

P7: Experience Evaluation Plan & Simple Evaluation

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Part 1: Basic Evaluation Plan

Purpose

The purpose of this evaluation is to test the usability of the paper prototype of *Belong*. *Belong* is a mobile application that aims to help international students foster connections and feel at home when they first come to the United States. By observing and collecting feedback, we hope to discover the strengths and weaknesses of our app, as well as obtain insight on the features that would be most useful.

Methodology

For each evaluation, the testing team will take turns being facilitator, computer and note-taker. The facilitator will guide the participants through the task by giving them step-by-step instructions. The computer will log how long participants take to complete each task and will change the paper screens that the user is interacting with as the user goes through the tasks. The note-taker will take notes on the process and write down the participants' answers to pre- and post- testing questions. Each session will begin with the testing team explaining our purpose for conduct this usability testing, as well as giving the participants pre-test questions to gather demographic information about the participants.

In our evaluations, we will use think-aloud protocol and ask the users to say everything they are thinking aloud as they complete the tasks. We will use specific completion criteria to determine when users have completed the tasks. Once each task is complete, we will ask the users follow-up questions to gather information about pain points.

Logistics

Pre-Test Questions

- Where are you from?
- How long have you been in America for?
- Have you had trouble finding friends in the United States?
- Do you have experience user testing?

Test Environment, Equipment, Logistics

In order to simulate our participants as users of the Belong app, we will conduct the usability testing in a quiet space they feel comfortable in. This is to simulate them using the app in the comfort of their own home. Prior to testing, we will ask the participants if they are comfortable having their voices recorded for purposes of revisiting their responses later.

For the test, we will have the following specific equipment:

- A paper prototype of the Belong app
- An iPhone with the Voice Memos application
- A notebook to take notes

Facilitation Approach

The testing team will rotate between the roles of facilitator, computer and note-taker in order to take turns experiencing what it's like working different parts of the process.

The testing team will also log and note down the time taken each participant took to complete each task. This would help us calculate the level of completion each participant can reach to within a certain time frame, giving us an idea of how intuitive and easy our app is to use.

Post-Test Questions

- What did you like about the app?
- What did you not like about the app?
- What features of the app do you think would you use the most often?
- What improvements do you think could be made?
- What features would you have liked to see in the app?

Tasks

Task 1 - Organizing to meet a group of people with common interests

Task Description

In this task, we want the user to be able to edit their interests and select a particular interest, which the system will use to generate a list of other users with that interest as well. We then want the user to be able to create a group message with people from this list and organize to meet up with them by creating a common event.

Task Scenario

Imagine that you are a student looking to meet new friends with common interests. Use the connect feature of the app to add an interest, start a group chat, and create an event with people you have been matched with.

Completion Criteria

This task is complete when the user has successfully joined a group and created an event with other students based on a common interest.

Task 2 - Adding a new reflection after event

Task Description

In this task, we want the user to find out how to add a reflection about an event after that event has occurred. We want the user to be able to navigate the system to select an event to reflect on from their list of past events, add photos, write text, and tag people in that event. We then want the user to be able to view their finished reflection in My Journey.

Task Scenario

Imagine that you are a student wanting to save the memory of an event after the event has occurred. Use the my journey feature of the app to add a new event to reflect on, add a photo, write text, and tag people.

Completion Criteria

We will know that the task is complete when the user has added a reflection and is able to view the completed reflection in their Journey.

Task 3 - Looking at a past reflection

Task Description

In this task, we want the user to be able to search My Journey for a past reflection on an event based on the event title or tags. We want the user to be able to view that past reflection with the option of editing its contents.

Task Scenario

Imagine that you are a user that wants to reflect on their experience in the United States so far. Use the reflect feature of the app to search through your journey for a past reflection based on the event title or tags.

Completion Criteria

The task is complete when the user has searched for a specific past reflection and is able to view the details of their reflection in their Journey.

Participant Profiles

The participants of this evaluation were international students at the University of Washington, aged between 18 - 20. All participants had some experience speaking English prior to moving to the United States for college and are highly comfortable using technology in their daily lives. These participants come from different parts of the world and have been in America for at least one year.

Participant 1 (E1): Our first user is an international student from Bangkok. He went to an international school, so he had experience speaking English and exposure to American culture before coming to the University of Washington. He is a third-year student, is studying Economics, and is in a fraternity here.

Participant 2 (S1): The second user is an international student from Qatar. He is fluent in English and had been to the United States before he came to the University of Washington to get his Bachelor's Degree in electrical engineering. He is currently a Junior here and is still exploring American Culture.

Participant 3 (T1): The third user is a second-year international student from Mexico City at the University of Washington. She was raised by a Mexican dad and an American mom, and so is fluent in both English and Spanish. However, she had never lived anywhere else besides Mexico before moving to the United States.

Part 2: Simple Evaluation

Findings

Finding 1 - Metaphor of a mountain-climber was not obvious

In our usability testing, participant E1 was not able to identify that the figure was climbing up a mountain in the 'My Journey' part of the app. E1 thought it was instead "just a progression of lines", and following our explanation that it was a figure climbing a mountain, E1 was confused about what the mountain was supposed to represent. T1 also thought that the visual layout of the mountain in the 'My Journey' portion of the app was "not really necessary" and that they would prefer if their reflections could be categorized in a list format or as if in a diary.

Our initial rationale for the mountain was that it would represent the growth of an international student as they grew more used to living in the United States for college. The mountain-climbing figure on our app would represent and acknowledge the struggle that international students face in these experiences. However, this paints the international student experience in a negative light, and upon reflection, we realized that the struggle of mountain-climbing might not integrate very well with our core concept for our app - helping international students cultivate a feeling of belonging in the United States.

Suggestion - Change the visual layout of 'My Journey'

Upon collection of our participants' feedback, the testing team has decided that we need to change the visual layout of 'My Journey' to represent international students' journey of growth in a more relevant and clear way.

E1 suggested changing the visual layout to represent 'climbing a mountain every day' to signify the difficulty of the international student experience. However, our testing team is not sure that this idea falls in line with the core concept of cultivating belonging any better than our initial idea. T1 suggested that the user reflections be organized in a list format and that there should be a scrolling function to quickly sift through reflections. Our testing team thought a scrolling function would be very useful for users, but is not convinced that having user reflections be presented in a list format would be the most effective way to show a user's personal journey.

Overall, there is need for the testing team go through another round of ideation to determine what visual layout would be most suitable to convey a user's personal reflection journey.

Finding 2 - More opportunities for personalizing their profiles

During testing, our participants gave feedback that they weren't given enough information about other users that this would make it difficult for them to choose group members from interest match lists. Participants E1 and S1 expected to be able to check their group members' profiles before inviting them to events and adding them in a group chat. They wanted more information about someone before choosing to reach out and form a connection. In this vein, participants suggested that users should be able to add personal information to their profiles.

Suggestion - Reflections should have the option to be made public

Participants gave feedback that it would be useful if users could have the option to make their event reflections public on their profile. This would allow users' friends and potential new friends the opportunity to explore that user's profile to get a deeper understanding of the user's personality, interests, and experiences.

Suggestion - Entering more detailed information on users' interests

One of the other ways user can show their interest in the activity can be by posting specific details about their interests and how are they involved in them. For instance, users interested in soccer should be able to write about what position they like to play or what their favourite teams are. Such specific details would help make users appear more personable, as well as demonstrate that their interests are genuine. This would enable more effective matches between users with common interests and provide users greater comfort in adding new people to group chats.

Finding 3 - Users want more control over who they are matched with

After our usability testing, we realized that the connect feature was currently way too arbitrary. Participant E1 felt that "a lot of people would add interests based on vagueness, and put things on like 'food.' I wouldn't just want to be matched in a group chat with ten people that like food." This feedback made us realize that we needed to have a specific way to match people so that they can meet people that they would enjoy being around. Our initial rationale for having randomized matching was that we want users to meet people that were different from them.

However, users want to feel like they are in control of the app and the connections that they make.

Suggestion - App needs to offer users the option to accept or decline group messages

In our initial version of the app, users would be added into group chats upon invitation and have the option of removing themselves from the group later. However, participant E1 asked, "Are you going to be forced into group chats?" E1 spoke about how they hate random notifications, and how they would want to be able to be more selective in choosing the groups that they want to join. As a result, we will change the app to allow users to accept and deny group message requests.

Suggestion - App should suggest new interests and groups based on a user's current interests, profile, and friends

When asked what features they would like to see, participant T1 spoke about being exposed to new interests and activities to cultivate a feeling of belonging. After coming to the United States, users will be exposed to many new activities and hobbies. Participant T1 said that they would really like to see the app suggest interests based on what their friends like and what their current interests are. Users would then have the option to explore more activities and become closer to other people.

Finding 4 - App should have a more intuitive way to add an interest

All three of our users were very confused about the steps to add an interest in the 'Connect' section of our app. They all needed more clarification and said that it should be clearer. It took all the users a while to find the 'plus' button, and all assumed that they should click on the interest circles when we asked them to add a new interest.

Suggestion - Modify the process and visual design

Although participant S1 said that the confusion was because the prototype was low-fidelity and that color would have really helped, we feel that the app should still be designed so that users would understand the idea on a low-fidelity prototype. As a result, we will modify the interface so that the process of adding an interest is clearer.

What Worked Well

'Connect' feature

All of our three participants really liked the 'Connect' feature of the app as it allowed them to meet easily and attend events with a group of people. They agreed that it can be really helpful for them as international student to a new country.

Photo reflection feature

Two out of three participants really liked the concept of being able to keep photo reflections of their experience in a new country. They felt that an option to make reflections public would make it so that they could have an easier time connecting to new people and understanding where others are coming from.

Interface design was consistent and easy to understand

Two out of our three participants said that they thought the interface design was engaging, consistent and generally easy to understand. They said that the app was straightforward in that it functioned as they expected it to. They also liked the use of the little figure in the 'My Journey' section of the app, as it made the experience more engaging.