



P1B Design Concept | Kyle Burger

Design Brief

An outline of the design objectives and the problems they seek to address

Introduction

The growth of music sharing platforms has shaken the digital world, from the days of Napster to our current age of iTunes and Spotify. But what keeps these platforms relevant is not only their services, but their ability to evolve. Mixing social networking and music has been very effective, as proven by Soundcloud, fostering the growth of independent musicians and established creators alike. It is, however, important to focus on finding the right balance between socializing and music listening, which leads to the problem that Soundcloud faces. In its current state, Soundcloud's mobile app is completely designed in favor of the user's listening experience, which, in return, disregards many of its social features. This design brief will address the issues present in Soundcloud's app, as well as provide solutions that will better balance its social networking and music listening capabilities.

Problems:

In its current state, many of the Soundcloud features are tucked away and hidden in favor of its simplistic design. The explore feature, notifications, and record buttons are all separated from the main navigation, making it an inconvenience to access. The commenting feature, a function from the Soundcloud website which is essential for giving artists feedback, is completely missing from the app. Users of the Soundcloud app may be fond of its simplicity and aesthetically pleasing design, but others stray away from it as a result of functions that are missing or difficult to find.

Such functions are key features of social networking, and making them more visible is crucial to establishing Soundcloud as a viable social media platform.

Objectives:

Soundcloud has variety of features, some of which may be more important to certain users than others. In order for users to take full advantage of the app, these features must be made visible. Soundcloud's objectives involve creating a music social network. In order to do this, users must be able to communicate with each other.


1. Balance social networking features with listening features by making key functions more accessible
 - Profile
 - Commenting
 - Notifications
2. Relocate other key app features previously placed in 'settings' tab
3. Adhere to Soundcloud's design and color scheme

Assumptions:


- Users want to communicate with other users
- Users like the simplicity of this design
- Users would like key app features to be more accessible

Target Users:

The below personas reflect the target audience for these design changes:

Persona:	The Creator
Photo:	
Fictional name:	Will Caulfield

Profile:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 years old • Student • Part time job • Independent music producer
Goals and tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a platform for publishing his music • Receive feedback and critique from listeners
About:	<p>Will is a young and busy student who loves creating music in his free time. He struggles, however, to find a platform that can provide him with the exposure and feedback he needs. Will often finds himself busy with coursework or his part-time job, so when he has time to make music, he wants to make sure he's making the best of it.</p>

Persona:	The Supporter
Photo:	
Fictional name:	Jackie Garnett

Profile:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 years old • Student • Avid supporter of local bands and music
Goals and tasks:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discover independent music creators • Support local bands
About:	Jackie loves hearing discovering hidden musical talents, both online and in her area. She loves looking for new music and going to local concerts with her friends. She, however, is unaware of any platforms that will help her find new music and support aspiring artists.

User Tasks:

These are goals that users and potential users of Soundcloud's app may have, and can be met through this redesign:

As a musician, I would like to share my music with the world and receive feedback from my listeners.

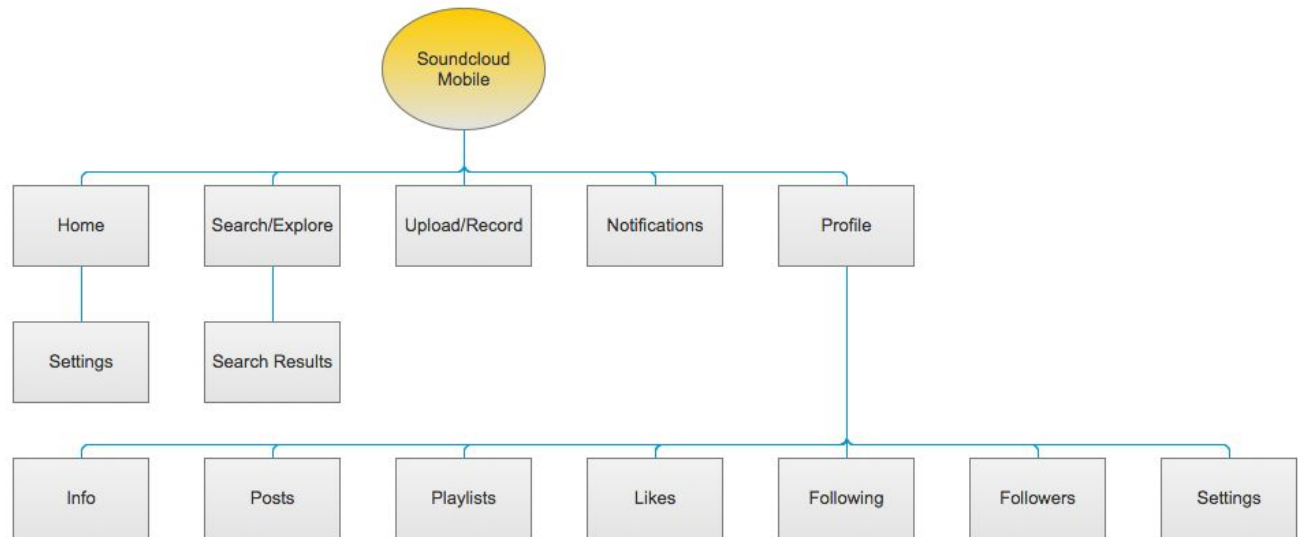
As a music listener, I would like to have a way to easily browse for new music and artists

As a musician, I would like to have a platform where I can meet and connect with fellow music creators

As a Soundcloud user, I would like to be able to share my thoughts on pieces of music and see what others had to say

Site Map

A visual overview of the Soundcloud redesign



The above diagram is representative of the navigation on the Soundcloud redesign. The first row is the main navigation, and lower rows are pages that can be accessed within certain navigation options. The key changes made were the relocation of upload, notifications, and explore from the profile to the main navigation. The profile navigation has a wide array of options which pertain to your personal profile, all of which are available in the current version of the Soundcloud app. The profile page has also not been redesigned, as its current design is quite effective. The only change made to it was its relocation from the settings tab to the main navigation. The settings button is located on both the home and profile page in order to increase accessibility.

All pages, with the exclusion of the Profile page, eventually lead to a page at which the user can listen to and comment on music. The hierarchy of these music pages are as follows:



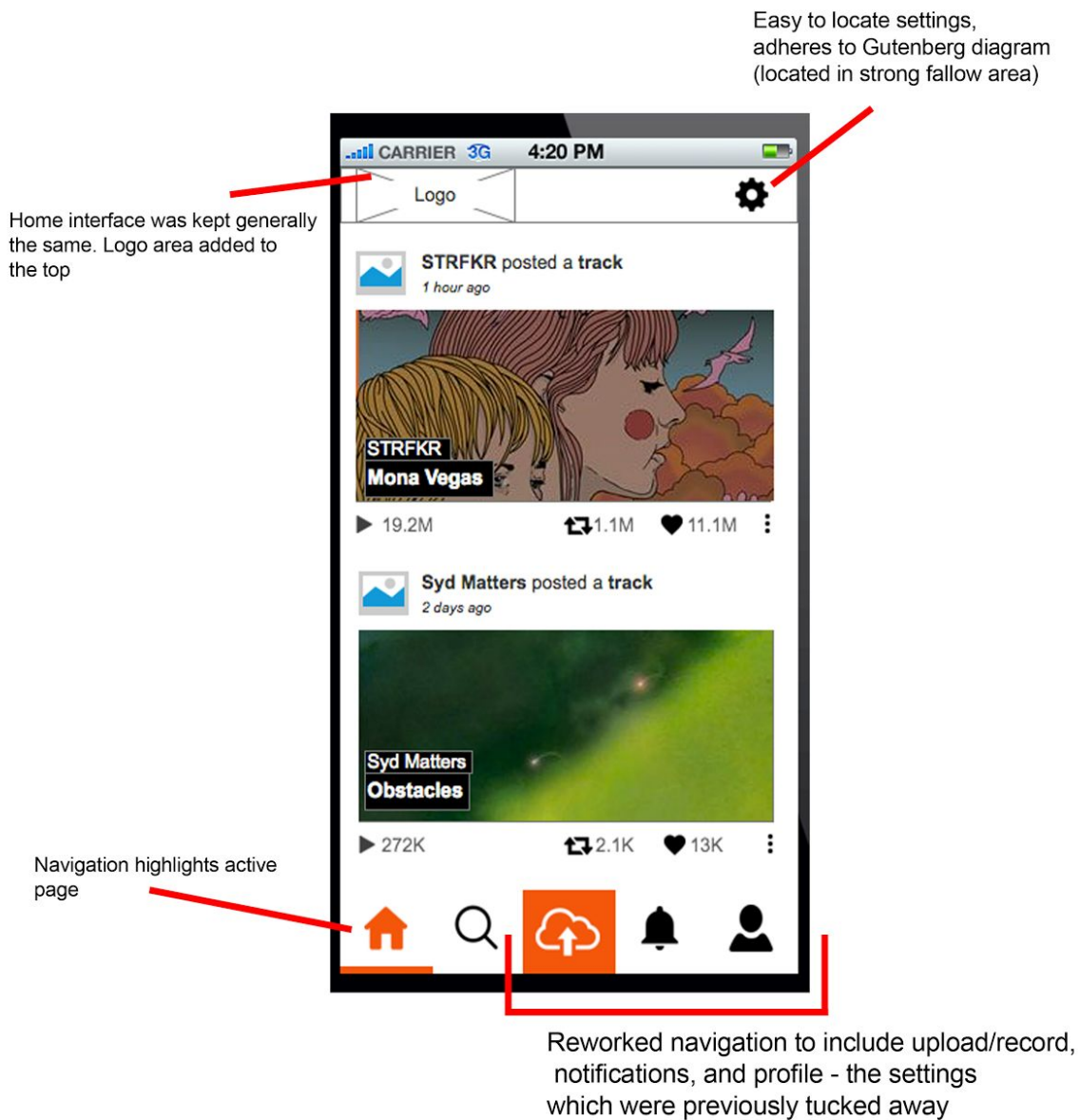
This is not pictured on the above diagram to avoid redundancy.

Annotated Mock-ups

An overview of the key changes made in the new Soundcloud app design

These mock-ups showcase the key changes made in the new design, and walk through the process of leaving a comment:

1. The Home Screen



2. Search and Explore

Selecting the magnifying glass
will open the search + explore
page

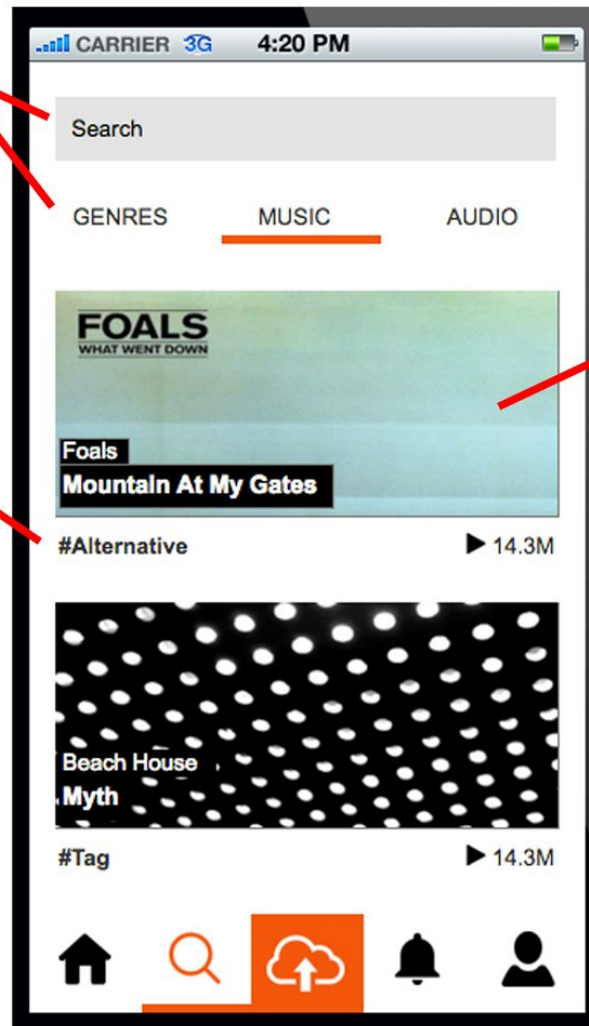
Search and explore functions
merged together

Explore function kept
relatively the same from the
original app

No more massive tag list -
users can see tags
below pieces of music
to get an idea of what
to look up.

These tags were part of the
original app's 'explore' design

Select a piece of music
to begin the commenting
process

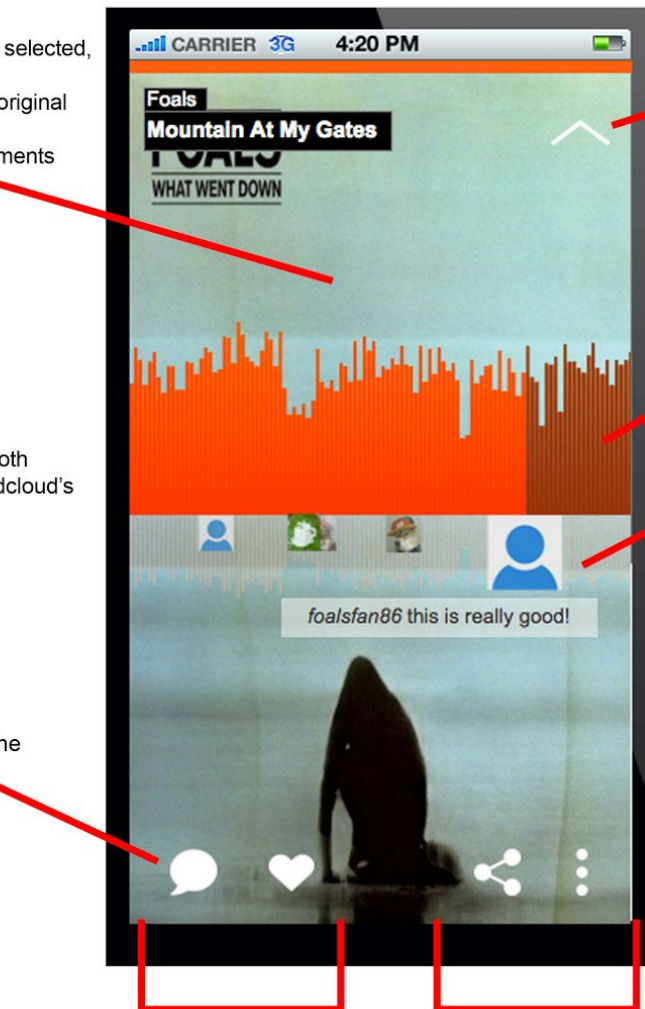


3. Music interface. This interface opens when a piece of music is selected:

When a piece of music is selected, this interface opens up. It adheres to most of the original design, and incorporates viewing and posting comments

Design has similarity to both old app design and soundcloud's web design

This button will open up the commenting interface



Pressing this button will minimize the music window. This is a feature on the original app

Audio waveform moves right to left as the song plays, just as it does on the original app

As music plays, user comments will display, similar to the web interface. Users can scrub audio to look at other comments or get to another part of the song

Icons for interacting with this piece of music are in close proximity

Sharing and information icons grouped together

4. Commenting interface. This interface opens after selecting the chat bubble icon:

Commenting panel opens over music track.

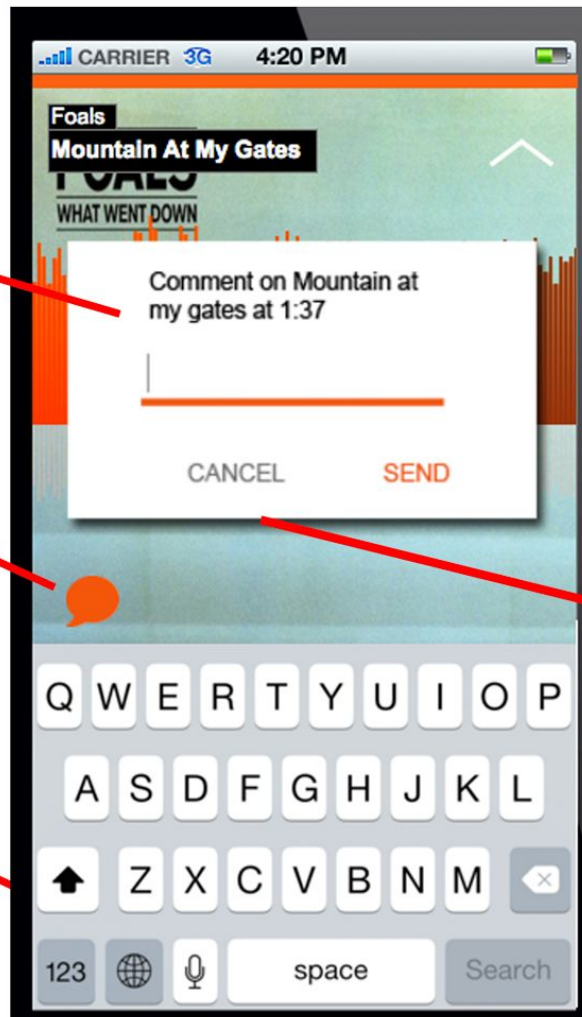
Time stamp depends on when the comment button was pressed

Chat bubble highlights and hides other icons.

Pressing the chat bubble will close the comment window

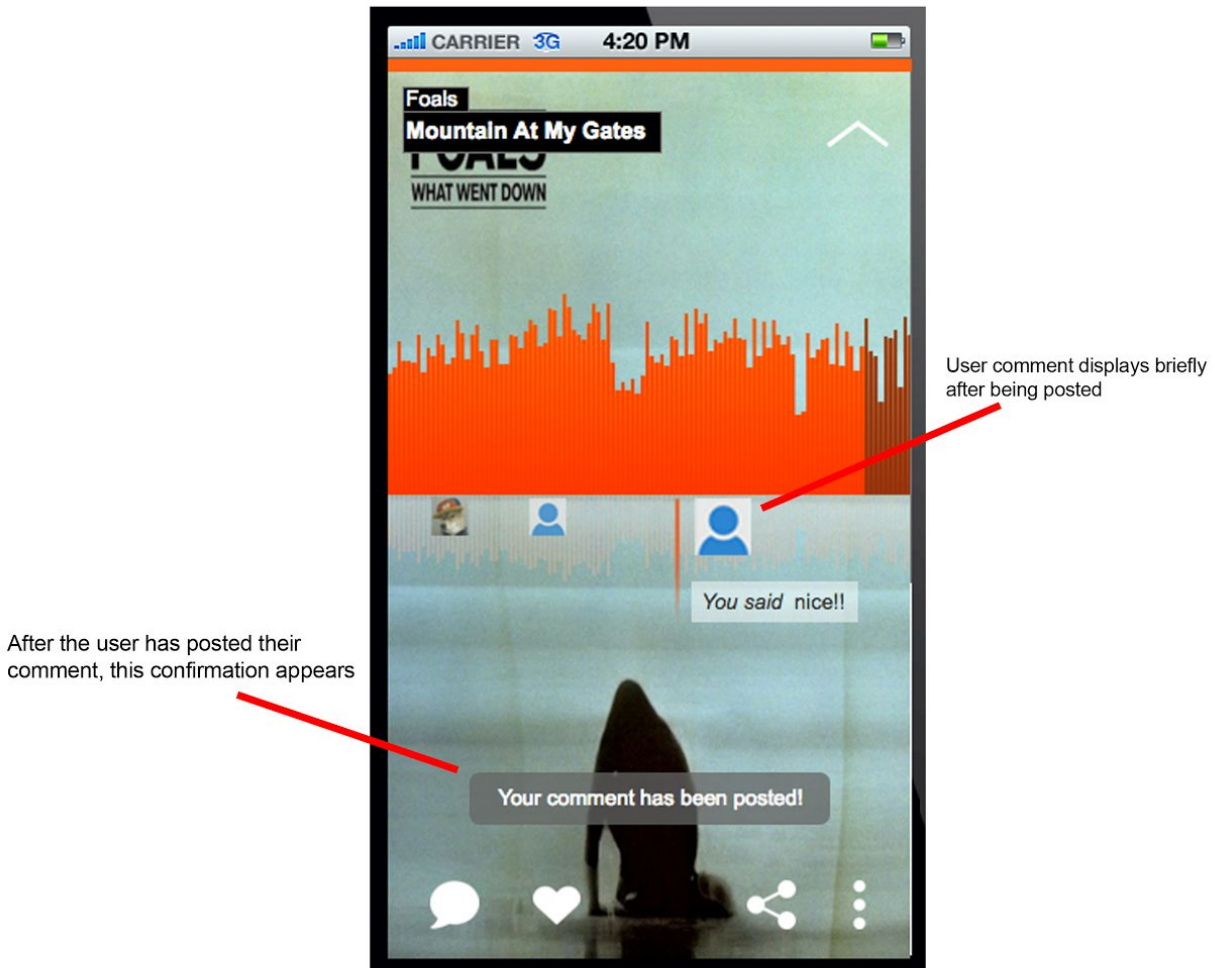
Onscreen keyboard opens with commenting panel.

Previously, the app would take a total of 3 taps to get to the onscreen keyboard (Options -> Comment -> Tap Comment Window)

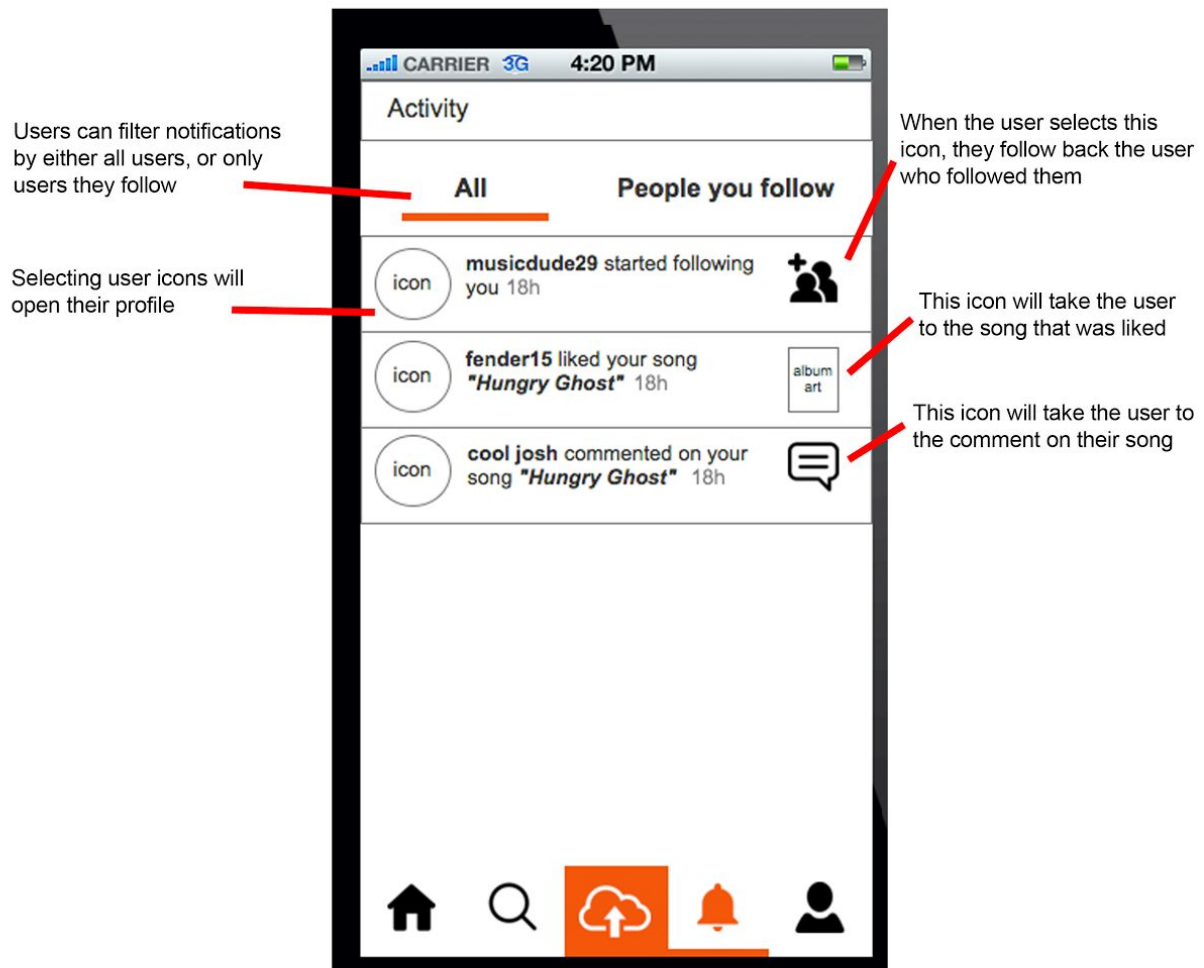


Cancel will, of course, also close the comment window, along with pressing the chat bubble icon again

5. Post-Comment Music Interface. This interface is the same as the Music Interface with the exception of comment confirmations:



6. Notifications. This interface can be accessed by selecting the bell icon on the main navigation. Users can be notified of new followers, likes on their music, and comments on their music:



Reflection

An overview of the key changes made in the new Soundcloud app design

The new Soundcloud design takes advantage of a handful of design principles in order to highlight its features and encourage socialization. Some of the strengths of this design is its ability to balance social networking music listening features of Soundcloud. It incorporates these features while feeling similar to Soundcloud's previous design, as well as its web interface. This design uses proximity to group together commenting and liking, two features which both allow users to interact with a piece of music. Pages like the home and search/explore pages follow a more consistent center aligned design. Buttons are also highlighted when the user selects them, such as the commenting button and any button on the navbar. Some pages also make use of the Gutenberg diagram, such as the home screen, which places the settings button in the strong fallow area so it is easily located by users. This design got rid of the huge tag list in the search tab, which, as stated by Hick's Law, may cause users to spend less time there, but it also won't overwhelm them with a massive list if they are unsure of where to start.

There were a few decisions made in this design that had some tradeoffs. Having comments display with the song (depending on its timestamp) means there wasn't a way for users to scroll through a list of comments. This is something that is possible on the soundcloud site, but implementing this into the app means adding another window, which could mean adding another button to the music interface. I didn't want it to get too busy, as sticking to the goal meant keeping the design as simple as possible. Getting rid of the tag list also means that users might spend less time on deciding what music to look up, as earlier stated. Having users spend more time on the app is definitely a good thing, but the tag list felt overwhelming to look at, especially for new users who don't know where to start. Getting rid of it might have been a good or a bad decision; perhaps performing user tests would provide a better answer to this. Another potential issue that came to mind was with the commenting system. When the onscreen keyboard opens, the chat bubble highlights. Pressing the chat bubble again will close the onscreen keyboard, which I thought might be a convenient way for users to close the comment box. This is something that might be problematic if a user is typing in a comment and presses it by accident. Again, this is something that can be asked about in user testing, which would also help bring any others issues with the design to light.

Overall, I felt that the goals in making Soundcloud more social were met. The primary features that foster socialization - notifications, user profiles, and commenting - were made much more prominent. With the search and explore features being combined, users don't need to look up and browse music separately. The new design brings out some of Soundcloud's key features without making it feeling overwhelming, adhering to the goal of keeping things simple.

Axshare File

This prototype can be interacted with at <http://flops.axshare.com/#p=home>