

Competitive Analysis

Group 1: Naomi Hatch, Siqi Zhai, Chenxin Zheng, Angelica Wang

Things that your solution needs to support to address the problem:

For our project we are hoping to connect users to each other and other communities that work on sustainable gardening and work against climate change. In order to help users connect to local green initiatives and their local gardening community we need to connect users to local organizations, allow users to follow specific topics they're interested in, allow organizations to share opportunities, deliver information in digestible bites, educate users about native species, inspire action and support growth.

Partial Competitor: Community Bulletin Boards

Community bulletin boards are a physical and analog way to spread information around communities. Oftentimes, they include ads about services and events in the community. While addressing a different problem of sharing broad information for free in the community, it shares a similar target user: community-centered folks who want to get involved. Community bulletin boards can be found in schools, cafes and local gyms; they are a place for anyone in the community that uses the establishment to put a flier with their message up.

Pros

- It is very easy for anyone to get their message out and for an interested party they have to make no commitment before accessing information.
- Due to the boards being placed in physical locations they tend to reflect the community they are in and can be a way for community oriented people to find information.

Cons

- Anyone can take fliers down so there is no way to ensure your message stays up or in sight as it may also be covered up. Boards can fill quickly and messages will be lost in the pile.
- Reach can also be an issue as only a few people will view each flier so the same message will need to be spread to many boards across a community to be seen.
- Additionally there is no back and forth, people can view flyers but a next step would be connecting through another form of communication or attending an event.

Partial Competitor: Nextdoor

Nextdoor is an online forum that connects neighbors with each other to share information, goods, and services.

Pros

- Users enter their location information, ensuring that they are part of the correct neighborhood community so that they see and post relevant local information.
- Neighbors can communicate with each other about things that directly affect them.

Cons

- Users can't choose what people or topics they want to follow, so their feed might cause them information overload as they have to read through posts they aren't interested in.

Partial Competitor: Ann Arbor's website

Ann Arbor's government website provides resources, information, and opportunities to get involved for those interested in sustainable gardening and conservation.

Pros

- As a government official website, the information is comprehensive and professional.
- Event announcements, workshops, and programs help Ann Arbor residents establish a sense of community involvement and help enhance connections between residents.
- It provides specific resources and opportunities based on the local community's needs.
- It allows users to subscribe to information that can be sent via message or email. Compared to actively browsing for information, receiving notifications allows users to not miss a message.

Cons

- Mobile interface design is very poor, and the website can be less accessible for users on the go. Mobile apps have the advantage of allowing users to access information wherever they are.
- The website may not provide personalized experiences or suggestions for each person based on their interests and location. So, personalized needs can be a point to focus on in our product design.
- People's way of getting information has become social media apps. Seldom people will choose to get the information they want through a boring government website.

Direct Competitor Alipay Chinese App: Chenxin Zheng

Some Chinese apps are also trying to do something about sustainable gardening and trying to connect users together or to the communities.

Pros

- The Chinese payment app Alipay launched a mini program several years ago called ant forest.
- By working with other organizations, this mini program makes people connected to the local community in the way that it transforms people's daily eco-friendly actions, like walking or taking the public subway, into real trees planted.
- The design of this mini program is like a game, which makes it more interesting and can make more people willing to use it.

- Another advantage of this mini program is that it's shown on the home page of China's largest payment application, which makes the usage both accessible and convenient.

Cons

- It also contains some charts between friends to motivate people, but the connections between users and each other are lacking.
- The page contains too many elements.

Analogous Competitor: WeChat

WeChat is the largest communication app in China with a group chat function in this app, which works like Instagram group chat but with more functions. People can easily connect and communicate with each other by using this function. Besides this function, this application also contains the mini program and public account functions which every user has access to. There is a mini program called smart farm, where people can pay to rent a piece of farmland for the organization to plant, and when the rented land produces fruits, they can get the fruit for free.

Pros

- The public account function in WeChat doesn't have this problem, people can follow the public account to get the news or articles/receive updates of the activities/ join the group chat (some public account may set auto message that when people follow them, they can the invitation link to the related group chat) / open mini program that linked to it.
- It's simple for the government or organizations to create their own account, some organizations already created their accounts and it's also easy for other people to find them and follow them. In that case, people can be connected to each other or the community in an easier and more efficient way, they don't need to spend too much time on finding the group's QR code or asking somebody to invite them. In addition to this, people can learn more information about sustainable gardening and some related activities by reading the pushed articles or news without putting too much effort and time on finding them.
- Smartfarm allows users to rent real land and have real fresh produce delivered to them.

Cons

- But the biggest problem is also that people cannot connect to the other users in Smart Farm.
- The Smartfarm page and UI designs of this mini program are poor.
- However, the biggest problem of this function is that the group chats can be hard to find. People need to have the group's QR code to join the chat or be invited by someone who is already in the group chat.
- Another problem is that there is a low barrier to entry because sometimes due to the group owner's settings, anyone who has access to the QR code can join the group.

Reflections

Building a sense of community is important for our target users so it is important to have this in the ethos of our product's design. When users are engaged and feel like they are part of a community they may be more likely to work towards a common goal and not give up. Many of our competitors' products included lack of connection and feeling too big or disconnected; this means we need to prioritize connection. We also learned how important usability is because we are already working with an overwhelming topic making sure the usability is easy and following patterns is key to retaining users.

Another problem that our competitors face is how much information to present to people. There is often no way for users to personalize their experience, so they face information overload as they filter through all the information available to find what they are actually looking for. There may even be so much information presented that the user misses what is important to them entirely. Even within the subject of sustainability, there is a broad range of subcategories that people would be interested in. Therefore, it's important for our product to allow users to follow the specific topics they want to see, catering their experience to them.

With Ann Arbor's website we can see that sources matter so any information we share needs to come from reputable sources like local governments or agencies that hold respect in their community. Also, it is better to provide personalized needs which focus on each resident.

In addition to these, many competitors seem to have a lack of attention to the design aspect. Many interfaces and UI designs are poorly designed. They always have too many elements in one page and it can distract the users easily.