Public Spaces Incubator

Reclaiming conversations online

CBC ⬤ Radio-Canada

rtbf.be

SRG SSR

ZDF

New_ Public

Online conversations have been defined by the big social media platforms.

✓ These platforms are driven by revenue and clicks, a focus often at odds with public interest values

✓ Conversations on these platform are too often toxic and polarizing, and audiences are fragmented

✓ There has been an erosion of trust with significant cost to society and democracy

The Public Spaces Incubator **can strengthen *public conversation*, while supporting public media goals.**

- ✓ Redefine and reclaim conversational spaces

- ✓ Innovate - invent the future on our owned & operated platforms

- ✓ Own the conversation around content

- ✓ Deepen audience engagement

- ✓ Strengthen civic engagement

- ✓ Increase trust with audiences and citizens

Public Spaces Incubator

Our partners

"Online spaces that are free from disinformation, misinformation, harassment and abuse are near extinction. [...] Now is the time for public service media to play a role in reversing this trend."

—Catherine Tait
President and CEO,
CBC/Radio-Canada

"This joint initiative aims to use the richness of digital tools to create a new space for interactions, without censorship [...] A utopia, some will say, a democratic ambition, we answer, that we want to make real and accessible to as many people as possible."

— Jean-Paul Philippot, Director-General, RTBF

"Democracy thrives on an open and fair dialogue in society. We must not leave this to the major American platforms.[...] Our common goal is to counter the increase in hatred, violence, propaganda and defamation on social media with a public service alternative."

— Norbert Himmler, Director, ZDF

"The SSR is close to the Swiss population. To maintain this proximity, it creates bridges, encourages exchanges and ensures that a constructive dialogue is maintained in substance and form. Respect for diversity of opinions and people is a key condition of this process which is essential to democratic vitality."

— Gilles Marchand, Director-General, SRG SSR

"It's both possible and necessary to create more constructive public conversations online – public service media are perfectly positioned to play a key role."

—Eli Pariser,
Co-Director,
New_ Public

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Canada, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, USA

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A Collaborative Partnership

The goal is **not to replicate** existing global platforms, but to develop products and services **on the platforms** managed by Public Service Media (PSM) Organizations

Funded by four PSM Founding Members from **Belgium**, **Canada**, **Germany** and **Switzerland**

Together with **New_ Public**, experts who guide the research, development and design of digital solutions for new conversational spaces

We created 100+ prototypes of ideas for better public conversations.

Prototypes are basic or low-fidelity sketches of an idea, made to explore further possibilities and get feedback from internal stakeholders and audiences.

Purpose of prototypes

- First step in making ideas concrete

- Feedback leads to iterations or (often) new ideas

Format of prototypes

- Not live, low-operability

- 1-3 minute videos or very basic code

- Often accompanied by a set of questions or alternative executions

The following prototypes are examples pulled from the many themes and concepts we're testing, each based on motivations identified in research, as well as our broader aspirations for public conversation.

✨ **Though these are just test designs for now, we hope they convey our range of thinking** – the result of sketching and co-creating with hundreds of participants across four countries (online and IRL). ✨

Theme

Beyond-binary

We know from desk research (and we heard in our own interviews) that **most users do not participate** in an online conversation by writing out a comment or reply. At the same time, the current alternative on the internet usually consists of a binary choice (e.g. Upvote/Downvote or Like/Dislike).

Prototypes that we've developed in this theme explore moving beyond a binary to more nuanced positions and/or emotional reactions, while also lowering the barrier to participation with one-tap interactions.

Prototype: Comments Slider

Comments Slider

Comments Slider **visualizes comments along a spectrum**, and allows users to position themselves and explore the perspectives of others with this affordance. Based on responses, this UX **offers another layer of active facilitation:** encouraging comments where there are few, and identifying common ground across the spectrum.

Hypothesis: IF people can reply and see others' replies to a question across a spectrum rather than a binary, THEN they will be able to get a better sense of the real distribution of opinions, BECAUSE a spectrum encourages more nuance in opinion.

⭐ **Video:** <u>Click here</u> to view the prototype walkthrough
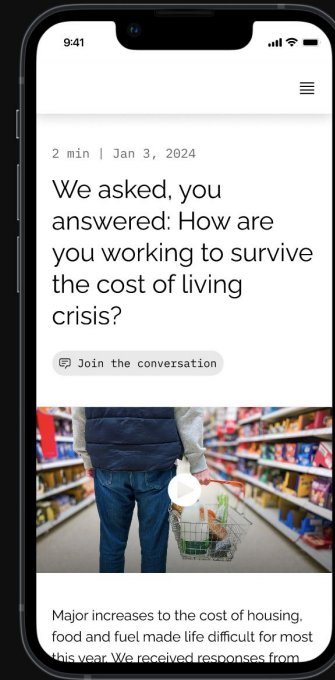
Story adapted from CBC News, for illustrative purposes. Comments generated by Chat GPT.

Theme

Representing public discourse

In audience interviews, we found that people want more context in order to participate in online conversations: they want to understand who else occupies a space with them, who is speaking, and what gaps exist.

Prototypes that we've developed in this theme explore new ways of representing public discourse. Public broadcasters want to represent and respond to their audience's interests and perspectives; with features in this theme, users can directly influence public broadcaster priorities, coverage, and editorial direction. The following prototype accomplishes this by visualizing perspectives and highlighting ones not yet represented in a conversation.
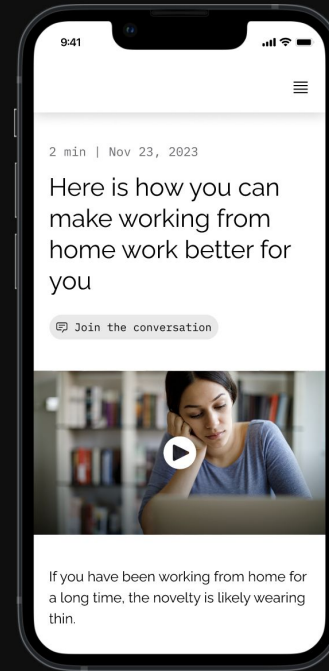
Prototype: Representing Perspectives

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Representing Perspectives

This prototype allows **journalists to identify what perspectives they'd like to hear from** in a conversation. Users can **self-identify with these perspectives** when they write a comment. After all perspectives are included, a **visualization** provides some **analysis of the perspectives**.

Hypothesis: IF journalists identify a list of important perspectives and the design highlights which of these perspectives are missing from a conversation, THEN it will be easier to identify and invite in missing perspectives from the conversation, BECAUSE it will be immediately clear which perspectives are missing.

⭐ **Video:** <u>Click here</u> to view the prototype walkthrough

9:41

2 min | Nov 23, 2023

Here is how you can make working from home work better for you

💬 Join the conversation

If you have been working from home for a long time, the novelty is likely wearing thin.

Story adapted from CBC News, for illustrative purposes. Comments generated by Chat GPT.

Theme

Being together

In our early research with younger cohorts, we heard a particular desire to simply "be together" in digital spaces. We can learn from what young people are already doing in online spaces and design to meet them where they are.

Prototypes that we've developed in this theme explore being together online, in the spirit of digital spaces as public spaces. Drawing on interaction patterns from social media that young people already use (while acknowledging the challenges, notably those of moderation, that this approach brings with it), the following prototype explores new ways to interact with others during and after a livestream, encouraging people to participate in lightweight, fun, and ephemeral ways.
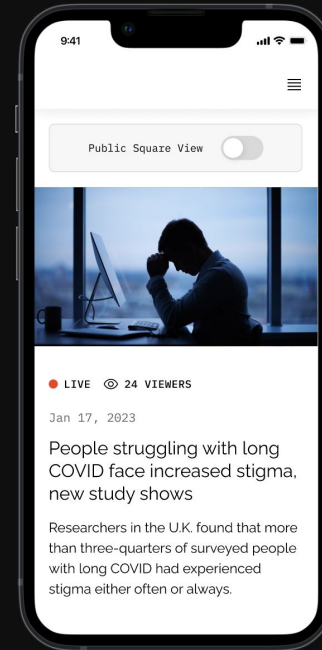
Prototype: Public Square View

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Public Square View

This prototype explores ways to **create a sense of "togetherness"** during a livestream. This view allows the user to see how many people are watching with them and to interact with others in new ways. After the livestream, users can **join a conversation room** to keep talking about a specific topic.

Hypothesis: IF people can first interact in more ephemeral and lightweight ways before joining a discussion room, THEN there will be more positive or constructive dialog, BECAUSE they will already have some positive familiarity with each other.

9:41

Public Square View

● LIVE 👁 24 VIEWERS

Jan 17, 2023

People struggling with long COVID face increased stigma, new study shows

Researchers in the U.K. found that more than three-quarters of surveyed people with long COVID had experienced stigma either often or always.

Story adapted from CBC News, for illustrative purposes. Comments generated by Chat GPT.

Public Spaces Incubator

Public Spaces Incubator is a multi-year international partnership, structured in 3 phases.

We are here

PHASE 1: DISCOVERY

We immersed ourselves in diverse perspectives on broadcaster and user needs and strategized around design opportunities

PHASE 2: DESIGN

We designed prototypes of digital conversational spaces that can increase civic engagement and offer a healthy forum for connection and discussion

PHASE 3: DEVELOPMENT

We will develop MVP / MVP+ digital conversational spaces that are tested with public service media broadcasters and users

IMPLEMENTATION

Post-PSI; Public service media broadcasters will have access to open source content to implement and scale on their owned platforms

Thank you and stay tuned!

Contact: **psi@newpublic.org**

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