

Support for Relation Building within the Community by using Chat

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1. Introduction

In our daily lives, a wide friendship helps us, and there are some merits to expanding your personal connections. In general, Japanese tend to feel resistance in their first-face-to-face exchanges[ref], and it is difficult to meet directly and expand friendship, but recently various communication services have been developed as means to expand the network of people, and we can build new relationships relatively easily with people all over the world. However, even these developed communication tools still contain the risk of crime through exchanges with unknown partners and the sense of resistance of conversation with them, so some people feel uneasy about expanding friendships on the Internet.

This paper proposes ComFriends, a communication tool that reduce the resistance feeling of the conversation between the first meeting and help us expand our friendship more easily and more safely. ComFriends provides users with conversations between people who belong to the same community in a state of mutual interest, and support users building relationships. We first present some existing approaches for assisting relationship building for the first time, next we will show the approach of ComFriends.

In this work, we investigate the factors that people feel resistance in the first conversation and the information that they need to build relationships, and we will show the clues for facilitating interaction in the first meeting and future SNS development.

2. Related Work

Today, various systems have been developed to assist relationship building or utilize the relationships according to purpose. Here we will introduce some of them and consider the elements that are necessary for relation building from them.

- Communication support facing directly

There are several approaches directly facing each other for the first time. For example, it is a suggestion of conversation contents. What you talk about in the conversation with the person you meet for the first time is an important issue for the speakers. In order to eliminate this obstacle, various systems to propose the content of conversation were developed, which helped users to talk smoothly. However, as a problem, these systems proposed topics which speakers didn't want to talk to their first-time opponent. Also, it seems that many people felt a sense of resistance to face directly with the first-time opponent, except for situations where you had to face each other directly and talk.

- Virtual relationship expansion

There are also studies for us to have a virtually broad connection via others[ref]. In this system,

individual's personal networks can be shared in a database, and each individual can connect to various people via that personal network. If you face a problem at work and you need human resources who can solve the problem, you can find people suitable for the problem resolution smoothly through your acquaintance.

- People proposal based on common elements

We are unconsciously looking for something in common with our opponent when interacting with the person for the first meeting, and it is said that the psychological barriers to the partner will be removed if we feel a sense of familiarity due to this commonality[ref]. In a project, researchers grasp elements such as hobbies of people who need help and supporters, and artificially match people with similarities in order to conduct volunteers more smoothly. Actually, the result that pairs with many common points have many topics of conversation, they tend to get along is appeared. Especially, among the several elements, the hobby common seems to have a great positive impact on familiarity. However, since these artificial matching is carried out by the third party's evaluation, it is an uncertain means for relation building, and the administrator burdens a lot. We thought that it is good for our application to find common points with the partner depending on the user's will.

3. Design Implementation

Before creating ComFriends, in order to explore the problems of existing relationships building application and chat application, we created a concise design close to those and asked for users' evaluation. Procedures of the first design implementation are shown below.

- Questionnaire

In order to produce the initial design of ComFriends, we first asked 18 people aged 20 to 57 years old. In the questionnaire, we confirmed the following five items: 1) Do you feel resistance to conversation for the first meeting, 2) Do you feel resistance to talking on the SNS with someone you have never met before, 3) Have you experienced easy talking with the person you were in first meeting, 4) Do you think that interaction within the community is necessary, 5) Do you want to expand the network of people in the community.

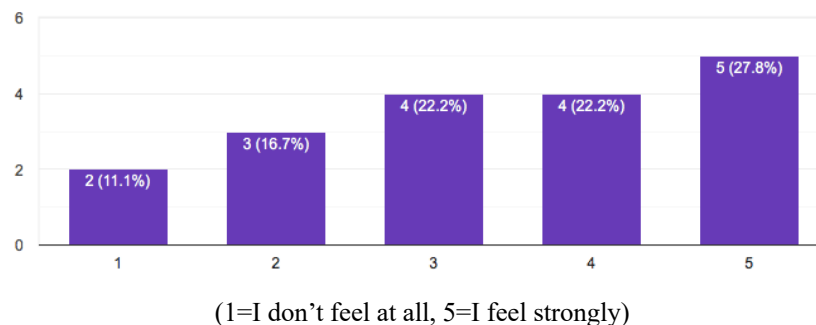
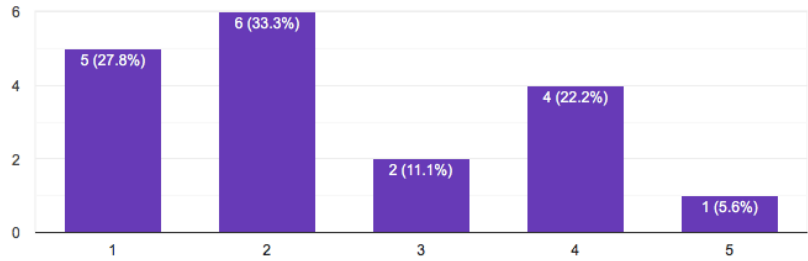


Fig. 1. Result of first question - Do you feel resistance for the first meeting?

First, the result of the first question is as shown in Figure 1. As a results, participants who felt resistance

in the first-time conversation were more than participants who did not, their main reasons are “I don’t know what to talk about”, “I don’t know what kind of person is”, “I don’t know the speed of partner’s reply”, etc.



(1=I don’t feel at all, 5=I feel strongly)

Fig. 2. Result of second question -

Do you feel resistance to talking on the SNS for with someone you have never met?

In contrast to previous question, the result of the next question is as shown in Figure 2, and the number of people who feel resistance is very low in the case of a conversation on SNS. As reasons for decreasing resistance, they said “I can’t see the other’s expression, so I don’t have to worry about it”, “I can get the information necessary for conversation through the users’ profile”, etc. In addition, as a situation that participants felt easy to talk with each other for the first meeting, they gave cases when the content to talk about is decided, when each other has common hobby, and when the reaction shows clearly from the other.

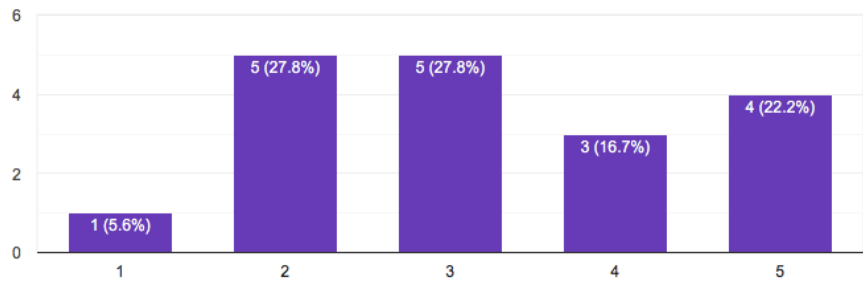


Fig. 3. Result of fourth question -

Do you think that interaction within the community is necessary?

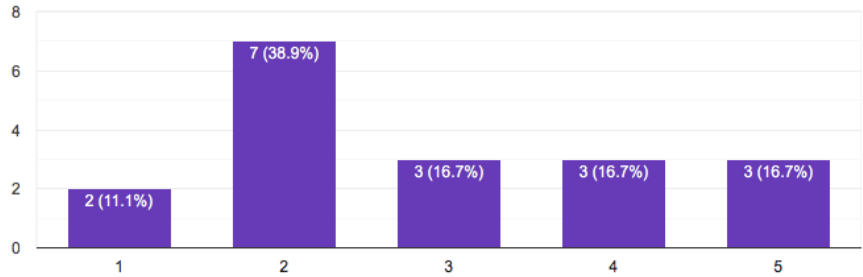


Fig. 4. Result of fifth question – Do you want to expand the network of people in the community?

Next, I will show the results of questionnaire about exchange within the community. As shown in the figure 3, half of participants felt an exchange within the community was necessary, and half felt it was not. While the former argued that it is necessary for cooperation in the event of emergency, the latter argued it would be difficult to complain about group living by getting to know each other. We think that these merits and demerits that apply to “residential community” such as residential areas and apartment houses, not “affiliation community” like schools and workplaces. Also, as shown in the figure 4, there are fewer people who want to expand the network within the community, some people mentioned that the main cause is the difficulty of building a new relationship regardless of whether it is an interaction within the community or not.

- Approach

Considering the results of the questionnaire, basically we decided to create an application with the following approach: 1) Provide a concise profile required for conversation, 2) Preparation on the premise that they show mutually favorable reaction.

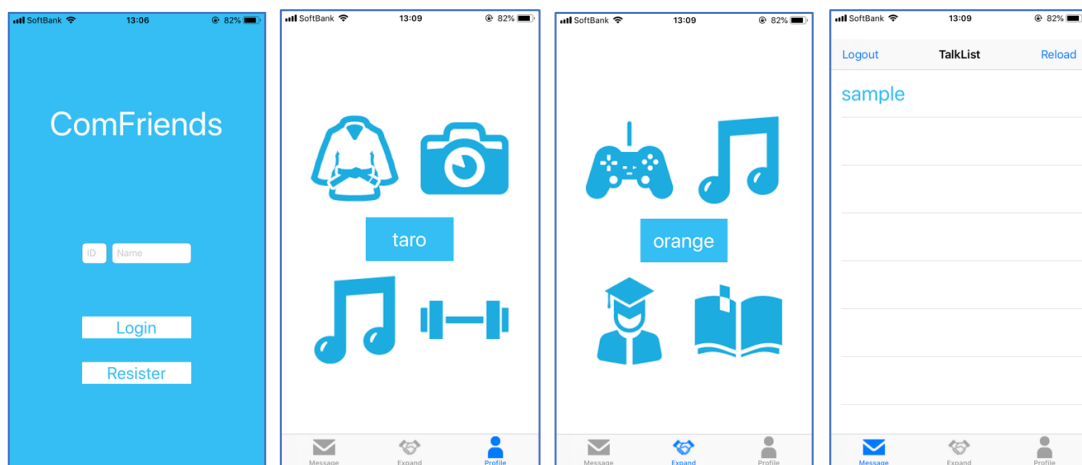


Fig. 5. Initial Design – Login Scene, Profile Scene, Expand Scene, Message Scene

This design consists of three main scenes. The first scene is “Profile Scene”. On this screen, you can check your brief profile. The next scene is “Expand Scene”. In this scene, users belonging to the same community are proposed one after another. The users of the application will indicate whether or not they are interested in the profile proposed on this screen by dragging the image. If they are not interested in the opponent, they move the image up, and if they are interested, they pull it in front to accept. The last scene is “Message Scene”. In this scene, a talk room between users who are interested in each other through the “Expand Scene” is created. They can talk like an existing chat through this talk room and check opponent’s profile.

• User Study

We conducted a user study using the initial design of ComFriends for 5 participants aged 20 to 25. First of all, in a prior questionnaire, we asked whether they would like to expand their network of people in the community, what their hobbies are, what kind of information they need for the partner when building a relationship through SNS. We thought that it was necessary to treat the community as “school and workplace” and “region and apartment house” separately, so we checked the motivation for personal network expansion for each of them. As a result, all the participants are students and they do not want to expand the network of people in the region and apartment house, but there are many people who strongly desire it in schools and workplaces, so we decided to conduct experiments only with the university community they belong to. Next, with reference to the hobby confirmed in the preliminary questionnaire and the information required by participants to build relationships, we prepared several profiles that they would be interested in and asked them to react those. After that, we asked participants to talk to fictitious users whom they were interested in through chat and simulated the conversation. Then, contrary to that, another user whom participants were interested in talked to them through chat and simulated the conversation.

• Interview

After the user study, we interviewed the participants about the design used in the experiment.

Theme 1: Usability

The initial design got a high evaluation in term of ease of use. Participants said that they could easily use them as they did for existing talk applications they normally use. Some of them required several means to express emotions which are problems of text chatting.

Theme 2: Ease of Talking

Regarding this point of view, evaluation was divided among the participants. While people who often talk with someone they have never met on SNS and who are motivated to expand relationships said that they were able to talk easily based on the displayed opponent’s characteristics, others who feel that they are not good at conversation itself and who have low motivation for relationships building said that they felt it was difficult speak because they didn’t know the tempo of conversation with person for the first talking and how to write the chat of opponent. And in order to solve the problem of not knowing the tempo of conversation, they suggested to display whether each other is entering the sentence or not.

Theme 3: Sufficiency of Information

First of all, they stated that gender information is necessary in common. In this design, the only way to get gender information was to guess from opponent’s name, and it was uncertain way. Participants mentioned that whether to build relationships or the behavior in conversation changes depending on gender information of the opponent. In addition, in connection with the theme mentioned above, one of the participants stated that a brief introductory text is needed to know how to write the other party’s

chat. She stated that she would estimate the way the other writes the sentence and the sense of distance in the chat, even if she can not get the information about the characteristics from that sentence. Finally, the strongest opinion was that the characteristics of the profile were too brief. For example, even if the user's opponent has characteristics of music and reading in common with the user, because there are several genres and pieces of work among them, they insisted that they do not necessarily get along well each other. We used a brief profile in fear of users being selective about the proposed profile and not interested in anyone, but in the case of a wide community like this time, there may be no problem even if detailed information is proposed. They also said they wanted to change the extent of disclosure of detailed information depending on the partner. There were participants who felt that they did not want to show their detailed information if they could not get along with the other.

Theme 4: Relationships Building

Regarding this, the participants' awareness towards friendships from usual times greatly influenced the results. Participants who have some relationships that were made on SNS recognized the other as acquaintance only by this chat conversation, but those who do not said that as long as they do not meet directly, they could not recognize them as acquaintance. As we are thinking that this application is the first step to building relationships, it is good if it is possible to make a relationship with only chat, otherwise it is better to become a foot to direct exchange. Also, information is insufficient this time to recognize the other as acquaintance. In this experiment, whether there was a conversation about the community greatly changed the impression of the participants. They said that if they cannot recognize that the partners are close to them, they will become unrelated to them. We felt that we should present more information related to the community.

• Results

As a result of the initial study, we thought that the following main elements are necessary for ComFriends.

1. Enhancement of chat
2. Refinement of proposed profile
3. Addition of community elements

We show the details about these elements in the next chapter. Also, we could roughly identify three patterns of participants.

1. People with a wide range to recognize opponents as acquaintances as they are in short conversation on SNS and who have a high relationship building motivation.
2. People who have a high relationship building motivation but who do not recognize opponents as acquaintances in short conversation on SNS.
3. People with low motivation for relationship building.

Since we want to utilize the premise of chat in the community to assist relationship building, we decided to narrow down the target to the second people after that.

4. Improvement

- Enhancement of chat

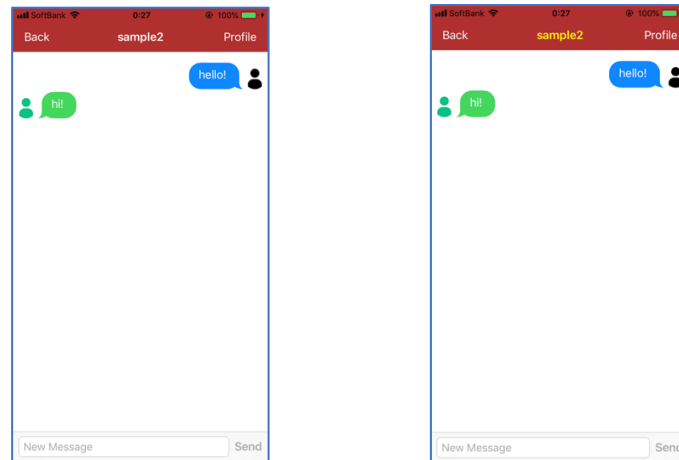
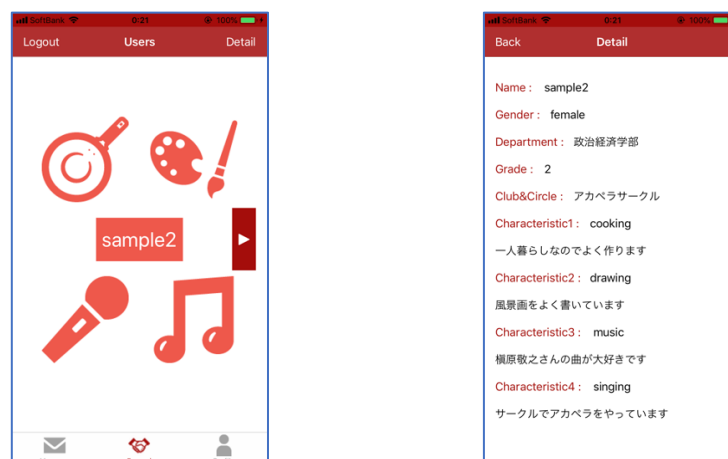


Fig. 6. New Talking View

The first improvement is the expansion of the chat function. One of the evaluations obtained in the initial design was the unclearness of the conversation speed of the partner. This is considered to be a major obstacle in the first meeting, so in order to eliminate this, we fixed the chat design so that the user can visually get the information whether or not the other party is entering the text. If the partner inputs text, the name of the partner displayed in the talk room changes to yellow, otherwise it turns white as shown in the figure 6.

- Refinement of proposed profile



The next improvement is refinement of the profile of the proposed user. In the initial design, due to the large number of genres in the displayed characteristics, there was a problem that the user could not necessarily find whether the conversation with the partner would be successful with a simple characteristic. Therefore, in order for the user to know the characteristics of the partner in more detail, we added a field for showing a one-word comment on each characteristic to be displayed. Users can

check this detailed information by pressing the “detail” button located at the upper right of the screen. This will also give the users a clue as to how to write their partner’s chat. Also, based on the evaluation that gender is important information for selecting the partners, we modified the proposed profile to be able to grasp the gender of partners by color difference. If partner is male, his profile is displayed in gray, and if partner is female, her profile is displayed in light orange. Finally, in the initial design, we got an opinion that participants remember their partner by associating with the opponent’s icon in conventional SNS, so we made it possible to display the icon set by users in the talk room.

- Addition of community elements

The last improvement is the addition of community elements. In the initial design, the proposed profile does not contain community information, and either user had to proposed that topic in the conversation. We thought that users feel close to each other by recognizing strongly that partner belong to the same community as theirs, so in this time, we added information on the grade, department, and club activities at the university to which participants belong to profile. In addition, because there were some participants who do not want to disclose information on community to people whom they do not know, we made it possible for users to arbitrarily set the disclosure range of community information to 3 types in this design: 1) Public to all, 2) Public only to partners who are interested in each other, 3) Not public to anyone.

5. User Study & Evaluation

6. Discussion

7. Conclusion

8. Reference