

Consultancy Report

2022

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BASC0023 The Knowledge Economy

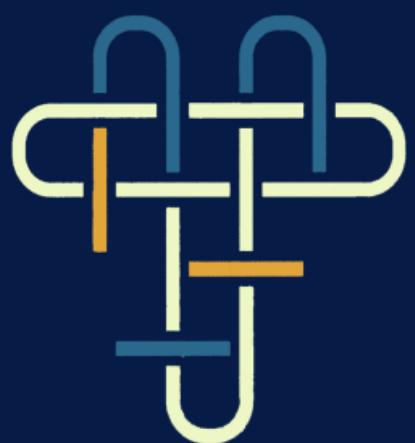


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Executive Summary

The Quick Pitch

Pxibits is on a mission to add emotion to online text communication. Created in 2014, the company has collaborated with different agencies, may it be to work on social media or app development in both Paris and London. It has also been chosen by several investors for second and third follow-up meetings. It collaborated with UCL's BASc Consulting Teams to be advised on both marketing strategy to follow, and product development.

The Problem

- The experience of sharing emotions through online texting is broken.
- Generation Z struggles to express their feelings while chatting, causing misunderstandings and anxiety.
- Incumbents such as Emoji do not solve the problem as they're not able to replicate real-life emotions.

The Solution

- Pxibits is an integrated solution, allowing users to add emotion to a message without writing extra text.
- In one tap only, the user can share how they are feeling at the moment they are typing the message.

Highlights

There is an urgent need to fix the texting experience as it is the preferred method of communication for the new generations, and providing them with the best tool to make this experience even closer to reality may be a game changer, guaranteeing increasing market share for the next decades.



Add **J**exture 2 ur texts!

1. Introduction and Task Specification

Our main challenge as a consultancy team is to develop and assess Pxibits' future profitability and provide a clear and structured report with our analysis and recommendations for the company.

1.1 What is Pxibits

Pxibits was initially launched as a startup in 2017 by Sawsan Mohamed. At first, Pxibits focused on the development of 'digicues' such as animated icons and personalised emojis in order to revolutionise online communication. Since then, growing competition emerged from major players such as Apple's "Memoji", Samsung's "Avatars", Facebook's "Giphy" and Google's "Sticker Maker".

Pxibits' Ethos is to **portray and enhance the tone in which messages may be delivered, therefore solidifying clarity of communication between users**. It wants to focus on communicating the tone of voice by grasping its complexity and variety, to be able to portray it more accurately via texts. This unique product value is what makes Pxibits stand out and it gives greater nuance to text communication.

1.2 Aims & Objectives

"Every major innovation in communication technology has demonstrated a complex interplay with social forces to produce transformative effects on human relationships" (Spitzberg, 2017). Pxibits may help people get closer to each other by making online communication similar to face-to-face communication. In our project, we recognised the need for the product to undergo a substantial transformation, due to the ever-shifting digital landscape.

1. Product development - provide recommendations on redirection of product design
 - a. UX Research
 - b. Product design and functionality
 - c. Scientific exploration into colour-mood association theory
2. Marketing strategy – plan and develop a comprehensive marketing strategy for launch
 - a. Market research to identify key early adopters
 - b. Re-branding assessment & recommendations
 - c. Social media outreach & content strategy
 - d. PR & Communication recommendations

1.3 Methodology

The report is composed of two main parts. The Product Development team focused on a user-centred design approach and centred its research on consolidating the data that would act as the backbone for the effectiveness of the product. The second part is focused on general market research as well as on Texture's entry and exit strategy. An analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of crucial marketing decisions was also conducted. The report ends with a set of recommendations and limitations our team faced during our analysis and strongly encourages Pxibits to follow it for smooth market adoption.

2. Task Progress

2.1 Team Sub-divisions

Based on our strengths and expertise, we decided to split the team into subdivisions, so we could work on the product in parallel from two angles: Product Development and Market Research. By doing so, each team was able to focus on achieving their goals, and was able to prevent working towards a broad idea that could only be loosely achieved. As you can see in Figs 1 and 2, we organised a collaborative workspace, where all team members could keep in track with the sub-divisions, and the entire team's progress.

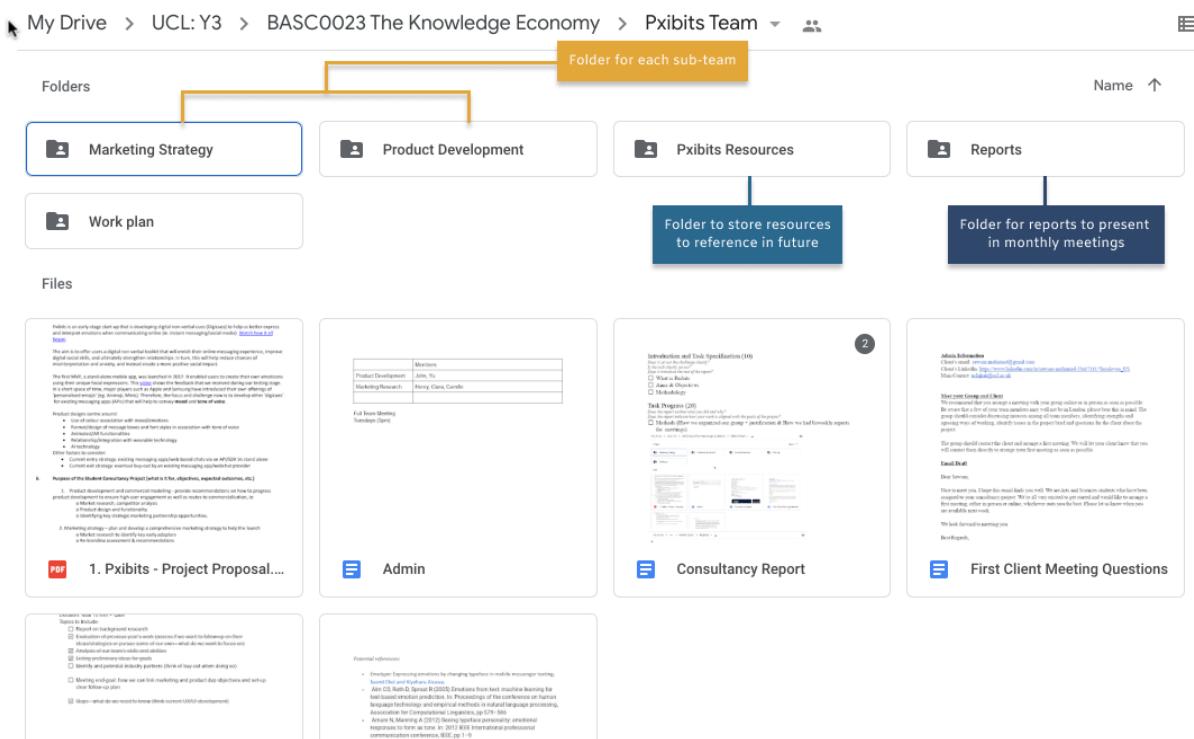


Fig 1. (Source: Screenshot by author)

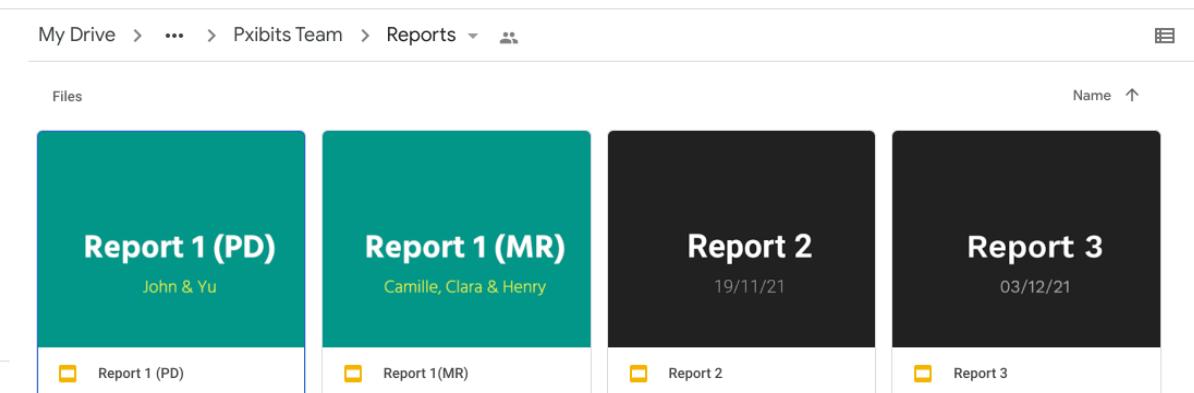


Fig 2. (Source: Screenshot by author)

2.2 User-centred Agile Approach

The User-Centred Agile (UCA) method is an integration of User-Centred Design (See 4.1) and the agile method – Scrum. Scrum is a lightweight framework that helps to organise teams to solve complex issues: We conducted Scrum-inspired weekly ‘mutual knowledge-exchange meetings to enable all team members to gain a fuller understanding of the other team’s progress (Deuff and Cosquer, 2013). For example, we would have a Q&A after each team’s presentation, which would minimise concerns or gaps between the two teams.

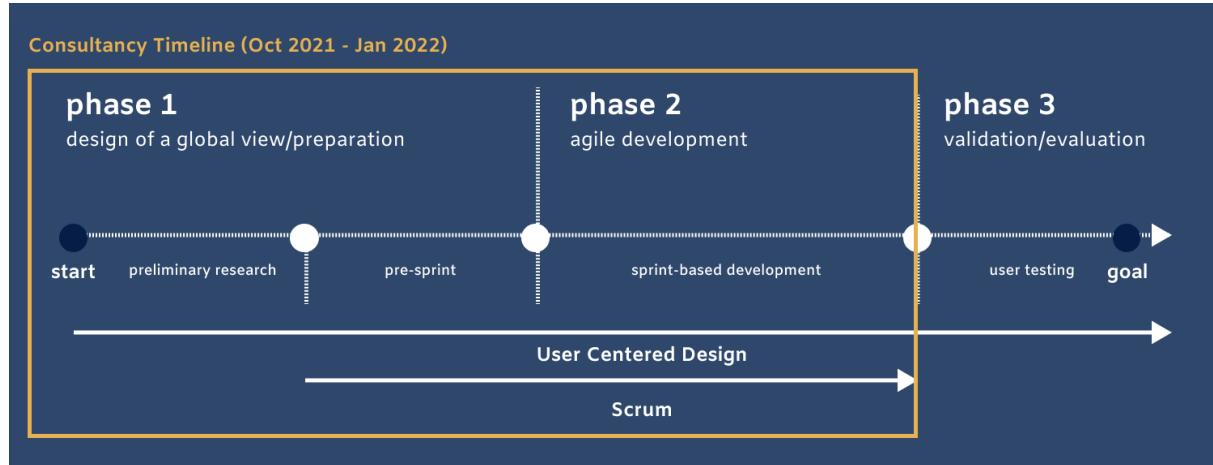


Fig 3. (Source: Created by author on Figma)

Simultaneously, we would hold monthly meetings with our client to update them about our progress and discuss the direction of the product (Fig 2).

3. Rebranding

We felt that the previous branding could be improved from a marketing point of view because current UI trends tend to be minimalist which was not in fit with Pxibits design schemes. We also felt that Pxibits was a name designed to describe the previous idea of an app to put pictures into messages, but does not reflect the current design direction.

3.1 Colour Scheme

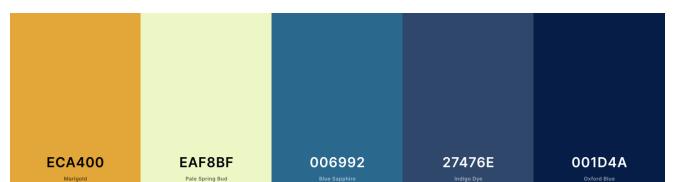
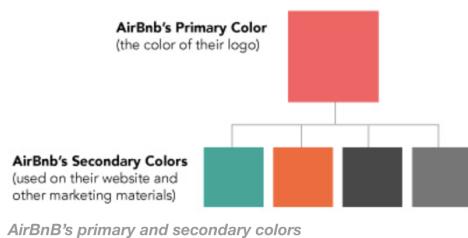


Fig 5. (Source: Created by author on Figma)

Fig 4. (Source: Brackett, 2020)

We wanted the colour scheme to reflect the range of emotions Pxibits helps to convey, so we chose the complementary colours of orange and blue that embody both positive and negative moods (Fig 5). We used Airbnb's colour scheme (Fig 4) as a reference point to identify primary and secondary colours based on colour contrast.

3.2 Logo



Fig 6. Brainstorming Logos (Source: Created by author on Figma)

The first idea was to imitate the sun and the moon with the chosen colour scheme, yet we felt it did not compliment the brand name Texture. Upon consulting our client, we were posed with the challenge to add texture to the surface of the logo. Since we had decided on our minimalist design approach, it was difficult to incorporate texture, which is a 3D concept into a flat design. Through trial and error, we recognized that texture could be created by mimicking a sense of depth using interwoven lines.

3.3 Slogan



Fig 7. (Source: Created by author on Figma)

A company's slogan is crucial in giving potential customers a glimpse of its brand identity. In fact, more than 50% of people say the slogan is the element that helps them understand the company's purpose the most and plays a somewhat important role in their purchasing decision (Mpofu, 2020). This is why we chose to keep it simple, short, and self-explanatory. Moreover, by identifying our core target market as 18-24 year olds (See 4.5), we felt the need to keep it colloquial and cheesy - a message that could be used as a hashtag on social media platforms.

4. Product Development

4.1 Goals

1. As HCI (Human-Computer Interaction) and programming students, we emphasise the importance for our design decisions to respect user-centred design principles. Hence, criteria

for our decisions are ease of use, productivity, efficiency, effectiveness, learnability, retainability, and user satisfaction (ISO 9241-11, 1997).

2. We will approach the product using the CMC (Computer-mediated communication) framework. CMC refers to various forms of human communication enabled by networked computers, which can be synchronous or asynchronous and involve one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many exchanges of text, audio, and/or video messages (Lee and Youn Oh, 2015).
3. The prohibition of primary data collection poses a challenge for our team to develop a user-centred product without conducting any form of user testing. Subsequently, we will shift our focus to using existing ‘results as evidence to support (or refute) aspects of the design’ throughout our development process, and give recommendations of how the designs could be further evaluated in the future (Dix, 2004, p.326).

4.2 Identifying User Need

In one Independent study surveying around 2,000 adults, one in five respondents acknowledged the experience of incorrectly interpreting the tone of a text message they had received (Snowden, 2021). Moreover, this study revealed that the issue of anxiety over text messaging concerns the younger generation significantly, where 41% of 18-24 year-olds reported their stress compared to a mere 10% for those over 55 (Snowden, 2021). These results are reinforced by the results of another study which confirms that text messaging is the primary method of contact for the younger generation (Forgays, Hyman, and Schreiber, 2014). Hence, it is not an overstatement to say that the issue of miscommunication over text messages is pressing, and there is a user need for the product Texture aims to deliver.

Research conducted by Huang et. al. suggests that interactivity with CMC tools leads to a greater psychological perception of interactivity compared to HCI tools (Huang et. al. 2021). In other terms, it is easier for people to communicate their feelings to another human being than to a computer.

4.3 Evaluation of API vs Standalone App

API (Application Programming Interface) refers to an intermediary layer that processes data transfer between systems (IBM Cloud Education, 2020). It provides a set of definitions and protocols for building and integrating application software. APIs let your product or service communicate with other products and services without users knowing how they’re implemented. (Red Hat, 2017). In other terms, an API is plugged into an existing app in order to interact with it. Once integrated to another messaging service or app, such as Whatsapp or Telegram, a Texture API would allow the users to add texture to their texts.

	App	API
Pros	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Easier to market, as it benefits from more awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Already plugged to an existing app

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has its own brand, does not rely on any other. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptable to different platforms
Cons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The social media app market is saturated (Gray, 2018) it would require people to change their habits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low awareness outside the tech community Hard to create a distinguishable brand by itself

Fig 8: Summary of initial benefits and weaknesses (Source: Created by authors)

Creating a solution to achieve this goal implied making it available to the largest number of people, to have an actual impact and not develop a gadget that would be entertaining to use a few times. Hence, creating an app could be counterproductive. The API solution could be very good, its reach would be importantly boosted if it is possible to collaborate with powerful incumbents.

Based on these conclusions, the Product Development team brainstormed on how we could leverage the influence (and user-base) of an incumbent in order to make Texture widely available without expecting people to change their habits.

4.3.1 Whatsapp case

Regardless of the exact feature we choose to go with, it is important to note that we will be able to **interact** with WhatsApp, but not **modify** how WhatsApp works. For example, we would be able to write messages on behalf of the user, but they would still look like normal messages and wouldn't be in modified chat bubbles. We could, however, think of ways to get around this restriction by generating AI-powered stickers that would match the emotion of the user for example. Based on the previously sent voice or text message, a sticker could be created to enhance the feeling shared. There are several libraries allowing developers to interact with Whatsapp, such as Yowsup (Github, 2021). Nevertheless, this would imply people to download an extension for Whatsapp in order to use Texture, making the communication a bit unclear as to whether we are offering an app or an extension. Hence, we chose not to move forward with a Whatsapp extension for now.

4.3.2 Telegram case

Telegram differs from Whatsapp in terms of how it allows third-party developers to alter the app. Indeed, Telegram has put in place the [Telegram API and TDLib](#) allowing people to build customised Telegram clients. We could hence think of a Texture Telegram client which would be based on the user's feelings, modify their messages before sending them. Texture could then be distributed as a standalone app based on Telegram, such as [Nicegram](#) (though it is still an API). Also, it would use Telegram's libraries, making it faster in terms of development and reliability.

Based on this study, the Product Development team recommends pursuing the idea of a Telegram API for the following reasons:

1. The libraries to interact with Telegram have been developed by Telegram teams themselves, hence making them complete, safe, and easily usable.
2. Whatsapp [bans users who are using a third-party client](#), which means that we could only go for an extension.

- Whatsapp would only allow us to make stickers or transcriptions, i.e. we could only slightly modify a pre-existing feature of the app, whereas Telegram offers complete customization.

4.4 Full Analysis of Crucial Decisions

In this section we provide a Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat (SWOT) analysis for each of the key development decisions that were taken.

4.4.1 Texture SWOT Analysis

Texture has an innovative idea that responds to a market need and could easily be implemented. Once adopted, Texture has a huge opportunity for market growth across demographics and geographies, potentially being globalised as the new way of communicating nonverbal cues. As it is intended to be integrated into existing messaging platforms it has the benefit of being very flexible.

	Helpful to achieving the objective	Harmful to achieving the objective	
Internal Origin (attributes of the organization)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intuitive UI/UX Proof of concept/ Existence of a market need Ability to adapt to market as it changes Unique value creation (focus on tone of voice) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Early in development/ No customer feedback No UX Research 	Market adoption is thus the key factor in the early stages. To make sure Texture can tackle this challenge, it needs to choose the right channel to get to its potential customers, keeping in mind the competition with tech giants that might have an incentive to use their own IP to create their own copycat versions of Texture.
External Origin (attributes of the organization)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Platforms have an incapacity to communicate feelings Many potential apps to be adopters / buyout routes No direct competitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficult to Patent Potential Copycat Risk Might be confused with a priori similar roles fulfilled in many apps (GIFs, Stickers, Emojis...) 	Therefore, to be successful in the short and long-run, Texture needs to use a channel that will optimise its natural strengths and mitigate to a maximum the identified weaknesses and external threats.

Programming Interface (API) and an App extension.

Fig 9: Texture SWOT Analysis (Source: Created by author on Figma)

4.4.2 API SWOT Analysis

	Helpful to achieving the objective	Harmful to achieving the objective	
Internal Origin (attributes of the organization)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires less overall design than an original app Cheaper to create Simpler to use Easier to begin uptake due to resistance to new apps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potentially harder to brand and market Might require constant modification to fit with changing platforms Will not have complete control of direction once implemented into apps Difficult to integrate into apps 	Although an API would be the easiest to create and may face smoother market adoption, it can be harder to get the approval licences to integrate big messaging boxes such as WhatsApp, Instagram and iMessage. It is the best solution short-term.
External Origin (attributes of the organization)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can be integrated into existing messaging apps Can access exiting customers Non-rival to major messaging companies Can be integrated across rival platforms giving potentially huge market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easier to copycat than an entire brand Might be cheaper to copy rather than license for large companies Less chance for complete buyout since it is not a direct threat 	<i>Fig 10 : API SWOT Analysis (Source: Created by author on Figma)</i>

4.4.3 App Extension SWOT Analysis

	Helpful to achieving the objective	Harmful to achieving the objective	
Internal Origin (attributes of the organization)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Could offer more personalized content Instant online and offline access (vs GIFs keyboards) Staying "in-front" of customers (on device home screen) Easy to navigate/user-friendly app > staff interaction > increase communication Data capture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More costly and complicated to develop Updating needed Lack of focus: customer fatigue of the overflow of new apps > market saturation 	<i>Fig 11: App Extension SWOT Analysis (Source: Created by author on Figma)</i>
External Origin (attributes of the organization)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have the potential for consolidation or market adaptation if needed Real-time focus group: get feedback from customers Easier for a full buyout Less risks of copycat and getting licenses denied 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk of pp becoming irrelevant/market rejection Risk of choosing the wrong developing partner Risk of security breaches 	Taking the above analyses into account, we suggest that Texture implements its idea via an API instead of a standalone app as in the initial launching phase, it'll be the easiest to implement widely with a high probability to be acquired by large messaging companies. It will then quickly reach more customers than Texture's initial target market. It also solves the major issue facing an app extension which is the resistance to download a new app.

The only remaining weakness, which is the difficulty to integrate an API to an existing app, could be resolved by an initial collaboration with Telegram. With Telegram's policy of promoting and helping developers, the company can market Texture's version and may also be interested in acquiring Texture in the long-run.

4.5 Target Market

In the initial development phases, Texture should focus on one location as a market test before potentially expanding. It should focus on the UK as it is where our team operates. The company is offering a new digital feature to already existing messaging apps, therefore, its target audience must adapt quickly to new updates and technologies as well as being frequent texters. Texture will thus focus its advertising and reach on young adults, ranging from 18 to 24 years old. This demographic is also the main one to use daily social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and Snapchat (Barnhart, 2021), platforms that will be used in Texture's advertising campaign.

4.6 Capturing Requirements

Upon identifying a user need, we move forward to capturing requirements, which 'focuses on exploring the problem space and defining what will be developed' (Preece, Sharp and Rogers, 2019, p.385).

4.6.1 User Persona

As a starting point, we created a user persona based on the target market the Marketing team had identified, in order to precisely illustrate 'rich descriptions of typical users of the product under development' (Preece, Sharp and Rogers, 2019, p.404).



Fig 12: User Persona (Source: Created by author on Figma)

4.6.2 User Story

User stories are card-based prototypes that ‘illustrate a user’s path or journey through the product or service’ (Preece, Sharp and Rogers, 2019, p.453). Since each step represents ‘a unit of customer-visible functionality’, it was useful in order to identify specific technical requirements the application would require (Preece, Sharp and Rogers, 2019, p.388). As we mapped the current user journey, we recognised how inefficient the process was for the user to select their mood on the tone star. Hence, we decided to use an AI approach, where Texture could detect the mood or tone from text analysis and natural language processing. Here it was important to give agency to the user by allowing them to click the Texture button again if the suggested mood was inaccurate. By replacing the Tone Star with the Texture button, we were able to minimise the cognitive load and steps taken for the user to complete their journey.

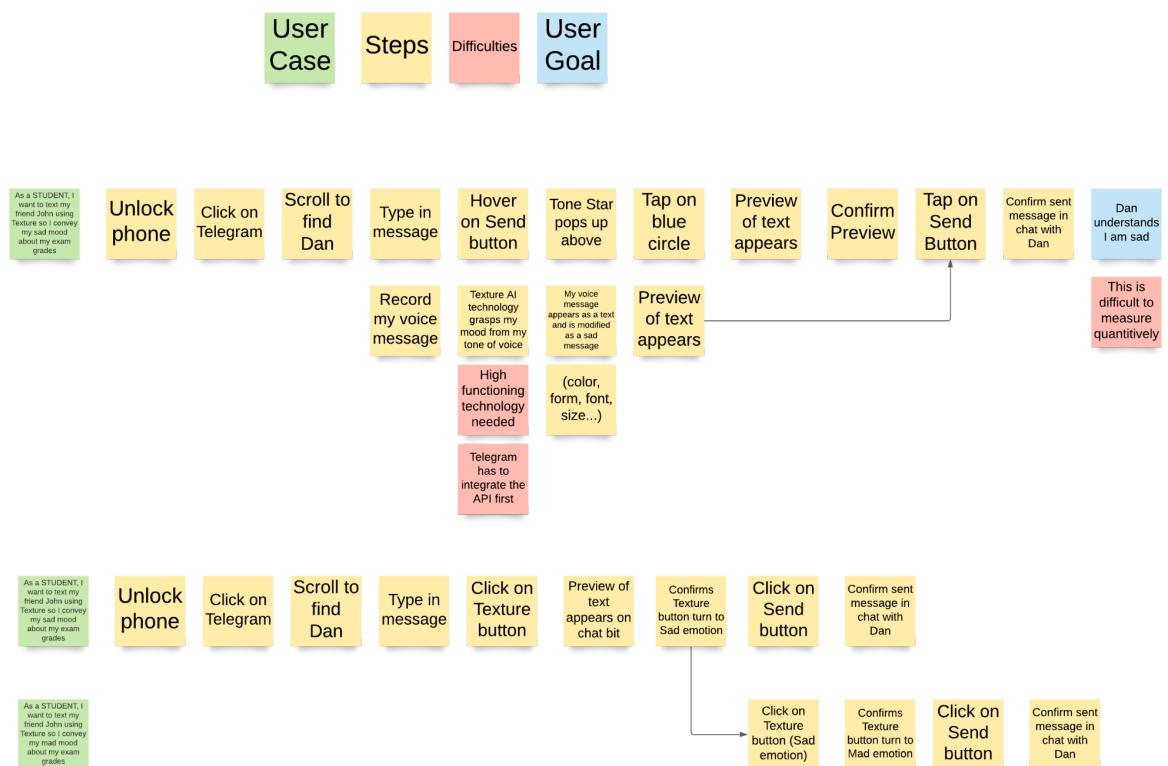


Fig 13: User Story Mapping (Source: Created by author on LucidChart)\

4.7 Colour-mood Association

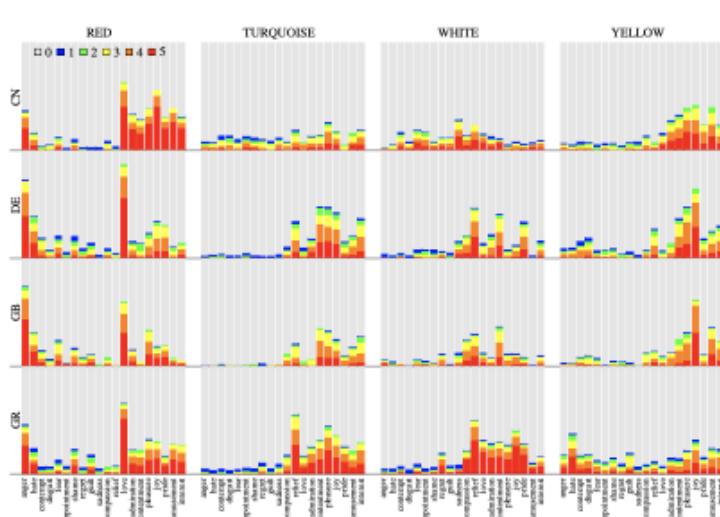


Figure 6. Colour terms RED, TURQUOISE, WHITE and YELLOW: stacked bar charts showing proportions of the six GEW rating intensities, separately for the four countries. Same format as Figure 4.

Fig 14: Colour-mood association data 1 (Source: Jonauskaitė et al., 2019)

When conducting preliminary research, we uncovered the lack of scientific evidence supporting the basis of the mood star which is the theory of colour-emotion

association. Jonauskaite's 'machine learning approach to quantify the consistency and specificity of colour–emotion associations and their cultural specificity', took us by interest, especially when concerning the ethical diversity of our target market (Jonauskaite et al., 2019, p.13). We decided to use the results of this study to consolidate which colour to embody what emotion.

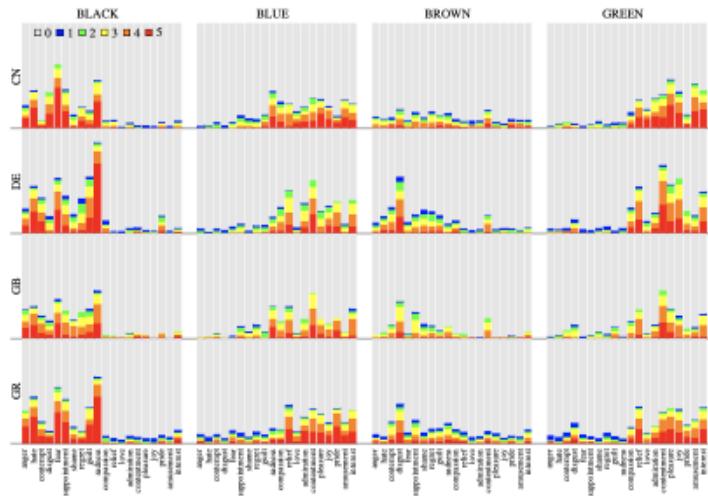


Figure 4. Colour terms BLACK, BLUE, BROWN and GREEN: stacked bar charts showing proportions of the six GEW rating categories representing the intensity of the associated emotions, separately for the four countries. Same colour code as in figure 2. Rows represent countries (CN: China, DE: Germany, GB: United Kingdom, GR: Greece) and columns represent colour terms.

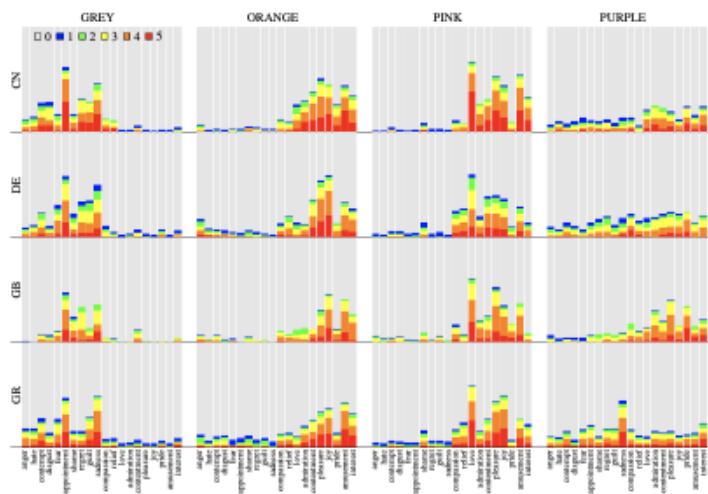


Figure 5. Colour terms GREY, ORANGE, PINK and PURPLE: stacked bar charts showing proportions of the six GEW rating categories, separately for the four countries. Same format as figure 4.

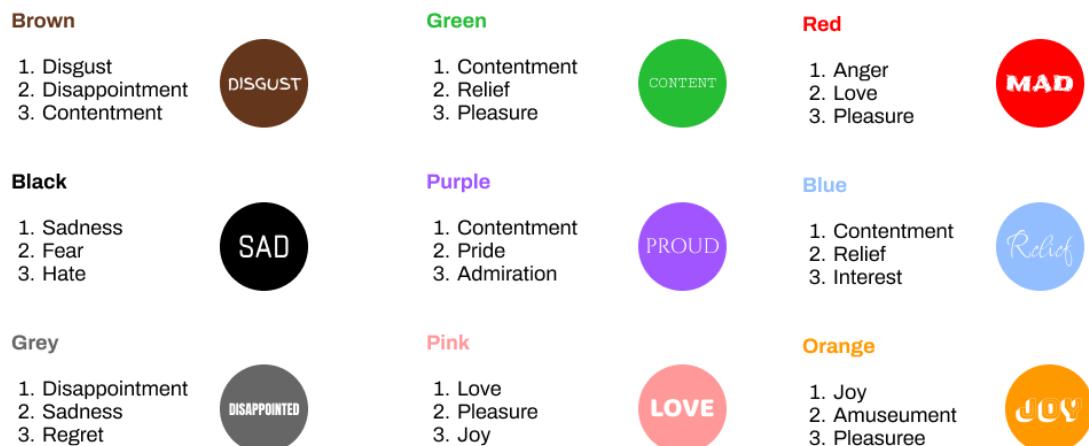


Fig 16: Variation of texture buttons (Source: Created by author on Figma)

By analysing Jonauskaite et al.,'s datasets (2019), we ranked the most common emotion associated with the certain colour to determine the colour of the text. For further reference, it is important to note here that these buttons should only be used in the UK market, since colour-emotion association widely varies by culture.

4.8 Iterative Prototype Design

As we started prototyping the mood star, it appeared that it would not be convenient and smooth on a daily usage. Indeed, in its UX, the mood star had similarities with the emoji experience, as it implied long press, and selection between different emotions (Fig 17). Furthermore, after testing it within the consultancy group, the main outcome was that the long press on - or near- the send button is associated with the recording of a voice note. To avoid confusion, and create a unique -hence branded- experience, we decided to add a selector next to the 'send' button which would not require a long press to distinguish Texture from incumbents such as Emoji.

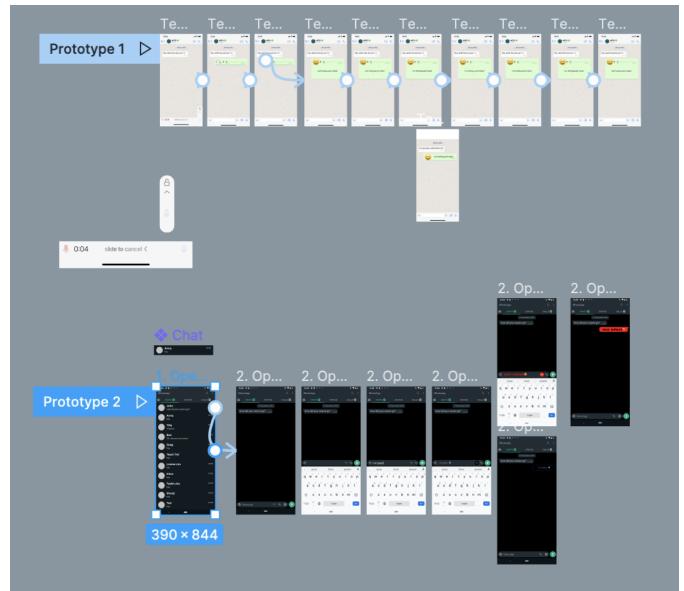


Fig 17: Prototype design (Source: Screenshot of prototype process on Figma)

Upon our analysis, we decided to focus on two UI features. Minimalism, the design concept that focuses on "Less is more", Features clean lines and monochromatic colour schemes. We decided that we should use this since we are creating an API that indicates minimal screen space to communicate information. As you can also see from the [Prototype Explanation Video](#), a low level of animation was used to offer informative feedback about the user's actions and effect.

5. Marketing Research and Entry Strategy

5.1 Goals

We have determined 3 core goals that we should seek to achieve with our marketing strategy. To successfully achieve market entry we will likely need to completely fulfil the first two goals and to enable the long term goal of being bought out, the third target will be critical.

1. Build Awareness of Texture/ Gain publicity
2. Build trust and confidence in product/ Gain loyal users
3. Get on radar of buyout candidates

The first goal is the primary goal of marketing. Raising awareness is very important to make money, as the success of any product requires uptake. As the number of people that use the product increases, so does the potential to make a profit from it. In the case of Texture, this relationship is less direct than in a sold-to-consumer product, but still is the root cause of the value. By providing a service to many people, Texture would become valuable through the benefit this service gives to the consumers. In this case, Texture is looking to be a potential buyout candidate in the long term, so the size of the consumer base gives a good demonstration of the profitability of providing Texture's service on a platform.

Building trust and confidence in the product is also invaluable. In order to achieve the long-term goals, the right sort of brand has to be created. There would be no use in exposing the product to many people in a manner that doesn't build trust, as there would be very low uptake (Raner, 2021). It is of particular importance that the early adopters have a keen sense of trust, as their testimonials and usage of the product need to be positive if it is to expand (Vadino, 2020). It is essential that a positive brand association is created as early as possible. We must demonstrate that Texture is exciting, useful and does what we promise, so the marketing has to supply this messaging to potential consumers.

The third goal is important because Texture will use a bulk-payment in the form of an acquisition to become profitable, as it will not be monetized at first. This goal should be facilitated by the success of the other two goals, as the combination of a large consumer base and a trusted brand is an effective way of demonstrating profitability and gaining attention from larger companies. In the words of Cremades, creating a buzz and laying out a roadmap are both very important for a company looking to be acquired and the simplest way to achieve this is by demonstrating interest and profitability (Cremades, 2019).

In terms of timings, we propose putting an emphasis on building trust and confidence first, then focusing on gaining publicity and in turn, a greater number of users, before lastly ensuring we are on the radar of our candidates for buyouts.

5.2 Social media and website

As a technology-based company, it is natural to gain a wide social media base (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, websites, etc.). These should be the public face of the company and contain all the marketing information that ought to be conveyed in a consistent form across all media platforms.

They must act in tandem with other methods of marketing to ensure that there is a consistent narrative developed between the different advertising strategies. If a potential customer is made aware of Texture from another marketing strategy, they will be directed towards our social media and website when deciding to take up using it or not. So, it is of paramount importance that our website and social media use the same selling points we have used elsewhere in the marketing strategy.

We recommend having a consistent and punchy branding – see the rebranding section of the report and a very clearly laid out summary of Texture's sales pitch. This is an opportunity to represent the benefits, purpose and USP of Texture without it coming through the medium of another person's opinion. The tagline "Add texture to your texts" should be prominently featured across all outlets.

The key advantages of using our social media and website as a form of marketing is that the information is exactly as we want it, and there is no filter between us and a reader. They are free to create, and do not involve having to pay anyone. The main disadvantage is we have to build a platform of followers ourselves which would be time consuming and difficult. It is likely very difficult to garner interest in the social media presence of a company like Texture. We were unable to find successful examples of similar tech-based products with a wide following.

To build a wide following we would require entertaining and engaging content, which could potentially be done through viral challenge based marketing.

We would suggest using it primarily as a signposting tool and a way of communicating further information to those who are already interested in the product. We should also consider that any companies looking to find out more about us, such as a potential buyer would first look at our social media, so it should be tailored to appeal to a company as well as a customer.

5.2.1 Viral Trends

Exploiting or creating a viral trend could potentially expose Texture to a vast audience with minimal costs. In terms of spreading brand recognition it has the potential to be far more effective than other proposed methods of marketing and it has been demonstrated that viral marketing can have a huge effect on previously small industries, such as tourism to a tiny town in China called Litang (Zhang and Huang, 2021).

The best way we identified of attempting to go viral is to create a variation of the lyric text pranks, which often go viral on Tiktok. By having the emotions in the lyrics from using Texture's API, it would have an extra dimension that could create more nuanced recreations of song lyrics. These could be used either to create similar pranks and could be integrated with traditional influencer marketing to attempt to start the trend.



Fig 18: Example of viral trend (Source: Youtube)

The most fundamental problem is that you cannot predict what is likely to go viral with any degree of certainty, as it is all about timing and luck, as to whether a concept goes viral. There is also a significant lack of control over how it develops and how it is perceived, and there is a risk that it may actually harm Texture's brand if associated with undesirable connotations (Reichstein and Brusch, 2019). If the trend alienated parts of the target demographic, by being perceived as annoying for example then it could potentially harm the brand. A trend would also communicate minimal information about Texture so it would be necessary to direct those made aware of Texture towards social media or website sources that contain more information.

5.2.2 Micro-Influencers

Micro-Influencers are content creators with relatively small (1000-1,000,000 followers) but often very engaged followings. They are typically based around relatively niche topics (Anderson, 2019).

Examples of instagram micro-influencers could be Ali Abdaal (@aliabdaal) or Ruby Granger (@_rubygranger).

The particular advantages of sponsoring content from a micro-influencer are plentiful. It is considerably cheaper than most other forms of advertising and often has far more engagement since followers of a micro-influencer follow them for the specific niche (Anderson, 2019). In the case of Ruby Granger, for example, it is to gain productivity and work advice as she is a productivity and university studies-based influencer. This means that the audience of a micro-influencer is somewhat self-selecting and already have a high level of trust in the influencer, which mitigates common pitfalls with influencer marketing such as ‘fake followers’ and influencers sponsoring too many irrelevant products (Taylor, 2020). Lou and Yuan’s research suggests that the trustworthiness of the influencer is closely related to the audience’s resulting trust in the brand (Lou and Yuan, 2018). Using micro-influencer content is potentially an effective way of winning a relatively small but involved customer base.

The disadvantages to using micro-influencer are the lack of wider reach. This means it would potentially take a long time to get a large customer base. There is also a lack of control over the content, which makes it significantly harder to maintain a consistent message across all marketing forms – which in turn is important in maintaining brand trust (Raner, 2021).

Influences can be found on many different social media platforms, including but not limited to Instagram, Facebook, YouTube and Tiktok. We recommend focussing on influencers found on Instagram and Tiktok, as these two platforms have very highest engagement numbers for Texture’s target demographics of young people based in the UK. They also have conducive systems for influencer content (Barnhart, 2021). Instagram has a billion monthly users and Tiktok 100 million (*ibid.*), with 76% of 18–24-year-olds using Instagram and 55% using Tiktok (Auxier and Anderson, 2021). In terms of pure numbers they are only rivalled by Snapchat in the 18-24 demographics.

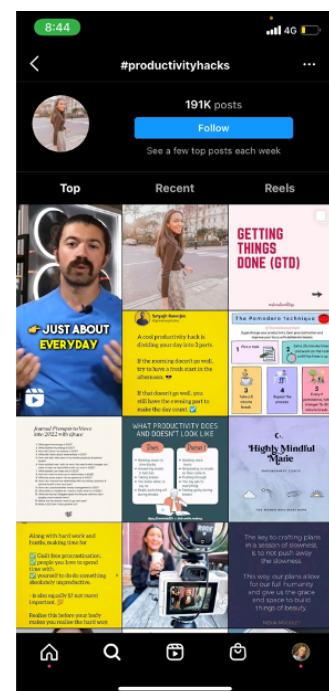


Fig 19: Example of using the discover feature (Source: Instagram)

On top of this, users of Instagram and Tiktok are able to discover and follow influencers with ease, through the explore and discover functions (something that is not the case for snapchat, which is more focused around conversations with a single person rather than many people engaging with content). We would recommend sponsoring content creators to create reels on Instagram, as this maximally exploits Instagram’s algorithm to reach the most number of potentially interested people. It closely mirrors the form of Tiktok so the same tactics could be used there.

We would advise finding micro-influencers, whose niche relates to pics of it as best possible, who have very engaged followers. A potential way of doing this could be productivity-based or tech-based influencers as reducing miscommunication in texts would increase efficiency in communication and the connection to technology is self-explanatory.

The way to identify suitable influencers is by using hashtags such as #productivityhacks on the explore page and then looking at the likes-to-followers ratio, the number of comments on each post, and the content of the comments. What should be looked for is an influencer with a large proportion of their followers liking their posts, with many comments related to the content they are talking about rather than their looks for example. By these criteria, Ruby Granger would be a good template of a micro-influencer to start with.

Once a core group of early adopters is using the platform, influencer advertising can be expanded if necessary by using bulk emailing to reach larger numbers of influencers with platforms like [tribegroup](#).

5.2.3 Mainstream Influencers/Celebrities

The fundamental differences between micro-influencers and mainstream influencers are the number of followers and the cost. According to Anderson the cost of a sponsored post tends to be around \$1000 per 100,000 followers, whereas a celebrity influencer could cost into the hundreds of thousands per post (Anderson, 2019). For this reason, due to the company size of Texture we believe that celebrity influencers, such as actors or creators with tens of millions of subscribers would simply be too expensive to be used. It should be mentioned that rates are usually negotiated between the company and the influencer so quotes of prices are only representative of the ballpark figures that could be expected.

It is potentially more possible to use mainstream YouTubers, as the costs are more affordable and the content could potentially work well with some of the larger tech youtubers. This would fit with our general marketing strategy as their audiences would already be interested in tech niches, and could be potentially more likely to use Texture than the average person. We would also be using trustworthy advertising sources as they are already seen as experts in the area.

We identified Mrwhosetheboss (<https://www.youtube.com/user/Mrwhosetheboss>) and Marques Brownlee (<https://www.youtube.com/c/mkbhd>) as potential larger youtubers who might be interested in Texture as it relates to their content. Mrwhosetheboss is potentially a particularly good option because he is both UK based, which is beneficial for our UK target audience, and also prominently features reels - which are both cheaper to sponsor and reach many people. It would be financially sensible to invest in skippable advertising, as this is much cheaper than sponsoring the video or buying non-skippable advertising. Since our advert should ideally fit naturally in the theme of the video it would still get a lot of exposure as people are likely to be interested in watching it (Gul, 2021).

As a general strategy, we recommend using mainstream influencers once a core user base has already been secured from more targeted methods, as we can then make use of existing trust in our brand and recommendations from word of mouth.

5.2.4 Articles

Articles written about texture in magazines or blogs are potentially a great way to communicate large amounts of information to sizable audiences. An article that focuses on texture in a publication such as Huffington Post, TechCrunch or Forbes would give far more context to the product than other forms of advertisement we have identified, and what is said would carry a lot of weight because of the trustworthiness of the publication. Furthermore, it is potentially free if the author chooses the topic.

There are downsides however, such as the fact there would be no control over what is written, so it might well not fit with our aim of having consistent branding. It also is very difficult to get the attention necessary for an article written. One possible way of having an article written is establishing long-term personal relationships with journalists and slowly pitching the idea to them in an organic way (Taylor, 2020). Taylor suggests measures like engaging over time with a journalist's work and asking them questions or for advice. This is however likely to be very time consuming and has no guarantee of leading to an article. It is also possible to pay a PR firm who would do the work on Texture's behalf but that would cost around \$5000 a month (*ibid.*).

Potentially, the best way to get an article written about the API is to let it happen organically by getting enough exposure and having prominent individuals use or advertise Texture.

Method	Strengths	Weaknesses	Feasibility
Micro-Influencers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Builds trust effectively Very high engagement from followers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low following so slow uptake No control over content Relatively cost effective 	Very achievable
Mainstream Influencers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large Following 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less closely related to product and therefore less trust No control over content Quite expensive Doesn't communicate much information 	Achievable
Celebrities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Huge Following Potential to be picked up by other sources (free advertising) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unlikely to be closely related to the product Very expensive 	Essentially Impossible
Articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reliability from the trust in the source Contains a lot of information Free 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No control over content Very difficult to get one written 	Difficult
Texture's social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Controlled information Cheap 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Takes a while to build following 	Very achievable
Viral Trends	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential for huge visibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn't communicate much information 	Low chance of success

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheap to create 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most challenges do not take off • Risk that challenge would lose association with the product 	
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Fig 20. Summary of methods (Source: Created by author)

5.2.5 Timeline

We recommend creating a timeline where different strategies are used at different times, when they are most beneficial. The most important stage from the marketing perspective is the initial market entry, because a long term strategy of acquisition is impossible without first having a successful entry into the market.

To do this, we are first focusing on first building a small number of early adopters who trust Texture's brand and can give evidence of the success of the product. Then we recommend using strategies that reach larger numbers of people and use the trust we have established in our product to gain a larger number of users, gaining exposure and hopefully creating enough buzz around the service to get spread by word of mouth and sources that we have not contacted.

This means first establishing our brand through designing a consistent and marketable face to our website and social media outlets. We then recommend beginning to advertise using specific niche micro-influencers that have been carefully identified to fit with Texture's brand to direct prospective early adopters towards using Texture, and viewing our website and social media.

From there we would advise expanding by using either larger numbers of influencers by bulk emailing, or by focussing on larger personalities and influencers and hope that we get written about by journalistic sources. It might also be sensible to explore the potential of using influencers we are working with to promote forms of Viral Marketing, which would also expose the brand to a much larger number of people, as well as garner significant attention from other media sources.

5.3 Exit Strategy and Potential Buyers

Being acquired by tech-giants is a valuable exit strategy for startups or small-scale companies in the digital sector (Lemley, M. and McCreary, 2019).

Texture's unique features might give an advantage to a potential buyer over its competitors and therefore encourage an acquisition process. Texture has some valuable selling points to negotiate with different tech-giants. Indeed, it would enable the expansion of the product scope and enhance a digital company's technical capabilities. We might advise you, in order to increase big tech companies' interest, to focus a pitch on the benefit they would gain integrating Texture's innovative software to their current products.

We propose an evaluation of four companies: Google, Apple, Telegram Messenger and Meta Inc. Through that assessment, we will identify the strengths and weaknesses of choosing to exit the market with each tech-giant.

First, Apple Inc is a hardware and software corporation which delivers computing technology, cloud computing services and consumer electronics (e.g., iPad, iPhone, Mac). From these products and services' distribution, Apple had a net income of \$52,385 million in March 2021 (Consolidated Financial Statements - Apple, 2021). Moreover, it has raised \$6.2 billion in funding over six rounds. Also, Apple was involved in eleven exit strategies. We could aim to follow the example of Zomato, the online restaurant guide or Adobe, 'the software company that provides its users with digital marketing and media solutions' (Apple - Funding, Financials, Valuation & Investors, 2021 | Crunchbase).

We understand the importance Apple attaches to new investments to enhance its brand and expand. Apple's tendency to buy out companies may signal its disposition to buy out new small-scale companies and hence pursue this strategy. It could signal a potential for success in Texture's negotiation for a buyout.

Furthermore, Apple's main strength is its brand value. The latter has been ranked first most valuable brand (\$408.6 billion) in the world for the last nine years, according to Interbrand (Apple - Interbrand, 2021). As well, Forbes considers Apple to be the most valuable brand in 2020, even twice more than Microsoft (The 2020 World's Most Valuable Brands, 2020). Most importantly, Apple is continuously expanding its services and products portfolio (e.g. Apple TV+ launched in 2019). These two priorities would make Apple a reliable buyer and a safe choice for Texture.

Aside from Apple's restrained advertisement and promotions, we must raise a concern about the fact that Apple is not compatible with external software. Indeed, if Texture were acquired by Apple, it would only be available to Apple's customers. It would therefore reduce the scope of our target market. This weakness should be considered by Texture, when considering Apple to be a potential buyer.

Google, on the other hand, can be employed on every software and would allow it to reach any internet user. The search engine represents 90% of all searches in the European Union (Tracking EU Citizens' Concerns using Google Search Data | Knowledge for policy, 2021) which would definitely be a great advantage for Texture.

Moreover, Google's parent company created in 2015, Alphabet Inc, is recognised to be the second largest internet company worldwide. In February 2021, it totalized a market capitalization of \$1.392 billion. (Clement, 2021) Google's high revenue may allow Texture's acquisition and ensure investments for its development. Google's priorities tend to be its adaptability (e.g., Android and mobile technologies) and its innovative ecosystem. These are two significant aspects which Texture may value to trust and thus rely on the company.

Not to mention that Google has already been involved in thirty-eight exit strategies, which compares favourably to Apple. Some companies that used an exit strategy and were acquired by Google are Betty Labs, a sports application, and ADT Security, a business which provides fire prevention alarms and electronic security services (Google- Funding, Financials, Valuation & Investors, 2021).

Even though Google has bought out numerous companies, its failure to face the social media revolution may raise some questions about its ability to adapt. From now on, internet users can find the latest news on social media platforms. To palliate this change, Google tried to create social media platforms, but their projects failed. After Google+ was not successful, Shoelace was shut down too. (Wood, 2020). That weakness could mean that integrating Texture is of less value to Google, since

Texture is focused on a texting audience and would more naturally be used on social media platforms. As Google did not succeed to embrace the challenge of the social media era, in comparison to the other companies, they stand to benefit less from Texture's acquisition.

On the contrary, Meta Platforms Inc completely grasped the importance of social media and based their strategy on the expansion of the latter. Indeed, Meta owns several social networks such as Facebook, Messenger, Instagram or WhatsApp (Community Stories | Meta, 2022). Facebook had an average of 1.93 billion daily active users in the third quarter of 2021 (FB Earnings Presentation Q3 2021, 2021). The popularity of the platform, as well as for the other social networks Meta owns, would allow Texture to be integrated in the users' text-messaging and has a very large potential value to Meta.

Furthermore, Meta's significant strength is the fact that it proposes an excellent user experience as it fully understands users' needs and behaviours. From this perspective, Meta seems to be the most coherent choice for Texture. The company, compared to Apple and Google, will be able to integrate Texture to its social networks and propose a new way to translate emotions through texts to its users. We think that Meta would be more willing to buy out Texture. Indeed, it would be an opportunity to reflect its understanding of its users' need to transmit their emotions and would show its continuous desire to innovate.

Still, we must mention an issue that Texture may want to take into account. Meta gives very low concern to data privacy. Indeed, it does not value the protection of its users' data. On the contrary, the company used them unethically. (O'Flaherty, 2021) The involvement of Meta in the non-protection of users' information could lead to a decrease of the social networks' value and popularity. Moreover, the indifference Meta shows towards data caused multiple scandals. The latest occurred in 2021, when 533 million Facebook users' phone numbers and personal data were leaked online, after Facebook stole them (Holmes, 2021). This threat could tarnish Meta's brand image and potentially lead to its downfall. We therefore encourage texture to be mindful of it.

One last company we should mention is Telegram Messenger. This software, just like Meta platforms, offers instant-messaging services. It could be considered a potential buyer as it raised \$2.7 billion funding over two rounds. (Telegram Messenger - Funding, Financials, Valuation & Investors, 2021 | Crunchbase.) Moreover, as mentioned earlier, Telegram may be more keen to help and promote Texture as well as potentially acquire it.

However, Telegram was only founded in 2013 and does not have a powerful brand recognition. Texture may view it to be a weakness as it has 500 million users (Telegram FAQ, 2022), which is less than one third of the Facebook ones. Texture might therefore be less recognised and will target a much smaller audience. Still, we could be distributed as a standalone Telegram client which would facilitate its market process as people will only have to install one app. In that regard, we should consider Telegram Messenger to be a very promising potential buyer for Texture.

In light of the strengths and weaknesses the four tech-giants present, we would recommend Meta Platforms Inc or Telegram Messenger. They are indeed the preferred choices for Texture's exit strategy. These companies would be the most coherent buyers according to their ability to integrate an API to their social networks as well as their brands recognition worldwide.

The last key recommendation to make is to offer the prospect of acquisition to all the aforementioned technology companies, as a bidding war is imperative to maximising profit (Cremades, 2019). Milne

notes that any preemptive offer is likely to be undervaluing a company and it is only by creating competition that a company can be bought out for the highest price: “greed and fear are the dominant emotions in tech M&A. It’s wonderful if the buyers buy you, but terrible if they don’t because they may lose you to a competitor” (Milne, 2021). The ideal position to be in is where Texture is already on the radar of the large tech companies and can use their fears of a competitor getting a competitive advantage by completing the acquisition to drive up the selling price.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Recommendations

Starting from the idea that Pxibits would be a software designed to communicate complex emotion in text, our brief was twofold: for the product development team to finalise the direction of the final product and for the marketing team to develop a marketing strategy that acts as a route towards a buyout, which was the originally identified exit strategy.

Having first verified that there is indeed a market gap in the form of the younger generation having anxiety from the current broken texting experience, which makes it hard to communicate emotions, we then evaluated whether there is more potential in developing a standalone app designed to be an extension, or an API designed to be integrated into existing platforms.

We recommend using an API, for two key reasons. We found that the app market is already saturated, making it very difficult to break into the market, and the API has the benefit of being able to be integrated into any existing messaging platform, giving us more flexibility. We overcame the problem of messaging platforms not giving permission to integrate APIs by deciding to first use the Telegram platform, which provides the tools required for integration and allows more customization. We then created a prototype of the API, using a tonestar based on theories of colour association, that would be accessed in a similar way to how voice notes are currently accessed on WhatsApp.

We next designed a user persona based on the client’s recommendations, and a user story to illustrate the target demographics, and how the product was envisaged to be received. This was crucial to identify to build our marketing strategy upon. We also recommend completely rebranding Pxibits as we felt it did not cohere with the current minimalist design trends and was named after a product idea that is no longer being pursued. We suggest calling the product Texture and have created a new design and logo based around a minimalist colour scheme, and have written some potential taglines that would be useful in creating a consistent brand. “Add texture to your texts” is the tagline that we think is most promising.

We recommended a short to medium term marketing strategy of creating an integrated and consistent social media presence and website, then drawing potential customers to it using niche micro-influencers on the Instagram and Tiktok platforms. We then recommended attempting to expand the user base without breaking the trust in the brand to raise the profile of the product, gaining traction and potentially further free marketing and getting on the radar of larger technology companies that might look to acquire Texture. The methods of doing this would be utilising larger influencers and a viral marketing campaign, as well as aiming to have articles written.

Our last key recommendation was how to secure an exit strategy. Tech giants are the most appropriate buyers as they have the funds and incentives to do so. We identified Meta, Apple, Google and Telegram as the most likely buyout candidates. Based on a mixture of their acquisitions history, the presence of existing messaging platforms that have the greatest potential benefits of acquiring Texture, and the ease of integrating Texture, we concluded that Meta and Telegram would likely be the best candidates. We also suggested opening negotiations with all the aforementioned companies to create an element of competition that could lead to a bidding war to drive up the price would be a sensible strategy.

6.2 Challenges

There were many challenges to this consultancy project, of which we were able to mitigate most.

The first difficulty was attempting to rebrand Pxibits into Texture, without being able to run surveys and gauge the responses of potential customers. It meant that ideas we had about what branding is likely to be successful, and our attempts at doing so could not be proven in the real world. We mitigated this issue by using academic research where possible, to give evidence towards our suggestions, and using feedback from our group and Sawsan to give second opinions.

Another issue was that our group did not have previous experience in creating APIs. We mitigated this by using research and trial by error to work towards our eventual prototype, and by creating a prototype instead of a full, workable API.

We also found it very difficult to find times to meet that suited all members of our group and the client at the same time, due to the large number of us and the variety of different commitments, such as classes. It was often necessary to have these large meetings to update the client on the progress we had made and get her feedback on what we had done and the next steps we had identified. We used a mixture of online and in-person meetings that allowed more flexibility with timings. We also designed a format for the meetings, with timings that worked for Sawsan, where members of the team would arrive late or leave early, and would cover their areas in the time that they were available.

6.3 Limitations

There were also some fundamental limitations to the project, which required us to work around them.

The most critical of these was the fact that we were limited to desk-based research, which in particular meant we could not conduct surveys.

This was an issue for several different parts of the project. For decisions like branding we were not able to consult our target demographics, we were not able to obtain user opinions on the developmental direction of the product, and we were not able to obtain any real-world evidence in the form of a survey for the potential success of decisions we made, such as whether to proceed with an app or an API. It also meant that we were not able to test the prototype, so the direction of our project was built on assumptions from the research we found, rather than hard evidence.

The second key limitation we had was that we didn't have the time or people power to create a prototype API, which is why our prototype simulates what it would look like but cannot be used. This

limitation meant that we could not test the feasibility of our prototype, even amongst ourselves. Building this prototype API is likely the next key step to developing Texture and we would recommend doing so and then getting consumer feedback in the near future.

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