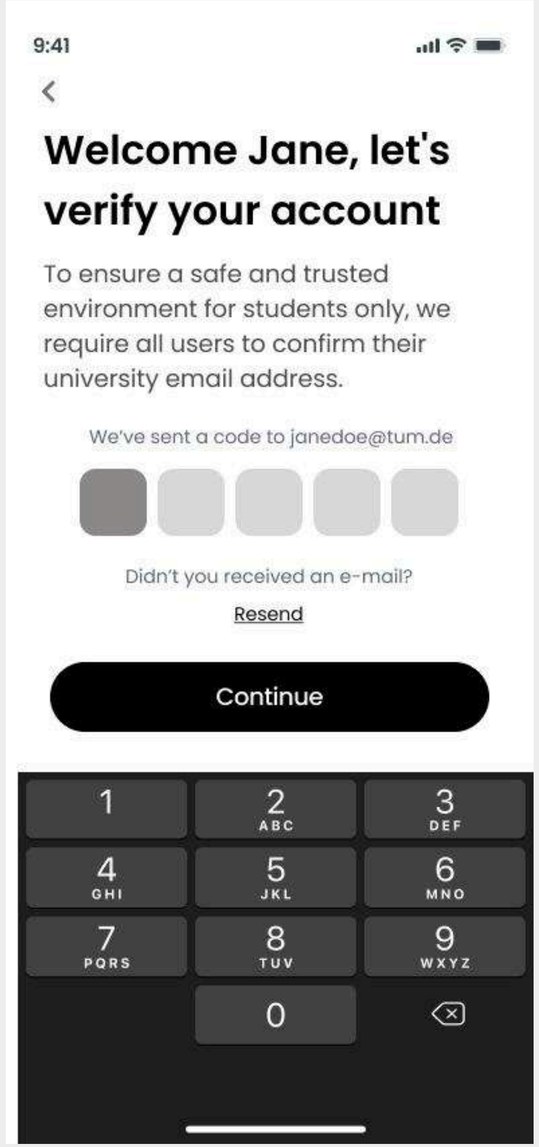
Search and Match Functionality:
Keyword-based searches to find collaborators with relevant expertise or similar research interests (e.g., matching based on research questions or fields).
Suggestions or notifications about potential collaborators interested in similar topics.

Event Integration:
Access to networking events or conferences where potential collaborators might gather.
Notifications about events tied to specific fields of interest.
Interactive Elements:
Messaging or chat options to facilitate informal, off-topic discussions before committing to a project.
Features for "warming up" relationships before formalizing collaborations.
Transparency and Feedback Mechanisms:
Space for collaborators to leave feedback or reviews on experiences working together.
Options to filter profiles by trust indicators (e.g., verified skills, positive testimonials).
Collaborative Tools:
Shared workspaces for outlining project plans, timelines, and responsibilities.
Templates for documenting guidelines and protocols to ensure clarity.

A.3 LOW FIDELITY PROTOTYPE







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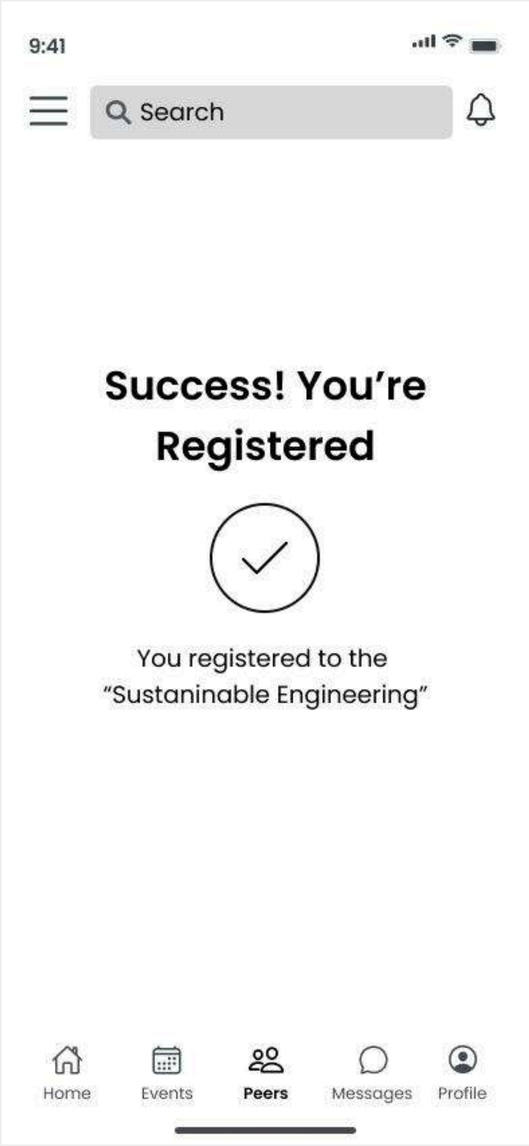

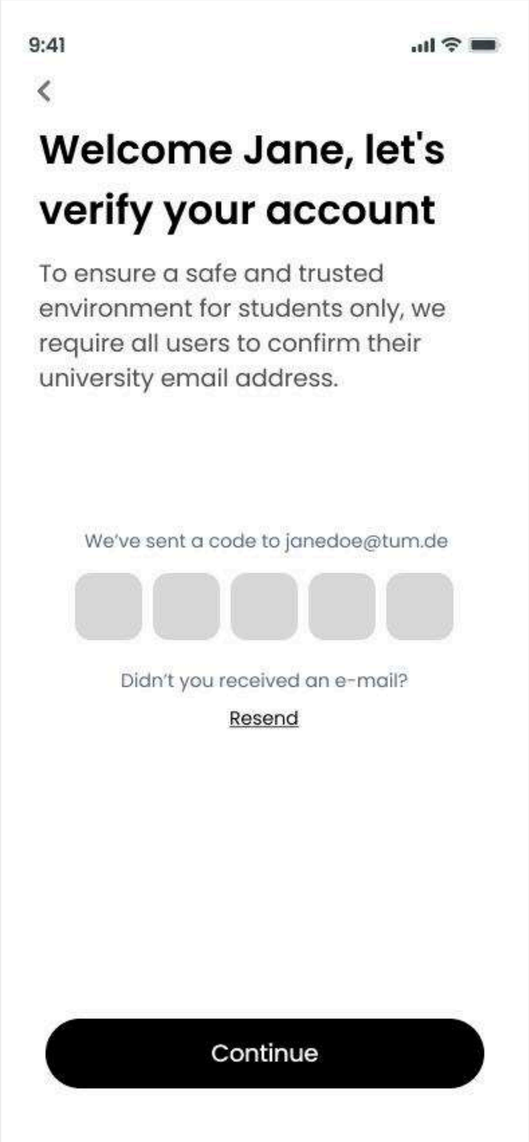

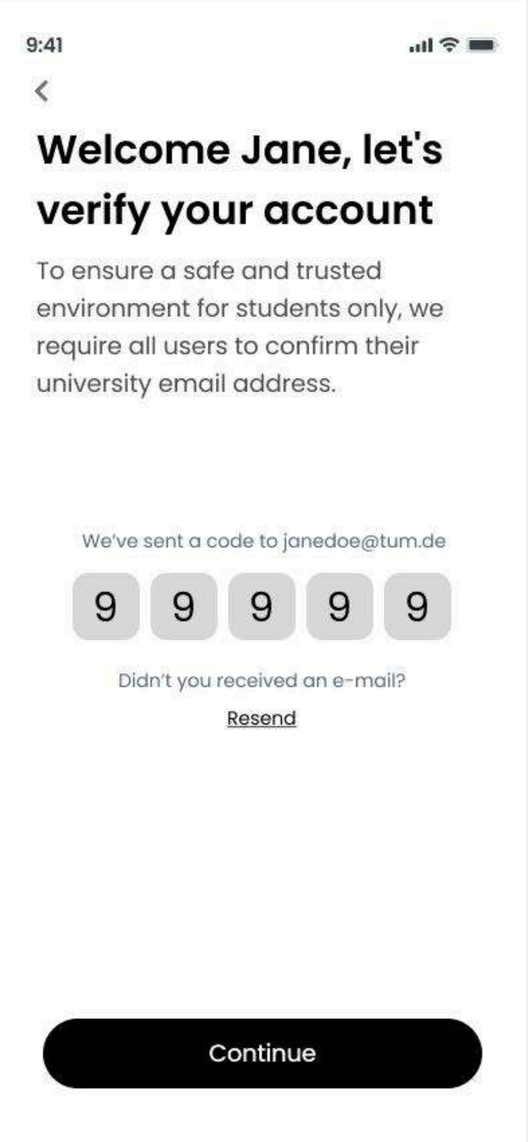

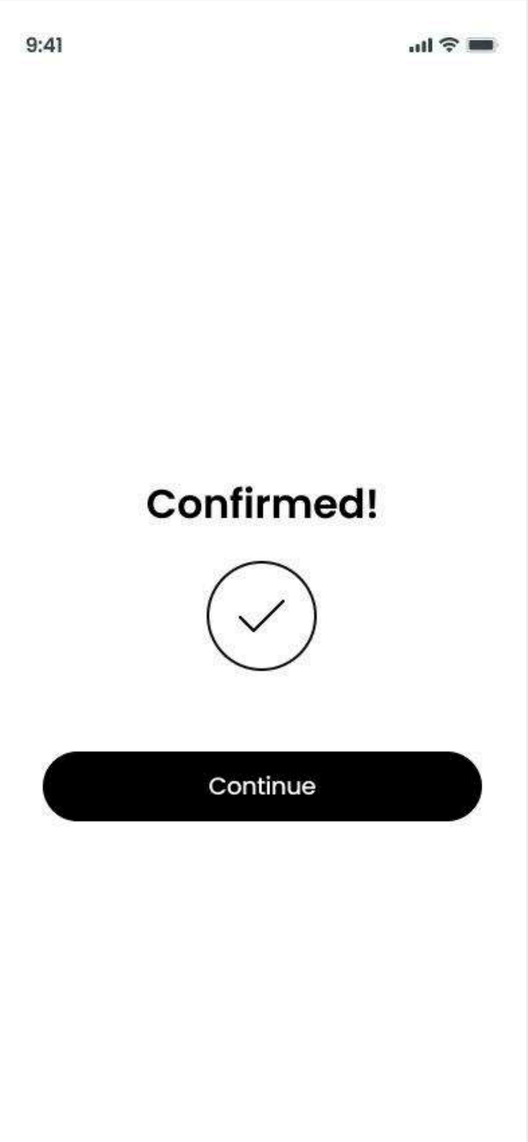

A.3 LOW FIDELITY PROTOTYPE

9:41

Academic Information

Personalise your profile for the best experience. The more we know about you, the better we can match you with opportunities and people.

What are you studying?

MSc in Civil Engineering

Which year are you in?

2

Do you have any specific research interests or academic areas you're passionate about?

Sustainable Construction

Skip

Continue

9:41

Academic Information

Personalise your profile for the best experience. The more we know about you, the better we can match you with opportunities and people.

What are you studying?

Lorem Ipsum

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Lorem Ipsum

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Lorem Ipsum

Skip

Continue

9:41

Interests

Personalise your profile for the best experience. The more we know about you, the better we can match you with opportunities and people.

What are some of your hobbies or interests?

Lorem Ipsum

Which languages you are speaking?

Lorem Ipsum

What types of events or activities are you most interested in? (e.g., workshops, hackathons, cultural exchanges, networking events)

Lorem Ipsum

Skip

Continue

9:41

Interests

Personalise your profile for the best experience. The more we know about you, the better we can match you with opportunities and people.

What are some of your hobbies or interests?

Traveling

Which languages you are speaking?

English, German

What types of events or activities are you most interested in? (e.g., workshops, hackathons, cultural exchanges, networking events)

Workshops

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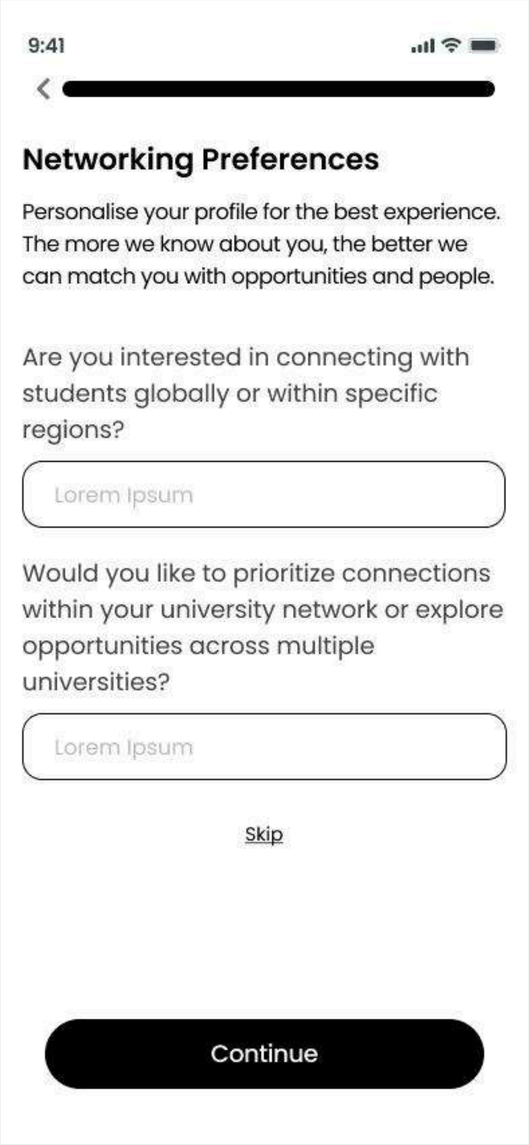

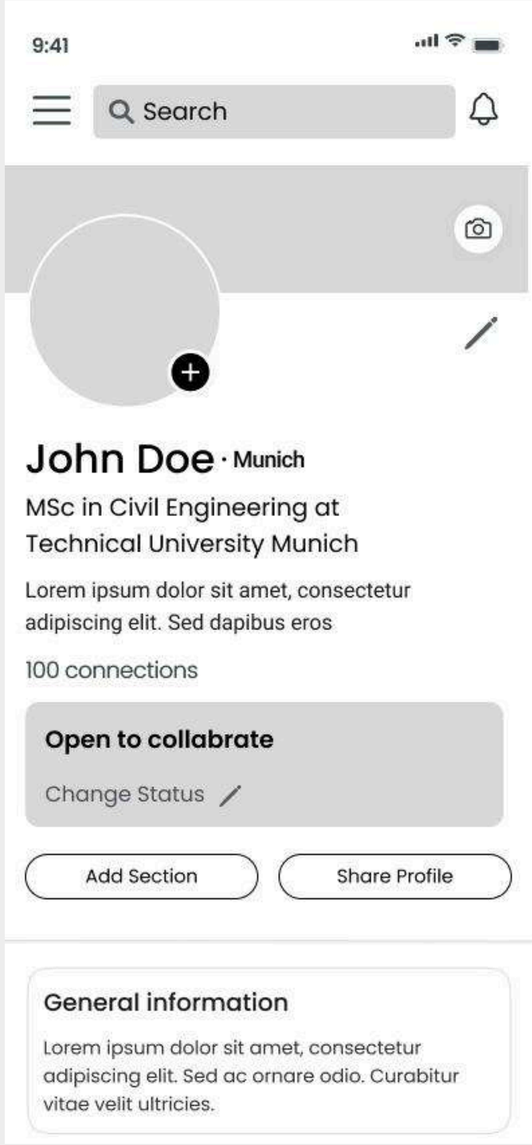

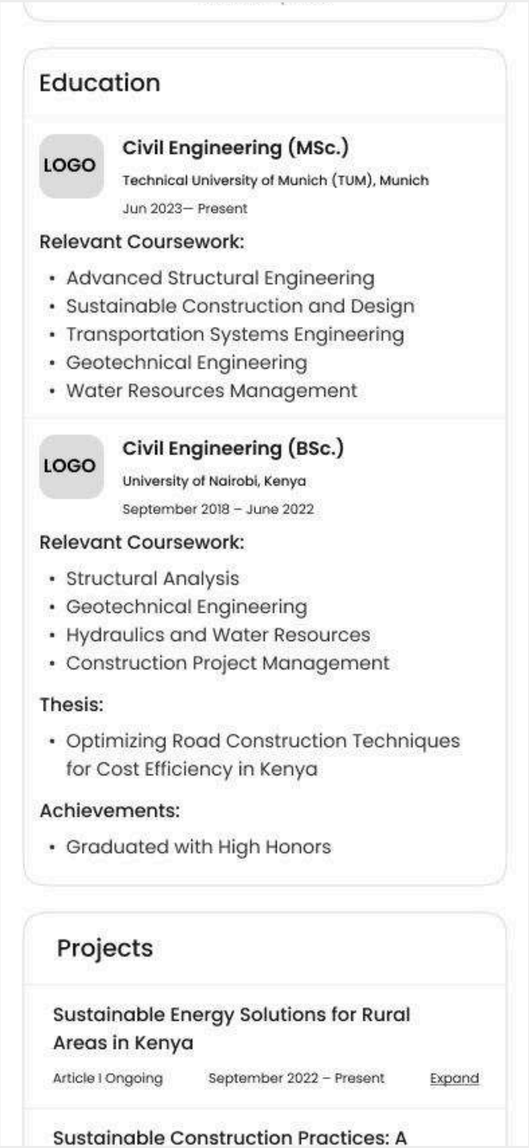

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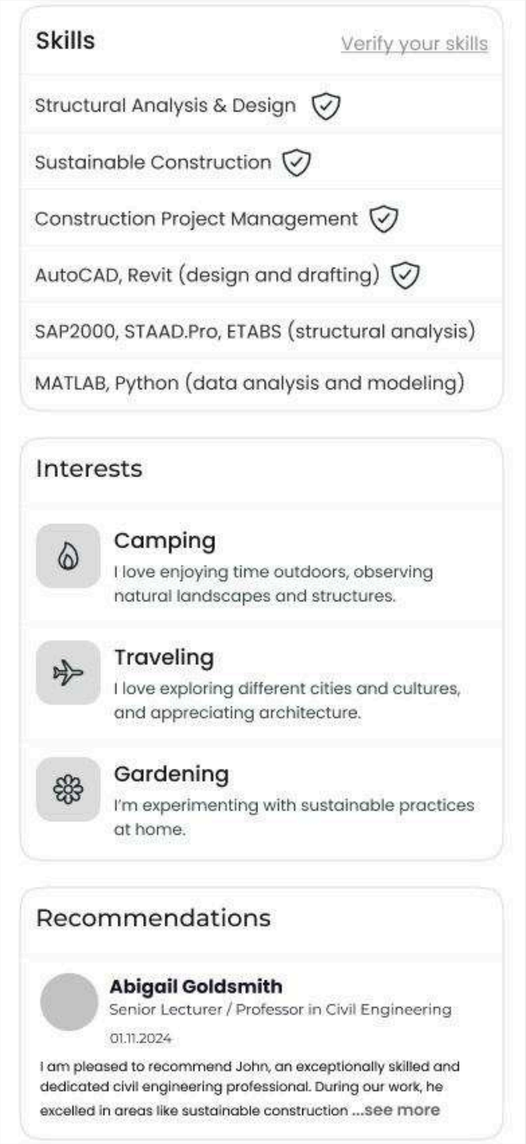

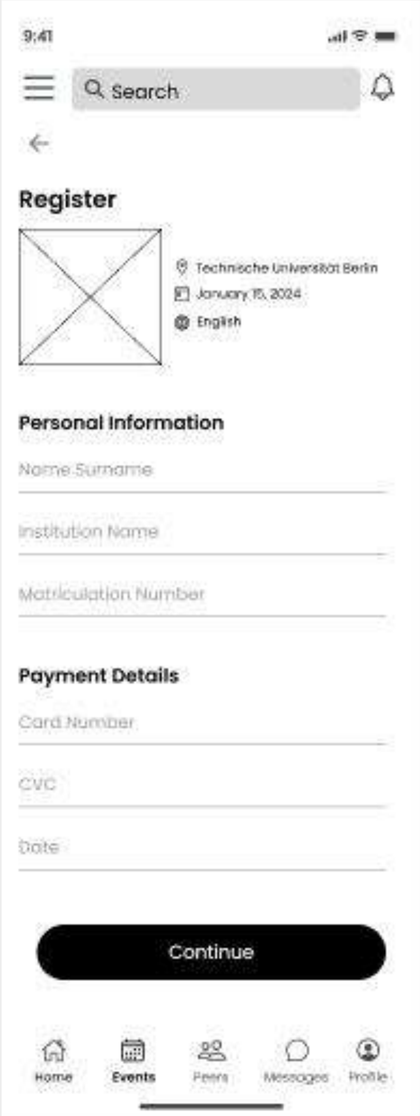

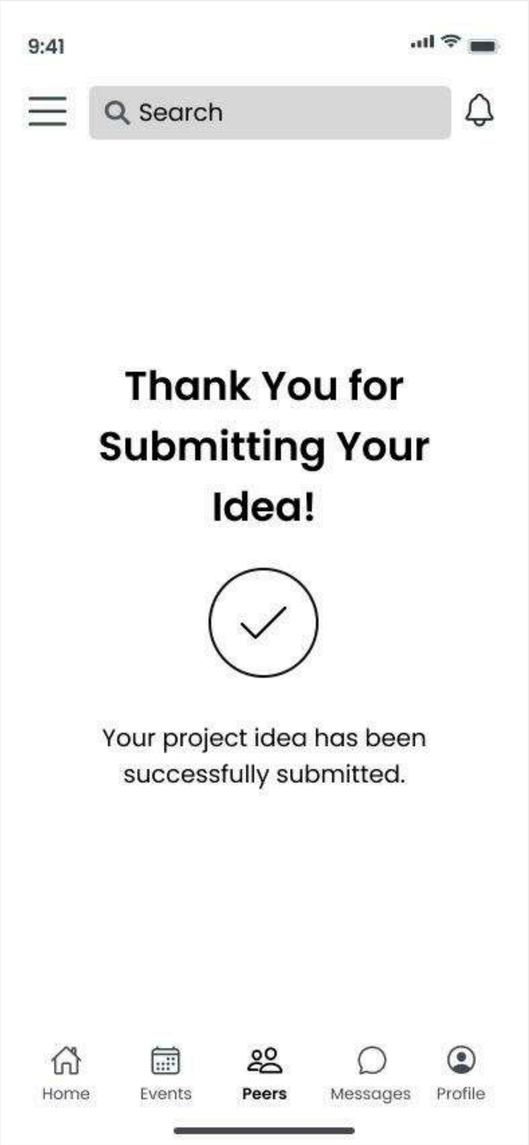

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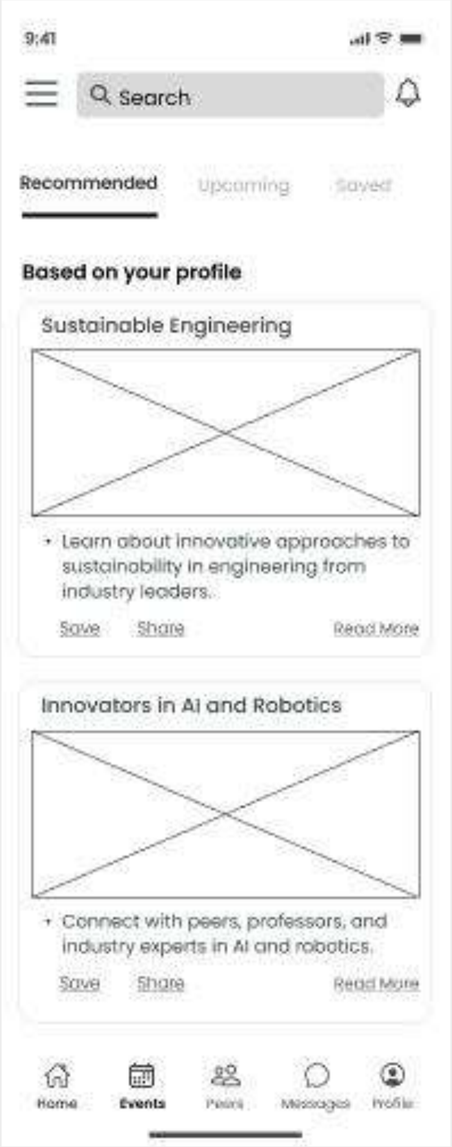

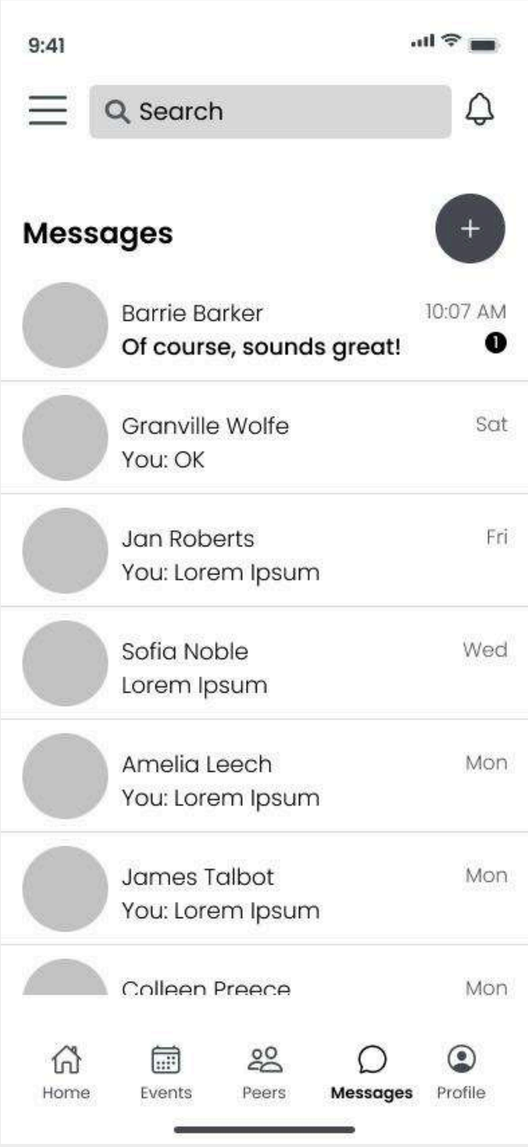

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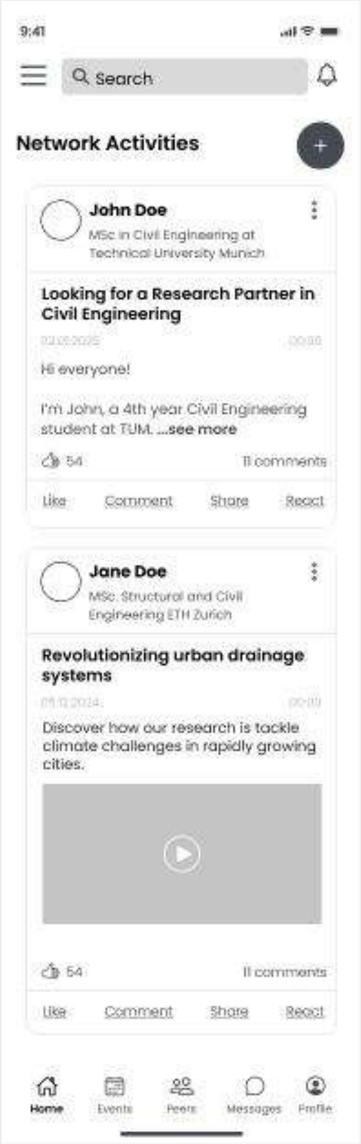

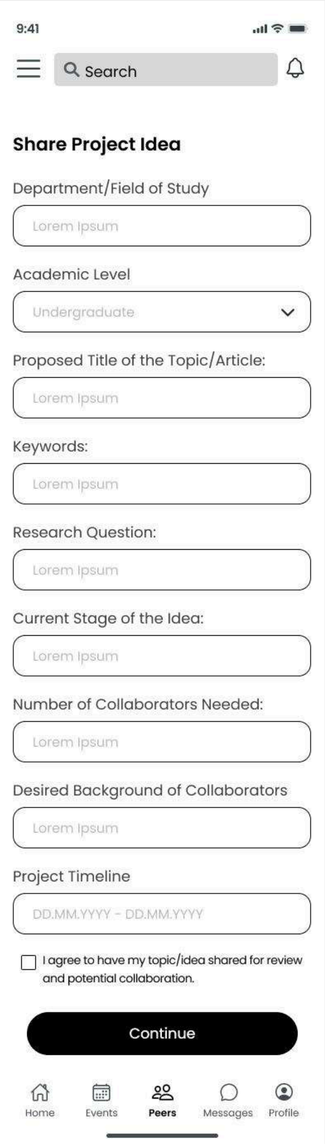

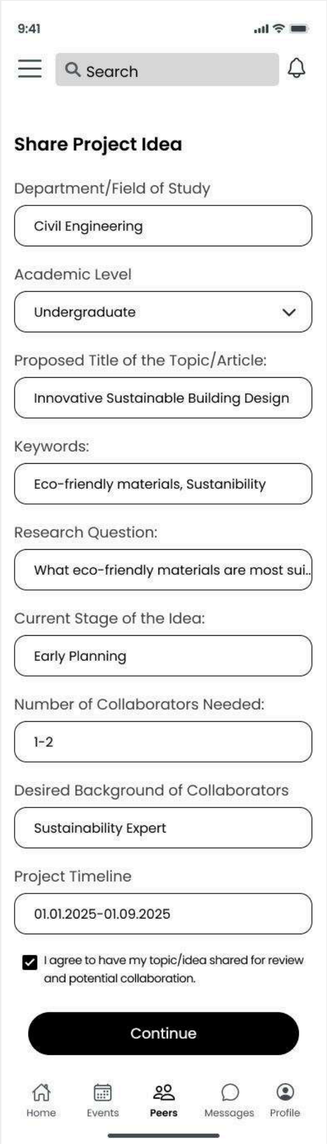

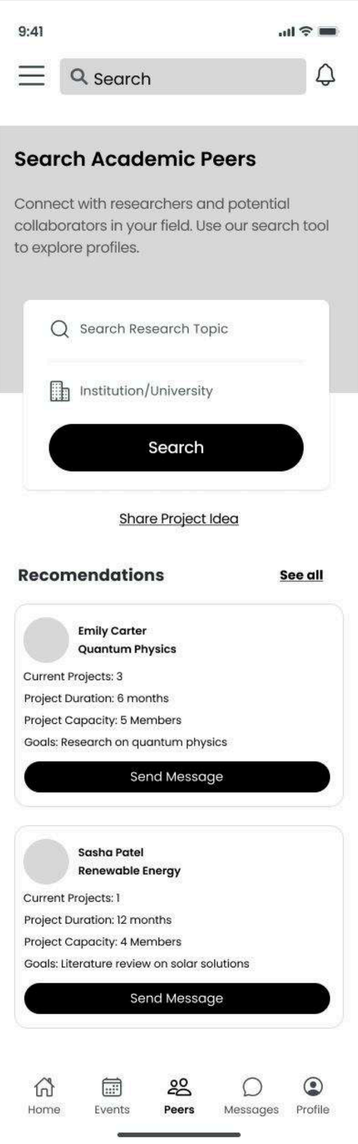

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A.4. LOW FIDELITY TEST PLAN

1. Test Purpose (Formative Testing)

- Conduct formative testing to evaluate the usability of the low-fidelity prototype at an early stage of development.
- Gather feedback to identify usability issues and improve the prototype iteratively.
- Focus on core tasks like signing in, finding a peer, sharing project ideas, and finding events.
- Observe user interactions to identify challenges or confusion, and refine the prototype based on feedback.

2. User Tasks

Task 1: Sign In
- Scenario: Log in to your account and check if you are directed to the homepage.
- Goal: Ensure users can log in and reach the homepage.
- Key Observations: Issues with the login process, errors, confusion.

Task 2: Find a Peer and Send a Request Message
- Scenario: Find a peer and send them a connection request.
- Goal: Test search function and messaging clarity.
- Key Observations: Clarity of search function, ease of sending messages.

Task 3: Share a Project Idea
- Scenario: Enter a project idea, provide details, and share it.
- Goal: Ensure users can share a project idea without confusion.
- Key Observations: Ease of sharing, clarity of input fields, potential obstacles.

Task 4: Find an Event
- Scenario: Search for an event and select one to participate in.
- Goal: Test event search and filtering function.
- Key Observations: Ease of searching and selecting events.

3. Test Questions

Sign In
- Was the sign-in process clear to you, or did you face any confusion?
- Were you able to log in smoothly? Did you encounter any errors?

Finding and Sending a Message
- Was it easy to search for and select a peer?
- Did you have trouble sending a message?

Sharing a Project Idea
- Did you face any issues sharing your project idea?
- Were the options for sharing clear and sufficient?

Finding an Event
- How easy was it to search for and select an event?
- Did the filters work as expected?

A.4. LOW FIDELITY TEST PLAN

Overall Experience
- What difficulties did you encounter during the test?
- How would you rate your overall experience using this prototype?

4. Timeline and Environment

Test Date: December 7, 2024
Location: Empty study room
Required Tools: Computer or tablet for interaction with prototype, notebook to record feedback.
Duration: 30-45 minutes per user

5. Conducting the Test (Formative Approach)

Preparation (10-15 minutes): Introduce the purpose of the test as formative and explain that feedback will be used to improve the prototype.

Task Execution (5-10 minutes per task): Users complete tasks while you observe and note difficulties.

Post-Test (10-15 minutes): Ask questions to gather feedback on usability and user experience.

6. Post-Test
- Analyze feedback to identify usability issues and pain points.
- Use insights to iterate and improve the prototype.

7. Post-session Questions
How intuitive or easy was it to understand the purpose of the app? Did it meet your expectations for helping you find academic peers or events?
Were there any points during the session where you felt confused or unsure about what to do next?
Is there anything you think could be added to the app to make it more helpful or easier to use?
When you were searching for events or peers, did you find the process smooth or were there any challenges?
Would you recommend this app to a friend or colleague? Why or why not?
What would encourage you to use this app more frequently?
Is there anything you learned or realized during the testing that surprised you about the app?
Was the sign-in process clear to you, or did you face any confusion?
Was it easy to search for and select a peer?
Did you face any issues sharing your project idea?
How easy was it to search for and select an event?
Were you able to log in smoothly? Did you encounter any errors?
Did you have trouble sending a message?
Were the options for sharing clear and sufficient?

A.5. LOW FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 1 (Nur - Female - 19 - International Relations Student)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
Found the app's structure simple and non-complex, making it easy to navigate. Searching for events and peers was smooth and straightforward. The project-sharing process was easy, and the form-like structure was appreciated. The sign-in process was clear, with no confusion. The app met expectations for finding academic peers and events. The visual design, though minimal, made the app intuitive and easy to use. The participant would recommend the app to others, especially for event participation.	Saved Items: Difficulty locating saved items, with no clear way to access them. Navigation: The navigation menu was not prominent, making it harder to find key sections. Filters: Lacked detailed filters for better search customization. Event Search: No indication of whether events had an online participation option. Messaging: No “read” indicator, making it unclear if messages were seen. Messaging layout felt reversed and unclear. Login Process: Required SMS confirmation for every login, which was frustrating. Sharing Posts: Fear of accidental sharing due to a lack of a confirmation prompt.	The app reminded the participant of LinkedIn but felt different in purpose. The black-and-white design wasn’t visually engaging, but it did not impact usability. The participant was interested in using the app more if it could contribute to CV building.

A.5. LOW FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 2 (Ayse - Female - 24 - Psychology Student)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
The app's interface was easy to navigate. Searching for and selecting events was the easiest part of the app. No issues with logging in. No issues with sending messages. Sharing options were detailed and sufficient. Would recommend the app to others. Motivated to use the app more frequently if it offers more social opportunities.	Event Ticket Details: Couldn't determine if an event had an online ticket after registering. Messaging: Difficulty knowing if messages were read, leading to uncertainty when waiting for responses.v Messaging experience was frustrating due to the lack of feedback. Project Sharing: Found the project-sharing form too long and cumbersome. Preferred looking at shared projects rather than filling out long forms. Sign-up Process: Wanted a simpler registration process with just email and password.Found the excessive number of required fields frustrating.	Wanted to collaborate with others academically and join existing projects. Would like to see expert profiles in the app due to high academic expectations. Appreciated the detailed sharing options but felt impatient while using them.

A.5. LOW FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 3 (İkbal - Female - 22 - Design Student)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
The app's interface was easy to understand and navigate. No issues with logging in. Searching for and selecting an event became easy after getting familiar with the layout. Would recommend the app to others but wants to test it longer first. Motivated to use the app more frequently due to academic collaboration opportunities. Appreciated the detailed sharing options.	Form-Filling Frustration: The app repeatedly asked users to fill out forms, especially after logging in and when sharing a project idea. Event & Peer Search: Lack of advanced filters made finding relevant options time-consuming. Project Sharing Process: Form was too long and asked for unnecessary details. No ability to save previous entries, requiring users to re-enter information every time. Missing Features: No “favorites” or “save for later” option for events and peers. No peer comparison feature, which could help in making decisions.	Would like a library-like feature or forum for accessing academic materials. Found peer selection relatively easy but wished for more detailed filters and comparison tools. Found event selection challenging at first but improved with familiarity. Suggested integration with LinkedIn for better sharing options.

A.5. LOW FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 4 (Hafsa - Female - 26 - Usability Engineering Student)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
The app is intuitive and meets expectations for finding events. Searching for and selecting an event was the easiest feature to use. No issues with signing in or sharing a project idea. The sharing options were clear and sufficient. Would recommend the app to others, especially if it expands to non-scientific fields like design.	Peer Search Issues: Initially confused about where to find peers, expected it under the "network" section. Lack of advanced filters made peer searching challenging.Needed to check each peer manually, which was time-consuming. Messaging Issues: No confirmation or notification after sending a message.	Would like notifications about users working on similar projects to boost engagement. Found event search smooth but suggested Google Maps integration for better navigation. Suggested LinkedIn integration and additional social sharing options. Open to exploring peer collaboration features more but couldn't provide full feedback yet.

A.5. LOW FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 5 (Varun - 27 - Male - Product Designer)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
The sign-in process was perfect, with no confusion. Event search was smooth and helpful, making it easy to find relevant events. No issues with logging in or sending messages. The sharing options were clear and sufficient.	Navigation Confusion: Some parts of the app were difficult to figure out initially. Having two search options caused confusion. Error Handling Issues: No way to recover from mistakes when an error occurred. Peer Search Complexity: Not entirely easy to use, and the search could be simplified. Project Sharing Visibility: The share option was not prominent enough, making it harder to find.	Would recommend the app after improvements are made. Suggested reducing the number of questions at the beginning and allowing users to complete them later. More personalization would increase motivation to use the app. Realized that predictability in apps is important for usability.

A.5. LOW FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 6 (Vishwa - 28 - Male - Graphic Designer)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
Event search was very easy and smooth to use. Sign-in process was clear, though could be slightly faster. No issues with sending messages. Sharing options were clear and sufficient. Would recommend the app for students seeking project collaborators or help.	Peer Search Issues: Search was not working in the peers section, making it difficult to use. The peers section had too much cognitive load on the screen, causing confusion. Navigation Confusion: The navigation bar was visible only after scrolling, which caused initial confusion. Project Sharing Confusion: Unclear purpose of the project-sharing feature and its location in the app. Peer Search Clarity: The process to search and select peers was confusing, especially with the broken search feature.	Suggested adding a short tutorial after signing up to explain app features. Suggested adding exclusive events to encourage more frequent app use. Confusion with the project-sharing feature, unsure of its purpose and location.

A.5. LOW FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 7 (Akira - 24 - Female - Frontend Developer)

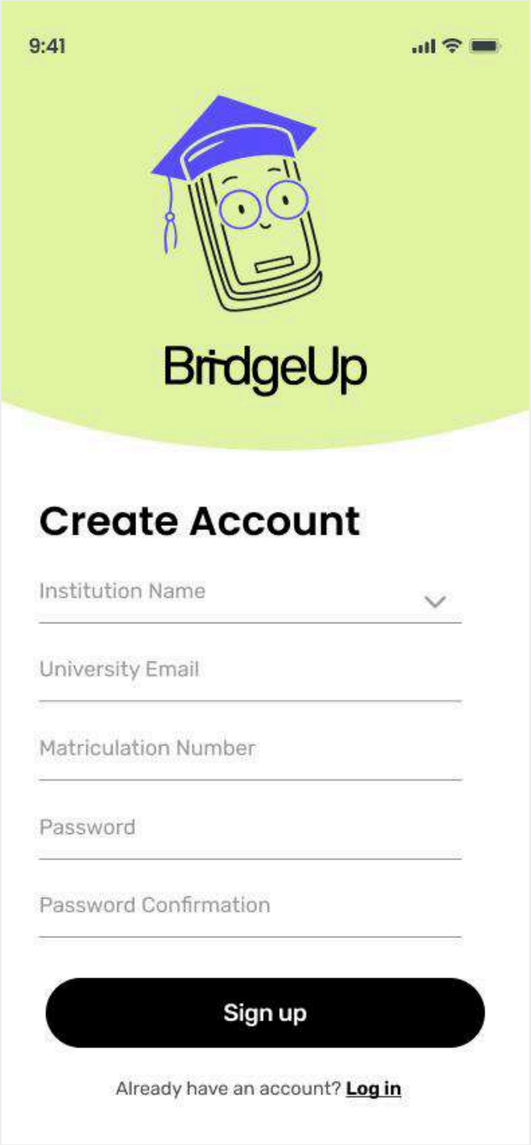
POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
The purpose of the app was clear and it helped in finding peers and events. Searching for events was easy and intuitive. No issues with the sign-in process; it was clear and quick. Messaging feature worked seamlessly. Sufficient sharing options available.	Peer search: Required multiple clicks to find necessary information. Confusion around filtering search results due to many options and unclear prioritization. Lack of clear error messages when search filters failed, leading to frustration. Overwhelming experience caused by too many features without proper guidance.	A guided walkthrough for new users could enhance the experience. Adding optional tags when sharing project ideas would improve visibility. Frequent updates and notifications about new features or events would increase app engagement.

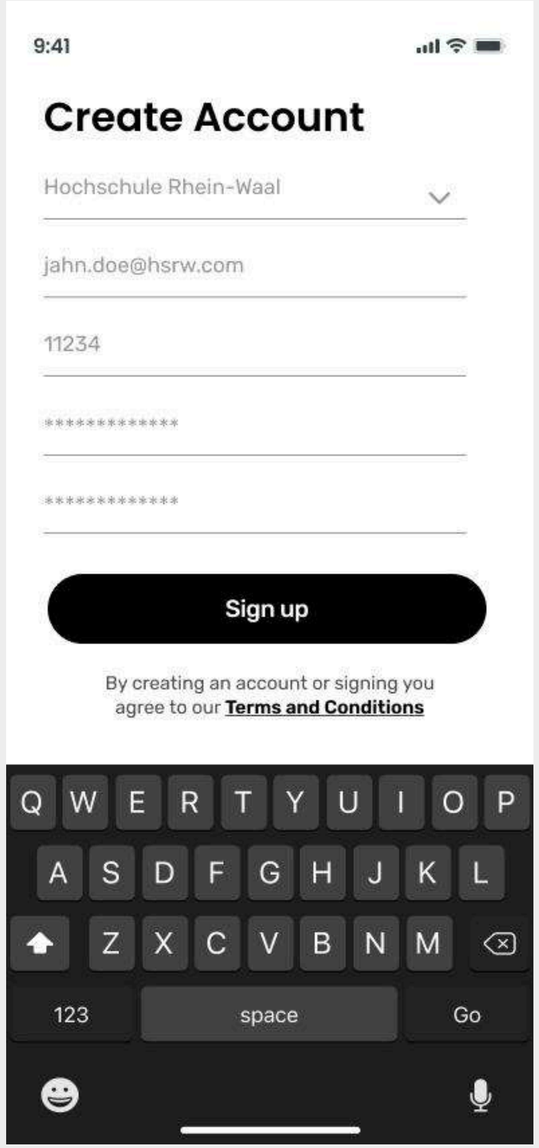
A.5. LOW FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

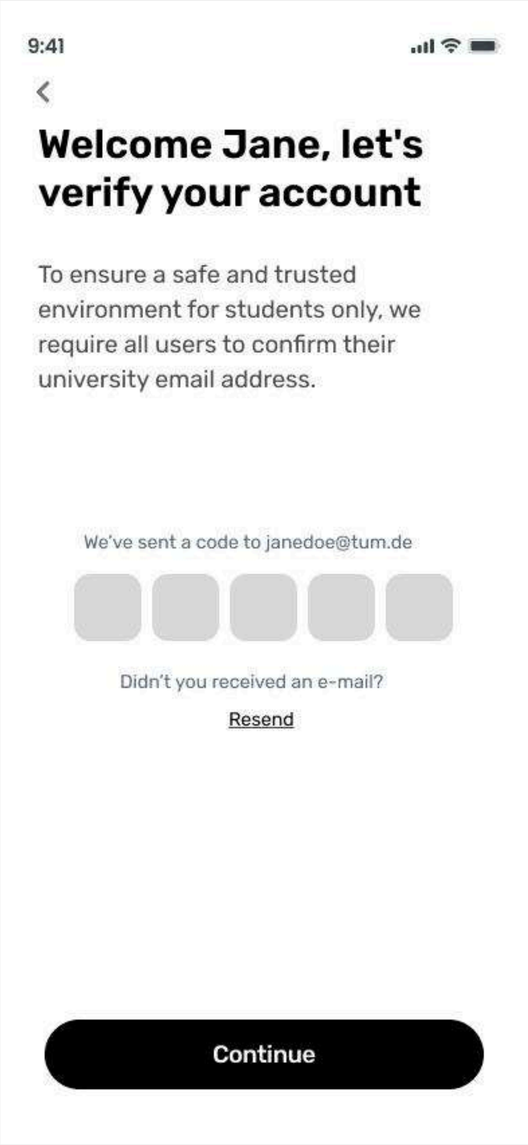
Participant 8 (Amore - 30 - Male - Mechanical Engineering Student)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
The app's purpose was clear and helped in connecting with peers. The sign-in process was smooth and easy to follow. Peer recommendation algorithm was surprisingly effective. Sending messages was simple and seamless. The options for sharing were clear and sufficient.	The interface took some time to get used to. Difficulty editing project posts after publishing. Limited filters when searching for events and peers; could not combine certain search criteria. Search results for peers were cluttered, making it difficult to focus on relevant profiles. Event section felt secondary, and more event categories would improve search.	A dedicated in-app FAQ or help section could assist with common questions. Adding a preview option before publishing project ideas would be helpful. Better integration with university systems like calendars or messaging platforms would increase app usage.

A.6 HIGH FIDELITY PROTOTYPE







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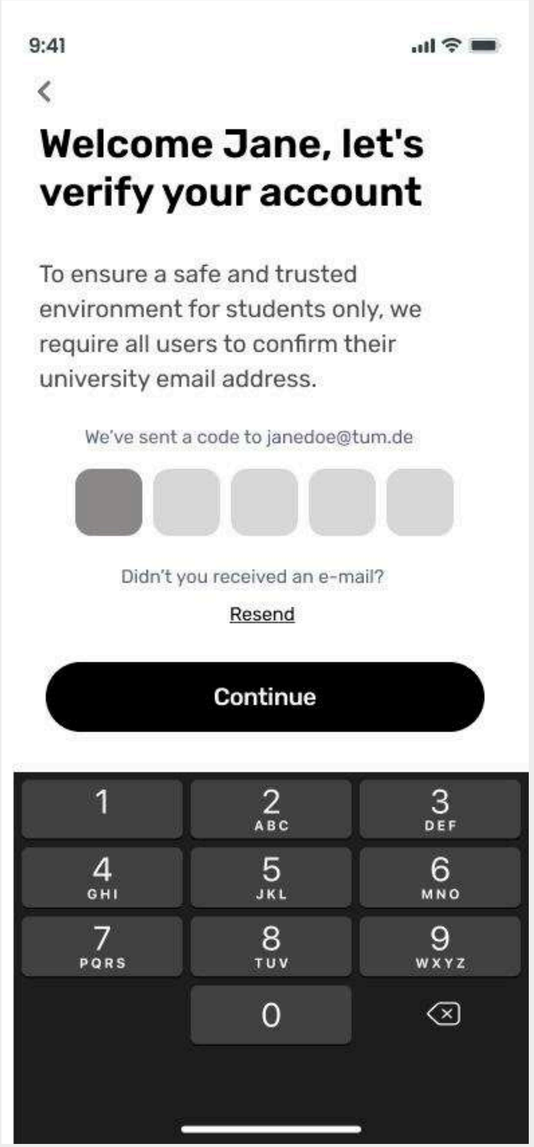

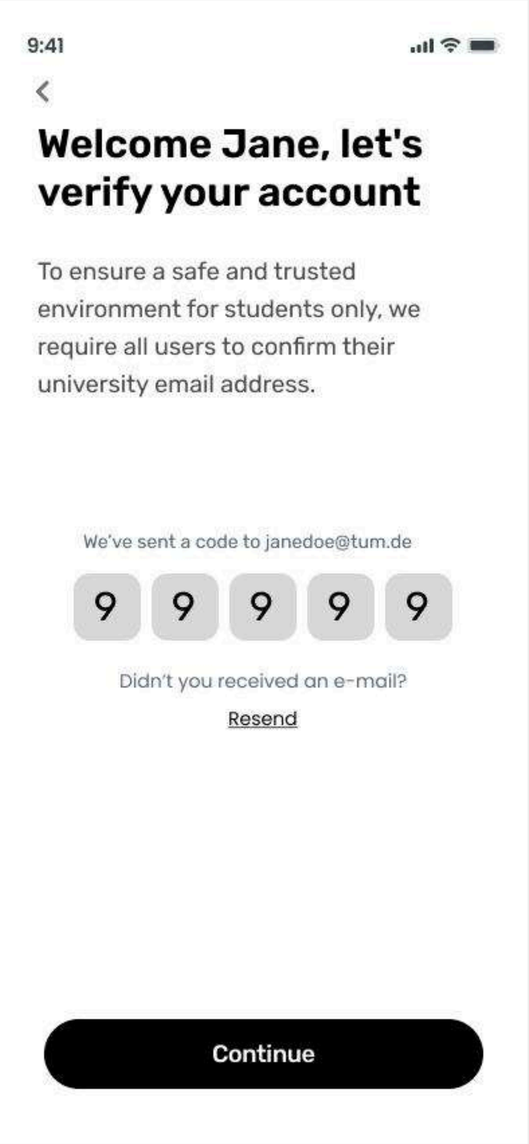

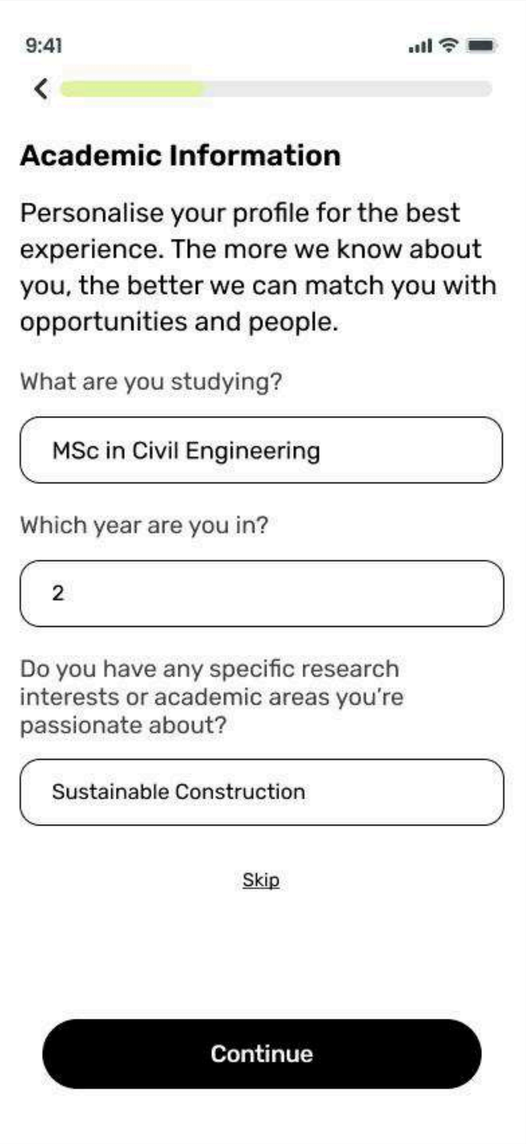

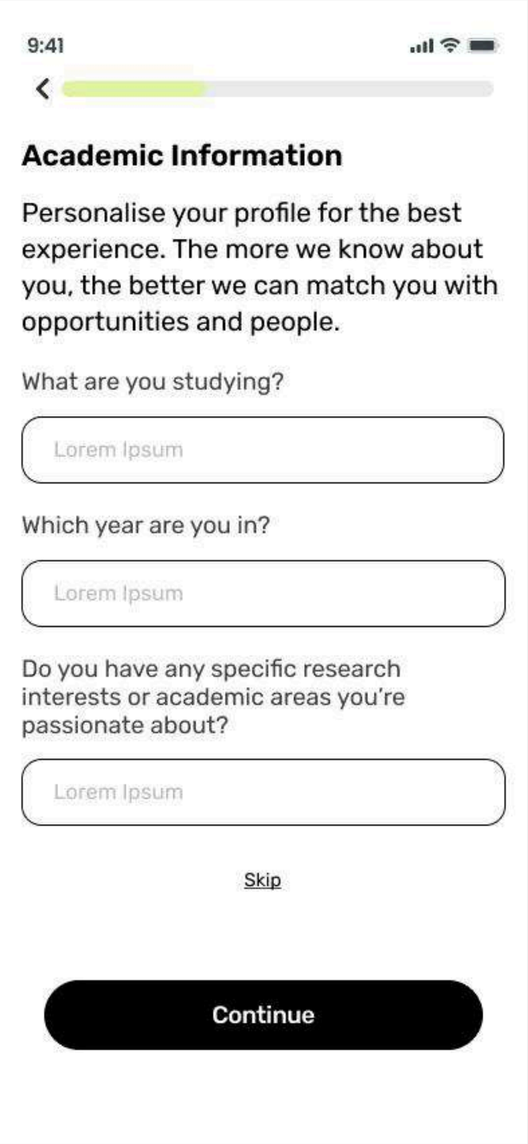

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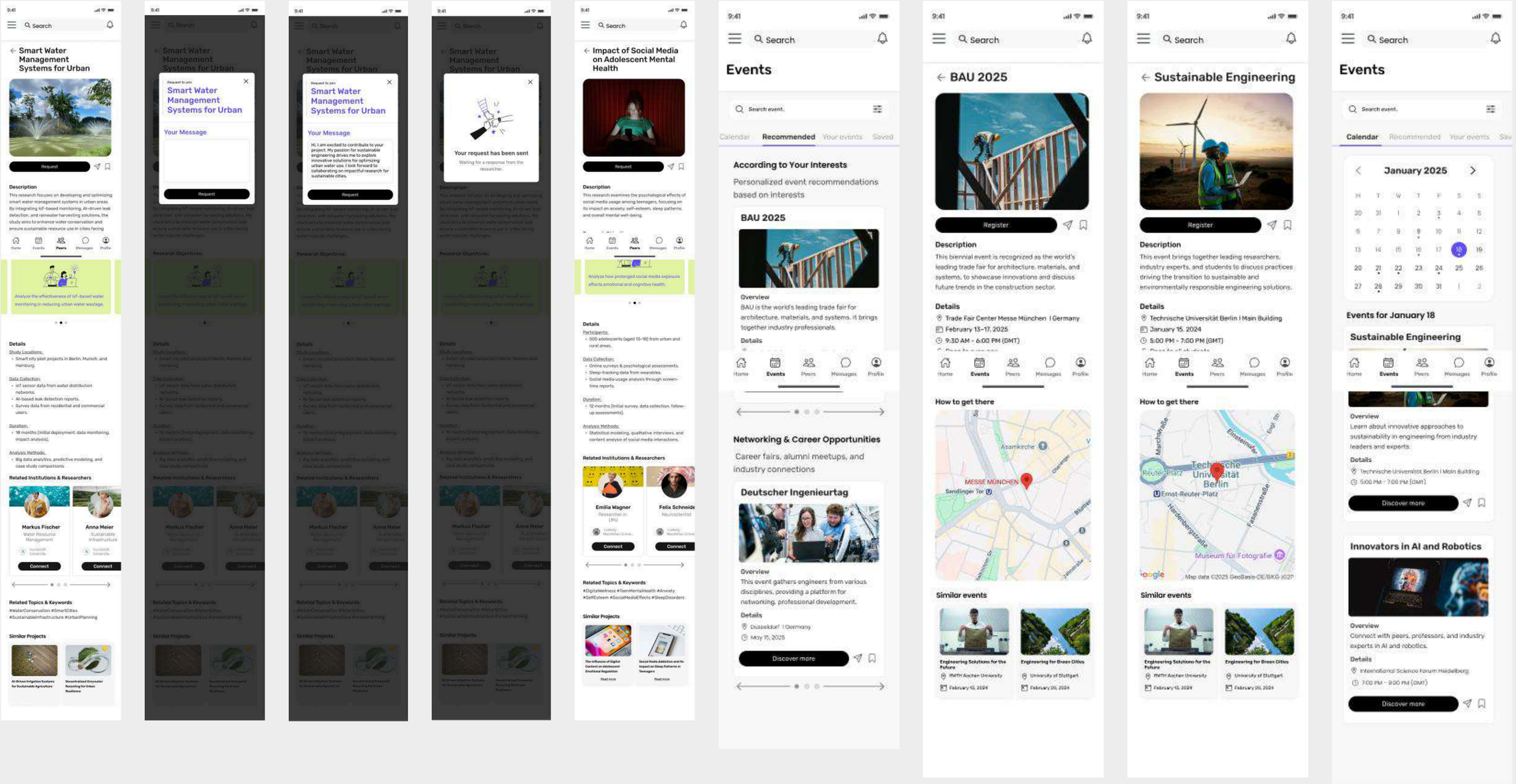

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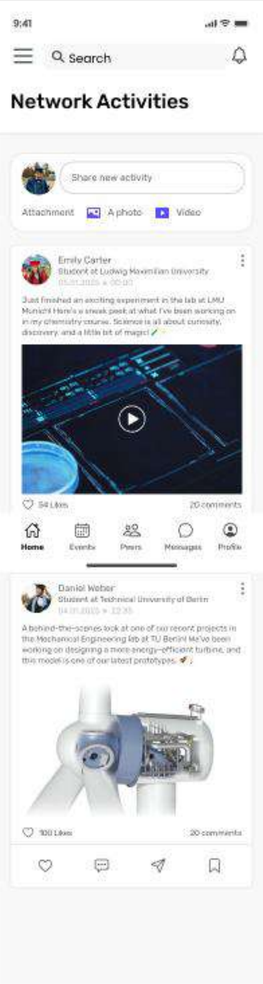

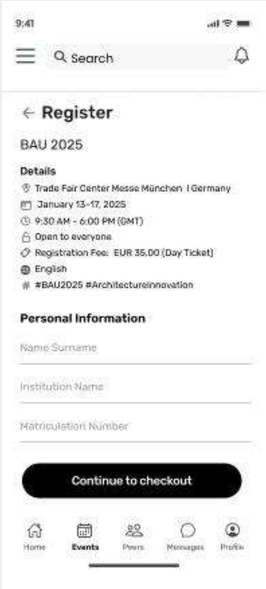

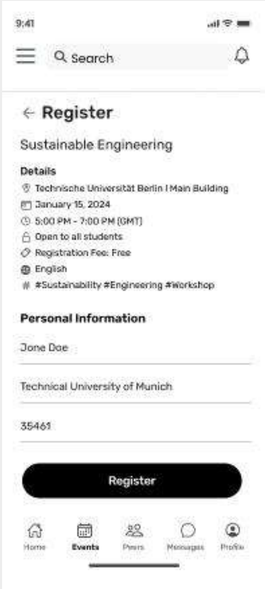

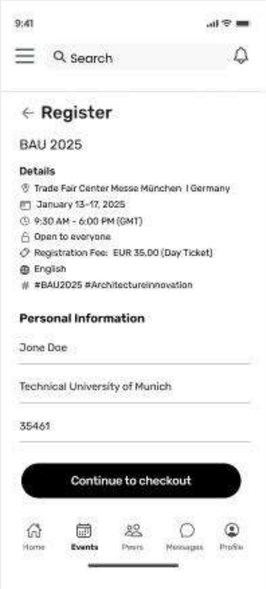

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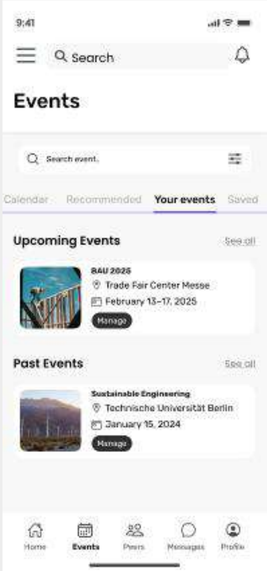

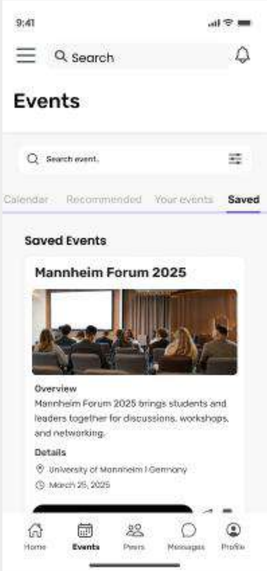

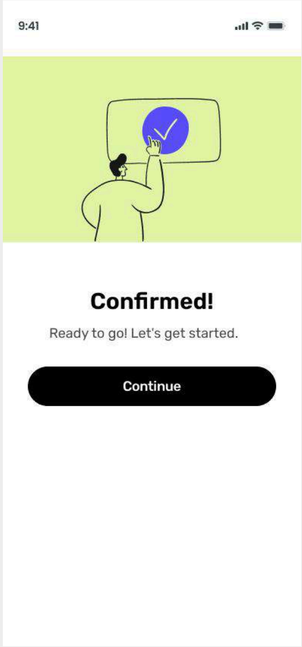

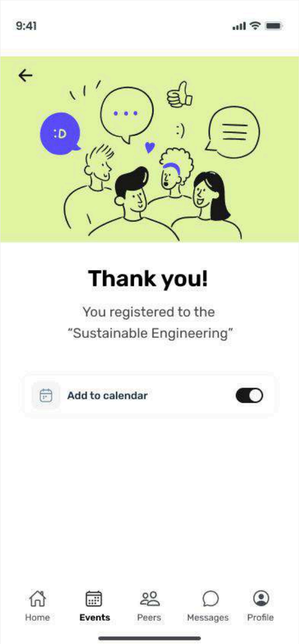

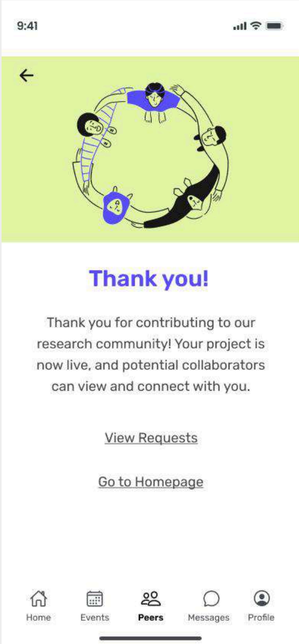

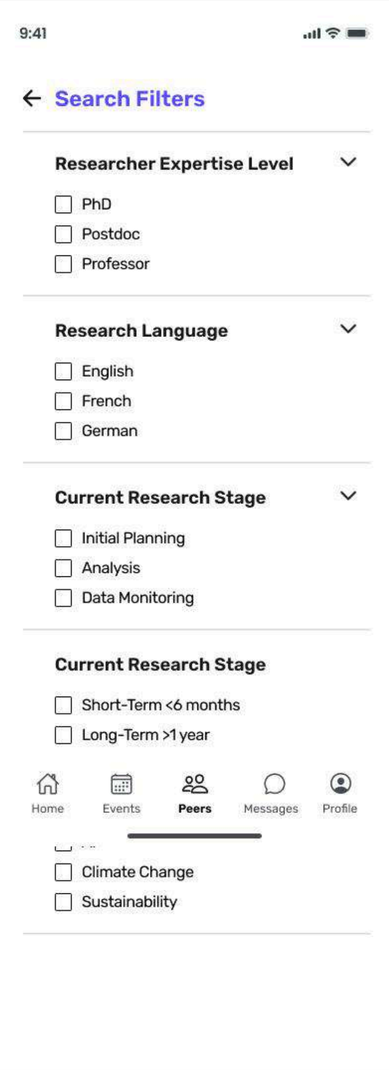

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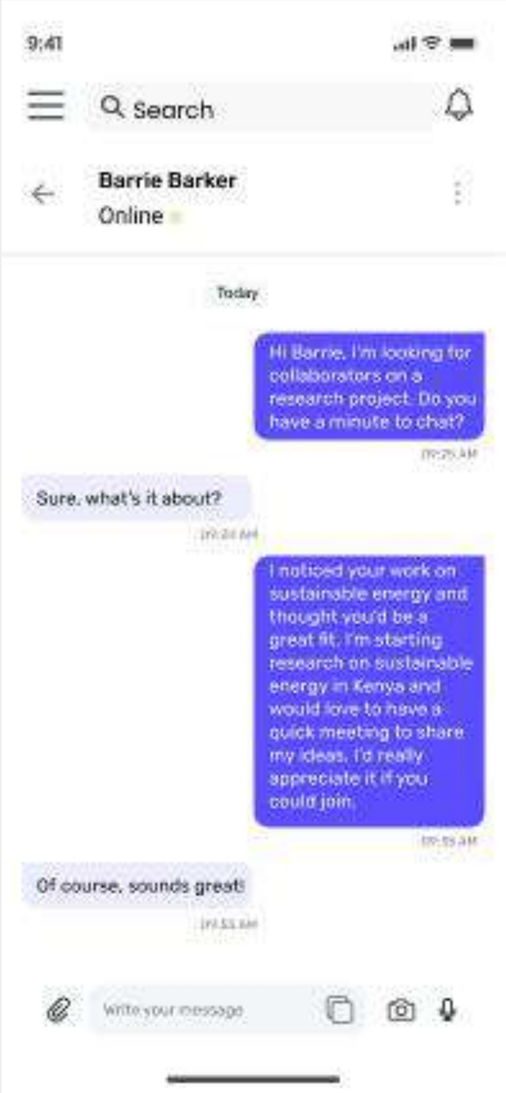

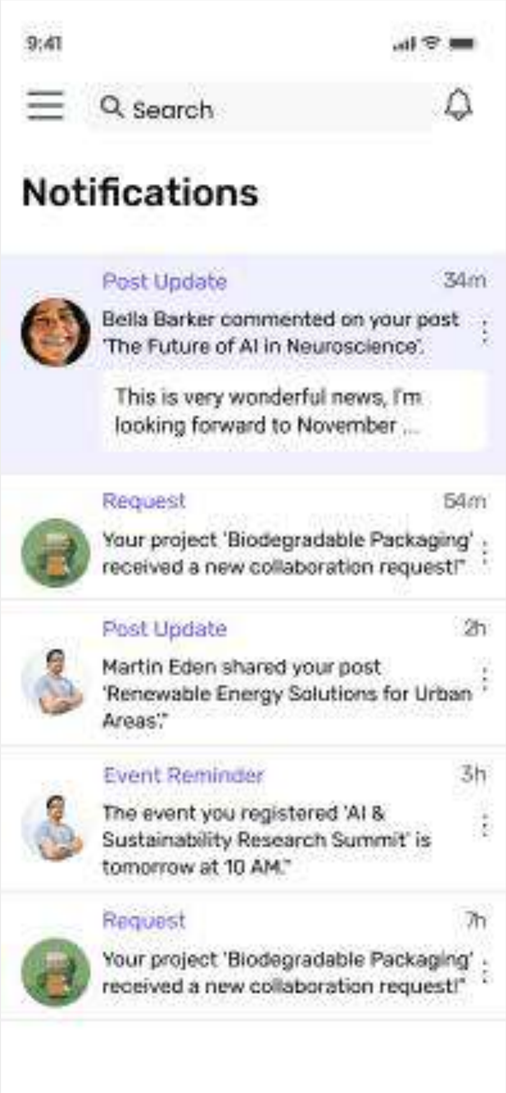

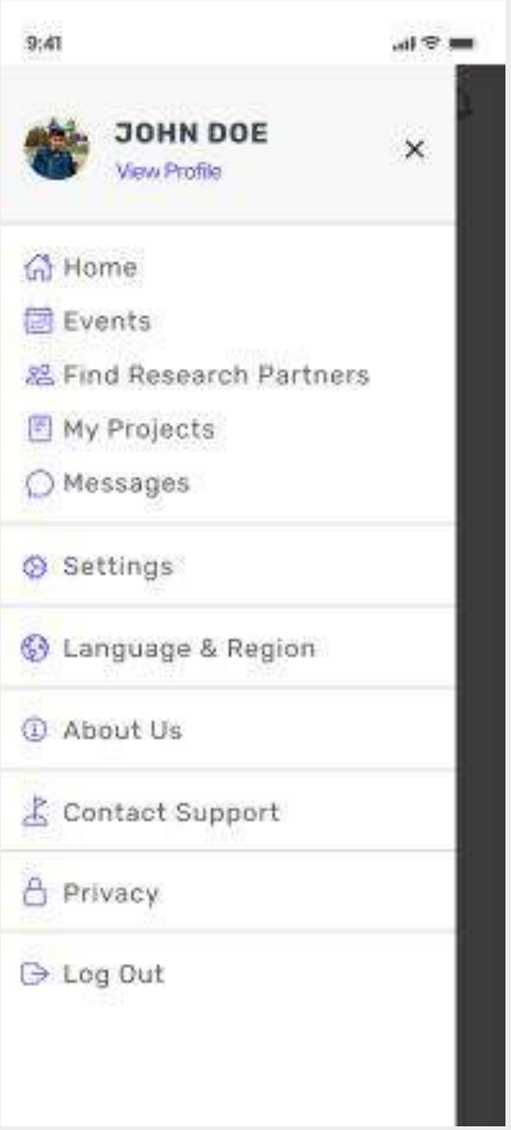

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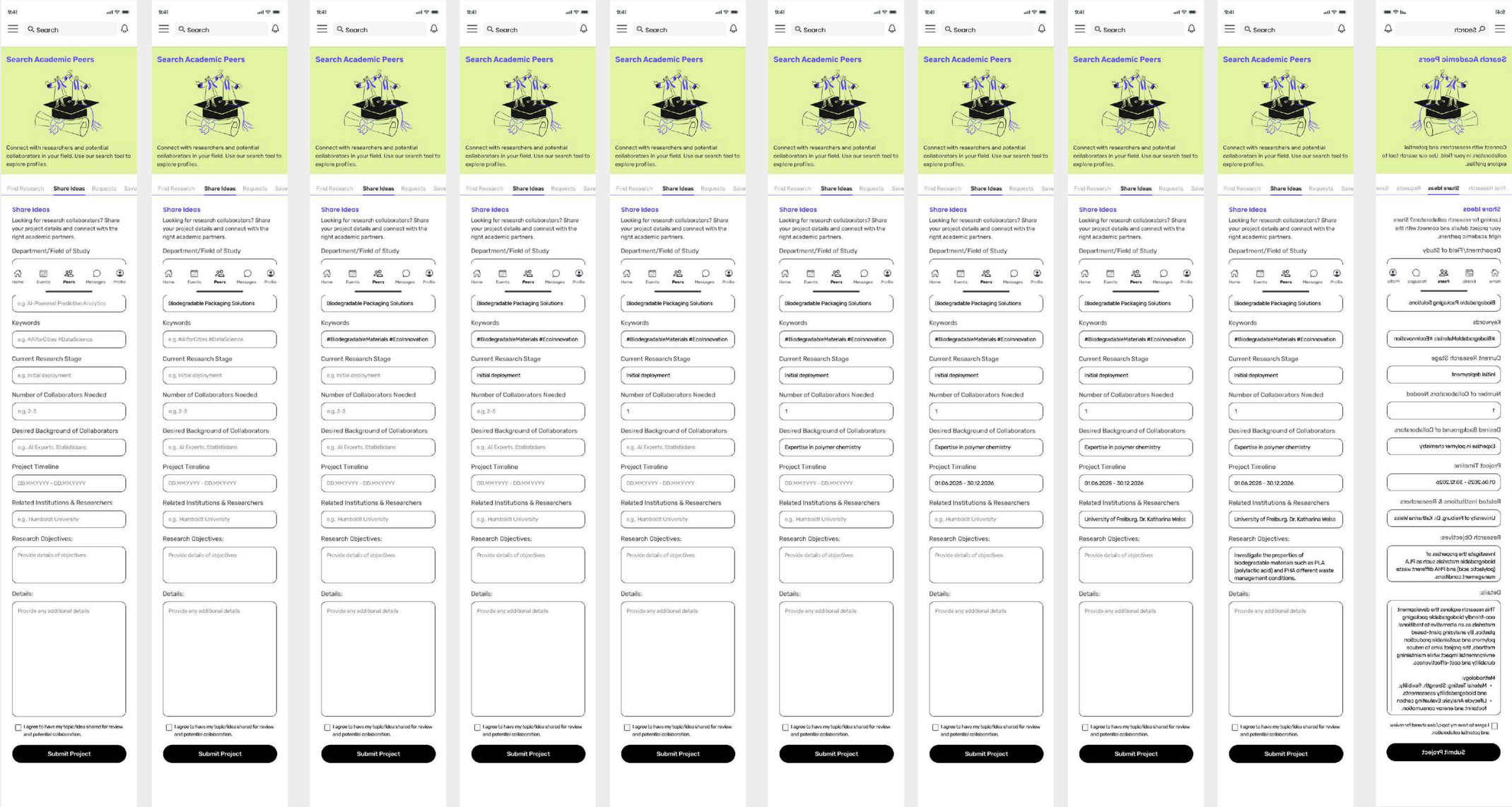

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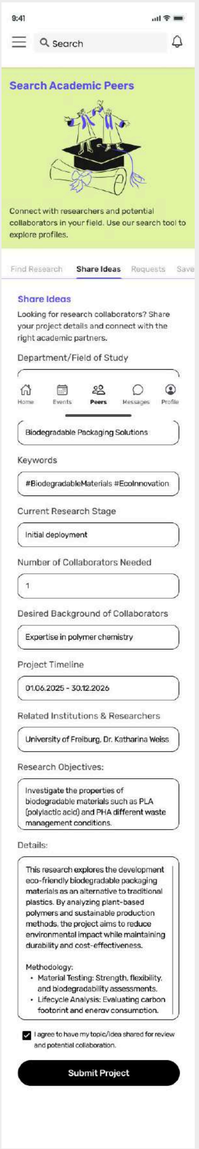
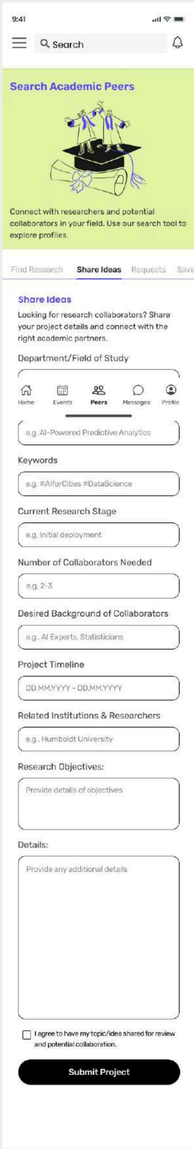
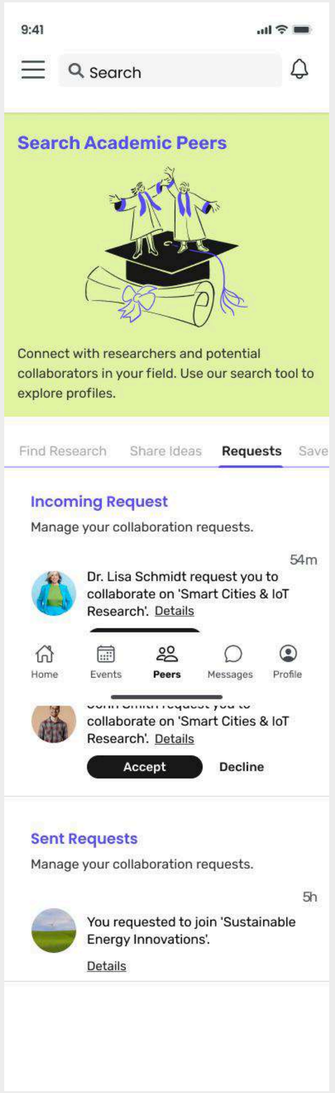
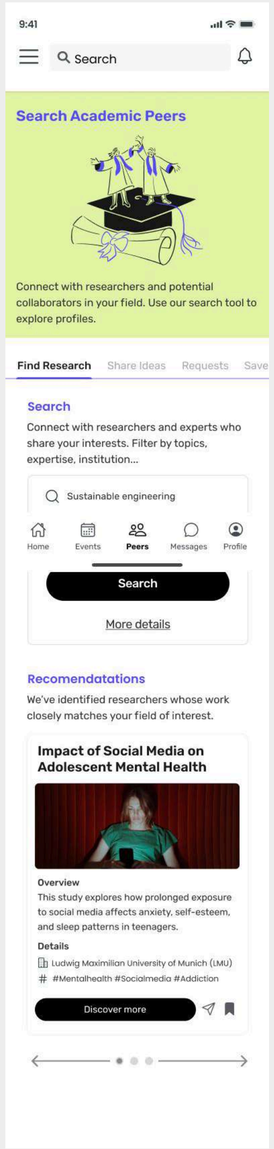
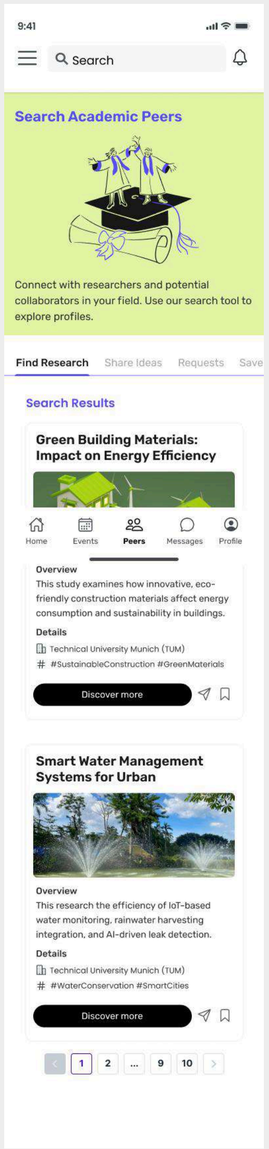
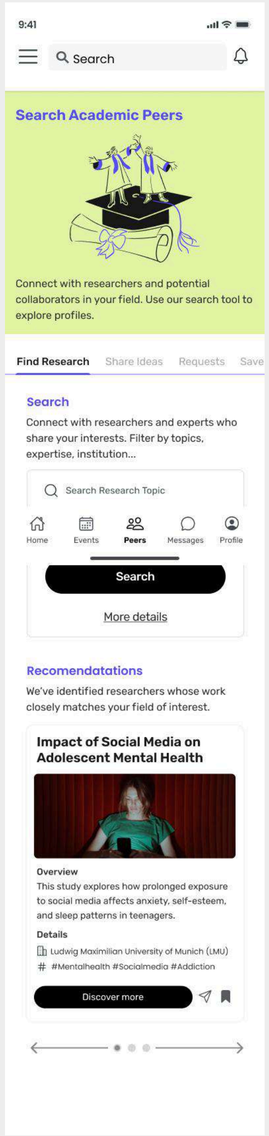


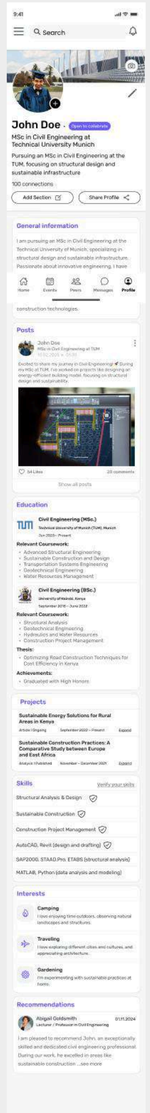












Figma Link:

https://www.figma.com/proto/KRbT0MmvB0x8R0qP8duFJj/ARPA--Prototype?page-id=0%3A1&node-id=7-2861&viewport=-5003%2C248%2C0.44&t=1iRFVGGZ0k1u2EuZ-1&scaling=scale-down&content-scaling=fixed&starting-point-node-id=7%3A2861&show-proto-sidebar=1

A.7. HIGH FIDELITY TEST PLAN

1. **Test Purpose (Formative Testing)**
   - Evaluate the usability of the high-fidelity prototype with new features and scenarios.
   - Gather feedback on core tasks such as signing in, event registration, messaging, peer finding, and idea sharing.
   - Focus on user experience, visual design, and functionality.

2. **User Tasks**

Task 1: Sign In and Navigation
Task 2: Event Searching and Registering
Task 3: Event Searching and Registering with Payment
Task 4: Messaging and Notifications
Task 5: Peer Finding and Requesting Projects
Task 6: Sharing an Idea and Checking Requests
Task 7: Homepage and Profile Navigation

Task 1: Sign In and Basic Navigation Features

Scenario:
You open the app and want to create a new account and sign in or sign up.
Create your account, verify your account.
Navigation part: You are using the app, begin using the navigation bar and the left-hand menu on your screen.

Tasks:
Opening the application
Creating an account
Verifying your account
Navigating through the app

Questions:
How easy was it to create and verify the account?
How easy was it to locate and use the navigation menu?
Did the sign-up form feel simple and easy to complete?
Did the left-hand menu help you quickly access key sections of the app?
Were the icons and labels in the menu clear and understandable?
Did you find what you were looking for without much effort?
Were you able to do the task without interruptions ?
What do you feel about the questions we ask you to make your experience easy?

Visual Feedback
What do you think of the new color scheme/look of the menu and navigation?
Were the icons properly sized and located?
Did the app feel intuitive and user-friendly?
Were the colors, fonts, and button placements visually appealing and easy to use?

A.7. HIGH FIDELITY TEST PLAN

Task 2: Event Searching and Registering

Scenario:
You want to go to an event in 18th of January and you check current events for that day and register one and add to your calendar.

Tasks:
Opening the calendar
Picking the date
Checking the events for that day
Deciding which event to go
Checking the details for that event
Putting your personal information and complete registration
Adding the event to your calendar

Questions:
How easy was it to find and navigate to the date (January 18th) on the calendar?
Were the event options clearly displayed?
How easy was it to check the details of an event? Was any important information missing?
Did you experience any difficulties when registering for the event? If so, what were they?
How confident were you that your registration was successful?

Visual Feedback:
Are the events for that day displayed in a clear and organized way?
Do the icons, images, or colors help you understand event details quickly?
Is the registration form visually simple and easy to fill out?

Task 3: Event Searching and Registering 2 - with payment

Scenario:
You want to go to a certain event in your field of study. Employ search , and find events according to your interest and register. Check your events and manage

Tasks:
Find an event according to your interest
Checking the detailed information about the event
Deciding to register the event
Put your personal information
Make the payment
Complete registration
Manage events and check events you bought ticket

Questions:
Were the event search helped you to decide to pick an event according to your personal interest ?
Was it hard to register for an event ?

A.7. HIGH FIDELITY TEST PLAN

Do you think information on the event page was enough to decide ?
Did you experience any difficulties when registering for the event? If so, what were they?
How do you feel about the payment section, can you share your thoughts?
Do you think all necessary details about events were given to you ?

Visual Feedback:
Did you like the event section, was is smooth enough?
What do you think about the readability of the texts/event information?
Are the events for that day displayed in a clear and organized way?
Do the icons, images, or colors help you understand event details quickly?
Is the registration form visually simple and easy to fill out?

Task 4: Messaging Features & Notifications

Scenario: You want to contact a fellow regarding a potential collaboration. Use the messaging features; explore the notifications.

Tasks:
Send a message to a fellow and observe the read/delivery indicator.
Checking whether people were online or offline.
Explore notifications.

Questions:
How easy was it to locate the messaging feature?
Did you find it intuitive to search for and start a conversation with your fellow?
Were the message input field and send button clearly visible and accessible?
Are the notifications helpful to you?

Visual Feedback:
How did icons/buttons for message delivery, and notifications appear?
Were they distinct and understandable?
Did the messaging system feel smooth and responsive?
Were there any distractions or unclear elements?
Did the app provide useful feedback when sending/receiving messages (e.g., typing indicator, seen status)?
What improvements would you suggest for the messaging or notification experience?

Task 5: Peer Finding and Checking Requests

Scenario: You want to work on a project in Sustainable engineering which conducted Technical University Munich (TUM), search a project and request a project called Smart Water Management Systems for Urban. Check the details regarding to this project.

A.7. HIGH FIDELITY TEST PLAN

Tasks:
Opening the peer section
Creating the search and checking detailed search options.
Finding the project
Reading details and project objectives, who are involved etc
Clicking the request button
Typing a message and sending a request

Questions:
How easy was it to locate the peer section?
Was the search bar easy to find and use?
Did the search options allow you to filter projects effectively (e.g., keywords, categories, institutions)?
Did the project page provide all necessary details (objectives, team members, location, duration)?
Were the project descriptions clear and informative?
Did the peer-finding process feel smooth and efficient?
Were there any unclear or frustrating steps?
What improvements would you suggest to make searching and requesting projects easier?
What do think can be added to make your search process interesting?

Visual Feedback:
Was the project description visually structured (headings, bullet points, images)?
Were key details (team members, objectives, institution) easily scannable?

Task 6: Sharing an Idea and checking requests

Scenario: You want share a project idea and you want to check the requests you received.

Tasks:
Share your idea
Check the requests

Questions:
How easy was it to find the "Share Idea" feature?
Did the idea submission form feel simple and intuitive?
Were required fields (title, description, category) clearly marked?
Did the interface allow you to add supporting materials (images, files, links)?
Did you receive confirmation after successfully sharing your idea?
Do you need any extra fields to give more inputs?

A.7. HIGH FIDELITY TEST PLAN

Visual Feedback:
Did the idea-sharing and request-checking process feel smooth and efficient?
Were there any confusing steps?
Did the interface provide helpful feedback (e.g., success messages, alerts)?
What improvements would you suggest for idea sharing and request management?

Task 7: Surfing in a homepage and checking profile

Scenario: You want to go check the post on homepage and check your profile.

Tasks:
Opening homepage
Checking the profile

Questions:
Was it easy to locate and open the homepage?
Did the profile layout make it easy to navigate between sections?
Was it easy to find and access the profile page?
Did the homepage and profile pages feel smooth and intuitive to navigate?
Did you face any difficulties accessing or viewing content?
What is that one thing you like about surfing posts in home?

Visual Feedback:
Was the homepage visually appealing and easy to scan?
Were posts formatted neatly with proper spacing?
Did buttons (like, comment, share) stand out clearly?
Did images, videos, or embedded content display correctly?
Was the profile page structured in an easy-to-read format?
Did each section (General Info, Education, Projects, etc.) have a clear and consistent layout?
Was text size, color contrast, and spacing appropriate for readability?

General Visual Feedback:
Do you think that this application is targeted toward young users ?
How do you feel about the general visual design of the app after the updates, for example, color scheme, icons, navigation?
Were the buttons and icons easily found?

Additional Feedback:
Is there anything you would like to add or change within the app in order to make it more useful or enjoyable?
Did you experience any bugs or issues while using the app when performing your tasks?

Number of Participants: 9

A.8. HIGH FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 1 (Lucila- 27 - Female - Designer)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
Account creation and verification process was straightforward. Navigation menu was clear and easy to use. Left-hand menu helped quickly access key sections. Events were well-organized, easy to find, and registration was smooth. Project descriptions were clear and easy to read. Color combination and illustrations were appreciated as they were young-oriented and visually appealing	Hashtags in the event section should be clickable. Text size on the main page, project descriptions, and post-sharing form was too small. The last question in the form about networking and opportunities was unclear. Couldn't figure out how to edit and view shared ideas.	The time span for sharing ideas was liked, but no additional fields were needed. The search bar and project filtering were helpful, but more information would be appreciated in some cases. The messaging system was similar to Instagram, and it worked well, but improvements were suggested (like adding more screens or making the send button more visible).

A.8. HIGH FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 2 (Itzi- 28 - Female - Psychologist)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
Clear Profile Sections: Well-organized and easy to navigate. Intuitive Icons: Easy to understand, helping quick access to features. Appealing Color Scheme: Aesthetic, modern, and easy on the eyes. Simple Design: Clean and focused, without distractions. Easy Navigation: Quick access to key sections without confusion. Effective Feedback: Clear confirmation messages for successful actions. Visually Appealing Event/Peer Sections: Clear icons and images for better understanding.	Funds: Absence of any visible information about available grants or funding opportunities. Profile setup lacked customization for adding information on research funding or grants. Funding in Profile: Users wanted to be able to showcase their experience with funding applications or research grants directly in their profiles. Scholarships: It can be added to the profile.	Event Information: Details are clear, but could include more comprehensive options (e.g., cancellations, refunds). Search Functionality: Useful but could benefit from more specific filters.

A.8. HIGH FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 3 (Senthil - 24 - Male - Data Science Master Student)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
Easy Navigation – Found the app intuitive with a clean design. Event Registration Simplicity – Liked how simple it was to add/drop courses.	User wanted more event descriptions, speaker bios, and agendas. Users requested a dark mode feature for better accessibility and eye comfort.	Student Profiles – Useful but doesn't explore them often.

A.8. HIGH FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 4 (Varun - 27 - Male - Product Designer)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
User found in-app messaging more efficient than e-mail for quick discussions with potential collaborators. User felt event feature was great. He could easily upload and promote university seminars related to his field.	Unsure how many students actually saw his posted event and wanted better analytics.	Found the basic search useful, but suggested AI-powered recommendations for researchers. Users wanted more customization, such as direct invitations, search refinements, and email integration.

A.8. HIGH FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 5 (Vishwa - 28 - Male - Graphic Designer)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
User found student profiles informative, making it easier to assess potential collaborators. Liked the responsive design, as the user could browse for partners and events on the go.	More options for events were expected. Apart from seminars and workshops, user wanted internship oriented and other things as well.	Wanted more refined filters, such as specific institutions or researcher credibility. Wanted a detailed review and rating system to see previous experiences of potential research partners.

A.8. HIGH FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 6 (Ayse - Female - 24 - Psychology Student)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
Sign-Up & Navigation: Easy and intuitive account creation and navigation. Event Registration: Well-organized and easy-to-find events. Messaging Features: Smooth and responsive messaging. Peer Finding: Fast and goal-oriented project search. Homepage & Profile: Clean layout and easy navigation. Visual Design: Modern, user-friendly, and appealing to young users.	Event Confidence: Unclear if events were successfully added to the calendar. Messaging Notifications: No unread message indicator in the bottom menu. Peer Search: Search button in peer-finding was ineffective. Idea Sharing: Hard to find in the menu. Visual Appeal: Could use more color; small "settings" icon. Event Info: Lacked details on cancellations and refunds.	Navigation & Icons: Clear, except for the “event” section. Event Page: Needs more details on preparation and arrival. Notifications & Messaging: Clear within the messaging section but lacked homepage visibility. Idea Submission: Needs clearer prompts for engagement. Profile & Homepage: Well-structured; additional filtering options suggested

A.8. HIGH FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 7 (Aysenur - Female - 24 - Civil Engineering Student)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
Sign-In & Navigation: Quick account creation, intuitive menus. Event Registration: Easy event discovery, registration, and calendar addition. Messaging: Simple to use with clear notifications, but missing "seen" status. Peer Finding: Smooth project search with effective filters. Idea Sharing: Simple submission, but lacked field indicators. Homepage & Profile: Fluid homepage, easy-to-navigate profile. General Design: Visually simple, user-friendly, and youth-oriented.	Sign-Up Form: Lacked field indicators, causing confusion. Event Confidence: Uncertainty about registration confirmation. Payment Section: Hard to locate. Messaging: No "seen" status or profile pictures in chat. Idea Submission: No option to upload files/ images. Profile Layout: Personal info could be better organized at the top. Readability: Font sizes should be larger for clarity.	Navigation Icons: Mostly clear, but switching from the profile to the homepage wasn't smooth. Event Information: Well-detailed, but some users suggested larger text for readability. Visual Appeal: The light theme was well-received, but different text colors might enhance contrast.

A.8. HIGH FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 8 (Ebru - Female - 24 - Math Student)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
Sign-In & Navigation: Easy account setup and smooth navigation. Sidebar helped with quick access. Event Registration: Well-organized events, simple registration, and clear confirmation. Messaging: Easy to find and use, with clear notifications and read indicators. Peer Finding & Idea Sharing: Searching for projects was smooth; idea submission was simple but required extra steps to find. Homepage & Profile: Engaging visuals, intuitive profile layout.	Navigation Icons & Labels: Could be more distinct for better clarity. Event Search: The process worked but required some effort. Filtering options could be enhanced. Payment Section: Could be more streamlined for easier access and use. Idea Submission: No option to upload images, files, or links. Peer Search: Searching from the homepage would have been more convenient than the peer section. Homepage Search: There was no direct search function on the homepage.	Event Visuals: Not enough images for events, but this wasn't a major issue. Profile Layout: Well-structured but could be refined for better readability. Visual Design: The app was visually appealing, though contrast and icon clarity could be improved.

A.8. HIGH FIDELITY TEST FINDINGS

Participant 9 (Amed - Male - 23 - Computer Science Student)

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE	NEUTURAL
Sign-In & Navigation: Easy account creation, verification, and sidebar navigation. Event Searching & Registration: Intuitive calendar, clear event details, smooth registration. Event Registration with Payment: Effective search and simple payment process. Messaging & Notifications: Easy-to-use messaging system and useful notifications. Peer Finding & Project Requests: Effective search filters and detailed project pages. Idea Sharing & Request Management: Intuitive submission process with clear instructions. Homepage & Profile: Visually appealing homepage and well-structured profile.	Navigation Labels: Some icons were unclear without labels. Event Search: Lacked advanced filtering options. Payment Section: Functional but visually unappealing. Idea Submission: Limited file upload options. Messaging Customization: No notification customization.	Navigation: Functional, but some icons needed extra effort to interpret. Event Search: Basic filtering was effective but lacked advanced options for detailed searches. Payment Process: Efficient and functional, though the design could be more engaging. Messaging System: Easy to use but offered no customization for notifications. Idea Submission: Simple and straightforward, but restricted by limited file upload options. Profile Customization: Well-organized but lacked unique or standout features.

A.9. BRAND RESEARCH

RESEARCH/COLLABORATION TOOLS

Google Docs
figshare
Notion
Overleaf
zotero
MENDELEY

ACADEMIC NETWORKING PLATFORMS

VIVO connect share discover
A
XING
ORCID Connecting Research and Researchers
ResearchGate
LinkedIn

EVENT APPS

eventbrite
ticketmaster
Meetup
StubHub
SEAT GEEK

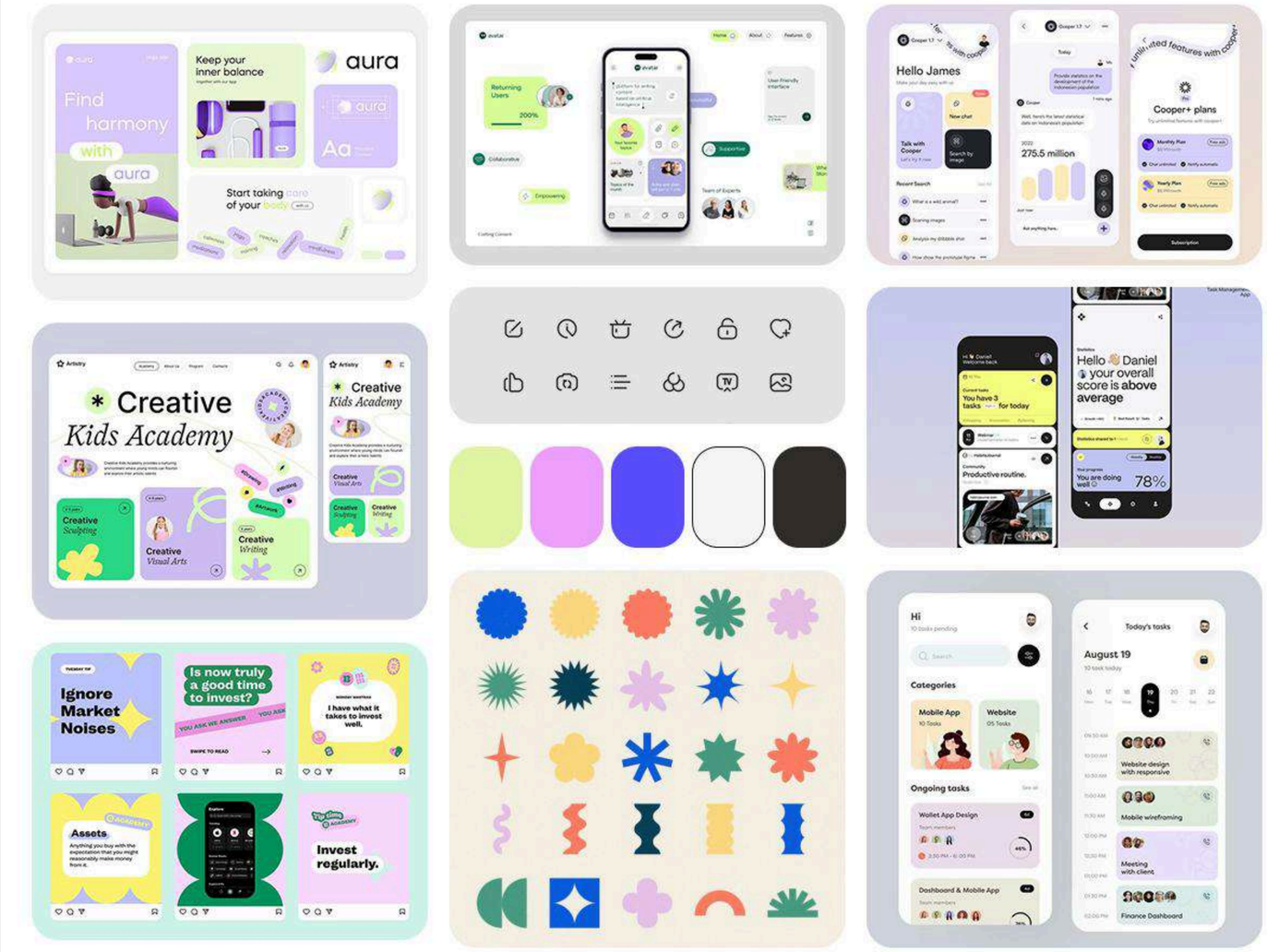
UNIVERSITY APPS

moodle
MyUni Fast | Easy | Simple
STUD.IP
uninow

A.10. MOODBOARD

Moodboard

Design Exploration



A.11. LOGO DESIGN / TYPE FAMILY

Branding

Logo

BridgeUp

BridgeUp

BridgeUp

Logo Small

BridgeUp

BridgeUp

Icon App

Typography & Colors

Font

Rubik

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
0123456789 !@#$%^&*()_+{}|:"<>?-=[];',./`~

Weights — Extrabold Semibold Medium Regular

Heading 1

Heading 2

Subheading 1

Body1: Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet consectetur.

Color Palette

#E2F4A6	#EEA0FF	#5A4EFF	#F5F5F5	#2F2E2C