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Contextual Inquiry Report

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ROLES

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PROBLEM AND SOLUTION OVERVIEW

Talking to someone for the first time in a public setting can be very intimidating. There is often no indication of common ground or shared interests with which to break the ice. Because of this, many social opportunities are missed. What if the man sitting across from you on the bus shared your love of motorcycle maintenance? What if the girl at the next table in the coffee shop had just finished refinancing her home mortgage and could tell you the pitfalls to avoid? Sociall is a mobile app that solves this problem by allowing people to share information with other people in their vicinity. Privacy settings along with the option to chat before meeting generate the security and trust needed to make Sociall comfortable for its users.

CONTEXTUAL INQUIRY INTERVIEWEES

To perform our contextual inquiry, we targeted people representative of a college population/age group.

Several specific environments were chosen based on who we thought might use our app: a college library, a cafeteria on the ave, a university-sponsored hike, and a comedy festival party. For the people interviewed, we planned to watch them interact with other people who they were meeting for the first time and then ask them questions more specifically linked to how they went about meeting people and the issues they faced in doing so. We also inquired about privacy issues that they foresaw with a social app like Sociall.

Emma is a senior student double majoring in Economics and Statistics at the UW. She currently uses the Facebook app on an iPod Touch and would be happy to use a mobile app that enables connections with new people because she enjoys discussing common interests with new friends. Regardless of her desire to have new friends, she is very cautious because she is concerned with exposing her private information. In fact, in a case like having a new friend on Facebook, she carefully thinks whether this person is trustworthy or not. In this way she avoids unnecessarily exposing her privacy sure to only connect with people she has both met in person and shares interests with. A person like Emma represents a member of our target audience: people who are willing to make new friends to talk with about their common interests but might hesitate to do so due to their concern over their privacy.

Fey and Hang are two women we met at a cafe on the Ave. Fey is in her early 20's, currently working as a waitress at a restaurant in Portland, Oregon. She has come up to Seattle to take a vacation for a week. Hang is a senior student at the UW and will graduate after this Spring quarter. We specifically selected both Fey and Hang since they both came to the cafe alone to eat their lunch. It turned out that they were looking for someone who might have some common interests to chat with during their lunch rather than eating alone. Nevertheless, they could not find anyone. Both of them represent an important segment of our target audience: individuals, in a casual environment like a cafe where people come to eat and to chat with their friends, who are looking for someone they do not know and want to have a pleasant time chatting with them.

Naomi is a junior at the UW majoring in sociology. She is twenty years old and used to use Facebook, but doesn't anymore (she has deleted her account). We met Naomi on a day-long group hike organized by the UW Honors program. We first watched how she interacted with people in the group that she didn't know and then her asked her a few questions. Naomi has lived around Seattle her entire life and enjoys doing outdoors activities and meeting new groups of people. Although she has lived locally, she has traveled around the States and South America and has enjoyed talking to other travelers during her trips. She also has a Christian background and helps out at some local community centers. Naomi represents an outgoing subset of the population who actively seeks out opportunities, such as hiking, in which to meet new people.

John is a 20 year old theater major from Lewis & Clark University in Portland, Oregon. John was followed throughout the course of a three-day improvised comedy festival where it was observed how he made connections with other improvisers. Though he has no problem performing in front of large groups, he describes himself as "not very good at meeting new people". John knows that parties provide a great opportunity to meet people, but he suffers from a diagnosed social anxiety disorder triggered by being in large groups. He says that when he finds someone who shares common knowledge with him conversation is easy -- his favorite is when he finds someone from his home town or someone who has visited his home town, this makes for a "good, back and forth conversation" -- but finding this common ground (as well as building up the courage to talk to a stranger) can be a struggle. John represents an important segment of our target audience: those who would like to meet people in a casual setting, but feel uncomfortable both initiating these connections and finding common interests.

CONTEXTUAL INQUIRY RESULTS

ENVIRONMENT

- Emma does not desire to meet or chat with new people in public spaces such as airports, buses, or bars. This is because she considers these places too open and filled with strangers. On the other hand, she feels more desire to know new people in a more college-oriented venue, such as a classroom or library. She especially wants to know new people in a lecture hall, where there are so many like-minded people who share the same interest and background, but sometimes she just feels too intimidating to start a chat. She particularly wants to know other classmates' interests. Besides, interesting enough, she mentions that there is some similar app that is for homosexual people, which helps them find other gay/les/bi nearby called Encountr<http://encountr.net/>.

- For Fey and Hang, the environment was one of the major factors that influenced their social interaction with new people. They mentioned that being in a casual environment like a cafe where people were expected to eat and to share their opinions with others always encouraged and promoted their social interaction. In fact, Hang emphasized the importance of location. She mentioned that in a place like a library she would avoid having a conversation with a stranger because she would go there to study rather than to chat.

- Naomi is against giving out her information in most environments. She feels that the information would not represent her as a person, and that she does not trust what other people might do with it in many public areas. She is interested, however, in the potential of using the application to find people to study with in libraries and would feel more secure using it on campus.

- John has trouble meeting people in crowded areas. Even in large groups composed entirely of his friends he finds himself getting anxious. He doesn't have much desire to meet people in busy locations like the bus, but he thinks it would be nice to meet fellow students while working in the library or fellow actors when taking a break at the local coffee shop. John also mentioned that his field of acting is all about who you know. He knows that he should be talking to more directors and established actors, but doesn't really know how to find them or what he would say if he did. Thus, he would also love to have an easy way to make connections in a professional setting.

Environment plays a major role when interacting with strangers. Different settings are accompanied by varying views of privacy and purpose. In general our interviewees preferred more laid back settings (libraries, coffee shops, etc.) populated with people who were already likely to share a common background (such as classes taken). In

environments like the bus, where there was a perception that there were many strangers or that it wasn't already "normal" to start up a conversation, our interviewees showed less interest in initiating conversations.This shows that we should perhaps tailor our application to a specific set of environments that are common instead of trying to create a more general solution.

WILLINGNESS

- Since Emma is a shy person, she has some tendency not to talk with strangers. She does, however, have a desire to meet new friends. Because of her shyness, it is not likely that Emma will proactively meet random people around her. Due to timidness and fear over meeting strangers, regardless of her desire to make new friends, she will probably have a hard time doing so. In fact, she even confides to us that it has always been hard for her to converse with people who are not her classmates or friends. She struggles with socialization to the point where she has said she might not attempt to make new friends in the future.

- For Fey and Hang, their willingness to socially interact with random people allowed them to be open to talking with strangers. Those we asked for an interview, in fact, refused us because not only were they busy studying but they are also uninterested in talking with others. However, Fey and Hang delightfully accepted our interview request because they were looking for someone to share their common interests and stories of their daily life. As soon as we introduced them to each other, they opened up a conversation to get to know each other more, found the common interests, and enjoyed their time talking with each other. In fact, Fey and Hang had had a very pleasant conversation for about 20 minutes. It was possible all because of their willingness to have a good time talking with someone rather than eating alone at a cafe.

- Naomi describes herself as an open person. She is very interested in meeting new people, but is not very confident in her ability to hit it off well. When talking to people, she prefers meeting a larger group since she can then listen to what the group the is talking about before jumping into the conversation. In small groups, Naomi starts by asking general questions about school, their studies, where they live, or by commenting on their appearance. When asked what she would want to find out when meeting someone, she said: "where they live, who they hang out with, a snapshot of them in their environment, and what they were like as a kid."

- John is okay with solitude; he regularly commuted 1.5 hours each way in high school. He doesn't consider himself very good at meeting people, but finds that he enjoys himself more when he is talking with someone than when he is not. In the party setting he was initially observed in, he was never really alone, but in groups was often on the periphery, not really contributing, and in one on one interaction he seemed to be struggling to find a shared interest with the other person. When the right topic came up, however, he became more excited about it and had no issue talking at length and even leading the conversation. In fact, he admitted that he felt more confident beginning conversations in a party setting as everyone in attendance actually wanted to be socializing. If there was an easier way to find which people wanted to be socializing and what they were interested in he would find himself willing to talk with new people a lot more.

In our research, it was common to hear that an interviewee didn't consider himself a good conversationalist. Some, such as Emma, had gotten to the point where she decided she might just not try to make any new friends due to how difficult it is for her. Even in this extreme case though, the desire to meet new people if it was easier, is

there. Everyone from those who are already social (Fey and Hang) to those who barely even talk to friends (Emma) want to make connections with new people. For both groups the inhibiting factor is different -- for the unsocial it is that they are afraid there will be no common interest to talk about and for the social it is just hard to find another person who is willing to talk -- but without this factor in place both groups would make more connections. Since it seems that most people would be willing to meet new people if it was made easy, we should be able to focus more on broad demographic factors (age, education, etc.) instead of having to divide between the different social groups that make up these demographics.

PRIVACY

- Emma is very conservative with her privacy. She is only willing to expose a limited amount of her private information to 1) friends and those who she already knows and 2) other college students who share a similar background (e.g. same major, same student group/association, registered in the same class, etc.). Other than those, she mentioned that she would avoid giving out her private information such as her interests or education. Even on Facebook and LinkedIn Emma is careful of having friends due to her concern over her privacy. She wants to meet some people to socialize based on common interests but at some level this privacy problem prevents her from doing so.

- For Fey and Hang, privacy issues were not much of a factor. Despite the fact that they just met each other, they began to feel more comfortable as they conversation progressed and they got to know each other more. Once they realized the other was honest and sincere, they started sharing their generally personal things like their religion, their boyfriends, and even their emails to be friends on Facebook.

- Naomi is very concerned about privacy and said that she would not be willing to share information in most situations. She would be most open to it in university environments, such as a library, where she could find people to study with for classes.

- John says it would be great to know information about other people, but is afraid he would pre-judge others based on their information or write them off too early as having nothing in common. He suggests perhaps having a list of "things he likes to talk about". John has no problem talking to someone who inquires about, say, his religion, but would not be comfortable putting something like that into a public profile. The amount of information John is willing to share with others is based on a number of factors. He would be fine sharing his interests with someone who goes to his school, or information about his body type with a casting director, but not a complete stranger. However, he might not want that casting director to see his interests that his classmates could. He liked the idea of a point system, where different categories (same age range, same school, same city, same friends, etc.) amount to different sums of points. How much information someone could see would then be based on this score.

Privacy seems to be at least a bit of a concern across the board, but John probably summed up the general feel best when he said that he "would never put on the Internet anything [he] expected to be completely private". Most of the concern seems to center around what information is shared with strangers. Once the personal connection is actually made though, and the actually identity of the other person is confirmed, security concerns diminish greatly. There is little that our interviewees were uncomfortable talking about when asked directly, in person. This implies that we might want to have granular control over how much information is shared with strangers for our app, but that we shouldn't have to worry much about what actually unfolds when the connection is made.

ANALYSIS OF NEW AND EXISTING TASKS

EASY TASK - FIND SOMEONE WHO YOU WOULD BE INTERESTED IN TALKING TO

Robert is a social college student working towards a major in music. He has several friend groups around campus, but often finds that his musical tastes differ a lot from those of his friends. Tonight, he is attending a local show by one of his favorite bands. He knows that other students from the university are attending as well, but doesn't recognize anyone in the crowd. Robert wants to know whether anyone else in the crowd is someone that he'd enjoy talking to and perhaps become friends with. Robert represents a user who simply wants to know how well he could get along with other people in his vicinity. He knows that people around him share similar interests (music) and that if anyone else shares other common interests, he would love to strike up a conversation with them.
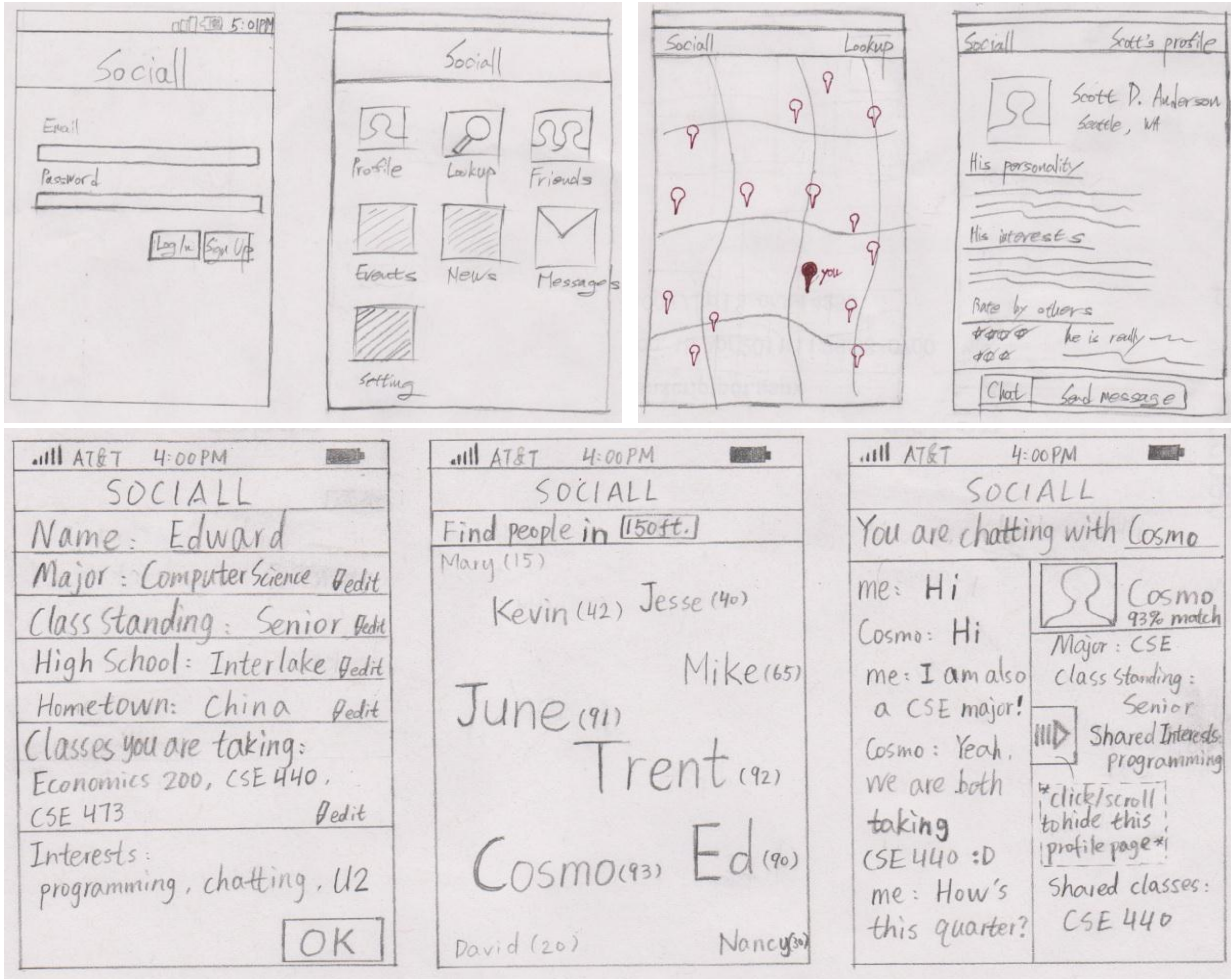
MODERATE TASK - START A CHAT WITH SOMEONE INTERESTING AND ARRANGE TO MEET THEM

Hannah is a 20 year old college student who stops by Starbucks every morning to get coffee. She is interested in biology as well as running and tennis. She is open to meeting new people, but is pretty shy and usually ends up reading the news by herself at one of the tables. Today, she decides she wants to talk with someone new, preferably someone who shares interests with her so that she can carry on the conversation. Hannah represents a user who wants to meet someone casually to talk with for a short while. She is interested in starting a longer friendship if the conversation goes well.

DIFFICULT TASK - FIND SOMEONE TO STUDY WITH FOR A SPECIFIC CLASS AND MEET THEM

Ben is a Freshman at the UW and is therefore enrolled in many large classes. Ben is outgoing and has friends at the dorms, but has not had time to form a study group with people in his classes. He has been pretty intimidated by the class sizes and the college workload and consequently often studies alone at the library. As a major midterm nears, Ben decides that he wants to find other people to collaborate with. Ben is interested in networking with other people who share classes. He is looking for social networking and people who have specific backgrounds.

SKETCHES OF MAIN COMPONENTS

Screen 1 (Login):
Sociall
Email
Password
Log In | Sign Up

Screen 2 (Menu):
Sociall
Profile | Lookup | Friends
Events | News | Messages
Setting

Screen 3 (Map/Lookup):
Sociall | Lookup
you

Screen 4 (Profile):
Sociall | Scott's profile
Scott D. Anderson
Seattle, WA
His personality
His interests
Rate by others
he is really —
Chat | Send Message

Screen 5:
.ιιll AT&T   4:00PM
SOCIALL
Name: Edward
Major: Computer Science ✏edit
Class Standing: Senior ✏edit
High School: Interlake ✏edit
Hometown: China ✏edit
Classes you are taking:
Economics 200, CSE 440,
CSE 473 ✏edit
Interests:
programming, chatting, U2
OK

Screen 6:
.ιιll AT&T   4:00PM
SOCIALL
Find people in [150ft.]
Mary (15)
Kevin (42) Jesse (40)
Mike (65)
June (91)
Trent (92)
Cosmo (93) Ed (90)
David (20) Nancy (30)

Screen 7:
.ιιll AT&T   4:00PM
SOCIALL
You are chatting with Cosmo
me: Hi
Cosmo: Hi
me: I am also
a CSE major!
Cosmo: Yeah,
we are both
taking
CSE 440 :D
me: How's
this quarter?
Cosmo
93% match
Major: CSE
Class Standing:
Senior
Shared Interests:
programming
*click/scroll
to hide this
profile page*
Shared classes:
CSE 440

Screen 1

SOCIALL

Computer Science 🔍

👤 **Ed Liu**

Education ✎ Edit

University of Washington
Computer Science & Engineering
Class of 2012

Interests ✎ Edit

Programming, U2, Bob Dylan
American Literature, mobile

Words that descibe you ✎ Edit

Ninja, nerd, Chinese,
entrepreneur, coder

profile page

Screen 2

SOCIALL

Computer Science 🔍

Search in : 150 ft.

Trent

Cosmo

June

David

Kevin

Jon

Mary

Ruth

Will

Brian

👤 **Trent**

92% match ★★★★☆

Computer Science major at University of Washington

Shared Interests:
Programming, mobile

Correlated keywords:
Coder

Chat !

Screen 3

SOCIALL

🔍

? Does the keyword "Computer Science" descibe Trent well?

Yes ⊙ [_____] (48)
No ○ ‖ (0)

Vote

Trent's current reputation: 99%