



# hearsay

Social Web

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## Intro/Overview

As music enthusiasts, we sought to create a platform solution that would help support local music artists. Once we reflected on our recent experiences in college, we realized that we weren't very connected with the local music scene. Therefore, we thought it would be a great starting point to focus on connecting local artists with their communities.

Through background research, we realized that local artists normally post their content on online platforms such as SoundCloud and Bandcamp. Advertising is usually limited to traditional social media platforms, but word-of-mouth tends to be more popular and impactful. Self-promotion tends to be competitive, depending on the size of the city, and can lead to discouragement very quickly.

After working out the logistics, we settled on a platform where local artists would be able to post concerts/events and advertise them to the community while also receiving feedback that they can use to improve their craft and performance. People interested in discovering or supporting local artists would be given recommendations based on their preferences and most importantly, their current location.

Luckily, our proposed platform satisfies two groups - local artists and local concert goers. Local artists will benefit by receiving an additional marketing/promotion channel and constructive criticism, while local concert goers will be more connected with their communities and be able to engage with artists in a unique, mutually beneficial way.

## Related Work

### Literature Review

From the literature review done for this project, we discovered a few interesting findings about the current music industry. According to Digital Music News, 91 percent of all artists online are "undiscovered" (Digital Music News, 2014). These statistics come from Next Big Sound's 2013: The Year in Rewind, which used social media benchmarks to group artists and defined artist success by counting the number of record deals, TV appearances, and chartings on Billboard each artist has. NBS found that nearly 80 percent of artists receive less than one new Facebook like a day, and that mega-sized artists (those with a large enough online following) and mainstream artists make up 1.1 percent of all online artists yet they take up 87.3 percent of Facebook likes (Digital Music News, 2014). This means that a small amount of the online artist population controls a disproportionately large amount of the online following. This establishes a tough barrier of entry for new artists that are trying to break onto the scene.

What's also difficult for new indie artists, as we found out, is booking gigs (New Artist Model 2016). Before any artist works with a booking agent, he or she has to start out by booking their own gigs and concerts. However, this is certainly easier said than done. There are a multitude of artists competing for venues at any given night. New artists have to hopelessly cold call promoters and venue owners only to get turned down. For venue owners, they only want to book artists with experience, as this decreases their risk of not selling enough tickets for a performance. With that being said, up and coming artists trying to perform in

front of a live audience for the first time has to have a large online following presence, one that will allow venue owners to have the trust to book them for the first time.

In terms of interacting with fans, an article by California State University Signal found from interviewing a few local artists that artists prefer “interacting with fans physically” over interacting and engaging with them online on social media (CSU Signal 2018). At these shows, artists are able to connect with people, find out more about their personal life and “what brings them to shows” (CSU Signal 2018). The artists also stated that there is a good sense of comradery between local, up and coming artists. If a fellow musical artist is in need of something another can provide, someone is always more than willing to help. If a local artist is having a show in the area, others would try their best to attend and tell others to check them out.

To summarize, our literature review and research reiterated our assumption that people are interested in small, local music artists, artists that represent the same neighborhood or city as themselves. We found that the current music industry has an incredibly high barrier of entry due to the small number of well-known artists that are controlling a unproportionally large number of followers online and garnering a majority of the recognition. This makes it incredibly hard for smaller artists to get started since there are a lot of other musical artists all competing for a much smaller audience. Without this recognition or following online, it makes it tremendously difficult for these local artists to book their first concert or show because venue owners aren’t willing to take risks on an artist that may or may not have a lot of fans.

The objective of this project is to help those that are interested in indie music find and discover some of the artists in their local area. Since artists don’t prefer to interact with fans on an online platform, users will instead be exposed to all the upcoming events and shows that are happening in hopes that they are encouraged to attend. At these events, fans can share their experiences for others to see. These experiences can come in the form of recorded videos, a timelapse of their heart rate or motion tracking, or just comments about specific times during the show that the fan really enjoyed. With all of these factors combined, we hope to help local artists better share their music and increase their online following so that they can one day book their first gig. We hope to help local fans better discover artists in their community and hopefully also discover some new, fresh indie music.

## **Competitive Analysis**

Our research on related products and platforms in this space focused on web and mobile applications that had the mission of connecting artists with fans or booking agencies. With this focus, the platforms we examined for competitive analysis and to inform our own app design were ICONN, SongKick, BandsInTown, and SoundCloud. From these platforms our team realized that few platforms focused on smaller, independent, artists. Most site or apps primarily targeted bigger established names and the fans of those established artists. Additionally, very few of these existing platforms facilitated an environment or interaction where social connection could happen through or as a result of the music. Of these platforms, SoundCloud fulfilled these criteria the best. SoundCloud effectively promotes independent artists by making it easy to upload and share music. The SoundCloud platform also encourages listener feedback and community engagement by allowing the listener to comment on certain sections or timestamps in the song. Because Sound Cloud

does both of these effectively, is the app we chose to primarily engage with when designing our own approach to social connectivity and community engagement through hearsay.

### ICONN (Ice Connect)

ICONN (also known as Ice Connect) was started by Ja Rule after the infamous failure of the "Fyre" app, which had a very similar initiative. ICONN is a talent booking agency that allows users to securely connect with and book artists, actors, influencers, and models for private events and appearances. Their mission statement is to "solve the decades-old problems that entertainers have had with negotiating terms, executing agreements and getting paid." Iconn is built on a foundation of verified talent buyers and a digital booking management and payment system that allows a secure one-to-one connection between both parties. ICONN partners with artists and agencies to deliver a selection of celebrities that the user can hire through the site.

### Songkick

Songkick is an American technology company that provides concert discovery services and ticket sales for live music events. Songkick's web and mobile app allows users to track touring artists, receive alerts for concerts in their area and purchase tickets to shows, using technology and services that power ticket sales on behalf of artists.

### BandsInTown

Bandsintown is a music website, billed as a "platform where artists and fans connect". The site allows users to receive notifications about tours and bands playing in the user's area. It also has tools for artists to manage tour dates. The platform consists of three different applications: Bandsintown Concerts, Bandsintown Manager, and Bandsintown Promoter.

Bandsintown Concerts is a concert discovery app. The app uses data from a user's iTunes library, Facebook Likes, Spotify, Rdio, Google Play and Twitter accounts to pre-populate a customized list of tracked artists and local concert recommendations. Tour dates are collected from more than 200 primary ticket providers and booking agencies, as well as the artists directly.

Bandsintown Manager is a suite of concert marketing tools for performers that allows them to list tour dates, promote events and facilitate direct contact with their fans. Tour dates are loaded into Bandsintown Manager. The app is used by many highly prominent musicians in the industry.

Bandsintown Promoter offers promoters, venues and labels insights and direct access to concert-goers based on their music taste and location in key markets. The platform identifies the number of "Trackers," or Bandsintown users following a specific artist in certain geographic locations.

### SoundCloud

SoundCloud is an online audio distribution platform and music sharing platform that enables its users to upload, promote, and share audio. SoundCloud is available as both a web app and a mobile app, and is most effective for new or independent artists due to the low barrier of entry for posting music online. Since this low barrier of entry facilitates

newer or less established artists, it is also a platform that promotes feedback and cultivation of new talent by users. Listeners can comment on certain parts of the song with timestamps, or take the music and remix it for their own profile. The web application is more regularly used than the mobile app, which has received reviews that are not entirely positive.

## Method

### Initial Research & Surveys

After we gathered information in our literature review and performed a competitive analysis, we analyzed the results to come up with meaningful questions for the surveys that we sent out to both concert goers and artists. We developed a survey for concert goers and an interview for artists in order to gain a detailed understanding of their current interactions and needs regarding either attending or performing at concerts.

Once we had developed an initial list of questions, we met with the professor to refine them and ensure that we were avoiding any potential bias. The first part of the survey asks if people would consider themselves, “concert goers,” or not. For the purpose of the survey, we defined a “concert goer” as someone who attends at least three or more concerts per year. From there, we ask how they normally find out about concerts and how they find out about new local artists performances. We also inquire about what current ticketing platforms they use in order to book their tickets for concerts and if they would use current platforms for finding out about concerts or buying tickets if they were more easy to use. The last part of our survey targets the interactions between concert goers and artists; we ask how they currently provide feedback, how important it is to engage socially with the local music community, and if they would be interested in an app that allowed them to provide feedback and find out about local performances in an easy way.

Our target number of surveys completed was 30; after a week of sending out the survey, we collected 28 responses. From the 28 responses, around one-third of the responses were from non-concert goers. Using the perspectives of both non-concert goers and concert goers and keeping their needs in mind, we began to brainstorm the first version of our prototype.

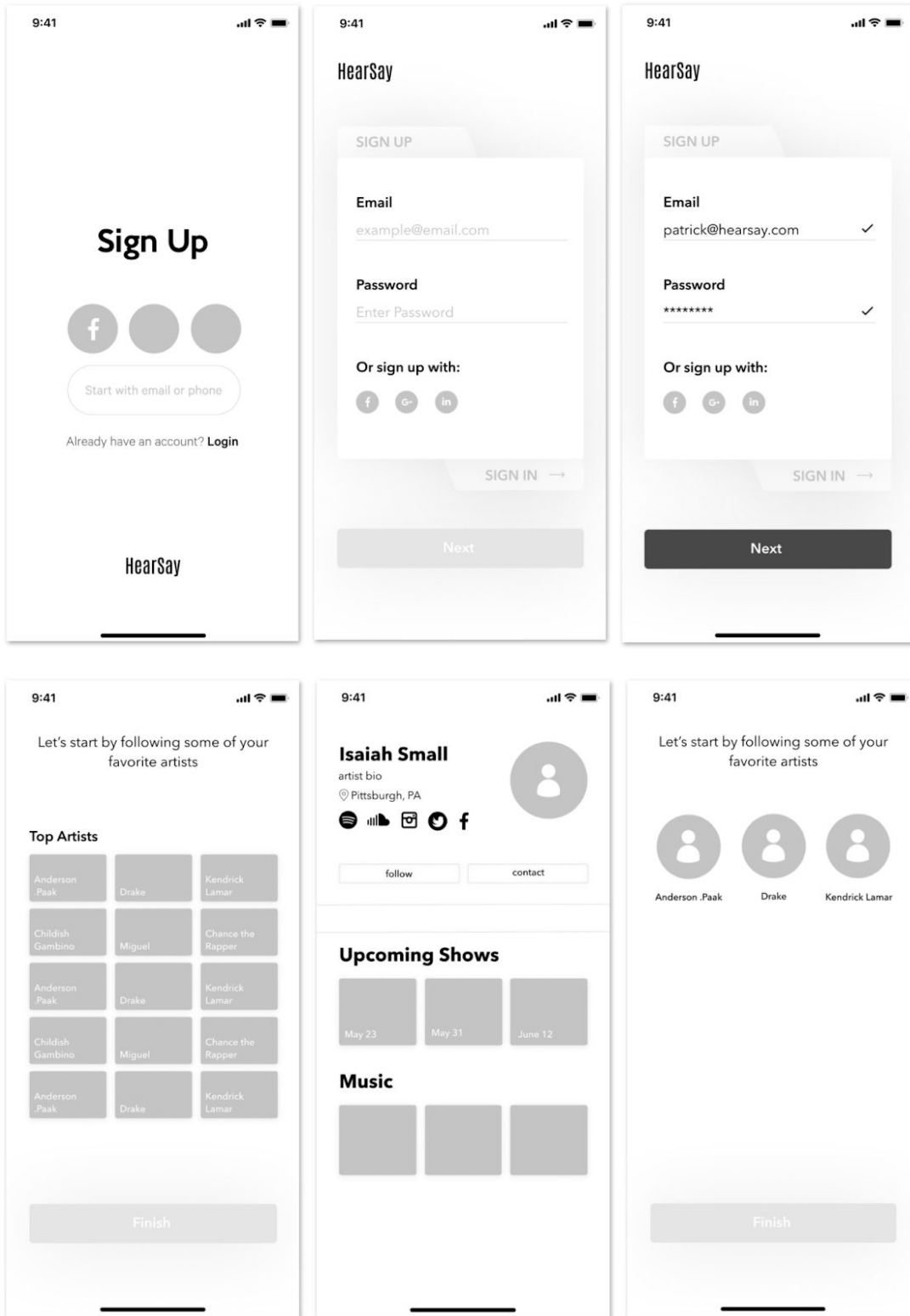
For local artists, we decided to conduct in-depth interviews rather than a survey. We asked questions about classifying them as artists (ex. genre, fan size), advertising practices and preferences, openness to feedback, importance of community, positive/negative experiences, and their plans going forward. Since we chose an interview format, we left most of the questions open-ended, which led to very rich findings and quotes. We were aiming for 5 interviews, and we were lucky enough to accomplish this with a variety of students and locals.

### Initial Prototyping

For our initial prototype, we focused on the onboarding and profile configuration experience of a new user. To encourage active engagement, we wanted new users to be able to choose the artists and genres they already liked, and be able to have these preferences inform the suggested artists in the area that they were being shown. The low-fi prototype was used largely for getting initial feedback and responses from our user testing

group, to gain insight as to their response to such an app and also to gain insight on basic usability in the app we were designing.

**Low-Fidelity Prototype Screens:**



**Initial User Testing**

In our first low-fidelity prototype, we had four screens: a sign up screen, a log-in screen, an artist selection screen, and an artist home page. In order to test the concert goers on these initial screens, we conducted a cognitive walkthrough so that we could examine whether the initial screens of our app were intuitive or not. Throughout all of the testing we asked users to think-aloud so that we would be able to hear how they were feeling about our app and if the direction was clear. We began by asking the user to sign up on the first screen and we would manually change it to the next screen once the user had signed up correctly; if a user was not correct or wondered something about the screens, we encouraged them to ask and wrote down concerns/confusions. From there, we asked users to select their favorite artists. On the final screen, we asked concert goer users to walk us through each section of the artist profile; we then followed up with them to see if it was lacking any features that could improve its usage.

The same process was carried out for artists. We displayed our initial screens and described what the interactions would look like for both parties. During this stage, we were given very feedback (described later on) that was very influential in our final prototype.

### **High-Fidelity Prototyping**

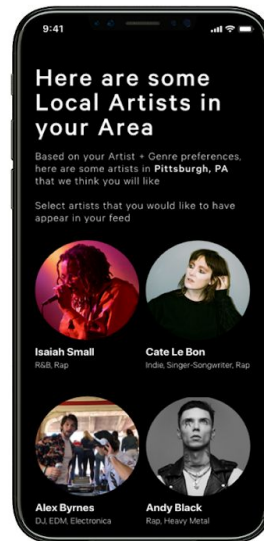
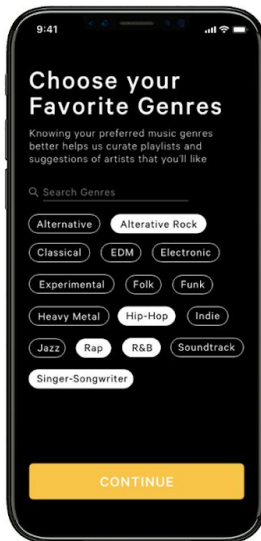
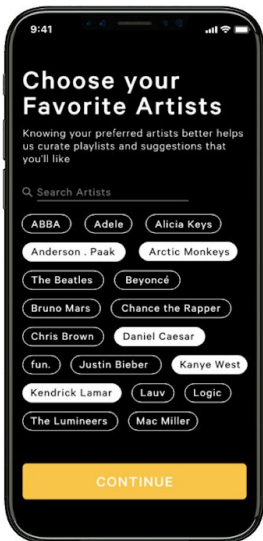
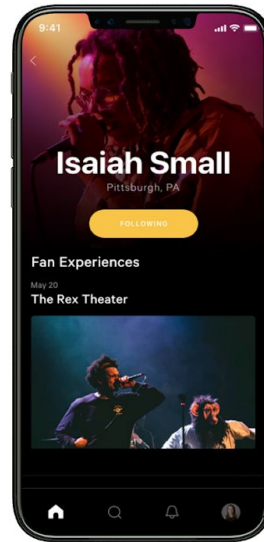
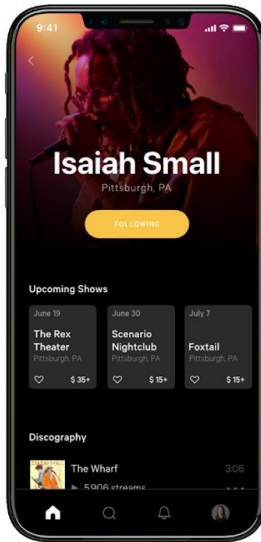
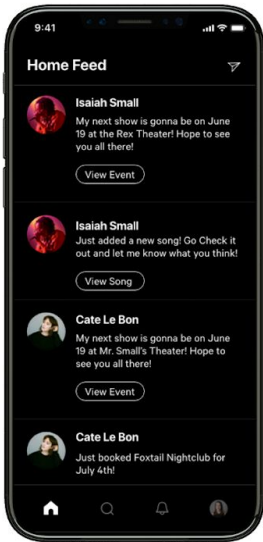
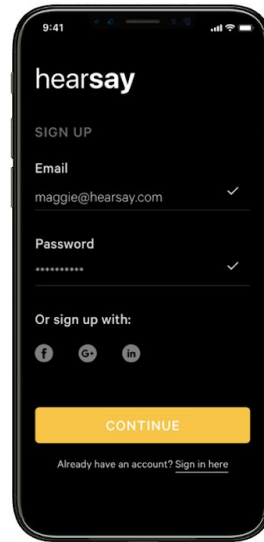
The high fidelity prototype feature the finished screens for onboarding, as well as the finished screens for the user and artists home pages, and explore pages for new artists. In our initial feedback from both users and the professor advising the direction of the project, it was suggested that we add a feature that promotes social connection more so than a comments or feedback page would. In response to this feedback we designed a feature that would allow users to upload "Fan Experiences" to the artists page. These we designed to be in time fan reaction to music such as heart rate and comments. Users could connect a smartwatch or fitbit to the app, and during concerts add their heart rate through the set to the collection of the other attendees at that event to see how engaged or excited the audience was with the artist.

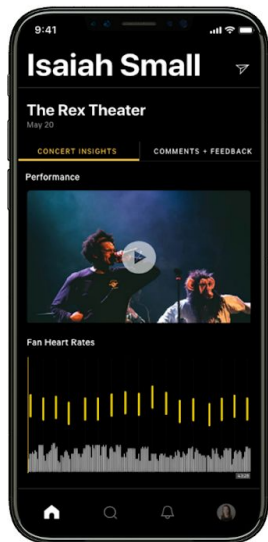
#### **Link to Final Prototype:**

<https://xd.adobe.com/view/f2410df0-7a2e-4378-704f-e448d3e76206-8470/?fullscreen>

#### **High-Fidelity Prototype Screens:**







## Final User Testing

In our final high-fidelity prototype, we did a similar style of testing as the low-fidelity screens but much more in depth. We used Adobe XD so that the user could again do a cognitive walk-through but this one would feel a lot closer to what the real experience would be. Again, the user fills out their information and selects their favorite genres and artists; from these selections, recommendations about local artists are created. We then asked users to explore the home feed and review the artists profiles and events that they could find. Once they did an initial look at the profiles, we asked them to further explore Isaiah Small's profile and find the fan experiences section. Users were taken to the concert insights page where we explained that in order to participate in this experience that they would need to connect their smart watch so that it could track their heart rate. We asked if they could explain the "Fan Heart Rates" graph in order to see if it was intuitive at first use to users.

While our final prototype was designed for concert-goers, we were still able to effectively run user tests with the local artists. We ran them through the same process and concert goers and described what the sign up and page management process would look like from their end.

## Results

### Results from Concert Goers

Throughout the course of this project, we gained a detailed understanding of the interactions that concert goers and artists currently have; as explained earlier, we have iterated on hearsay in an attempt to facilitate face-to-face connections between concert goers and artists, as well as interactions on the platform among concert goers. When we sent out our initial surveys to concert goers we interestingly found that there was a disconnect between how concert goers discover new concerts (usually by word of mouth) and the amount they rated how important social interaction with the local music community was. When users were asked, "How do you normally find new local artists

concerts to attend?," the majority of them answered either on Facebook or other forms of social media where they had conversations with their friends or in-person conversations with their friends. From this finding, we initially thought that people would be interested in engaging socially with the local music community; however, when we asked people to rate how important this was, around 50% rated themselves neutral. This may be due to the term, "local music community," rather than specifying friends or local artists. In terms of the ways that we found that people currently provide feedback to the artists' regarding their performance/music, most people said Instagram's features like direct messages, comments, or tagging the artists in an Instagram story. When we assessed the current issues that people had with current ticketing platforms, they communicated that they did not like these platforms because of the large fees that appear when you are finalizing a purchase; despite their frustration, about 43% of people said that if current methods were easier to use, that they would be encouraged to attend more local concerts. Finally, when asked if people would be interested in an app that would allow them to provide feedback to local artists, around 84.6% of people said, "Yes." These results helped us move forward in further developing the decisions around the concert-goers' actions and reassured us that our concept would be one that concert goers are interested in exploring.

After our first lo-fi iteration of Hearsay, we found that we should improve a few features. First, on the onboarding phase of the application, the user recommended a sort function where they are able to sort by top artist and by genre. More specifically, to make the onboarding process less intensive on scrolling, we had the idea of displaying 10 artists per genre, but also including a link that would bring the user to more artists of a certain genre. In addition, to prevent crowding on the onboarding page, we could use a dropdown to select genre rather than scroll. For our second iteration of Hearsay, we included a few new features that entailed user testing - our heart rate monitor and geolocator. In the perspective of concert goers, we got a few points of feedback both good and bad. One success of our prototype, according to one of the users, was that we included interesting way of integrating a health feature into a social media application. They said that they had never used a heart rate monitor outside of a fitness setting, and especially not in a way to increase social interaction. On the flip side, some things we still need to be cognizant of and continue to work on is to increase the ease of use of our application and lower barriers to use. For example, our heart rate monitor requires extraneous technology like apple watches and fitbits. However, this will isolate our users.

## **Results from Artists**

From the artist interviews, we were able to gather very valuable findings. We first realized that most of them primarily use SoundCloud to share their music and really care about bringing attention to their new music. To our surprise, they were all very open to feedback, especially before they ventured out to more "legit" platforms such as Spotify and Apple Music. Lastly, they were all very proud to represent their hometowns. From these insights, we decided to include links to their SoundCloud pages, a like/dislike function and comments (with an anonymous option), and a hometown tag (and other relevant info) to the artist bio.

After presenting the prototype, we receiving very positive reactions from the artists. They enjoyed the design of the layout, found the app to be a very unique outlet for interacting with fans, and loved the section with fan videos and insights. However, some concerns included fans not spending enough time on the app and having to manage their content on

another platform. While the project timeline didn't allow us to fully address these issues, we found them to be less concerning than the artists' original constructive criticism.

## Discussion

After going through literature exemplars, we found that we wanted to improve the current situation for discovery of new artists. Because mega sized artists dominate internet clicks, we needed to find new and novel ways for concert goers to discover and interact with local artists. Our application design focused on breaking down the high barriers to entry (especially in terms of discovery) in the music industry.

We would be remiss to mention the unforeseen drawbacks of our app. For example, our heart rate monitor would segregate our users financially. Those who can afford heart rate trackers such as apple watches and fitbits would have access to all the application features. However, those who do not have the means to acquire external trackers would not be able to partake in all of the application's social features. Thus, when updating and further iterating our application, we need to be wary of extraneous extensions and ensure all of our users are offered the same service. One of the ways we could iterate the heart rate feature is to change it to a speedometer feature. This would be easier to access because smartphones already have built-in or free speedometer applications.

Furthermore, our users were confused about how to use our heart rate feature, and specifically why it was relevant. To combat this confusion, we wanted to include an annotation feature where users can pinpoint specific spikes in their heart rate or movement speeds (tracked by speedometer) and add meaningful notes. These annotations would be shared with their friends on the application, and their friends would also be able to comment on the specific annotations. We decided to create a more extensive back and forth between users to increase the interactions between concert goers. On the flip side, concert goers would be able to upload their annotations and movement speeds to the artist's page. Artists would then be able to see how their audience is reacting to them. By being able to visualize the excitement of their audience via increased movement speed, artists are able to gather feedback about specific instances in the performance where audiences are reacting well to their content. They then can use this information to cater to their audiences.

In the future, we would like to iterate the application further and continue to integrate more unique features that increase social interaction between both concert goers and between concert goers and artists.

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