Design Dream Team
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FALL 2020 INTERACTION DESIGN PROJECT

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MILESTONE 1 - UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM

PROJECT CONCEPT

We are creating a social media platform where underrepresented communities can share places/ideas/etc... that positively benefit them. For instance, there would be a thread where the transgender community in a certain geographic location can share where there are public gender-neutral restrooms or safe spaces to hang out. Our goal is to create a safe-space for these underrepresented & minority groups to openly communicate.

TARGET USERS

Who are the target users?

Our target users are anyone who identifies themselves to be a part of a minority group and is looking to create discord within their community or connect with other people who identify within the same group. For the sake of developing our program, we will heavily focus on the LGBTQ+ community and then expand so it is compatible for users of all minority groups.

Who are not the target users?

We want to stray away from users who will use this platform to create illegitimate groups that may make our platform a little less legitimate. For example if someone ironically makes a page people might be attracted to it.

Why is this an appropriate target group?

This is an appropriate target group because I think that the LGBTQ+ community is a standout minority group that has a lot of social identities and issues that we could target. It also helps that the LGBTQ+ community is at the forefront of social change and will stimulate a lot of initial conversation.

SOLUTION OVERVIEW

The Problem: After speaking to many students at LMU that identify with one or more minority groups, it's clear that they don't feel that mainstream social media services, such as Instagram, Facebook, Tiktok etc, provide a space for them to safely discourse topical issues with other members of their community(s).

For one potential user we interviewed, they discussed how Instagram has strict censorship rules that *should* be protecting against actual harmful and hateful speech but instead restricts common speech unique to their community. The user explained that content including the phrases "I hate white ppl" and "men suck" are unnecessarily censored by Instagram which has lasting negative impacts on their community. It's essential that people within minority communities are able to freely communicate however they want to without having a generic algorithm harm their freedom of speech.

Another potential user addressed how they are afraid to speak their truth on these mainstream social media sites when so much of their life and personal information is publicly displayed. This user explained that they wanted to keep their accounts public in order to share their messages with like-minded people but with that comes scrutiny from people who don't agree with you. They described receiving hate messages and even death threats because of posts they created and shared. It's important that no user should feel scared to post on a platform that is marketed as a safe space.

The Solution: By discussing the problems within pre-existing systems with potential users, we can now outline solutions for our system to address these issues.
  I.   Censorship
       ○ A rigorous approval process before users are able to speak and fully utilize the system
       ○ A pro-active and fast reporting system that quickly removes harmful speech
       ○ A community centered approach to keep users accountable for each other
  II. Security (for users and the system as a whole)
       ○ Users will have total control over how much personal information they would like to share publicly
       ○ Users will have total control over who can see what aspects of their profiles and allowing users to create different groups
       ○ Public forums will still require rigorous approval in order for a user to have full access
  III. Perception
       ○ It's important that the potential users know our system is a safe space for them and their community

- ○ Advertising our platform as a safe-space to encourage users seeking that to join and deter users that might compromise a safe space
IV. Inclusivity
  - ○ We want everyone to feel a part of the community so we will have an ever expanding list of communities so that if a user doesn't see their particular community, it can be added in the future
V. Customization
  - ○ We want the uniqueness of each of our users to be shown on their profiles
  - ○ Allowing users to customize as much as possible including name, pronouns, profile picture, colors, fonts, and more
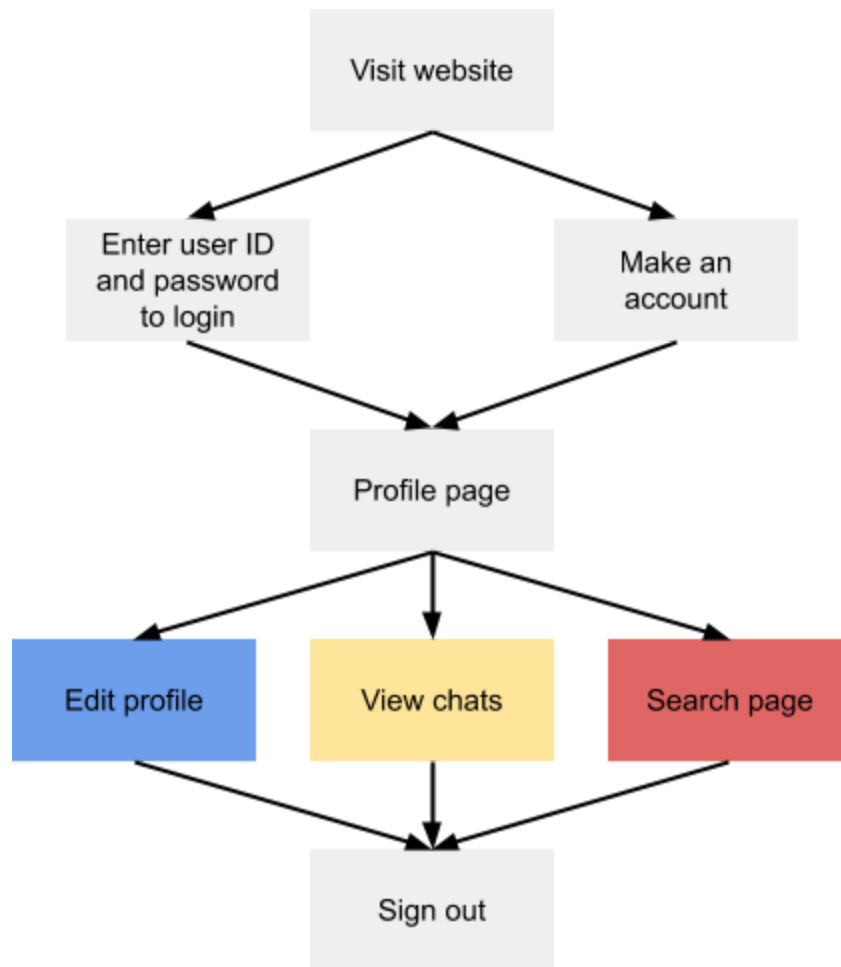
TASK ANALYSIS

Important characteristics of the task performed by users: The main goal of our system design is to create a simplistic yet effective tool to allow users to connect with each other in a safe community. We will start with an online website as the main hub of online traffic, and if the following becomes large enough then a mobile application will be created. The tasks performed by the users should be simplistic and efficient to assist the user to spend less time searching endlessly through menu options or search bars, and instead connecting with other users. Due to the fact that we want to maintain a safe environment and community the platform should be able to quickly and correctly allow the user to input their verification information and find their communities.
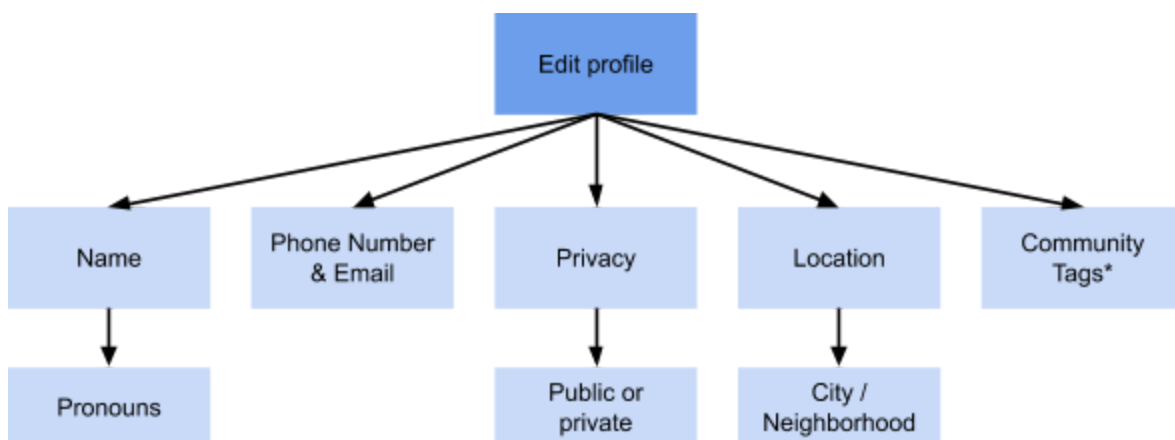
Important characteristics of the task environment: Due to our large targeted user population and many groups that can utilize the application as a communal meeting space. The app must be able to verify their login credentials no matter where a user decides to sign-in from, or if they don't have access to the same machine every time, for instance, if a person must use a public computer to access the platform. This will allow many more users to utilize our application. The subtasks a user must accomplish to access the information or communities that they are looking for are designed to be minimal and simple to allow easy access for the user.

Task Analysis of the Problem: The overall goal of gather is to connect people from underrepresented groups with a safe-space where they can share ideas and suggestions and uplift their community. The main task is to have chat threads for each different group of individuals. This main task can be divided into multiple sub-tasks which are represented through the pages of our application.

General Subtasks for Users of this Application:

```
                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │  Visit website  │
                        └─────────────────┘
                         ╱               ╲
          ┌─────────────────┐       ┌─────────────┐
          │  Enter user ID  │       │  Make an    │
          │ and password    │       │  account    │
          │  to login       │       └─────────────┘
          └─────────────────┘
                         ╲               ╱
                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │  Profile page   │
                        └─────────────────┘
               ╱                 │                  ╲
      ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
      │ Edit profile │   │  View chats  │   │ Search page  │
      └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘   └──────────────┘
               ╲                 │                  ╱
                        ┌─────────────────┐
                        │    Sign out     │
                        └─────────────────┘
```

'Edit Profile' Subtasks:

```
                        ┌──────────────┐
                        │ Edit profile │
                        └──────────────┘
      ╱         ╱            │            ╲          ╲
┌────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌─────────┐ ┌──────────┐ ┌───────────┐
│  Name  │ │  Phone   │ │ Privacy │ │ Location │ │ Community │
│        │ │ Number   │ │         │ │          │ │  Tags*    │
│        │ │ & Email  │ │         │ │          │ │           │
└────────┘ └──────────┘ └─────────┘ └──────────┘ └───────────┘
     │                       │           │
┌──────────┐           ┌──────────┐ ┌──────────────┐
│ Pronouns │           │ Public or│ │   City /     │
│          │           │ private  │ │ Neighborhood │
└──────────┘           └──────────┘ └──────────────┘
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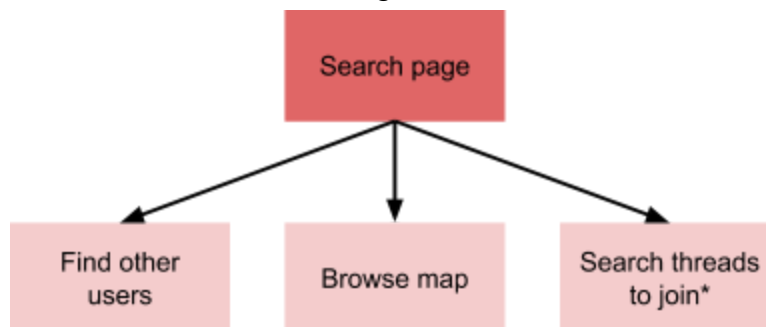
*Community tags are essentially keywords you can attach to your profile that can be seen by other users (i.e. sexuality, pronouns, religion, ethnicity, etc…).

'View Chats' Subtasks:
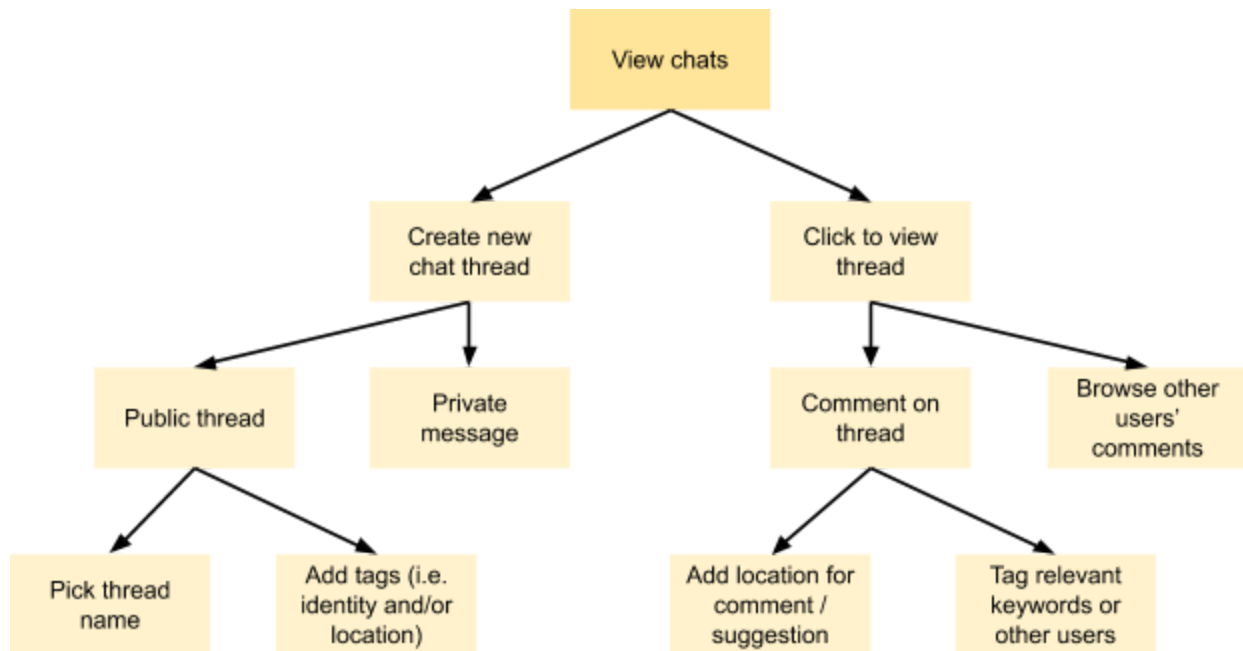
'Search Page' Subtasks:

Users can search for threads by using tags/keywords or search more specific group names.

Interpretive Evaluation of the Existing System: There are many other social media platforms that encourage interaction between users and have chat thread features, but ours is unique. Our system offers an exclusive safe space for these minority communities. Some similar communication platforms include:

- Facebook
- Slack
- Reddit
- Twitter
- Discord

All of these applications are great for communication but don't have a specific focus. For example, most people use Facebook to connect with friends and family. An article on the demographic of Facebook users states that 88% of users are on the platform to stay in contact

with friends and family[1]. On the other hand, our application encourages users to meet new people with similar interests. Facebook has Facebook groups, but they don't emphasize inclusiveness and safety. Other platforms, like Slack and Discord, are used to interact with users you already know. Reddit and Twitter are what one may call "discussion websites" as they encourage users to interact with everyone when discussing any topic. Not all users feel welcome and comfortable to use these apps. Twitter (and other applications) users often feel deindividualization and thus are more likely to express emotional content which is often hurtful to others[2]. This stems from abusing anonymity and lack of self-awareness. We want to create a platform void of this hate speech that is so often propagated through social media.

Many other apps are demonstrating efforts to help minority or underrepresented groups feel safe. For example, Yelp, an app that reviews restaurants and other businesses, began to track availability of gender-neutral bathrooms. In 2017, Yelp added a feature that allows users to filter results based on whether or not the business has a gender-neutral bathroom[3]. This makes transgender users feel more safe and comfortable to go out.

What our application has that others don't is that it promotes safety and inclusivity while providing a communication network for people to interact. Our application creates a space for individuals to share their knowledge to help others who share the same obstacles in life. One example of helpful information is pools where Muslim women can go swimming while still preserving their modesty. SWIMkids USA has an all-female swimming class for Muslim women so that they feel comfortable going swimming[4]. Many Muslim women choose to forgo swimming in the United States, as most of the pools are open to everyone. Information like this is the center of our application. We want to improve people's lives by connecting individuals so that they can help each other navigate life.

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[1] Aboulhosn, Sarah. "18 Facebook Statistics Every Marketer Should Know in 2020." *Sprout Social*, 8 Sept. 2020, sproutsocial.com/insights/facebook-stats-for-marketers/.

[2] Burnap, Pete, and Matthew L. Williams. "Cyber Hate Speech on Twitter: An Application of Machine Classification and Statistical Modeling for Policy and Decision Making." *Wiley Online Library*, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 22 Apr. 2015, onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/poi3.85.

[3] Chokshi, Niraj. "Yelp Starts Tracking Gender-Neutral Bathrooms for Transgender Users." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 6 Mar. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/03/06/us/yelp-gender-neutral-bathrooms.html.

[4] Eroh, Rachel. "Swim Class Helps Muslim Women Exercise, Preserve Their Modesty." *East Valley Tribune*, 17 Mar. 2017, www.eastvalleytribune.com/life/swim-class-helps-muslim-women-exercise-preserve-their-modesty/article_061142ba-08ff-11e7-82af-73ca6ba5dafa.html.

Mockup Design: We do not currently have an existing system or interface, because we are still in the idea development phase. Below is a first-draft mockup of the interface design for this computer application.
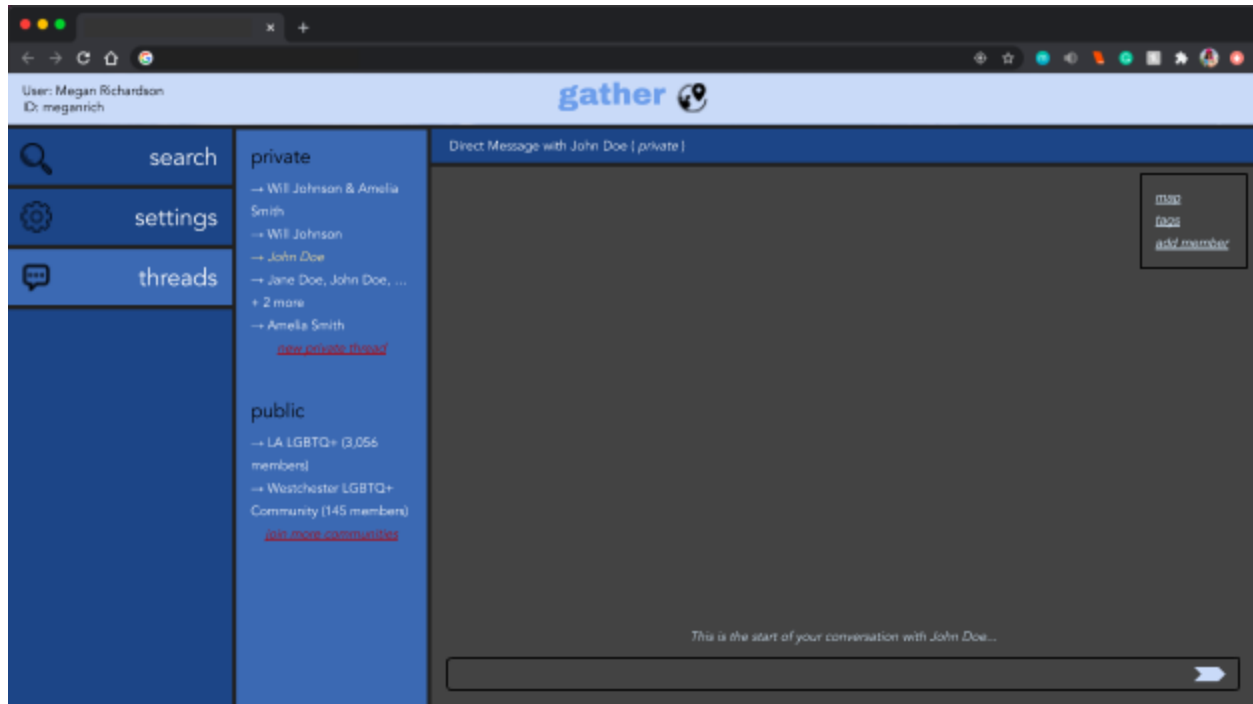
Many of the different pages can be seen through the subtask diagrams above. The three main sections are 'search', 'settings', and 'threads'. Our interface is going to be simple so that users from all backgrounds and levels of comfortability with technology can use it. This is because we aim to promote inclusivity in all senses.

Heuristic Evaluation: Below we are using Jakob Nielsen's heuristics to analyze our plan for user interface design.[5] These heuristics will guide us as we implement them throughout the design process.

1. Visibility of system status:

   Our platform will keep the user informed through guiding messages, colors, and shapes on the screen. At any point, the user will know what section they are in (i.e. 'settings', 'search', or 'threads') through highlighted marks and who they are talking to through labels at the top of the screen.

2. Match between system and the real world:

   Our first model will be only in English, but we plan to have an option to translate the website into more and more languages so that it is truly accessible to all individuals from different backgrounds. We will refrain from using any advanced

[5] Nielsen, Jakob (1994). *Usability Engineering*. San Diego: Academic Press. pp. 115–148. ISBN 0-12-518406-9.

language to ensure that all users understand everything. We are going to implement logical and real-world order in our design. For example, the older messages will be above the new ones (chronological order).

3. User control and freedom:

   We will support user control by allowing users to delete messages after they send them. This encourages users to communicate more without fear of messing up. The design easily allows users to return to other pages if they click on the wrong button. They simply have to use the buttons on the left-hand side of the screen to navigate to whatever page they wish to see.

4. Consistency and standards:

   We plan to follow platform conventions. This means we will use the same symbols for the same things to ensure consistency. For example, this arrow symbol will always be used to send a message:

   ➤ We will <u>only</u> use this symbol for this purpose.

5. Error prevention:

   Our design will check for errors before a user attempts to commit their mistake. This prevents any problem from happening making the design more usable.

6. Recognition rather than recall:

   We will attempt to minimize the amount of information a user must memorize. Our platform requires little to no memorization as all the important information (i.e. conversation threads) is laid out in front of the user at all times. They can search in conversations to view past messages, with the catch that they must remember a keyword to find it.

7. Flexibility and efficiency of use:

   There will be keyboard shortcuts that aid advanced users in accelerating their actions (i.e. making a new thread, typing a message, etc…). This doesn't interfere with novice users and their interaction with the application, yet it helps more technologically-savvy users get from point A to point B faster.

8. Aesthetic and minimalist design:

   One aspect of design that we are focusing on is not including unnecessary data/information. This helps keep the interface sleek and usable. Only relevant and helpful information will be shown to the user.

9. Help users recognize, diagnose, and recover from errors:

   Any error code will be understood by any users. Thus, we will not be using codes or technical language to alert the user of their mistake.

10. Help and documentation:

    Our system should be simple enough for any new user to understand. Despite this, we will provide a help option in our settings page. This option will allow users to search questions and view a basic list of tips and steps they need to take to navigate the platform (i.e. help to privately message someone, view the map in a thread, etc…).

REFLECTION

One complication we ran into was determining who our target user would be. We debated how specific or general we should be. A specific group (i.e. the LGBTQ+ community) would allow us to tailor our application more towards those individuals. On the other hand, making our target group smaller also reduces our sample of possible interviewees. Thus, we decided to generalize our target users to underrepresented or minority groups so that we can more easily find and access relevant data.

By creating a dialog between us and potential users we learned about many elements that will be crucial in the design process of our system. Through our communications, topics such as censorship, security, and inclusivity are all top priorities when designing for our users. The product that will come from these important insights will truly have a positive effect on the overall success of the system.