

# **TCKConnect: A platform for Adult Third Culture Kids to find a sense of belonging**

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# Abstract

Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) represent a unique demographic who spent their formative years in a country (or countries) other than their parent's passport culture, often leading to rootlessness and challenges in forming a stable sense of identity and belonging. ATCKs experience feelings of disconnection from non-ATCKs due to their unique backgrounds, emphasizing the ongoing challenge of finding meaningful connections and a sense of community. Recognizing the need for belonging through shared experiences, and drawing from my personal experience as an ATCK, this research addresses the gap in existing social platforms by proposing TCKConnect, a geolocation-based mobile app designed to foster in-person meetups and support the formation of local communities among ATCKs.

Employing the Double Diamond Model, a structured, design methodology, this thesis integrates user-centered design principles and user and usability testing. Beyond the app, the project includes an interactive online documentary that represents the collected data and research, showcasing the ATCK experience through a narrative format.

# Acknowledgments

I would first like to acknowledge the ancestral territories of the Mississauga of the Credit, the Anishinaabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples, who are the original custodians of the land on which we live, work, and create.

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# **Dedication**

To my family and friends.

To my parents, my mother, Mrs. Shrutika Khamkar, and father, Mr. Sudesh Khamkar, whose endless support, encouragement and belief in me have been my foundation.

To my sister, Ms. Ketaki Khamkar, who has been a constant source of strength and inspiration.

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# Keywords and Terminology

Here are keywords that are frequently used in this paper:

1. **Third Culture Kids (TCKs) or Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs):** Third Culture Kids (TCKs) refer to individuals who have accompanied their parents to live most, if not all, of their childhoods and developmental years outside of the country or countries from which they hold a passport. The first culture of such individuals refers to the culture of the country/culture from which the parents originated, the second culture refers to the culture in which the family currently resides, and the third culture refers to the distinct cultural ties among all third culture individuals that share no connection to the first two cultures. This 'third culture' could be a mix of multiple different cultures. The term applies to both adults and children, as the term *kid* refers to the individual's formative or developmental years. However, for clarification, sometimes the term adult third culture kid (ATCK) is used.
2. **Belonging:** A common struggle for TCKs is feeling that they don't fully belong to any one culture. Whether it's in their parents' home country, or the country or countries they grew up in, TCKs may feel like outsiders. This challenge can create feelings of isolation or confusion about where they truly fit in. The TCK builds relationships to all these cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture are assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of the same background.
3. **Rootlessness:** While TCKs may adapt quickly to new places, they may also experience feelings of rootlessness, lacking a true sense of home. This refers to the effects of geographical mobility on an individual, wherein they may feel as though they have no ties or connection to any particular place or community group. This can be accompanied with a reduced sense of belonging, or feelings of dissonance between oneself and their culture(s).

# Chapter 1: Introduction

This section provides a brief overview of the research motivation and summary, including the problem statement, hypothesis and research questions, significance and contributions, methodology, scope, and limitations of the research. It concludes with an outline of the thesis structure by chapter.

## 1.1 Research Motivations

Growing up in a foreign country with the understanding that our stay was temporary instilled a deep sense of impermanence, profoundly shaping my identity. This transient childhood transitioned into another form of displacement when I returned to my hometown, Pune, India at 18, experiencing a surprising and disorienting “reverse cultural shock”. Returning to a passport country where they appear similar but feel foreign can create social and academic challenges (Pollock & Van Reken, 2017). Despite being in my “home” country, I felt like a hidden immigrant, struggling to find connections and a true sense of belonging, carrying with me the complex identity formed during those years of temporary residence.

As an Adult Third Culture Kid (ATCK) who personally grappled with these challenges, especially during my young adulthood, I was inspired to contribute to the research surrounding ATCKs. I am motivated to create a platform that helps fellow ATCKs find a sense of belonging by connecting with one another, an online resource I wish had existed during my own challenging transition.

I ultimately developed connections and became a well-adjusted adult, however, I observed significant disparities among my school friends who returned to their home countries. Some navigated the reintegration process smoothly, primarily because they had connections with other ATCKs. Others, however, faced similar struggles to mine, particularly when they lacked a support network of fellow third culture individuals.

As a Master of Design candidate in the Digital Futures program at OCAD University, my goal is to contribute to the ATCK community by developing innovative design solutions.

My background in architecture has always centered on designing for users, a passion that naturally evolved from physical to digital spaces. Principles like visual representation of the product, features, spatial organization, and user-centered design, naturally translated into digital product design or UI/UX, where I now focus on creating intuitive digital experiences through human-centered design and usability research. This thesis has given me an opportunity to design a digital tool that could enable ATCKs to connect, facilitate in-person meetups, and ultimately discover a more profound sense of belonging.

## 1.2 Research Summary

### 1.2.1 Problem Statement

This study considers one of the main challenges faced by ATCKs: the challenge to find a sense of belonging. “Most people yearn to belong, whether it be to a place or a group of people. For ATCKs, belonging to a place is less likely due to their high childhood mobility, but belonging through relationships is an achievable reality”. (Lyons Shelly, 2022). ATCKs often grow up in different and/or multiple cultural environments and can feel disconnected from a single “home”. This absence of a connection to a specific place frequently results in feelings of rootlessness, disconnection, and isolation, particularly as they transition into adulthood.

The lack of structured opportunities for ATCKs to connect with one another in adulthood leaves many without a community to relate to. This thesis addresses this gap by introducing TCKConnect, a platform designed to foster a sense of belonging through in-person meetups and shared experiences. By creating an app for ATCKs to connect and meet, TCKConnect aims to alleviate the feelings of rootlessness and disconnection that many face.

### 1.2.2 Hypothesis and Research Questions

Studies show that in-person interactions contribute to better mental health, reduce feelings of isolation, and create a deeper emotional bond compared to online communication (PMAC, 2021). While methods such as word-of-mouth or personal networks can facilitate connections, they are often limited in accessibility, scalability, and spontaneity. These traditional approaches require pre-existing networks which may not always be available to ATCKs. A digital platform offers a scalable and efficient solution by providing ATCKs with immediate access to a network of like-minded individuals, regardless of where they are. A geolocation-based app allows users to discover and connect with fellow ATCKs nearby, enabling them to organize or join informal meetups at their convenience.

#### Primary Question

How can the design of a geolocation based mobile app help Adult Third Culture Kids find a sense of belonging and community?

#### Secondary Questions

How do Adult Third Culture Kids construct and understand 'belonging' in the absence of a traditional geographic home?

What are the unique social and cultural connectivity needs of Adult Third Culture Kids that are not currently met by existing social media platforms?

### 1.2.3 Significance and Contributions

This thesis contributes to the study of ATCKs who are seeking their sense of belonging and identity. By addressing concepts such as rootlessness, the hidden immigrant phenomenon, and the multifaceted nature of ATCK identity, this study aims to provide valuable insights into their unique lived experiences.

In addition to advancing academic research, this thesis contributes to the field of User Interface and User Experience (UI/UX) design by exploring how digital platforms can be tailored to meet the specific connectivity needs of ATCKs. The proposed high-fidelity Figma design prototype introduces innovative design solutions that facilitate in-person meetups, addressing gaps in existing social platforms. Through this work, the thesis bridges the domains of ATCK studies and UI/UX design, demonstrating how digital tools can be harnessed to foster belonging and connection.

### 1.2.4 Approach and Methodology

The Double Diamond Model was employed as a part of my methodology, a widely used framework in UX design that was developed by the British Design Council in 2003. The model emerged from a need to standardize how design processes were described and managed across different disciplines.

The Double Diamond divides the design process into four distinct phases: Discover (questioning the challenge and researching user needs), Define (making sense of findings and creating a clear design brief), Develop (creating and testing multiple potential solutions), and Deliver (selecting and launching the final solution). The model's enduring value lies in its versatility and accessibility - it can be used to assess varied project types, facilitate strategic discussions, shape research approaches, and help teams navigate between divergent and convergent thinking phases.

The framework's continued relevance after 20+ years stems from its deliberate simplicity and adaptability across various contexts, from business to social innovation. It has become a fundamental part of design language worldwide, serving both design practitioners and non-design audiences including policy makers, CEOs, and educators.

### 1.2.5 Scope and limitations

The focus of this research is to design a high-fidelity Figma prototype, low fidelity technical prototype of a mobile app specifically curated for ATCKs to find a sense of belonging through local meetups and through finding connections. However, several limitations are inherent to the scope of this graduate thesis project.

First, the app will remain a prototype and will not be fully coded or released. It is a conceptual design that does not include functionality for storing user data or live deployment. Second, user research, including surveys and feedback, was conducted with a small sample size of 28 survey respondents and 9 usability test participants. 15–20% margin of error at a 90% confidence level is expected. Additionally, the research period was constrained to 10 months, limiting the opportunity for long-term studies, large-group usability testing, and further iterations of the prototype.

## **Chapter Overview**

Chapter 2 contains a background review of the literature and contextual sources from relevant academic fields including TCKs and their transition into ATCKs, the unique challenges they face regarding belonging and identity, rootlessness, the challenges of maintaining connections, and the power of shared experiences.

Chapter 3 discusses the methods and methodology employed in the Double Diamond Model for the research. This structured approach supports a user-centered design for creating a platform tailored to ATCK needs.

Chapter 4 presents the project elements and prototypes, including the TCKConnect app; interactive tools like a chatbot that was later eliminated from the app; and a web documentary that highlights the survey results described in the next chapter. Additionally, a participatory exhibit provides a wall of post it notes that speaks to the feeling of having a “home”, displaying information from the survey.

Chapter 5 consists of the Initial Online Survey that received 28 responses. It highlights various topics and themes that ATCKs relate to that were addressed in the literature review. This chapter also includes the analysis of Usability Testing conducted both in-person and online. A detailed breakdown of both surveys, and the quantitative and qualitative analyses of both.

Chapter 6 discusses the conclusion, outcomes and contributions of this project and the plans for future research, which is to partner with TCKGlobal’s administrators and bring this app to reality.

# Chapter 2: A Literature Review on Identity, Belonging, and the Need for Connection

## 2.1 Overview

As introduced in the book *Third Culture Kids* by Pollock & Van Reken, (2017), countless people of almost every nationality and from a great variety of backgrounds identify with the feeling of not fully belonging anywhere in the world. They may be North Americans who grew up in Singapore, they may also be Japanese children growing up in Australia, British children raised in China, Turkish youth reared in Germany, African children living in Canada, or the child of a Norwegian father and a Thai mother growing up in Argentina. All of them have one thing in common: they are spending, or have spent, at least part of their childhood in countries and cultures other than their original culture. They are third culture kids (TCKs) or, by now, adult TCKs (ATCKs).

ATCKs represent a unique demographic whose formative years were spent in cultures different from their parents' home culture (Pollock & Van Reken, 2017). This population faces distinctive challenges in identity formation, belonging, and social connection that persist well into adulthood. This literature review examines these challenges, with particular focus on how they manifest in adulthood and the critical importance of connection with others of similar background. Furthermore, it explores the current support systems available to ATCKs and identifies gaps that need to be addressed.

## 2.2 Defining TCKs and ATCKs

### 2.2.1 Origins and Evolution of the Term

The term "Third Culture Kid" (TCK) was first coined by Ruth Useem in the 1950s during her observations as an American expatriate in India (Tan et al., 2021). The definition has evolved to encompass specific characteristics that distinguish TCKs from other cross-cultural populations. Modern definitions of TCKs encompass three essential elements. The first is cross-national experiences during developmental years, specifically before age 18. The second requirement involves spending at least one continuous year away from a parent's passport country. Finally, the temporary nature of the stay is a defining feature (Pollock & Van Reken, 2017; Tan et al., 2021).

### 2.2.2 Distinction of TCKs and Immigrant children

A crucial distinction exists between TCKs and immigrant children, centered on international mobility and expectations of belonging. While immigrant children's families



typically intend to settle permanently in their new country, TCKs face inherent temporality with no expectation of belonging in the host country (Meier, 2015). This fundamental difference makes the TCK experience “inherently dynamic, mobile, and forever shifting” (Schaetti & Ramsey, 1999), significantly impacting their sense of identity and belonging.

### 2.2.3 Transition from TCK to ATCK

As TCKs mature, they carry their experiences into adulthood, becoming Adult TCKs. This transition has both merits and challenges, as they retain the identities formed during childhood, which can sometimes lead to delayed adolescence, and prolonged struggles in establishing a sense of self.

## 2.3 The Challenge of Identity Formation and Belonging

### 2.3.1 The Complex Nature of ATCK Identity

The identity of an ATCK is complex, shaped by a continuous negotiation between multiple cultural influences. Unlike their peers, ATCKs often lack a stable cultural anchor, leading them to develop what Moore and Barker (2012) describe as a “multiplicity of identity.” This multiplicity allows them to shift between cultural identities as situations demand, but it can also blur the boundaries of a cohesive self. Social Identity Theory suggests that individuals derive a sense of self from group associations; for ATCKs, however, the absence of a stable cultural group complicates this process, often extending the identity formation period into adulthood. (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Recent studies reinforce this challenge. Jones et al. (2022) conducted a systematic review of TCK adjustment and found that adolescence remains a particularly sensitive period for identity formation, as ATCKs must reconcile multiple cultural frameworks while navigating social expectations. The study highlights that many ATCKs experience extended periods of identity exploration, often into their early adult years, due to the transient nature of their upbringing and lack of a singular cultural belonging. This finding aligns with earlier research by Barringer (2001), who found that TCKs often experience prolonged adolescence due to difficulty in identity formation. Similarly, Useem and Cottrell (1993a) indicated that TCKs might continue experiencing identity challenges well into their twenties. Downie’s (1976) exploratory study of college-entering TCKs revealed high levels of identity management upon re-entry into the United States, further emphasizing the complexity of this process. Additionally, the research emphasizes that peer relationships play a significant role in stabilizing identity, as ATCKs often rely on friendships with other globally mobile individuals rather than cultural heritage for a sense of self.

### 2.3.2 Rootlessness

For many ATCKs, the concept of “home” is difficult to define. Unlike those who grow up rooted in one place, ATCKs experience “home” as a fluid concept that is less about place and more about relationships with those who share similar experiences. This belonging “everywhere but nowhere” phenomenon leads to a sense of rootlessness, with many ATCKs dreading the question “Where are you from?” as it highlights the instability of their cultural identity (Fail, 1996). Such rootlessness can affect ATCKs’ sense of permanence and continuity, contributing to a feeling of dislocation.

### 2.3.3 Hidden Immigrant

A unique challenge faced by ATCKs is the “hidden immigrant” phenomenon. This describes individuals who, though they resemble locals in their passport country, feel like outsiders due to a lack of shared cultural experiences. ATCKs often find themselves struggling to meet cultural expectations they do not fully understand, leading to an internal sense of disconnect despite outward similarities. Gilbert (2008) emphasizes that this experience of being a hidden immigrant can exacerbate feelings of isolation, as ATCKs may not feel “at home” even in their passport country.

## 2.4 Challenges in Maintaining Connections

### 2.4.1 Relationship Formation Patterns

ATCKs often face distinctive challenges in forming close relationships due to their early experiences of transient connections. Frequent relocations, goodbyes, and losses contribute to unresolved grief that persists into adulthood (Pollock & Van Reken, 2017). To cope, many ATCKs develop strategies like emotional detachment, which, while protective, can hinder their ability to form stable, lasting relationships (Lijadi & van Schalkwyk, 2014). Doherty et al. (2023), further note that ATCKs are “significantly less comfortable forming close relationships” than their non-ATCK peers, highlighting the lasting effects of these early adaptive patterns.

### 2.4.2 Re-entry Struggles

Re-entry poses unique difficulties for ATCKs, often manifesting as reverse culture shock. As mentioned in Section 1.1 (Research Motivations), reverse culture shock happens when one returns to their passport country where they appear similar but feel foreign can create social and academic challenges (Pollock & Van Reken, 2017). Many ATCKs experience alienation from family and peers who may lack an understanding of their international background, leading to strained family dynamics and challenges in adjusting to a predominantly monocultural environment (Gaw, 1995; McLachlan, 2005). This sense of disconnection upon re-entry

highlights the broader identity and belonging struggles ATCKs face as they navigate contrasting cultural expectations.

## **2.5 The Power of Shared Experience**

### **2.5.1 The Psychology of Belonging**

Belonging is an essential human need, central to mental health and well-being. Maslow's hierarchy of needs places belonging just above physical and safety needs, underscoring its fundamental importance for emotional stability and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). For ATCKs, whose identities are shaped by frequent cultural transitions, finding a stable sense of belonging is particularly challenging (Pollock & Van Reken, 2017). Rather than grounding their sense of belonging in geographic roots, many ATCKs find this need met through connections with individuals who share similar cross-cultural experiences, allowing them to experience understanding and acceptance within a community of shared backgrounds (Fail et al., 2004).

### **2.5.2 Connection Through Shared Experience**

Research indicates that ATCKs often experience an 'instant recognition' when encountering others with similar backgrounds, a phenomenon where shared experiences foster a deep sense of familiarity and validation without the need for extensive explanation (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). This shared experience helps ATCKs form meaningful relationships that offer stability within their otherwise fluid identities, facilitating connections that can anchor them through periods of change and transition (Pollock & Van Reken, 2017).

In examining the sense of belonging among ATCKs, recent findings from Finder's (2020) study reveal that 133 participants reported a lack of belonging, while 51 found belonging specifically within TCK communities, and 37 experienced contentment despite lacking a defined sense of belonging. This study does not document whether all participants had equal access to ATCK communities, raising the possibility that the 133 individuals who reported no sense of belonging might have developed one if given opportunities to connect with fellow ATCKs, similar to the 51 participants who found belonging through ATCK communities.

## **2.6 The Role of Technology**

### **2.6.1 Digital Platforms**

Digital platforms provide a readily accessible space for ATCKs to connect with one another. Online communities like Facebook groups and Discord communities allow ATCKs to share stories, offer support, and foster virtual network. Research by Otero & Schmidt (2021) shows that these digital platforms can foster the perception among people that they belong to a larger community by virtue of the identity they share online rather than to where they physically lived or culturally belong.

However, while digital spaces help build a larger online community, they have notable limitations. Otero & Schmidt (2021) argue that social media serves as a source of community-building among people who share social and cultural affinities but with restricted opportunities for offline meetings. Another research on human interaction states that face-to-face engagement fosters deeper emotional connections than online-only interactions (PMAC, 2021). Studies further indicate that digital connections are most impactful when they can facilitate real-world meetings and community building (Not Another Social Media App, 2020).

These findings point to a critical gap in existing platforms: while they enable global connectivity, they lack the capability to help ATCKs identify and connect with others in their immediate geographical area. While existing platforms offer valuable virtual connection opportunities, they fall short in facilitating local, face-to-face community building. To address these limitations and better understand the opportunities for location-based community building, a comparative analysis of current platforms was conducted, which directly informed the development of TCKConnect (see Section 4.1.1 Comparative Analysis).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The literature consistently demonstrates that while ATCKs may struggle with traditional concepts of belonging and face unique challenges in forming attachments, they often find meaningful connection and belonging through relationships with others who share their third culture experience. This understanding points to the critical importance of facilitating connections between ATCKs and creating spaces where their unique experiences are validated and understood. Future research might focus on developing and evaluating specific interventions and support systems that can help ATCKs build these crucial connections and communities.

The evidence suggests that while the challenges faced by ATCKs are significant, they are not insurmountable. By fostering opportunities for connection with others who share similar backgrounds and experiences, ATCKs can develop strong support networks and find authentic belonging in their adult lives. This understanding should inform both practical support systems and future research directions in supporting this unique and growing population.

## **2.8 Research Gap**

Given that TCKs are still “widely under-researched in the current literature” (Fail et al., 2004), several areas warrant further investigation. The long-term impacts of TCK experiences on adult life deserve deeper exploration. Additionally, research should examine the effectiveness of various support systems and the role of technology in facilitating meaningful TCK connections and fostering a sense of belonging (Lyons, 2022). Finally, studying the impact of in-person versus digital communities on ATCK well-being could provide valuable insights for future support system development.

## Chapter 3: Methodologies and Methods (Double Diamond Model)

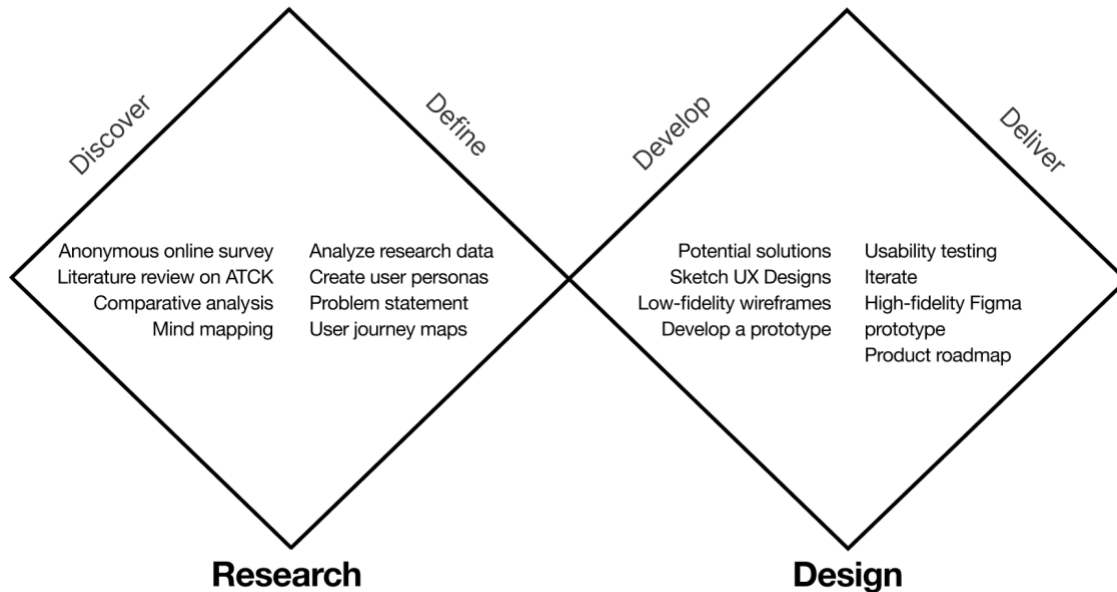


Figure 1: Double Diamond Model

This thesis follows the Double Diamond Model, a comprehensive design methodology. Moving through Discover, Define, Develop, and Deliver to structure the research and design process. It begins with surveys and comparative analysis to identify challenges (Discover), refines insights through user personas and information architecture (Define), explores design solutions with wireframing and prototyping (Develop), and tests and refines the final concept through usability studies and survey results (Deliver).

### 3.1 Discover

The Discover stage involved conducting an online survey to gather insights into the behaviors and needs of ATCKs, drawing from an extensive literature review that served as the backbone of this research, a comparative analysis of existing platforms that attempted to create connection but fail to curate spaces specifically for ATCKs, and mind mapping to generate ideas and visualize problem spaces.

#### 3.1.1 Initial Online Survey

To gain insights into the experiences, challenges, and social behaviors of Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs), an initial online survey was conducted. The survey aimed to explore key aspects such as mobility patterns, identity struggles, sense of belonging, and the role of digital

platforms in facilitating connections among ATCKs. It also aimed to understand whether they have ever experienced the feeling of being a "hidden immigrant," particularly upon returning to their home country. The survey was conducted using Microsoft Forms to ensure privacy of the respondents and used OCAD U's provided OneDrive to save the results as approved in the REB application. This survey follows best practices in online survey methodologies for hard-to-reach populations, as outlined by Lijadi and Van Schalkwyk (2015), who highlight the importance of digital data collection in studying globally dispersed ATCKs and ensuring participant engagement in cross-cultural research.

A total of 28 participants completed the survey, all of whom self-identified as ATCKs. The ages ranged from 18 to 45+ years old, with a significant portion in the 25-34 and 35-45 age groups. The majority had moved an average of five times during their childhood, with some reporting 10+ moves, indicating a highly mobile upbringing. Many respondents had lived in multiple countries for varying durations, with the most common length of stay being 1-5 years per country. In terms of social integration, the survey explored challenges in making new friends, preferences for connecting with locals or fellow ATCKs, and participants' overall sense of belonging. It also examined experiences with existing digital platforms, levels of interest in a dedicated ATCK networking app, and desired app features to enhance community-building efforts.

The survey gathered a deeper understanding of individual stories and firsthand experiences, which served as a foundation for creating detailed User Personas (Section 3.2.1) based on their responses. Moreover, participants interested in usability testing have shared their email addresses through this form. A detailed analysis of the survey findings, including key trends and participant responses, is presented in Section 5.1 (Survey Findings).

### 3.1.2 Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis is a side-by-side comparison that systematically compares two or more things to pinpoint their similarities and differences. The focus of the investigation might be conceptual, a particular problem, idea, or theory, or perhaps something more tangible, like two different data sets. After a successful comparative analysis, one should be able to identify strengths and weaknesses and clearly understand which product is more effective. (Dovetail, 2023)

## 3.2 Define

The Define stage was where analysis of the research data took place, user personas were built based on the literature review and the online survey. The problem statement was refined and user journey maps created.

### 3.2.1 User Personas

Personas are fictional characters created from research data to represent different types of users who might use a product, service, or system in similar ways (Cooper, 2020). A persona is an archetype instead of an actual living human, but personas should be described as if they were real people. (Neilson, 2015) Alan Cooper, widely credited with pioneering the concept of personas, describes them as "hypothetical archetypes" that help designers focus on user needs rather than assumptions (Cooper, 2020).

### 3.2.2 User Journey Maps

Journey mapping is a process that provides a holistic view of the customer experience by uncovering moments of both frustration and delight throughout a series of interactions. Done successfully, it reveals opportunities to address users' pain points, alleviate fragmentation, and, ultimately, create a better experience for your users. (Neilson, 2018). Yale University's Usability & Web Accessibility team defines journey maps as a "combination of storytelling, visual design, and empathy".

For this thesis, journey mapping was applied to structure the TCKConnect user experience. By outlining expected interactions and identifying common friction points, the design was refined to improve accessibility, ease of navigation, and engagement.

### 3.2.3 Information Architecture

Before developing the user interface, it was crucial to establish a visual understanding of the flow of the app or information architecture, which Pikover (2018) describes as: "Information architecture (IA) is, like a blueprint, a visual representation of the product's infrastructure, features, and hierarchy. The level of detail is up to the designer, so IA may also include navigation, application functions and behaviors, content, and flows. There is no set limit to the size or shape of an IA; nevertheless, it should encompass the generalized structure of the product so anyone (theoretically) should be able to read it and understand how the product works."

## 3.3 Develop

The Develop stage was focused on producing potential design solutions, sketching UX wireframes, and developing low fidelity prototypes, the earliest stage was also exhibited in the Digital Futures "Demo" exhibition in October. This was a work-in-progress exhibition.

### 3.3.1 Paper prototyping

Paper prototyping is the process of developing ideas and designing user flows using hand-sketched "screens" that represent a digital product. Paper prototypes test on a high-level user experience rather than interaction design. The initial stage of a wireframe is employed by sketches, with a pen and a paper. (UXPin, 2024). First step done in the design process of the UI screens was to



sketch out screens and decide the flow. These sketches were then later taken to Figma to create low fidelity wireframes.

### 3.3.2 Low Fidelity Wireframes

A low-fidelity wireframe (or lo-fi wireframe) is a simple sketch of a user interface that helps the designer plan the basic structure and layout of a website or app. These wireframes use basic shapes like rectangles and circles to represent elements such as buttons, text boxes, and images, without worrying about details like colors or fonts. Wireframing deploys simple blueprints of digital screens to capture basic layouts and content hierarchy. (Justinmind, 2024).

According to Simic (2022) lo-fi wireframes allow structure with proper spacing and alignment, "Low-fidelity wireframes are a great foundation for one's app development, which is why one almost always starts with them". They allow for clarification of app features, address scalability and ease-of-update. (Climer, 2024) Climer further states that wireframes give a framework for focusing on conversion pathways and page architecture. It's far easier (and, in the long run, faster) to draft and adjust in a highly visual, yet quickly modifiable wireframe than it is after the design begins. She also suggests that one should account for all the elements and features – and add, modify, or delete – at this stage, before overlaying with beautiful design.

### 3.3.3 High Fidelity Wireframes

A high-fidelity wireframe (or hi fi wireframe) reflects how a website or app will look in the hand of the user. High-fidelity wireframes include all the content, stylistic elements, editorial copy, and branding that the finished product will include to really convey what a product will look like. (Uizard, 2022). High-fidelity wireframes are essential in the later stages of the design process when you need to work out the finer details of the layout and user interface. They help in refining the design to ensure it meets the desired standards and requirements by specifying exact dimensions, color schemes, typography, and content placement. (Justinmind, 2024)

### 3.3.4 Prototype (low and high)

After developing wireframes, the next step is to develop a prototype of the app. A prototype is an early model or simulation of a product used to test and validate ideas before full-scale production. Prototypes vary in fidelity from simple sketches of a user interface to fully interactive digital models that resemble the final product. They serve to gather user feedback, identify usability issues, and refine design concepts, helping ensure that the final product meets user needs effectively. (UXPin, 2024).

There are two types of prototypes, low fidelity prototype and high-fidelity prototype. A low-fidelity prototype is a simple diagram of an early-stage design concept. Low-fidelity prototypes capture design ideas in rough whiteboard sketches or simple wireframes. Hi-fi prototypes have the look and feel of a finished product, with interaction designs that are practically pixel-perfect, they include animations and clickable screens. (Figma, Low-Fidelity Prototyping: What Is It and How Can It Help?, 2024).



As stated by Casacuberta (2017), “A prototype is a tool for visualizing a smorgasbord of interactive design work; in effect, prototypes (at almost any stage) are an amalgamation of all the work that came before into a single, visible, functional piece. This visual representation demonstrates what the product is doing at any given point, what the interactive elements are, and how the product would function in the real world.”

## **3.4 Deliver**

The Deliver stage was dedicated to testing the prototype with users. This involved gathering user feedback through both online channels and in-person testing sessions. This feedback was used to iterate on the design and refine the prototype further. A product roadmap was also developed, outlining the steps required to bring the app to life if it were to move into full development.

### **3.4.1 Usability Tests**

Two types of UX Usability Tests were conducted: In-Person test and Online test. Participants were recruited through people who signed up for usability testing through the initial online survey, personal networks and social media posts. A standardized set of tasks was developed for both test formats.

#### **The In-Person**

The participants were presented with the list of tasks one by one and asked follow-up questions after each task. A think-aloud protocol was implemented, which involves participants verbalizing their thoughts while performing specified tasks. According to Lewis (1982), think-aloud protocols involve participants thinking aloud as they are performing a set of specified tasks. Participants are asked to say whatever comes into their mind as they complete the task. This might include what they are looking at, thinking, doing, and feeling. This gives observers insight into the participant's cognitive processes (rather than only their final product), to make thought processes as explicit as possible during task performance. The In-person Usability Tests required the participants to be present at OCAD U to conduct the test.

#### **Online Usability Test**

For the online usability tests, survey respondents who had expressed interest were sent an email containing the task list, a link to the Figma prototype, and access to a Microsoft feedback form. This task list was identical to the one used for in-person testing. Participants were asked to complete the specified tasks using the Figma prototype and then provide feedback by rating each feature and commenting on the app's user-friendliness. Follow-up questions were included after each task rating to gain deeper insight into participants' navigation experiences. In this format, participants independently read tasks, completed them on the Figma prototype, and then submitted their feedback through the online form.

### 3.4.2 High-fidelity Figma Prototype

A high-fidelity prototype is a polished simulation of the final product. Visual design details and real content show the look and feel of the end product. For testing, robust interactivity and functionality provide a more realistic user experience. This non-coded version of the prototype has all its features and resembles if it were fully functioning app, allowing proper review/feedback of the app. High-fidelity prototyping plays a key role in the later stages of the design process, from usability testing to developer handoff. Design teams use hi-fi prototypes to vet a digital product's user flow and user interface or UI design with their target audience. (Figma, High-Fidelity Prototyping: What Is It and How Can It Help?, 2024). Designers also share high-fidelity prototypes with key stakeholders to demonstrate key design features, interactions, and workflows for input and approval.

### 3.4.3 Product Roadmap

A product roadmap is a shared source of truth that outlines the vision, direction, priorities, and progress of a product over time. It's a plan of action that aligns the organization around short and long-term goals for the product or project, and how they will be achieved. Total project time is minimum 1.5 year, out of which the first phase is completed because of this thesis.

*Table 1: Product Roadmap*

Phase	Duration
Research & Discovery	3-4 months
Design & Prototyping	4-5 months
MVP Development	3-4 months
Community Building	3 months
Growth & Optimization	4 months
Expansion	6 months

Total project time is minimum 1.5 year, out of which the first phase is completed as a result of this thesis.

## Chapter 4: Project elements and prototypes

This thesis comprises of 3 interconnected elements that collectively complement one another for better understanding to address the unique challenges of ATCKs. The presence of these elements help to display and showcase the research in an intuitive manner.

The centerpiece of this thesis is TCKConnect, a mobile app prototype specifically designed for ATCKs to connect, share experiences, and foster in-person meetups. The app's design prioritizes user accessibility and aims to address the gap left by existing online platforms.

TCKConnect aims to take a different approach. The app, when built, will collect only minimal data, user preferences and location, strictly for functionality (e.g., recommending events, showing nearby ATCKs). However, this data will not be sold, monetized, or shared with third parties. Unlike ad-driven platforms, TCKConnect will not track user behavior for commercial purposes, ensuring a privacy-first design that prioritizes user trust.

The context of the app's design sets the stage for the build of the prototypes.

### 4.1 App context

#### 4.1.1 Comparative analysis

A comparative analysis was conducted to evaluate existing platforms aimed at fostering community among ATCKs. These platforms, such as Facebook groups, Discord communities, and websites like TCKGlobal, were analyzed for their features, focus, and limitations. The findings revealed that while these platforms provide spaces for sharing stories and building online communities, they lack dedicated tools for facilitating in-person meetups, a significant gap TCKConnect aims to address.

Plus, there are privacy concerns with the use of such platforms. They are a major drawback, as these platforms collect user data, names, locations, and browsing behavior, to deliver personalized ads and content (Meta Privacy Policy, 2023; Discord Terms of Service, 2023). This involves tracking user interactions and sharing data with advertisers, raising concerns about user consent and data security.

The website TCKGlobal started in 2020 by Jay has resources, a space where people (fellow ATCKs) around the world have posted their stories. However, to post a story, one needs to email it to the founder. It also offers TCKGlobal merch, which serves to fund and run the website. However, the website itself does not offer any platform to directly chat with fellow ATCKs but instead has a link to a Discord community.

<b>Feature</b>	<b>TCKConnect</b>	<b>FB groups</b>	<b>Discord communities</b>	<b>TCKGlobal (website)</b>
<b>Purpose</b>	Specific for ATCKs to find a sense of belonging through meetups and by connecting online	Allows ATCKs to share their stories	Allows ATCKs to share their stories and build online community	Resource hub for TCK/ATCK community; focused on building an online community.
<b>Focus</b>	Promotes real world connections and local meetups	Online discussions, limited emphasis on in-person interactions	Online, chats. no focus on in-person meet-ups	Centralized resource hub for TCKs offering blogs, podcasts, and community links.
<b>Privacy and Safety</b>	Controlled, environment ATCKs.	Public or private groups, but less exclusivity and control over membership.	Requires invite-only servers but often lacks robust identity verification.	Provides access to curated resources, but limited user privacy customization.
<b>User Experience</b>	Minimal, clutter-free interface focused on ATCK needs.	Overwhelmed with ads, notifications, and unrelated posts.	A user likely has multiple other communities	User-friendly but static; less focused on action or interaction.
<b>Belonging</b>	Since it is designed for in-person meetups, there is a higher sense of belonging	There could be a sense of belonging, but it is a diluted experience	There could be a sense of belonging developed, but it is a diluted experience	Encourages belonging through shared ATCK stories but lacks personal, interactive features.
<b>Geolocation features</b>	Facilitates location-based connections for nearby meetups.	Limited location-based tools. Requires manual arrangement for meetups.	No native geolocation or meetup features.	No means of communicating with fellow ATCKs via the website.
<b>Event organization</b>	In-app tools to create, join, and manage events easily.	Events exist but are tied to broader Facebook tools, not TCK-specific.	No native event tools; relies on external coordination.	Uses discord, does not offer event creation or direct community-organized meetups.
<b>Community Moderation</b>	Tailored moderation to ensure a positive, safe environment.	Moderation varies by group; inconsistent standards.	Moderation depends on server admins; no standardized process.	The content is static but looked after by Jay the founder and her team
<b>Resources and Support</b>	Curated resources addressing ATCK-specific challenges.	General posts and shared articles; lacks curation.	Limited or no emphasis on resources for mental health or belonging.	Rich in resources such as blogs, Instagram page links and offers TCK merch to symbolize the community
<b>Monetization</b>	Non-profit model; no ads or intrusive monetization.	Ad-driven, potentially compromising user privacy.	Free platform with no tailored value for ATCKs.	Non-profit but offers TCK merch.
<b>Accessibility and Design</b>	Mobile-first design ensures seamless usability on the go.	Broad but not optimized for mobile-first experiences.	Desktop and mobile.	Website-based; desktop-friendly with less emphasis on mobile experience.

*Table 2: Comparative Analysis of existing platforms and TCKConnect*

The analysis highlighted the unique advantages of TCKConnect, including its geolocation-based functionality, emphasis on in-person connections, and a user-friendly interface tailored specifically for ATCKs. Existing platforms, while valuable, were found to prioritize general online interactions rather than fostering localized, real-world connections.

### 4.1.2 User Persona

User personas for the purpose of this thesis were shaped by the information gathered through the Online Survey and literature review. Curating this app specifically for ATCKs is a crucial part of this thesis. As shown in the following Figure 2, a user persona for an Adult Third Culture Kid was developed.



Figure 2: User Persona based on survey results and literature review

### 4.1.3 Information Architecture

The app's IA was developed to outline its structure, features, and navigation flow. Serving as a visual blueprint, the IA indicated in Figure 3 categorized features into groups and established a clear hierarchy to ensure seamless usability. The structure emphasized ease of use, with intuitive navigation paths that align with the app's focus on geolocation-based meetups and community-building.

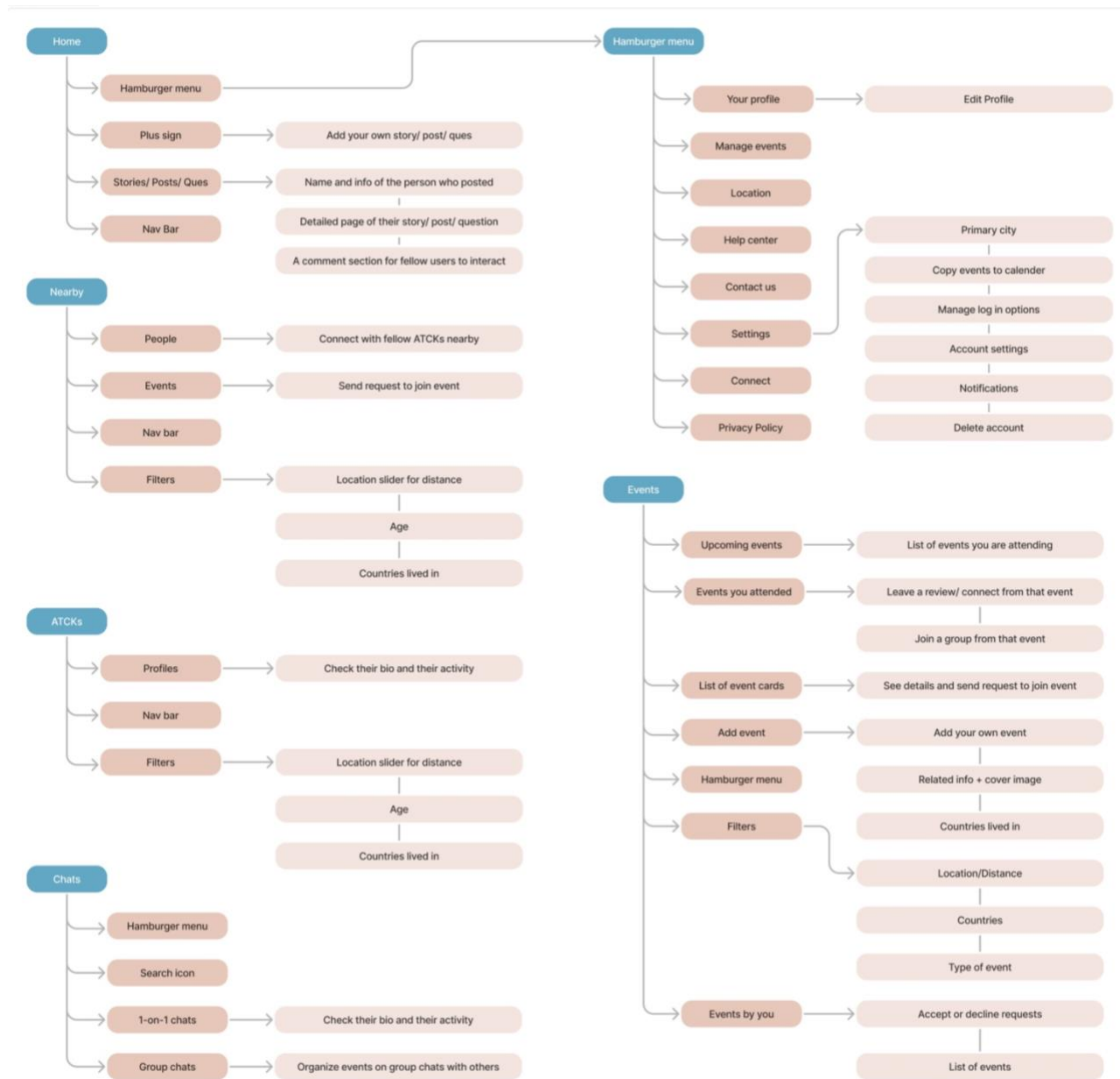


Figure 3: Information Architecture



## 4.2 TCKConnect V1

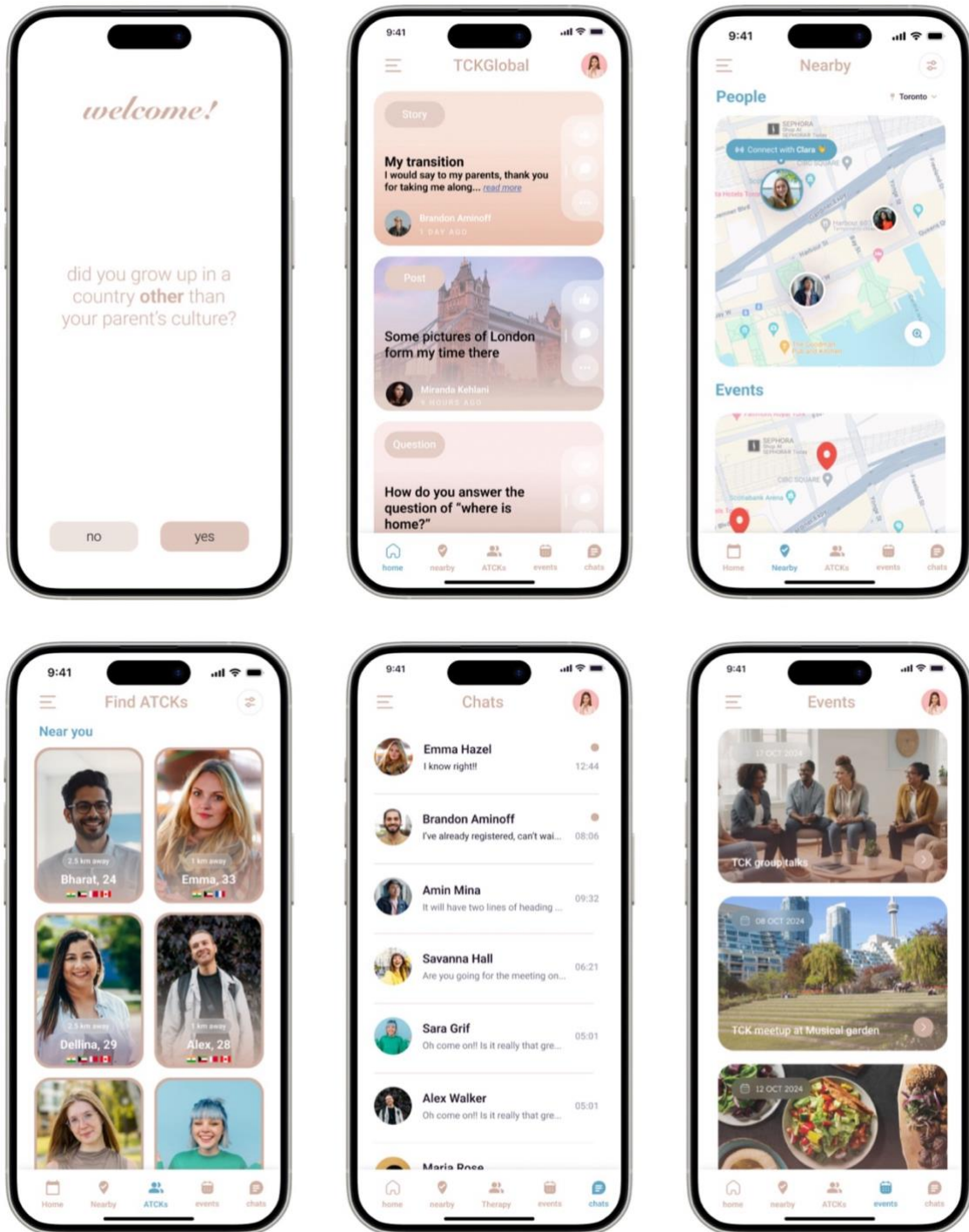


Figure 4: TCKConnect V1 screens

After a few basic sketches, the first version of screens was developed. As shown in Figure 4, there was an initial screening process to check if a person is an ATCK or not. Then, the application was divided into five main sections, accessible through a navigation bar. Home page, Nearby page, ATCKs, Events, and Chats.

- **Screening Process:** The initial screening process used a simple yes/no question to filter users: "Did you grow up in a country other than your parents' culture?" Users answering "Yes" could proceed to create an account, while those answering "No" were prevented from using the application. This ensured the platform remained focused on the TCK community.
- **Home page:** The "Home" page serves as a community feed where users can view posts from fellow ATCKs. This space allows users to discuss relatable topics such as identity struggles, belonging, rootlessness, and diverse cultural influences. Users can engage with the community through three distinct content formats:
  - **Posts:** Users can share images with captions, perfect for visual stories and moments.
  - **Questions:** Members can pose questions to fellow ATCKs, initiating meaningful discussions about shared experiences.
  - **Stories:** This text-only format enables users to share personal anecdotes, incidents, or experiences in longer form.

In this version, content cards suffered from a design flaw where images and text overlapped, compromising readability. This issue was addressed in subsequent updates to improve the user experience.

- **Nearby page:** This page has two sections – People and Events. These sections were locations on the map where people could see things happening near them or the users who are near them. This is an easy and intuitive way to find things happening near the user.
- **ATCKs page:** This page referred to people who are within the radius the user has set, the user can click on their profile and send a request to them.
- **Events page:** page referred to the list of events happening within the radius set, with the event happening soon to be the first on the list. This allows you to see the events happening near you and sign up for them if you wish to attend.
- **Chats page:** page is where users can chat with fellow ATCKs that they have connected with through this app. This did not have a feature to add people or add new groups, which is something I added in the later version.



## 4.3 TCKConnect V2

Version 2 represents a significant evolution following multiple iterations of sketches and low-fidelity wireframes. While preserving the five core pages, this version delivers substantial improvements and details of multiple features.

### 4.3.3 Screening and Onboarding



Figure 5: Left to right; Splash Screen; TCK or not screen; More info about TCKs screen



Figure 6: Three simple questions that all TCKs relate to

As shown in Figures 5 and 6, the screening process maintained its core purpose and was enhanced with three options instead of two:

- **"Yes"**: Users identifying as TCKs who grew up outside their parents' culture could proceed directly to the onboarding.
- **"No"**: Users received a message stating "Sorry, you are not a TCK, thank you for your interest" after which the app closed.
- **"What does this mean?"** Users were directed to an explanatory page clarifying that the app is exclusively for Third Culture Kids. For those uncertain about their TCK status, three qualifying questions were presented, all specifically designed to resonate with Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs). Upon affirmative responses to all questions, users received a welcome message and could proceed to profile creation.

The onboarding process required users to add basic details like their name, age, bio, and current location – essential for discovering nearby events and people. Users could opt to keep their location private and remain undiscoverable on the map. Additionally, they needed to list countries where they had grown up, both as a key part of their identity and to enable the platform to connect them with people and events from similar countries.

#### 4.3.4 Home screen – Story/ Posts/ Questions

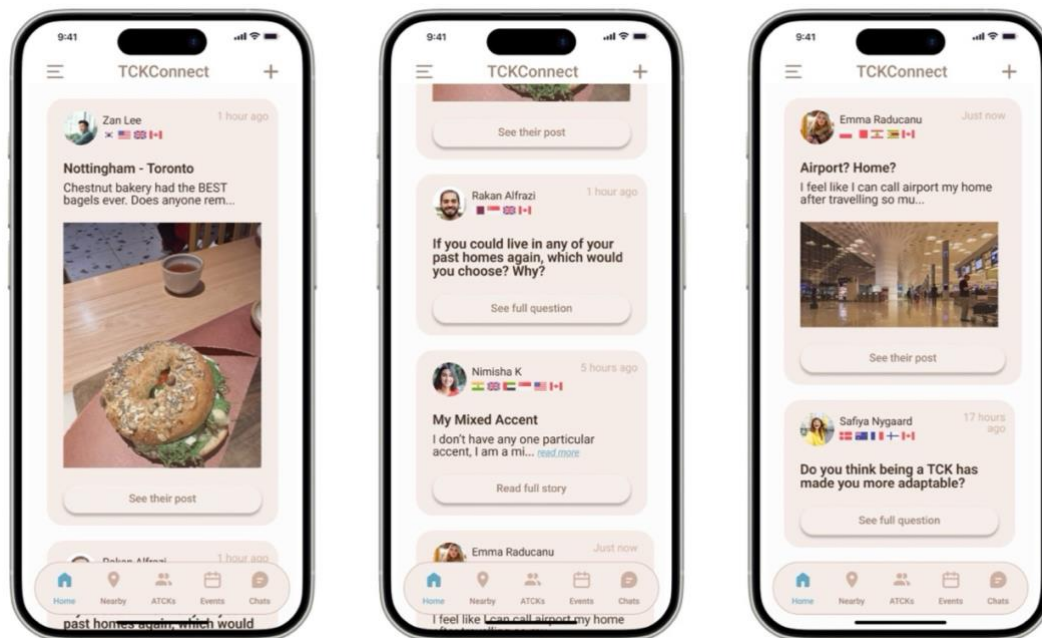


Figure 7: Home page

Key UI improvements from the first version included the addition of country flags to user profiles, representing the countries they had lived in while growing up. Additionally, the layout and color scheme were adjusted to prevent overlapping elements. While the app allows users to connect with anyone, the option to identify shared countries provides a preferred way for ATCKs to find others with similar backgrounds, without restricting interactions to specific groups.

Users can create three types of content – a “Story”, a “Post” and a “Question”. These serve as primary forms of engagement, allowing users to interact with the community. Content can be shared publicly (visible to all users) or privately (restricted to connections only). Figures 8, 9 and 10 provide a detailed breakdown of each content type, including how users can create, view, and interact with them.

## Story:

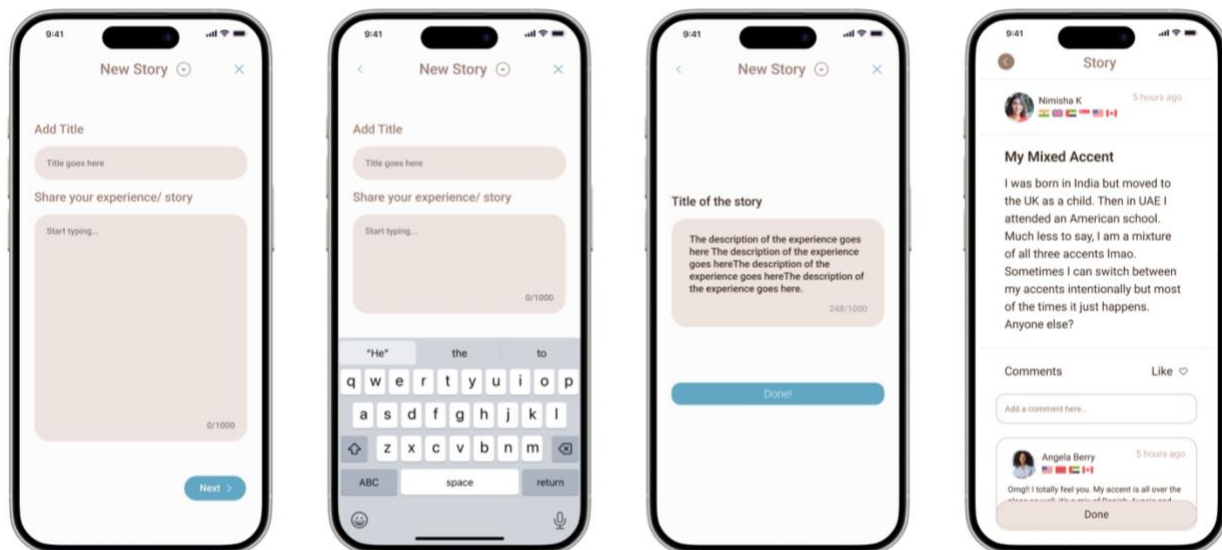


Figure 8: Left to right, screen 1-3 add story; screen 4 posted story of someone else

Users can add a new “Story” by clicking on the Plus (+) icon in the “Home” page. Figure 8 illustrates the flow of how to add a new story. A user can enter a title and a description of any length. This space allows them to share an anecdote, a personal experience, or anything they feel might resonate with other ATCKs, or simply something they want to express. Once posted, the story appears in the feed, where other users can like or comment on it. An example of an interaction with a posted story is shown in the Figure 8.

## Post:

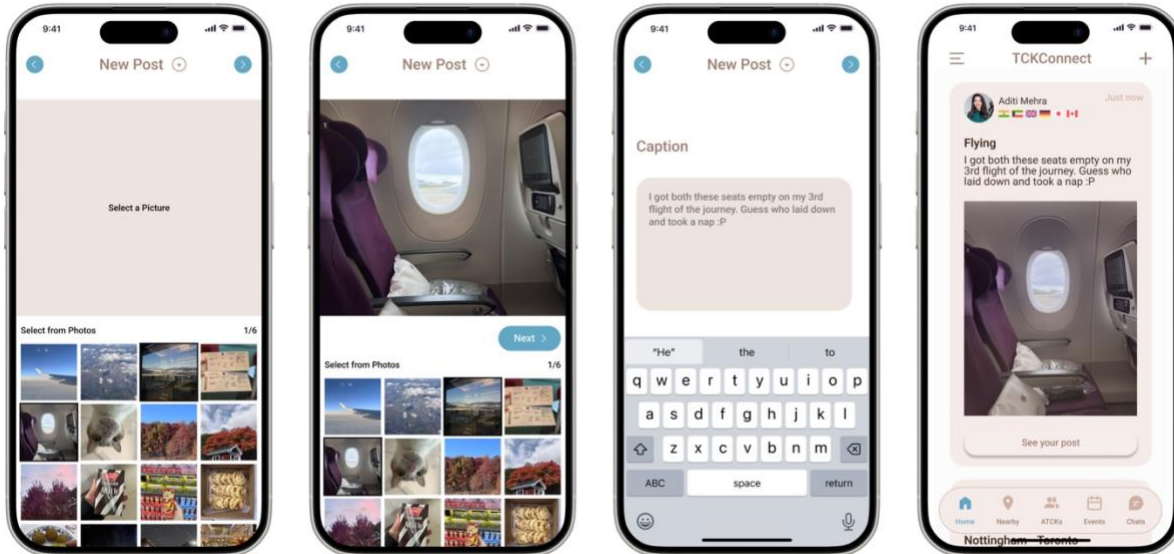


Figure 9: User flow to add a new post

Users can add a new “Post” selecting it from a dropdown menu. Figure 9 illustrates the flow of selecting a picture from your gallery, adding a caption to this picture and then posting it.

## Question:

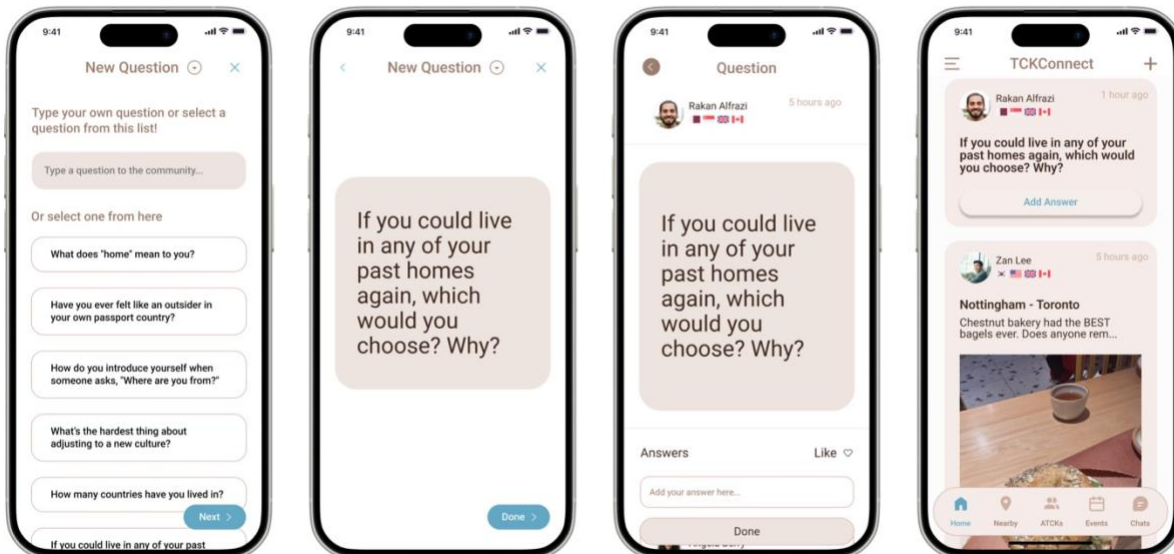


Figure 10: Adding a question

Users can engage with the community by posting a “Question”, as shown in Figure 10. They can either select a pre-made question from a list or type out their own. This feature serves as another way for users to spark discussions around topics ATCKs might directly relate to. They

can interact by posting answers in the comments, creating a space for shared experiences and conversations.

#### 4.3.5 Nearby

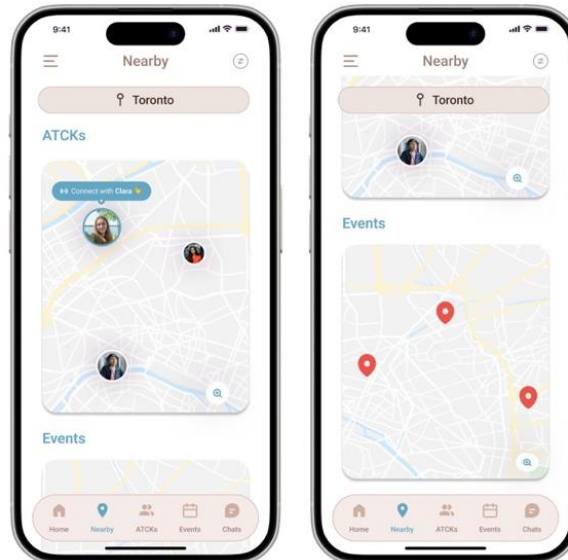


Figure 11: Nearby

The “Nearby” feature provides an interactive map that displays ATCKs and Events near a user's location, as shown in Figure 11. Users can view profiles of nearby ATCKs and send connection requests but only if those users have opted to share their location. Additionally, users can click on event icons to explore upcoming events and sign up directly through the app.

#### 4.3.6 ATCKs

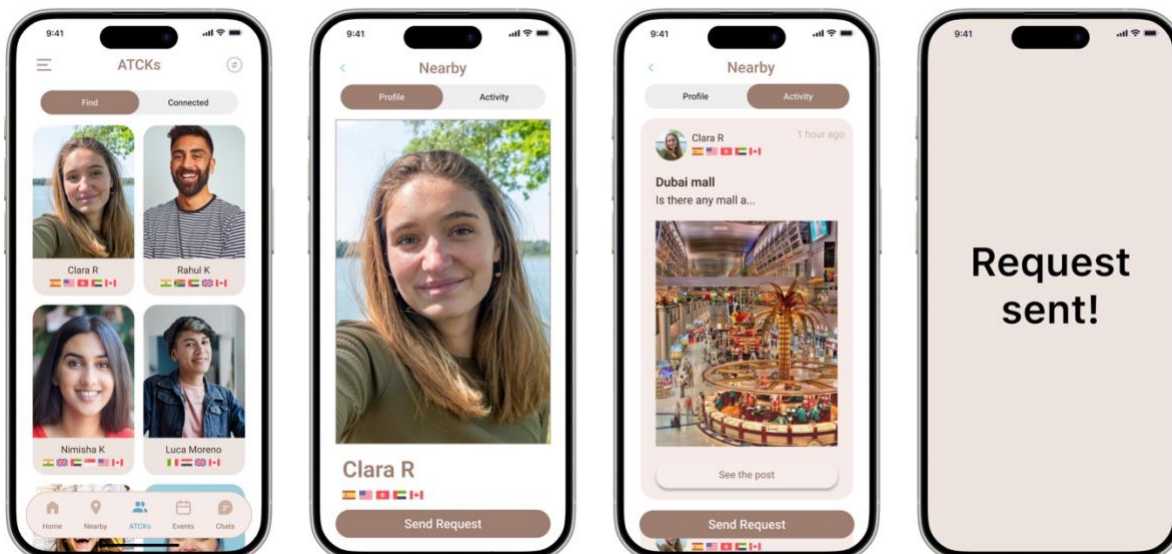


Figure 12: Left to right: Find new ATCK; Profile of a user; Activity of the user; Request sent



The page “ATCKs” shown in Figure 12, displays a list of profiles of nearby ATCKs based on filters set by the user. This page features a toggle section, one shows a list of people a user can add, and the other is a list of existing connections. Each profile shows a picture of the person and the countries they associate with.

Users can click on a “Profile” to expand it, see their bio, pictures and any other publicly shared information. The users can also toggle to the “Activity” section – here, users can see any recent posts or comments made by them, which are available to the public.

### 4.3.7 Events

#### Sign up for an event:

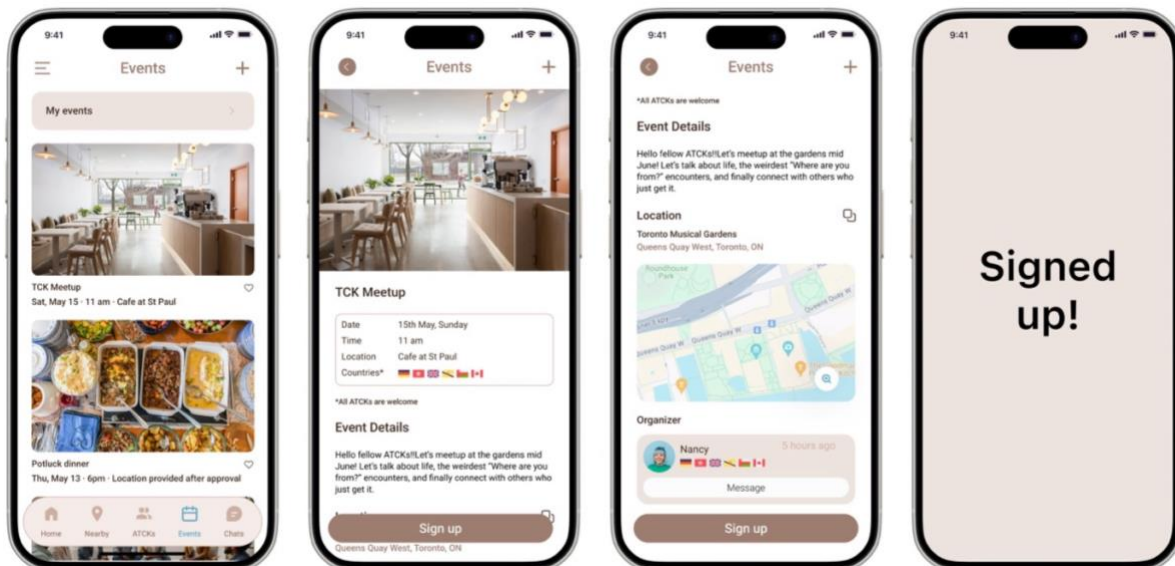


Figure 13: Flow to sign up for an event

The "Events" page, as shown in Figure 13, enables users to browse and sign up for upcoming events in their city. Accessible via the bottom navigation bar, this page presents a list of events organized by individual users or groups in the area. Users can click on any event to expand and access detailed information, including date, time, location, organisers, etc. Additionally, users have the option to contact the event organizers directly if they have any inquiries. Once they have reviewed the event details, they can proceed to sign up.

## Add an event:

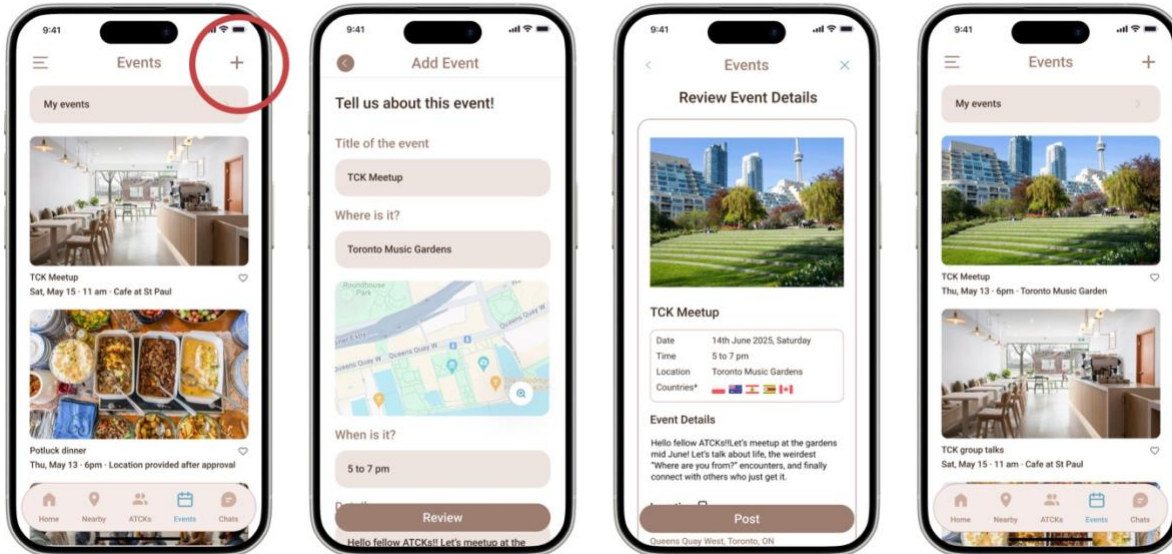


Figure 14: Flow to add a new event

To organise an Event, users can click on the Plus (+) icon on the top right corner and follow the guided instructions. The organiser is required to provide key event details, including the name of the event, the location, time, a brief description of what attendees might expect and add an image of the space or the theme. As shown in Figure 14, a map is automatically generated to visualise the event location. However, the organisers can keep the location hidden and can share it only with accepted attendees.

## Check your events:

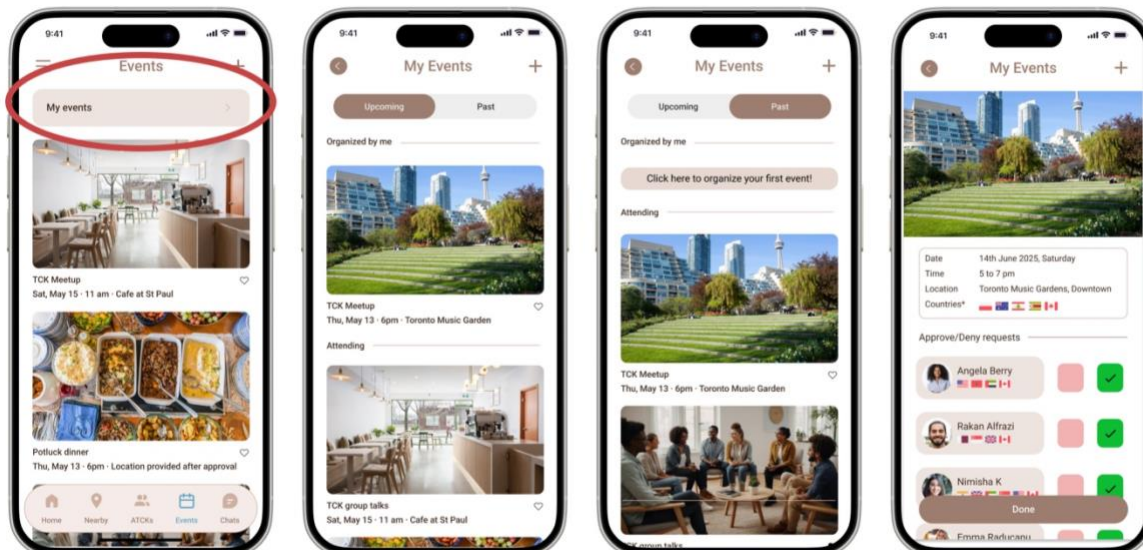


Figure 15: Your events

Users can track upcoming and past events, both those they've organized and those they're attending by selecting "My Events", as shown in Figure 15. For events they organize, users can approve or deny attendee requests, especially for private locations, ensuring safety and privacy. Once accepted, attendees are added to a group chat for event coordination.

#### 4.3.8 Chats

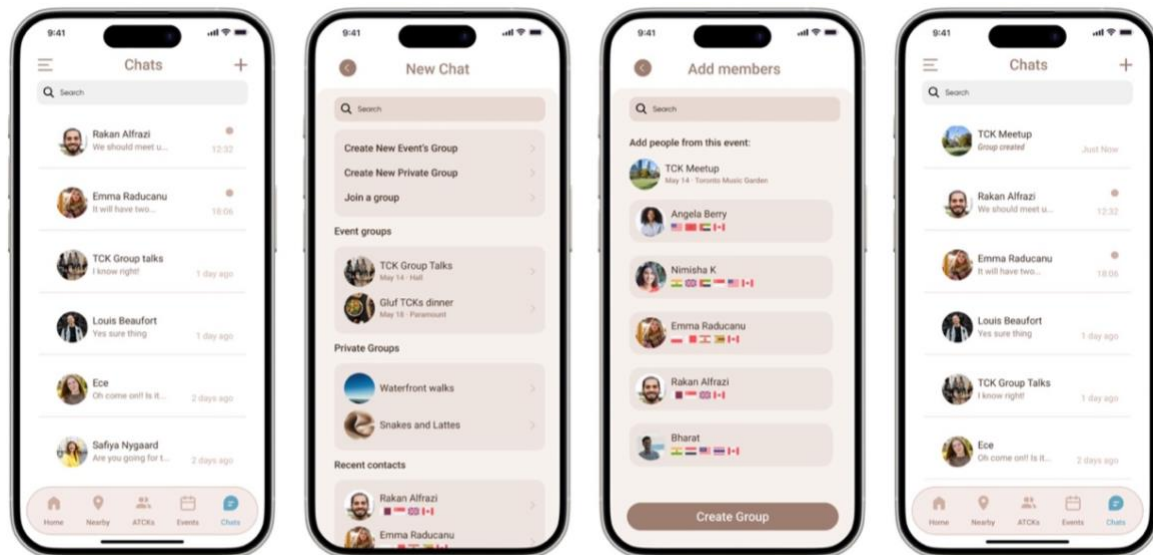


Figure 16: Chats

The Chat page, as shown in Figure 16, contains both one-on-one and group chats. Event organizers have the option to create a dedicated group chat for attendees who have been approved to join an event. This space allows participants to communicate, plan, and coordinate before the meetup. Once a group is created, a notification is sent to all event attendees, inviting them to join. However, participation in the chat remains optional, and attendees can choose whether or not to be part of the conversation before the event takes place.



## 4.3.9 Settings and Profile

### Settings Page

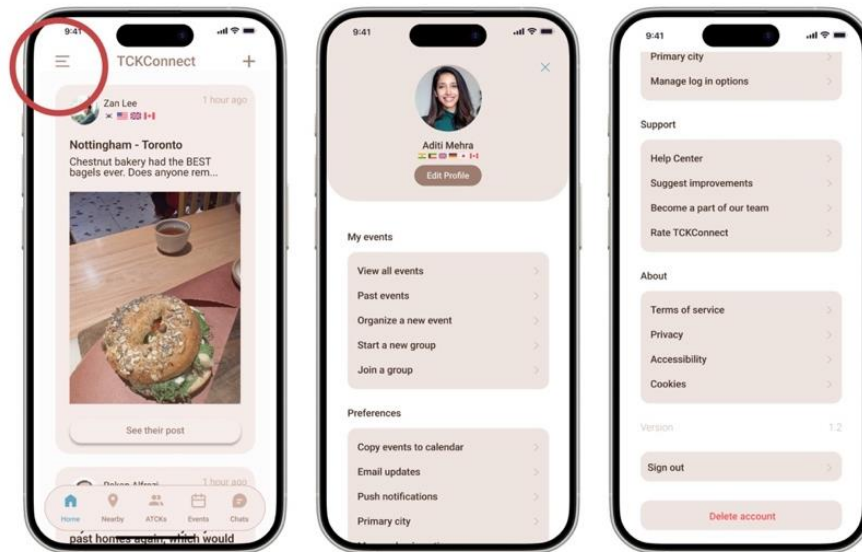


Figure 17: Settings

Users can access the Settings page, as shown in Figure 17, by clicking on the hamburger menu from any page within the app. This page provides access to various customization and account management options, including event management, preferences settings, and the ability to link a calendar for automatic event synchronization. Additionally, the page includes standard settings found in most apps, such as Terms of Service, Privacy Policy, Cookie preferences, and options to sign out or delete the account.

### Edit Profile

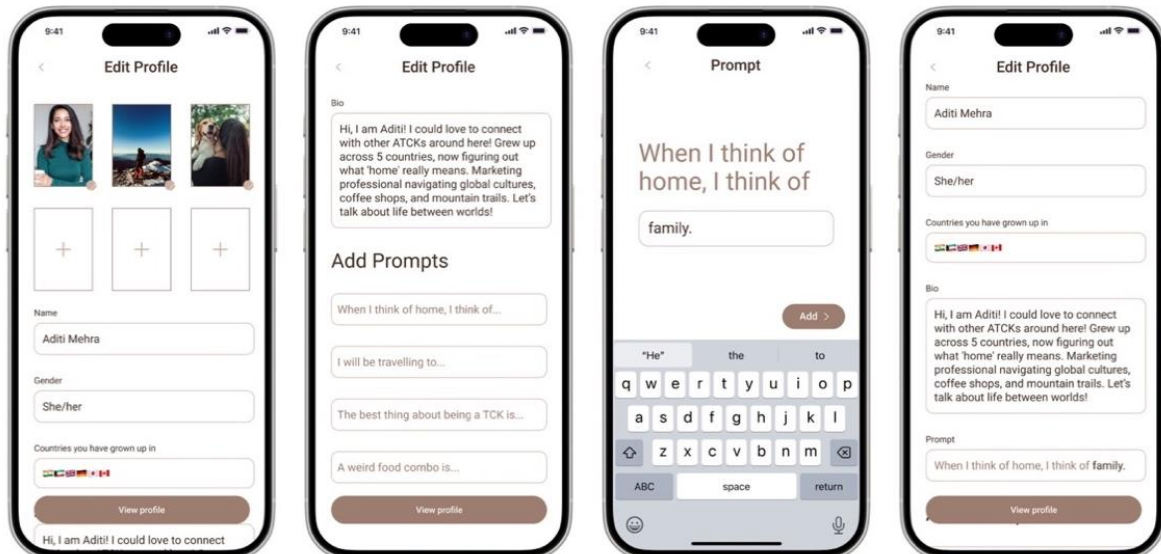


Figure 18: Edit Profile; adding a prompt

Users can edit their profiles from the settings page where they can add images, edit their bio, add any new information, or use the prompts. They can also modify the countries they have lived in, but they cannot change their name. As shown in Figure 18, a prompt is being used to add to the profile. A prompt is a predefined sentence starter that allows users to express their thoughts or perspectives. In this example, the prompt “When I think of home, I think of...” is completed with the word “family”, resulting in the profile displaying: When I think of home, I think of family.

## View Profile

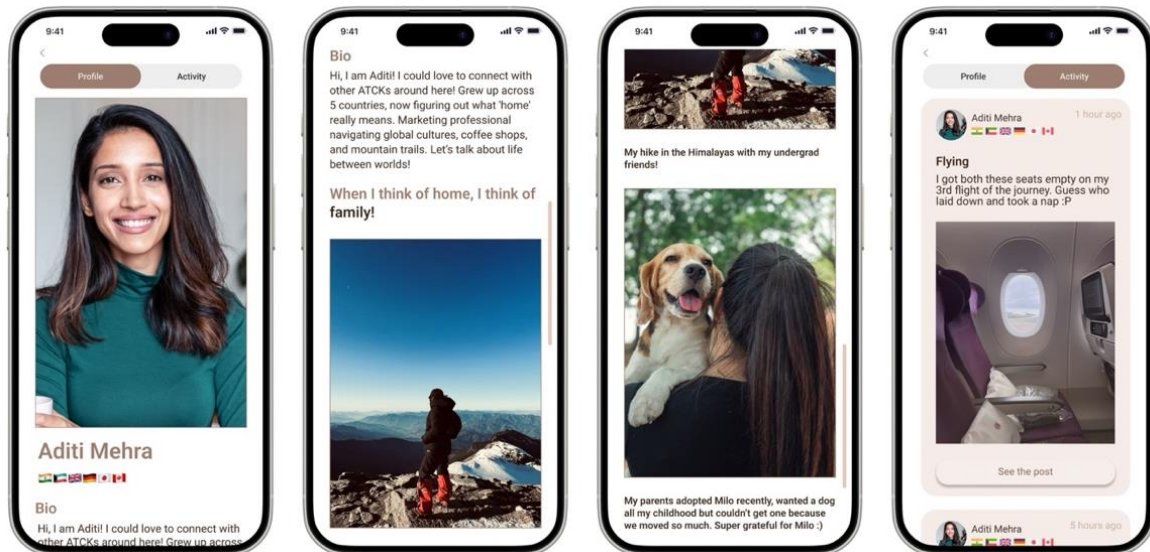


Figure 19: View Profile

Users can access their profile by clicking on their profile picture icon within the “Settings” page. They can also view their complete profile after making any edits to ensure all changes are reflected. As shown in Figure 19, the persona, Aditi’s profile serves as an example. Users can also view their “Activity” section, which displays their past posts. They have the option to set each post as public or private, with the default setting being private.

## 4.4 Chatbot

Initially, the design included a chatbot to the app that would complement and enhance the usage of the app for its users. It would give personalised suggestions to individuals and would also ask them how their event was if they had attended one. Additionally, it would also have basic information about TCKs and their challenges which might help ATCKs understand themselves better by conversing with it.

This chatbot named Haven, seen in Figure 20 and 21 below, was developed using StackAI. It is a platform that allows users to create custom chatbots and conversational tools by using any external conversational AI software (this prototype uses Anthropic). It was fed material related to TCKs used in the literature review and given commands as to how to perform, it was programmed to answer any questions in a concise, simple manner with a word limit of 100 words. However, it gave mixed outputs. Sometimes, the results were as expected and as desired – short, to the point, clear, simple answers to questions but sometimes it just gave way too detailed answers and cited the resources which despite clear commands on not to cite while having a conversation.

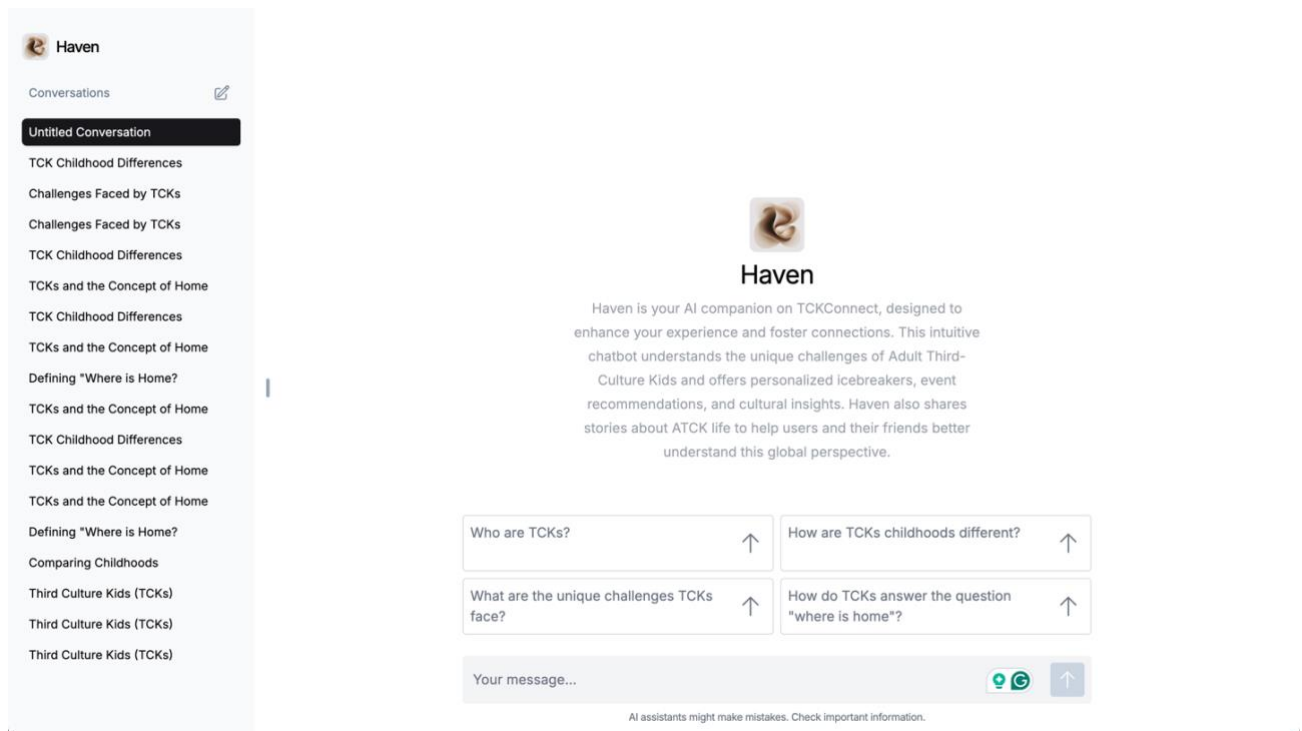


Figure 20: Haven, a chatbot

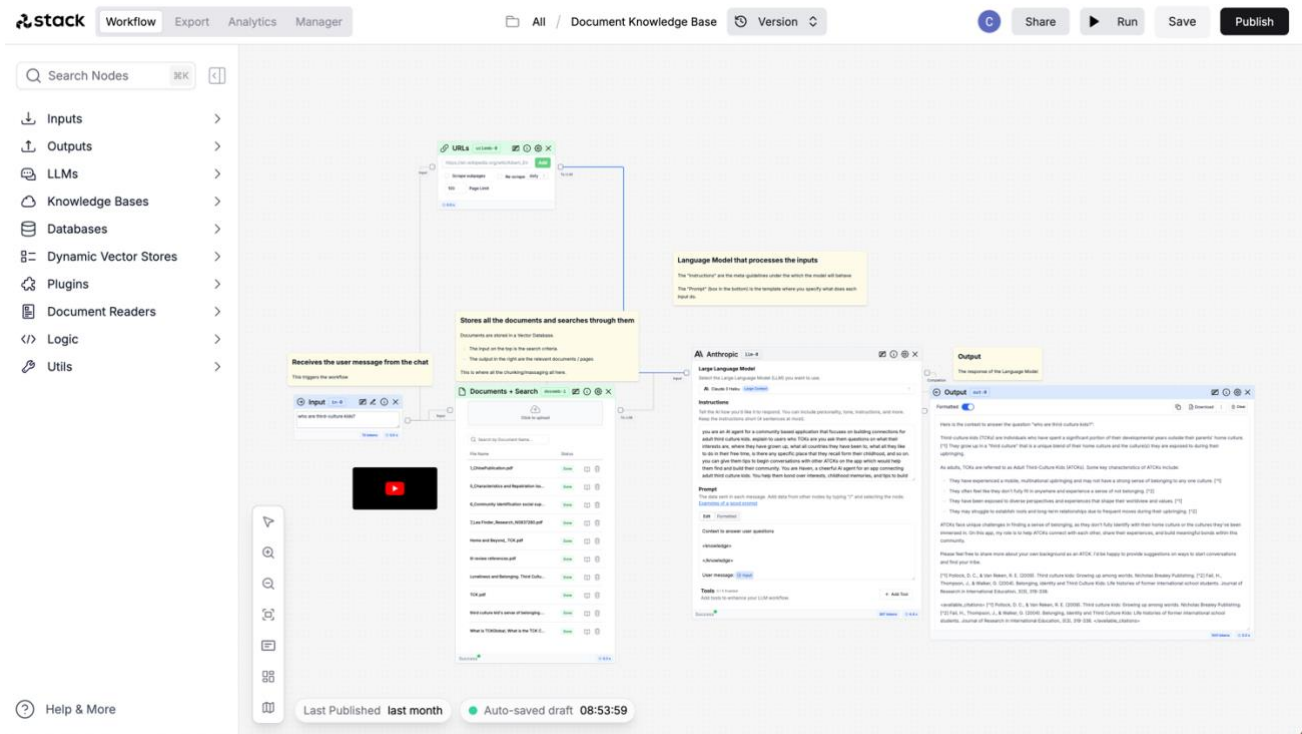


Figure 21: Workflow of Haven

After prototyping the chatbot it seemed to be an unnecessary addition; rather than using nudges and/or notifications. If someone needs to comment on an event that they attended, they could comment/post about it instead of chatting with their personalised AI bot. Most important, holding conversation with a chatbot rather than a human might defeat the purpose of finding fellow ATCKs and a building a community and people might just end up talking to a chatbot. ATCKs are seeking interactions with fellow ATCKs to find a sense of community, a chatbot cannot fulfil that role.

## 4.5 Interactive web documentary

The interactive website documentary presents key findings from the literature review, survey data (see Section 5.2), comparative analysis and the app's features all presented in an engaging, intuitive, scrollable format. The website's storyline is structured around nine topics (Refer Appendix E for detailed script).

### 4.1.1 Introducing a Persona

The persona, Aditi, developed in the Define stage of the Double Diamond, serves as the website introduction. This section introduces the persona with “Meet Aditi” and “She is an Adult Third Culture Kid.”

### 4.1.2 Aditi's journey

The viewer then explores Aditi's journey, from her birth till her current age 28. Some of the screenshots are as follows in Figure 22 and 23:



*Figure 22: Aditi's journey, Part 1*

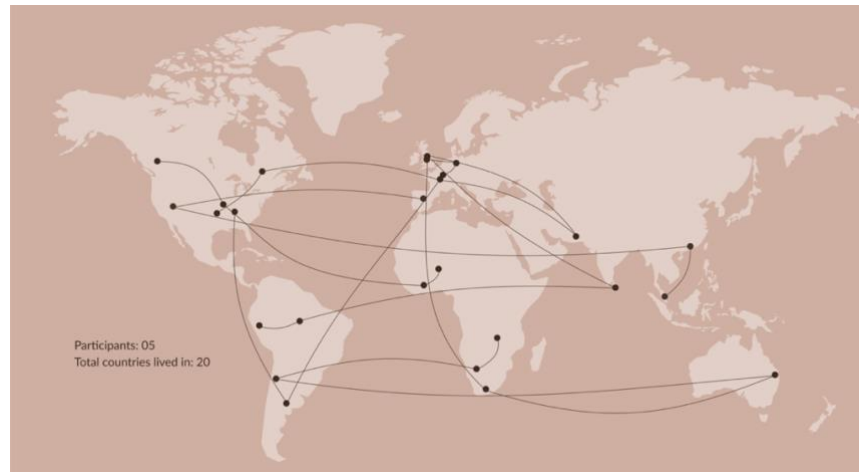


*Figure 23: Aditi's journey, Part 2*

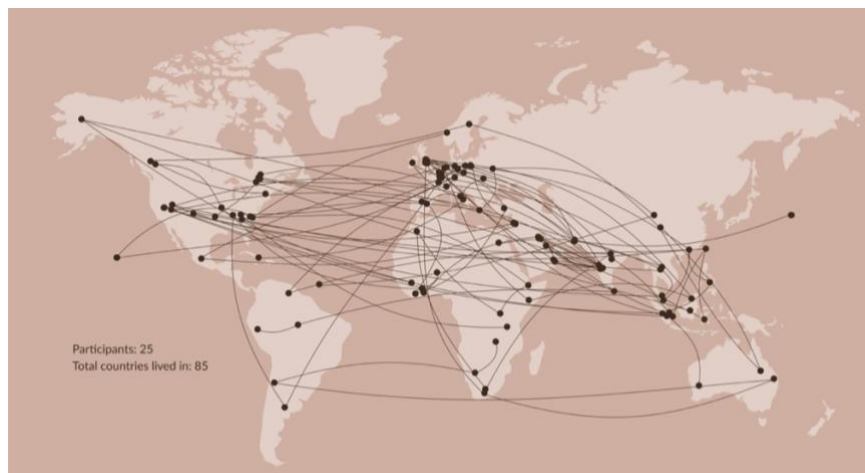
A sentence concludes this section and introduces the next, highlighting the prevalence of these experiences: “Just like Aditi, there are over 2M ATCKs around the globe. This study features 28 of them. Let's see a glimpse of their journeys!” This indicates that 28 people participated in this thesis, and the following data represents these 28 ATCKs.

### 4.1.3 Mapping participants' journeys

This section features a series of overlapping maps, each showing all the countries a participant lived in during childhood. As user scroll, the maps progressively overlay, see Figure 24 and 25 for reference.



*Figure 24: Participants 1 to 5 journey mapped*



*Figure 25: Participants 1 to 25 journey mapped*

The section concludes the maps and highlights the inference that is to be made from these, “The participants come from more than 85 countries. Growing up in a country or countries different from their parents' culture often creates complex feelings of rootlessness and challenges with belonging, among many other emotional and cultural impacts.”



#### 4.1.4 Quotes from Participants

This section presents five quotes from the survey data that addresses feelings of rootlessness and challenges with belonging, see Figure 26 for list of quotes.



Figure 26: Quotes from 5 participants

#### 4.1.5 Data

This section highlights two important findings from the survey data: the average number of homes moved is 5, and the maximum number of years spent, on average, in one country is 5. This emphasizes that the survey respondents were highly mobile.

#### 4.1.6 Data, key findings

As users scroll through this section, the central circle expands to visually represent increasing percentages.

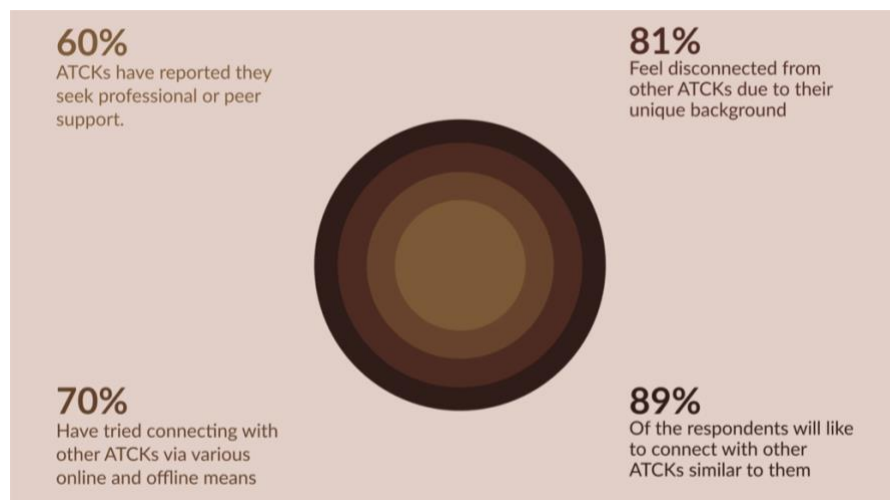


Figure 27: Data from survey results

#### 4.1.7 Making friends after 18

This section draws on the literature review and personal experience to address a specific developmental transition with the question: “How challenging is it to make friends after moving back home or to a new country for university after 18?” This also aligns with Madison Zeller’s 2018 thesis project, which developed an app specifically for college-attending TCKs to connect with one another. Refer Figures 28 and 29.

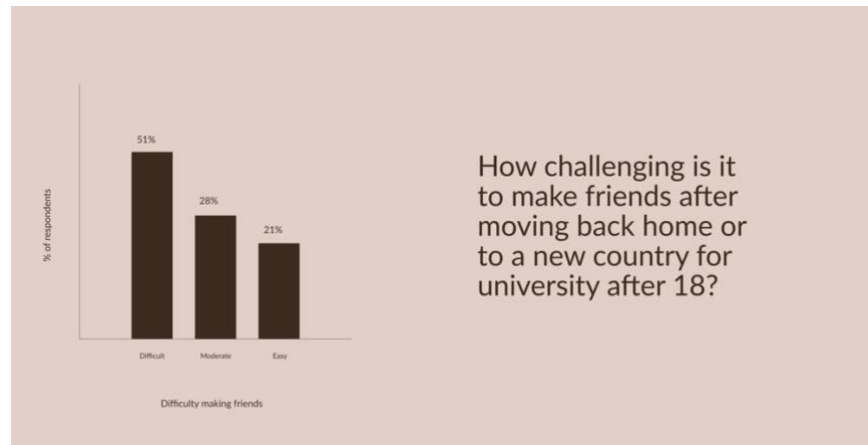


Figure 28: Graph showing results of different levels in difficulty in making friends

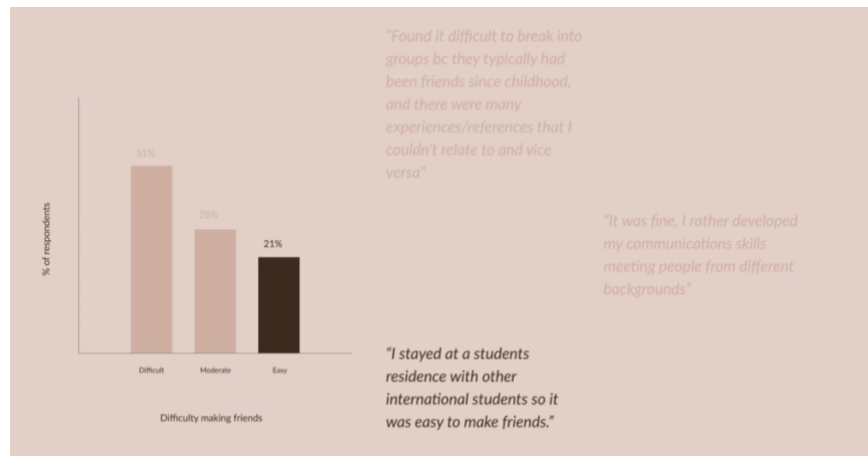
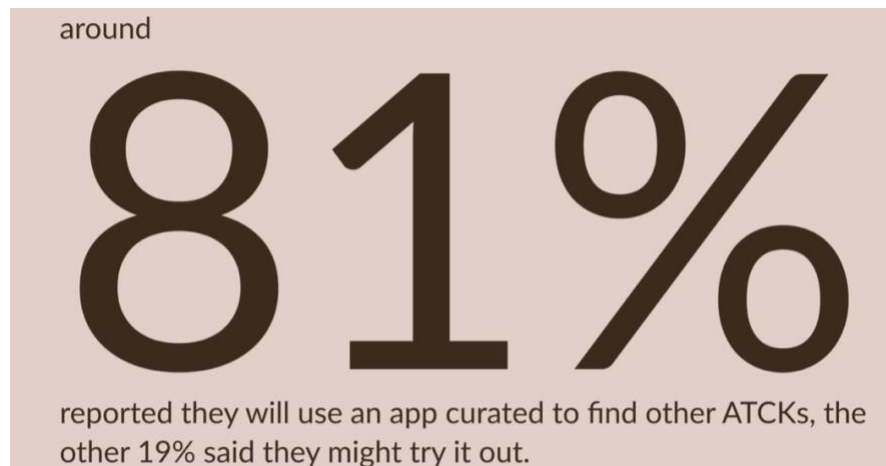


Figure 29: "Easy" bar highlighted with corresponding quote

The next part highlights a quote from Lyons Shelly, (2022): “Most people yearn to belong, whether it be to a place or a group of people. For ATCKs, belonging to a place is less likely due to their high childhood mobility, but belonging through relationships is an achievable reality.”



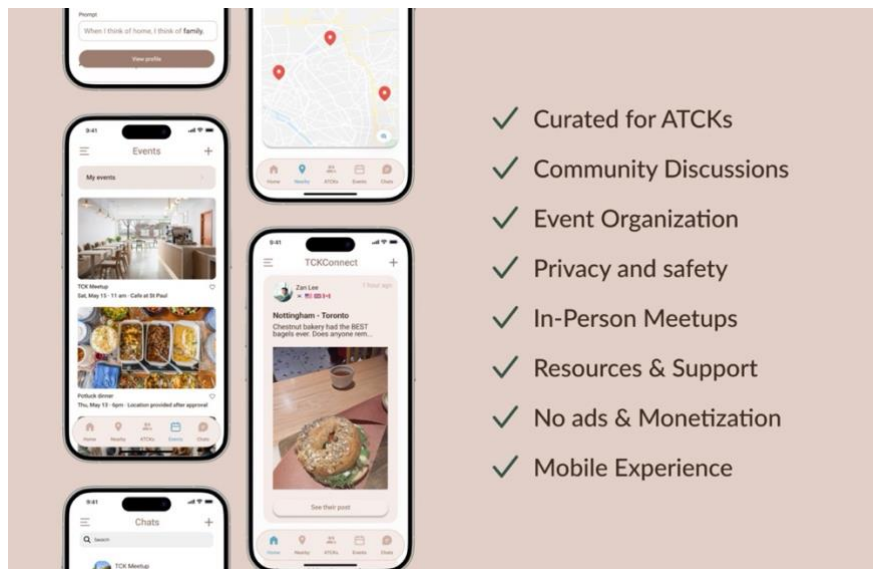
#### 4.1.8 Interest in an app for ATCKs



*Figure 30: Respondents interested in using the app*

As seen in the above image, Figure 30, effectively, 100% of respondents expressed openness to trying the application, demonstrating universal interest among the surveyed population.

#### 4.1.9 Comparative Analysis



*Figure 31: TCKConnect and its features*

The last section concludes with a list of features that are available on TCKConnect, that are not present on the rest of the existing apps. Refer Figure 31.

### 4.6 Understanding what/where “Home” is

To engage non-TCKs and draw parallels between their experiences and those of TCKs, this thesis incorporated an interactive element that invites audience participation. Research hopes

to give a glimpse of what or how TCK childhoods might seem like to non-TCKs through the display of its findings.

An attempt to communicate the nuances of the feeling of not being able to call a place “home” this thesis tries to include different ways to display this.

### 4.1.3 “What is home to you?”

As a part of the Demo exhibition of the program Digital Futures, conducted in the fall semester at OCAD University, the audience was presented with the question, “What is home to you?” a deliberately open-ended and thought-provoking query designed to spark reflection. The intention was to mirror the complex answers often given by Third Culture Kids (TCKs) when asked about “home.” Unlike the conventional question, “Where are you from?”, which assumes a straightforward geographic answer, this question sought to elicit responses rooted in feelings, experiences, and personal interpretations.

This activity was trialed during the October demo, where participants scanned a QR code to interact with the prompt. The immediate engagement demonstrated curiosity and interest, as the participatory nature of the question encouraged active involvement. The question required users to reflect on their own experiences, making it personal and engaging exercise.

Mentimeter

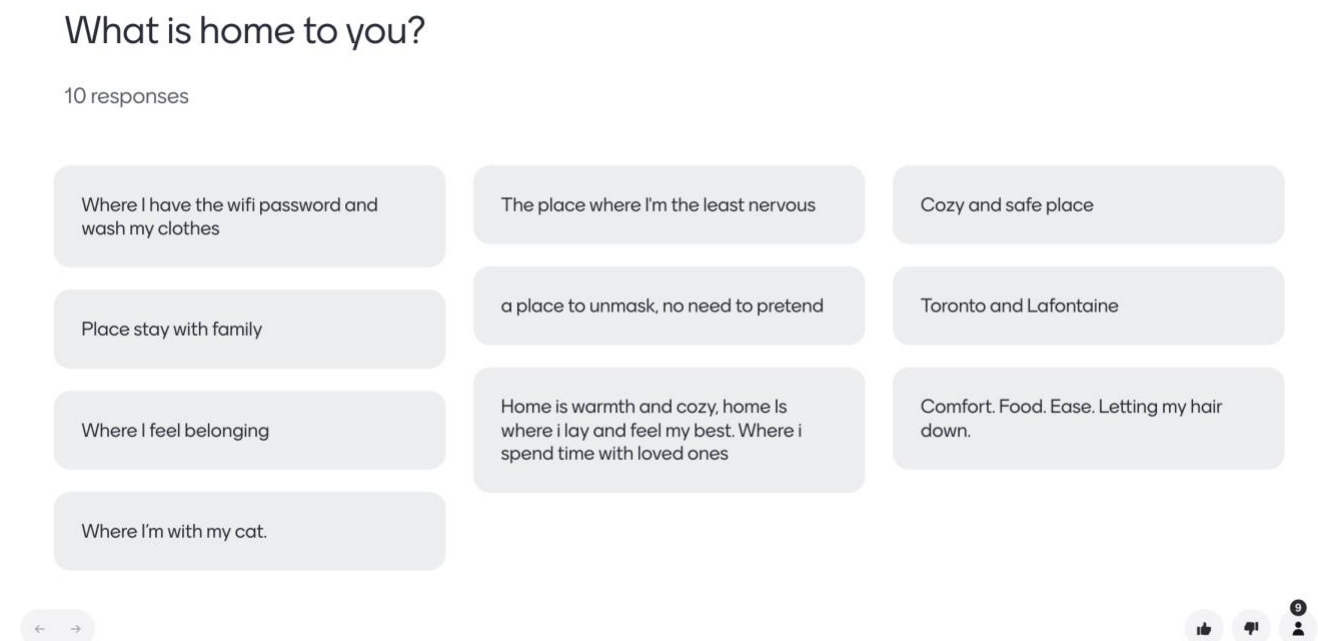


Figure 32: What is home to you?

The responses, indicated in Figure 32, varied widely, reflecting the diversity of perceptions about home. Answers included phrases like “home is where my cat is,” “home is where I feel belonging,” and “a place to unmask, no need to pretend.” Some participants mentioned specific

locations, such as cities or countries, while others focused on abstract feelings like comfort and ease. These varied responses highlight the universal yet deeply individual nature of the concept of “home.”

The wording of the question, “What is home to you?”, was intentional. While asking, “Where are you from?” may prompt most people to name their hometown or a specific place, TCKs often struggle to answer this question due to their transient lifestyles. Instead, for many TCKs, home is defined by feelings of belonging, safety, or connection rather than a physical location.

Although the reframing of the question should have allowed the audience to grasp the nuanced and emotional way TCKs define home, this approach was not entirely effective. In retrospect, it might have been more revealing to directly ask the pressing question “Where are you from?” or to pair both questions. “Where are you from?” expects the name of a country or place as an answer, while “What is home to you?” invites people to describe something they're emotionally attached to that embodies the sentiment of home. This contrast could better highlight the unique perspective of TCKs.

However, after discussions with the advisors, it was realized that this direction primarily catered to non-TCKs, who are not the target audience for this thesis. As a result, the aspect of spreading awareness of the TCK community was not explored further.

# Chapter 5: User research, Survey and Usability Testing

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an examination of survey findings from the initial online questionnaire (detailed in Appendix A), which explored ATCKs' social behaviors, mobility patterns, and digital platform preferences. Next, it details the usability testing results, incorporating feedback from both in-person and online usability testing of the app prototype. By analyzing user responses, navigation challenges, and engagement patterns, this chapter provides data-driven insights to refine the final design. Ultimately, the findings in this chapter serve as the foundation for the iteration and optimization of TCKConnect, ensuring that the platform effectively addresses ATCKs' needs for social connection and belonging in a way that existing platforms do not. (Task details in Appendix H).

## 5.2 Initial Online Survey Findings

### 5.2.1 Overview

This survey of 28 Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) reveals a digitally savvy, globally minded community actively seeking meaningful connections with others who share their unique life experiences. The respondents, ranging from young adults to 45+ year olds, demonstrate remarkably similar patterns in their desire for connection, technological comfort, and social challenges, regardless of age or background.

### 5.2.2 Mobility

The majority of ATCKs in the survey have experienced high levels of mobility. The most common pattern was 3-5 international moves during childhood. This pattern has enriched their cultural experiences but also introduced challenges in maintaining long-term relationships.

The duration of stays varied significantly, but most commonly fell into the 1–5 year range, followed by 5-10 years. The maximum years for stay in one place was 5 years, on average. This suggests that while these individuals moved frequently, they often had enough time to develop meaningful connections in each location.

### 5.2.3 Digital Comfort

A standout finding is the remarkably high level of technological proficiency among all age groups. Nearly all participants (26 out of 28) reported being proficient with mobile apps, using them daily. Only 2 participants identified as having moderate proficiency. Notably, even those aged 45 and above exhibited the same level of daily usage of apps as their younger counterparts. This insight indicates that the app being developed does not need to account for major technological barriers among older users.

### 5.2.4 Finding Friends

One of the key findings in the survey is the varying levels of difficulty ATCKs face in making new friends after moving to a new country at 18, when most people move for university. 74% of respondents reported to struggle to some degree with making new connections post-relocation or re-entry at this stage. Many respondents expressed that they feel different from those who have lived in only one place, making it harder to relate on a deeper level. Their social circle usually tends to gravitate towards other TCKs or international students as they could not relate to locals or non-TCKs.

*"I stayed at a students' residence with other international students so it was easy to make friends."*

*"As a traditional TCK, I find the monocultural way of thinking the most challenging in nurturing friendship."*

These findings align with the literature review as seen in section 2.4.1 relationship formation patterns. Pollock and Van Reken (2017) highlight that frequent relocation might create barriers to form long lasting bonds even in adulthood as they are accustomed to saying frequent goodbyes. The feeling of being a 'hidden immigrant' also does not help trying to make new connections post re-entry.

### 5.2.5 Feeling Disconnected

Several respondents shared that they often feel fundamentally different from those around them, leading to challenges in forming meaningful relationships. One respondent noted,

*"I can fit in, but deep down don't ever feel like I really belong because no one around me can relate to how I grew up"*

This echoes Fail's (1996) observation that ATCKs experience a sense of belonging "everywhere but nowhere" (Section 2.3.2). Another participant noted,

*"People seem unable to understand that I know a lot about the world, and it makes conversations difficult."*

This feeling of detachment is common among ATCKs, who often feel like outsiders even in their passport country. These experiences strongly align with the "hidden immigrant" phenomenon described by Gilbert (2008), where ATCKs may outwardly fit in but internally feel like outsiders (Section 2.3.3). One respondent captured this internal conflict,

*"You're kind of standing at the precipice of many different cultures, and at times it feels like you're never enough of one certain culture to be welcomed in fully, so it always feels like being an outsider to your own cultural roots."*

*"It's lonely, and I do not feel understood."*

This sense of disconnection can make it harder to build friendships, as ATCKs may struggle to find people who truly understand their experiences. It reinforces the importance of finding a community of like-minded individuals who share similar backgrounds and perspectives. The primary reason? A sense of being fundamentally different from those who have not shared similar international experiences. The respondents' expressed need for community with those who share similar international experiences validates Section 2.5.2's emphasis on "connection through shared experience," supporting Walters & Auton-Cuff's (2009) research that ATCKs experience "instant recognition" when encountering others with similar backgrounds, providing a sense of validation and familiarity that is otherwise difficult to achieve.

### 5.2.6 Attempts to Connect with fellow ATCKs

Many respondents shared their experiences in attempting to connect with fellow ATCKs in the past. While some have successfully formed meaningful relationships, others have struggled to find the right communities or platforms. One participant said,

*"It would be really great to have a community where people understand my experience and we can support and grow together."*

There is a clear and strong preference for connecting with other ATCKs.

### 5.2.7 Professional and Peer Support

A significant number of participants seek either professional or peer support for issues related to identity and belonging. Specifically, 14 respondents reported seeking peer support, while 6 had professional support. This suggests that despite their adaptability and global experience, ATCKs continue to grapple with questions of identity and belonging well into adulthood.

### 5.2.8 Interest in the app

100% of respondents expressed interest in using an app specifically designed for ATCKs. 81% saying they will definitely use it, while the other 19% saying they might use it. Some of the requested features are as follows:

- *The ability to connect based on shared schools or locations*
- *Tools for tracking travel and finding other ATCKs while moving globally*
- *A platform for sharing life milestones with people who understand their unique backgrounds.*
- *Talking points, other points of connect apart from background, makes it easier to be friends.*
- *A dating option*
- *App randomly matching users with people based on their profile*

### 5.2.9 Conclusion

The survey data strongly supports the development of a geo-location based ATCK-focused meetup app. Participants showed high technological proficiency and strong interest in such a platform.

## 5.3 In-Person Usability Testing Qualitative Analysis

For the In-Person Usability Testing, three ATCKs participated. Three separate one-on-one testing sessions were conducted with participants. The findings of the testing are described task-wise, and the results are shown in Table 2 as follows. If a participant was able to complete the task, the number 1 was recorded; and if they were unable to complete the task, the number 0 was recorded.

*Table 3: In-Person Usability Test report*

S.No.	Task	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
1	Check if you are a TCK	0	1	0
2	Create your profile	1	1	1
3	Add an answer to a "Question"	1	1	1
4	Add a comment to a "story"	0	1	1
5	Create a "Post"	1	1	0
6	Edit your profile and add a "Prompt" that reads – when I think of home, I think of...	1	1	1
7	Sign up to an event happening nearby	1	1	1
8	Send a request to Clara after liking one of her recent posts	1	1	1
9	"Like" that you might see interesting	1	1	0
10	Add and post your own event	1	1	1
11	Approve or deny requests of people to attend the event	1	1	1

### 5.3.1 Onboarding and Profile creation (Tasks 1 and 2)

#### **Task 1: Check if you are a TCK**

This is the first-time user experience as described in section 4.3.1. Two out of three participants were not able to complete this task as they skipped “finding out” if they are a TCK and answered “yes” in the first screen itself. Since they already knew they are TCKs, it is valid for them to not find the need to check. Participant 2 explored the option but that was more of a curiosity of what it meant and not trying to verify their own status as a TCK.

#### **Task 2: Create your profile**

This task entailed adding information of the persona, Aditi – all the information was all pre-filled and the participants had to navigate to the next screen trying to understand the flow. All participants successfully completed this task and reported the process to be straightforward and simple. Two participants were confused about adding countries – they thought those were buttons, this is a UI correction that needs to be made.

### 5.3.2 Posts/ Questions/ Stories (Tasks 3, 4 and 5)

All these tasks are a part of the homepage, refer 4.3.3 for screen visuals.

#### **Task 3, 4, 5: Add an answer to a “Question”; Add a comment to a “Story”; Add your own “Post”**

Although all participants were each able to complete at least 2 of the tasks, they were all confused and took time to discover that there are differences in questions posts and stories. All participants understood and interacted with the different types of tasks but were confused the terminology of each and associated the terms with existing social media apps like Instagram or WhatsApp. Despite the confusion, the participants were eventually able to understand what each thing meant and at least two out of the three were able to the tasks. Participant quotes:

- *“Oh, I see. So, there are there are like, distinct questions as opposed to like other posts, right?”*
- *“Alright, yeah, like I can see like it's written down there, see the post and okay, I see the question.”*
- *“I think it's... is it like the WhatsApp story or the Instagram story kind of thing?”*

Insight: Rename the different terms associated and change UI elements to make them more distinct.



### 5.3.3 Edit Profile (Task 6)

#### **Task 6: Edit your profile and add a "Prompt" that reads - "when I think of home, I think of..."**

All participants were able to complete this task with ease. Navigating to the profile section and then finding the prompt, reviewing the edited profile and "completing" was straightforward. "it was actually pretty easy to understand."

### 5.3.4 Signing up and sending requests (Task 7 and 8)

#### **Task 7: Sign up to attend an event happening nearby**

Two of the three participants completed this task by using the "Events" page instead of the "Nearby" page. They found it straightforward. One participant used the "Nearby" page but was confused about the exact location. This suggests an UI improvement to clarify navigation.

#### **Task 8: Send a request to 'Clara' after liking her recent activity post**

All participants were able to complete this task, however, two out of three participants added her from the "Nearby" page and not the "ATCKs" page, likely due to the visual prominence of profiles on the map. They were all able to navigate to her "Activities" page and like her recent post. Participant 3 added her from the ATCKs page as intended, however suggested there to be filters in the ATCKs page to set a radius. This participant said:

*"I would first want to know who's around me, so I definitely want the location to work. I know I know not everyone's comfortable sharing the location with an app because of the data collection and all of that, but so maybe a work around that would be to enter the postal code".*

### 5.3.5 Events (Task 9, 10 and 11)

#### **Task 9: Add a "Like" to any even**

Two participants easily navigated to the events page and "liked" any event they found interesting. It was a simple, they found it to be a straightforward task. One participant was not able to find the like easily, but they eventually found it. Two out of three participants found the Like button to be a little small, so it took them a few tries to click on it for it to turn to a different colour, signifying the action is completed. This suggests a UI change to make this button slightly larger.

#### **Task 10: Add and post your own event**

All participants were able to navigate and complete this task. Participant 3 found the plus button on the top of the "Events" page a little difficult to click, which led to frustration. They navigated to different pages assuming it did not work but eventually returned to the events page to create a new event. On the other hand, the task is intuitive to navigate. Participant 1 commented:

*“Nice. I like the shortened page. It's very concise and this layout is perfect for like my thumb. Naturally goes down to the post as I'm scrolling it. It's like I finished reading it and then it's the next action. It's already naturally where it would be”.*

### **Task 11: Approve and decline requests**

Most users were easily able to complete this task of approving or declining requests of people who had signed up for the event they created. However, almost all of them were open to approving all people and were open to inviting all new people to join the events. Participant 2 says *“No, I don't think there would be a reason for me to decline.”* Participant 3 was concerned about privacy and suggested there can be a way to verify profiles and maybe that would be a way to accept or decline requests.

#### **5.3.6 Final thoughts from participants**

Participant 1 suggested they would like to use it to find people and then add them on Instagram or other networks. Participants 2 and 3 were excited to use this and connect with fellow ATCKs. They said they would also add people on their personal network after meeting them. Participant 2 particularly liked the maps where they could visually see the nearby elements. An average rating of 7.7 was given to the prototype, to the overall idea, design, usability and features.

#### **5.3.7 Insights**

All three participants provided valuable feedback. The onboarding is a smooth process with just the UI element of countries requiring redesign. A clarification of posts, questions and stories needs to occur, by either changing the UI or UX or both. Tasks related to the events were well structured and intuitive, participants could easily complete the tasks. Participants tend to draw parallels from existing apps that have created a dictionary of terms that are associated with certain tasks, like a story is a 24-hour disappearing temporary post.

## 5.4 Online Usability Testing Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis

An online Usability Test was conducted by providing the participants with the same list of 11 tasks used in the in-person usability testing.

Participants rated the ease of completing each task, and Figure 23 presents the average ease-of-use ratings for all tasks. A detailed breakdown of each task's ratings and participant feedback is provided in the following sections.

These average ratings are referenced throughout this section when discussing individual task performance.

- Ratings from 8–10 indicate that the task was easy to understand and complete.
- Ratings from 5–7 indicate moderate difficulty.
- Ratings from 2–4 indicate that the task was difficult to complete.
- Ratings from 0–1 indicate that participants were unable to complete the task due to difficulty in understanding it.

Each participant was also asked a follow-up question to provide additional feedback.

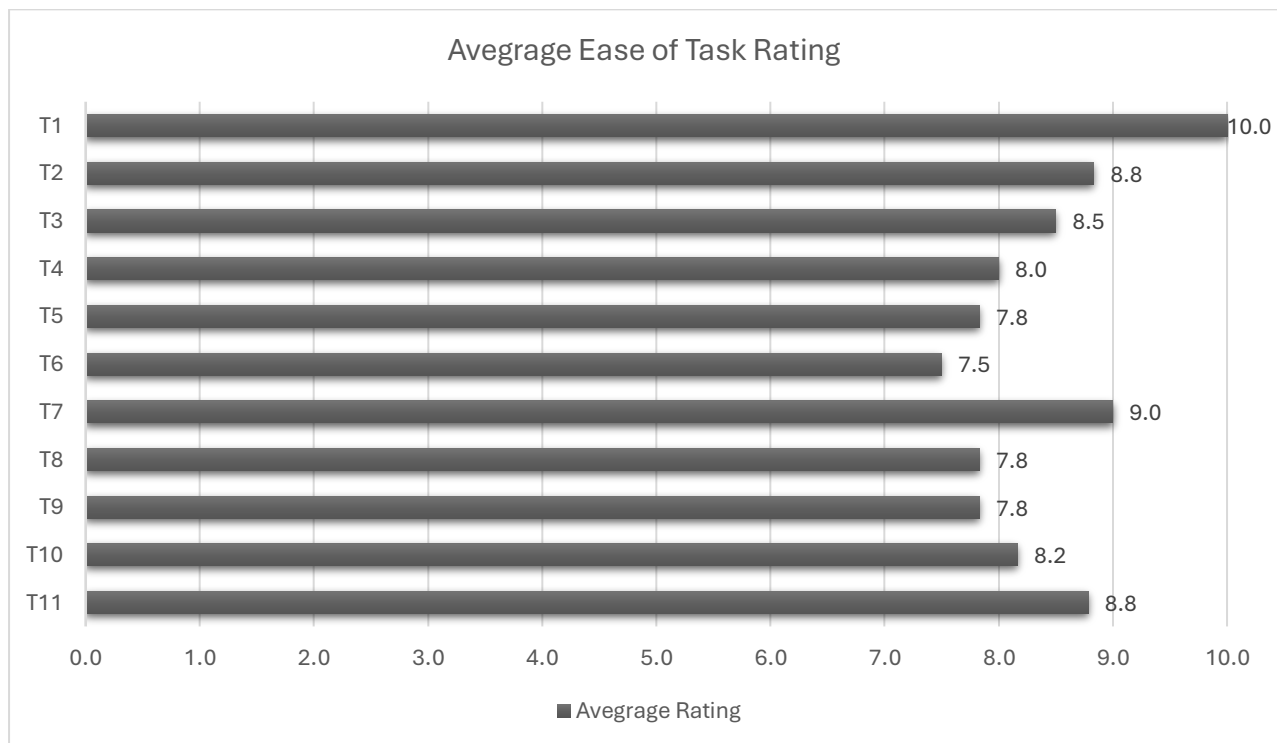


Figure 33: Participants' ratings for usability testing for each task; the higher the rating, easier the task

### 5.4.1 Onboarding and Profile creation (Tasks 1 and 2)

#### Task 1: Check if you are a TCK

As shown in Figure 33, this task was completed by all participants. However, the follow-up questions revealed that participants did not “check” but selected “yes” and moved to the next task, suggesting that participants did not fully understand the task as intended. Most respondents felt this

feature was helpful. One participant mentioned they were unsure how a non-TCK might benefit from the app.

However, Participant 5 suggested that this should not be exclusive to TCKs and non-TCKs might benefit from using the app, particularly partners or parents are trying to understand or support a TCK. This is something that had come up during the initial online survey, they suggested that to have a dating option to find partners who can easily understand them (see Section 5.2.8). For the future versions, there is a possibility that this platform can be opened to users who are interested in learning about TCKs.

## Task 2: Create your profile

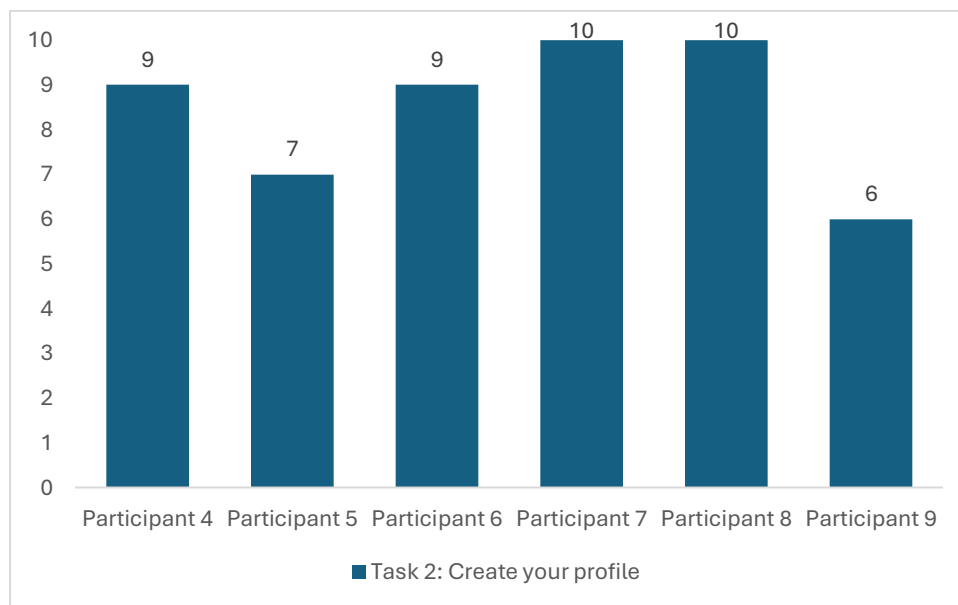


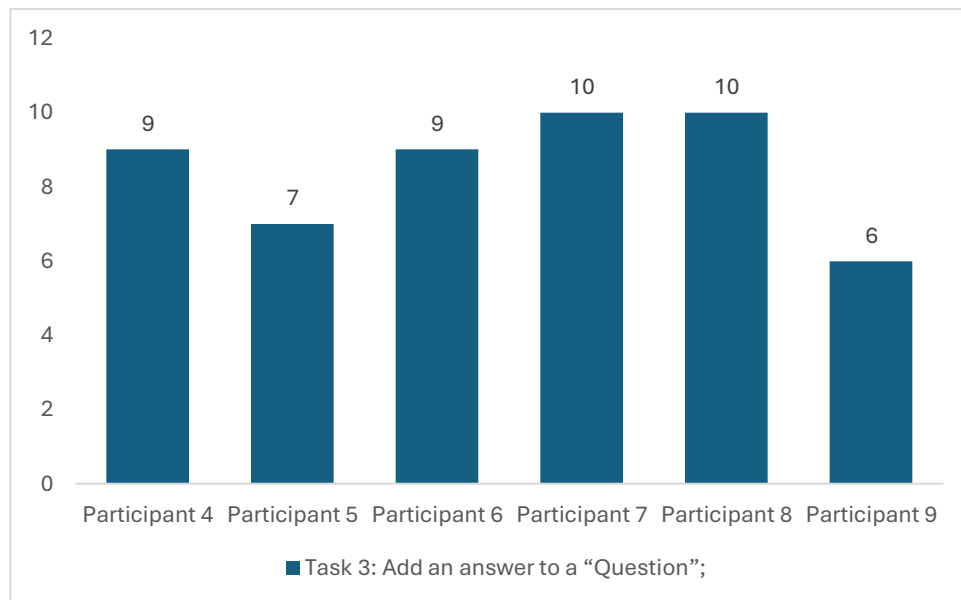
Figure 34: Individual Ratings of Task 2

This task was reported to be straightforward and easily completed. As seen in Figure 34, four out of six participants were able to easily complete the task. Participant 6 said *“It was self-explanatory. Helps that each prompt is on a separate page, until the very end when you can edit all answers. Works well!”*

### 5.4.2 Posts/ Questions/ Stories (Tasks 3, 4 and 5)

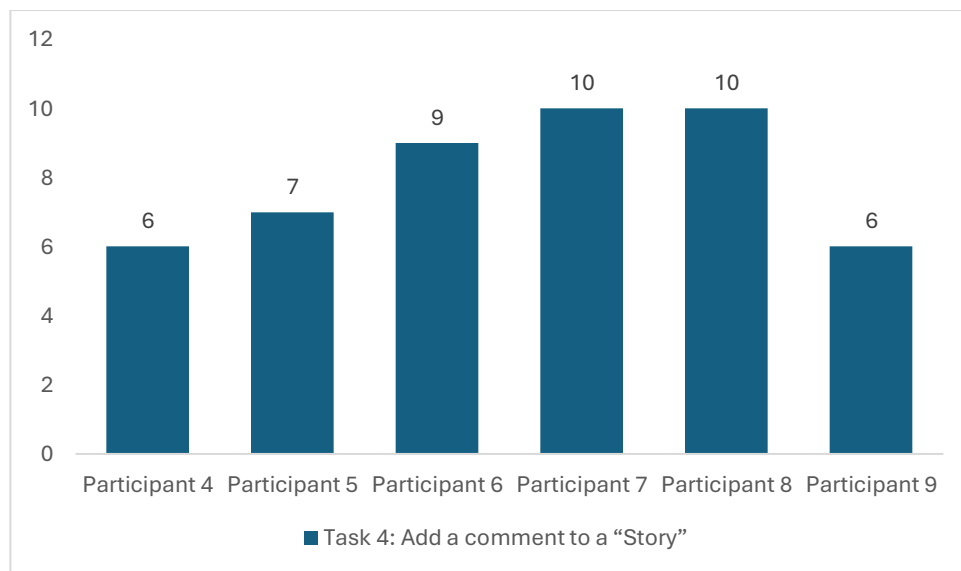
All these tasks are a part of the homepage, (refer Section 4.3.3 for screen visuals).

**Task 3, 4, 5: Add an answer to a “Question”; Add a comment to a “Story”; Add your own “Post”**



*Figure 35: Individual Ratings of Task 3*

As shown in Figure 35, four out of six participants reported to have completed this task easily. However, similar to the in-person usability tests, participants reported to find the distinction between these three to be confusing and suggested that the UI could be better to distinguish between the three types of buttons by possibly introducing another colour.



*Figure 36: Individual ratings of Task 4*

Figure 36 shows individual ratings of easiness on a scale of 1-10 for Task 4. Participants 4 and 9 found it comparatively difficult to complete as they associated terms like “Story” with existing social

media apps and one of them suggested to rename it to something different like “experience”. As seen in Figure 33, task 4 has an average rating of 8, signifying overall it was easy to complete.

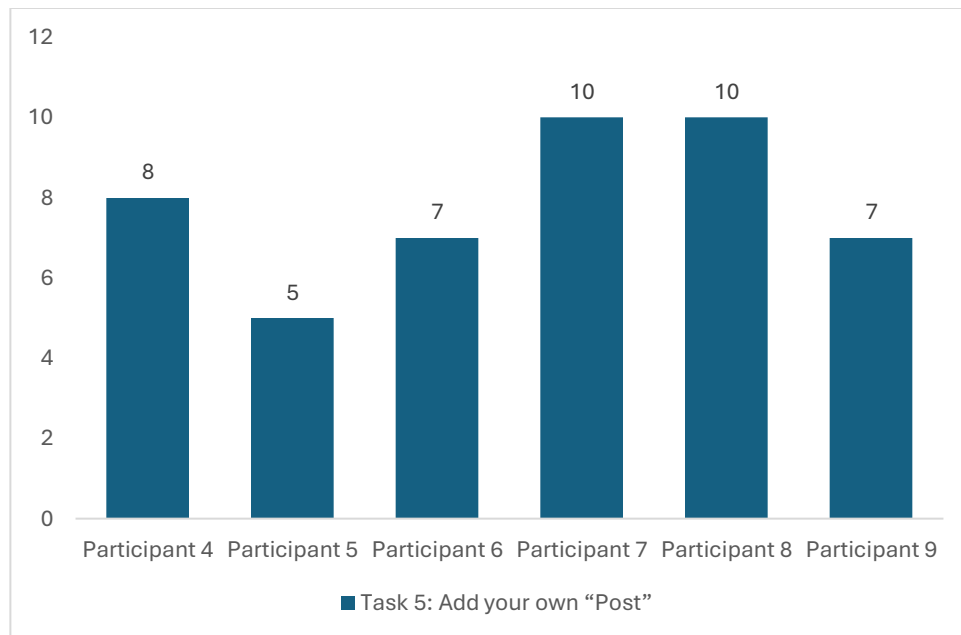


Figure 37: Individual Ratings of Task 5

As seen in Figure 37, 50% participants reported to have struggled to find the dropdown menu despite clicking on the plus (+) sign has a default of adding a story. Task 5 has an average rating of 7.8 as seen in Figure 33, signifying it was moderately difficult to complete.

### 5.4.3 Edit Profile (Task 6)

**Task 6: Edit your profile and add a "Prompt" that reads - “when I think of home, I think of...”**

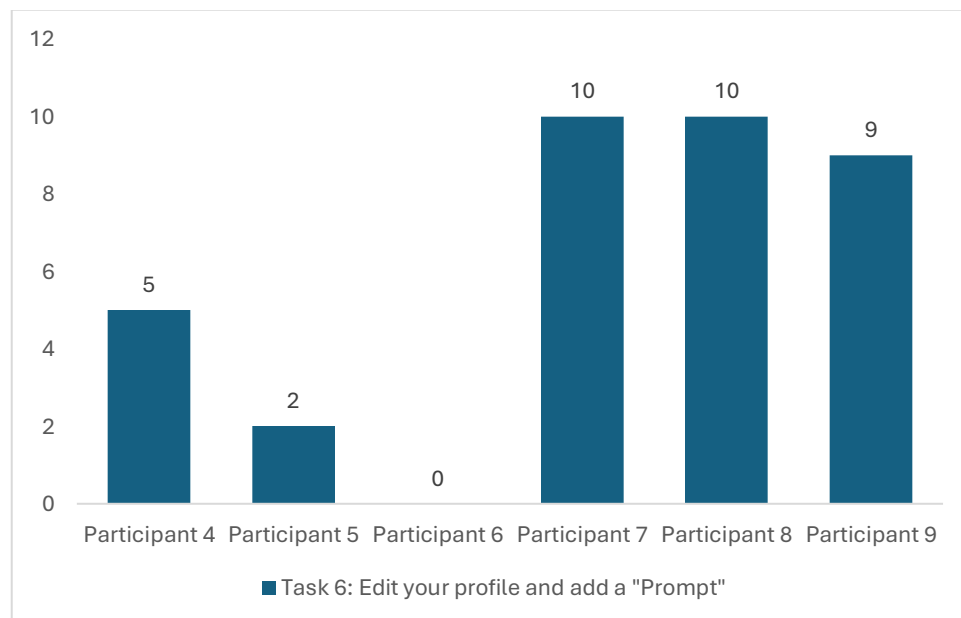


Figure 38: Individual Ratings for Task 6

As shown in Figure 38, Participants 4 and 5 were not able to complete this task because it was not clear to them. Participant 6 however, misunderstood the point of the task and gave feedback on the example and not the task itself – hence, their response is not to be considered for evaluation. However, other three the participants found it easy to complete.

#### 5.4.4 Signing up and sending requests (Task 7 and 8)

##### Task 7: Sign up to attend an event happening nearby

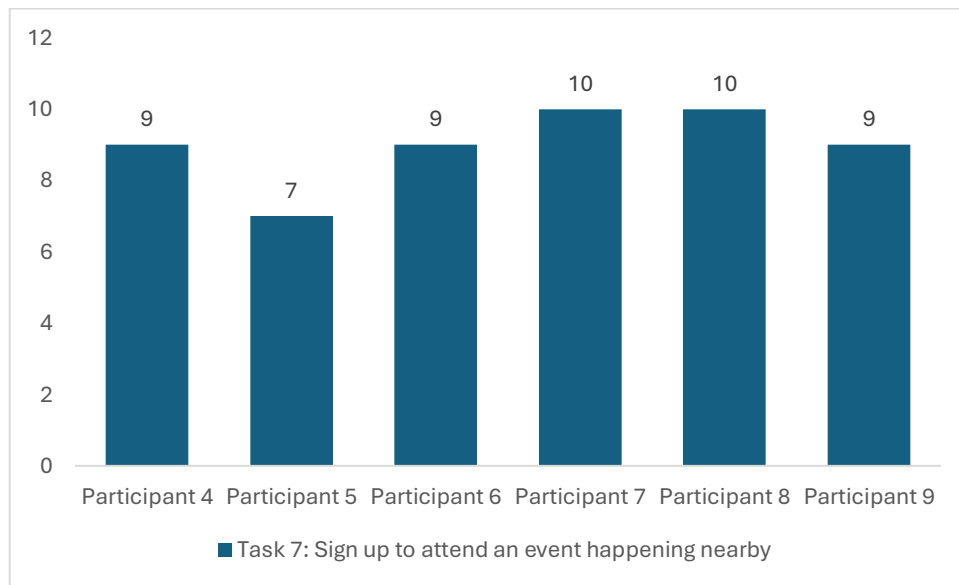


Figure 39: Individual Ratings for Task 7

As seen in Figure 39 and Figure 33, this was one of the easiest to complete tasks and all participants were able to complete it. One of the participants suggested this reminded them of InterNations, this is a platform for expats to find their community in international countries.

### Task 8: Send a request to ‘Clara’ after liking her recent activity post

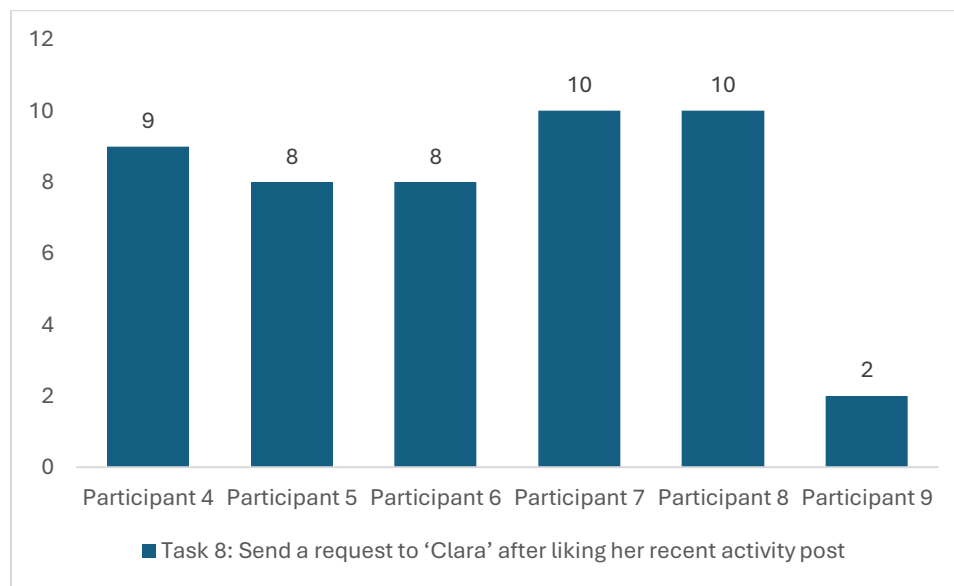


Figure 40: Individual Ratings for Task 8

As seen in Figure 40, five out of six participants were able to complete this task. One of the participants was not able to complete the task as they could not find Clara’s post. One participant said, “It could be nice to have a 3rd category which says “Pending” or “Requested” so you can keep track of who’ve you’ve sent requests out to and their current status”.

### 5.4.5 Events (Tasks 9, 10 and 11)

#### Task 9: Add a “Like” to any event

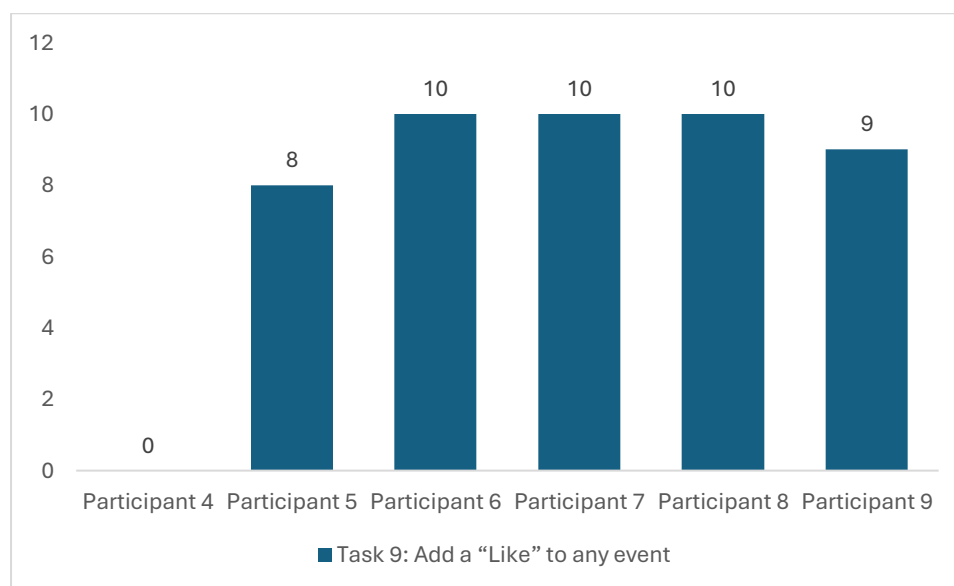


Figure 41: Individual Ratings for Task 9



As seen in Figure 41, Participant 1 was unable to complete this task and rated a zero, they suggested it might not be the right name for the task. The rest of the 5 participants were easily able to understand like an event, rated the easiness of it on 8, 9 or 10. 50% participants reported it was easy to complete.

### Task 10: Add and post your own event

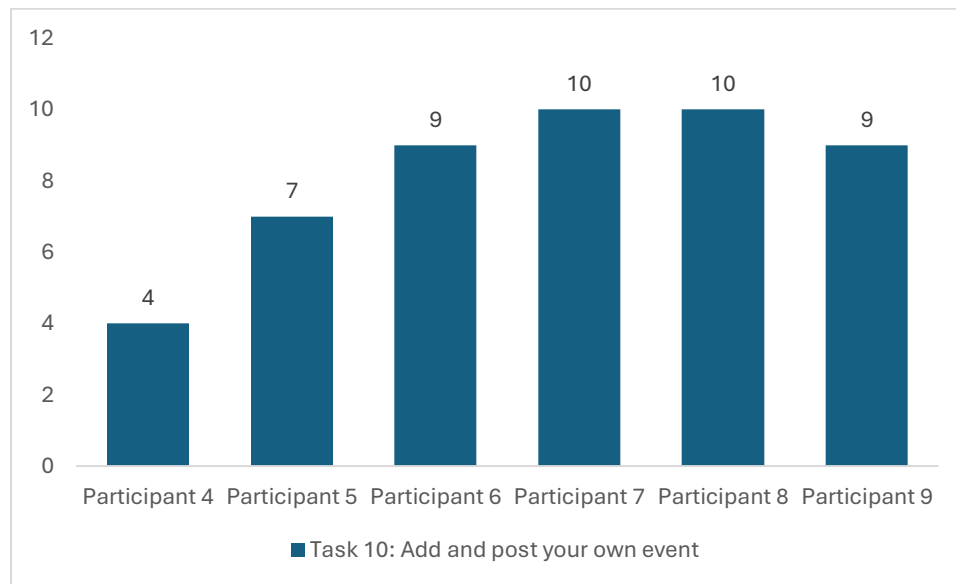


Figure 42: Individual Ratings for Task 10

As seen in Figure 42, majority of the participants were able to complete the task. Participant 5 reported it was “easy” despite giving a rating of 7. Participant 7 liked the organisation of the event sections *“I like that I can organize events too. and it was also really easy to do. I also like that there are no requirements to organize your own event.”*

### Task 11: Approve and decline requests

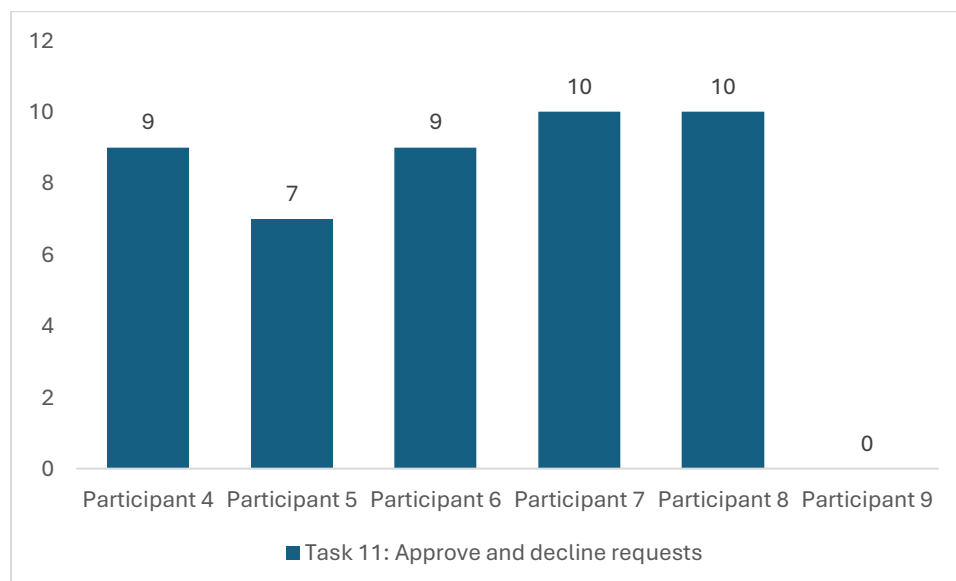


Figure 43: Individual Ratings of Task 11

As seen in Figure 43, most of the participants found the task easy to complete except Participant 9. Participant 6 suggested there could be two different events one being private and one public and open to all so that approving and denying requests makes sense for private events but not public ones. They also suggested that the existing information on the app could be used to filter/show events to certain people instead of “denying” approval.

#### 5.4.6 Final thoughts from participants

This section contains questions asked to participants and the analysis of their answers.

##### 1. Anything they expected to find but didn't.

Participant 5 suggests that the app features on some structured and targeted community building, possibly apart from user generated interactions on the homepage – some more focus on prompts or conversation builders from the community moderators to curate a space for people to share they said

*“Focus on what we might/ could have in common as 'unrooted' people - now feels too much location focused. Would be nice to see encouragement to invite/ share what it's like to be/ feel a lack of sense of belonging with those generally around us (the non-ATCKs); that in your app we can find camaraderie”*

##### 2. Thoughts on “Nearby” page.

Participant 4 says *“it's the strongest feature of the app”*.

Participant 8 says *“I like the visuals of having a map, handy”*.

Two participants suggest that it is nice for events but not the best for individuals as it may raise privacy concerns and instead of showing their location down to the street maybe just a general area or city could be mentioned, similar to what participant 3 from in-person usability testing suggested, to provide the zip code instead of the area.

##### 3. One feature they liked and disliked.

Participant 4 liked the Chats feature that they had the option talk to someone before they met them. Three participants loved the idea of the app itself the most and that it was not too complicated to navigate through. Participant 6 had some powerful insights, they said:

*“I liked the simplicity of the UI, found it easy to navigate. However, I think there needs to be more hierarchy in the colour palette. It's very aesthetic but at times it feels like the aestheticism is taking over the functionality, and proper contrast and distinction between sections/CTAs/headings etc is important for legibility and accessibility, especially if folks have issues with seeing light text on a light background or small text etc.”*

##### 4. On a scale of 1-10, how easy was it to use.

The average overall rating is 8.58. This suggests that the app overall was intuitive and easy to use.

## **5. Would they use this app. Why or why not.**

Five out of six participants say they would definitely use the app.

*“Yes, I would - I think this could be a great space to find ppl with similar experiences and backgrounds!”*

Participant 4 says they would not use the app to meet ATCKs but would prefer to meet them more naturally, someone who might be a classmate or a mutual friend.

## **6. Final thoughts.**

Participant 9 says

*“I would love to connect with more folks like me, please make this a reality.”*

### **5.4.7 Findings from the online testing**

Similar to the in-person usability testing, participants found the homepage posts/ questions/ stories part confusing. They drew parallels with similar terms that the existing social media platforms use. The hierarchy of the UI elements and/or the colour could be modified to better suit the readability. The map visual was very intuitive for events but possibly not so much for ATCKs, or maybe profiles of people, if they choose to be on the map – it could be a general area and not the exact one.

## **5.5 Insights from both tests**

### **Positives:**

The usability tests, both in-person and online, highlighted several strengths of the app’s design along with areas that need refinement. Overall, participants found the app intuitive, visually appealing, and well-structured. The overall onboarding process was smooth and easy to follow. Event-related features were particularly well-received, as users could easily sign up for, create, and manage events, all of which are the apps key features for geo-location based community building.

### **Necessary improvements:**

There were some areas that caused confusion, specifically the homepage terminology between “Posts,” “Questions,” and “Stories”. It was unclear to many users, who associated these terms with existing social media platforms. Renaming these sections and/or refining the UI could help clarify their functions. Additionally, while navigation was mostly seamless, some users accessed features in unexpected ways, suggesting that minor UX adjustments could better align

the app with natural user behavior. While the app's aesthetic design was widely appreciated, two participants suggested improving contrast or hierarchy to enhance readability.

### **Overall comments:**

The map feature was praised for event discovery but raised privacy concerns when used for individual profiles, with users preferring a general location indicator instead of precise details. Despite these refinements, the app received strong positive feedback, with an average usability rating of 8.3. Most participants were excited about using it to connect with fellow ATCKs, emphasizing that the core concept is valuable and engaging. One participant highlighting that non-TCKs might show interest in learning about TCKs as they might be a partner or a parent, and the future versions could adhere to this suggestion. With minor UI refinements and improved feature clarity, the app has strong potential to effectively serve the community.

Both usability testing processes had their respective advantages and disadvantages. In-person testing was more effective for notetaking and observing live reactions. However, potential biases may have existed, as participants could have felt obligated to be more polite during face-to-face interactions, even if they did not favor a particular feature. Conversely, during online testing, participants might have been more candid, as the lack of physical presence could reduce social pressure and encourage honest feedback.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

This thesis explored how ATCKs find a sense of belonging through people and not a specific place in context of rootlessness, resulting in TCKConnect, a digital tool designed through user-centered principles to facilitate meaningful in-person connections among ATCKs.

### **6.1 Outcomes and contributions**

This thesis's contributions are twofold: academic research insights and digital product design innovations.

In response to the primary research question **“How can the design of a geolocation based mobile app help Adult Third Culture Kids find a sense of belonging and community?”**, the research revealed the limitations in existing platforms such as Facebook groups, Discord communities, and TCKGlobal, which predominantly focus on online discussions, lack infrastructure for structured, real-world interactions specifically tailored for ATCKs or rely on external sources to coordinate. Current solutions require users to navigate multiple platforms to coordinate a single in-person meeting, whereas TCKConnect streamlines this process within a dedicated environment exclusively designed for the ATCK demographic. Moreover, TCKConnect has multiple other features that are curated for ATCKs only. Survey data demonstrated overwhelming interest in the proposed application, with effectively 100% of respondents (who collectively have lived in over 85

different countries) expressing interest in utilizing the platform to connect with nearby ATCKs. This sentiment was aptly captured by one participant who stated: *“I would love to connect with people like me, please make this a reality.”* (see Section 5.4.6 Q6). However, certain challenges may arise in using a digital tool to ensure in-person meet-ups. Despite the overwhelming 100% interest from participants, whether they will actually attend these events is something that needs to be tested further.

The secondary research question **“How do ATCKs construct and understand 'belonging' in the absence of a traditional geographic home?”** addresses the academic lens of the thesis. The literature review identified foundational ATCK challenges including rootlessness (Fail, 1996), hidden immigrant experiences (Gilbert, 2008), and prolonged identity formation (Useem & Cottrell, 1993). These theoretical frameworks were subsequently validated through primary research, wherein 81% of survey respondents reported experiencing disconnection due to their unique backgrounds. This study confirmed that ATCKs rely on relationships, not geography, for belonging (Lyons, 2022), a principle that subsequently informed the conceptual foundation of TCKConnect.

The other major contribution was the development of a high-fidelity Figma prototype for TCKConnect, an application centered on geolocation functionality that facilitates in-person connections, and a curated space for ATCKs to share their thoughts. This addresses the second secondary research question: **“What are the unique social and cultural connectivity needs of ATCKs that are not met by existing social media platforms?”** Beyond its core geolocation functionality, the application incorporates numerous features identified through survey responses addressing critical needs within the ATCK community (see Section 5.2.8). These implementations include the ability to connect based on shared geographical histories, operationalized through the integration of country flags beneath user profiles. Additionally, the application's global accessibility addresses the need for maintaining connections while navigating international mobility; as users relocate, the platform automatically displays events and community members in their new location.

The prototype further addresses the expressed need for “a platform for sharing life milestones with people who understand their unique backgrounds” through the “Home” page, which enables users to share narratives and pictures on which other community members can interact with them through comments or likes. One of the survey respondents also articulated the need of “talking points and other points of connection apart from background” to facilitate conversations. This need is addressed through the implementation of the preexisting “Questions” feature (see Section 4.4.2) wherein users can select and post it to the community, thereby initiating communication pathways. A potential enhancement to this functionality could include administrator-curated discussion topics to supplement user-generated content and stimulate broader community engagement. Some of these suggestions directly influenced the architectural design of the app, as they were incorporated into the Homepage, making it the first page users see when opening the app instead of the Events page. This strategic placement prioritizes community engagement and content sharing at the forefront of the user experience, establishing a sense of belonging before even accessing the geolocation features that facilitate in-person connections.

## 6.2 Future Pathways and Applications

While this research has produced a high-fidelity Figma prototype of TCKConnect, several pathways exist for future development and implementation. Preliminary discussions with TCKGlobal administrators have opened possibilities for collaboration. Additionally, conversations with one of their administrators have already led to discussions about leveraging their coding talent to bring the design to life. TCKConnect could serve as an extension to their existing online presence, which currently maintains a static website and relies on Discord for online connections.

Future usability tests could employ a blended approach that combines the advantages of in-person and online methods. Online tests could be conducted incorporating screen and voice recordings, leveraging the strengths of both methods while minimizing their limitations.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) would focus on user retention and community formation. After joining the app, users would ideally attend meetups regularly. Over a period of six months, success would mean users have found a stable group of connections and use the app for ongoing planning. Event activity would also be a significant KPI; successful implementation would see meetups regularly occurring in major cities and countries, helping to invite new members into the community. Further engagement metrics would include the usage of the homepage features, indicating whether users feel comfortable sharing personal stories, questions, and experiences. High levels of user-generated content would suggest emotional safety and platform trust. To maintain engagement, prompts and conversation starters curated by administrators could also be introduced periodically to encourage deeper interactions among users.

## 6.3 DFX Exhibition

This project was exhibited at the DXF exhibition, which was held from March 28, 2025, to April 2, 2025, at OCAD U's Waterfront campus. The installation consisted of a few different elements. These were a video recording of the prototype in use, projected on a screen; the Interactive Documentary website displayed on a screen with a mouse for scrolling that was placed on a plinth; six posters at the center of the wall that spoke about TCKs, survey findings and the rationale for an application; and finally, the high-fidelity prototype on the phone mirrored onto a vertical monitor.



*Figure 44: DFX Exhibition*

The seven-day long exhibition provided an opportunity to engage with a wide range of visitors and was an enriching experience. A common theme observed was that many immigrants related aspects of their experiences to those of TCKs. Upon initially encountering the topic, visitors often made immediate personal connections, typically through their own experiences as immigrants. However, through further discussion, the distinctions between ATCKs and immigrants became clearer, particularly how childhood mobility leads to specific challenges and how building a sense of community within a “Third Culture” is fundamentally different from immigrant experiences.

A few ATCKs were also present at the exhibition. Connecting with them and hearing how they would benefit from something like this, further validated the research findings. One visitor, who was familiar with the TCK demographic through friends’ children, questioned why TCKs might experience emotional difficulties given the perceived privileges of their lifestyle. This interaction highlighted a general misconception: while TCK lives may appear exciting and privileged from the outside, there is often underlying, unresolved grief and identity complexity stemming from frequent moves during formative years without personal choice. This distinction was explained to the visitor, who appeared to better understand the hidden emotional challenges faced by ATCKs.



As the primary focus of this thesis was ATCKs specifically, the experiences of immigrants, refugees, and expatriates were acknowledged but not prioritized. Raising broader awareness about the distinct experiences of ATCKs could form the basis for some future work.

## **6.4 Final Remarks**

This thesis has highlighted the critical importance of belonging and community in the lives of Adult Third Culture Kids. While technology has facilitated virtual connections, there remains a gap in platforms designed to foster meaningful, in-person interactions specifically curated for ATCKs. Through research, usability testing, and iterative prototyping, TCKConnect has emerged as a potential solution to address this.

Ultimately, the findings of this research emphasize that belonging for ATCKs is different, it's not about geographic roots, it is about relationships, shared experiences, and understanding. By creating a platform that enables ATCKs to find and build these connections, this thesis contributes to both academic discourse and a practical solution. As the next steps unfold, the hope is that TCKConnect can transition from concept to reality, providing a much-needed space for ATCKs to forge meaningful relationships and find a sense of belonging.

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# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Initial Online Survey

### App for Adult Third Culture Kids

Hello! My name is Rutooja, and I'm a Master's student at **OCAD University**. My thesis project focuses on understanding the unique experiences of **Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs)**, individuals who grew up in different cultures and often feel like they're from everywhere and nowhere.

I'm developing a low-fidelity prototype of an app called TCKConnect. The app aims to help ATCKs connect with people who share similar experiences, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Your insights will play a key role in shaping the app to truly meet the needs of ATCKs.

Please note the following:

- **Participation is entirely voluntary.**
- Completing this survey indicates your **consent** for the information provided to be used in my thesis project at OCAD University.
- The survey takes approximately **7-10 minutes** to complete.
- All responses will be anonymized and de-identified.
- Data will be securely stored on OCAD University's OneDrive and accessible only to me and my advisors.

**If you provide your email**, I may contact you for the next stage of research, usability testing of the prototype. Your answers to the first survey will be integrated into survey data and **de-identified**. This will be confidential and accessible only to me and my supervisors. Usability Testing can be done online or in person if you are in Toronto.

- Online usability testing: You'll receive a link to the prototype and a feedback form.
- In-person usability testing: You'll visit OCAD University, where I'll ask a few questions while observing your interaction with the app. With your consent, I may take photos and audio recordings for research purposes.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me, Rutooja Khamkar, at [rutoojak@ocadu.ca](mailto:rutoojak@ocadu.ca), or my supervisor, Dr. Sara Diamond, at [sdiamond@ocadu.ca](mailto:sdiamond@ocadu.ca).

### REB approval number: 2024-73

If you are interested, you can check out the results of this thesis, which will be available on OCAD U's repository in May 2025.

1. Are you an Adult Third Culture Kid? (Someone who grew up in a country/countries other than their passport country and is now over 18)

Yes

No

2. Please select your current age range.

18-24

25-34

35-45

45 +

3. How many times have you moved?

1-2 times

3-5 times

6-10 times

10+ moves

4. For how long did you stay in the country you moved to during your childhood? Consider the country where you lived the longest during your childhood if you moved frequently. \*

1-5 years

5-10 years

More than 10 years in one country

Other

5. Which country are you living in?

One of the countries you grew up in

Home Country

Living in a new country

Other

6. What passport did you hold as a child?

7. Would you like to give a list of the countries you have lived in and for how many years?

8. Why did you move to the country you are **currently** living in? \*

For work

For school

Personal/family

Other

9. Feel free to elaborate the previous answer :)

## Understanding your TCK experience

10. Did you move back to your home country after 18? \*

Yes

No

Other

11. How challenging was it to make new friends after moving to a country after 18? \*

12. Would you like to elaborate?

13. Do you sometimes feel disconnected from people because of your unique background as a TCK? \*

Yes

No

Maybe

14. Would you like to elaborate?

15. Does your friend circle where you **currently live** mostly consist of locals or fellow ATCKs?

Local friends

ATCKs are the ones I am closest to

Other

16. How connected are you with your friends from different places you have lived in? \*

No connection with

I talk to my close most of them

17. Do you seek professional or peer support for issues such as identity, belonging, or transition? \*

I have professional support

I seek peer support

Other

## Connecting with fellow ATCKs

(it's the last section!)

18. Have you tried connecting with fellow ATCKs in the past? \*

Yes

No

Other

19. If yes, how? and were you successful? If no, why not?

20. Are you interested in connecting with other ATCKs who share similar experiences? \*

Yes

No

Maybe

21. Could you elaborate on your previous answer?

22. Would you use an app specifically designed to help you find other ATCKs? \*

Yes

No

Maybe

23. Is there something that you would like to have as a feature on this app?

24. How would you rate your level of comfort and proficiency with using mobile apps? \*

25. If you would be interested in this prototype, please share your email.

26. Are you in Toronto between January to March 2025?

Yes

No

## Appendix B: Consent Form for In-Person Usability Testing

### Consent Form for In-person Usability Testing

Date: 19<sup>th</sup> October 2024

Project Title: An app for Adult Third Culture Kids

Student Investigator: Rutooja Khamkar, student, OCAD University, [rutoojak@ocadu.ca](mailto:rutoojak@ocadu.ca)

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Sara Diamond Faculty of Arts and Sciences OCAD University  
[sdiamond@ocadu.ca](mailto:sdiamond@ocadu.ca)

#### **PURPOSE**

This study aims to explore the experiences and challenges faced by Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) and examine how technology can help foster a sense of community and belonging. As part of a **Master's in Design thesis project** at OCAD University, this research includes usability testing for an app specifically designed for ATCKs. A minimum of **five participants** will take part in in-person usability testing, providing feedback to improve the app and to gain insights into the social and emotional needs of ATCKs. The results will contribute to a better understanding of ATCK experiences and enhance the prototype's functionality to support this community.

#### **WHAT'S INVOLVED**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to engage with the app by navigating through its features and completing specific tasks. During this session, you will use the app and answer questions about its design, functionality, and ease of use. The session will last approximately **30–40 minutes** and will involve answering questions related to the usability of the app, providing feedback, and sharing your impressions. With your consent, audio recordings and photos may be taken to document your interactions with the app for research and analysis purposes.

#### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS**

While there may be no direct benefits to you as a participant, your feedback and insights will contribute to the development of the prototype of an app designed to help Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) find community and connection. By participating, you will help improve the usability and functionality, ultimately supporting the creation of a platform that may benefit other ATCKs who seek a sense of belonging and shared experiences.

#### **POTENTIAL RISKS**

This study involves minimal risk. Reflecting on personal experiences related to community and belonging may cause mild emotional discomfort for some participants. Please note that participation is entirely voluntary, and you are free to skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.



## CONFIDENTIALITY

**Confidentiality of Participant Data:** Your privacy is a top priority, and all information collected during the study will be treated as confidential. Identifiable data, such as audio recordings and photos, will only be collected with your explicit consent. These recordings will be securely stored on OCAD University's OneDrive and will only be accessible to the research team, including myself and my advisors. Your name and other personal identifiers will not be attached to any public reports or publications.

**Use of Photos in the Thesis Document:** Photos taken during the session may be included in the final thesis document solely with your consent. These images will not contain additional identifying information. If you prefer, you may agree to have photos taken but opt out of having them included in the final document. In this case, the photos will be used only as a reference for analysis and will not be part of the thesis document.

**Data Retention and Destruction:** All data, including audio recordings and photos, will be retained until **May 2025**, which aligns with the completion of the thesis. After this period, any identifiable data—except images used in the thesis with consent—will be permanently deleted using secure digital deletion methods, ensuring privacy and confidentiality. Your responses will be reported in an aggregated and de-identified format to ensure no individual participant can be identified.

**Review and Edit Rights:** As a participant, you have the right to review any audio recordings made during the usability testing session. Upon request, you may listen to the recordings and request edits or deletions of specific segments. This right is available for up to two weeks after the recording, providing time for you to ensure the recordings accurately reflect your feedback.

**Data Access:** Access to all data will be restricted to myself, Rutooja Khamkar, and my advisors, Dr. Sara Diamond and Adam Tindale. This limited access helps maintain confidentiality and protect your information throughout the study.

## INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

There is no financial compensation or material reward for participating in this study. However, by contributing your insights and feedback, you will play a valuable role in the development of an app designed to foster community and connection for Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs).

## VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may choose to participate or decline at any time without any consequences. If you decide to withdraw, you may do so in the following ways:

**During the Study:** You can stop participating at any point during the session, and no further data will be collected, all the data collected till then will be either stored or kept, based on your consent.

**After the Study:** You may request the deletion of any identifiable data (such as audio recordings, photos, or other personal information) up to two weeks after your session. This includes requesting the exclusion of photos from the thesis document. Once the withdrawal request is

processed, your data will be permanently deleted and will not be included in any analysis or publications.

There are no penalties or consequences for choosing not to participate or for withdrawing.

To withdraw your data from the study, please contact me, Rutooja Khamkar via email at [rutoojak@ocadu.ca](mailto:rutoojak@ocadu.ca).

## PUBLICATION OF RESULTS

The findings from this study will be included in a Master's thesis as part of the requirements for the Master's in Design program at OCAD University. The thesis will be made publicly available through the OCAD University digital repository. All results will be reported in an aggregated and de-identified format, ensuring that individual participants cannot be identified. Photos will only be included in the thesis document with explicit consent and will not contain additional identifying information.

## CONTACT INFORMATION AND ETHICS CLEARANCE

If you have any questions about this study or require further information, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact the Principal Investigator Rutooja Khamkar or the Faculty Supervisor Dr. Sara Diamond using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Research Ethics Board at OCAD University **REB approval number 2024-73**.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact:

Research Ethics Board c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation

OCAD University

100 McCaul Street

Toronto, M5T1W1

416 977 6000 x4368

[research@ocadu.ca](mailto:research@ocadu.ca)

## AGREEMENT

I agree to participate in this study described above. I have made this decision based on the information I have read in the Information-Consent Letter. I have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about the study and understand that I may ask questions in the future. I understand that I may withdraw this consent at any time.

#### **Audio recording**

☐ I agree to be audio recorded for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

☐ I do not agree to be recorded for the purposes of this study.

#### **Photographs**

☐ I agree to be photographed with images used for analysis only. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

☐ I do not agree to be photographed for the purposes of this study.

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your assistance in this project. Please keep a copy of this form for your records.

## Appendix C: Recruitment messages

There are two ways I will be reaching out to people; one is via social media posting and second is via my personal network – they will take place via texts/emails.

### Method A: Posting on Social Media

#### 1. For the Online Survey

Calling All Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs)! 🌐🌟

Hi everyone! My name is Rutooja, and I'm currently working on my Master's thesis at OCAD University. Being a Third Culture Kid who has found it difficult to find fellow ATCKs, I've always wondered if there are platforms that can help me connect with other ATCKs locally.

This inspired my thesis! I'm developing a prototype of an app called TCKConnect, which aims to help ATCKs find people similar to them and hopefully a sense of community and belonging by connecting with others who share similar experiences.

I've put together a short survey to gather your insights. It takes about 10 minutes to complete. Your responses will be anonymized before analysis, meaning your identity will not be linked to your answers.

If you provide your email:

I will be able to reach out to you to ask you to participate in second stage of research which is usability testing of the prototype of this app. You will no longer be anonymous; however, your survey response will be separated from your identity and the content will be anonymized.

Usability testing will occur online or in-person (if you are in Toronto)

- For in-person testing you will be required to come to OCAD University during a time that works for us, I will ask a few questions and with your consent, your photos and audio recordings will be taken for research and documentation purposes.
- For online testing you will be shared a link to the prototype and a feedback form.

Here is the form link:

<https://forms.office.com/r/HkeTv8Cqby>

Feel free to share this with other ATCKs in your network!

Thank you in advance! Your input is invaluable—thank you so much for being part of this project! If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me, Rutooja Khamkar at [rutoojak@ocadu.ca](mailto:rutoojak@ocadu.ca) or to my supervisor Dr. Sara Diamond at [sdiamond@ocadu.ca](mailto:sdiamond@ocadu.ca)

REB number 2024-73

Warmly,

Rutooja

## **2. For Usability Testing**

### **2.1: Follow-up online usability testing:**

Hello! Hope you are doing well :)

Thank you so much for signing up to test the prototype of TCKConnect, an app designed to help Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs) connect and build a sense of community!

I'm excited to share that the prototype is now ready for your feedback. Below is the link to the app, and I'd love for you to explore it on your mobile device. Once you've had a chance to try it out, please fill out the Microsoft Form to share your thoughts and suggestions. Your input will be incredibly valuable in refining the app and making sure it meets the needs of our unique ATCK community.

(will insert app prototype link once completed)

<https://forms.office.com/r/2uw57WasRT>

Please feel free to take your time and explore the app. Your feedback is important, and there are no right or wrong answers—just your honest impressions!

If you have any questions or run into any issues, don't hesitate to reach out. I really appreciate your time and help with this project!

Thank you in advance! If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me, Rutooja Khamkar at [rutoojak@ocadu.ca](mailto:rutoojak@ocadu.ca) or to my supervisor Dr. Sara Diamond at [sdiamond@ocadu.ca](mailto:sdiamond@ocadu.ca)

REB number 2024-73

Warm regards, Rutooja

### **2.2: Follow-up in-person usability testing:**

Hi,

I hope you're doing well! I wanted to check in and see if you would be available for an in-person usability testing session next week. Would you be free on [day/time] for the session?

The session will take around 30-40 minutes, and your feedback will be invaluable in refining the app to better meet the needs of our ATCK community. With your consent, photos and audio recordings may be taken to help with analysis and documentation. Please feel free to read the attached consent form, you will require to sign it before the session.

If that time doesn't work for you, please let me know a few other options that might, and I'll do my best to accommodate your schedule.

Looking forward to hearing from you!

*(consent form)*

Thank you in advance! If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me, Rutooja Khamkar at [rutoojak@ocadu.ca](mailto:rutoojak@ocadu.ca) or to my supervisor Dr. Sara Diamond at [sdiamond@ocadu.ca](mailto:sdiamond@ocadu.ca)

REB number 2024-73

Regards, Rutooja

## 2.3 Posting on social media in case I do not get sufficient participants by end of Jan 2025:

Calling All Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs)! 🌍 ✨

Hi everyone! My name is Rutooja, and I'm currently working on my Master's thesis at OCAD University. Being a Third Culture Kid who has found it difficult to find fellow ATCKs, I've always wondered if there are platforms that can help me connect with other ATCKs locally.

This inspired my thesis! I'm developing a prototype of an app called TCKConnect, which aims to help ATCKs find people similar to them and hopefully a sense of community and belonging by connecting with others who share similar experiences.

I'm excited to share that the app prototype is ready for user feedback! Below is the link to the app, and I'd love for you to explore it on your mobile device. Once you've had a chance to try it out, please fill out the Microsoft Form to share your thoughts and suggestions. Your input will be incredibly valuable in refining the app and making sure it meets the needs of our unique ATCK community.

If you are in Toronto and would be interested in in-person Usability Testing of this app prototype, please let email me at [rutoojak@ocadu.ca](mailto:rutoojak@ocadu.ca). For in-person testing you will be required to come to OCAD University during a time that works for us, I will ask a few questions and with your consent, your photos and audio recordings will be taken for research and documentation purposes.

If you are interested in Online Usability Testing, please feel free to checkout the following links, it is a prototype of the app and an online feedback form.

*(prototype link)*

<https://forms.office.com/r/2uw57WasRT>

Please feel free to take your time and explore the app. Your feedback is important, and there are no right or wrong answers—just your honest impressions!

If you have any questions or run into any issues, don't hesitate to reach out. I really appreciate your time and help with this project!

Thank you in advance! If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me, Rutooja Khamkar at [rutoojak@ocadu.ca](mailto:rutoojak@ocadu.ca) or to my supervisor Dr. Sara Diamond at [sdiamond@ocadu.ca](mailto:sdiamond@ocadu.ca)

REB number 2024-73

### Method B: Reaching out through personal network

This may vary slightly depending on the person, but the general message would be the following:

#### 1.For the Online Survey From:

Hey (name), how are you doing? I am currently working on prototype of an app for Adult Third Culture Kids! Your input to this survey would be valuable and would take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

Your responses will be anonymized before analysis, meaning your identity will not be linked to your answers.

It's a survey! Here is the link: <https://forms.office.com/r/HkeTv8Cqby>

There is another stage, the Usability Testing for the prototype of this app. It can be done either online or in-person (if you are in Toronto). For online testing I will share a link to the prototype and a feedback form. For in-person testing you will be required to come to OCAD University during a time that works for us, I will ask a few questions and with your consent, your photos and audio recordings will be taken for research and documentation purposes.

You can choose to be either online or in-person, not both. Please let me know what your choice would be!

## **2. For Usability Testing**

### **2.1 : Follow-up online usability testing:**

Hey (name)! how have you been? I've completed the prototype for my thesis app, and I would love it if you could take a few minutes to test it out and give me some feedback. Your insights will help me improve the app to better meet the needs of our ATCK community. Thanks again for all your help!

Here is the link: <https://forms.office.com/r/2uw57WasRT>

### **2.2 : Follow-up in-person usability testing:**

Hey (Name)! I've completed the prototype for my thesis app, and I'd love for you to test it out in person since you're in Toronto! The session would take place at my OCAD U studio, and it's a 30–40 minutes one-on-one session. With your consent, I'll be taking photos and audio recordings for research and for my thesis document purposes, but no worries if you're not comfortable with that—you can still participate fully in the testing. I've attached the consent form, please read through it. I'd really appreciate your help—thank you so much!

### **2.3 Reaching out through personal network (new people) in case I do not get sufficient participants by end of Jan 2025:**

Hey (name)! How are you doing? As you might know I am pursuing a Master in Design at OCAD U and would like your help for Usability Testing for a project I am working on!

Being a Third Culture Kid who has found it difficult to find fellow ATCKs, I've always wondered if there are platforms that can help me connect with other ATCKs locally.

This inspired my thesis! I'm developing a prototype of an app called TCKConnect, which aims to help ATCKs find people similar to them and hopefully a sense of community and belonging by connecting with others who share similar experiences.

I'm excited to share that the app low-fidelity prototype is ready for user feedback!

If you are in Toronto and would be interested in in-person Usability Testing of this app prototype, please email me at [rutoojak@ocadu.ca](mailto:rutoojak@ocadu.ca). For in-person testing you will be required to come to OCAD University during a time that works for us, I will ask a few questions and with your consent, your photos and audio recordings will be taken for research and documentation purposes.

If you are interested in Online Usability Testing, please feel free to check out the following links, it is a prototype of the app and an online feedback form. I'd love for you to explore it on your mobile device. Once you've had a chance to try it out, please fill out the Microsoft Form to share your thoughts and suggestions. Your input will be incredibly valuable in refining the app and making sure it meets the needs of our unique ATCK community.

*(prototype link)*

<https://forms.office.com/r/2uw57WasRT>

Please feel free to take your time and explore the app. Your feedback is important, and there are no right or wrong answers—just your honest impressions!

If you have any questions or run into any issues, don't hesitate to reach out. I really appreciate your time and help with this project!

Thank you in advance! If you have any questions, feel free to reach out to me or to my supervisor Dr. Sara Diamond at [sdiamond@ocadu.ca](mailto:sdiamond@ocadu.ca)

REB number 2024-73



## **Appendix D: Tasks for Usability Testing (same tasks for online and in-person)**

### Onboarding (Flow 1)

- 1: Check if you are a TCK
- 2: Create your profile. You are 'Aditi Mehra'.

### Returning User (Flow 2)

- 3: Add an answer to a "Question".
- 4: Add a comment to a "Story".
- 5: Create a "Post".
- 6: Edit your profile and add a "Prompt" that reads - "when I think of home, I think of...".
- 7: Sign up to attend an event that is happening nearby.
- 8: Send a request to Clara after liking her recent post.
- 9: "Like" any event from the list that you might find interesting.
- 10: Add and post your own event.
- 11: Approve or decline requests of people wanting to attend your event.

## **Appendix E: In-Person Usability Testing follow up questions**

- How do you feel about the onboarding process?
- What do you like/ dislike about it?
- What do you find easy/difficult about this task?
- What are your thoughts on the structure/ categorization?
- Would you add/ remove anything?
- Did you understand what a “Prompt” meant or was it confusing?
- What did you like or dislike about this feature?
- Were you able to understand easily what I meant my “liking her recent post”
- Add and post your own event.
- Approve or decline requests of people wanting to attend your event.
- Was there anything confusing or unnecessary in this process?
- Do you have any suggestions?
- Is there anything you expected to find but didn't?
- What are your thoughts on the ‘Nearby’ page now that you have seen the ‘ATCKs’ and ‘Events’ page?
- If you could change one thing about this product, what would it be?
- On a scale of 1-10, how easy was it to use this product?
- Would you use this? Why or why not?

## Appendix F: Online Usability Test Feedback form

### Feedback for TCKConnect

Thank You for Participating in the Usability Testing! Hi! My name is Rutooja, and I'm a Master's student at OCAD University. My thesis project focuses on understanding the unique experiences of Adult Third Culture Kids (ATCKs)— individuals who've grown up in different cultures and often feel like they're from everywhere and nowhere.

I'm testing a mock-up **prototype of an app called TCKConnect**, designed to help ATCKs find a sense of community and belonging by connecting with others who share similar experiences. Your feedback will help refine the app to better serve the ATCK community.

Please note the following:

- Participation is entirely voluntary, and you're not obligated to complete this form.
- The Usability Test is done to evaluate the intuitiveness of the product and not you. There are no right or wrong answers.
- This is a mockup design of an app, not all the buttons/features are function and all the answers are pre-filled.
- By completing this survey, you **consent** to your responses being used for my thesis project at OCAD University.- All responses will be anonymized and de-identified.
- Your response will be kept confidential and used solely for the purpose of this research and no personal identifiers (your email or name) will be shared outside the scope of this project. It will be securely stored in OneDrive provided by OCAD U. It will be accessible only to me and my advisors.
- Testing and feedback will take approximately **25-30 minutes**.
- You may request to have your response deleted up to two weeks after submission by contacting me at [rutoojak@ocadu.ca](mailto:rutoojak@ocadu.ca).
- The prototype will not ask for any personal data, it is a simple mockup of the app that does not have the ability to store any data.
- Please submit the form **before Mon, 10th March, 2025** for it to be included in the study.

Prototype link: <https://shorturl.at/TE5SR>

List of tasks:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1XdIgz5lygPw0ooij5svKzPwcb9j3uyipFMKWZgZMTvo/edit?usp=sharing>

If you have questions, please feel free to contact me, Rutooja Khamkar, at [rutoojak@ocadu.ca](mailto:rutoojak@ocadu.ca), or my supervisor, Dr. Sara Diamond, at [sdiamond@ocadu.ca](mailto:sdiamond@ocadu.ca).

### REB approval number: 2024-73

The final results will be published in my thesis, available on OCAD U's repository in May 2025. Thank you for helping shape this app to better serve the ATCK community!

### General information

1. Are you an Adult Third Culture Kid? (someone who grew up in a country or countries that is other than their passport culture and is now above 18) \*

Yes

No

2. If you are comfortable, please share your email, this will just help me keep track if I have to reach out again!

3. When people ask you "Where are you from" - what is your answer? Does it vary depending on the person?  
Feel free to answer as you like, I would like to know how you navigate through this question :)

Let's begin with the tasks now!

#### Task 1 and 2: Onboarding (Flow 1)

1. Check if you are a TCK
2. Create your profile, you are 'Aditi Mehra'.

4. **Task 1 - Checking if you are a TCK:** Were you able to "find out" if you are a TCK? \*

Yes

No

I don't know what you mean

Other

5. If you were able to complete Task 1, do you think it's necessary? let me know what you think about those questions!

6. **Task 2: Creating an account:** How do you feel about the onboarding process? \*

Was not able to do it

Fairly straightforward

7. Can you expand on the rating? \*

Prompt: You can talk about if it was easy/ confusing/ difficult to understand something etc. Please describe why you felt that. Feel free to expand as much as you like!

#### Task 3, 4, 5: Returning user (Flow 2)

3. Add an answer to a "Question".
4. Add a comment to a "Story".
5. Create a "Post".

8. **Task 3: Add an answer to a "Question"** How easily were you able to understand this task? \*

I didnt do it, it was to  
o confusing

I understood it easily

9. Please expand on the previous answer. \*

Prompts: If you found it difficult, what about it was hard to understand? What was confusing?

10. **Task 4: Add a comment to a "Story"** How easily were you able to understand this task? \*

Did not do it

Very easy to understand

11. Please expand on your rating. \*

Prompts: Were you able to do it? How easy or difficult was it to figure out what "Story" meant? Were you confused? What could be designed differently? Expand as much as you feel like!

12. **Task 5: Add your own "Post"** How easily were you able to complete this task? \*

Did not do it

Easily added my post

13. Please expand your rating. \*

Prompts: Were you able to figure out the dropdown menu? What was difficult/ easy? Did it take you a couple of tries to understand?

Task 6, 7, 8

**Task 6: Edit your profile and Add a "Prompt" that reads - "when I think of home, I think of...". Task 7: Sign up to attend an event that is happening nearby.**

**Task 8: Send a request to Clara after liking her recent post.**

14. **Task 6: Edit your profile and Add a "Prompt" that reads - "when I think of home, I think of...".** How easily were you able to complete it? \*

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

I was not able to do it

Completed it easily

15. Please expand on your rating. \*

Prompt: Did you like this feature? Do you have any recommendations for any more features? Expand as much as you like!

16. **Task 7: Sign up to attend an event that is happening nearby.** How easily were you able to complete this task? \*

Was not able to do it

Completed it easily

17. Please expand on your rating. \*

Prompt: Was anything confusing? Do you have any suggestions?

18. **Task 8: Send a request to Clara after liking her recent post.** How easily were you able to complete this task? \*

Was not able to do it

Completed it easily

19. Please expand on your rating. \*

Prompt: What are your thoughts on this? Do you like/ dislike it? Feel free to tell me anything you like!

Tasks 9, 10, 11

**Task 9: “Like” any event from the list that you might find interesting.**

**Task 10: Add and post your own event.**

**Task 11: Approve or decline requests of people wanting to attend your event.**

20. **Task 9: “Like” any event from the list that you might find interesting.** How easily were you able to complete this task? \*

Was not able to do it

Completed it easily

21. Any thoughts on task 9?

22. **Task 10: Add and post your own event.** How easily were you able to complete this task? \*

Was not able to do it

Completed it easily

23. Please expand on your rating. \*

Prompt: What did you like about it? Was anything confusing? Write anything you were thinking during the process!

24. **Task 11: Approve or decline requests of people wanting to attend your event.** How easily were you able to complete this task? \*

Was not able to do it

Completed it easily

25. Please expand on your rating. \*

Prompt: What did you like about it? Would you suggest anything different? Let me know any thoughts you have.

## Final thoughts

26. Is there anything you expected to find but didn't? \*

27. What are your thoughts on the 'Nearby' page now that you have seen the 'ATCKs' and 'Events' page? \*

Prompt: Do you like the map feature? Is it intuitive? Do you think its unnecessary to have the same thing repeat itself? Let me know!

28. What is the one thing you really liked and disliked? Why? \*

29. On a scale of 1-10, how easy was it to use this product? \*

*Ignoring the glitchy clicking of buttons as that is unfortunately not in my control :(*

30. Would you use this? Why or why not? \*

31. Any final thoughts

## Appendix G: Lo-Fi Wireframes



## Appendix H: Detailed script of the interactive website

### Section one

The persona, Aditi, developed in the Define stage of the Double Diamond, introduces the website. The first section introduces the persona with "Meet Aditi" alongside an illustration of a girl on the left side. The next part of the same section reads "She is an Adult Third Culture Kid."

### Section two

We then explore Aditi's journey, her story of growing up among different cultures and around the globe. This section features a map overlayed with captions for different countries, describing one country's experience at a time:

- India: "Born in India, but I barely remember it—home only by passport." She was born there and lived there only until the age of 3.
- UK: "Ages 4 to 10: Moved to the UK, I spoke with a mix of accents and never fully fit in with local kids." This highlights that she had a mixture of accents—British and Indian—but she never really could "fit in" because she looked and sounded different.
- Japan: "Ages 11 to 14: Moved to Japan, loved the culture, went to an American school, but always felt like an outsider trying to fit in." Here, it's highlighted that during her early teenage years, she liked Japanese culture, and although she studied at an American school with other international students, she still felt like an outsider.
- UAE: "Ages 15 to 18: Moved to the UAE and went to an Indian school. I felt like I belonged, but only temporarily." In the UAE, she attended an Indian school where people looked like her but probably didn't have the mixed accent she did. She likely found a sense of connection through cultural similarities, which gave her a temporary feeling of belonging.
- Back to India: From ages 18 to 22: For her undergrad studies she moved back to India where she felt like a "hidden immigrant".
- Germany: "Ages 23 to 25: Moved to Germany for grad studies"
- Toronto: "Ages 25 to 28 (current age): "Settled" in Toronto for now, still trying to find my community". Settled is in quotes as it shows that setting down is not a sentiment a lot of TCKs relate to, as they are more used to being mobile and moving after a few years

The next part is a sentence that is a conclusion of this section and an introduction to the next, highlighting the prevalence of these experiences: "Just like Aditi, there are over 2M ATCKs around the globe. This study features 28 of them. Let's see a glimpse of their journeys!" This indicates that 28 people participated in this thesis, and the following data represents these 28 ATCKs.

### Section three

This section features a series of overlapping maps, each showing all the countries a participant lived in during childhood. A country count and participant tally appear alongside for reference. As users scroll, the maps progressively overlay, visually demonstrating the extensive global distribution and mobility patterns of the survey respondents.

The next part of the section concludes the maps and highlights the inference that is to be made from it "The participants come from more than 85 countries. Growing up in a country or countries different from their parents' culture often creates complex feelings of rootlessness and challenges with belonging, among many other emotional and cultural impacts."

### Section four

This section presents five different quotes from the survey data that addresses feelings of rootlessness and challenges with belonging. Each quote appears alongside a faceless illustration, as no data on participants'



gender or personal information was collected. Age ranges have been included since this data was collected and is crucial to show the diverse age spread of survey respondents. The quotes included are:

- "I can fit in but deep down don't ever feel like I really belong because no one around me can relate to how I grew up"
- "You're kind of standing at the precipice of many different cultures, and at times it feels like you're never enough of one certain culture to be welcomed in fully, so it always feels like being an outsider to your own cultural roots."
- "For a long time, I didn't feel at home in any of the countries I lived in, but that changes over time."
- "Sometimes they don't understand the struggles, and they can't relate to your experiences, you sometimes feel more connected with other ATCKs who understand what you've been through/are going through at times."
- "It's lonely and I do not feel understood."

### Section five

This section highlights two important findings from the survey data: the average number of homes moved is 5, and the maximum number of years spent, on average, in one country is 5. This emphasizes that the survey respondents were highly mobile.

### Section six

As users scroll through this section, the central circle expands to visually represent increasing percentages. Four key statistics are displayed:

- 60% ATCKs have reported they seek professional or peer support.
- 70% have tried connecting with other ATCKs via various online and offline means.
- 81% respondents reported they feel disconnected because of their unique background.
- 89% of the participants would like to connect with other ATCKs.

### Section seven

This section addresses a specific developmental transition with the question: "How challenging is it to make friends after moving back home or to a new country for university after 18?" This question was included based on literature review findings and personal experience, recognizing that the transition to undergraduate studies at age 18 represents a critical juncture for ATCKs. This also aligns with Madison Zeller's 2018 thesis project, which developed an app specifically for college-attending TCKs to connect with one another.

The accompanying graph shows that 51% found it difficult to make friends, 28% found it moderately difficult, and 21% found it easy. Supporting quotes from participants includes:

- *"Found it difficult to break into groups bc they typically had been friends since childhood, and there were many experiences/references that I couldn't relate to and vice versa"*
- *"It was fine, I rather developed my communications skills meeting people from different backgrounds"*
- *"I stayed at a students' residence with other international students so it was easy to make friends."*

The next part highlights a quote mentioned in the literature review, by Lyons Shelly, (2022): "Most people yearn to belong, whether it be to a place or a group of people. For ATCKs, belonging to a place is less likely due to their high childhood mobility, but belonging through relationships is an achievable reality"

### Section eight

Provides the statistic that 81% respondents reported they will use the app and the other 19% said they 'might' use it. Effectively, 100% of respondents expressed openness to trying the application, demonstrating universal interest among the surveyed population.