

Discord App: A user study project

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Introduction

Discord is a proprietary freeware VoIP application and digital distribution platform—designed initially for the video gaming community—that specializes in text, image, video and audio communication between users in a chat channel. It was first released on May 13, 2015, but the first stable release was not out until April 1, 2019. Today, it is one of the most prominently used voice and video chat software in the world, being used in almost all e-sports tournaments, along with being utilized by people all over the world.

The purpose of our user study project is to gather data about the usage and user experience of Discord, transform this data into information and use it to define different personas and user requirements in order to find out if potential users would use Discord, what would they use it for and what they actually expect/want from such application so it can be improved.

The idea of reaching our goal is to perform three different user study techniques – survey, interview, observation in order to gather the needed data. By following the process of triangulation – gathering data from multiple sources, we could have more dependable data. Then we analyse and synthesise this data in order to come up with different personas and a list of user requirements.

Target Users

Before coming up with the target users, it was important to establish what the app is used for. While Discord is mainly used as a tool to talk with team mates while playing video games, it is also commonly used for talking to friends and family, having business meetings or for educational purposes. Furthermore, Discord is a multi-platform software, meaning that it can be used on many different devices.

Therefore, the chosen target users are:

- People with PCs, laptops, mobile phones, tablets, etc.;
- People who need to communicate with friends, family, classmates, colleagues;
- People who like to use voice/video chat apps;
- Professional, semi-professional and recreational gamers;
- Students;
- People who participate in meetings.

Gathering data

We started by collecting data from the survey we created. At the same time we performed observations and interviews on six different students. We have selected two students who have never used Discord, two who have used it long time ago and two who are experienced users. On the first two pairs we performed an observation which included 15 simple tasks that cover the basic functionalities of Discord. We recorded their performance of the tasks and the Discord screen of what they were doing at the same time in order to identify their behaviour, feelings and emotions. After the observation we conducted an interview with each one of the students and asked them questions regarding their experience with the application right after they have used it. With the two experienced students we conducted only the interview technique because they use the application on daily basis.

In the end we had data from the three different user study techniques and were ready to start with analysis and synthesis.

The Survey

There are a lot of different platforms and software on the internet designed to make the creation of survey forms easy and simple. For our user study, we decided to go with Google Forms, because it is easy to give access to editing a form to other people and because of the great graph display it offers.

The Questions

We decided to start with the question “Have you ever used Discord?” in order to immediately separate the people who take the survey into two groups: those, who have experience with Discord and those who have none. Depending on the answer to this question, different sections of the survey appear.

The “Questions for experienced users” section

This section contains the following questions:

1. How long have you been using discord for? (Multiple choice)

Possible answers:

- A few weeks
- A few months
- Over a year
- A couple of years

2. How often do you use Discord? (Multiple choice)

Possible answers:

- Daily
- A few times a week
- Rarely

3. What do you use discord for? (Checkboxes)

Possible answers:

- Video game chat
- Talking with friends/family
- Business
- Education & Studies

- Online courses
- Other

4. How did you find out about discord? (Checkboxes)

Possible answers:

- Video game forums
- Friends/Family
- Work
- School, University, etc.
- Online ads
- Other

5. How would you rate your experience with discord? (Linear scale of 1 to 5)

Followup question:

Why? (Paragraph)

These questions are used to group our users into different categories, such as “recently started using Discord”, “have been using Discord for a while”, “use rarely”, “use frequently”, along with providing insight into what different groups like and dislike about the app.

The “Never used Discord” section

This section contains the following questions:

1. Have you ever used any other voice/video chat application? (Skype, WhatsApp, etc.)
(Multiple choice)

Possible answers:

- Yes
- No

2. If yes, could you specify which app? (Short answers)

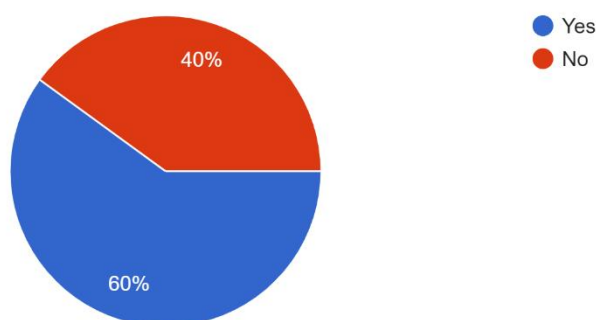
These questions were chosen in order to determine which competitor software and apps people prefer over our software.

The answers

This is the graph for the opening question of the survey:

Have you ever used Discord?

45 responses



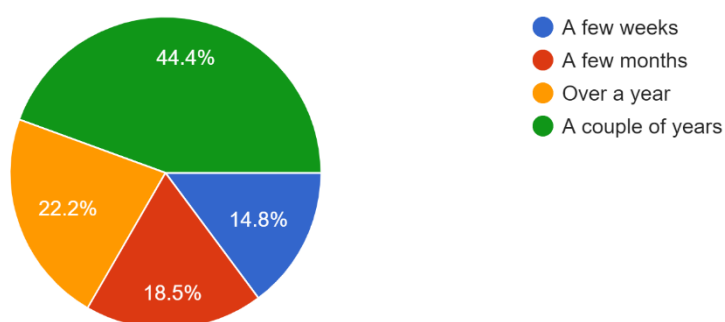
Here, we can see that 60% of the people who did our survey have used Discord before, while 40% have not.

The “Questions for experienced users” section

This is the answer graph for the first question of this section:

How long have you been using discord for?

27 responses

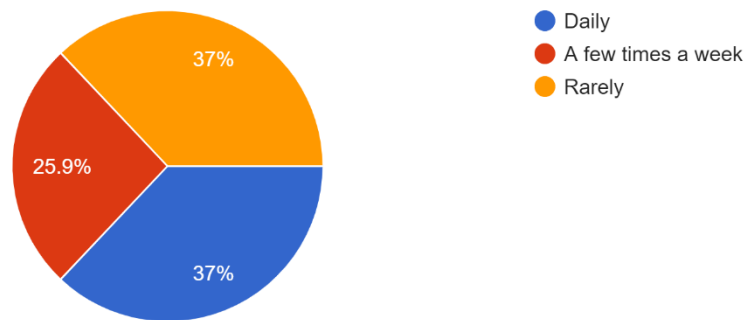


Here, we can see that 44.4% of the people surveyed who have used Discord before have been using Discord for a couple of years, 22.2% have been using it for over a year and 18.5% and 14.8% have been using it for a few months and a few weeks respectively.

This is the graph for the second question of this section:

How often do you use Discord?

27 responses

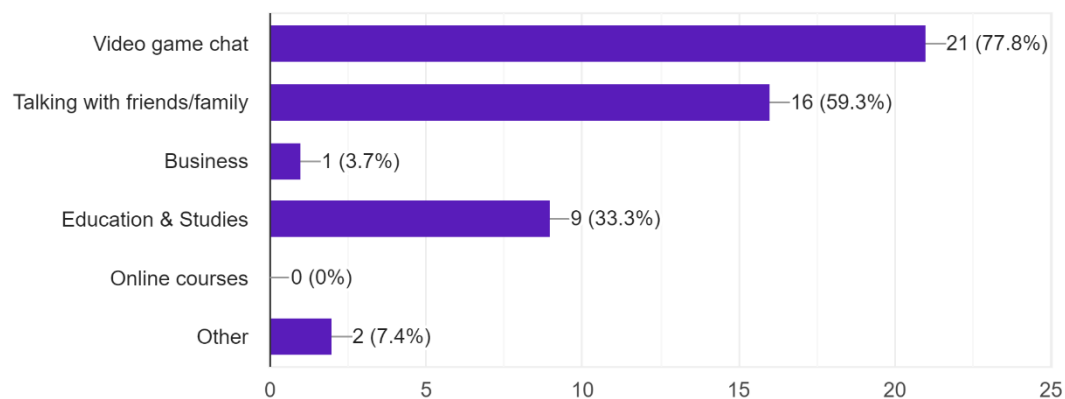


We can see that 37% of the people who answered “Yes” to the opening question use Discord rarely, another 37% use it on the daily and 25.9% use it a few times a week.

When asked what they use Discord for, the Discord users answered this way:

What do you use discord for?

27 responses

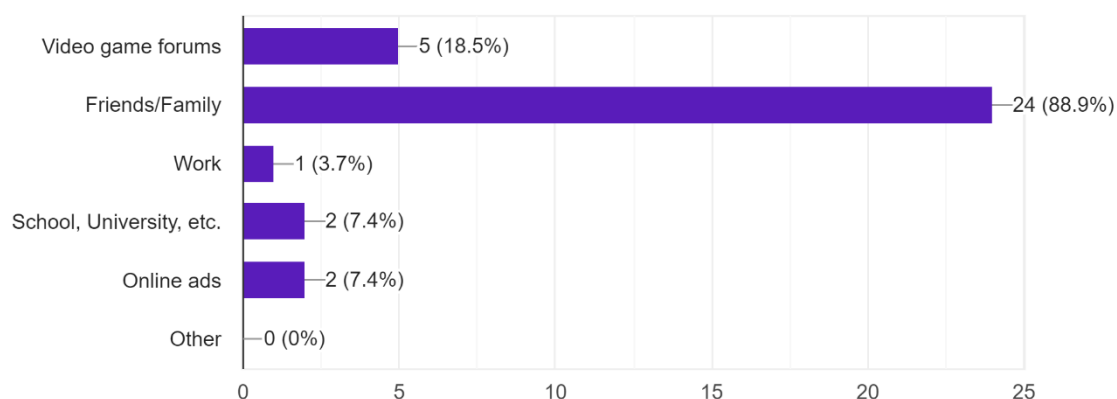


We can see that, out of the 27 people who have used Discord before, 21 of them used it for gaming, with talking with friends and family came in at a second place with 16.

We could also see that most of the people found out about Discord from friends and family:

How did you find out about discord?

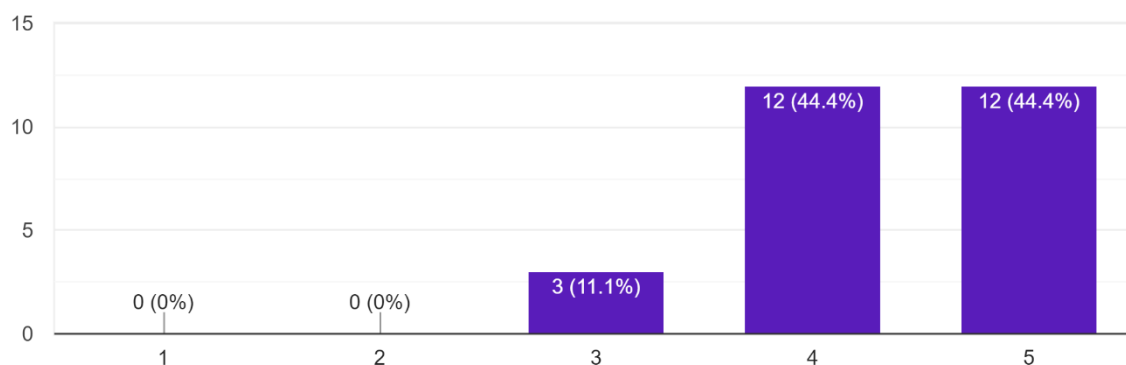
27 responses



Most people would rate Discord at four or five out of five, with only a few of them rating a three and none of them rating it a one or a two:

How would you rate your experience with discord?

27 responses



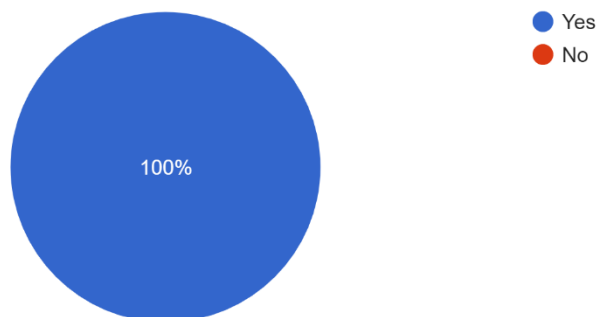
When asked why they rated the app the way they did, most users said they liked the functionality of the software, but were not fans of the UI and the quality of the server connection.

The “Never used Discord” section

Every person who had never used Discord before had used at least one other competitor app before, with the most used ones being Skype and WhatsApp:

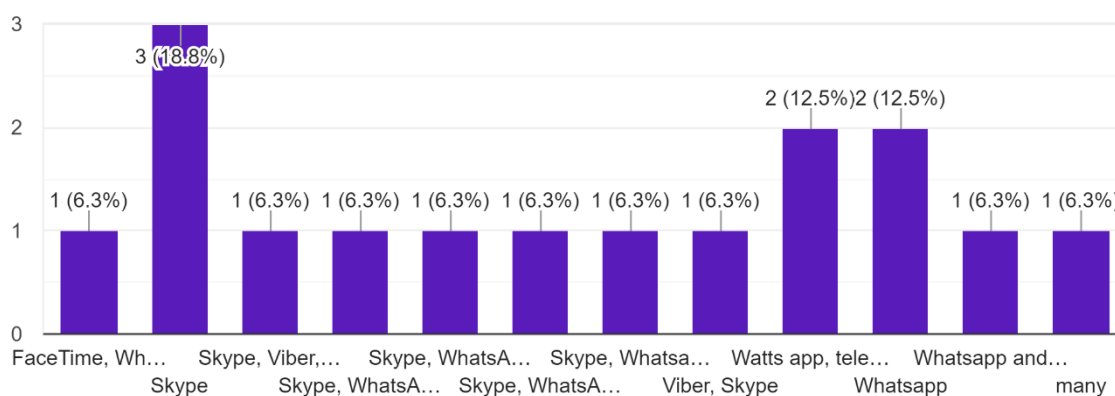
Have you ever used any other voice/video chat application? (Skype, WhatsApp, etc.)

18 responses



If yes, could you specify which app?

16 responses



Conclusion

From the conducted survey, it was easy to put forward these three user personas:

1. Jason: 17 y/o, Gamer, also uses Discord to talk with friends. Has been using discord for a few years, uses it frequently. Average rating: 4,25. Likes the UI and easy-to-use controls that help him stay focused on his gaming.
2. Adam: 20 y/o, Social guy, uses discord to talk to friends and sometimes for educational purposes. Started using Discord recently, but uses it rarely. Average rating: 3,8. Likes the UX, but thinks that the app layout takes some getting used to. Dislikes the frequent notifications.

3. Alex: 19 y/o, Uses Discord for his education, gaming and talking with friends. Long time user, frequently uses the app. Avg. rating: 4. Highly dislikes the server connection, also doesn't like the design.

Stemming from this, we were able to derive that the users mostly dislike the UI and the server connection, while they liked the functionality and the artistic design of the app.

The Interview

We interviewed and recorded six first year students at Fontys university of applied sciences (<https://fontys.nl/>) with different level of experience with the app. (Table 1**Error! Reference source not found.**)

Student name	Experience with Discord
Cristina	Never used Discord before
Alexandra	Never used Discord before
Roberta	Used Discord a long time ago
Peter	Used Discord a long time ago
Martin	An experienced user
Ivan	An experienced user

Table 1. Fontys first year students and their experience with Discord.

The questions we asked are the following:

- How would you describe your experience with discord? (We asked this question because we wanted to get a short overview of the whole Discord experience);
- Are you planning to use discord in the future? (This question was asked due to the fact that we wanted to get an idea whether the UX of the app is enjoyable and if the person would actually like to come back to it);
- Are there any aspects of the app that you've found particularly comfortable to use? If yes, describe them (This question was needed in order to get an idea of what are the possible pros of the app);
- Are there any aspects of the app that you've found particularly uncomfortable to use? If yes, describe them. (This question was needed in order to get an idea of what are the possible pros of the app);
- Did you find the UI of discord intuitive? (We asked this question in order to get an idea whether Discord UI is actually intuitive and easily to nail);
- What would you/do you use discord for? (This question was asked in order to identify for what reason the user is using Discord);
- Is there anything you would like to tell us about discord? (This question was asked mainly to focus on user requirements);

- Did you change your opinion about discord? (If you had one) (This question was optional so we mainly used it for people who used the discord long time ago and whether they enjoyed using it or not).

The video files of the interviews are located in a folder called *Interviews* and each one of them is named with the following template: *Student-name-interview.MP4*.

After watching the recorded interviews, we created a transcript with the questions and answers for each interview. All of the transcripts can be found in a folder named *Interviews-transcripts*, that is located in the folder *Interviews*, with the following name template: *Student-name-interview-transcript.docx*.

From the transcripts we created a file (*Interviews-data-analysis.xlsx*) in which we put the most important things from each answer of a question and organised everything in a table so we can start doing the analysis.

In this table we found different patterns, trends and answers that overlap in order to come up with valid information that we are going to use to form our personas. We shaped three different personas based on the data we have from the interviews. They can be found in a file called *Interviews-data-personas.docx*.

The Observation

We presented 4 people with 15 tasks, they had to complete using the Discord application. We recorded and then observed their behavior while they used the application and the info we derived from these observations can be found below. (The actual videos of the observations can be found in the “Observations” folder)

According to observations, people who were introduced to discord for the first time and people who used discord before didn’t struggle much with its functionality and UI. That can be seen in the data table. Yet there were complications.

- 1) Newbie users had issues with steps 1, 2, 3 and 4 due to the fact that they had to go through an additional settings window that didn’t have an obvious appearance and was hard to locate. Also, users had issues with adding friends because the friends tab was also hard to locate.

- 2) Even though Discord has sort of a user guide that uses exclamation signs in order to show the applications main functions, users still acted confused and were panicking when they logged in for the first time. This leads us to the fact that Discord has way too much unnecessary information on the home screen.
- 3) Apart from that a small percentage of observed users thought they changed the name and a picture. In fact they were actually confusing server setting with profile setting. Knowing that we can say that Discord doesn't have a clearly structured data.

Steps from 5 to 15 were done with much less complications due to the fact that all the information that was needed to perform the steps was present in a single window. All buttons had clear and understandable appearance, and were located at the obvious spots. For example, face-cam and screen share buttons were next to each other in the call window. According to that we can say the pros of the app.

- 1) The functionality of the conversation process that was done in either audial or textual way is intuitive for unexperienced users due to the fact that it is similar to different messengers that our observed user might have used before.
- 2) The conversation window has only the most important information and functions in order to make the conversation process smooth and understandable for user.
- 3) Even though users struggled with steps 1-4, they actually learned how to use the setting windows. Once they nailed it, they were able to easily locate a log out button that was in the setting.

	Log in	Change name	Add profile picture	Add friends(2)	Text a friend	Call a friend	Add another friend to the call	Use mute button (on/off)	Use screen share	Use face-cam	End the call	Create a group with 2 friends	Send a file to the group	Exit the group	Log out
Cristina	+	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Alexandra	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+
Roberta	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Peter	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

Legend	Never used Discord
	Used it before

This table represents the different tasks our subjects had to complete and whether they managed to do so.

Conclusion

Main cons of the app are based on poor interface due to the fact that it is complicated for a new user to locate the setting button. Apart from that the app experience becomes confusing when user has to open an extra tab or a window. User just gets lost and confused. Main pros of the app are good conversation window experience because every functionality there is self-explanatory and intuitive to locate.

Process of analysing and synthesising the gathered data

We got the analysis of the survey answers from what Google forms generated for us. This we used to identify three different personas based on the survey. At the same time we performed synthesis on the answers from the questions of the interview by searching for patterns, trends and answers that overlap. With these groupings we again formed three different personas based on the data we have from the interviews. Using the data we have from the observations, we shaped again three new personas. These personas are based on the behaviour, feelings and emotions our observees experienced during the observation. Finally, we combined all of these personas into three final personas that are valid for all the three user study techniques and are derived from all the data we have.

Personas

Emma: The Goody Two Shoes

Age: 20

Occupation: Student

Background

Emma is a first year student at Fontys University of Applied Sciences in Eindhoven. She would use Discord for studying and meetings, doing projects and occasionally for talking with friends.



Motivations

Emma feels a little bit disorientated using Discord because the design of the app is confusing for her and different from the apps she usually uses. In general, she will not use Discord on her own because she prefers other apps. She will use it if other people require it from her or preferred it for meetings. What motivates her to use the app is the texting, calling and video chatting, the screen sharing option and the muting of background sounds when people are speaking.

Problems and expectations

It is hard for her to find the account settings and the group chat settings. Also she is doesn't enjoy the poor server connection.

Mark: The Social Butterfly

Age: 23

Occupation: Student/Works in IT

Background

Mark is a third year student in a technical university and he works in the IT field. He uses Discord regularly to keep in touch with friends abroad and communicating with friends in general.



Motivations

Mark is keen on using the app and thinks it has a simple look and it is very easy to use once you have enough experience with Discord. What he likes is the call and video chat, the easy addition of people, how fast it is to start a conversation and the easy creation of a server.

Problems and expectations

Mark thinks that the app layout takes some time to get used to it and that some of the functionalities are useless. He would like to be able to customize the colours of the app and create his own themes. Also he dislikes the frequent notifications.

Nate: The Gamer

Age: 17

Occupation: Student/High school student

Background

He is a student/high school student in a technical field of study. He is a dedicated user of Discord and uses it mostly for gaming and occasionally for studying.



Motivations

Nate likes everything about the app, especially that it handles conversations with many people well, without convulsing. Due to the fact that he is a gamer, his main focus are the technical functionalities rather than the user interface. At the same time he finds the user interface very intuitive and responsive and as long as it works, he is okay with that.

Problems and expectations

He does not like that Discord has issues with the video quality because of full servers. He expects improvements about the conversation quality for international servers.

User Requirements

- The app should provide clearer definition of its purpose for people who have never used Discord;
- The account settings and the group chat settings should be easily located by the user;
- The app should offer less functionalities for users who do not want to use everything in Discord;
- The user should be able to customize his/her interface with colours and custom themes;
- The video call quality should be improved;
- The conversation quality for international servers should be improved;
- The server connection should be more stable.

Conclusion

In the end, we ended up with three personas that are based on the most common answers in the survey, patterns in the answers of the interviews questions and reactions of the observations. These personas represent different groups from our target users. From them, we derived a list of user requirements.

Apart from that based on our data analysis we would to suggest couple of improvements for the app, such as:

- 1) Change the settings button location and make it bigger. The button should be located somewhere at the center of the page and be bigger in size.
- 2) Get rid of the unnecessary information on the home page and put it on a separate tab. Replace it with main discord functions.
- 3) Change the template design and make it lighter.
- 4) Implement a better user tutorial system which will step by step explain how the app is structured.
- 5) Get more finances to fix the technical issues during the conversations.