



BULLSHUT APP: A SOCIAL INTERFACE TO AVOID SMALL-TALK

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What if we were able to find a real conversation by only knowing a specific interest from our conversation partner?

BullShut App aims to avoid awkward moments at any sort of social events. Its main purpose is to create a conversational space among two individuals during a brief period of time. By typing a chosen topic, one is allowed to find other users and to be found by them in a radius of around 30 metres. The App's final purpose is finding and establishing a real conversation between two strangers with a shared interest. After typing the topic one is interested in, one gets the possibility of starting a chat limited to 140 characters per user. Therefore, if they want to talk to each other, they will have to find each other in person.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Our smartphone is a distraction tool. It entertains us in our daily lives. It makes us believe, that we are not alone, but connected to each other the whole time. A smartphone is an essential device for most of us. But, where do we find a limit between necessity and dependency? Are our phones able to rule our social exchanges and interactions?

These questions arose due to the proliferation of mobile phone Apps in the last years: almost each one of our problems is arrangeable using an App. We have Apps for almost every task and moment, helping us to quantify ourselves and to control all our actions and movements. This interest in getting to know ourselves better, might also be putting us apart from having a look at the people around us. This device helps us to keep in touch with people we no longer see and feel, but what if its use was reverted to allow us to interact and get to know people directly around us?

I would like to bring to the front our problems to find and establish a real conversation, in a society where everything is mediated by our phones. On one hand, *BullShut App*'s main purpose is to ease our social interactions and bring us back the pleasure of having a conversation about something relevant to us. On the other hand, it questions our ability to speak about something serious, with consequences and truly interesting for us, without the mediation of a device.

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

2.1 CONCEPTUAL PREMISES

BullShut App makes use of a technology, which in our mobile phone might be considered almost obsolete by many users: Bluetooth. A technology, which when it first appeared on a mobile phone, was presented as a fast way to share files among users. This exchanging mechanism has been now replaced by a more sophisticated way to share files and data: the Internet. We no longer want to share files or photos with people nearby, we do not always have our friends close to us, so we like to share our files with people far away from our current location.

In spite of this, Bluetooth technology might help us in the task of reaching people out of our social network-based domains. In order to be more specific, Bluetooth limits our research to people who are spatially in our surroundings. But, are we ready to interact with them? Do we want to do it? Do we want to see a stranger and hear her/his voice? For some people it might be scary, for some others a nice experience in which the phone gets back its human dimension: bringing people together.

2.2 TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

In order to realise this project I worked together with Tassilo Posegga, a master student with experience programming smart-phone applications. During the whole process, we used the Android Studio IDE [1] due to one of the attached samples: we did not have to start to program it completely from scratch. On the contrary, we could start modifying a preexisting App named Bluetooth Chat, making it easier, to establish the connection protocols and implementing the two-way chat over Bluetooth between two Android devices. Thus, afterwards we could concentrate on the workflow's design and the rest of details and characteristics, as the possibility of changing the Bluetooth name of the device when the App is started and also limiting the chat duration to 140 characters per person. This limit introduces a new handicap for the users who prefer typing rather than talking, because once the user finds a topic and starts chatting: either she uses the chat to find the other person, or she will take the risk of running out of characters and never knowing who this person was.

3 ON CONVERSATION AND HUMAN INTERACTION

3.1 IMPROVING OUR INTERACTIONS

About human-human and human-machine interaction there are currently some finished and ongoing projects, which make me start to reflect on our communication troubles and its relation with technology. One of the most remarkable projects would be the work by Lauren McCarthy at the MIT in Massachusetts [2]. She developed in the recent years several pieces of Device Art. An example of it would be the 'Conversacube' a box which helps and gives some advices on a date, or 'pplkpr', an App that tracks and auto-manages our friendships. The interest in these topics has increased in the last years, because nowadays we might be in front of a generation of human beings not very capable of interacting without a smartphone.

It is hard to deny, that we are in a world, where people isolate themselves everywhere: at a bar, waiting for the bus, in the pause of a conference, or in the corridors of a festival, either looking at the news feed of their own virtual social life, or talking about random topics they do not really care much. Therefore, it might be necessary to open a gate to allow real exchanges and subvert the use of a mobile phone. A device, which for some years lost its main purpose: shortening distances between people by using the voice.

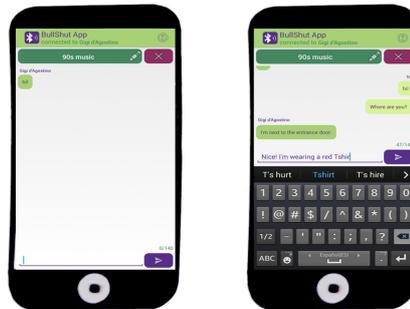
BullShut App

Find a conversation close to you!

- 1 Download the app from Google Play Store
- 2 Think of a conversation topic you would like to talk about
- 3 Browse the topics in your area
- 4 Start chatting and find a real conversation



1. Tap on the pencil icon to write the conversation topic you would like to talk about.
2. Save it by clicking on the floppy disk icon.
3. Once you saved your topic, tap on the magnifying glass icon & find another users.



4. Select one of the available topics and start a chat.
5. Remember, there is a 140 characters/person limit!



6. Find a conversation partner and enjoy a pleasant face-to-face exchange of ideas.

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Links to BullShut App:

Download: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=ic.bullshut>

Video: <https://vimeo.com/135243073>