



CSCI 5708 Mobile Computing

Application Study: *Hobbiespot - Meet People Who Share Your Hobbies*

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Group 16

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Introduction

Today, the Internet has 4.54 billion users, and these users are always looking for an interesting way to interact with each other (*Smith, 2019*). Social media is everyone's favourite medium to connect; it holds more than 3 billion active users (*Smith, 2019*). The domain of social media has evolved at a great pace and is very competitive. The App Store and Google Play Store are flooded with social networking applications. Most of these social networking platforms connect people virtually. However, we are excited about taking it to the next level by developing a social media application that creates a platform for people to connect with their virtual friends and socialize with them in real-time. We want to create a fully real-time socialization platform. We are targeting the audience of age 13 or more who wants to socialize. Our target audience is expected to be of modest income (i.e., not poor) with an Android device and should be literate.

At this point in time, we only have a conceptual and high-level flow of what our application should do. We do not have any functional specifications or a robust implementation plan yet. However, our aim is to develop the application with a good user experience. There are many applications that allow users to socialize in real-time but are either biased towards dating or do not have much flexibility yet. There are applications like Tinder, Zoosk, Bumble (Date mode), Happn etc. which are more dating oriented. We explored other apps like Meetup, All Events in City, and Eventbrite which are close to our idea and are not dating apps. However, we think they are group-specific, making them a bit less flexible. And finally we have also considered other apps like Bumble (Bumble Bff and Bumble Bizz modes), Jalebi, Sociable, Hunear, We3, InterNations, EatWith and WithLocals which are very similar but have some nuances. After exploring these applications in the Play Store and App Store, we chose *Hobbiespot* app as we felt that it has the highest similarity to our concept.

Hobbiespot is a platform for users with the same hobbies to discover plans/events in their locality by other users and tag along with them (*Play Store, 2019*). The version of the app which we analyzed for the app study is 3.1.37, obtained from the Google Play Store. We analyzed the app on a Samsung A50 running on the Android-based platform 9.1.0 OS.

According to the developers of Hobbiespot:

“Do you want to share the experience of going to an event with someone but can't find who to do it with? Hobbiespot will help you find those people. This social network has thousands of users where you will find people who will have the same tastes in music and concerts, sports, travel, cinema, video games and many more hobbies.”

Selection Criteria

The main reason for selecting Hobbiespot is its concept which is focussed completely on real-time socialization. It allows users to create events as well as discover events. It allows users to view the

plans/events nearby that may be of interest to them. Users can meet people with similar hobbies and interests. They can subscribe to periodic events based on their hobbies like music, camping, travel etc. so that they don't miss their favourite activities. Users can create plans from their favourite hobbies and share it with others. Thus, users can have the flexibility to organize private events or small hangouts like dinner or a movie. This makes it more flexible than other applications like Eventbrite, Meetup, and All Events in City that require users to join various groups, get tickets and attend events, making them a bit formal and public in nature. Hobbiespot is also different from InterNations, WithLocals, Worldpackers which seem tailored for travel, international tourists, expats and networking with global minds.

Hobbiespot is not match-oriented like the typical dating apps these days. Such apps often require users to like and match with each other, text and then possibly meet, thereby adding overhead in socialization. With Hobbiespot, you just view the plans created by your connections, sign up for them and meet people, or create your own events and let people tag along. This allows people using the application to mingle with others having similar interests, without involving the like/dislike prejudice factor added as seen in the mainstream social/dating apps.

Hobbiespot also lets users keep track of their activities and organize all of their plans, hobbies, photos etc. in their profiles in the form of a wall/timeline which is one more interesting feature that it provides.

These features closely align with our idea of a complete real-time socialization platform. Also, Hobbiespot was released in 2018 and thus meets the recency constraint for the study.

Target Audience

Hobbiespot is rated 'Teen' on Google Play Store which means it is appropriate for users aged 13 or above. It uses Facebook accounts of the users for signing up. It does not target any particular demographic explicitly. However, the CEO of Hobbiespot, Roberto Salcines, listed out three kinds of users: casual, ambassadors, and companies selling experiences to users. He also stated that they developed it in anticipation of what younger millennials would demand (*Salcines, 2019*). Thus, the users who can really find the app useful are all users who want to meet others with similar hobbies; users who are new to a place and want to connect with people but do not want to limit their connection to be virtual; users who want to grow their professional network; users who feel alone and deprived of social interactions; students who want to befriend other students with similar academic interests or to form clubs of any sort; students who wish to meet professionals in their fields to guide or mentor them; users who want to find people of their ethnicity nearby and get along with each other; users who want to maintain a social circle or the ones who are excited to meet new people; users who are bored and wish to have casual meetups with new people; event organizers and other companies which can monetize their events.

This app will not be useful for people who like to keep themselves reserved or prefer to stick to the same group of friends. Hobbiespot is not of much use to users below 13(children). The user base is concentrated in big cities like London, New York, Los Angeles etc. as of now. We think that the app has great potential but is not at its best currently and the reasons are noted in the *Discussions*, and *Usability* sections.

Discussions and User Reviews

The app has 10000+ installs on the Google Play Store and is not available on App Store. 241 users rated the app and the overall rating in the Google Play Store is 3.6/5 which we feel is subpar, given the potential of the concept(*Play Store, 2019*). There are 13 reviews so far. Interestingly, the ratings are either 1-star or 5-star. From the reviews that had a 5-star rating, we inferred that those users admire the app's idea. Most of the negative reviews are concentrated on the app's sluggish performance and terrible usability issues.

By going through the reviews in chronological order, we could infer that the app was initially released in Spanish and there was no option to switch the language to English. This ensued negative reviews. However, it seemed like the Spanish users did like the app's concept and hence there were a couple of positive reviews in Spanish and a few thousands of downloads. Over a period of time, the reviews turned out more negative and most of them are regarding the app's instability. The latest review was on January 7, 2020(*Play Store, 2019*). This review suggests that the users strongly dislike the idea of selecting hobbies from a predefined list of hobbies provided by the application. Also, the reviews by users from May 2019 have not been addressed by the developer(*Play Store, 2019*). No response from the developer and the date of last update, July 9, 2019, indicate that the app is either not being maintained anymore or there is some big software update being planned. Furthermore, we have explored the application and found that there are quite a number of usability issues and bugs that we have listed in detail under the *Analysis*, and *Usability* sections.

Against this background, what intrigued us about the app is that it could reach 10000+ installs despite having multiple bugs. There are applications that have fewer bugs like "Arrive – Newcomer Connections for New Canadians" by RBC ventures, which is still in the 5000+ band. There are similar apps like Meetup, and Eventbrite which let users create groups and collectively attend meetups/events. These apps run smoothly, have fewer bugs and are doing great on the App Store with 10,000,000+ installs and 4.5+ rating. On the other hand, apps like InterNations, WithLocals and EatWith which focussed on travellers, foodies, and expats are in good shape with 500,000+, 50,000+, 100,000+ installs respectively on Play Store. All these apps have good user experience and fewer bugs. Hobbiespot is a great concept of making these meetups/events more casual, friendly, private and dynamic by not focussing on predefined categories of groups(eg: Halifax Vegan Meetup Group under the vegan category, Halifax Coffee Meetup Group under the coffee category). Nevertheless, by introducing the concept of similar hobbies and a static list of hobbies to choose from, Hobbiespot restricts user freedom. Thus, from the usability issues, bugs and user reviews, we inferred that Hobbiespot could be an example of an app with a good concept, great potential but a lack of robust implementation and maintenance.

Application Analysis

Hobbiespot is an application created to empower, encourage and engage people beyond their online profiles and in the real world(*Salcines, 2019*). They do this by allowing their users to create their own

plans with other users; find and purchase tickets to attend events, and finally connect with others based on interests and organize meetups. All of this is done by using the user's location details and other generic information such as name, profile picture and their interests, which again is either obtained directly by connecting to the user's Facebook account or manually asking the user to sign-up with an email address and provide the other details manually one after the other.

When a user subscribes/joins their favourite groups or hobbies, they get notified about all the details to ensure they never miss an event or plan. Apart from creating and joining groups with the same hobbies, users can also comment, upload photos and videos of into their hobby groups and explore new activities that you might have never thought you could practice. The application also promotes events and suggests them to users based on the reviews (*Hobbiespot*)

Hobbiespot despite being developed as a general-purpose social media app targets mainly on the needs of the young consumers that is, the Millennials and Generation Z who are more likely to prefer spending money on experiences rather than things(*Hobbiespot, 2019*). This application is a one-stop app for all social organizing and experience shopping.

The core strengths of this application as on date would be its modern UI design and the idea behind it, which has huge potential since most of the social media apps are primarily focusing on meeting and connecting with people virtually whereas the emphasis of this application is to find ways to meet a group of like-minded people in the real world. The application also provides users with ways to analyze their activity, organize your private events and to keep track of your friends so you can sign up for their plans. Hobbiespot not only caters to the needs of the casual users but also to the companies or corporations selling experiences to users by providing them with the APIs/SDKs to automate the process of connecting through their platform(*Salcines, 2019*).

Based on our exploration of the app and multiple reviews on app store(Google Play Store), there are quite a number of bugs in the application like: the application sometimes never gets past the splash screen i.e. it gets frozen there; the application crashes frequently while messaging other users; the other error is caused when the email address is used to sign up to the application which then says it is "validating" for a while with a loading symbol and then displays a vague error message saying there was some problem and to try again. These usability issues are expounded in the *Usability* section.

In our opinion, the things which the application can be better at are: making changes to the rule of selecting hobbies from the provided list of categories because there will definitely be many users with different hobbies or interests and also there is no option to add a new category for interests or hobbies. The other major problem the users are facing right now is that they are unable to find any events in their area. So, instead of asking the users to answer a series of questions first and then telling them "There are no events or users in your area", the application can be started with something like "Sorry! we are currently unavailable in your area and then let the user proceed with the next steps."

Be it connecting people across the world virtually or in real-time, the domain of social networking is already dominated by many tech giants and a startup would have many risks and threats in such competition. Thus, for thriving successfully in the social networking domain, robust implementation and

great user experience are essential for any app no matter how novel the idea is. Based on the user reviews and our exploration of the app, we reckon that Hobbiespot could have done a lot better if the initial versions of the app were robust and had a better user experience.

Usability Analysis

Hobbiespot received plenty of negative reviews on Play Store and App Store due to a lack of some features and functionalities which are available in any typical social media applications. But the idea of the application is appreciated by lots of users. Because of poor implementation, we found many violations of Nielsen's (1994a) Heuristics.

1: Visibility of system status

The application should always show the status of the application in a prompt manner so that the user is aware of what is going on. In this application, there are multiple instances in which the users are unaware of background processing and might feel that the application is not responding. After the application is launched, it occasionally takes longer than usual. Also, on the splash screen, there is just the logo of the company and nothing that indicates that the application is loading. We also found that after pressing the share post/event button, it takes some time before a window appears providing a list of applications such as WhatsApp, which can be used to share the post. It was also found that in the activity list there is no scroll bar that lets the user know about the current position of the list. Also, there is nothing that indicates that new activities are loading. It makes it look like the activity list is static.

2: Match between system and the real world

We found that the user can actually follow their own profile which either could be a glitch or a bad match between the system and the real world [Figure 1]. Also, after a new post is published, the published time is always "50 years ago" [Figure 2]. It remains that way until the page is refreshed manually.



Figure 1: User can follow own profile



Figure 2: Notification having timestamp of 50 years ago

3: User control and freedom

The application does not contain any unwanted or disturbing advertisements. But we came across an annoying feature which hinders the user freedom. After the application is launched, if the user is not friends with at least three people, it will always ask to follow someone and provide you with a long suggestion list [Figure 3]. Though the user can use the “Later” button to skip it, however, for user control and freedom, there should have been an option such as “Always remember this choice” or “Do not ask again”. Also, when any application notification pops up, it hides the bottom of the screen which restricts the user from navigating to other sections [Figure 4]. Another violation of user control is that if the user selects the wrong image to send, there is no way of undoing it and select the right image.

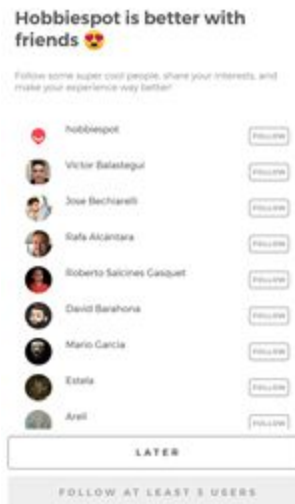


Figure 3: Suggestion list

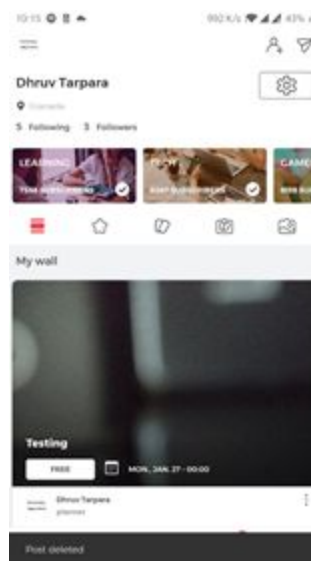


Figure 4: User not able to navigate while showing notification

4: Consistency and standards

The consistency and standard layout of the application is necessary to win the trust of the users. It also ensures that users do not have to learn new things just to use an application. “Hobbiespot” has done a great job to ensure consistency; however, some icons used for particular actions are not industry standard. One of them is the “Events” button logo on the home screen which doesn’t have any description about the working of this button until the user clicks on it. Another bad selection is the “Delete all notifications” button logo on the notifications tab. Also, unlike the majority of social applications, Hobbiespot lacks the feature that comments on a post can be liked or replied to. Also, the application does not let the user tag

someone in their comments or posts. Apart from these, the application is designed in such a way that anyone can easily get the hang of it.

5: Error prevention

This heuristic focuses on preventing users from committing errors. In this application's sign-up page, users are not prompted to enter the password again to verify and thus allow typos in the user's password. This will lead to the frequent use of the "Forgot Password" option and can frustrate the users. Another dubious functionality is a button on another user's profile which says "Friend" when both the users are following each other [Figure 5], and "Following you" if only one of them is following the other [Figure 6]. The confusing thing about this button is that it just shows the current state and not the action that it will perform after it has been pressed. For example, if both the users are following each other and by mistake one of them while looking at other's profile presses the button whose state is currently set to "Friends", they will end up unfollowing the other user and the button's state will change to "Following". Also, change in the status also notifies the profile owner which might create an awkward situation.

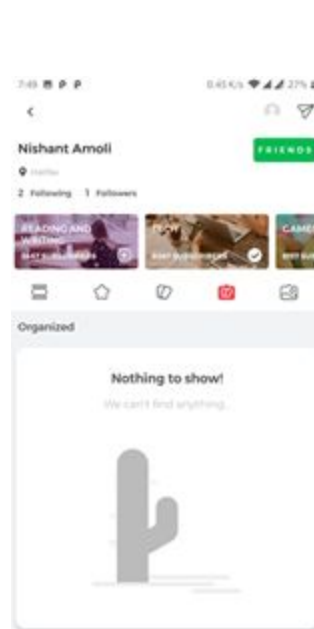


Figure 5: Other user's profile having status - "Friends"

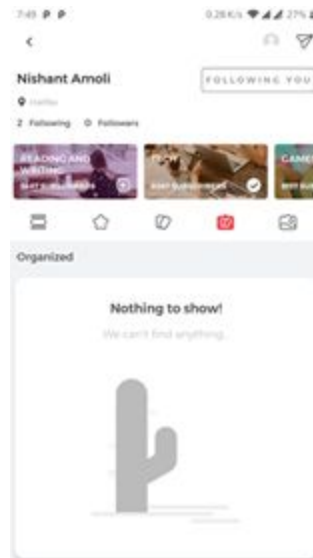


Figure 6: Other user's profile having status - "Following you"

6: Recognition rather than recall

Just like Facebook or Twitter, Hobbiespot provides the functionality to let the user attach a picture or a video. However, only the icons are provided to add that attachment. There are four options. The user can either upload a photo or a video, or make them using their phone's camera. The user has to identify which icon corresponds to a particular action. Although the icons are familiar, it would have been better if the designers would have added text for a better understanding. On the notifications page, the icon used for "Delete all notifications" is not intuitive. Also, whenever the user selects the comment option on event/post, they have to again click on the "Leave a comment" button though the keyboard is popped up. Usually, when the keyboard is opened, the application should automatically focus on the textbox.

7: Flexibility and efficiency of use

There are many restrictions and a lack of common features in this application. One of them is that the user can't adjust the zoom or focus while taking a photo which is basic in every other application accessing the camera. Also, multiple photos cannot be sent in a personal chat and if the user selects the wrong image, it cannot be undone. As mentioned previously, while writing a post or commenting on it, the user cannot tag anyone. So, there is no way for the person who is mentioned in a post or comment to be notified about it. Also, the only way to share a post is through other messaging apps like Whatsapp, Instagram direct, Gmail, etc. The application provides a good feature that allows students to find other users who go to the same university. The bad thing is that the list is limited. After we failed to find Dalhousie University on the list, we tried to look for an option to add it. However, at this point, that feature is not included. While publishing an event or a post, it is mandatory to select an activity to categorize it, which provides efficient searching. However, the issue is that if the activity has no relevant category, then there is no option to

create a new category for that activity. For instance, we tried to post an event that was related to Physics, but since we couldn't find it or add it, the only option was to categorize it under Reading and Writing. This is a serious flaw when basing the application on 'Similar Hobbies'. This has resulted in negative reviews.

8: Aesthetic and minimalist design

Overall, the aesthetics and the colour scheme of the application are appealing to the user with the exception of the image view module. When the user clicks on an image to enlarge, a white line appears on top of the screen lowering the visibility of the back button [Figure 7]. Otherwise, the look and feel of the application is on par with other good social media applications.

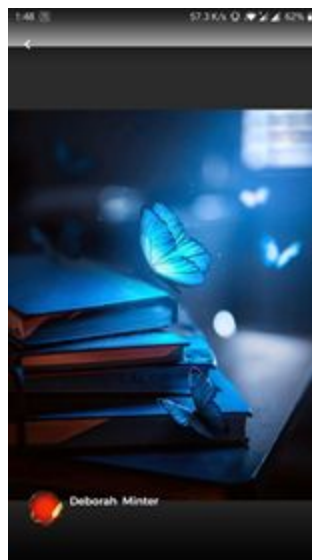


Figure 7: Enlarged image view - Navigation arrow having white background

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

Proper error presentation to end-users is necessary unless the application is made for a particular group of people. Since this app's target audience is the general public, we found that the application does a poor job of explaining the causes of errors, nor does it provide any solution. In this application, once a user sends a message/image or leaves a comment, they can't edit or remove it. When a user creates a new activity, occasionally it can't be published and the application does not show the cause either.

10: Help and documentation

In order to help the user troubleshoot and resolve a problem, it is necessary to have a help and documentation section. In this application, there is no documentation, help, guide or Q&A for the users to refer. Even most of the comments and concerns in Play Store are not being addressed.

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