

# Ethical Analysis

Alfio Cardillo, Stefanos Kypritidis, Josu Bernal,  
Nima Kamali Lassem, Kristóf Balázs

## 1 Vision, Mission and Values

‘Let’s talk’ has the important vision of creating a world where connections happen face-to-face instead of over the ‘screens’. We envision a society where technology facilitates us to form authentic connections instead of isolating ourselves in our houses, endlessly scrolling and texting, which social media is famous for. According to the survey [1], social isolation is a condition in which an individual lacks a sense of social belonging, meaningful connection with others, and fulfilling relationships. In addition, the study found a strong linear correlation between increased social media usage and increased perceived social isolation for 19 to 32-year-olds.

Building on this foundation, the startup has the mission to revolutionize social interactions through technology that promotes meaningful interpersonal connections, summed up in its tagline: “Use your phone to use your phone less”. According to the article [2], social media is making people unsocial and isolated, explaining various examples where people end up on their phones in face-to-face interactions. In fact, the article underlines the presence of many empty relationships and meaningless connections in social media, making people lonelier than ever. Our solution aims to change that by creating a new, smart & fun way of connecting people and supporting the creation of meaningful connections.

‘Let’s talk’ is built on a plethora of key core values encapsulating social responsibility. First of all, the social impact value, which was mentioned already, is significant. The platform aims to combat loneliness, reduce social anxiety, and support mental health through real-world connections. As the renowned Greek philosopher Aristotle once said, “Man is by nature a social animal,” and thus, it is necessary for humans to socialize and form authentic connections. Moreover, another core value is data privacy. Users of our app will always have the option to accept or decline personalized ads, and user information will only be used for question generation purposes. In addition, at its core is innovation but with a purpose, meaning technology is used to enhance human connection by features that promote real conversations and not distractions. Lastly, inclusion and sustainability are achieved by inviting diverse people to use our platform and by following eco-friendly practices, e.g., paperless operation.

## 2 Definition of the Service or Product

‘Let’s Talk’ is a mobile app designed to encourage meaningful face-to-face social interactions. The core functionality works when two users physically meet and connect their phones, triggering our algorithm to generate personalized conversation topics based on their shared interests and relevant current events.

Before implementing any feature, our team performs an Ethical Impact Assessment to ensure alignment with our mission of facilitating meaningful face-to-face conversations, following the famous IEEE ETHICALLY ALIGNED DESIGN. [3] We deliberately avoid elements that might keep users looking at their screens rather than each other, such as extensive user profiles or addictive notification systems.

## 3 Governance Model

Our startup employs a transparent decision-making structure where all founding members have equal voting rights on important ethical and product decisions. We use a simple majority vote system on our shared Notion workspace to ensure accountability, as a requirement for “unanimous consent” among an equally owned business is highly recommended by Forbes. [4]

In addition to its ethical significance, implementing effective whistleblowing policies is crucial to avoid potential litigation and negative publicity. To achieve this, we will implement an anonymous platform for submitting reports of wrongdoing via secure channels, to achieve confidentiality to encourage detection and internal resolution. This platform will include procedures for case intake, investigation timelines, and feedback to the reporter. [5]

Furthermore, we will create a group of users to get feedback on the upcoming features, since user involvement is considered the most important factor when it comes to determining the success of IT projects. [6]

Lastly, our remuneration policy fixes equal base fees for all founding members and adds variable pay to predefined KPIs measured over a fixed period (typically three years), with packages reviewed annually by an independent remuneration committee of two non-executive supervisors. This process ensures that no member decides their own pay on top of the base fee. [7]

## 4 Appetite for profit

Our project arises from a necessity experienced by us, as users, and our primary goal as a startup is to create the best product possible. We firmly believe in the democratization of the Internet, and we recognize that success can only come from delivering a quality product and innovative ideas. At this stage, our objective is to break even, allowing us to sustain the project and enhance the product’s quality to impact more lives positively. We aspire not to be an unusable app riddled with ads that frustrate users but rather to become an essential tool that people rely on every day. We are not unrealistic in our

expectations; we understand that this journey can only be successful with the support of our shareholders, and we recognize that the market poses significant challenges for growth. However, we firmly believe in our vision and are convinced that the widespread issue of screen addiction is substantial enough to warrant our efforts in addressing it.

## 5 Environmental Awareness

What we offer is a digital service; hence, we’ve focused more on the impact the technologies we use have on the environment. In particular, by analyzing our pipeline, we’ve concentrated mostly on two fundamental tools used: cloud storage, used to store the ingested data, and LLMs, responsible for generating text out of the knowledge collected.

Cloud storage and computation can generate pollution in multiple ways, as behind them there are huge structures called data centers that use different resources to work, and that made this industry surpass in pollution the airline one.[8] Many big companies, namely, Microsoft, Amazon and Google are investing in becoming carbon free and to reuse the water for their cooling system, but as some accuse them of just doing “green washing” with promises that look more like market strategies and suggest to use other technologies [9], other instead advise to use services from these big providers, as they are the only ones able to invest large amount of moneys on having a “green cloud” and advise against using small providers, suggesting that if everyone moved to bigger systems, it would reduce by 25% the energy consumption of the cloud industry. [10] [8]

In our case, we’ve decided to use Google Cloud. Our servers are in Madrid as it was the closest latency-wise, and 76% of the energy used is carbon-free. [11]

LLMs are models that require a vast amount of computation, both during their training phase but also when deployed and used [12]. The issue is that, as we’ve seen, the resources the cloud industry provides are still not fully renewable, and these LLMs use an enormous amount of them. We think that nowadays, companies should also start considering this aspect of LLMs and use them with caution.

In this regard, our goal is not to use the best model available, but rather a smaller model that consumes significantly fewer resources while still delivering satisfactory results.

## 6 Stakeholder approach

Although our startup is still in its early stages, and discussing stakeholders may seem distant, we remain focused on this topic with a clear vision, aligned with the spirit of ‘Let’s Talk’. One of our key advantages is that, as a data-driven enterprise, our statistics and metrics are both easily computable and shareable. This capability is a significant differentiator for our company, and we are actively

working on these metrics. With that in mind, we, as founders, see no reason to conceal this data. Given that screen addiction is a relatively new issue that hasn't been adequately addressed, we believe these statistics will not only help us enhance our app but also raise awareness around the problem. As a small startup, we understand that our growth will heavily depend on the investment and support from stakeholders, which is why we strongly believe in transparency and clarity. We are not afraid to share our reports because we believe that a well-structured company should have nothing to hide. Our unique advantage lies not in the numbers, but in the way we do things.

## 7 Role Model Function

As the startup's main functionality is to incorporate knowledge from the web and generate questions from that, an ethical question that we had to deal with, was regarding the source of the data.

We've seen how big LLMs have clearly used copyrighted content for their training [13] and recently this has become more and more evident with the new advancements in image generation, with illustrious figures, like Hayao Miyazaki going against these models, defining their generated content as "an insult to life itself". [14]

Clearly, following the easy path and incorporate every type of knowledge in our database, by for example ingesting large amounts of pirated books or articles, would have allowed better results and indirectly greater profit, but we do believe that going against human right over their artistic work, a part from being illegal, is utterly harmful and dangerous, as shown by articles that highlight the benefits of intellectual property for society. [15]

Hence, we've decided to use public APIs (some may have call's limits), that also store the source in case that content was extracted from some articles.

Additionally, as we store all the responses from these calls, we are able to cite and mention the content's source that helped in the creation of that question. Although it is true that our idea consists in using LLMs in the process, we just use them to rephrase the knowledge we give in input to resemble a question that can create a discussion.

In these regards, we would like to serve as models for other businesses in a society where AI companies are harming intellectual property more and more, showing how a viable product can also be done while respecting others' work.

Finally, we want to reiterate our belief in the principles of technology minimalism and promoting non-intrusive, non-addictive usage. This is a motto we aim to encourage among other companies and serve as a guiding principle for the future. Our goal is to enhance our lives with technology rather than allow ourselves to be consumed by it.

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