

Collaborative Design Project

Progress Report

WEEK 1

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28th October 2020

Introduction

As a part of our design project we have been challenged to look to the post-covid future in search of possible design opportunities which we may tap into by creating a start-up. The goal is to be able to find, understand and address a problem that we foresee in the post-covid world in a realistic way such that we might at least sustain and ideally profit from the venture to address that problem.

This project is a collaborative exercise. The group members bring a mix of specializations to the table and furthermore we collaborate with people with industry experience to create something which would have real world value.

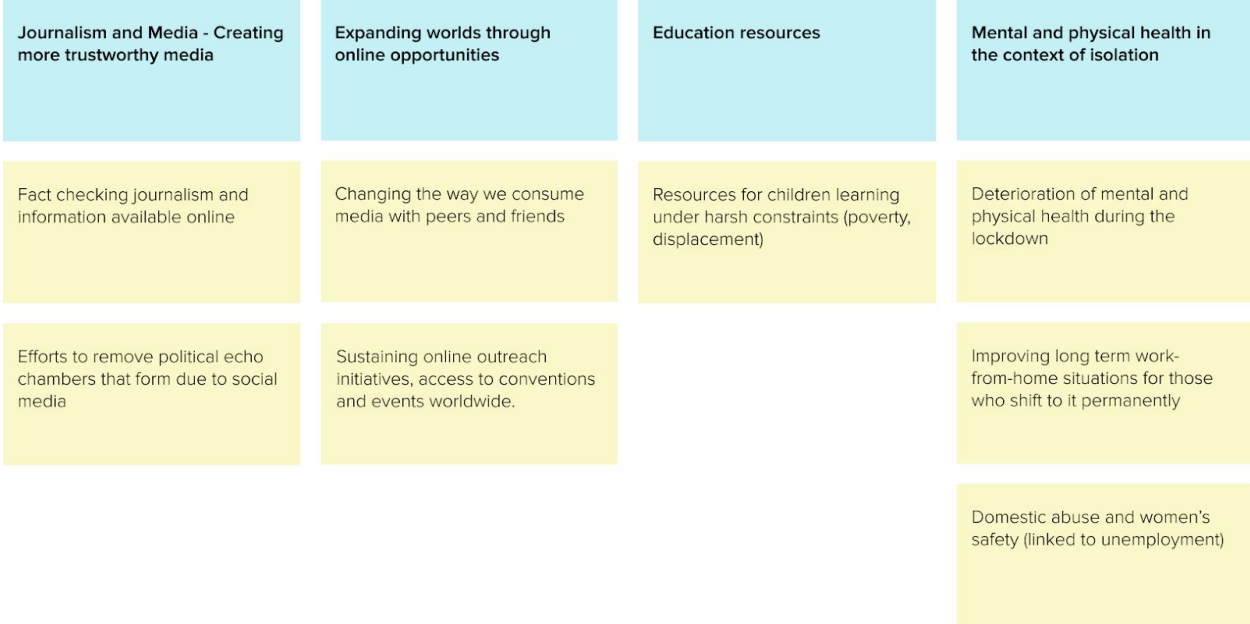
Design Opportunities

For the initial process of trying to find design opportunities, we used divergent thinking techniques to come up with as many possible ideas that we could. It was very important in this stage to not disregard any idea without fleshing it out a little bit first.

After the preliminary ideation session and some discussion we had come up with 8 broad problems:

Fact checking journalism and information available online	Efforts to remove political echo chambers that form due to social media	Resources for children learning under harsh constraints (poverty, displacement)	Deterioration of mental and physical health during the lockdown
Changing the way we consume media with peers and friends	Sustaining online outreach initiatives, access to conventions and events worldwide.	Improving long term work-from-home situations for those who shift to it permanently	Domestic abuse and women's safety (linked to unemployment)

We were able to further consolidate these into 4 major issues:



Then we elaborated on each of these problems out to understand if there was some scope within these that we could address. Having broadly understood each of these problems, we picked our champion idea based on what we felt we could address best within the scope of this project.

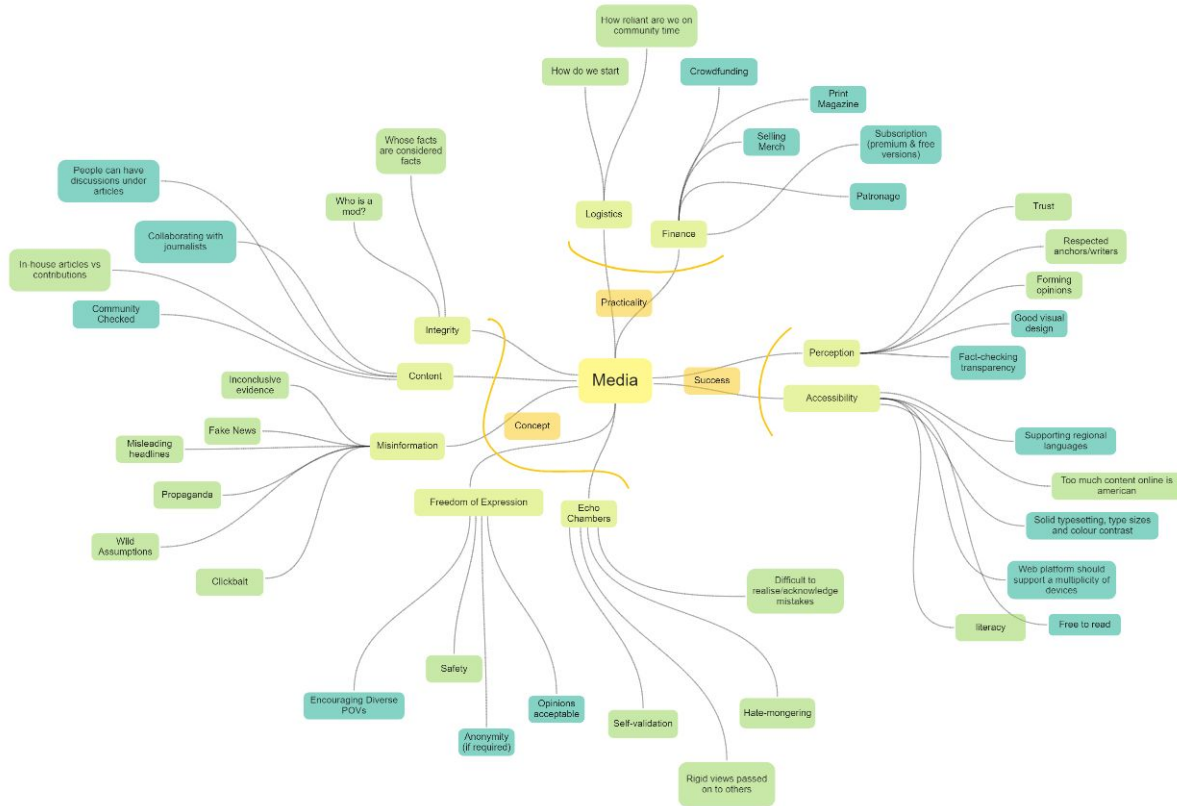
The idea we kept coming back to, despite trying to focus on the others, was that of journalism and news media. Over the past few years we have witnessed how brazenly poor our media institutions have become, and especially during the pandemic, we have seen how dangerous misinformation can be. Echo chambers created by recommendation algorithms are emerging worldwide, and as a result, cross-ideological conversation is dwindling as people become more polarized in their views. Furthermore, the financial distress that the journalism industry is facing of late means that more and more news is censored in favour of the interests of advertisers — be they private institutions or the government itself. Gross underreporting of essential news plagues the media we see around us, and all of these concerns combined to create a problem that we wonder if, as students of design, we can perhaps begin to comprehend and address.

Problem Statement

For our design project, we will **attempt to address the rampant spread of misinformation and the trend of social and political polarization that we have observed in Indian news media over the past few years.**

Mind Map

We used the ideas and problems from the brainstorming we had done during the earlier stages regarding this problem but now that we had narrowed it down to a more focused and concise version in our problem statement, we decide to create a thorough mind map to flesh out all the aspects that this problem entails and some ideas for possible solutions.



https://miro.com/app/board/o9J_khiuTcA=

Secondary Research

We looked at a variety of existing news media channels and publications to understand how they address some of the challenges we had specified and to come up with what other problems we might encounter while trying to create something in the news media space. We looked at publications like The New Yorker, JacobinMag, The Wire, NewsLaundry, and many more. The chief things that we observed for each of these examples was:

- Economic Models
- Content-creation models
- Perceived quality
- Perceived legitimacy
- Publication Priorities
- Political Priorities or biases

We also looked at a number of articles and writings on these topics, one of which was a podcast interview of Abhinandan Sekhri, the founder of NewsLaundry. This source gave us quite a few insights on economic models of news media and how they affect the quality of news being provided. Some of the key insights were:

- News media's overdependence on advertisements compromises on the kind of news they can report and to the extent at which they can be critical of some figures.
- This was a problem that especially got worse during the pandemic when industries stopped advertising early on in the lockdown to cut costs, and the publications were dependent on government ads to sustain themselves.
- The problem is not fake news, but under-reporting of news. A single news story takes the spotlight, while other events that take place during that time, which may be far more important, get under-reported.
- This leads to the noisiest news and noisiest writers/anchors getting the most attention, leading again to needless sensationalization of news.

Secondary research is not entirely complete, however, as we will continue to look deeper into the subject, as a comprehensive knowledge of the nuances of a complex problem such as this is definitely a must in order to produce any useful results. In the coming days we will look deeper into alternate economic models, Imagined Communities (Benedict Anderson's theories), as well as community based journalism.

Primary Research

We took a three-pronged approach to primary research, a process that is still underway. Given the nature of the assignment we have given ourselves, research and a thorough understanding of the problem is of utmost importance, and thus we are devoting more time than originally accounted for to it.

The three phases of primary research are **survey, interviews, and collaboration**.

Survey, the first step in our approach to primary research, was essential to provide us with quantitative data, specific to the ideas and concepts we're considering and supplying insight on the user base we might want to consider. In order to encourage maximum participation, the survey was designed such that it could be answered within 45 seconds. The majority of the questions were either multiple choice or multiple select types, with only a few that required a subjective answer. By distributing the survey link in as broad a user base as we could (with the help of parents and colleagues) we attempted to have a fairly diverse set of responses. With these efforts, we were able to get **106 responses** to the form before closing it so that we could analyse the data we had collected. Many of the responses were carefully and skillfully worded, with many fantastic insights derived from the more subjective responses.

The questions of the survey were divided into three broad categories:

- Personal Context

These questions helped us understand *who* was filling out our survey — gaining this demographic context was essential to a wholesome analysis of the results of the questionnaire. Such questions included age, gender, education, occupation, and self-identified political orientation.

- News Media Consumption Habits

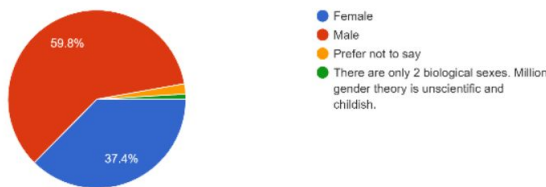
The section that followed attempted to understand the existing media habits of the survey-takers. Questions collected information on which news sources they use with specific examples, if they paid for news at all and if so, in what fashion, and on other similar topics. One subjective question here asked the responders to explain how they established the **reliability** of their news. Participants were also asked about their political expressiveness — how willing they are to seek political debate and with whom.

- Interaction with Online Media

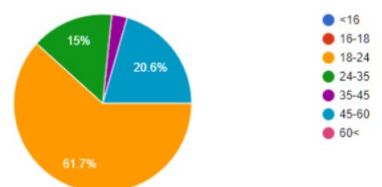
In line with the idea of a publication, we asked a few questions about interaction with online platforms and media to gather information on the plausibility of various ideas and concepts we might develop. People were asked about the trust they had in community-based information sources such as Wikipedia, along with if they have ever fact-checked or contributed to such a platform. In one question that yielded many fantastic insights, survey-takers were asked what they enjoy in news; that is, what is **appealing** to them in the presentation of news.

Some of the relevant results from the survey are published here, for reference.

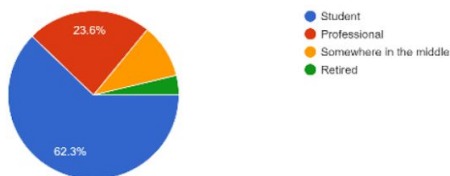
Gender
107 responses



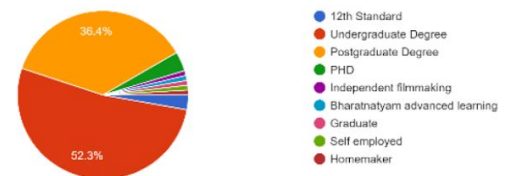
Age Group
107 responses



Occupation
106 responses

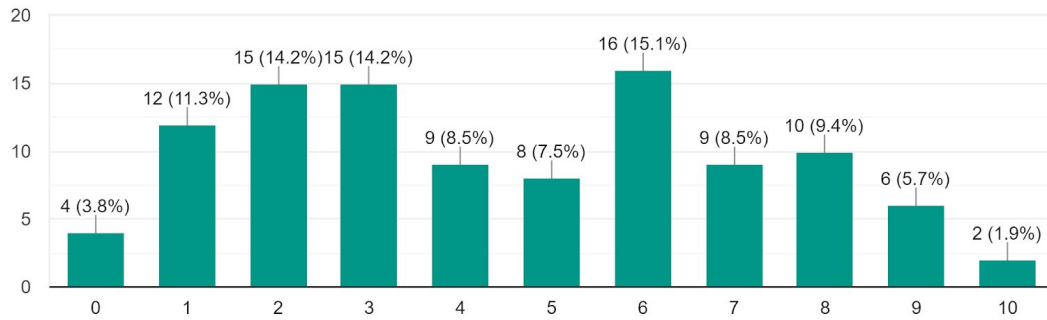


Education (Feel free to put in what you're currently pursuing)
107 responses



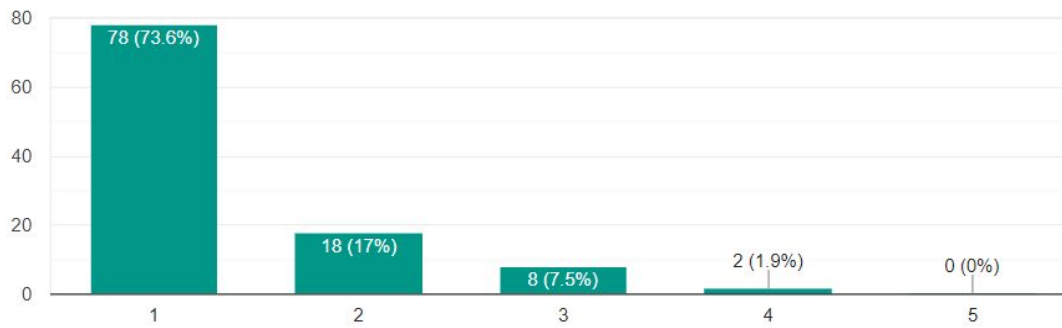
How vocal are you about politics?

106 responses



How often do you discuss politics on a public online forum? (Reddit, Quora, under news articles, Facebook, etc)

106 responses



Do you actively seek political opinions contrasting with yours for the the sake of discussion?

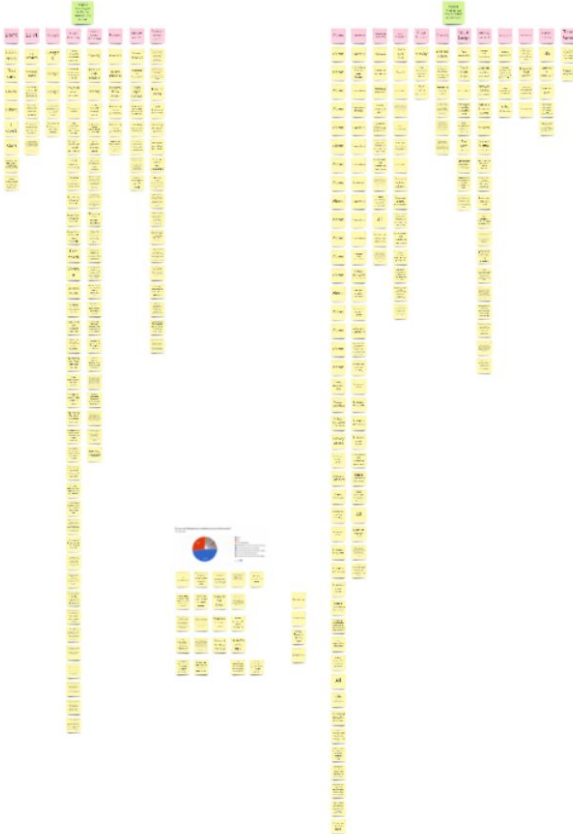
106 responses



The two subjective questions, about reliability and appeal of news, yielded many fantastic responses. We took all the responses into miro as individual sticky notes, and grouped them based on affinity to create a structure that serves as a bar graph for popularity of opinion, as well as a consolidation of the various types of responses.

For establishing the reliability of current news sources, the most popular method stated was that of **cross-checking** the news with other publications and news media. Others relied on their **trust** in certain news sources, **reviews** from friends and family, or judging article-to-article based on the **content** itself. Many admitted that they do not, or feel that one cannot verify news.

When it came to the appeal in news, most people said that they enjoyed **videos** in news, followed by **illustrations**, **interactive** and **data visualization** elements, and just outstanding writing! Many people preferred **comedy** or satire, some liked **notifications** to keep them up to date.



These insights will come into play once we begin managing our priorities for this project; when we attempt to define the shape and nature of our final product, these insights will play an important role in helping us make decisions.

The two other prongs of primary research, interviews and collaboration, are expanded upon in the next section.

Future Steps

We have laid out a tentative plan for the coming 4 weeks. The plan is divided into 3 major stages:

1. Research
2. Users
3. Conception

Within Primary Research, out of the 3 types of Primary Research we wanted to pursue, we were able to finish the first one, that is, the survey and quantitative information collection.

We're currently working towards setting up interviews with people. As for collaborating with people, we've already reached out to 3 people with this proposition. They would essentially guide us and give us feedback since each of them is somewhat experienced in this field.

1. **Prof. Sharmila** is an Associate Professor at the HSS department of IIT Bombay. She will be guiding us on how to go about content creation in particular. We were thus far able to have one meeting with her, in which we gained some wonderful direction and interesting resources to consider for secondary research.
2. **Paranjoy Guha Thakurta** is an acclaimed journalist and political commentator. He will be guiding us regarding some of the more holistic issues with contemporary Indian news media.
3. **Akademi Magazine** is a small but popular online Indian publication. We have set up a meeting with the founders Aarman Roy and Charu Pragya in the coming week to understand what are some real world problems that we might encounter while making our idea into a business.

Due to the nature of the problem we've chosen to work on, it is imperative that we do the research and user understanding part diligently. Hence we have also been careful to pace ourselves and not to commit to any specific design ideas prematurely.

References

1. [The problem with real news — and what we can do about it](#)
2. [Newslaundry co-founder Abhinandan Sekhri on building an alternative news model & paying to keep the news free! - The Indian Startup Show](#)
3. [Burst Our Bubble](#)
4. [Under Modi, India's Press Is Not So Free Anymore](#)
5. [What will the world be like after coronavirus? Four possible futures](#)
6. [Akademi Mag: An Independent Magazine](#)