BrightCrowd—User Research Plan

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Introduction: BrightCrowd is a professional network that provides real and easier connection among people who share similar interests. It's artificial intelligence automatically keep user's constantly evolving network up to date.
Goal: Improve the user experience with more intuitive interaction
Objective: Increase user sustainability and satisfaction
Target Population: Both existing and potential users from UM, including alumni, staff, and current students

Key Findings from Preliminary Research:
I conducted 10 interviews with 8 current users and 2 potential users on campus.
Interviewees:

	Bachelor	Master	PhD	Staff
Current User		4	3	1
Potential User	1			1

From these interviews, there are 3 key findings that BrightCrowd can work on to improve the user experience:
1. *Registration is simple, but the instruction of the steps after can be improved to highlight the mission of the platform:*
   People cannot immediately tell what the main purpose of this platform is, so they are confused about the next step after registration. For example, one interviewee said if she does not need an immediate network, then she didn't know what she should do for the next step after registration.
2. *The responses and connections are real and instant, but the sustainability can be improved to keep user engagement:*
   After getting feedback or providing feedback, there is no next step to track or keep the connection formed through BrightCrowd. The quick connections are mission-based, but there is no system within BrightCrowd for users to meaningfully develop or sustain the connections made.
3. *The UI is clean and simple, but the interaction design can be improved to decrease confusion:*
   Users cannot easily and quickly figure out what they should do on the site. For example, there is no instruction on the posting page, and when one of the interviewees clicked on "+New Post" (since she was already on the page) nothing happened on the screen. Confusion or frustration related to things not working as expected is almost always associated with users leaving an application.

Hypothesis for Testing: Upon my interviews with 8 current users, 7 out of 8 are inactive users. The one person that did use BrightCrowd became inactive after replying to several posts. My hypothesis for people not using or stopping using after registration is their need for maintaining practical networks is not meet by the current product. There is no system for encouraging user engagement, and the mission of the platform is not articulated clearly with the current interaction design.

Research Questions:
Overarching question: What are the goals that users want to achieve by using BrightCrowd?
Follow up questions:
1. Why do people stop using it after registration?

2. What are users' key expectations of BrightCrowd?
3. How would users like BrightCrowd to play a role in helping them continue or develop connections made?

Methods and Process:
1. **Stakeholders Interviews** (5 engineers and 1 marketing person):
   There are 3 key questions I would like to know before approaching to the users, so I can have a better understanding about the company and the product:
   1) How will you define BrightCrowd?
   2) What is the value you think BrightCrowd brings to its users?
   3) What has been the biggest challenge in developing BrightCrowd (both technically and socially)?
   4) Where do you envision BrightCrowd in the future? What role do you expect BrightCrowd to play in networking and professional development?

2. **Comparative analysis:**
   I would rely on the BrightCrowd team to help me identify direct and indirect competitors to evaluate, as well as some key evaluation points. I can have a better understanding of how the other competitors design their user experience of building networks or seeking professional advice online. This competitive analysis will also help me see how users engage with the platforms.

3. **User Interviews (10 interviewees):**
   Remote interviews will be the primary method because students and staff are mostly not on campus during the summer vacation. By conducting user interviews, I hope to find what people want to achieve with the current platform, what experiences and value they expect to gain by using BrightCrowd, and what would prevent them from reaching the goals. I will start from here to approach to my research question about "What are the goals that users want to achieve by using BrightCrowd?"
   1) Recruit interviewees by sending open emails, using social media platforms, and using BrightCrowd user database.
   2) Design interview protocols
   3) Analyze qualitative data with affinity mapping to identify key themes and pain points from the interviews
   4) Build personas and user journey maps

4. **Survey (60 responses):**
   This phase is for understanding people's expectation for a "real professional network." The participants should be defined as potential BrightCrowd users at UM along with existing BrightCrowd users. The survey will help to touch the premise of the hypothesis to find the real need of building and maintaining networks. The survey would include demographic questions, questions about how and why people network, what their goals, values, and expectations are, and more specific questions about the BrightCrowd platform. The key findings from the survey will help inform the design of the usability testing tasks.
   1) Design and pilot test the survey with 10 participants, and edit the survey accordingly
   2) Send survey through email, social media platforms, and BrightCrowd user database
   3) Synthesize and analyze the quantitative data to identify key findings and provide actionable insights

5. **Usability Testing (6 participants):**
    Users will test the interface and the collected data should reveal challenges people have with the UI
    With the analysis, I hope to find ways to improve the interaction design to meet the needs found
    from the survey and user interviews.
    1) Design the task flow (the main task will likely be profile editing, posting, and replying to post,
    though these could change based on what is learned from the survey). I will also design reflective
    follow-up survey questions to ask participants. These questions will help me more specifically
    identify pain points, things they liked, and potential improvements
    2) Recruit participants (not necessarily current BrightCrowd users, but college web users or those
    with an interest in professional networking can participate as potential users)
    3) Pilot the usability test with two users, and edit the test plan and task flow accordingly
    4) Conduct the tests
    5) Synthesize and analyze the qualitative data to provide insights and generate recommendations
    At this phase, I hope BrightCrowd can provide a testing environment because I found that users are
    concerned about doing action in a real environment, because the other users may see their post for
    only the task.

Expected Outcome:
The possible recommendation could be:
1. A report or a presentation with findings and recommendations from the research, as well as a
    prioritization of the findings (in terms of how critical they are to the user experience and technical
    effort required to implement or change)
2. A backlog of proposed changes that can be discussed with the engineers
3. New wireframes, mockup, or prototype that can be discussed and tested (might be usability testing
    or A/B testing)
Depending on we what learned from the research as it is conducted, things may (and likely will) shift,
and I will allow for flexibility in the research plan.

Expected Timeline:
Stakeholder Interviews: 3 days
Comparative Analysis: 2 days
User Interviews: 15 days
Survey: 10 days
Usability Testing: 10 days
Design Wireframes or Write Reports or Do Presentation: 10 days
Total days: 50

Expected Budgets:
Incentive for survey: $50x1 gift card for lottery
Incentive for interviews: $5x10 for 30-minute remote interviews, $10 for each if it's face-to-face
interview
Incentive for usability testing: $20x12 for one-hour on-site usability testing
Estimated Cost= $50+$100+$240=$390