The Missing Conversation

Exploring the possibilities of designing a democratic virtual platform that would enable users to elect people to converse with each other online.

Magnús Elvar Jónsson

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Abstract

Through my research I explored the design elements for a (as of yet not developed) user driven non-profit and non-partisan petition network that requests two individuals to engage in a conversation that would be broadcast online. And if it were developed, what characteristics and structure should the interface have in order to be informative, user-friendly and inviting to use?

I see the conversation network that I want to create as an alternative platform to the highly focused interview structure of media today. This kind of platform does not exist today, and I think it could be valuable for educational, political, and entertainment purposes.

I looked into the differences in structure between ordinary and media conversations, to clarify what I see as the value in simply talking together. I looked into the structures of existing broadcast media and user based networks, to map the interest and possibility individuals have to influence media, and to investigate how the conversation network could best be structured and designed. Finally I propose the mechanics and design of the network based on this research and with the aid of graphics and drawings.

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Question of enquiry

Through my research I want to explore design elements for a (as of yet not developed) user driven non-profit and nonpartisan petition network that requests two individuals to engage in a conversation that would be broadcast online. What characteristics and structure should the interface have in order to be informative, user-friendly and inviting to use?

Keywords: broadcast media, petition, network, conversation, user-driven.

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Biography

I'm a freelancer and a student mainly interested in interactive design, photography, concept making and the communication of brainstorming. I completed my Bachelor degree in Visual Communication in 2010 and I am currently working towards my Master's degree in Design at the Iceland Academy of the Arts. Since 2011 I have been working full and part-time as a graphic designer at the interactive design company Gagarin, where I worked on a wide range of design, including interface design, photo editing, illustration and typography. Through Gagarin I took part in designs that won the Icelandic Graphic Design Association Recognition 2012, Icelandic Graphic Design Association Award 2013 and European Design Awards 2014.

Acknowledgements

Requesting a conversation

When I talk to people I often stray off topic, and although some people find this frustrating, I see great creative opportunities in this. I find that having a conversation that strays into unexpected and even ridiculous themes does not hurt the initial topic of the conversation, but rather expands the topic and nurtures new ideas and connections. At creative brainstorming meetings I find that this technique is very much welcomed and appreciated, but in most other conversations, being private, or in media, the art of straying off topic is looked at as unfocused and a waste of time.

I have the idea of a user driven non-profit non-partisan petition network that requests two individuals to engage in an online broadcast conversation, that would function as an alternative to the interview structured dynamic seen within contemporary broadcast media. My project will be to research the design elements needed for such a network, what characteristics and structure should the interface have in order to be informative, user-friendly and inviting to use. Online sites with parts of the functions of my network idea already exist. To simplify I could say my conversation network would be a mix of the way that the petition network Change.org gains the power of the masses to make things happen, and the way that conversations are broadcast online through Google Hangouts. I think that the power of petitions could go hand in hand with a user driven broadcasting network. This kind of platform does not exist today, and I think it could be valuable for educational, political, and entertainment purposes.

I see the conversation network that I want to create as an alternative platform to the highly focused interview structure of media today. There will be suggested topics in my network but these are mere suggestions. After a

conversation has been broadcast online, it will be stored for future enjoyment or educational purposes. Users can go over it and divide the topics that were discussed into a sub menu. So if a user is only interested in a special part of the dialogue they can go straight to that chapter and leave the rest. The main point of my network would be to get people to simply talk together about whatever inspires them to talk, without being guided or stopped by a third party. This is not an interview, there is no host.

The main challenges of such a network would be to get people to participate in voting for conversations and believing in it. There is a risk that the elected people will not agree to converse and this risk might challenge the faith of the users to vote in the first place. There is also a risk that the conversations might suffer from a dominating personality, creating a monologue rather than an equal conversation. In the following chapters I will look at the structure difference of ordinary and media conversation, to clarify what I see as the value in simply talking together. I will look at the structures of exiting broadcast media and user based networks, to map the interest and possibility individuals have to influence media to get ideas to how the conversation network best could be structured and designed, and finally propose the mechanics and design of the network based on this research and with the aid of graphics and drawings.

The value of conversation

> "Conversation's definition is elastic and can range from descriptive to normative, from chatter to soulful communion, from the artful dodging of courtly conversation, the bourgeois authenticity of intimacy, to the soul-flights of Platonic or Buberian dialogue and micro-analyses of conversation analysis."[1]

We all talk with the people around us, and conversations, as the quote above suggests, conversations varies widely in terms of topic and situation. Any conversation has the potential to lead anywhere, stray off initial topics, develop into unforeseen areas, and I see this fact as a great value. The experience of conversing is also one that we learn from. Anything from talking to friends, a teacher or watching conversations on TV gives us an insight into how others perceive and grasp the world around us.

The creative and inspiring potential in conversation is one of the reasons I want to create a conversation network. Even though we are already surrounded by conversation in mass media I see that a majority of these are based on a structure or norm that kills this creative potential. This is the interview type of conversation that consists of "chain of *question-answer* sequences[2]" with no room for the evaluation, feedback or possibility to bring up new topics that most other ordinary conversations have.

I can appreciate the interview structure as a means of getting facts on the table in an efficient manner, and agree that on that basis it is a useful way of communicating. But I do think there should be room for the free, undisturbed conversation alongside this media standard of communication.

1   John Durham Peters, "Media as conversation, conversation as media," in Media and Cultural Theory, ed. James
2   Ian Hutchby, *Media Talk: Conversation Analysis and the Study of Broadcasting* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 122.

Broadcast conversations are something we are exposed to on a daily basis, and we are usually not the ones participating in the conversation. It is still an active practice to watch and listen to a conversation, as put in the book Media and Cultural Theory: "'Passive listening' is one of the worst ideas ever to infest cultural criticism - as if listening were not one of the most difficult things people ever do."[3]

This means we are still participating in the broadcast conversation around us. As the book *Media Talk: Conversation Analysis and the Study of Broadcasting* discuss: Even though the audience of a broadcast conversation is not a verbally active participants in the conversation, they are not merely overhearing or eavesdropping. They are being addressed by the broadcast and thus the experience simulates an everyday conversation.

So this suggests, on the basis of watching a question-answer (Q&A) structure broadcast, we are participating without the chance to interfere, and with a limited chance or expectation for the participants in the broadcast to contribute something outside of the interviewers planned questions.

Q&A structure

The majority of communications that we are exposed to through media are news broadcast. News programs have since the earliest days of radio and television filled a great deal of airtime and is an easily recognizably structure of communication. News programs such as for example CNN's Anderson Cooper 360°, BBC Two's Newsnight and CBS's 60 Minutes, generally consist of question-answer exchanges between journalists and relevant individuals, and often public figures like politicians. In the book *Media Talk: Conversation Analysis and the Study of Broadcasting* this exchange is described as following:

3   John Durham Peters, "Media as conversation, conversation as media," in *Media and Cultural Theory*, ed. James Cur-ran, David Morley (Oxford: Routledge, 2006), 124-125.

> "The basic turn-taking system for news interviews is fairly straightforwardly described as a chain of question-answer sequences in which the participants orient to the specialized nature of their talk by restricting themselves to one or other of these turn-types according to their interactional role (that is interviewers ask questions, while interviewees - ideally, at least - answer those questions)."[4]

These roles give the interviewer a certain power to lead the conversation and stay on topic. In the book Hutchby goes on to discuss the norm of the interview, "*the fact that the interview is produced via norms rather than external constraints*" and gives examples of how the interviewee can in fact change the structure of power within the interview by asking questions himself. This protest happens occasionally and can have a great entertainment and marketing value. For example Channel 4 news posted an interview on YouTube with the headline "*Who's interviewing who?! Richard Ayoade speaks to Krishnan Guru-Murthy*[5]" where Ayoade manipulates the interview structure makes it appear more like a conversation and even questions the questions he's being asked and throws them back at the anchor.

The book goes on to point out that private conversations also include question-answer sequences, but here, in contrast to the news interview, an acknowledgement or evaluation of the answer is included. In educational settings this is also the common way a teacher would interact with a pupil by acknowledging and evaluating her or his answer.

And this room for acknowledgement or evaluation is what can function as a leap to deepening a topic, or changing it. My point being, I am not looking to ban a question answer sequence in the conversation network I want to create, as long as this occurs naturally and allow for the creative potential of conversation. I would see this kind of network as an alternative and an expansion on the discussion we see in the media.

4   Ian Hutchby, *Media Talk: Conversation Analysis and the Study of Broadcasting* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2005), 122.
5   Channel 4 News. "*Who's interviewing who?! Richard Ayoade speaks to Krishnan Guru-Murthy,*" YouTube video, 4:11, October 21, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjC3ycS_2js.

Power to influence

It seems like the non-moderated conversation is missing from media today. But what I can also see is a kind of gap in the media where for example two high profile people frequented in the media, that are debated and discussed, and even debate and discuss each other, do not talk to each other. I would for example be interested in watching the two famous contemporary philosophers, Slavoj Žižek and Noam Chomsky talk together. But amazingly enough these two pop philosophers have not even been interviewed together. This missing conversation is true for a great amount of people. For example having the current President of the United States, Barack Obama, who's government opposes Wikileaks[6], and the founder of Wikileaks, Julian Assange talk together. This could have a great educational, political, historical and entertainment value. These missing conversations in the media today are part of why I dream of a conversation broadcast network, to create the possibility of mending this gap. But how could I make that happen?

TV has the power through network and audiences to get high profile people to participate in their broadcasts. As an individual I can ask someone to participate in my broadcast, but without being able to pay for his or her airtime or promise an audience. There are many online networks today that enable individuals to create their own broadcast (YouTube, Vimeo, Vine, pod-casts), networks that gather and request people to take part in a Q&A (Reddit) and networks that petition social changes (Change.org, Avaaz.org). As an individual I have some options in influencing media by participating in networks like these.

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6   Ed Pilkington and Dominic Rushe "WikiLeaks demands answers after Google hands staff emails to US government," the Guardian, Last modified on January 26, 2015. http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2015/jan/25/wikileaks-google-staff-emails-us-government.

YouTube

The video sharing website YouTube allows users to upload their own video content, and individual user content is what the majority of the content on YouTube consists of. The ease of access to devices such as laptops, mobile phones, tablets computers and Wi-Fi technology has made personal broadcasting a simple and relatively cost free task, and 300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute[7]. With 1 billion users YouTube is the biggest platform for individuals to broadcast and view content. When a youtuber posts a video there is no guarantee that the broadcast will be watched, but you can subscribe to a users channel on the site. Even though a subscriber doesn't necessarily watch every video, subscribers suggest an interest for your channel, a possible audience. But a video also collects views from people that don't subscribe. The popular channel PewDiePie for example has close to 35 million subscribers and his videos has views varying from close to 63 million (almost double the number of his subscribers) to 1 million views. So if I were to use YouTube as a tool to make a conversational broadcast I would have to create the content before I could attract people to watch it. This means that initially I cant promise the people I want to feature on my broadcast any views at all, an this in turn would make it less likely that people would participate. Also, the choices of participants for my broadcast would be based on my own interest, where I can only guess at what other users would be interested in watching. So this would work better if I could get people to participate in the process of choosing candidates for the conversation broadcast, and to "subscribe" to the content that has not yet been made. With a mass behind it before wards it is more likely to get the candidates to join in on the broadcast with this gathered potential audience. This would be like crowd-sourcing[8] the broadcast.

Google Hangouts

Google Hangouts is a multimedia messaging service where you can chat through text, video and/or audio, and share pictures and videos. It has a cost free video calls feature that enables you to make a live broadcast of a

7   "Statistics," *YouTube*, accessed February 20, 2015, http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html.
8   the practice of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people and especially from the online community rather than from traditional employees or suppliers

conversation and publish it on YouTube. The system is similar to Skype in that it is free when calling between Wi-Fi networks, but costs if you call landlines or mobile phones. The main focus is on family and friends communication, talking to people you know rather than strangers. Since most people have Google emails, making them part of the Google ecosystem, it is easy to invite specific friends and community circles. Up to nine people can join in on a face-to-face video conversation in Google Hangouts. This video broadcast feature has also been used in commercial ways by Google and different organizations such as New York Times[9], Glamour Magazine[10] and National Geographic[11] to broadcast a type of panel discussion or Q&A. For example Tesla entrepreneur Elon Musk and businessman and investor Sir Richard Branson participated in a broadcast conversation[12] that also various entrepreneurs joined in on. The conversation was moderated by Yonca Brunini and was organized by Google for Entrepreneurs, and they discussed entrepreneurship and start-up. Musk and Branson had 20 minutes to answer the host Bruninis questions, and then answer the other participants questions.

The live broadcast video chat feature[13] and the feature of being able to publish it afterwards, is what interests me about Google Hangouts. This is the kind of feature that could be used to broadcast the conversations in the network I want to create. However, the layout of the Google Hangout is not ideal for watching a conversation between two people, as it focuses on only one person at the time while the other is shown in a thumbnail view. If I wanted to create a Google Hangout conversation to be published on YouTube, with say Chomsky and Žižek, my only realistic option in making this happen would be to appeal to a relevant organization to arrange this for me. This circles back to the point that without an already collected audience or having the support of a more established institution it is a complicated task to convince people to participate.

9   The New York Times. "Making Pasta With Nigella Lawson - A Google Plus Hangout," YouTube video, 34:00, Streamed live on March 14, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zwMBCs4rUUg.
10   Glamour Magazine. "Glamour Google Hangout: Spring Beauty Trends With Theodore Leaf, Jessica Harlow, and Nikki Ogunnaike," YouTube video, 36:13, Published March 21, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CLIeuO3vhsA.
11   National Geographic. "Hangout with Climbers on Mount Everest - National Geographic Magazine," YouTube video, 27:07, Published May 18, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWVX0MEGpRY.
12   Google for Entrepreneurs. "Elon Musk and Sir Richard Branson Hangout on Air," YouTube video, 57:38, Streamed live on August 8, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vy9y_YSpYxA.
13   Live Hangouts On Air," Google Plus, accessed February 20, 2015, https://plus.google.com/hangouts/onair

Reddit

The entertainment, social networking and news website Reddit, has a popular feature called Ask Me Anything (AMA), that allows people to take part in an online written Q&A. In connection to this users can submit a request for people to participate in the AMA through the subreddit (a niche forum within Reddit) IAmARequests. To name a few that have participated in AMA after being requested: Jón Gnarr, former mayor of Reykjavik[14]; Roger Ebert, film critic, journalist, and screenwriter[15]; Warwick Davis, actor and television presenter[16]. However a lot of people participate without being officially requested, and these are usually defined by the two categories. The first is "something uncommon that plays a central role in your life" and has featured the current President of the United States, Barack Obama, and the broadcaster and naturalist Sir David Attenborough. The second category is "a truly interesting and unique event" and has featured AMA's like "*I was mauled by a bear, fought it off, and drove 4 miles down a mountain with my face hanging off*"[17] and "*I spent 18 years in prison for a murder I didn't commit*"[18] . Reddit AMA's has certain similarities to the network that I want to create and it tells me that there is a potential interest in such a user driven network. Reddit is mainly driven by its users that request and participate in the AMA's. Even though the AMA examples mentioned above were very popular, the participation can range from 23888 comments on Obama's AMA[19], to few or even no comments on a less popular AMA, depending on the AMA heading and users interest. Anyone can participate in the AMA as an interviewee, interviewer or a requester, and this freedom in participation is something that could be valuable for my network because it offers equality in participation that is lacking from traditional broadcast media such as CNN.

14   ggnub69, "AMA Request - John Gnarr, the mayor of Reykjavik, Iceland," Reddit, Published on December 10, 2012, http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/14lnzj/ama_request_john_gnarr_the_mayor_of_reykjavik/.

15   crandamaniac, "IAMA Request: Roger Ebert," Reddit, Published on November 2, 2009, http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/a05if/iama_request_roger_ebert/.

16   ryne84, "AMA Request: Warwick Davis / Willow / Leprechaun and many more!," Reddit, Published on December 14, 2012, http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/14ueda/ama_request_warwick_davis_willow_leprechaun_and/.

17   allenahansen, "I was mauled by a bear, fought it off, and drove 4 miles down a mountain with my face hanging off. AMA," Reddit, Published on April 8, 2013, http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/1byn1l/i_was_mauled_by_a_bear_fought_it_off_and_drove_4/.

18   EricGlisson, "I spent 18 years in prison for a murder I didn't commit. AMA.," Reddit, Published on June 5, 2014, http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/27ehyu/i_spent_18_years_in_prison_for_a_murder_i_didnt/.

19   PresidentObama, "I am Barack Obama, President of the United States -- AMA," Reddit, Published on August 29, 2012, http://www.reddit.com/r/IAmA/comments/z1c9z/i_am_barack_obama_president_of_the_united_states/.

Change.org

Petitions are a great way of getting a mass of people to back up a future project. Of the many petition networks online, a few of them have quite a substantial number of users, like Care2.com, Change.org and Avaaz.org. Care2 have around 28 million users, Change.org has more than 85 million users in 196 countries, and Avaaz has 41 million members in 194 countries. The petitions gain supporters by having the users promote it through social media such as Facebook, Reddit, and Google Plus.

The way one signs up to join or start a petition is commonly through using already existing social media accounts. You only sign up once, and from then on you only have to sign in to sign a petition. On Change.org for example you log in and can sign a petition right there and then, even every single petition on the site if you want. You can choose not to have your name published online regarding the signed petition. Starting a petition is a bit more work, you create a profile for your petition by writing about it and adding pictures. It is then published on Change.org as a petition anyone who logs in can sign, and you are advised to share it on social media to recruit supporters.

The way that petitions collect interest for a specific cause could be a potential structure for gaining audience interest in a conversation broadcast. I am interested in the way Change.org is structured in three essential steps to start a petition, and this is something that could work well for the conversation network. These steps are; start a petition, preview and publish, share. The freedom you have in creating content for sites like Change.org has resulted in people creating for example petitions against petitions. This opens for the question of editing. In a conversation broadcast, potential conflicts such as pro racism discussion, fake users/ requested conversation participants, or copyright and hate speech issues in the petition profile texts could arise.

Online petitions are often criticized[20] as a form of slacker activism, so called

20   Justine Gonzalez, "Online Petitions: Slacktivism at its Best," Mic, last modified January 30, 2009, http://www.mic.com/articles/976/online-petitions-slacktivism-at-its-best.

slacktivism[21], because of the ease it takes to create an online petition and is that the ease and anonymity that is attached with e-petitions. This allows for a lack of accountability, and these petitions can more easily be ignored in comparison to calls letters and protests. Although there is little evidence that the petition support results in actual changes, what this tells me is that there is great interest amongst people, slackers or not, in participating in networks aiming for change. Individuals all over the world are interested in taking part in a network that gives them the power to make a difference. The petition structure and promotional quality is something that would work well for a conversation network. But the question remains if people would be as interested in voting for conversations as they are in changing politics or environmental causes.

In this chapter I've been looking at the existing online networks that enables me as an individual to create a broadcast, and how I can engage other people in participating and backing a broadcast. This has given me some clues to how I could puzzle a conversation network together, through using public resources, like the interest in starting up and voting for petitions, the global interest in participating in networks that you can influence, and existing broadcast technology.

TED.com

Sites like YouTube.com, is in addition to being a hugely popular source of entertainment, also an educational network, that along with sites like the more educationally focused Wikipedia.org and TED.com have chosen to share information and content without charging users for it. If one knows where to look, anyone can come and learn. The online encyclopedia Wikipedia is an example of a website that is user driven and anyone can make content changes. Wikipedia and YouTube are completely user driven, without the users there would be no content. TED however, is not made by its users, but the users help shape it, as the audience shape any media, through forming the statistics of interest in specific content. The first TED talk was posted online in 2006, and

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21   Actions performed via the Internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement, e.g. signing an online petition or joining a campaign group on a social media website.

became widely popular. Since social media sites like Facebook have become a part of everyday life, TED talks also reach their audience and are promoted through online sharing.

As an educational network based on video broadcast talks, TED can give me some clues to how to structure a conversation network.

TED.com is a non-profit educational network based on video broadcast short (18 min or less) monologues. In 1984 when TED started up the talks focused on technology, entertainment and design, but has expanded to cover vast variety of topics, in over more than 100 languages. Every talk featured on TED has to follow seemingly strict norms in terms of how the talk is presented as every talk is rehearsed and has to fit into a time schedule. TED as an online network is a great way of learning about all kinds of topics. They aspire to share ideas and get people talking about the ideas they present in their talks. The accessibility of this often very complex knowledge is what interests me about this network. The minimalistic design in the layout and organization of the thousands of videos that can be watched on TED makes it an easy task to acquire new knowledge and share it on your social media. This give me an idea of how I could present the videos of my conversation network in a well designed way, and how nische topics can be made accessible to a wider audience through a well organized interface, and through social network sharing.

Survey of interest
One of the challenges I face in wanting to create a broadcast based on conversation, without demanding a topic, including a Q&A structure or a time limit, is that this conversation might be dreadfully boring to watch. So I decided to ask the people around me in an attempt to map potential interest. I created out a short survey that I sent to friends and family to find out if there was interest in a petition based conversation broadcast network, who people would be interested in seeing talking together, how long they would be willing to watch such a conversation, and if they would participate in suggesting or voting for a conversation. I only had 54 responses to the survey but I still think

it gives a hint into general interest. They survey was divided into two parts, one part included questions regarding the interest to participate in such a conversation network, and the other part was about the interest in watching a conversation. Here I asked people to rate specific conversations from boring to interesting, and create lists of people they would be interested in watching having a conversation.

Overall there was a positive response to participate in this possible network. When asked about the interest in joining an online petition to make one of their chosen conversations happen 84% would join, 11% was not sure, and only 5% would not want to join. Less people (38%) were interested in starting a petition themselves. 42 % would prefer to use the network only to vote and watch conversations suggested by other people, but 53% was indecisive about this preference. But a surprisingly 47% would be interested in watching their suggested conversation for more than 60 minutes, which is far longer than I expected, and proves promising for a conversation broadcast that would have no time limitations.

I listed a number of paired names such as the movie director Quentin Tarantino with comedian Louis C.K., Burmese opposition politician Aung Sang Suu Kyi with linguist and philosopher Noam Chomsky, and then asked the participants in the survey to rate their interest in this conversation on a range from 1 (very boring) to 5 (very interesting).

These questions were meant to tell me something about people's interest in possible petitions that could be started on the network, and also what categories would be popular. I can roughly divide the examples in 6 entertainment ones and 6 political ones, for example, the Tarantino and C.K pair would be categorized as entertainment and the Aung Sang Suu Kyi and Chomsky pair would be political. In general the political category scores higher in interest. Since I made up these conversation examples, based on my personal interests and my thoughts of what would be interesting, the answers serves as examples of who would follow these as possible petitions, rather than say anything about what petitions might appear on the network.

A new network

I want to create a place that supports the unfocused and flowing conversation. I wish to take the interviewer, or host, and possibly even the pre-decided topic away and let people converse at their own pace, outside of the usual broadcast studio.

A user driven, non-profit, network that requests two individuals to engage in a conversation that will be broadcast online. By researching existing broadcast and user driven media I can see that this kind of network does not exist today, and that individuals are interested in taking part in content creation. There are many existing networks that contain certain elements of the network I want to create, especially the petition structure of Change.org, and the broadcast possibilities of Google Hangouts, and these elements lay the foundation of how to structure the new network technically.

I want the network to be user driven to give individuals the power over the broadcast content. Considering that this network focus on conversations, which compared to other media, might be considered slow paced. I imagine the target group of this network would be 18 plus years. I don't think this network would be for everyone, but I think it could appeal to the same people that watch TED talks, public panel discussions and people that in general are interested in widening their social consciousness. Depending on the content ending up on the network, it could even be used as aid for educational institutions, or for students to learn about for for example the philosophical ideas that happened to be discussed in some of the broadcast conversations. I don't think this network has to aim for the widest possible range of audience to succeed, it stands and falls on user interest, but could function well within a smaller community, say 5000 users that aim for local participants for their

conversation broadcast. But I do see a great potential for the network to grow, either standing alone or as being part of another already established network that relates to educational spirit of this network.

The Internet has made the world a smaller place, and from the idea that the Internet is common property and is created and developed by users, this Internet democracy as well as the increased access to simple recording equipment fuels the potential of a network based on conversations rather than interview structures. The basic technologies to video record a conversation already exists in the participants' homes, it's the web cameras on their computers, phones or tablets, and of the Internet access. This excludes the need and cost for all production elements, such as a studio, film crew, makeup and lighting. To ensure a certain quality a third person that works for the network will video call the elected participants before a broadcast begins, to check on video and sound quality before tuning out for the broadcast to begin. In addition to this third person, administrators will run technical aspects of the site itself, such as maintenance of the page, as well as all other contact with elected candidates for the broadcast.

The candidates petitioned for a conversation will be contacted when the petition has reached a certain amount of votes and informed about the interest for them to participate in a broadcast. They then decide if they want to take part or not. If they chose to take part they are not bound by the topics, they are suggested for them but not an obligation. But the things they do discuss will be organized into a sub-menu of topic after the broadcast. This will be done by users so that other users can navigate the conversation by categories and also the search for conversations or parts of conversations by topic. The conversations are stored on the platform so you can keep watching them or referring to them.

How the network works in 8 steps

1. Suggesting a conversation and topic
2. Get a mass behind it
3. System administrators contact the requested people
4. Wait for them to accept or decline
5. Broadcast the conversation
6. Enjoy, and discuss
7. Map the topics discussed in a sub-menu
8. Enjoy and discuss

Interface

The website will consist of a front page, Home, that links to the four main sub pages; Suggest (a conversation), Watch (a conversation), Vote (for a conversation), and Search (for conversation/broadcast). Throughout the pages of the network there will be a top banner (menu) that allows you to navigate back to and between the main pages Home, Suggest, Watch, and Vote. In addition to this there is a search feature and a log in feature. In the search feature you can search by topic or name, and this will take you to a search result page that shows you results of both broadcast and petitions with the word you searched for. Here you can filter the results into petition, conversation, or conversation playlists based on topics.

There will be a foot banner on the bottom of all the pages that includes less frequently visited pages such as About us, Frequently asked questions, Contact information, Terms of services, Company blog (if there is one), and links to Pluto's social media pages.

I think it's important to have the front page and main functions of Pluto easily available at all times in the top banner, to be able to re-navigate from which ever sub page you are on. Similarly the foot banner will include the less frequently visited information to make the top banner, and main purpose of the network, more organized.

Front page

Here you can sign up to participate in the network by creating log in information or using your existing login information from other accounts such as Google or Facebook. Signing in helps the site monitor voting, and prevent people from voting multiple times, and using existing login information makes it easier for people to sign up and vote. When you're signed in you have the option of browsing existing conversations to watch, petitions to vote for, or starting your own petition by suggesting a conversation.

The front page will be divided into mainly two parts. One part will be presenting conversations to watch and discuss, and will show the most popular broadcast videos (videos with the most views).
The other part will present petitions for conversations to vote for, showing the largest petition (the suggested conversation that has the most votes behind it). Both parts will include up to ten examples, depending on the screen size of your device, and you will be able to choose between viewing what is popular locally or what is popular globally.

Suggest a conversation

You arrive to this page by clicking suggest in the top menu. This is where you create a petition for a conversation. The first step is to create a profile for a conversation you would like to broadcast by giving some information about the two participants and adding pictures. You can link to the persons Wikipedia site if they have one. You also state why you want to see these two people talk together, and add a suggested topic if you want. The second step is to preview the petition, and publish it to get votes. The third step is to share the petition on social media to recruit supporters.

Vote for a conversation

Here you can browse the petitions by topic and popularity, read about the suggested conversations, vote for those you would like to see, and share on social media if you want to.

Watch a conversation

You arrive to this page by clicking Watch in the top menu, and here you can browse conversation broadcast by topic, name and popularity. When you choose a broadcast to watch you will be directed to a page where you can watch and comment on that broadcast.

When you watch the conversation, you can see the participants in equal size, side by side on the screen. The video broadcast features will be similar to YouTube, by including a play, pause and stop button, as well as a scrub bar, but also have an additional content bar where users organize conversations into topic categories.

This organization is related to the comment system on SoundCloud[22] where you can comment on a specific part of a song in the scrub bar. In Pluto this categorization might be separate from the scrub bar, but it will be chronologically in the same manner, so that the indicator showing where you are in the video can follow the topic categorization even if it is not on the scrub bar.

22   SoundCloud.com - SoundCloud is a online audio distribution platform.

The Missing Conversation Project

For the graduation exhibition I created an animated video to explain the concept of my idea. It is a two-minute, black and white, video guiding the viewer through the potential of the Missing Conversation Network shown on a 37" TV screen. In addition to this I exhibited an iPad with an interactive application that allowed visitors to add conversation suggestions to an archive of Missing Conversations.

The animated video shows comic book style characters being drawn up on a background of crumpled paper, while a voice over takes you through the basic idea, thoughts and potential of the network.

I chose drawn figures rather than including photographs of hypothetical participants because the aim of the video is to explain the concept in the simplest and shortest manner for a museum visitor to grasp. Faced with a choice between using pictures of hypothetical participants and drawing them I chose drawing because I find that if you bring in a picture of for example George W. Bush, you evoke a stronger emotional connection connected to this person, but as soon you cartoonify him you soften the impression and it's easier to grasp the larger context of the video.

My aim to explore the design elements for a user driven petition network has taken me through an investigation of the structure of conversation in media today, where I found that the conversations that we are exposed to in broadcast are most often based on question-answer sequences that can take away some of the freedom and value of conversations that do not have such a focused interview structure. This tells me that there could be space on the market for a network that offers an alternative to highly focused interview structure that we

are so heavily exposed to and my Missing Conversation Project could be just that alternative.

I also looked into the possibilities that individuals have to influence media through researching online networks that allow certain participation. I found that there is great interest in creating broadcast, joining petitions and participating in the content creation of networks like YouTube, Reddit and Change.org and I found that If individuals create there own broadcasts there are great challenges in gathering viewers for the broadcast. This told me that basing my design of the Missing Conversation Network on a mixture of petition sites and self-broadcasting sites can solve the problem through gathering viewers before hand.

I looked closely at the structure at networks like the video broadcast TED.com and the petition collection site Change.org to find possible design structures for my network. Both these sites are made for the masses, they are simple and easy to use and navigate compared to sites like Reddit that need more time to get familiar with. This gave me a great guideline to what elements to bring into my network.

Finally I conducted a survey to see interest that allows people to list hypothetical conversations of their choosing and their interest in pre-suggested conversations. I also included questions regarding how long they would watch a conversation of their own choosing. Although this was a very minor survey the results gave me a strong indication that people are interested in the project and surprisingly to me they would be interested in watching their chosen conversation for more than an hour.

In the exhibition space some visitors were reluctant to suggest a conversation. I heard people say that they didn't want to suggest just anyone, the matter had to be thought through before being added to the archive. Others were more playful and tested the limits of the application through suggesting naughty words instead of names. In the Missing Conversation Network the anonymity

that the iPad allowed will not be there and therefore silly suggestions are less likely to be common.

I see a great potential in the future of the Missing Conversation Project. I would love to see this realized as an actual network as well as taking part in further studies on the design and social values of this network.

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Appendices

Survey

Here you can see the survey form I used and the resaults:

If you could choose 2 people out of anyone who has lived on this planet to engage in a conversation and you could watch. Who would they be?

You can name as many as you want

Jesus and Mohammed
Leonardo da Vinci and Quentin Blake. Topic: art/drawing.
Pablo Picasso and Jack Kirby
Obahma and Bergþóra Gísladóttir
stuart pearson wright (artist) - arnold schwarzenegger
a die hard star trek fan with little social skills - william shatner
kim jong un - ricky gervais
richard ayoade - patrick stewart
David Bowie - My friend Harry"
nikola tesla & marcel duchamp
Josef Stalin and Jennifer Aniston
Kurt Vonnegut and Foucault
Martin Luther King - Adolf Hitler
Ernest Hemingway - Mahatma Gandhi
Ein Stein
Rebecca Watson, Saga Garðarsdóttir, John Stewart, Bogi Ágústsson, Sigrún Davíðsdóttir (fréttaritari RÚV í London), Sveinn Helgason (fréttaritari RÚV í Washington), Carl Sagan, Perry DeAngelis
Gahndi and Hitler
my grandfather and Gertrude Stain
Hypatia of Alexandria and Stephen Hawking.
Jesus and Kleópatra
Charles Darwin - Nikola Tesla
Alan Turing - Bill Hicks
Leandro Ehrlich - David Bowie
Frank Azaria (Voice actor from the Simpsons) - David Attenborough
George Orwell - Aldous Huxley
Zack dela rocha - Malala Yousafzai
Amy Poehler - Joseph Keller
Albert Einstein - seyðlarkarl frá Inkunum
Sarah Palin and Tina Fey
Oscar Wilde and Staline
George R. R. Martin and J. R. R. Tolkien
Confucius and Martin Luther King
no one
Jesus and Buddha
Abraham Lincoln & Barack Obama
Aristotle and jeff buckley

Henri Matisse and Keith Haring
andy warhol >< alan turing
Edinson and Einstein
Hitler and Ghandi
Abraham Lincoln - Mother Teresa
Gandhi - Einar Benediktsson
Jón Sigurðsson - Martin Luther King - Rosa Parks
Sokrates & Ghandi
Jesus and Hitler
Salvador Dali - Wilhelm Freddie
Sókrates - Platon
Ghandi and Nelson Mandela
Ghandi and Mother Theresa
Oscar Wilde og Jane Austen
Putin and Hitler (after Putin's death) should really have a talk about religion and masses
Don Rosa and Carl Barks
Marshall Rosenberg and Hitler
Louisa May Alcott and Anais Nin
Alex Ferguson & Sir Matt Busby
Nicola Tesla and Stephen Hawking
Nicola Tesla and Albert Einstein
Jesus and Richard Dawkins
Gandhi and Hitler
Sigmund Freud and Erich Fromm
Adolf Hitler and Kim Il-sung
Leon Trotsky and Vladimir Lenin
Gandhi - Genghis Khan
Adolph Hitler vs Gandi
Alan Watts & Halldór Auðar Svansson
Da Vinci & Einstein talk about how to think outside the box when solving problems.
Jesu Kristur og Múhameð
Stephen Colbert and J.R.R. Tolkien
Magellan and Marco Polo
Ernest Hemingway and Wislawa Szymborska.
Jesus and Egill Skallagrímsson
Coco Chanel and Isabella Blow
Marie Antoinette and Rose Bertin
Oscar Wilde and F. Scott Fitzgerald
My mom and dad´s first ever conversation
Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr on quantum machanics

What about 2 people who are alive today? And If you could suggest a topic, what would it be?

You can name as many ideas as you want plus topics

Dalai Llama
Bob Dylan and Stephin Merritt. Topics: Their poetry and their songwriting.
CM Punk and Undertaker on the state of wrestling today and stories from behind the scenes
These are both alive. I´ll ask them to talk about freedom for every person.
(Obahma and Bergþóra Gísladóttir) (as for topics I am fine just to see where their convosation goes).
david attenborough & james inhofe on global warming
Kim Jong II and Ben Stiller - Topic: German Girls
Bill Lumbergh and Bill McKibben discussing how to solve the problem of global warming
Ban ki Moon - Xi Jinping on Future of secure food in a growing world and the role of sustainability, example: China's aquaculture - with 61 % the biggest in the world which uses too many antibiotics which weakens the health of people and is polluting the rivers
Roger Deakins - Cinematography - Frank Darabont - Filmmaking
People who are educated with Climate stuff and are willing to make a change here in the world. Conversations with investors. Topic will be Climate and how to change pollution culture to Green-energi culture. Fast and effectively.
Rebecca Watson, Saga Garðarsdóttir,
John Stewart, Bogi Ágústsson,
Sigrún Davíðsdóttir (fréttaritari RÚV í London), Sveinn Helgason (fréttaritari RÚV í Washington),
Obama and Kofi Annan
Haruki Murakami and August Künnapuu - Topic: About sport and art
Richard Dawkins and Pope Francis about religion.
Jón Gnarr and Angela Merkel To talk about world peace
Steven Hopkins og Oprah Winfrey. - Journey through life.
(Sarah Palin and Tina Fey) I would chose the same as above and have them talk about the weather and other mundane topics just to see how long it would take Palin to bring up Fey's mockery from SNL.
Aung Saan Suu Kyi and Malala Yousafzai - Dictatures, power, freedom of speech, how to get girls in education and politics.
Tina Fey and Amy Poeler Topic: women in comedy
Páll Skúlason and Sigmundur Davíð. The role of a goverment
no one
Leoncie and Vigdís Hauksdóttir - Talk about life and human rights
The Pope & Laci Green on sexual health
Sigmundur davíð og katrín oddsdóttir
David Attenborough and Professor Brian Cox. The topic would be life and plants.
Putin >< pussy riot - how to maintain the radical exoticness in contemporary society
Obama and Ólafur Ragnar Grimsson
Dalai Lama the 14th and Malala Yousafzai. Education.
Dalai Lama - Yoko Ono - Bill Gates on Freedom, human rights, peace
Obama & Dalai Lama topic : war &peace
Obama and Jón Gnarr
Putin and Jón Gnarr - Talk about the world change of peace, end of poverty, equality to every group of people, sustainable earth. And last and not least, admitting mistakes and how to be humble."
David Bowie - Judith Butler
Malala og Obama
Wandana Shva and Barack Obama, industrial production of food with chemicals and environmental issues
Malala and Hillary Rodham Clinton - Womens educatinon
Neil Gaiman og j.k.Rowling
Marina Abramovich and Nikas Safronov about art
Dalai Lama and Don Rosa
Marshall Rosenberg and Anders Brevik about nonviolent communication
Beyonce Knowles and Kim Kardashian about daily life and upbringing
Kanye West and Tim Gunn about fashion
Inga Muscio and Chimamanda Adichie on sexual orientation in intercultural settings
Stefán Pálsson & Eyjólfur Þorkelsson, state of the union

Neil DeGrasee Tyson and Bill Gates, about science, the future and what mankind is doing right and wrong
Bill Gates and Elon Musk about entrepeneurship
Stephen Hawking and Bill Gates, the gratest inventions they know of.
Putin and Dalailama - peace
dont now
Pope Francis and Stephen Fry. They would discuss religion, of course.
Kim Kardashian and Honey BooBoo about the importance of being unpretentious and natural.
Edward Snowden & Barak Obama about spying on people
Putin & Jon Gnarr talk about life and if everyone should have one.
Vladímír Pútín og Barack Obama
Christiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi
David Attenborough and Aubrey Manning (Life on Earth)
Francis Drake and Horatio Nelson (Sea Battles)"
Nick Cave and PJ Harvey. Talking about their favourite films.
Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and George W. Bush on Human Rights of prisoners
Can't think of any specific, but any influential in industry/specialisations/professions that are of interest to me. How is it different from Ted though?
Kim Jong-un and Charlie Rose/Bloomberg on N.Korea´s choice of rule
Bill Clinton and GW Bush on being a moral leader of the free world
Fox News presenter Bill O'Reilly and Noam Chomsky on US foreign policy

For how long would you be interested in watching one of those conversations?

- 1 - 15 min 5%
- 15 - 30 min 18%
- 30 - 45 min 9%
- 45 - 60 min 20%
- 60+ min 47%

If you could join an online petition to try to make one of your chosen conversations happen, would do that?

This would mean log-in in through facebook or email and click a button.

- Yes 84%
- No 5%
- Maybe 11%

If there was an online network for these kind of conversation requests. Would you start a petition for a conversation and try to get support for it?

- Yes 36%
- No 15%
- Maybe 49%

Would you prefer to vote for and watch conversations that other people suggested?

- Yes 42%
- No 5%
- Maybe 53%

If the talks would be in a language that you don't understand, but would have subtitles, would that make you less interested in the talk?

- Yes 11%
- No 75%
- Maybe 15%

J.K Rowling (author) - George R. R. Martin (author)

Rate your interest in this possible conversation

1 being very boring and 5 very interesting

- 1 .... 16%
- 2 .... 20%
- 3 .... 38%
- 4 .... 16%
- 5 .... 9%

Quentin Tarantino (director) - Louis C.K. (comedian)

Rate your interest in this possible conversation

1 being very boring and 5 very interesting

- 1 .... 5%
- 2 .... 16%
- 3 .... 20%
- 4 .... 29%
- 5 .... 29%

Julian Assange (Creator of wikileaks) - George W. Bush (Former president of the USA)

Rate your interest in this possible conversation

1 being very boring and 5 very interesting

- 1 .... 7%
- 2 .... 7%
- 3 .... 9%
- 4 .... 25%
- 5 .... 51%

Jón Gnarr (Former Mayor of Reyjavík) - Davíð Oddsson (Editor of Morgunblaðið and former Mayor of Reyjavík)

Rate your interest in this possible conversation

1 being very boring and 5 very interesting

- 1 .... 7%
- 2 .... 7%
- 3 .... 22%
- 4 .... 22%
- 5 .... 42%

Beyoncé (Entertainer) - Bill Gates (Founder of Microsoft)

Rate your interest in this possible conversation

1 being very boring and 5 very interesting

- 1 .... 24%
- 2 .... 24%
- 3 .... 20%
- 4 .... 16%
- 5 .... 16%

Andri Snær Magnason (Author and environmental activist) - Ólafur Ragnar Grímson (The President of Iceland)

Rate your interest in this possible conversation

1 being very boring and 5 very interesting

- 1 .... 11%
- 2 .... 7%
- 3 .... 22%
- 4 .... 36%
- 5 .... 24%

Izzeldin Abuelaish (Palestinian Medical Doctor) - Benjamin Netanyahu (Prime Minister of Israel)

Rate your interest in this possible conversation

1 being very boring and 5 very interesting

- 1 .... 9%
- 2 .... 13%
- 3 .... 11%
- 4 .... 22%
- 5 .... 45%

Amy Poehler (comedian) - Naomi Klein (author and social activist)

Rate your interest in this possible conversation

1 being very boring and 5 very interesting

- 1 .... 20%
- 2 .... 16%
- 3 .... 25%
- 4 .... 15%
- 5 .... 24%

Aung Sang Suu Kyi (Burmese opposition politician) - Noam Chomsky (linguist and philosopher)

Rate your interest in this possible conversation

1 being very boring and 5 very interesting

- 1 .... 18%
- 2 .... 16%
- 3 .... 20%
- 4 .... 15%
- 5 .... 31%

Madonna (Entertainer) - Miley Cyrus (Entertainer)

Rate your interest in this possible conversation

1 being very boring and 5 very interesting

- 1 .... 42%
- 2 .... 27%
- 3 .... 11%
- 4 .... 13%
- 5 .... 7%

Kathryn Bigelow (director) - Norman Finkelstein (political scientist and activist)

Rate your interest in this possible conversation

1 being very boring and 5 very interesting

- 1 .... 16%
- 2 .... 27%
- 3 .... 38%
- 4 .... 11%
- 5 .... 7%

Vivienne Westwood (fashion designer) - Patti Smith (singer-songwriter, poet and visual artist)

Rate your interest in this possible conversation

1 being very boring and 5 very interesting

- 1 .... 29%
- 2 .... 20%
- 3 .... 13%
- 4 .... 24%
- 5 .... 15%

Project
Photographs from the Iceland Academy of the Arts MA Degree Show of
Design and Fine Art