

EXPLORE
YOUR
PERSPECTIVE

Master Thesis By
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EXPLORE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Designing for an Alternative Perspective on Religious Faith

Master Thesis

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Religious transition includes a spectrum of experiences that harbours a myriad of challenges. Though it is a non-linear process, every religious transition starts with a critical questioning of religious norms that one has been exposed to.

Reasons for questioning vary from traumatic experiences with religious others to cognitive and moral dissonance and contradictions in the sacred scriptures. Questioning brings the urge to discuss the contested aspects of one's religion with others in the religious spheres. However, people questioning some aspects of their religion are usually discouraged in their inquiry because being critical of one's religion is seen as heresy and a transgressive action to be avoided.

The lack of space to discuss critical questions with religious others can result in a feeling of loneliness and loss of relatedness. In the meantime, religious doubts can culminate while one suffers from uncertainties about their religion. Not being able to find answers to resolve their religious doubts makes some fear that they might lose their religious faith and get astray.

Still, one's critical stance and positive feelings toward their religion can co-exist even after disavowing religion. Leaving one's religion doesn't always cause complete abandonment. Instead, people may be eager to learn from other believers to take a different angle on their former religion.

The goal of the project is to assist people in their religious transition process. More specifically, the aim is to support people critical of their religion in exploring whether to be at peace with their faith by providing them with a safe space to create their own unique understanding of their religion. To conclude, the Explore Your Perspective app encourages people to go beyond the binary perspectives dominating their religious transition experiences.

PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis project concludes my master's studies at the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering (IDE) of TU Delft. After five months of hard and devoted work, I am very excited to present the results of my graduation project to you.

Before I started the IPD master's program, I had worked as an industrial designer for a few years back in Turkey. I was designing home appliances products for mass production. I enjoyed doing my job a lot, but I wanted to use my creativity to bring meaningful solutions not for profit but with the vision of sincerely improving people's lives and well-being. At the IDE, I learned how much design could do, how much it could dare! Therefore, I wanted to dare greatly and design a solution for the complex religious transition process by utilising my experience at the IDE and my personal motivation.

There are several people that I would like to express my gratitude; without their support, this project would not have been possible.

I first want to thank my project supervisors, Marieke Sonneveld and Annemiek van Boeijen for their guidance throughout the project. You didn't just supervise me; your positivity and encouraging attitude helped me keep myself motivated. It has been a great experience learning from your critical perspectives. I also want to thank you for your trust in me to start this project; your trust gave me the chance to grow as a designer. It was an honour and an enormous joy to work with you.

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INTRODUCING THE PROJECT

This chapter outlines the initial design brief as the starting point of this thesis project. In this regard, the context, the problem definition, and the approach used to guide the project will be explained.

1.1 Prolegomenon

The initial focus of the project was on the people from Muslim ethnic minorities, born and raised in the Netherlands that are in their religious transition process. According to the literature findings, the project focus was changed as it was found that there are significant similarities of the religious transition narratives of people with Abrahamic religious backgrounds (see Chapter 2). Therefore, the project involves people once affiliated any of the divine religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam).

1.2 Background

In the 60s and 70s, The Netherlands started to recruit and receive Muslim 'guest workers' from Turkey and Morocco. Since then, the number of people with Islamic backgrounds has increased in the Netherlands. Though religious belonging is considered strong among Dutch Muslims (Chafai, 2020), there are generational differences regarding religiosity, adherence to one's own ethnic group, and liberal Dutch culture. While families and Muslim communities have significant influence over their children's religious identity, the larger Dutch context creates another force that contributes identity construction of Muslim youth. Some of the Muslim youth live in two worlds, one is the conservative inside; the Islamic doctrine provided by families and communities, and the other is the liberal outside, the Dutch society.

The attachment to religious identity is not unchanging among the youth born and raised within these Islamic environments; religious doctrine and traditions can be questioned critically by Muslim youth. But questioning one's own beliefs towards religion can be the start of a painful journey full of guilt and fear. The first reaction to freshly emerged doubt is to find answers to resolve the conflict. Looking up different explanations of the controversial issue on the net or consulting imam (sect leader) are some of the ways to deal with doubt. The possibility of losing faith can be terrifying since religion provides a comprehensive way of living and support for stressful life events and existential matters (purpose in life, the promise of the afterlife, etc.).

When doubts cannot be solved, it may lead to religious disaffiliation over time. While some people may deal with doubts, pain, and inner struggles for years, some may conclude relatively quicker and say, 'I do not believe anymore'. By acknowledging their disbelief, people find themselves facing various challenges and dilemmas. It can be a lonely process when people have difficulties communicating their disaffiliation with their families, friends, and relatives. The chance of being rejected and alienated is high since apostasy is the greatest sin that any Muslim can ever commit. People in religious social circles may think that one is looking down on the Islamic doctrine by leaving the faith. Besides, families can suffer from losing their status and respect within the community. These are some of the factors that hold people from coming out. Some people dare to share their disbelief and lose family ties and all connections. When people cannot share that they are no longer Muslims, they need to perform a 'proper' religious body and participate in religious rituals to belong. This behaviour comes with emotional struggles where people feel insincere. Moreover, there is a delicate balance to maintain between wanting to be yourself and not hurting your family. Therefore, this makes the construction of a new identity harder.

"When I quit Islam when at age twenty-one, I was a virgin. The idea of losing my virginity before marriage nearly gave me a panic attack. I had completely internalized the idea that an unmarried woman who'd had sex was worthless."

(an interviewee in Waterlander, 2018)

Moving out of Islamic traditions and faith does not mean that people can change their lifestyles easily. When people attempt to experiment with things that are not allowed according to Islamic doctrine that they're exposed to, there can be a constant feeling of guilt and shame holding people back from adopting a secular lifestyle. The process of adopting a new way of living can take time until faith leavers feel comfortable with themselves finding out their new spiritual and moral foundations.

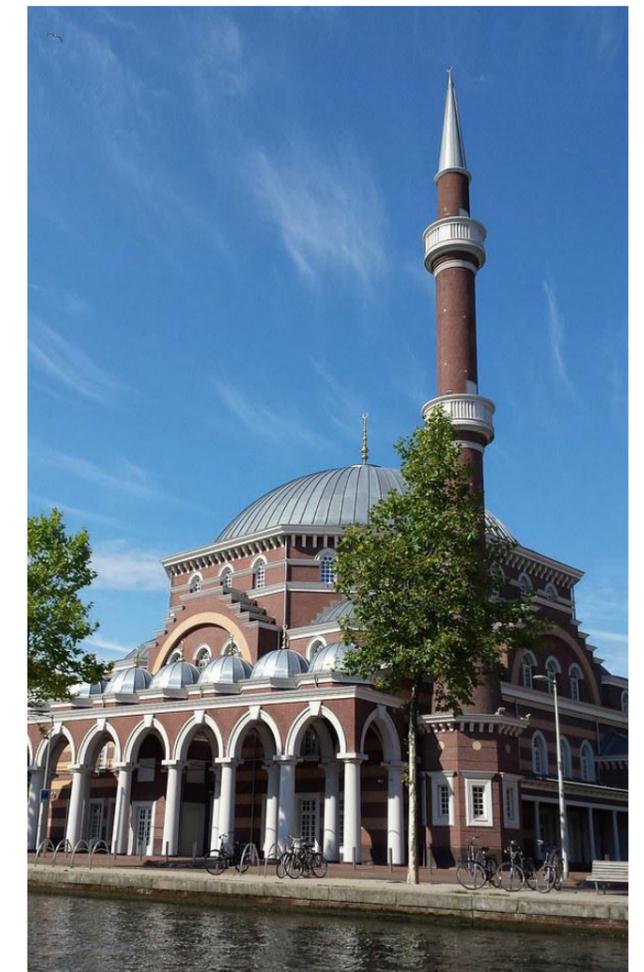


Figure 1.1 A photo of a mosque in Amsterdam

1.3 Problem Definition

The initial objective of the project was to introduce a design intervention into religious transition in the Netherlands among Muslim minorities. The earlier design goal of the project was to support people who are experiencing religious disaffiliation in the Dutch context. The initial target group was the people born and raised in Islamic environments within Muslim ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, no longer subscribe to Islam, and haven't converted to another religion.

As previously described, the process of leaving faith among Muslim minorities is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. It contains intra and interpersonal complications with social and emotional struggles. Because of its multifaceted nature, it is difficult to predict and manage the transition process. Thus, the project aims at making a positive impact on the religious transition experiences by exploring ways to support individuals in the Dutch context.

The main design question is how to support people who are experiencing religious disaffiliation among Muslim ethnic minorities in the Netherlands.

1.4 Approach

Inspired by the Double Diamonds methodology (Design Council, 2019), this project is built on the three main phases of the design process: a research phase, an ideation & conceptualisation phase, and a concept development phase. In the next sections I will explain what design activities took place during each of these phases.

Research

The project brief was created after the initial research on religious transition. Next to literature research, semi-structured interviews were conducted to define a scope that helped form the design brief. The official start of the project started with the confirmation of the project brief.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the religious transition process literature research was conducted. The knowledge gained from this research helped to scope the primary research. The primary research aimed to obtain knowledge on the struggles and support experienced during the religious transition in the Dutch context. Generative sessions and semi-structured interviews were used to gain knowledge from 6 people who have experienced religious transition.

All the gathered insights of the research led to a design focus where the researcher developed personas, a design goal, and an interaction vision.

Ideation & Conceptualisation

In the light of the design goal and the interaction vision as well as the knowledge from the primary and the secondary research, ideation process was started. After initial individual ideation, a co-creation session was organised with fellow design students and 2 faith leavers who were the interviewee of the primary research. The result of the co-creation session was used as an inspiration to inform concept generation. The generated concepts were visualised in the form of low-fidelity prototypes.

Concept Development

In this phase the final concept was developed into a final design. In this process there were many iterations with prototypes performed. After further ideation and paper prototyping, an app workflow was created. It helped the designer to have a better understanding of the content of the design. Besides, a benchmark was performed to investigate how certain apps structured and what features and functionalities there were to integrate to the concept being developed. Initial User evaluation was conducted to get feedback from the target users. After that with usability testing, the user interface was tested and improved. Finally, after the design freeze, the interviews to evaluate the final design were conducted. The design process had to stop due to the time frame of the project, but this graduation project ends with conclusions, recommendations, and a personal reflection that can help to improve the design solution further.

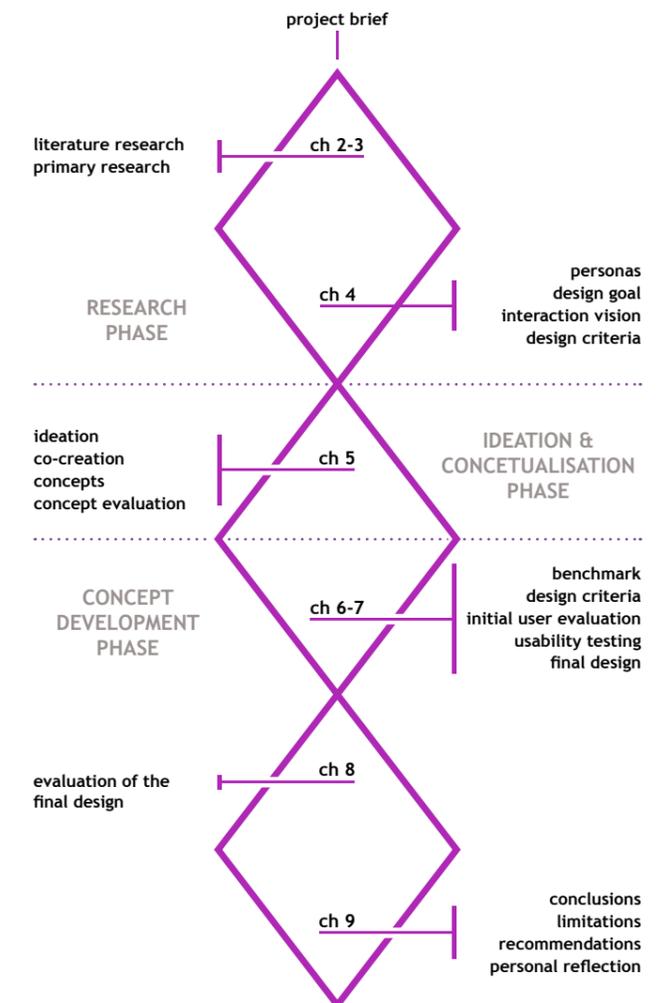


Figure 1.2 Overview of the approach

2

EXPLORING THE PHENOMENON

This chapter presents the current state of research regarding Islam in the Netherlands, factors influencing one's religiosity, and the religious transition process. Whilst the initial focus of the chapter was on Islam, the findings about religious transformation include experiences of people who left Abrahamic religions (including Judaism and Christianity).

2.1 Research Questions

The following research questions were used as a starting point for the literature research and were adapted based on obtained knowledge.

1. Islam in the Netherlands

RQ1.1. What is the history of Islam in the contemporary Dutch context?

RQ1.2. What are the current statistics regarding religiosity among Muslim minorities?

2. Religious Identity

RQ2.1. What are the factors influencing Muslim youth religiosity?

3. Apostasy

RQ3.1. What does 'leaving faith' mean in Islam? How is apostasy perceived in religious spheres?

4. Leaving Faith

RQ4.1. How does the religious disaffiliation process start?

RQ4.2. What are the steps in the transition towards religious disaffiliation?

RQ4.3. What are the struggles and enablers for people leaving their religious faith?

RQ4.4. How do faith leavers' habits, routines, and everyday life experiences change?

RQ4.5. How do faith leavers seek help regarding their struggles in their religious transition process?

RQ4.6. What are the services available to support faith leavers in the Netherlands? How do they provide support?

2.2 Islam in the Contemporary Dutch Context

The first Muslim community in the Netherlands can be traced back to 1951 when some Moluccan soldiers who fought for the Dutch colonial army came to the Netherlands for settlement. In the early 1960s, the Netherlands started to recruit migrant labourers, mainly from Turkey and Morocco. Since then, the Turkish and Moroccan populations have dominated the Muslim religious field in the Netherlands.

According to a report from the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) in 2018, around 6% of the adult population in the country are Muslims. While people with non-Western origin constitute most of the Muslim population in the Netherlands, people with Turkish and Moroccan backgrounds make up roughly two-thirds of the group.

Huijnk (2018) addresses the diversity of Muslim lives in the Netherlands and classifies Muslims in the Netherlands into five categories: (1) secular, (2) cultural, (3) selective, (4) pious, private, and (5) strict, practising. In secular Muslims' lives, religion doesn't take an important place

and is barely practised. Though religion means more to cultural Muslims compared to seculars, they do not have an interest in religious rituals (e.g., praying or visiting the mosque). Selective Muslims occasionally take part in rituals. Religiosity has an important place in the lives of the pious, private Muslims who adhere to a religious way of living. Still, they rarely visit a mosque and prefer practising in private. For the strict, practising Muslims' lives, religion plays a central role; they intensely adhere to requirements of religion, praying, fasting and so on.

An increase in secularisation and religiosity can be observed in the Muslim ethnic minorities, while the latter is more dominant. It has been indicated that Islam is increasingly experienced and interpreted individually in the Western, secular society (Huijnk, 2018). With individualization, Muslim youth rely more on their own interpretation of faith and take a critical stance against the Islamic doctrine they are surrounded by. For some, this may lead to secularisation, but for a bigger portion, it means an increase in religiosity (Huijnk, 2018).

94% of Moroccan origin people regard themselves as Muslim, which is 86% for the people with a Turkish background. On the other hand, 10% of Turkish and 5% of Moroccan groups identify themselves as non-religious. Though the percentage of non-religious Turks is small, there is a growing trend opposing religiousness. Besides, more people among the second generation of Turkish and Moroccan immigrants call themselves non-Muslim than the first generation (Huijnk, 2018).

On the other hand, the vast majority of Turkish and Moroccan Muslims give significant importance to their religious identity in the Netherlands, 89% and 96%, respectively (Huijnk, 2018).

2.3 Factors Influencing Religiosity

As primary socialisation agents of religiosity, parents provide the foundation for religious worldview. They are the reference of religious behaviour for their children and decide on religious education and participation in religious activities and events (Bao et al. 1999; Regnerus et al. 2004; Ruiters and Van Tubergen 2009). Pol & Tubergen (2014) indicate that their parents' religious practices largely influence, especially immigrants' religious practices.

However, the parents are not the only ones who influence their children's religiosity. It is also essential to consider the social context. Having others who can reinforce religious norms and values in the children's social environment makes the socialisation of norms and values more effective (Pol & Tubergen, 2014). While the family has a predominant effect on religiosity, later in life, the influence from outside comes into play; for example, being exposed to norms in school and their teachers' worldview (Tubergen, 2007). Moreover, involvement in new social groups and partnerships can also influence people's worldviews and religious identities (Tubergen, 2007). A discrepancy between immigrants' beliefs and practices and the majority population in a country may affect the transmission of religiosity and make it less effective

than among families in a majority situation (Kwak, 2003). However, strong adherence to religious norms can be a reaction to believers' minority position in a secular and liberal society in which religious lifestyle is far from the norm (Huijnk, 2018). For some born in the diaspora, the intensity of public Islamophobia may cause them to take a defensive stance regarding their religion (Timol, 2020). Thus, being exposed to anti-Islamic sentiments may influence one's religiosity.

According to Brañas-Garza et al. (2013), while exposure to homogeneous and intensive religious practice during childhood results in a lower tendency to convert out or leave one's religion, religious pluralism of a country may lead to the disposition of its population to convert out and abandon religious affiliation.

Immigrants are less exposed to secular norms and values of the mainstream Dutch culture when they locate in ethnically concentrated areas where they often interact with people of their ethnic community (Tubergen, 2007). Tubergen (2007) accounts that these co-ethnic dominant areas enable stronger social control than areas with few co-ethnics since ethnically concentrated areas provide a strong religious community. Living in these areas may result in higher religiosity. Furthermore, religious transmission might be fostered when families live in such co-ethnic communities (Pol & Tubergen, 2014).

Tubergen (2007) points out that people who are part of organisations dominated by co-ethnics have a higher religious affiliation. The higher the level of education, the lower the religious affiliation. While

acknowledging the modesty of his finding, Tubergen (2007) argues that the group's unemployed members were more religious.

Another factor influencing immigrants' religiosity is their partners. According to Tubergen (2007), Immigrants with a Dutch partner are less religious than immigrants with a co-ethnic partner. However, non or lower religiosity can also be the reason for having a Dutch partner (Vliek, 2019b). Besides, socialising with secular Dutch culture may indicate fewer religious attitudes (Tubergen, 2007).

2.4 Definitions of the Phenomenon

Various definitions describe the phenomenon of religious transition in the literature. The term 'deconversion' is one of the descriptions used in the literature (among others, Barbour, 1994; Streib et al., 2009; Streib & Keller, 2004; Harrold, 2006; Lee & Gubi, 2019; Pauha et al., 2020). Barbour (1994) defines it as 'a loss of faith'. Vliek (2019) argues that 'deconversion' has transitional (negative) implications from one state to another, focusing on one's former religion. Another description used is 'apostasy' (e.g., Cottee 2015; Cragun&Hammer, 2011). According to Vliek (2019), the term 'apostasy' presumes an oppositional stance against one's former religion. Besides, it contains unavoidable negative connotations (Streib et al., 2009). On the other hand, the term 'ex-Muslim' is predominantly used in media and seen in the literature. However, some people may not feel comfortable with the term 'ex-Muslim', because of its retrospective

implications and the discomfort of being defined by something that people no longer adhere to (Cottee, 2015; Vliek, 2019). 'Disaffiliation' is one of the terms used to explain leaving one's religion. Bromley (1991) points out that disaffiliation typically has two dimensions. First, ending one's membership or "dropping out" of religious activities and second, disidentifying with the group or theology. Disaffiliation from a religious group doesn't necessarily need to be accompanied by deconversion (Fisher, 2017). Both can happen separately or simultaneously. The term 'Moving out' has emerged in recent years. Karin van Nieuwkerk (2018) coined the term as a statement of the dynamic notion of the religious transformation process. This term is adapted by Vliek (2019).

2.5 Religious Transition

The belief that there is no God, or an increasing tendency towards atheism, is one of the major trends that influences the Western religious landscape today (Pauha et al., 2020). According to Sevinc et al. (2018), there are two paths to non-belief: The first is growing up as a non-believer, whilst the second is deconversion from a religion (Fazzino, 2014). Based on their literature reviews, Sevinc et al. (2018) conclude that most non-believers today have a religious background.

It is important to note that religious transition is not unique to the people who decide to leave their religious tradition either for non-religiosity or another tradition. Almost all religious people, to

some extent, experience changes in their religious beliefs (Albrecht & Cornwall, 1989). Thus, it can be said that movement outside of one's religion is not always a big jump that results in abandoning their religion. People may leave their religious traditions (e.g., rituals and activities) but keep believing in the existence of a higher power (Bromley, 1991). In other respects, for some, doubting their faith can result in more attachment to their belief and facilitate the development of a more personalised form of religion (Chickering, 2007).

In their study of people from Christian denominations, Pérez & Vallières (2019) notes that deconversion is a gradual process that contains personal significance caused by substantial events and cumulative effects of experiences (also see Cottee, 2015). Similarly, Streib et al. (2009) found out that the experience of deconversion in most cases from their research was gradual. The authors assume the high responsibility that deconverts have for their own decisions as one of the reasons behind this graduality: It may take time to conclude if one decides to leave their religion or stay with it. Besides, Streib et al. (2009) consider the complexity of cognitive and emotional pros and cons that one must negotiate as another reason why moving out of religion is a gradual process.

Cottee (2015) defines the decision to renounce Islam comes after a daunting period that is prolonged and often agonising; sustained reflection and self-questioning, and self-doubt.

Moreover, in his research study about the experiences of people who left Judaism in Canada, Belfon (2020) found that all his

participants experienced a gradual process of doubting as part of their religious transition process.

On the other hand, Fisher (2017) states that deconversion can be a relatively quick process (as little as a few weeks) but typically occurs over the years. According to Ebaugh (1988), some people may experience deconversion without realising its occurrence.

2.5.1 Triggers of Religious Doubt

Every person who loses their religious faith must have experienced the first doubt. For some, this can be a big moment that is hard to forget; for others, it can be a moment that passes unnoticed (Lee & Gubi, 2019). Religious doubt is often initiated by an emotional event or trauma (Vliek, 2019).

According to Pérez and Vallières (2019), doubting may elicit inevitable nagging questions that need to be asked, and this behaviour can start from childhood. Doubts can also be ignored and suppressed, but when they accumulate and become numerous, doubts cannot be avoided (Pérez and Vallières, 2019).

Similarly, Cottee (2015, p.32) reports that people may experience religious doubts in a cumulative sequence that varies from person to person. Cottee (2015) found out that doubts typically centred on one or more of the following: (1) the truth-claims of Islam; (2) the morality of Islamic commands or prohibitions; and (3) the utility of Islamic commands/prohibition. Vliek (2019) indicates that the change of

the perception of God from compassionate to ferocious due to impositions of religious surroundings and the moral dilemmas caused by the religious norms can initiate doubting. Cottee (2015) identifies the key triggers of religious doubts regarding Islam: (1) significant personal experience; (2) exposure to alternatives; (3) scriptural discoveries; (4) spiritual alienation; and (5) political events.

Moreover, spiritual doubt can be triggered by moments of intellectual discrepancies and unexpected social realities and doubting one's faith may induce emotional distress when people re-consider the authenticity of their Christian beliefs (Fazzino, 2014).

In his research Smith (2011) found out that people who left Christianity started questioning what they were taught growing up and the religious meanings when they were involved in new social contexts. As their interactions with others changed and had new meanings, they developed new outlooks and commitments. Leaving a parent's home is considered a factor in starting to doubt the existence of God because people encounter others with different worldviews, backgrounds, and beliefs (Smith, 2011). Similarly, one's differences from their environment can initiate doubts about the existence of God (Vliek, 2019). According to Vliek (2019), leaving the parental house may give some the physical space to develop self-identity beyond social, cultural, and religious impositions. Furthermore, lack of parental warmth and experiencing strictness are associated with more religious doubt (Hunsberger et al., 2002).

2.5.2 Reasons to Move Out

Deconversion comes with a period of cognitive dissonance (Lee & Gubi, 2019). In their study, Lee & Gubi (2019) distinguishes three themes for the reasons to deconvert: intellectual, emotional/interpersonal, and intuitive. On the other hand, Khalil & Bilici (2007) identify two categories of motivation for leaving Islam: 'intellectual motivations' related to theoretical and ideological concerns and 'experiential/social motivations', which refer to both personal experience and historical examples of social behaviours of a particular belief system. Based on these two categories, Khalil & Bilici found two main motivations in their study: 'The status of women in Islam' and 'Muslims as cruel, oppressive, and backward'. According to Khalil & Bilici (2007), some former Muslims may follow widespread, commonly known stereotypes about Islam and Muslims in their motivations to leave their religion.

In their research on Christianity and disaffiliation in Western countries, Brañas-Garza et al. (2013) stated that liberal beliefs about sexual relationships, extramarital sex relations, homosexual relations and disbelief in religious miracles are among the factors for converting.

Belfon (2020) reports that reasons to move out of the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish way of living can be related to traumatic personal experiences with religious others, systematic mistreatment in the community, or unmanageable standards and overbearing rules that are forced on the members. On the other hand, the reason to leave can be simply about not being able to relate to Orthodoxy (Belfon, 2020).

According to Richter and Francis (1998), social change, change in values, critical life events, and childhood socialisation are some of the reasons for leaving the Church.

Cottee (2015, p.77) asserts that some may display behaviours that violate religious norms and doctrine before their testimony. These behaviours may be experienced as a gradual process and may encompass resistance from the religious surrounding. And this resistance can be considered a catalyst in people's decision to leave Islam.

2.5.3 Stages in Religious Transition

There are various definitions of the stages of the religious transition process. Barbour (1994) defines the significant elements of deconversion as follows: (1) 'intellectual doubt or denial' regarding the truth of a system of beliefs; (2) 'moral criticism', rejecting the entire way of life of a religious group; (3) 'emotional suffering', including grief, guilt, loneliness, despair, and (4) 'disaffiliation from the community'. Streib and Keller (2004) took the deconversion stages defined by Barbour one step further and added 'loss of religious experience' as an element for the early stage of the deconversion process. They consider this step important as 'intellectual doubt and denial' or 'moral criticism'.

The order of certain elements in the deconversion process can differ and make a difference in the whole deconversion story. For instance, while in some cases, moral criticism is the main reason for leaving religion, for others, it can be the loss of

religious experience (Streib & Keller, 2004).

Vliek (2019) defined five non-chronological stages of leaving Islam: (1) 'doubt', which is not solely about God but also can be about aspects of one's identity; (2) 'seeking alternatives', which can have an existential orientation or be about one's identity (one may start seeking alternatives (within a conscious or sub-conscious process) before having doubt, or simultaneously with doubt or while constructing new self); (3) 'move to the other side', indicating the transition from belief to non-belief (this process may happen at one moment or be a continuous struggle of rationality and emotional adherence); (4) 'defining the new me', regarding deliberation and comparison of the alternatives one finds probable to (re) identify oneself (this process may occur before one stops believing in God); (5) 'negotiating difference', referring to one's efforts to cope with their surroundings. This can be related to religious surroundings, including family, friends, and former in-group members, as well as negotiating the secular sphere and challenges that comes within, prejudices and discriminations.

In the same research, Vliek asserts that these non-chronological phases do not only include 'exit roles' but also one's interactions and engagement with surrounding discourses than the religious alone. The stages are often experienced dialogically and could manifest differently in people's lived experiences. Vliek (2019) demonstrates how complex and atypical a 'moving out of Islam' process can be.

On the other hand, in her study on people raised in Christian homes and who had been exposed to religious socialisation

in Evangelical communities in the US, Fazzino (2014) identifies three narrative stages. The first stage, pre-deconversion, is about struggling with spiritual doubt and emotional distress that result in a re-evaluation of one's beliefs. The second stage, cognitive deconversion, refers to moving from belief to non-belief. The third narrative stage, post-deconversion, is characterised by one's personal transformation regarding social changing surroundings.

Similarly, Cottee (2015) defines three main phases of apostasy: (1) 'pre-apostasy phase', representing the phase of deliberations and actions of people regarding their religious doubts; (2) 'apostasy phase' in which people come to a conclusion and disavow Islam while keeping their decision either private or disclosing their disbelief; and (3) 'post apostasy phase', illustrating the experiences after the decision of leaving Islam. It involves dealing with discrimination and prejudices against apostates, finding a way to fit in either a new social environment or a religious one, unlearning certain structures of response and reaction, and reorienting oneself without the guidance of a higher power.

In his model of the transition process (which applies specifically Judea-Christians and NRM (New Religious Movement)) toward irreligion (Figure 2.1), Fisher (2017) describes the initial phase of religious doubt and its possible outcomes. The starting point of the process is 'Question'; this is the moment believers hold questions regarding their religious beliefs or practices. This step does not necessarily entail development or having doubt. Experiencing questioning and following contemplations provokes

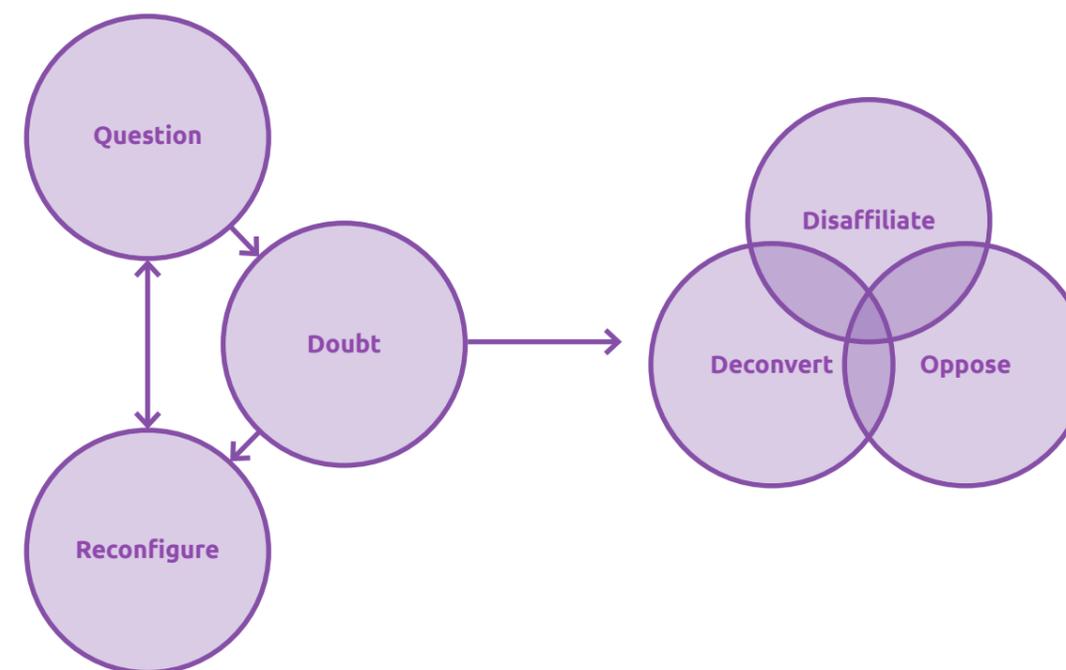


Figure 2.1 A visual representation of the transition experience (Fisher, 2017)

a need for reconfigurations, adaptations, and minor modifications to one's religious belief structure. When the reconfiguration attempts for questions fail and the questions remain unresolved, they may lead to feelings of doubt. Not all doubts result in irreligious identity or disaffiliation from the group; some can also be reconfigured per se. After experiencing doubt(s) that cannot be resolved or reconfigured, people find themselves in one of the following categories: 'deconvert', represents irreligiousness; 'disaffiliate', stands for leaving a religious group or community; 'oppose', is an attempt to resolve one's ambivalence through an oppositional stance to former belief or the organisation. These three categories can coexist either altogether or dyadically.

2.5.4 Pathways of Transition

In their studies with 99 deconverts in the USA and Germany, Streib et al. (2009) have developed four types of deconversion: (1) 'pursuit of autonomy, regarding the search for individual and critical development of new perspectives in a long-term process; (2) 'debarred from paradise', addressing the emotional suffering of leaving the religious tradition; (3) 'finding a new frame of reference'; (4) 'life-long quests – late revisions', seeking an alternative religious community where one can find a space for their religious quest.

Next to Streib et al. (2009), Cottee (2015) defines seven 'idea-type' binary possibilities regarding how the apostate carries out their exit from their religion: (1) they may

leave voluntarily, being aware of what they are doing, or unwillingly, being forced to disavow their former group; (2) they may leave secretly by hiding their exit, or openly by disclosing it; (3) they may leave suddenly or gradually; (4) they may leave aggressively by castigating their former group, or pacifically by expressing their disavowal in a circumscribed way; (5) they may leave decisively, certain and comprehensive in their disavowal, or they may leave tentatively, with self-doubt and mixed feelings toward their former group; (6) they may leave cleanly, with minimal emotional fuss, or they may leave messily, in a vortex of turmoil and high drama; (7) they may leave jubilantly, with feelings of relief, or they may leave mournfully, with a sense of pained regret.

2.5.5 Interdependency of influences

In response to the approaches of Ebaugh (1998) and Sterib et al. (2009), Vliek (2019) claims that these studies do not consider enough the importance of the other factors influencing exit processes other than one's former religion (mainly negative associations) or identity. In her study regarding experiences of moving out of Islam in the Netherlands and Britain, Vliek (2019) states that the complex life-worlds of people who are moving out of Islam consist not only of religious boundaries but also political, social, ethnic, and gender-related aspects. Moreover, she emphasises the necessity of going beyond the widely accepted duality of religious-secular, Muslim-non-Muslim and religious-atheist. In line with her stance, Saroglou et al. (2020) denote that deconverts may have a duality

of resemblance (in personality and values) that coexist. They may resemble both their nonbeliever peers and socialised religious believers.

Secularity and religion can coexist (e.g. secular and cultural typologies of Muslims in the Netherlands (Huijnk, 2018)). Brinkerhoff and Burke (1980), in turn, have made a distinction between Ritualists and Apostates, who have lost their religious beliefs but differ regarding the meaning they attach to religion.

Vliek's claim is in parallel with what Schielke (2010) argues. Schielke stresses the significance of understanding people's lives without overlooking complexities and the negotiations people go through while being subjected to certain powers.

2.6 Struggles in the Religious Transition Process

The religious transition process may contain a myriad of difficulties and challenging experiences. The struggles start in the very early stages of the transition when people experience religious doubts, and these struggles continue cumulatively along the way.

2.6.1 Interpersonal Difficulties

According to Cottee (2015, p.45), people who start doubting aspects of their religion tend to probe their doubts (also see Fisher, 2017). They look for clarity, reassurance, and tranquillity: they want to free

themselves from their doubts. Cottee (2015, p.45) found out that his participants (people who left Islam in Britain) usually started searching for relevant materials regarding their doubts online. Next to that, people who have doubts solicit the advice of others. They specifically look for confidants, knowledgeable others that they can share their doubts. However, it can be challenging to reach out to religious others regarding one's doubts since doubting in some religious communities is not appreciated; as a result, people may also suffer from loneliness. (Cottee, 2015, p.44). Therefore, people try to find ways to communicate their questions with religious others to rule out suspicion about their commitment to their religious faith: by using a tone of innocent naivety or pious concern (Cottee, 2015, p.45).

Due to the fear of adverse reactions from other Muslims to their critical questions, some people prefer to communicate anonymously with other Muslims online regarding their doubts and questions (Cottee, 2015, p.46). Cottee (2015, p.47-50) reports that some may experience dissatisfaction with the religious response to their doubts. In this way, their effort to find answers to their doubts may intensify rather than resolve them.

Cottee (2015) states that some feel guilt, even self-hatred, for coming out (declaring disbelief) because they think they violated their family's wishes and constantly think about the possibility of bringing shame and disappointment to their family when their disbelief becomes public. After coming out to loved ones, some families may start taking a distance and change their

behaviours towards individuals leaving Islam (Vliek, 2019c; Cottee, 2015). Some families may think that by leaving Islam, one siding with enemies and start having animosity and perceived radically different (Vliek, 2019c). Besides, some may not be willing to share their new – non-religious conviction with their families because it may be perceived as a rejection of the family and their roots (Vliek, 2019c).

When considering speaking out about one's disbelief towards Islam, people may be concerned with the political discourses revolving around Islam – not willing to 'feed into a narrative of islamophobia' (Vliek, 2019c).

Cottee (2015) reports cases where after coming out to their family, some regret and recant because of the sorrow they induced for their loved ones. Vliek (2019c) denotes that in her research, most people of the people moving out of Islam in the Netherlands have little desire to 'speak out.

According to Cottee (2015), when closeted people are surrounded by others strictly practising or living up to the expectation of the religious community, people in the closet often have difficulties relating to their environment (people and their behaviours). They may feel emotionally alienated and lose the common ground to communicate with others. They may desire to limit interactions with religious friends to avoid "righteous scrutiny" or judgement (including judgement from partners). Therefore, being unable to express oneself makes the feeling of loneliness inevitable (Cottee, 2015). On the other hand, some may find common ground within their Muslim surrounding in shared values (Vliek,

2019c).

Cottee (2015) reports about the fear of compromise (attracting the suspicion of family and friends) and one's cover of apostasy when one develops decent and emotionally satisfying relationships with non-Muslims. Therefore, some closeted people may deliberately stop themselves from closely interacting with non-Muslims, including partners and friendships.

Zimmerman et al. (2015) and Vliek (2019c) point out that family responses towards disclosure of disbelief vary: While some families may take a supportive and accepting stance, others may display bitterness, anger, and rejection. Fazzino (2014) found that some who leave Christianity may initially face higher costs than expected, including negative emotions and losing ties with family and friends. Those who managed to come out to their families and close friends had to rein it from time to time in order not to bring back the pain their apostasy caused (Cottee, 2015). Vliek (2019c) reports that after getting over the shock of one's decision to leave Islam, some families may be willing to create a new space for belonging.

After coming out to their families, some may receive acceptance of their non-religious identity. Still, their testimonies shouldn't be disclosed to the religious community because it may cost the family to lose their respected position in the community (Vliek, 2019b).

Cottee (2015) found out that after leaving Islam, people may yearn for a sense of unity, community, and belonging but not conformity. Similarly, Lee & Gubi (2019)

report problems with families among people who left Christianity in the UK and inner conflicts that people struggle with "wanting to be true to oneself and a fear of the consequences of being so". Similarly, Vliek (2019b) points out a constant conflict between a desire to be a self-identified atheist and wanting to belong to the religious (Muslim) and ethnic community.

In his research study about leaving Judaism, Belfon (2020) reports that people who left Judaism suffer from the limited practical and social toolkit to navigate their new experiences. Belfon (2020) indicates that people may need to go about this new journey alone because they may find themselves cut off from their families and the religious community.

2.6.2 Intrapersonal Difficulties

Apart from the interpersonal struggles, people may experience internal suffering from admitting that they no longer believe in their religion. One of the reasons for that is the discouragement imposed by religious others not to question Islam, and some may think that by having doubts, they are committing a sin (Vliek, 2019). Vliek's (2019) research shows that some may have instability in their thoughts and emotions before they accept their disbelief, for example, asking questions like 'I don't think it's true, but what if it is? Am I going to hell?' (also see Cottee, 2015, p.70-71). When doubting their Islamic beliefs, some experience guilt, feeling like a traitor (Cottee, 2015, p.42). Moreover, fear plays a role in the unsettling nature of doubting religion. By doubting, some may suffer from the fear of God's punishment in hell (Cottee, 2015, p.43).

According to Cottee (2015), after months or even years of deliberation, people who decide to come out (disclosing disbelief in God) may experience satisfaction and relief. However, these feelings are not long-lasting because of the myriad of uncertainties: If Islam is not the source of guidance in one's life, what is it now? What should they believe now? How do they define themselves and their value orientation? Who are they now? Moreover, Nica (2019) reports that some exiters may experience fear of punishment by the deity.

Besides, people may regret the many years they spent "believing something that wasn't true" (Lee & Gubi, 2019; also see Streib et al., 2009). In line with Lee & Gubi, Cottee (2015) found out that the main reason for people's anger after disavowing Islam is striking awareness of the loss of time and missed chances in life. Therefore, some may regret not leaving Islam earlier (Cottee, 2015).

Moreover, people may experience embarrassment and shame towards their past beliefs in religion because some find believing in a higher power as "childish" and "so obviously not true" (Lee & Gubi, 2019).

Ross (2009) identifies six types of loss within the experience of unbelief from the narratives of leaving Christianity: 'Loss of a relationship', referring to the relationship with God as intimate friendship; 'Loss of meaning', which relates to struggling with leaving life without sacred guidance; 'Loss of beauty', longing for peace comes with innocent faith as well as participating some religious rites that contain positive experiences; 'Loss of Identity', which means not knowing who one is without God (The

impact of this loss may be more severe for the people who had the religion central to their identity.); 'Loss of comfort and hope', being devoid of promises that lead to peace and hope, for example, reunion with loved ones after death; 'Loss of direction', which is about losing the assured guidance from God that leads one in the right direction and provides a sense of security. Ross notes that these losses may intertwine with each other. In line with Ross' (2009) findings about 'Loss of direction', Cottee (2015) indicates that people who left Islam may go through a period when they feel lost and confused - there is a certainty about what they are not and what they don't believe. Still, on the other hand, they experience uncertainty about who they are and what they believe.

2.6.3 Adaptation

According to Vliek (2020), those who move back and forth between religious and secular spheres may be exposed to certain expectations. To (re)negotiate these expectations, people form their own bodily behaviours. It is important to note that these expectations may be gendered from both secular and religious spheres.

Regarding post-apostasy interactions in a new social environment, there are many unknowns: how to organise a date, what to wear, what and how to drink, and how to signal a sexual interest or unavailability (Cottee, 2015, 172-175).

According to Lee & Gubi (2019), although some who left Christianity no longer believe in the religious teachings logically, they may still be emotionally affected by the beliefs they held for a long time. They stated that some Christian doctrines might

make people question their self-worth; in this case, people who left their religious faith need to work on overcoming these negative implications by moving away from the religion altogether (Lee & Gubi, 2019). On the other hand, Vliek (2019) indicates that for some, certain Islamic values that they were brought up with – sexual morality or eating certain foods - must be (re)negotiated in time. In the same study, Vliek points out that moving out of Islam can bring moral conflicts between people's new desires, interests, and the residue (also see Cottee, 2015) of moral codes they were raised with. This can be an impeding factor for their adaption to a new way of living, for example, sexual morality.

Furthermore, practised religious habits before deconversion may reveal in people's lives when they are non-believers, such as praying without realising its occurrence, especially in moments of worry, uncertainty, and vulnerability (Ross, 2009). In the same research, Ross (2009) asserts that people's reactions to such occurrences differ. Some can be tolerant and ascribe it to profoundly ingrained thought patterns; for some, it induces discontentment. Cottee (2015, p.175) states that some people may go through an unlearning process to discard specific structures of response, reaction, and way of thinking (e.g., regarding sexuality, homophobia, eating pork, etc.) that were ingrained in their former religious self.

Cottee (2015) reports that after recognising their apostasy, people tend to do the things that they were not able to do or not even thought of doing because of the religious restrictions in their communities: trying alcohol for the first time, or having

sex before marriage, or removing hijab, or consuming pork or eating non-halal food in general.

2.7 Well-being in the Religious Transition Process

In their research on religious disaffiliation in the US, Fenelon & Danielsen (2016) found out that people who left religious traditions report lower health and subjective well-being than those who stayed in the religion they were raised with.

Various factors influence how people cope with religious doubt, uncertainty, sharing their disbelief with friends and family, and adapting to a new way of living. These factors include religious upbringing, people's conception of God, and their interpretation of international developments and politics regarding Islam and Muslims (Vliek, 2019b).

Low education and older age make people see religious doubt as "wrong" (Fisher, 2017) and cause a need to suppress their doubts which results in worse health (Krause, 2006). On the other hand, suppression can be seen as a short-term coping strategy to prevent interpersonal trouble in the religious spheres, but doubt suppression has its limits (Krause & Ellison, 2009).

Doubting one's religion may result in poorer mental health compared to people who are more consistent in their religious and nonreligious identities (May, 2017). Fisher

(2017) accounts that remaining in the religious traditions while being open about one's doubt and avoiding commitment is a condition that compounds struggle and makes it worse than leaving the religion altogether.

Spiritual effects of leaving religion would be more likely seen in people who disaffiliate from strict denominations and high-cost religious groups with a stronger effect on well-being (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). Besides, not everyone experiences emotional pain as a part of the religious transition process (Gooren, 2011). The more confident the deconverts are with their new worldview, the higher their well-being becomes (Lee & Gubi, 2019).

Leaving one's religion may entail feeling stuck between two worlds and unable to find acceptance in mainstream society (Bromley, 1998b). Similarly, Cottee (2015) indicates that Ex-Muslims in contemporary Europe are doubly marginalised. They suffer double un-belonging: not belonging to the 'Muslim world' and not fitting into the secular and predominantly white non-Muslim world.

2.7.1 Cost of Concealment

Ross (2009) found out that remaining within Christianity without faith means a stressful suppression of the 'true self' for some people. Similarly, Lee & Gubi (2019) report that having to conceal disbelief from the family is seen as a stressor that prevents authenticity. In line with these findings, Cottee (2015) asserts that some people leaving Islam are engaged in 'persistent lying'. They are lying about their 'true' identity. Concealment can be seen as

discrediting and shameful because people feel compelled to perform (Cottee, 2015).

Cottee (2015) states that closeted ex-Muslims find themselves in a paradox: on the one hand, they try to preserve and sustain their relationships with family and friends; on the other hand, they want to be themselves, move on in their lives, develop new interests and follow their passions.

For many, it is not even possible or not desirable (or not necessary (Vliek, 2019c)) to share their disbelief with their loved ones. Instead, they prefer to stay 'in the closet' (Cottee, 2015).

According to Cottee (2015), living a closeted life as an apostate has similarities with gay closet lives. Cottee describes it as an oppressive and stultifying reality and the opposite of spontaneity and freedom. He also added that people suffer from profound loneliness and isolation because of the concealment.

2.7.2 Cost of Coming Out

When one's newfound atheist identity is revealed or observed, one may face discrimination (Cragun et al., 2012) and social ostracism (Hammer et al., 2012) because of the negative perception of the act of leaving one's religion. Cottee (2015, p.167-8) defines five themes of anti-apostate narratives in Muslim communities: ex-Muslims are seen as imposters, cognitively mistaken, confused or deluded, unserious, morally depraved, and crazy. The classical school of Shariah can be considered the source of these negative connotations since leaving Islam is viewed as a crime punishable by death (Akyol, 2013). On the

other hand, instead of discrediting people who leave Islam, some Muslims take a more moderate approach and consider ex-Muslims' decisions as a matter of free choice (Akyol, 2013, p.274-5). That is usually based on Chapter 2, Verse 256 of the Quran: 'There is no compulsion in religion' (Abdel, 2004, p.29).

Moving out of religion could be perceived as leaving not only religion but also morality (Vliek, 2020). According to Cottee (2015, p.168), rebutting these prejudices against them and advancing positive definitions is one of the greatest challenges ex-Muslims face. Furthermore, dealing with the negative reactions from the religious sphere makes identity crises painful and traumatic (Ebaugh, 1998). Fenelon & Danielsen (2016) report that the impacts of disaffiliation from a religious denomination depend on the group's social, spiritual, and institutional characteristics.

Fazzino (2014) indicates that the initial struggles of deconversion outweigh its eventual benefit when deconversion and disaffiliation occur simultaneously. One reason for that is that one often loses family and peer group ties and experiences emotional distress when leaving Evangelical Christianity (Fazzino, 2014).

Social relationships have a great deal of positive impact on physical and mental health (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). When one loses a source of social or financial support because they declare disbelief, they may face more difficulties finding an equivalent substitute (Sullivan & Fenelon, 2014). Nica (2019) suggests that the social relationships developed during religious affiliation are difficult to maintain after

leaving the religion; they are either terminated or diminished.

Moreover, loss of support after coming out as a non-believer may confine opportunities and resources and make navigating in the social setting more challenging. These factors contribute to reduced well-being (Nica, 2019). On the other hand, people who never had that source of support can easily adapt to its absence and find an alternative (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). Loss of support can also be related to health and well-being for emotional coping for disaffiliated (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016).

Lastly, the impacts of disaffiliation from a religious denomination depend on the group's social, spiritual, and institutional characteristics (Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016).

2.7.3 Oppositional Stance

For some, past religious involvement may be viewed as a form of captivity (Bromley, 1998a). Taking an oppositional stance against the former religious group may result in high stress and stigma, making people defensive (Mauss, 1998). This oppositional stance may impact identity development by putting more emphasis on former religion than any new possible affiliation (Foster, 1994).

Commonly, renouncing Islam is accompanied by strong anti-religious sentiments in the early days, whilst the opponent tone softens later in life (Vliek, 2019c). Vliek adds that these discourses and the need to be vocal result from the desire to testify newly found convictions and identity.

According to Vliek (2019b), traumas caused by religious experiences may push some to advocate for freedom of religion or freedom from.

2.8 Support in the Religious Transition Process

After leaving Ultra-Orthodox Judaism, many suffer from lacking a social guide to navigate life challenges (Berger, 2015). Moreover, the absence of a social group where exiters may support, guide, and motivate each other (Zuckerman, 2012) is another factor that makes leaving religion a challenging experience.

Nica (2019) indicates that as some find support and new relationships in the secular realm, some experience social isolation, a lack of relatedness, and limitations on tailored assistance to address specific stressors in their exit experience, such as complicated family relations.

In her research, Nica (2019) divides social support into three types of support: emotional (a perceived receipt of caring and concern), informational (a perceived receipt of advice), and instrumental (a perceived receipt of resources or practical help).

Social support can also be received via new partnership or marriage or in new formal settings such as the workplace and education (Nica, 2014). According to Nica (2014), after leaving religion, partnering with a nonreligious person is reported to be a more satisfying relationship and a factor

that increases well-being.

Fazzino (2014) points out the importance of new secular social networks in mitigating the emotional struggles that come with deconversion by providing validation, acceptance, and support (also see; Lee & Gubi, 2019).

2.8.1 Preferred Support

Lee & Gubi (2019) found that deconverts prioritise receiving help and support from people who have been through a deconversion process; only under this condition could they talk freely without the need to explain themselves and the fear of judgement. It is found to be the most beneficial form of support – talking to the people who can “get it”, who experienced the religion exit themselves and therefore are expected to understand. Besides, other researchers suggest that when interacting with other exiters, people may learn from each other's experiences, e.g., one can get help from a person who successfully navigated the same transition (Ross, 2009; Cottee, 2015) or a part of a transition. Besides, people who leave their religion do not only need to receive help to understand the meaning of their transition but also find positive meanings and gains in their journey (Ross, 2009).

Ross (2009) reports that “the spirit of cohesion” encourages exiters to stay active in support communities even after they are at peace with their new identities. They develop a sense of responsibility to help others who struggle in their transitions. Furthermore, these active roles may initiate the creation of new support groups (Ross, 2009).

Others who didn't leave their religion or lifelong atheists are seen as unable to truly understand the challenges of leaving religion (Ross, 2009). Moreover, former believers found it challenging to talk about their experiences with Christians because of the fear of judgement, prejudices, and attempts to make one reverse their decision (Lee & Gubi, 2019). At the same time, research notes that atheist or non-Christian friends (or, in some cases, partners; Ross, 2009) can also be helpful (Lee & Gubi, 2019).

Even professional help from therapists is not always desirable. Some people may experience judgement and a lack of understanding and interest from their therapists (Ross, 2009). Lee & Gubi (2019) indicated that people want to know if the therapist or psychologist is secular or can convey a non-judgemental and supportive attitude to assure that there will be a safe space for conversation. On the other hand, the success of therapy may depend on one's ability to articulate problems and difficulties in transition (Ross, 2009).

2.8.2 Support Channels

Cottee (2015) indicates that the virtual world is the safest place to talk to like-minded people with similar experiences. In the same research, Cottee provides information about the forum of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain (CEMB). The forum functions as a place to exchange ideas, share lived experiences and a platform to receive and give support to other people who left Islam or are in the process of leaving Islam. Another major forum is Faith Freedom International (FFI) which attracts a large number of people converted to Christianity from Islam, and the forum

has a more political stance. According to Cottee (2015), some people may get annoyed by the anti-Islamic content and some tendencies toward racist discourses in FFI. Another drawback of these forums is that they may become overwhelmed with all the sad stories, upset, and heartache. The stories may also be reminders of bad experiences. Therefore, some active members who supported others may recede from the online community. Moreover, the CEMB forum is an important source of help and support. Still, it has limits in providing intimate and enduring emotional partnership, which face-to-face interactions can only offer. When logging off the forum, people may suffer getting back to their feelings of loneliness and depression (Cottee, 2015).

Connecting with ex-Christians online is considered a big help, and there is an urge to take it to the next level and meet with ex-Christians in person (Lee & Gubi, 2019). In addition to communicating with ex-Christians, atheist or humanist organisations may provide a sense of social support and community (Smith, 2011). Moreover, YouTube videos, articles, and books by atheist authors are also helpful. These resources support deconverts to construct their non-religious stance and deal with negative emotions (Lee & Gubi, 2019). Lee & Gubi (2019) also point out that these supports become even more crucial when a person comes out and, as a result, faces pressure from their religious family.

People who leave their religion have difficulties revealing their identities when seeking support and usually remain anonymous (Cottee, 2015). Besides that, forms of online informational support

from non-religious (including former believers) communities are considered more accessible and safer (Nica, 2014); therefore, these groups/forums are used for online testimony (Cottee, 2015). On the other hand, after their disavowal of Islam, some people may become uncomfortable with the tone in such online groups. According to Cottee (2015), some people find the reactions in FFI too aggressive since they left that stage of rage behind.

In the Netherlands, support is provided by the Humanistisch Verbond (The Dutch Humanist Association) through the platform called De Vrijdenkplaats (The Freethinking Place). The platform is where people who consider leaving or have already left their religion come together and find inspiration in each other's experiences and recognition. According to Humanistischverbond (n.d.), De Vrijdenkplaats offers courses and organises meetings and theme evenings on various topics to help people in their religious transition.

2.9 Positive Outcome of the Religious Transition

In their research, Lee & Gubi (2019) found that for some, the benefits of deconversion outweigh its cost. While freedom is the dominant gain, another benefit is that some may attain higher pro-sociality towards outgroup members (Galen, 2015). According to Nica (2014), new relationships and support found in nonreligion are considered more "authentic".

Moving out of religion may encourage some people to take risks, meet new people, contribute to society, study other religions or examine former religion with scientific knowledge, and experience the life offerings as much as possible (Ross, 2009). Ross adds that after leaving religion, people may experience a sense of progress towards reaching a higher, more authentic, and more sincere purpose for their lives.

According to Fazzino (2014), the consequences and experiences of deconversion have changed over the past decades. In the new millennium (based on her research), she accounts that deconversion is a liberating experience that results in feelings of freedom, relief, and happiness (see also Wright et al., 2011; Ross, 2009). This contradicts the findings indicating religious people are happier and have a better well-being than people who leave their religion (see Fenelon & Danielsen, 2016). In line with Fazzino (2014), leaving religion can be seen as a relieving and liberating experience that one can finally be true to themselves and an opportunity to seize life's offerings (Ross, 2009; Zuckerman, 2012). This feeling of relief is highly dependent on the struggles and difficulties experienced before leaving religion (Ross, 2009).

2.10 Conclusion

The religious transition process may contain a myriad of difficulties and challenging experiences. The struggles start in the very early stages of the transition when people experience religious doubts, and these struggles continue cumulatively along the way. When people face difficulties, they usually don't stop and wait for the problem to disappear; they look out for support. This is the same for the religious transition experiences.

People may start suffering from the lack of acceptance in the very early stages of their religious transition. Since questioning religion and having religious doubts are disapproved, people hesitate to approach religious others to solicit advice regarding their doubts. This can push people to develop strategies to speak about their doubts to religious others without attracting any suspicion about their commitment to their religious faith. Once they manage to communicate their doubts, they may face negative reactions, and sometimes the responses from the religious spheres cannot help to resolve doubts but rather intensify them or even provide a basis for having more doubts. This may result in fear of losing one's faith, and the lack of communication only worsens it.

When doubts cannot be resolved, it may lead to abandoning religious faith over time. The decision to leave religious faith may come with intra- and inter-personal struggles and various dilemmas to face. Since religion provides a sense of security and guidance in life, after acknowledging their non-religious self, some may go

through a series of difficulties, such as suffering from uncertainties and lack of guidance in their lives.

Not everyone is able to share their disbelief with their family and religious friends right after their testimony of disbelief. This is mainly because of the fear of discrimination and ostracism due to the negative image of apostates in the religious spheres. Some may have concerns about discrediting their families' respected position in the religious community. Therefore, some prefer hiding their disbelief. This results in loneliness and isolation. Besides, people can find themselves in the dilemma of wanting to be true to themselves and to preserve and sustain their relationships with their family and religious friends. When a non-religious self is disclosed, one may face social ostracism and loss of ties with the family and religious community. In addition, as one of the biggest challenges after coming out as non-believers, some strive to challenge the prejudices against the people who left their religion.

Another challenge in the religious transition process is adapting oneself to the way of life without the guidance of religion. Some people may experience moral conflicts when they attempt to explore new desires or interests that were not allowed according to their former religious group norms. This can be a hindering factor in adapting to a new way of living. On the other hand, taking an oppositional stance against one's former religion may cause a high degree of stress and stigma. Besides, it can impede new possible affiliations.

After disavowing their former religion, some suffer from social isolation, lack of

relatedness, and limitations on tailored assistance outside their religious realm. This makes people look for others who have had similar experiences to overcome the difficulties they face. Online support from non-religious others and communities is considered more accessible and safer since some prefer to remain anonymous in their attempts to find support online.

It is important to note that the religious transition is a non-linear, atypical process experienced differently by each person. And not everyone's religious transition ends up with irreligiousness. For some, it can be about adjusting one's beliefs or increasing religiosity.

The findings have been gathered from various studies focusing on different contexts and religious experiences. Even though significant similarities have been observed among the narratives of people who left their Abrahamic religion, either Judaism, Christianity, or Islam, more research into the Dutch context must be done. The following chapter investigates people's lived experiences to shed light on the specific struggles they face and the support they need and have already received.

3

EXPLORING EXPERIENCES

This chapter presents an overview of the results from the generative interviews focusing on struggles and support within the religious transition experiences in the Netherlands. Most of the research study participants were born and raised in the Netherlands. While some disavowed Islam, others abandoned Christianity.

3.1 Approach

Semi-structured interviews and generative research were conducted to get a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of people who are in the process of leaving their religious faith in the Netherlands. The focus of the research study was mainly on the challenges people have been facing, the ways they deal with those, and the support involved.

The diagram in figure 3.1 shows the relationship between techniques used to gather insights and their ability to reach various types of understanding of the user experience (Sleeswijk Visser et al., 2005). According to Sleeswijk Visser et al. (2005), generative techniques enable people to express deeper levels of knowledge (tacit

and latent) about their experiences. This is done by letting them make designedly artefacts and then learning about the story behind their creation. These artefacts can be drawings, collages, or models. The purpose is to help people to reflect on, re-live and, to some extent, re-feel their experiences (Sleeswijk Visser et al. 2005).

3.1.1 Research Questions

Following research questions were used to guide the generative interviews to obtain knowledge about religious transition experiences in the Dutch context:

RQ1. What are the challenges people face during their religious transition?

RQ2. How do people deal with difficulties they encounter?

RQ3. What are the available support channels?

RQ4. How do people feel when receiving support? And What is the meaning of the support?

RQ5. What are the characteristics of the support needed?

RQ6. What are the positive and negative influences in terms of support from religion and liberal & secular realm?

3.1.2 Participants

The generative interviews were conducted with six participants that are in a religious transition process in the Netherlands. All participants were born and raised in religious environments and currently live

in the Netherlands. Five participants were born and raised in the Netherlands, whereas one was born and raised in Canada. The following table illustrates the overview of the participants.

3.1.3 Procedure

The process of gathering insights in the primary research consists of seven steps: (1) connecting with the target group to build trust and recruiting participants, (2) preparing interview questions, (3) designing generative session materials, (4) conducting a pilot test, (5) arranging consent form, (6) conducting one on one generative sessions and interviews, (7) analysing the data. The following is a detailed description of each step in the procedure:

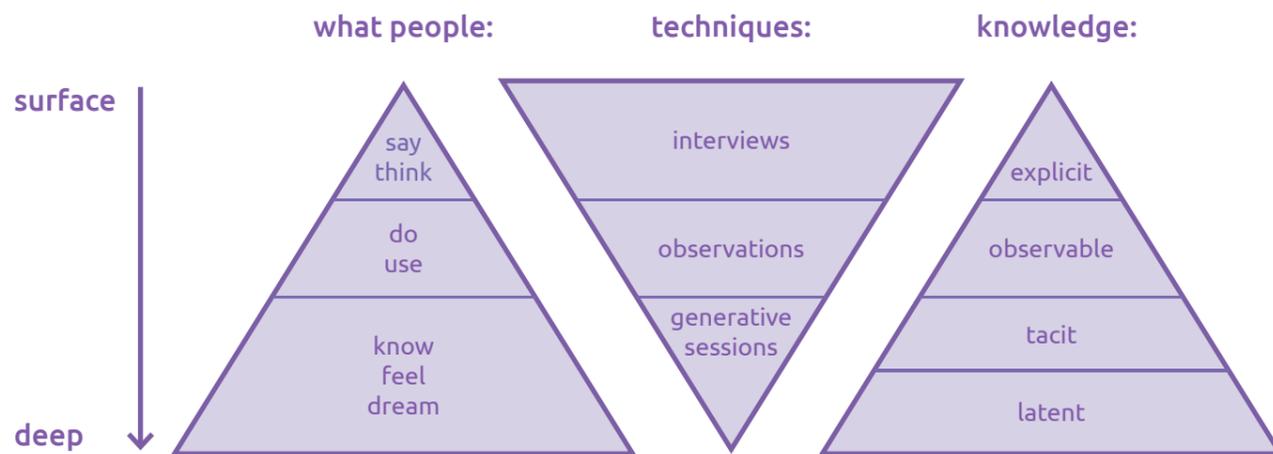


Figure 3.1 A visual representation of the different levels of knowledge and ways to access them by different techniques (Sleeswijk Visser et al., 2005)

Table 3.1 Overview of the participants

	Religious Background	Age	Gender m/f/d	Place of Birth and Upbringing
Pilot Participant	Islam	35	male	Mersin / Turkey
Participant 1	Islam	25	male	Eindhoven / The Netherlands
Participant 2	Islam	27	male	Ede / The Netherlands
Participant 3	Islam	27	female	Den Haag / The Netherlands
Participant 4	Islam	25	female	Tiel / The Netherlands
Participant 5	Christianity	29	female	Middleburg / The Netherlands
Participant 6	Christianity	48	female	Vancouver, Canada

1. Connection & Recruitment

Accessing people who are moving out of their faith in the Netherlands to interview was a big challenge due to the topic's high sensitivity. Besides, it was crucial for me to keep a low profile with the project since it is a highly controversial topic, especially concerning Islam in the Netherlands. During the recruitment stage, the biggest help was received from the Humanistisch-Verbond, a Dutch Humanistic Association based in Amsterdam. The organisation provides support to people who abandon their religious faith or are doubting it or seek one with a platform called 'De Vrijdenkplaats' (see Chapter 2.8.2). There is a Facebook and a WhatsApp group as part of the Vrijdenkplaats where faith leavers get to know each other and share their stories. To recruit participants, first, an introductory message (see Appendix B) containing personal information, the aim of the project, and the type of participants to recruit was shared by the organisation

within the private Facebook and the WhatsApp groups of De Vrijdenkplaats. Second, after not hearing from the group members, it was decided to shorten the message and share it in a flyer format (see Appendix B) to attract attention. Several weeks after sharing the flyer with the members via the humanistic organisation, the study's first participant reached out and shared his interest in the project. Next, snowball sampling was applied to find the second participant. Lastly, it was decided to communicate with the members of 'De Vrijdenkplaats' via WhatsApp on a personal level rather than via mediators. This helped to create a safe and trusting environment where some members showed their willingness to participate in the research study.

2. Structure the Interview:

A semi-structured interview script comprising the key topics and the sub-themes for each topic was prepared to

guide the interviews. The questions that were part of the generative activities were integrated into the interview script (see Appendix C). It was essential to preclude assumptions to ascertain unexpected insights from the participants.

3. Material Design:

The content for the generative session was designed with Adobe InDesign in parallel to the interview questions. Three different templates (see Appendix D) were created to discover deeper insights into the people's experiences.

4. Pilot Session:

An online pilot session was necessary to improve the interview and generative session set-up. The session was conducted with a user representative, a person who abandoned some aspects of his Islamic faith in Turkey. The pilot session helped estimate

the interview duration.

5. Consent Form:

An interactive pdf consent form to communicate the key information about the interview content was created. The consent forms (see Appendix C) were shared via WhatsApp and email and collected before the interviews.

6. Generative Session & Interview:

The interviews were held individually due to the topic's high sensitivity. Half of the interviews were conducted in person, and the other half were online via zoom. Miro, an online collaborative whiteboard platform, was used for the online sessions. None of the participants had a prior experience with the online platform. Therefore, an activity guide was prepared in Miro to explain the tools and functions necessary for each activity. Each session

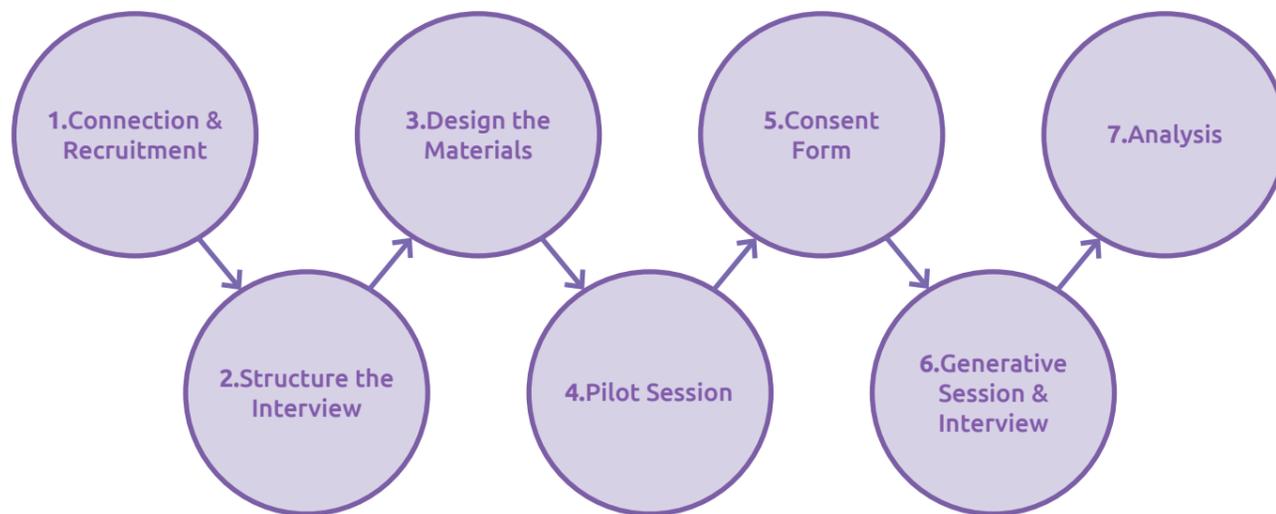


Figure 3.2 A visual representation of the procedure of the primary research



Figure 3.3 A participant completing a generative activity

took roughly 2 hours. In-person sessions were voice recorded with two devices to secure the recording in case of a technical problem. Online sessions were recorded with the record function of Zoom.

After an ice-breaker conversation, the interviewees were asked to talk about their religious upbringing. Generative activities followed (for the results, see Appendix D). The first activity was about creating/drawing one's religious transition process and indicating challenging moments. The second activity aimed at learning the characteristics of support people need. The last activity was meant to learn about the influences on one's religious transition process concerning support. After each generative activity, a semi-structured interview was conducted to understand more about the people's experiences.

During the interviews, when considered necessary, some parts of the research material were actively adapted to participants' narratives.

7. Analysis:

The analysis started by transcribing the most important parts of the interviews on Miro. First, the data from each participant were analysed separately; the relevant and most interesting quotes were collected in statement cards (Sanders & Stappers, 2013), and the cards were clustered to form various themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Later, notable patterns among all the themes were identified, and final themes emerged (see Appendix E).

3.2 Results

This section presents the key themes and clusters created after analysing the interview transcripts.

Reason Why

People have different reasons to leave their religious faith. For most of the participants, there was not only a single reason to move away from their religion, yet the reasons (doubts) were increasing exponentially while they tried to find answers to their doubts. Some of the reasons behind the participants' decisions regarding their religious faith are as follow: a series of traumatic experiences, for example, always seeming sinful and suffering from a lack of self-worth or living an oppressive life; exclusion of people with different sexual orientation and gender identification in religious doctrine; gender inequality amongst men and women; monopoly of truth, if everyone claims the truth, there cannot be one; clashes with rational thinking. In some narratives, the influence of the non-religious realm on people's decision to abandon their religious faith was apparent.

Lack of Acceptance

It is a challenge to find a way to fit in a group that disregards your struggles and your own opinions. People were searching for a safe environment where they could share their questions and real thoughts without fearing judgement. During their search, they suffered from isolation and loneliness.

"I didn't feel loved, and I didn't feel accepted because I couldn't be myself towards my parents, the persons that I cared most about. I couldn't show them my real self. I have to hide all the time, which made me sad for a long time."

"When you go through something like this, you feel pretty lonely..."

However, when resorting to religious others to discuss their doubts and hopefully find some answers, people found themselves in a situation where religious others were trying to convince them that they should avoid doubting. As mentioned earlier, people questioning their faith can be labelled as a deviant who vilifies the truth of their religion. The participants shared their discontent with religious others not being able to take criticism about religion.

"They expect you to throw away the doubts; they are not helping. Doubts are piling on."

"Sometimes religious people cannot take criticism...it is almost never a good conversation about religion. "

"Answers were always like, because we say so, the Bible says so..."

People did not seek understanding only from their religious group but also from non-religious others. They stated that it was not possible for people who were brought up non-religious to understand

their religious struggles. Overall, people expected others to respect and accept their thoughts and the position that they were taking.

"I couldn't share my thoughts either with religious people who didn't accept me, or people who didn't care about my religion at all."

"What I need is for people to accept who I am. As much as I respect a religious person, it is a Muslim; it's a Christian or Jew, I am also expecting them to respect me for not being religious or like being in-between state, whatever it is."

The participants shared their desire to be their true selves, living a life without judgement with their own standards. It is vital to be independent for them to live a life they want and think in the way they wish.

"I want to be able to see things in different ways...consider different opinions and choose what fits the best for me which I can stand behind, that openness, the ability to do so, to change your viewpoint according to what fits you best."

Some participants described their departure from their religion as liberating, exhilarating, and freeing. For one of the participants, it was not only about being honest to herself but also to the religious others so that she wouldn't have to pretend as if she was a Muslim.

“It was truly the best experience of my life; being honest about something so important in your life...”

Not all participants felt comfortable with coming out to their families, and religious friends and many do not feel the need to do so. However, it comes with a cost of always being on the alert to not to give themselves away. What eases this situation for some is not living with the family anymore. Therefore, not having people around to police their behaviours.

“I don’t want to live this double life because I still act like a Muslim with my Islamic friends...they still believe that I am a Muslim.”

Some people are prone to look for facts when searching for answers to their doubts. This non-interpretive tendency might be related to not finding an acceptance or space in the religious spheres to discuss their thoughts and questions. Of course, what is fact is contested; the fact can be a scientific argument, or it can be the sacred books, or hadith, or what religious scholars say.

“I also like to know what I am talking about...I don’t act too much on the emotional side; I am more factually driven, so to do that, I need facts.”

“I did like tons of information gathering, so I read the Quran, the hadiths and all, I read all of them...I wrote everything down I didn’t agree with, and I went to an imam and said,

‘we got a talk because I don’t agree with all of those things; what do you have to say about it?’”

People may use the information they gather regarding their doubts to start a conversation with religious others; this information helps them back up their arguments. Besides, some may collect information about their doubts to reaffirm their choices to leave their religion; it is because of the desire to make their own decisions regarding their own religious faith.

“It [Information gathering and discussing with an imam] gave me the confirmation that I was knowledgeable enough to be able to tell my parents everything...If I tell my parents that I disagree with this, I have to have the knowledge to back it up...”

When people reach out to religious others or sources to find answers for their doubts, what they receive or find may be considered as facts rather than interpretations. It can be said that some people may tend to find answers from outside rather than within themselves.

When reflecting on his experiences in the religious transition process, one of the participants talked about the factors that may have helped him to hold on to his religious faith. Dependency on others to have a different angle on his religion was dominant in his narration. For instance, he was expecting a progressive Islam to be out there as an option he might consider. When

dealing with doubts, the lack of acceptance in the religious realm may preclude the self-reliance needed to resort to one’s own understanding of religion. Furthermore, expecting change from outside might be related to being born into a religion and finding it ready as part of your identity.

“If Islam had a progressive new way of thinking, I could have gone there first to see if that fits more...it could have been helpful.”

“If they had a place where you could discuss your doubts, maybe more people would have stayed.”

Finding Like-minded People

One of the commonalities among the participants is that most of them thought that they were the only people who decided to leave the religion. Consequently, when they heard about others who left Islam, it was a surprising and empowering moment to realise that they are not alone, not the only ones.

“I really thought I was the only person in the world who ever decided to do so.”

“I wasn’t the only one in that status. Knowing that also helped my mental well-being.”

Some participants became aware of other faith leavers by chance, for example, by

hearing about a meet-up event on the radio, seeing a documentary on ex-believers on a Dutch TV channel, or coming across an article about the story of ex-Muslims in the Netherlands. Others encountered like-minded people when searching for the support online due to suffering from loneliness and lack of acceptance.

“It was a world opening up to me. I was like, wow, I wish I had found out earlier about this whole community of ex-Muslims. There were so many other people like me.”

“If I can’t find people in real life, maybe I could find them online.”

Before finding people like her (other ex-Muslims in the Netherlands), one of the participants discovered the online forum of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain. She made friends on the platform and was an active member for two years.

For the participants, difficulties with finding acceptance in their religious community began when they started having doubts. After they decided to leave their religion, the urge to find acceptance culminated. As many of them didn’t feel comfortable coming out to their families, they preferred to stay in the closet and hide their true selves from their loved ones. Finding other faith leavers meant finding a safe space without judgement to be themselves where they don’t need to pretend as if they were religious. Having similar experiences helped people understand each other’s struggles and find veneration for their opinions and perspectives.

"I need people because I like having people around me who know my feelings, know my thoughts. It is always nice talking to somebody who hasn't been through it, but it is just not the same as somebody who has experienced kind of the same things..."

"It felt like somebody was like hey, your feelings, thoughts are valid, they are okay, you can have them instead of having to hide them all the time. That was a place where I could be myself."

"It is always nice talking to somebody who hasn't been through it, but it is just not the same as somebody who has experienced kind of the same things. I think it improves the connection two and helps you talk deeper."

Being in a support group brings an opportunity of seeking help from people who have similar experiences. By sharing and listening to stories, people engender a space where they can learn from each other's lived experiences. The research revealed that the participants are not only looking for similarities in the narratives when they need help but also when they are eager to provide support to others. With their lived experiences, people can procure tips, tricks, and inspiration to deal with stressors others are trying to manage.

"...they are sharing their experiences, I see some similarities, I learn from what they have done with it, they learn from my story, and I go on..."

Some indicated the importance of interacting with faith leavers with similar religious backgrounds. This is because they can relate better to the stories and prevent the need for explanations of events in detail to make the listener understand.

"You have a shared language in a way [with people from the same religious background], you can still have a shared experience with others, but you have a shared language."

Seeing others who have been through similar experiences doing fine in life can mitigate one's anomie of their future self. Furthermore, when receiving professional help, it is valued more if a psychologist also has experienced religious transition and left their religion.

"I have something to move towards... there are other people who have survived this, and they've gone on, and they're doing well, and God has not punished them, and they're not living a horrible life."

All the participants communicated their tendencies to become a part of a bigger whole. This tendency emerged after they found people that have similar religious experiences.

"The community is important because I think it's always important to have a safety net and to stay connected with other ex-Muslims..."

However, it may be difficult for some to meet other faith leavers for the first time, especially if the person is not sure about their feelings towards their religion. On the other hand, others who feel comfortable interacting with others are eager to take an active role in the new-found community of ex-believers: Forming sub-groups for more intimate communication or trying to enlarge the group to reach out to others that need a community. Besides, newcomers may show enthusiasm for taking responsibility in the community to help organise events and meetings.

"If I could add a value to one person's life through this journey, that's good enough for me."

People do not only utilise their personal experiences regarding their religion when it comes to contributing to the faith-leavers community. Some are eager to use their professional skills to provide various forms of support for others. For example, one participant mentioned making a documentary to raise awareness about religious trauma within the public advice services such as police, psychological assistance, and health services. The same participants called faith leavers an "underserved population". According to the participant, this lack of awareness makes the support groups only a source of help for some people.

For some, volunteering jobs for these support groups may be crucial in their religious transition process; one participant called these jobs a "turning point" in his journey.

While simply interacting with other faith leavers and sharing experiences can help people to make sense of their process, the participants indicated that they also received professional support where they were informed about the theoretical background of religious transition processes. For some, reflection started due to their own field of study; for example, studying psychology and learning about attachment theory. These reflection moments of past experiences can help make sense of the religious transition process.

"I understood [after receiving professional help about the theoretical background of the religious transition] that this is why I did those things, that is why I thought like that. I didn't have those feelings just randomly; it was all part of a process."

Besides, people make book recommendations to each other in these support groups that can be useful for understanding the process. All these interactions with others can give people a space to cool off and calm down with their emotions towards their religious experiences; for example, due to this interactive environment, people can move from an oppositional stance to a more nuanced position towards their religious background.

“It [meeting with other ex-Muslims] changed my life drastically because these people have given me new knowledge about my process. At first, I was very radical in my hatred for Islam and everything, but now it’s more nuanced, and I can be critical of myself, too. They have also given me book recommendations. They have provided me with a place to vent my struggles with my family and the community.”

Lastly, another factor that enables people to reflect and understand the process is that their lives become more balanced (when they have a job, home, and partner). When all the rush to start their own life is left behind, they may have a more nuanced lens to understand their past religious experiences.

“Everything else was just...doing, just surviving and learning and progressing - That was when I had to stop, and I started to self-reflect and thought, ha, this is quite a significant impact on my life. ”

Tendency of Bias

The way some participants used words like “Islam”, “Religion”, and “Muslims” showed their tendency to generalise particular perspectives on these terms. People have different reasons for deciding to move out of their religion. For some, it is about gender inequality; for some, it is

about the rites that don’t make sense; for some, it is about being disappointed in God. Those experiences may result in a biased perspective towards belief and believers. Some people may tend to generalise what religion is and who a believer can be because of the exposure to certain religious norms and understandings for a long period. Therefore, some people may overlook the subjectivity of religion.

“If Islam is involved, you turn off your mind; okay, Islam thinks everything.”

“I still like Muslims, I don’t have anything against Muslims, it is just the religion I don’t agree with, but I don’t want to be like the propaganda person of the right-wing...”

Moreover, another tendency is to accept the monosemy of the religious scripts. This can show a lack of awareness of the different interpretations of sacred scripts.

“They [Muslim friends] say what the Quran says, which I can read.”

The support groups may be directive and force certain possibilities for the future orientation of the members. When meeting others who have left their religion, some may get inspired by others’ decisions or their current conditions. These moments of inspiration may make people imagine certain possible futures for themselves, acknowledging specific paths. This may limit them to think of other scenarios regarding their spirituality, such as reconsidering becoming a believer but with their own terms and standards. Moreover, support

groups may promote binary thinking where one person can only be in or out of their religion.

“Some people really far on their journey; I am just beginning, I guess, but it also gives me a sense of...I felt connected to the people. I am one of the people that earliest in the journey, young in my process. I can see those people on the same route but have more years on it. And I see they are still doing okay. Back in my mind, if I do this over five years, I will be dead or something...”

“[advising a person who just decided to leave religion]...you took the step already, step in the right direction you did something yourself because you really wanted to do it. And you can be proud of yourself just doing it; it is amazing. ”

While reconsidering faith and developing a different perspective on religion are probabilities for some participants, others tend to uphold their oppositional stance toward religion. Next to showing deliberative resistance not to become religious again, some don’t even recognise the possibility of it.

“I’d say you have to have like kind of determined...to power through it does not go back to your safe of being religious...”

When someone leaves a support group to

reconsider their faith, it can be seen as a bizarre act by some of the group members. Besides, some participants regarded reconsidering faith as a backward action rather than a prospective one which may involve new ways of experiencing one’s religious faith.

“He [someone from a support group] decided to become a Muslim again and left the WhatsApp group. That was such a weird situation...”

“Usually, people are really off to this religion and are not trying to go back.”

When people who left their religious faith take an oppositional stance against their former religion, they expect others who approach the support groups to cut all ties with their religion and to disfavour the religion. This behaviour is seen as a safeguard to avoid any believers who may try to take missionary roles within the support groups or who may judge others with their decisions.

“There is one rule, and that everyone has to be ex-Muslim, there cannot be any identity still Islamic...”

“We do not put anyone in the group before we have seen them in person and talk to them and ask them important questions.”

“We have a friend in the group; when he calls someone to get to know them

before allowing them in the group, he asks them: “do you think that the prophet is a paedophile?” and if that person says no, he rejects them. He doesn’t trust them enough to put them in the group.”

Disorientation

After complying with the religious norms for many years, acting, and thinking accordingly, people who left their religion find an opportunity to explore the world without considering the religious restrictions. It was not as easy as they desired it to be. Religion provided them with lots of guidance to organise their lives. What is acceptable and what is not were defined for them already. Leaving the religion meant abandoning the religious guidance that people found hard to replace. It is not necessarily about a longing for control but mainly about a guideline to organise their relation to the outside world. As one of the participants indicated, for some, this uncertainty can be a reason to reconsider becoming a believer.

“I don’t like living by the rules, but then what is that I do like, what works for me.”

“No guidance makes you feel like lost at the beginning.”

“Religion has guidance; it shows you how to behave, act around certain people, stuff like that...you kind of get lost in a huge sea of I can do this and that, but what should I do? How should I behave now? What is okay, what is not?”

Disorientation after moving out of religion is a challenge, but people find a way to adapt to their new life settings. Some participants mentioned that their strategy to find out what they are comfortable with and what is acceptable for them is experimenting, trial and error. It is an ongoing self-exploration process where people try to find their boundaries and interests. Some may see their past experiences as a basis to build upon to adapt to life after their religion.

“Once I’d left the Jehovah’s witness, there was the self-exploration in terms of dating, and you know drinking and drugs things that many people do. I never did anything to the extreme, and that’s just never been appealing to me, but there was absolutely that exploration process.”

“[about adaptation] I’d say try and error; I mean, of course, you have the basis from your religious background. You usually try to see, hey I have this basis, I had the borders which I couldn’t cross, now I am going to try to cross them, how far I am going to cross before I do stuff unacceptable or I go out of my comfort zone, and I see that I don’t like it. When you step out a few times too far, you are like; this is my border. In that way, you set up your parameters for what you can and can’t do, but at the beginning, it is difficult, and you feel lost...”

Moderation Towards Religion

Even though the stories people told about their religious experiences that led them to disavow their religion had negative connotations, some participants accounted for certain aspects of their religion that they found positive. They didn’t push away all the religious experiences.

“Religion has a tight community where people are willing to do much for you. ”

“Sometimes [religious] stories in the books are about values and lessons, for instance, Adam and Eve story, for me it tells that humans aren’t perfect and it’s about free will, we are human beings, we will do whatever we want...So, if you see it from that perspective, there are sometimes nice stories.”

One of the participants indicated that he still embraces some of the moral values from his religious past. Some expressed their yearning to have a tight community as they had when they were religious.

“But for morals...to be honest, a lot of my morals are still from my religious background because I am proud of them. I don’t think they change too much.”

“I have learned a lot of my time being a proper Muslim boy, just not everything I wanted, so now I am

going to the other side; I will try Buddhism next; who knows.”

Another tendency observed from the participants was their relativity to their religious experiences. Some participants pointed out the uncertainty they experienced when deciding to move out of their religion; some initially questioned their decision. For some, this questioning can be an ongoing process where they ponder their religious past. And sometimes, the comparison between now and the past can be inevitable. This comparison may result in regretting the decision to leave religion when people think they were happier with religion – even though they have faced many difficulties.

“Sometimes I feel like if I feel sorry for myself, or I am tired of something, I feel like maybe I should have just stayed in that church and just lived the life I was made for.”

“[After leaving Islam – in the early times] I always thought why I am like this, why am I the only person, why can’t I be like what my family wants me to be, so that would have been much easier.”

“Right now, I am living a life that I never was supposed to live...it is always a bit borrowed time, maybe.”

As mentioned earlier, all the participants experienced discouragement when seeking answers to their religious doubts. They didn’t find themselves in an environment

where viewing religion from a different angle was promoted or encouraged.

“There was no room to say I have a certain feeling about this...that has to do with not being allowed to ask questions, not being allowed to interpret some parts of the bible based on a personal experience, or just you feel about something... there is no room for that.”

One participant mentioned her desire to understand the religion from a different perspective; she is open to interacting with others who interpret the religion differently. She wonders what people find positive about their religion and can imagine herself learning from others' perspectives to forge her own view. Besides, the participant emphasised the importance of a safe environment to make such a discovery. For some, knowing that different perspectives on religion exist may be helpful. Furthermore, some people need non-factual, emotional approaches to understand and make sense of their religion.

“I would also be open to going to church or talking to people who are still religious and how religion helps them get through life. I think if you are thinking of leaving a religion, something like this would be very good, very helpful because you can see how different it is for everyone.”

“ [when describing the support she needs] ...a chance to explore in a safe environment...maybe go to different church sometime, maybe see how other people experience religion, what they get from it in a positive way because I think it is good to know there are people who feel receive a lot from God or religion...how it is a good thing for people.”

“[when describing the support she needs] ...just an open conversation with anyone - outside or inside the community - just someone who is not afraid of questioning some aspects of the religion or the bible who is just open to people having their interpretation to some extent.”

“Seeing that there are other people with other perspectives who have their own point of view makes you less scared of the world outside.”

Some participants mentioned a gradual change in their commitment to religious doctrine over time. Instead of sharing their disbelief with others, some choose to be less strict with religion. Similarly, rather than abandoning religion all at once, some preferred to leave some religious rites and traditions. Others tried to make their family accept that they had a different angle on religion.

“There is a point where you don't willingly do the things that the

religion requires you to do, so praying, fasting etc.”

“They [his religious friends] would say he is only doubting but not gone... no one leaves the Islam - they still believe that I am a Muslim.”

Fear All Around

All the interviewees reported various forms of fear that they experienced during their religious transition process. The first fear is about disclosure. Since some don't want to or don't feel ready to come out to their family, or religious friends, they prefer to perform a certain religious body to blend in. Due to being closeted, some participants had to live “a double life” and found it hard to keep up without disclosing their disbelief.

“I don't like virtual things [sharing questions on WhatsApp groups etc.]. I don't write down things [on WhatsApp groups regarding religion] because then you have proof.”

Some people hesitate to share their disbelief with their families because they consider the fact that that might hurt their feelings. Therefore, some see no need to come out to their families. People may not be afraid of the family members' reactions, but they don't want to make them sad. According to one of the participants, one of the reasons why her family would be sad is that without religious faith, she can no longer be in heaven after life.

“I don't want to make them sad [by disclosing her disbelief]. It's not even like I am afraid of their reaction, but I know they would be sad because they would be afraid that I'm not going to heaven.”

Another critical factor is that people moving out of religion consider how their families' social status and interactions would be affected by their decision to come out.

“They [her family] have good relationships in the community; that's all they have. Their family are in Egypt, so that's kind of the only thing they have in the Netherlands. So, that is a factor not to tell them [her family] at all [her disbelief].”

Moreover, some are not willing to influence their family with their opinions which caused them to leave the religion. They are aware that religion means a lot to some of their loved ones, and they find a lot of support from it.

“[After mother's death] My sister wouldn't be able to cope without religion because it's just too important for her, so I don't want to pull her in...”

Some can be afraid of facing negative reactions from their families if they dare to share their disbelief. The fear of cutting family ties, losing connection with family and friends, and being rejected can be dominant for some faith leavers. The families' religiosity is an important factor

in the decision to be closeted or open about one's disbelief. The more religious the family is, the harder it is for some to consider sharing their disbelief. This fact limits what people can share with their families. Some people prefer to share their changing perspective on religion rather than their disavowal with their families.

"I am pretty open, to be honest; I have told them everything except the words: I don't believe; besides that, I have told them everything, all of my arguments, all of my concerns, disagreements."

Moreover, the fear of rejection can also be related to the possibility of being put on the street. This is the case, especially for people who depend on their families for housing and financial support.

"When I was 15, I was really afraid of them kicking me out of the house [about disclosing her disbelief], being mad at me, not talking to me anymore..."

Fear can go beyond rejection and become more of a safety concern. Due to her active social media presence regarding religion, especially criticism of Islamic doctrine, one participant received several threats via social media.

"I put a lot of criticism on my Instagram stories about Islam, and some people don't appreciate it."

"I do not want to put things private. People are allowed to have an opinion on my opinion, but no room for death threats."

Being born and raised in religious environments can make people internalise various perspectives and understandings. This includes believing that people who leave their religion are bad, even worse, people. Therefore, some people may find themselves in a situation where they feel they are committing transgressive behaviour by considering abandoning their religious faith, which could ultimately make them bad people. For some, the fear of becoming a bad person is one of the discomforting aspects of the religious transition.

"I have been told that people who left Islam are the worst people... like Allah has special hell for these people."

After learning about support groups for faith leavers, some people may feel hesitant to involve in these groups. The reason for this behaviour can be explained by the fear of taking a position and acknowledging their disbelief. People can find themselves in a grey area and experience fear and internal struggles about making decisions regarding their religious faith.

"It took me two years to join it (De Vrijdenplaats). I was just so scared. You have these thoughts like when you join it; you are taking the step as if you are going to be Muslim or not. You are probably far gone if you join

them, and there is no way back."
"It took me a long time to join them because I still judged myself for having these thoughts. I knew I was not living like a Muslim; I was still like, oh, you have these thoughts, you need to pray, or I am having these thoughts, I am going to burn if it goes on like this. I was in a phase where I looked down on myself from above and said, "You are doing a really bad job.""

Lastly, for some people, their religious trauma can result in a lack of trust and hesitation to affiliate with any organised groups. People may become very sceptical about any organisation, including support groups for people who left their religion.

"I had been averse to having any kind of affiliation or being a member of anything, let alone, the closest that I got to being a member of something or identifying as something would be like a gym membership...and even then...Because I knew that when I came over to the Jehovah's witnesses, I'd be susceptible, I didn't want ever to join anything and also just be very mistrustful..."

3.3 Conclusion

The primary research findings show that a common struggle that all participants, regardless of their religious background, suffered from is the lack of acceptance. The problem of acceptance is multifaceted; as it doesn't only emerge in the religious surroundings, it is also not a specific challenge to a certain stage of religious transition, yet it pervades the whole transition process. This struggle comes into view when people approach religious people to discuss their questions and doubts to find answers. Since questioning religion or religious norms, or its doctrine is not approved, the participants' tendencies to be critical of their religion were actively discouraged. Consequently, the religious doubts accumulated, and this put some in a position where they started judging themselves because of having doubts and the possible consequences of it, such as, in the end, leaving their faith and becoming a bad person and later suffering from the eternal punishment in hell.

Some participants reported their efforts to find answers to their doubts in other channels rather than in-person communication with religious others, such as diving into online and offline sources (blogs, books, articles, discussion forums etc.). They were factually driven, not acting on their emotional sides to resort to their gut feelings to come to a conclusion regarding their critical questions.

The trouble of acceptance continued for the participants after they decided to leave their religious faith. Many of them could not communicate their disbelief to their loved ones due to the fear of adverse reactions.

Besides, for some, the reason behind their reluctance to share their disbelief is the fear of hurting their loved ones. There are several reasons behind this concern: first, the loved one can feel sad because the one who come out will not go to heaven; second, not wanting to make the loved ones start questioning their religious faith since they received a lot of support from it; lastly, the families can lose their connections and friendships in the religious community.

With all these concerns, some suffer from living a double life where they act as religious ones while they don't believe in the trueness of their religion. Living a double life comes with the cost of not being true to oneself and always living with a constant fear of disclosure. Since many participants were unable or unwilling to disclose their non-religious selves, they thought they were the only persons in their situation - leaving their religious faith. Therefore, many suffered from loneliness and isolation for a while in this stage of the religious transition.

This loneliness and isolation pushed many to go online and search for support. While doing this, some encountered others like them who decided to leave their religious faith. The others were both individuals and the communities of ex-believers (support groups). For some, this was the end of their suffering from loneliness and the lack of acceptance. They finally found people who could understand their opinions and worries and, most importantly, accept them as who they were. When interacting with others (sharing personal experiences), people tend to look for similarities that help them relate themselves to others' stories; therefore, they can find clues that

might help them navigate in their lives as closeted non-believers. And looking for similarities can include finding others who left the same religion; hence they found even more acceptance and understanding. Besides, engaging with like-minded people also enabled some to make sense of their religious transition process.

However, it might not be easy for some to approach any organised groups due to their traumatic religious experiences in the past. Another reason for being hesitant to involve in support groups is that some people may feel they have to make a clear decision about their spiritual uncertainty and should not have any residual religious affiliations. Therefore, according to some participants, some people had left support groups soon after joining; they didn't think they were that far in their religious transition process and saw themselves in a between stage.

Some of the participants' narratives show their tendencies to have a biased view of religious beliefs and believers. This is mainly because of the negative experiences with their former religion and the religious others. Before disavowing their religion, they had been exposed to a particular understanding of religion and its norms. Some are prone to think that what they were exposed to is the only way to understand and see their religion and religious others.

The research study shows that the help received from the support groups can be directional and force certain possibilities regarding the spiritual orientations of the group members. The dominance of oppositional stance against religion in support groups can make new members

mainly learn about the experiences of people who cut ties with their religion. This situation doesn't give any chance to interpret religion differently and be religious with one's own standards. On the other hand, with this prevailing opposing stance in some support groups, newcomers are asked to prove that they are no longer religious and have no tendencies to go back to religion. This condition is considered a safeguard against religious others who may jeopardise the privacy of the group members.

After many years of affiliation to their former religion and its doctrine, many of the participants suffered from disorientation. Since religion provided them with comprehensive guidance to organise their lives, showing what is acceptable and what is not, it was found difficult to replace it after abandoning one's religion. Some found their own ways to adapt themselves to their new life settings; for example, through self-exploration to find their interests and boundaries. On the other hand, the disorientation can be why some reconsider their religious faith to become a believer again.

Many participants indicated that not all their religious experiences were negative; they found some aspects of their religion positive. While some embrace some aspects of religion, such as moral standards, some express their yearning to have a tight community as they once had when they were religious. Besides, some participants expressed their relativity to their past religious experiences. Sometimes they find themselves contemplating a scenario where they didn't leave their religious faith; instead, they complied with the norms

and were happy with what they had. This behaviour made one of the participants, from time to time, question her decision to disaffiliate from her religion. That shows that people who are in the religious transition process are actively in motion, trying to find their own way to be at peace with themselves.

Due to active discouragement from their religious surroundings, and the factually driven mindset, some didn't find an opportunity to look at their religion from a different perspective that goes beyond the imposed norms and doctrine. One participant indicated her desire and openness to learn more about her religion from others who experience, understand, and interpret their religion differently. Besides, she wonders what people find positive in their religious experiences; therefore, reconsidering a religious faith can be an option for her. It is important to note that for some religious people, these different perspectives may be seen as transgressive thoughts or even blasphemy since, according to some of the participants, the boundaries of us and others are drawn clearly in the religious surroundings.

The fact of active discouragement from the religious surrounding and the openness to learn more about one's religion (even after disavowing their religion) provide a basis to define the design direction elaborated in the following chapter.

4

DESIGN OPPORTUNITY

Based on the key learnings from the literature and primary research, this chapter describes the focus area of the design project. The personas, the design goal, and the interaction vision will be explained. The chapter ends with the design criteria that guided the following design activities.

4.1 Non-linear Spectrum

The literature and user research have shown that the religious transition can be recognised as a non-linear spectrum of experiences that harbours different stages. While some struggle with religious doubts and try to find answers to be at peace with their religious faith while suffering from active discouragement, others have decided to disavow their religion. By renouncing, people embark on dealing with further challenges as part of their transition process.

The decision to leave one's religious faith is not always an unalterable action that takes a person to the point of no return to be a believer again. Some can still be open to taking a different angle on their former religion to find out if they would be at peace with it or not. This openness can be seen as an experimental act, not obligating one. It can be considered a hopeful act of responding to spiritual uncertainty. With all these decisions and contemplations, people move within the non-linear spectrum of the religious transition.

4.2 Personas

Two personas have been created to illustrate the different positions taken in the religious transition process. The personas represent people's experiences in various stages within the non-linear spectrum of the religious transition.

The first persona is based on the experiences of people that are in the early stages of the religious transition process. The second persona represents the experiences of people in the later stages of the religious transition; these are the people who left their religion but are eager to find out if they would reconsider religious faith or not.



Hakan (21) was born and raised in an Islamic environment in Breda as part of a Turkish-Dutch family. His family strictly practising the religion, and he was deeply involved in religious practices in his early adolescence. People from his family and community exhorted him not to question anything in Islam since there are things that he is not able to understand. Recently, Hakan started having doubts about his faith. He has been pondering the discriminative discourses against homosexual people in the religious community, and he started questioning gender inequality within the Islamic doctrine.

He wanted to discuss his burning questions with his Muslim friends, but as soon as he opened up about the issue, his friends got offended, criticized him for questioning religion, and advised him to stop doubting his faith.

Hakan determined to find answers; the more he looked for answers, the more questions he got. He seeks information online and reads what religious functionaries and hadith say about his questions. He is not at peace with what he learned and started becoming nervous that he may lose his faith. Hakan cannot imagine leaving his religious faith; this is the biggest sin a Muslim can ever commit. Besides, there are many things that he finds beautiful in Islam. Hakan feels helpless and lost in a quandary.

"They expect you to throw away the doubts; they are not helping. Doubts are piling on."

"Religion has the community; everybody cares about each other, willing to help each other, which is beautiful."

Figure 4.1 Description of the persona represents the early stages of religious transition



Growing up in an Orthodox Christian community in Ede made everything difficult for Laura (28). Until high school, she attended religious schools and was allowed to interact only with the people within the religious community. She was always blamed for being a sinner; bad things were happening to her surroundings because of her faults; therefore, she started having problems with her self-worth. Due to this oppression, she decided to leave her religion at 18. She made this decision when she was no longer living with her family due to her studies, this time in a public school.

Ten years later, today, Laura lives with her partner and has a full-time job. Since her life is more balanced, she has time to reflect on her religious experiences. During her adolescence, after leaving the religion, she considered herself an atheist, but now she doesn't know if there is a God or not. Recently, Laura has been struggling with her childhood traumas and realising how they shaped her personality - she doesn't see herself worthy of anything good.

Moreover, she feels lost and doesn't know how to proceed in her life without guidance and rules; she doesn't know what she likes and what works for her. It is a constant battle in her head.

Lately, Laura has been comparing her current state of life with her religious past. From time to time, she regrets her decision to leave the church. She is looking for ways to understand the religion differently, considering visiting different churches and seeing what people find positive in the religion so that she might get inspired. In her experience, religion is quite dark; she hopes to find something that can make her life easier and more meaningful.

"I don't like living by the rules, but then what is that I do like, what works for me?"

"I would also be open to going to church or talking to people who are still religious and how religion helps them get through life."

Figure 4.2 Description of the persona represents the later stages of religious transition

4.3 Design Goal

A design goal was formulated based on the literature and primary research while considering the personas. The design goal manifests the purpose of the following design activities. Besides, it is also necessary to define an interaction vision.

The design goal is intended to break the binary thinking that may come with

doubting some aspects of religion: the painful reality of complying with the norms and preserving religious faith; and the scary possibility of rejecting the norms and losing religious faith. The aim is to enable people in the different stages of the religious transition to realise an alternative reality where they can create their unique understanding of their religion. By doing that, they may be at peace with their religious faith on their terms or abandon it

"to support people doubting some aspects of their religion in the exploration of whether to be at peace with their faith or not by providing them with a safe space to create their own unique understanding of their religion"

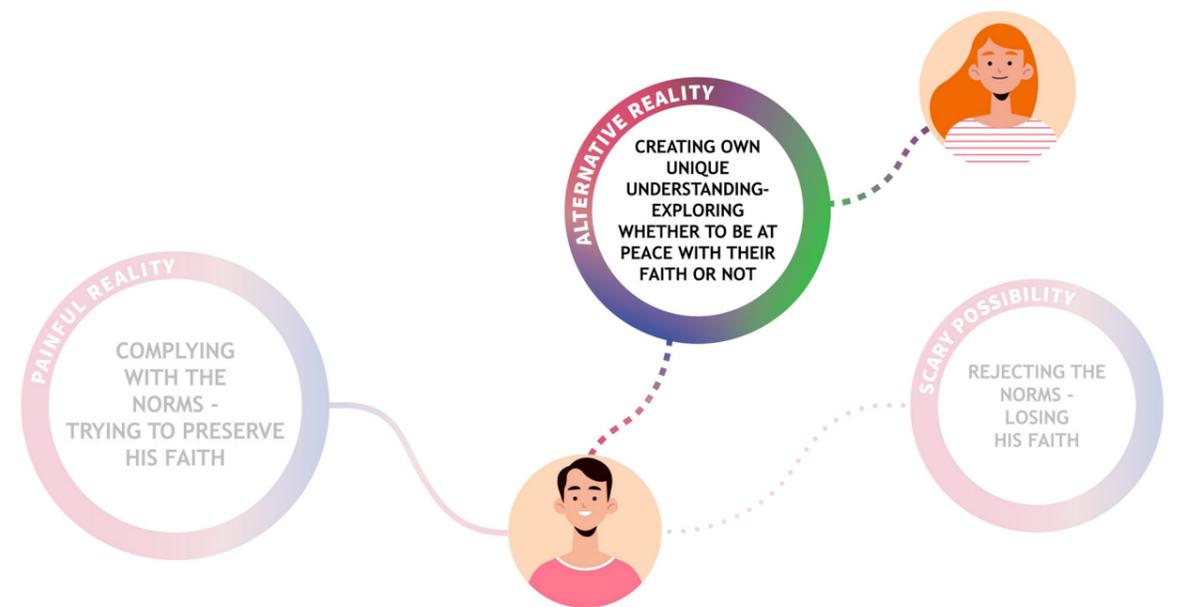


Figure 4.3 An illustration of the alternative reality that considers and connects the personas

4.4 Interaction Vision

Key Situation

Before defining the interaction vision, it was essential to understand the situation that is the core of the struggle that comes with religious doubt. This situation was used as the basis of the analogy iterations to see the appropriate interactions from a fresh perspective (Hekkert & Dijk, 2011).

While Hakan is not happy with some aspects of his religion and feels disappointed (due to not being able to find satisfying answers to his questions), he desperately wishes to be happy with his faith. Still, he doesn't know how to do it.

Analogous Situation

After various iterations, an analogy that can capture the essence of the key situation was formulated. The analogy should represent the situation in which one wants to be happy with something but cannot be. Being born religious is considered a gift from God that gives one a feeling of being cared for and privileged.

The analogy gives a reference to the belief of being gifted. In the analogous situation, a person – in this example, a male – received a gift from someone important to him. He didn't have time to open the gift, but he felt happy that the sender thought of him and cared about him. One day, he decides to open the present - this moment represents the people's attempts to resolve their doubts, such as doing research, trying



Figure 4.4 An illustration of the analogous situation

to find answers etc.– he wonders what is inside the box. When he finds out about the gift, he finds himself in a quandary, disappointed and unhappy with the gift, but at the same time, the person wishes that he could like the present and be happy about it.

The rest of the analogous situation was supported by an analogous dialogue where a close friend of the gifted person approaches him and tries to help by offering him a safe way to experiment to see whether he will like the gift and be happy with it.

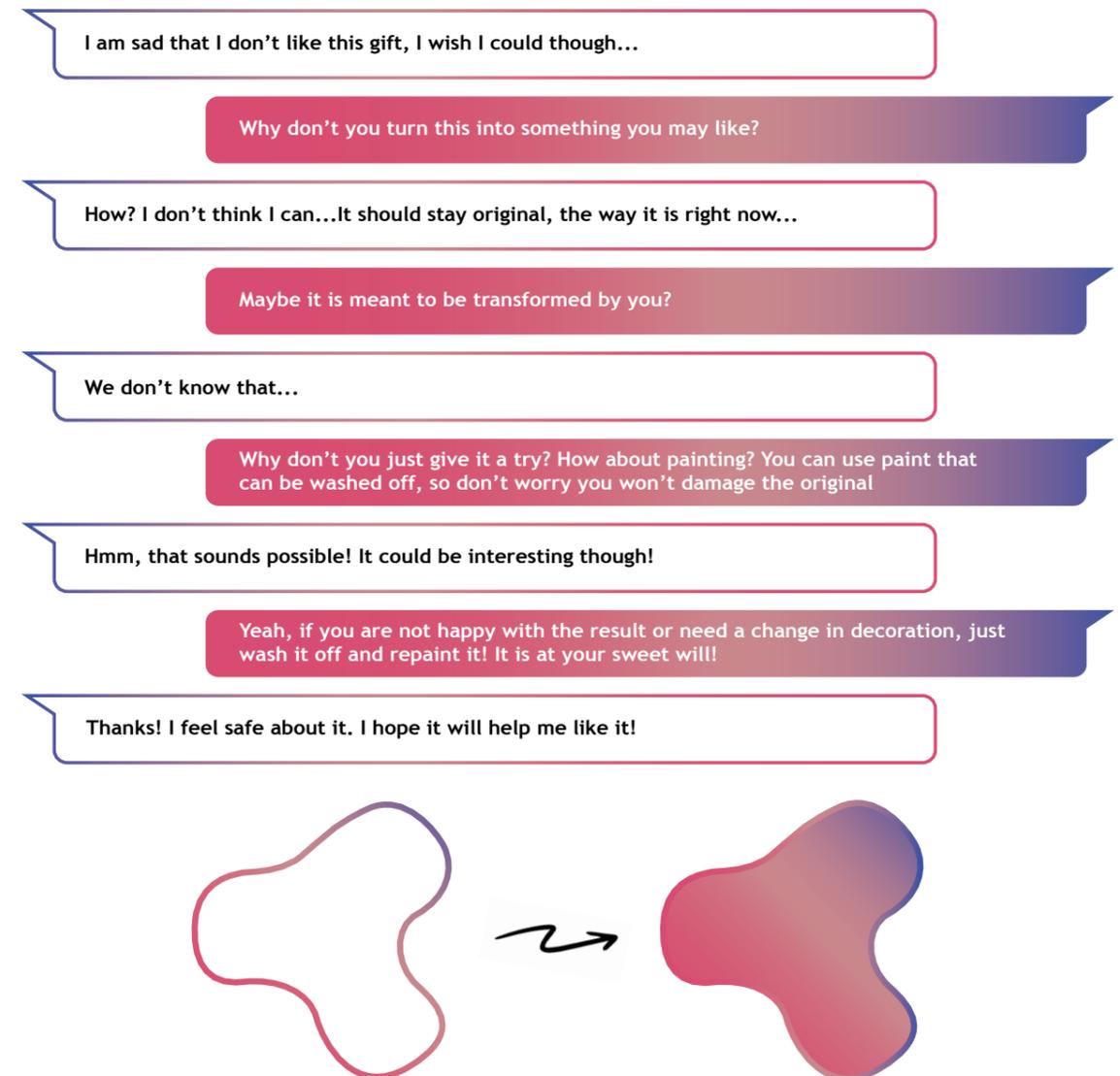


Figure 4.5 An illustration of the analogous dialogue and a friend's recommendation

The gift analogy was used to formulate an interaction vision. The interaction vision emphasises a safe experiment which aims to make people not afraid of daring to try out different opinions and perspectives regarding their religion.

Based on the interaction vision, the interaction qualities were generated. Next, to realise these interaction qualities, certain product qualities were defined (Hekkert & Dijk, 2011).

“offered a safe experiment by a close friend to turn the gift that you have mixed feelings about into something you may like”

Interaction Qualities: *Curious, Secure, Hopeful, Encouraging*
Product Qualities: *Caring, Dedicated, Sensitive, Explorative*

4.5 Design Criteria

The design criteria describe the crucial characteristics the design must have to succeed (van Boeijen et al., 2013). These requirements were meant to guide the creation of the concepts and the concept selection phase. Inspired by Pugh’s checklist (van Boeijen et al., 2013), a complete list of requirements was formed. The list was enlarged and adapted throughout the design process; new requirements were added according to the benchmark study results, the initial user evaluation, and the usability testing (these research activities are presented in Chapter 6).

On the list of requirements, the categories (in bold) indicate the characteristics that the design should comply with. The requirements with (W) represent the wishes, while the rest are the demands the design must satisfy.

List of Requirements:

Design Goal

Does it fulfil the design goal?

1. The design should support people to forge their own unique understanding of their religion in a safe environment; therefore, they can explore whether they would be at peace with their religion or not.

Interaction Qualities

Does it realise the interaction qualities?

2. The interaction with the design should be curious to enable people to explore different views and opinions regarding their religious doubts.
3. The interaction with the design should be secure that people don’t feel forced to make decisions that they are not ready for.
4. The interaction with the design should be hopeful to ease spiritual uncertainty.

5. The interaction with the design should be encouraging to make people motivated to consider and experiment with different perspectives and opinions .

Product Qualities

Does it have the product qualities?

6. The design should have a caring attitude towards people’s spiritual uncertainty.
7. The design should hold dedicated characteristics for people’s spiritual uncertainty.
8. The design should consider the delicacy of the religious transition and be sensitive.
9. The design should provide lots of space to discover different views and perspectives; therefore, it should be explorative.

Inclusivity

Is it suitable for the people with different religious backgrounds, stages in religious transition, socio-economic status, gender?

10. The design should be desirable to people regardless of their Abrahamic religious background.
11. The design should be supportive for any people who are having doubts regardless of their stage in religious transition process
12. The design should be suitable for all genders
13. The design should be accessible for the low-income or income less people (e.g., teenagers that are financially dependent on families)

Acceptance

Does it help people to find acceptance?

14. The design should provide a space where people feel welcomed and accepted with their religious doubts.
15. The design should enable people to communicate with like-minded people who hold religious doubts like them. (W)

Community

Does it provide a sense of community?

16. The design should facilitate the sense of community. (W)
17. The design should encourage people to give support to others. (W)

Autonomy

Does it evoke the feeling of autonomy?

18. When it comes to religious doubt, the design should enable people to make their own decisions according to their own standards – taking ownership of their process (W)
19. The design should give people a space to freely try out different opinions and perspectives

Positive aspects

Does it go beyond the doubts?

20. The design should also provide a space to explore what others find positive in their religious experiences. (W)

Making Sense

Does it support people to have a better understanding of their doubtful situation?

21. The design should provide features to help people keep track of their progress regarding their doubts; therefore, they can have a better understanding of their situation. (W)

22. The design should give people the time and space to ponder their doubts and what they have found out. (W)

Factual Tendency

Does it provide sources?

23. The design should consider people's tendency to look for facts rather than resorting to their feelings. (W)

Ease of Implementation

Can it be produced with little sources and cost?

24. The production and implementation of the design should be as low as possible for non-profit organisations (e.g., humanistic associations)

5

DESIGN EXPLORATION

This chapter provides an overview of the ideation activities and the generated concepts with their low-fidelity prototypes. Before starting the ideation phase, relevant existing solutions were studied. The chapter ends with the concept evaluation.

5.1 Approach

All the previously acquired information and knowledge have been utilised in the ideation process. The list of requirements that include the design goal, the interaction, the product qualities, and more have been used to guide the ideation results to make the results as relevant as possible for the context and the target audience. The selected ideas have been further developed to create the concepts.

Before the start of the ideation process, the relevant existing solutions for people who doubt their religion were explored.

5.2 Existing Solutions

There are few products/services that explicitly target the needs of people who doubt their religion. The first digital product is called 'Room for Doubts', which provides biblical answers to big questions regarding Christianity and claims to address the doubts to strengthen religious faith (roomfordoubt, n.d.). People can explore articles about religious doubts on different topics (i.e., Atheism, Death, Evil, etc.). Besides, people can ask questions, and the replies to these questions are often posted on the website or the mobile app.

The other product/service is 'Talkaboutdoubt.com'. The website aims to support people doubting their Christian faith or non-Christian seekers who have sincere questions about the Christian faith (talkaboutdoubts, n.d.). It does that by connecting experts to people and letting them have a 1-on-1 video call to discuss the matter. All people need to do is to submit their questions with some details and indicate their availability for the zoom call. People need to indicate their gender when they submit a question, and the website only shows two options for that, male and female. The product doesn't recognise the diversity of gender and already excludes some because of their gender identification.

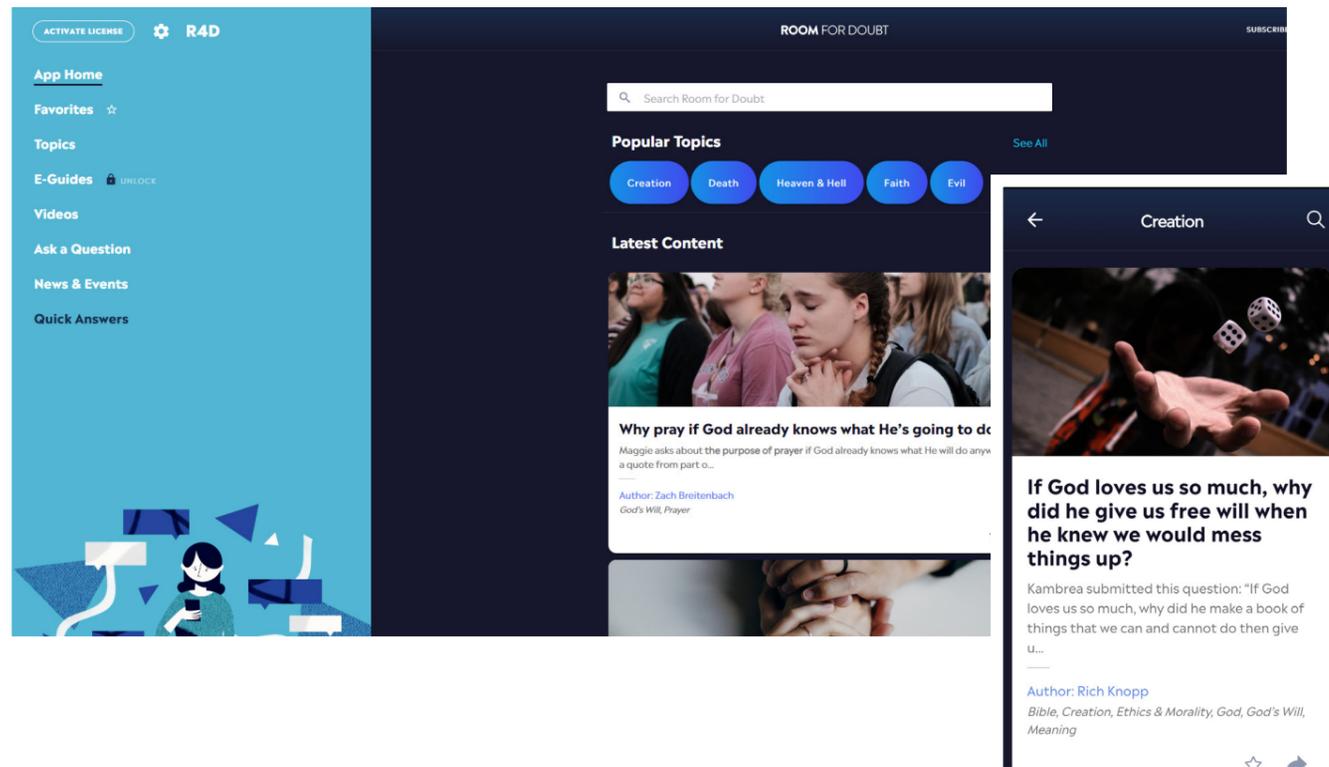


Figure 5.1 Illustrations of 'Room for Doubts' website and mobile app

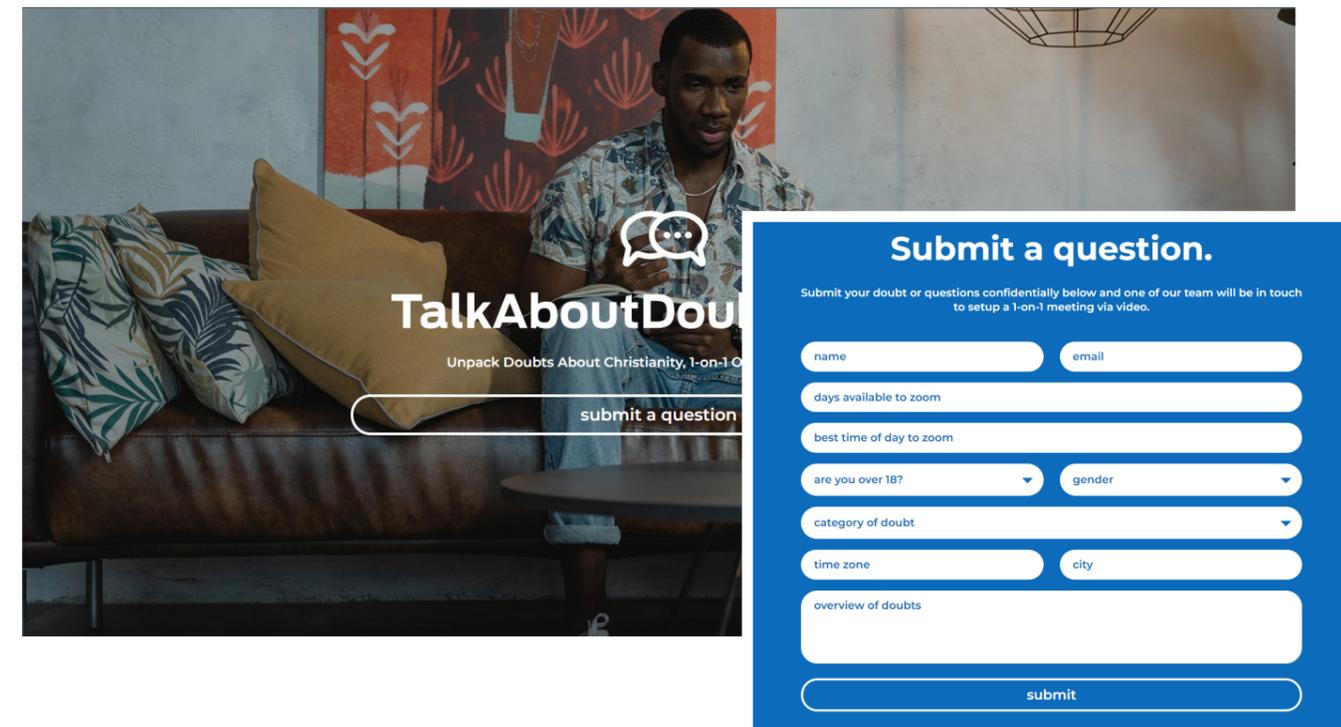


Figure 5.2 Images from the 'TalkAboutDoubts' website

5.3 Individual Ideation

The design exploration phase started with individual ideation. The ideation activity was supported by the list of triggers (see Appendix F) as it functioned as a source of inspiration. When creating the list, all the acquired information was revisited, and the most relevant and interesting insights were noted. Next to that, the list contains ideas that were noted during the research phase. The list has an unorganised format to reveal unexpected relationships and connections among each trigger. During ideation, each idea was controlled with the design criteria defined earlier to see to what extent they satisfied the requirements (see Chapter 4.5). Therefore, ideas that didn't have enough potential and relevance to the characteristics of the context and target group were not considered for further iterations

- ...
- Doubt to make it your own!
- Doubter or explorer? Use positive connotations...
- Tailored assistance to address specific stressors.
- You always move forward there is no going back!
- Does leaving religious norm mean leaving a religion?
- ...

Figure 5.3 An impression of the trigger-list derived from the literature and primary research

5.4 Co-creation Session

A creative session was organised to support the ideation process as another source of inspiration and further explore the design opportunities. Integrated Creative Problem Solving (iCPS) principles were followed to structure the creative session (Heijne & Meer, 2019). The online session was planned with a facilitator (a Strategic Product Design graduate student at IDE). My role was the problem owner in the session to introduce the problem to the resource group (participants) and to be actively involved in the idea generation as part of the resource group.

The resource group (the participants) consisted of six people. Each participant had different religious experiences and skills to contribute to the creative session. Table 5.1 explains the overview of the resource group.

It was crucial to be sensitive toward the participants' personal beliefs and convictions to create a safe environment for them. Therefore, while introducing the design problem, some acknowledgements were shared to avoid misunderstandings that might have resulted in resentment. The acknowledgements were about affirming the fact that people make different choices to find happiness in their faith. While some prefer to stick to the religious norms and be happy with their faith, some are delighted to leave their faith, and some people might be happy to find an alternative path to experience their religion by their standards. Moreover, the facilitator pointed out that

Table 6.1 Overview of the participants

	Religious Background	Age	Gender m/f/d	Design Education Background
Participant 1	None	24	female	Design for Interaction / Delft University of Technology
Participant 2	Islam	33	male	System Design Thinking / College for Creative Studies
Participant 3	Islam	29	male	Integrated Product Design / Delft University of Technology
Participant 4	Christianity	29	female	None - One of the interviewees from the primary research
Participant 5	Islam	27	male	None - One of the interviewees from the primary research
Participant 6	Islam	30	male	Integrated Product Design / Delft University of Technology

no one should feel pressure to explain their position towards religion unless they are eager to do so.

The session was guided by the question, "How to make people doubting their religious faith realise that they could create their unique understanding of their religion?". This question was meant to help the participants to focus on the mechanism: ways to realise the design goal (See chapter 4.3). Besides, the design criteria were not mentioned to the participants to avoid complexity.

The session started with an introduction round to get participants to know each other. The problem presentation followed it. After that, the first step of the creative

session was the Purge. The Purge aims to help the participants rapidly share the initial ideas popping into their minds. This step is vital to free their minds to generate other and new ideas (Heijne & Meer, 2019). The Purge was followed by a collage-making activity (Figure 5.4). The participants were asked to create a collage by thinking of the design question or certain parts of the sentence, for example, 'understanding' or 'realise'. They were asked to add post-its next to each visual to communicate the ideas that the visuals triggered. The goal was to help the participants to tap their non-verbal capacity to generate options beyond the obvious.

After the collage-making, the participants

were encouraged to get inspiration from others' collages and ideas to develop new ones. In the last step of the session, the ideas were clustered (see Appendix G) by the participants while having a conversation.



Figure 5.4 An impression of some of the collages that the resource group generated (for readable versions of the collages, see Appendix G)

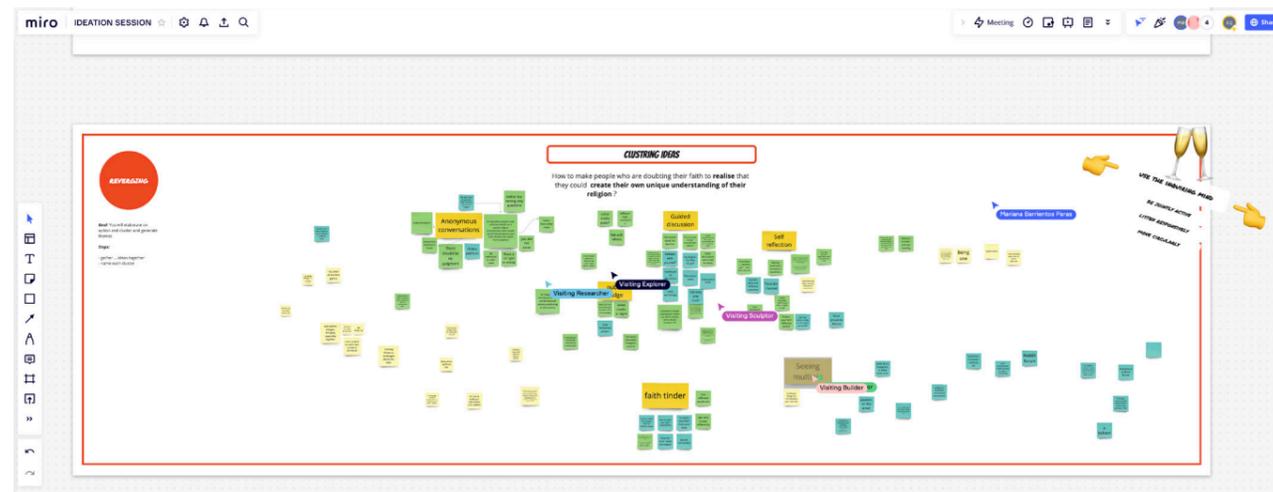
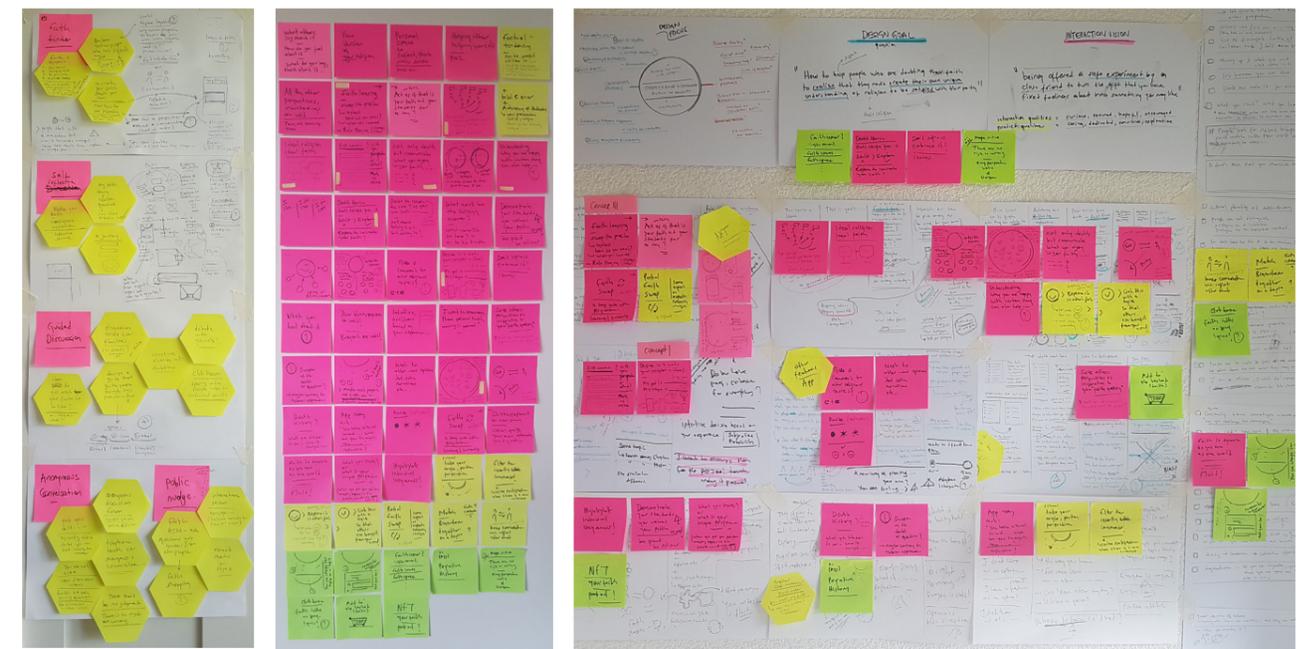


Figure 5.5 The resource group clustering the ideas

5.5 Concept Direction

After the creative session, the results were analysed, and the relevant ideas were selected. Those selected ideas were improved and inspired the new ones.

In the end, the promising ideas from the ideation activities were combined to generate concept directions. The following sub-chapters present the concepts generated from these directions.



co-creation based ideas

selected idea list

combining ideas

Figure 5.6 The promising ideas were written down on post-its and combined to form the concept directions

5.5.1 Faith Swap – Get Inspired & Inspire

The Faith Swap gives the users the feeling of acceptance and validation. They have an opportunity to exchange their faith manifesto with one another and explore different perspectives and understandings. The goal is to learn from others, reflect on experiences and form your understanding and perspective.

The users are asked to fill out their faith manifesto upon registering the app. The manifesto involves what people like about their faith and the subjects they are critical about. Therefore, people also have a chance

to enrich their positive perspectives toward their religious faith.

Besides, upon registration, people are also asked to indicate the colours they like to form a colour gradient that personalises their profile. When exploring others' faith manifesto, people can save the standpoints/perspectives they like or find interesting or inspiring. Furthermore, in the swap history, the users can check the changes on the faith manifesto they have explored.

The saved viewpoints/perspectives can be found in the saved gallery. Users can visit the gallery and adapt any viewpoint to their faith manifesto.

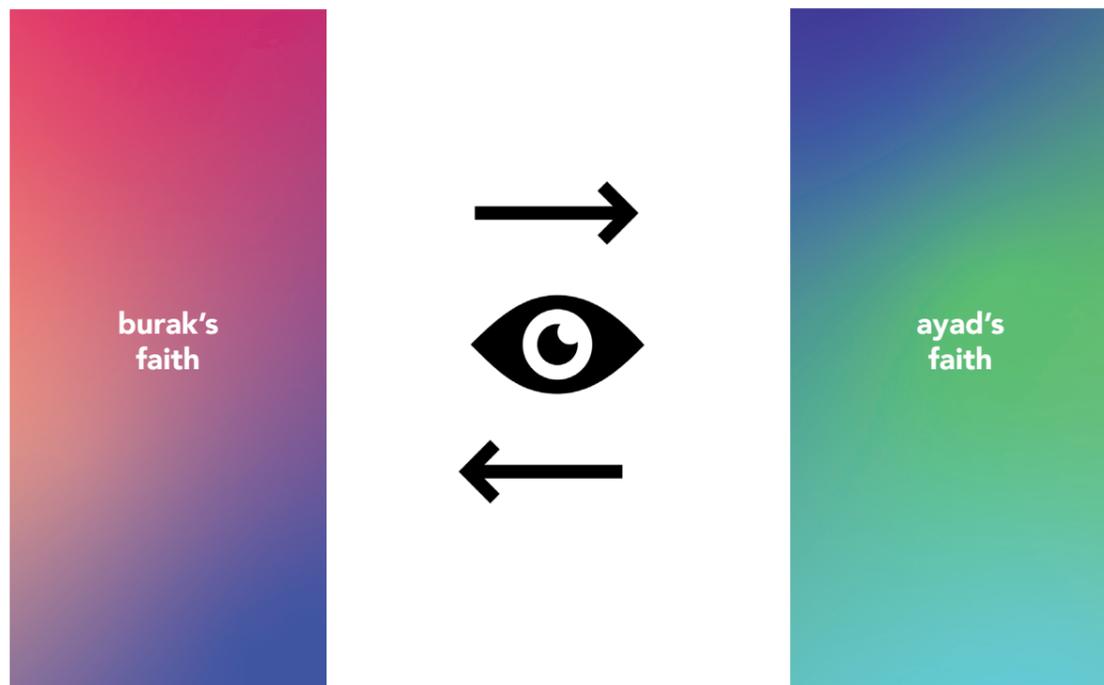


Figure 5.7 An illustration of the 'Faith Swap'



Figure 5.8 Illustrations of a user profile (upper row) and a swapped profile (lower row)



Figure 5.9 Illustrations of saved perspective section that enables the user to adapt different perspectives

5.5.2 Quest Collective – Explore & Reshape Your Faith

The Quest Collective is a platform for people having critical thoughts about their religion. The users/ members can create a topic for their doubt and invite the community to share their perspectives on it. The platform can also send notifications to ask people’s perspectives on topics that might interest them. The platform has different themes that

contain various topics. The users can request a new topic in case their doubt they consider entering does not fit in any of the existing topics. When tapping on doubt content, the users can see others’ comments/perspectives placed around the semicircle that contains the question and more. With the help of the rotation bar, the users can view the rest of the comments. The position of each comment represents a unique perspective. The users can add their perspective with or without online

links by tapping the plus icon. Moreover, the comments can be edited and updated by their creators. Besides, among the other comments, there is information from online sources (e.g., articles, videos, etc.).

When tapping one of the rings, the comments appear. The users can also see the comment history (if the comment has been updated). The comments/

perspectives that the users find interesting or inspiring can be saved to the perspective gallery.

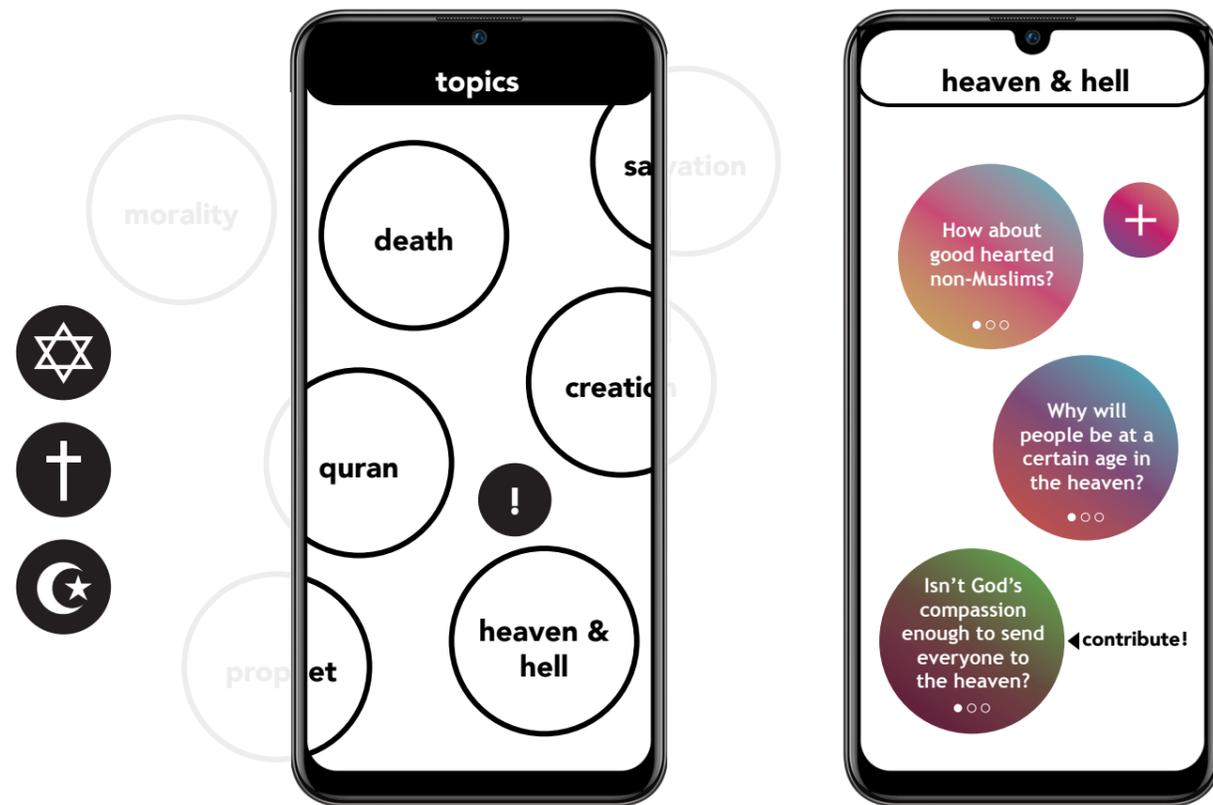


Figure 5.10 An illustration of various topics and critical questions



Figure 5.11 An illustration of a doubt page

5.5.3 Let's Talk – Explore & Reflect on Your Faith

The Let's Talk aims to bring people who are critical of their faith together and give them a safe space to discuss their doubts verbally. Each user has an anonymous account that contains their perspective on their faith. People are encouraged to note their doubts and what they find positive and pleasing in their faith in the app.

The users can enter a conversation request with details such as what they want to talk about, the time, and the day. The users who mark themselves available are matched randomly with others, and each group consists of four people. The 'doubt owner' becomes a moderator and types a question. Before starting the conversation, the moderator introduces the question and hands out the position cards (the order is up to the moderator). There are three position cards: (1) As far as I know; (2) I think; and (3)

For me, it should be. The goal of the cards is to encourage people to think and talk differently; therefore, they enlarge their perspectives. The conversation lasts until all the participants use each card. An open talk may follow.

The session is saved to each participant's conversation history, and right after the session, each participant, including the moderator, can reflect on their experience on the app.



Figure 5.12 Illustrations of sharing a talk and a notification



Figure 5.13 Illustrations of (1) session countdown, (2) typing a question, and (3) a session

5.6 Concept Evaluation

After an elaborate discussion with the project supervisors, the decision was to combine all three concepts. Each concept offers relevant and promising functions for the target users to explore their position towards their religious faith.

It was decided to discard the binary differentiation, such as being satisfied and dissatisfied or liking and disliking some aspects of your faith. These expressions lacked spiritual sensitivity and did not reflect the complexity of the religious experiences. Moreover, it was suggested that a vocabulary that resonates more with faith and spirituality should be used. Besides, instead of finding other words for doubts, it was found important to be open and honest about the word doubt and use it as it is.

About the faith swap, it was suggested to have an AI-supported tailored matching option. Therefore, people can swap their profiles with others that could give more relevant feedback on their questions. It was discussed to enable users to put short biographical information about themselves to make the app more personal.

6

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

This chapter presents the development process of the final concept and provides information about the benchmark study, the initial user evaluation interviews, and the usability testing. In the end, the final design will be shaped and presented in the following chapter.

6.1 Approach

The concept development phase involves many iterations with prototypes. Following further ideation and paper prototyping, an app workflow was created. The workflow was necessary to have a better understanding of the app content and its structure. A benchmark was conducted to investigate how certain apps were structured and what features and functionalities could be integrated into the concept under development. After that, the intended users evaluated the developed concept. Lastly, the usability of the interface was tested and improved accordingly.

6.2 Benchmark

Five apps that provide answers to religious questions were analysed to gain insights into their content, structure, and usability. Two of the apps (Room for Doubt and Got Questions) offer answers to questions about Christianity, two apps provide content for questions regarding Islam (Questions on Islam and IslamQA), and the last app contains answers for questions related to Judaism (Ask the Rabbi?).

Since the final concept aims to enable religious doubters to communicate with each other and share their perspectives, it was necessary to examine some of the social media apps. This analysis was needed because only one of the religious apps analysed (Ask the Rabbi?) allows peer communication, but in a very limited format, only under the answers in the comment section. Moreover, the answers posted on each religious app come from an expert

rather than peers. However, social media apps provide various features and functions that help people share their content and opinions and enable them to communicate privately (i.e., direct messages) or collectively (i.e., groups on WhatsApp).

The three of the analysed social media apps are widely used: WhatsApp, Instagram, and Twitter. The Clubhouse app was chosen due to its specialised functionality that enables people to talk while having an audience. This feature was found relevant to investigate because of its similarities to the 'Let's Talk' concept generated earlier in this project (See Chapter 5.5.3).

Because of the common use of popular social media apps, these apps were considered a source of inspiration to create an app that corresponds to people's mental models and enables a shallow learning curve.

6.2.1 Benchmark Approach

The benchmark was conducted on the following research questions:

1. How is each app content structured?
2. What are the features and functionalities in the apps that can be useful for the concept?
3. What are the flaws and inconsistencies in the apps?

The benchmark materials were generated by taking screenshots of each app's content that is relevant to the concept. The screenshots were collected on a Miro board.



Figure 6.1 The apps regarding religious questions (upper row) and the social apps (lower row)

Each app had its frame, and the screenshots were aligned according to the content order in the apps. Each screenshot was visited, and when necessary, notes were added to highlight potentially beneficial aspects and the aspects that should be avoided when developing the concept. In addition, the apps' structures were compared, for instance, the navigation in main menus or search bar structure etc.

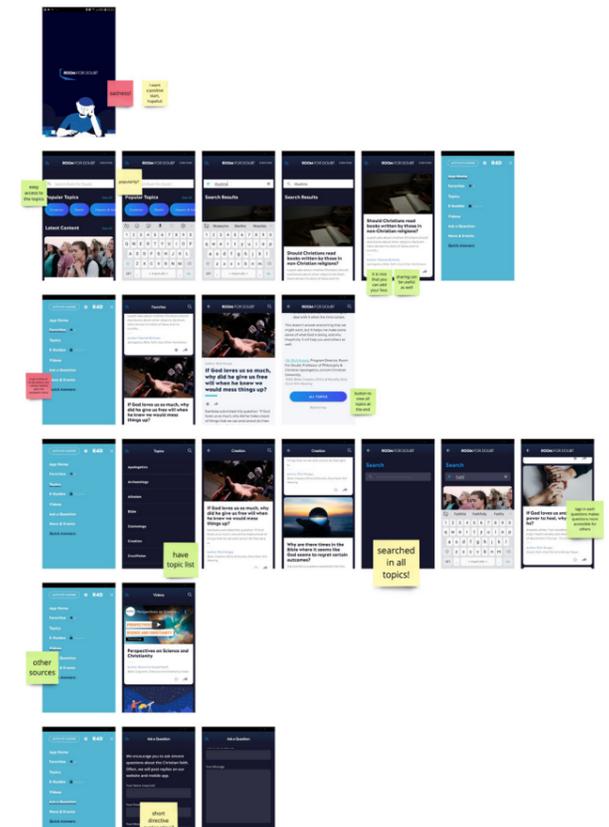


Figure 6.2 An impression of the analysis of the 'Room for Doubt' app content (for readable version, see Appendix H)

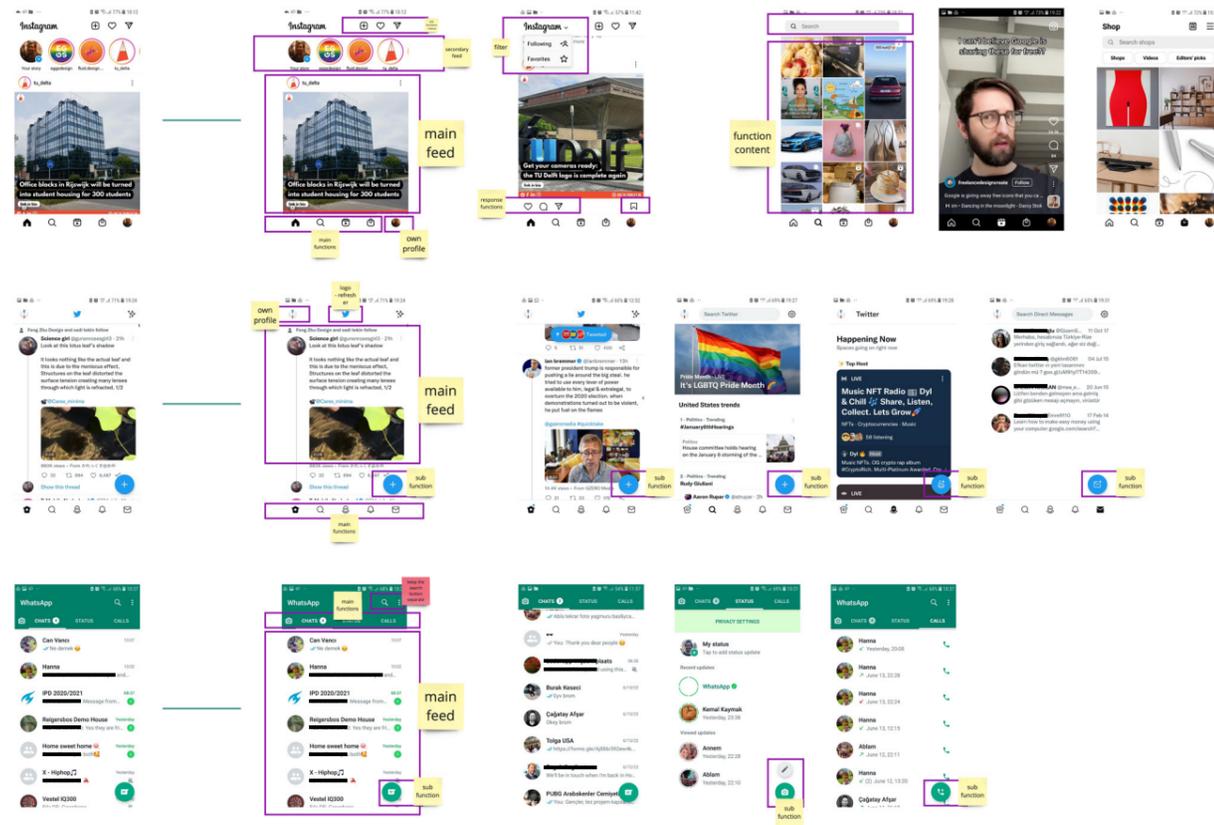


Figure 6.3 An impression of the comparison of main menu navigations of different apps

6.2.2 Design Criteria 2.0

The key findings from the analysis of the religious and social media apps were used to form the list of requirements. This list complements the design criteria formulated in Chapter 4.5. With the help of the following findings, the app content was structured, new features were added, and some were adapted.

On the list of requirements, the categories (in bold) indicate the characteristics that the design should comply with. The requirements with (W) represent the wishes, while the rest are the demands the design must satisfy.

List of Requirements:

App Structure

1. The design should have a fixed navigation bar to make the main functions easily accessible.
2. The design should have the standard features (e.g., notification bell) fixed on the main functions' pages.
3. The design should not have a home button; it is irrelevant to the concept design.

4. The design should enable accessing some contents via overlay menus without leaving the active page.
5. The design should reduce the dominance of the active page when overlay menus are used.
6. The design should avoid using side menus for the main functions.
7. The design should let the user know on which function page they are in with text (e.g., Reels text on the top left corner on Instagram when browsing in Reels)

Feed Content

8. The design should have sub-sections (e.g., in Instagram: Chats, Rooms, Requests sub-sections) when necessary.
9. The design should showcase content according to the user's search history (suggestions). (W)
10. The design should indicate information about the number of comments each doubt has. (W)
11. The design should enable access to random content. (W)
12. The design should allow people to configure their feed content. (W)
13. The design should provide a search filter for detailed content searches.
14. The design should allow people to follow topics that they are interested in so that they see relevant content on their

feed. (W)

15. The design should allow people to follow other users' content.

Content Finding

16. The design should make it possible to select topics and add tags when sharing content; therefore, others can easily find the content.
17. The design should enable topic-specific search.
18. The design should make it easy to access the topics.

Content Entry

19. The design should provide guidance about how to enter content.
20. The design should enable uploading visuals when sharing content (e.g., while entering a doubt or sending a message to other users). (W)
21. The design should enable keeping drafts to share later.
22. The design should contain additional sources that can be added by the users (i.e., relevant videos or articles for doubts posted)
23. The design should enable sharing voice recordings next to textual content. (W)

Other Functionalities

- 24. The design should enable voice recording for the talks function. (W)
- 25. The design should enable a shuffled profile swap.
- 26. The design should enable users to save content as favourites.
- 27. The design should allow sharing content one likes or finds interesting with others.
- 28. The design should offer an audio reflection next to typing. (W)
- 29. The design should show the updates on the contents (e.g., notification for a new comment).

Emotion

- 30. The design should avoid negative and sad expressions in the app – app layout, visual etc. (refers to Room for Doubts app).
- 31. The design should have introductory pages about its purpose when interacting with the app for the first time. It should encourage people to explore the app.

Language & Region

- 32. The design should make it possible to select multiple languages to follow content from different regions worldwide. (W)

6.3 Ideation & Prototyping

Further ideation activities were carried out to form an overarching mobile application design that combines all the concepts presented in the previous chapter. The wireframe sketches supported by paper prototypes were used to rapidly iterate and develop the concept according to requirements from the benchmark study.

Before starting a digital mid-fidelity prototype on the software program called Figma, it was necessary to have an overview of the application's content and how it is structured. For that purpose, a workflow was created on Figma. In the making of the workflow, ideation was ongoing.

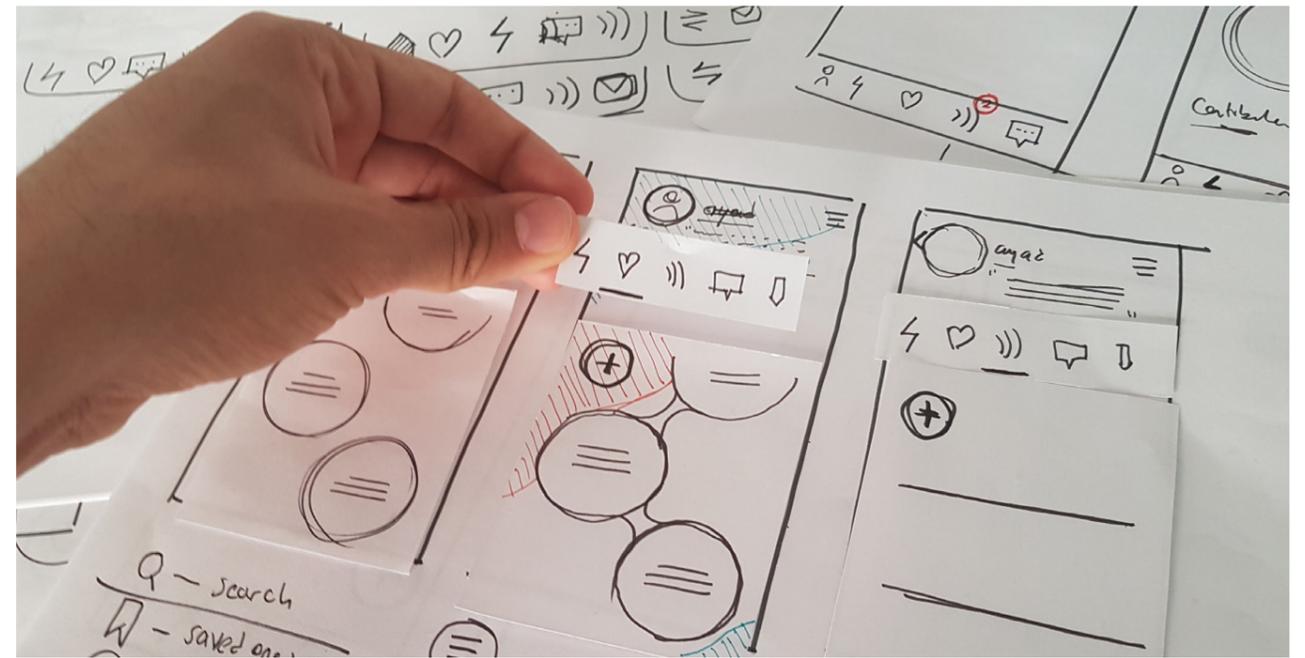


Figure 6.4 Wireframes and paper prototypes

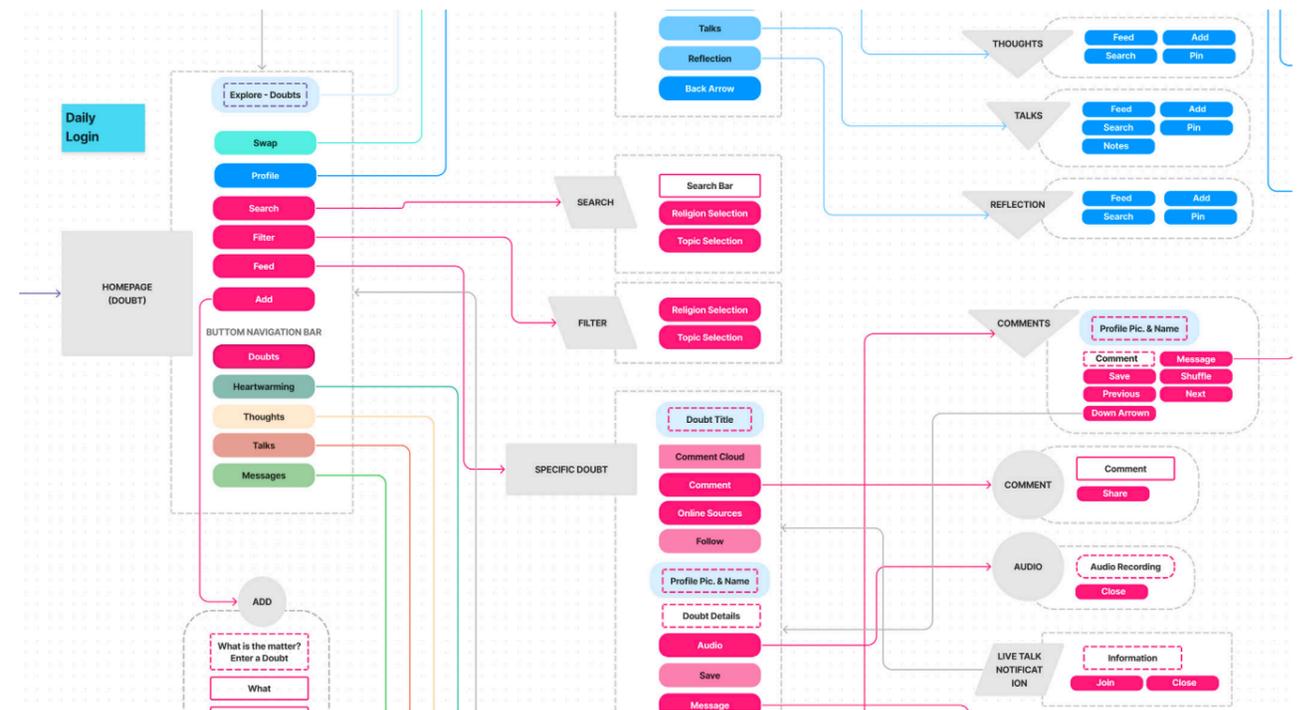


Figure 6.5 An illustration of the workflow

6.4 Design Update

The prototype used during the initial user evaluation interviews presented the result of the early design iterations. Providing people with a safe space to create their unique perspective of their religion is the main goal of the product. Therefore, the design concept at this stage contained six main functions and various features to support people in their explorations regarding their religious faith. The description of the main functions and the features is as follows:

Explore Doubts

The first function is the 'Explore Doubts'. This function enables the user to discover others' religious doubts and the opinions shared by the other users. The user can add their doubts to the app via the add button on the bottom right corner. When entering a doubt, the users are asked to add their doubts in a question format as a brief introduction and then it is required to add a description. To help others to find the doubt content easily, the user needs to indicate the relevant topics that their doubt entry

may fall in, and as the last step, certain tags should be added.

The user can do topic-specific searches to access relevant content. When viewing the results, the app informs the user about the current talks (the explanation of this function will follow) happening on the app related to the topics they have just searched.

The app enables searching for content in other religions. For example, a user with a Muslim background can explore the

doubts posted by people with a Christian background.

Each doubt content appears in the feed over a colour gradient rectangle representing each user. These colours were determined by users upon their registration to the app. When opening a doubt content, the user can access the full description of the doubt with a listen option. Comments and online sources can be viewed by collapsing the doubt description. The online sources are the sources that are recommended by the system related to the doubt.

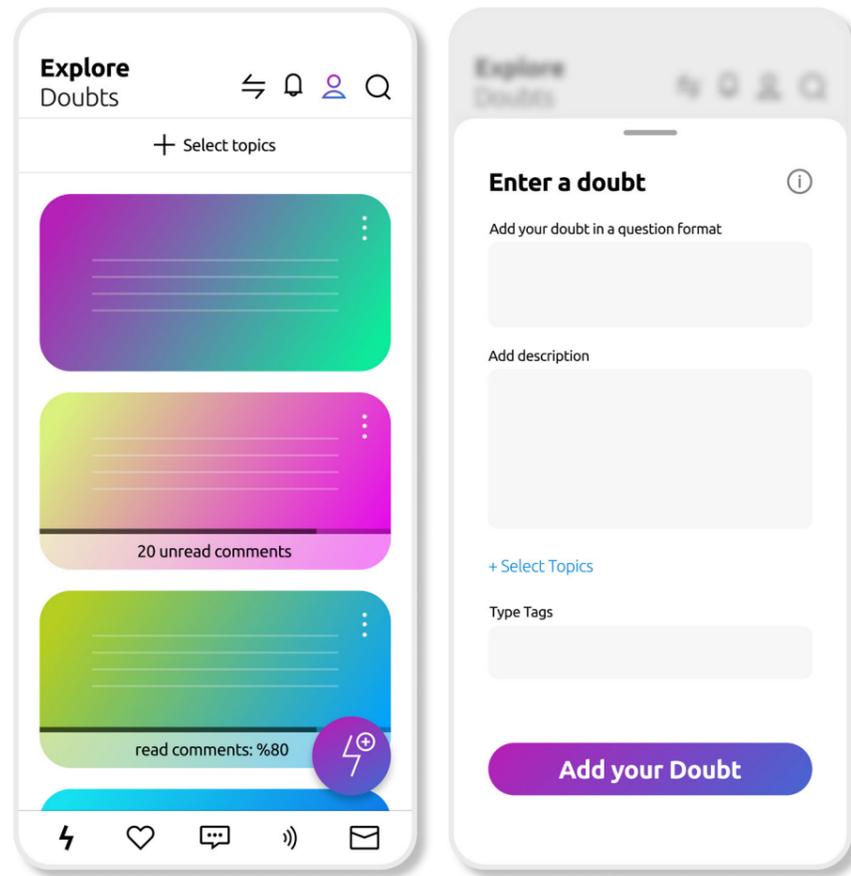


Figure 6.6 The 'Explore Doubt' content feed and doubt entry frame

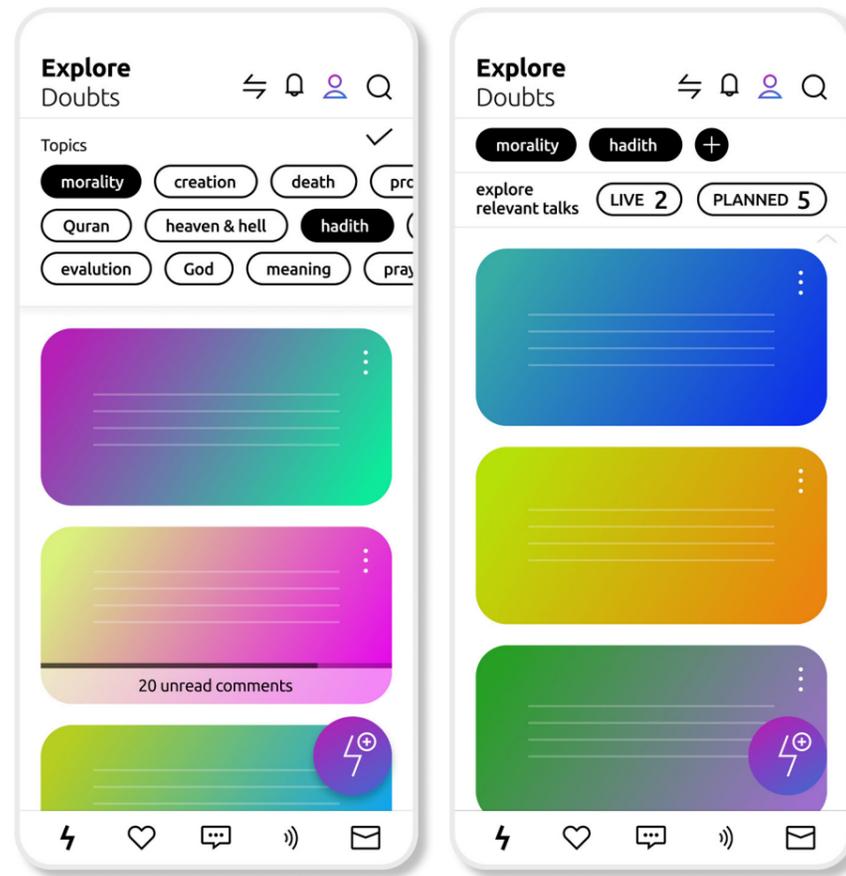


Figure 6.7 Multiple topic selection

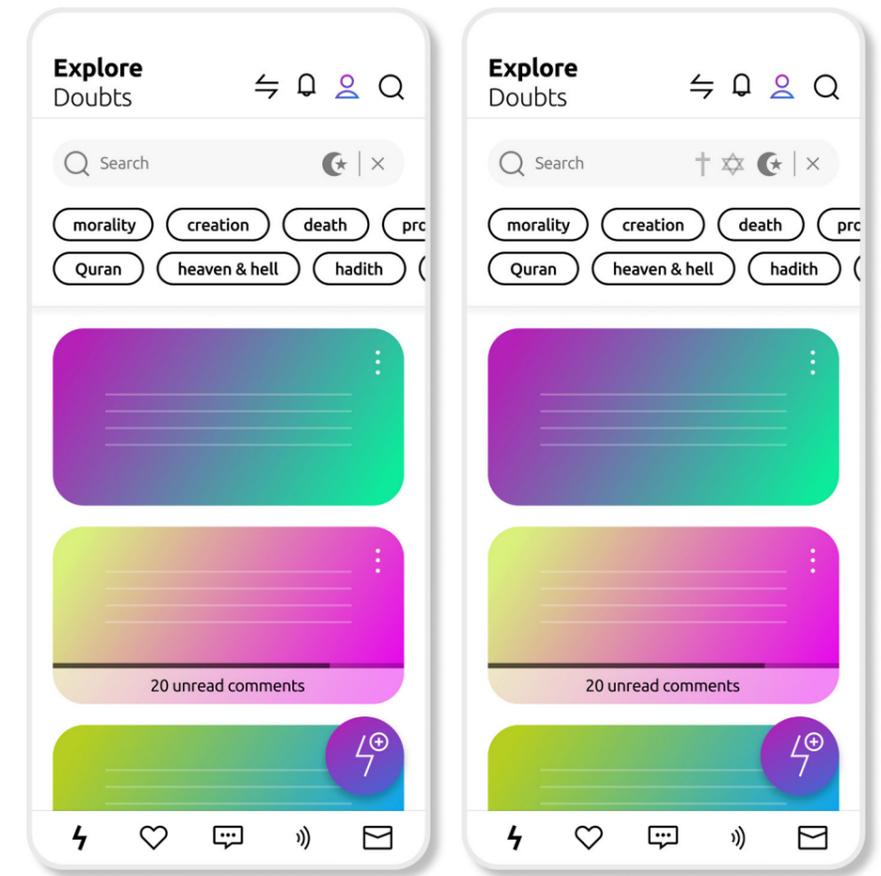


Figure 6.8 Religion switch option in the search bar

The doubt owners decide what sources to keep in their doubt content. These sources can be articles, YouTube video links, or book recommendations.

When viewing other users' comments on the doubt, the app emphasizes each comment and displays them individually. There is no linear thread to view the comments; instead, the users need to tap on the shuffle button to view the following comment. Another reason for not using a conventional comment thread is to avoid discussions that often go elsewhere, and some replies can

be forgotten due to the heated debate. Instead, the design encourages people to communicate one-on-one via direct messages. By that, more sincere and deeper conversations can be encouraged. The user can view the history of the comment – if a commenter changes their opinions, it can be observed. Besides, the doubt owners' reflections regarding their doubts can be viewed; therefore, the user has a chance to follow the changes in others' perspectives and opinions. Moreover, the doubt or the comments can be saved.

The process bar under the 'Comments' and 'Online Sources' buttons indicates how many of the comments have been read or not. This process bar also appears after going back to content feed. There can be numeric information regarding the unread comments (e.g., 20 unread comments).

Lastly, there is a significant emphasis on anonymity. The user can use a pseudonym instead of their real name, and there is no need to add a profile picture since the colour gradients replace it.

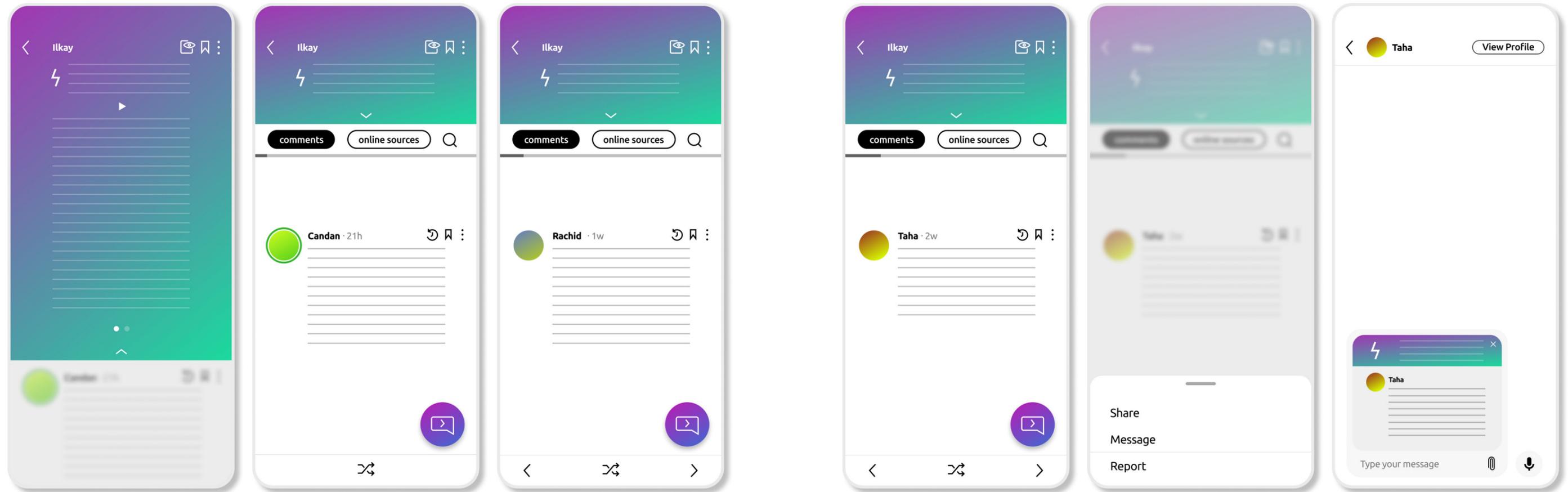


Figure 6.9 Impressions of doubt description and comments posted by other users

Explore Heart-warming

The second function, 'Explore Heart-warming' helps the user to discover what others find positive in their religious experiences. Heart-warming content posted by other users appears similarly on the content feed: on gradient colour rectangles. Each content is viewed directly through the feed. The user swipes left on each entry to read more about the content.

The user can add their heart-warming content to the app via the button on the bottom right corner. When entering new heart-warming content, the user is asked to type what they find heart-warming in their religion, and then it is required to add the 'why' of the content. To help others to find the doubt content easily, the users need to type relevant tags.

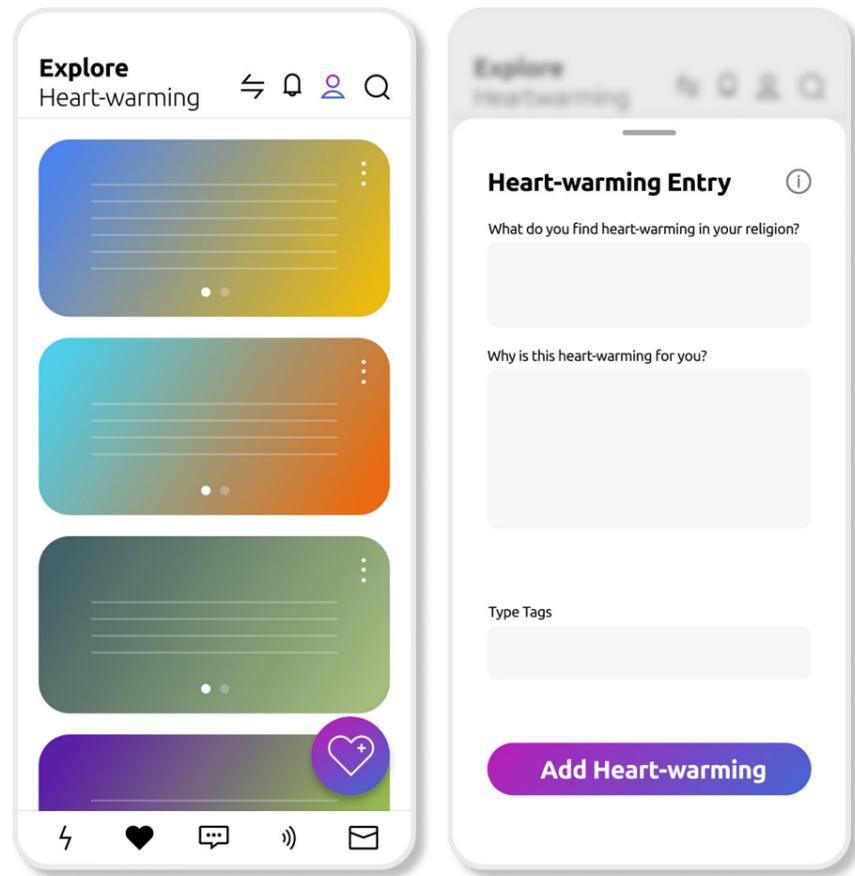


Figure 6.11 The 'Explore Heart-warming' content feed and heart-warming content entry frame

Explore Thoughts

The third function enables the user to share thoughts that come into their minds regarding their religious faith. Each thought appears on the feed on a colour gradient specific to the content owner and remains for a certain time. The user can hold their finger on the screen to pause; the next thought appears if the user doesn't intervene.

More of the thoughts can be viewed by swiping right on the content. The users can

start a conversation with the content owner via the message icon on the top right corner. Besides, the user who shared the thought can be followed via the 'follow' button. The profile of the content owner can be visited by simply tapping on either their name or profile gradient.

The user can add their thoughts to the app via the button on the bottom right corner. Similarly, the users need to provide tags next to their thoughts. Instead of typing their thoughts, the user can also record their voices and share.

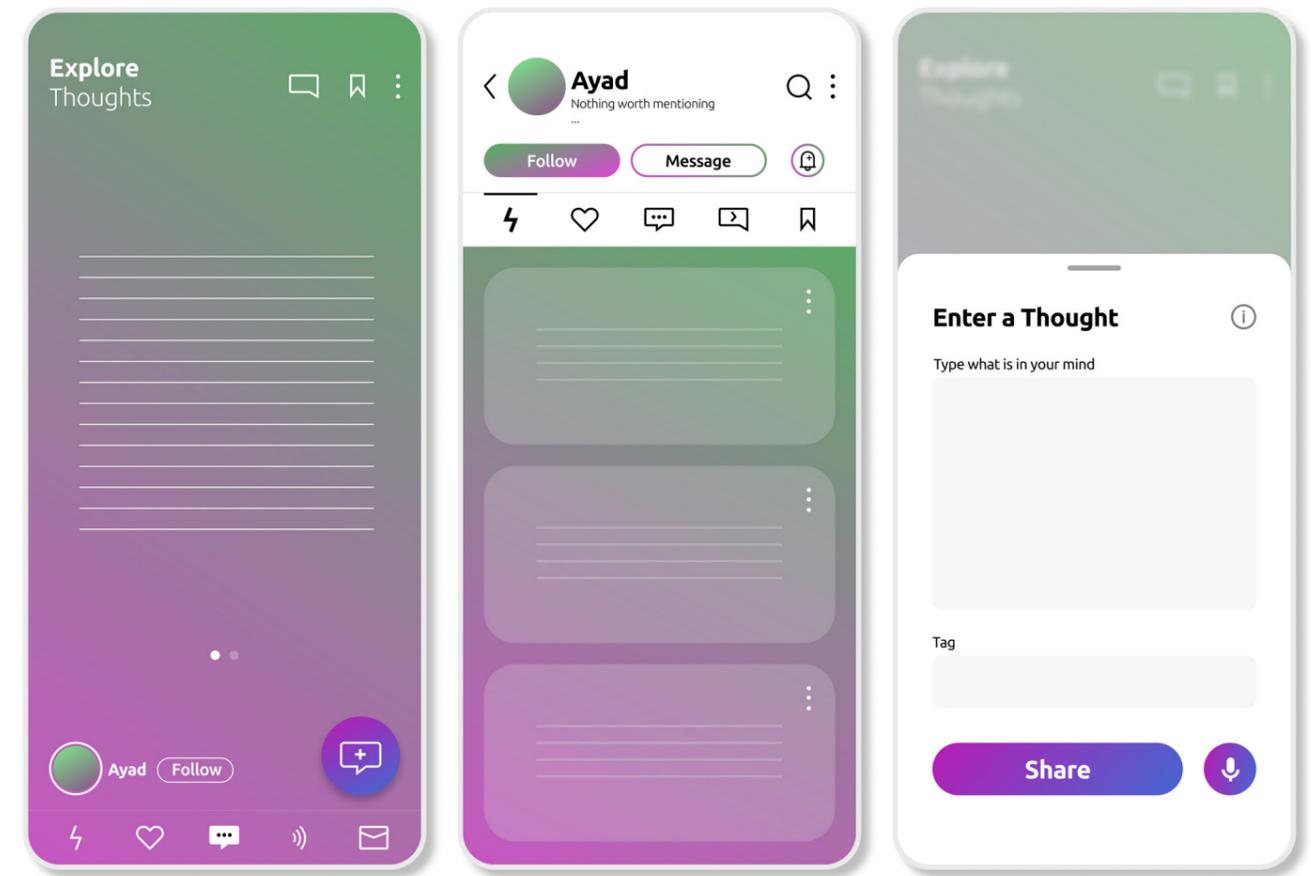


Figure 6.12 Illustrations of (1) viewing a thought content, (2) viewing content owner's profile, and (3) thought entry frame

The content with audio recording involves transcriptions of recordings to make it more accessible.

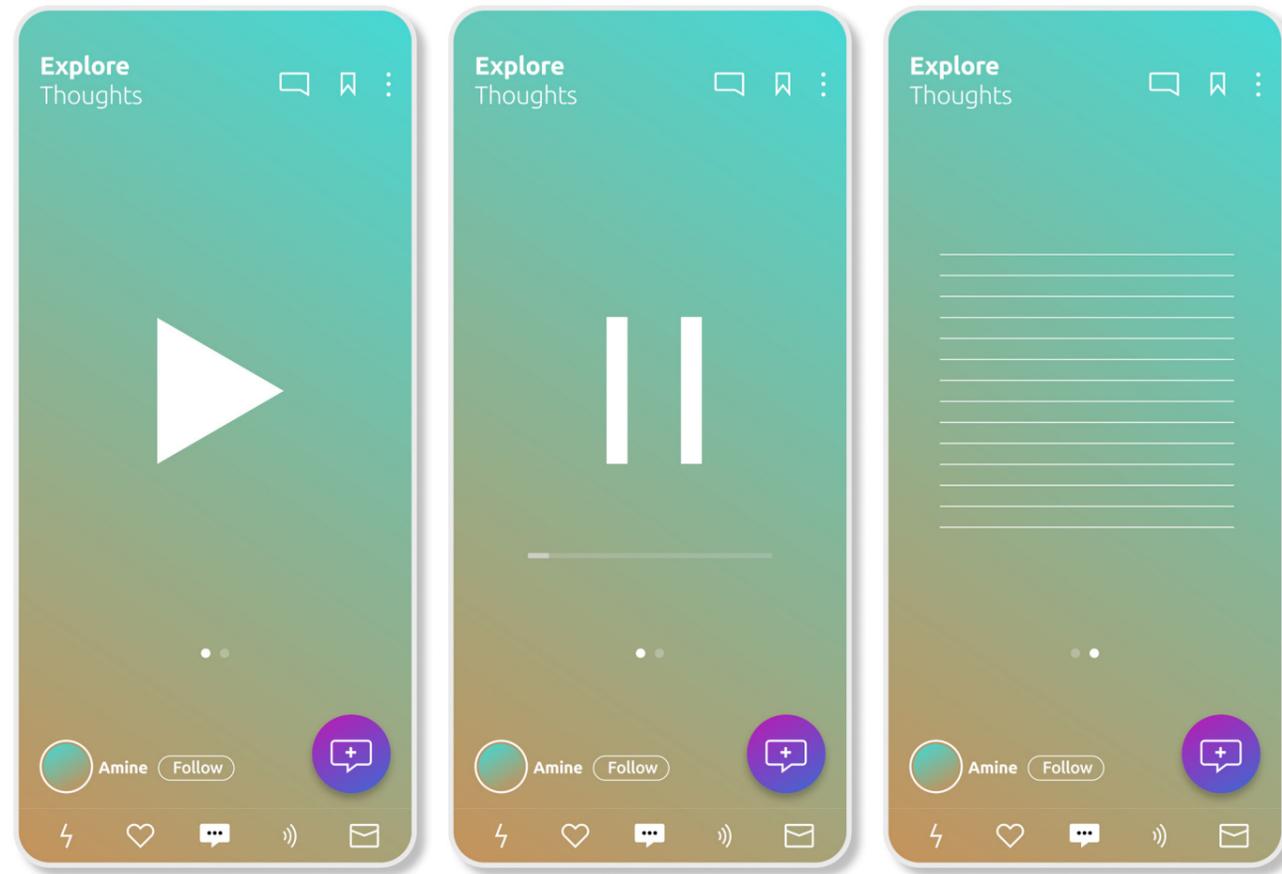


Figure 6.13 Listening to a thought content and accessing its transcription

Explore Talks

The fourth function provides the user with a space to talk to each other and verbally share ideas and opinions. The users can come together and plan a talk. The other users can also join to listen to the conversation, ask questions, or share their opinions. The app allows the user to take notes during the talk when they hear something insightful or worth noting. Besides, talks can be recorded to be listened to by the users who missed a talk. Moreover, during the talk, the user can see the other

listeners who may have a similar interest.

Topics-specific search can be done when looking for talks about specific subjects. The talks happening now appear on the feed with the 'LIVE' indication, and the planned talks indicate the date and time of the conversation. The user can set a reminder for the upcoming talks they are interested in; therefore, they can be notified before the talk starts. Besides, the talks can be added to their schedule by the calendar icon on the planned talk frames (e.g., google calendar). Like the doubts and heart-

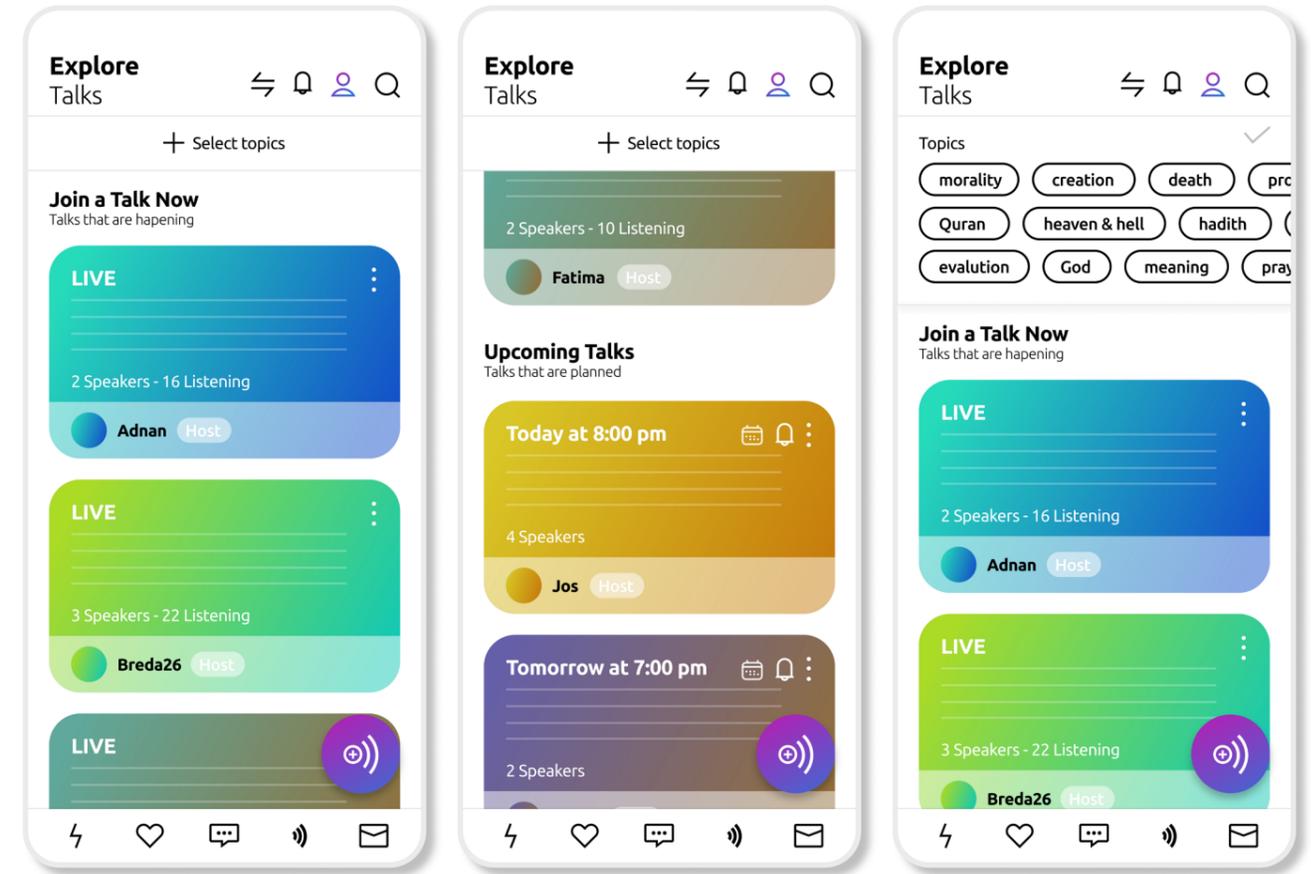


Figure 6.14 The 'Explore Talks' content feed (live and planned talks) and the topic selection menu

warming content feed, the talk content frames contain colour gradients. This time gradients show the host's colours. A gradient frame involves a short description of the talk and information about the host, the number of speakers and listeners.

The user can add a new talk to the app via the button on the bottom right corner. The talks can be set to start now or can be scheduled for a later date. Again, the users need to select topics and add tags.

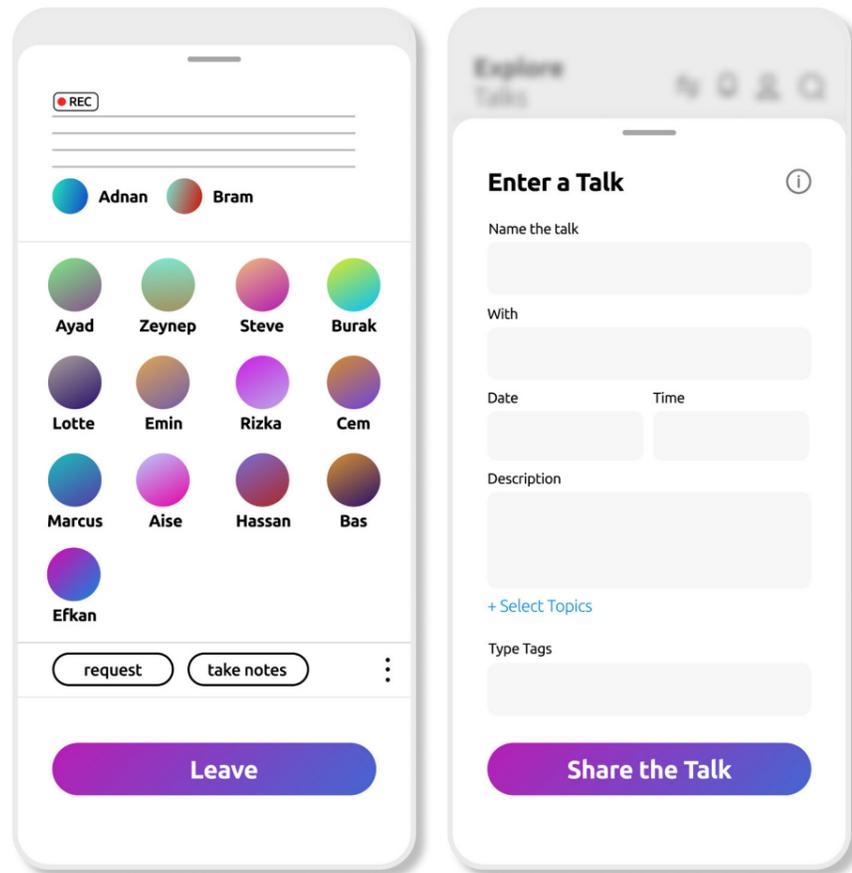


Figure 6.15 Illustrations of (1) a live talk event and (2) talk content entry frame

Faith Swap

The fifth function enables the user to engage more with others' religious faith content. When Faith Swap is on, the app's other features are disabled. This function is about swapping one's profile with another user and immersing in the content to gain insights into the different thought mechanisms and perspectives in a concentrated way. The faith swap can be done in two ways 'Tailored' and 'Shuffled'. The tailored swap means that the system matches one with another user that

commented on doubts on topics that relate to the one's doubts, while the shuffled swap refers to a random match.

Finding a match may take time; therefore, the system indicates this process either on the swap page or around its icon on the page of the doubts, heart-warming, and talk function.

When the profiles are swapped, the remaining time is indicated by a circular time bar around the profile gradient. Within this time, the user can explore the other

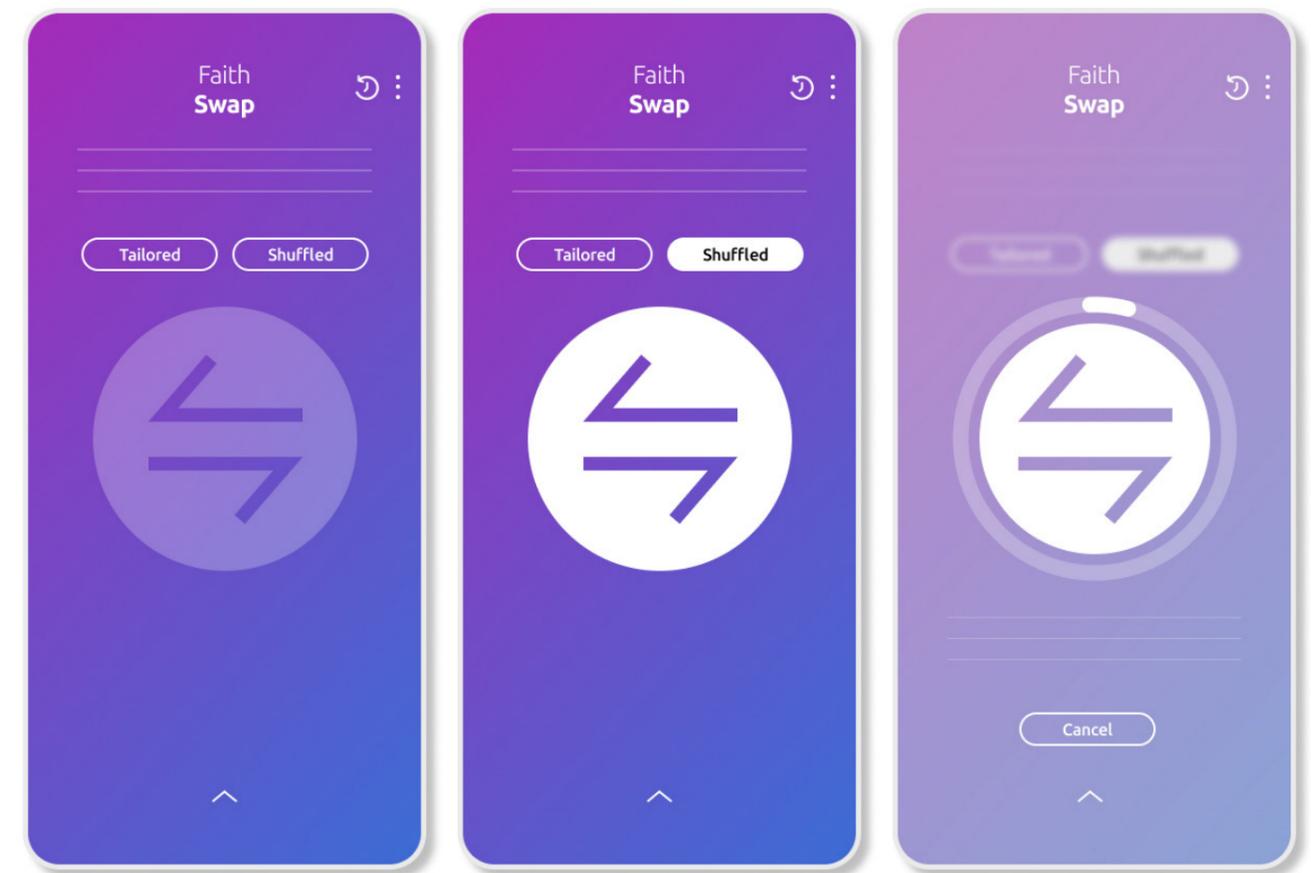


Figure 6.16 Illustrations of 'Faith Swap' frames and a process of starting a search for a shuffled match

person’s doubts, heart-warming content, thoughts, comments, and saved content. During the swap, it is possible to reflect on the observed content via the reflect icon on the top right corner of the page.

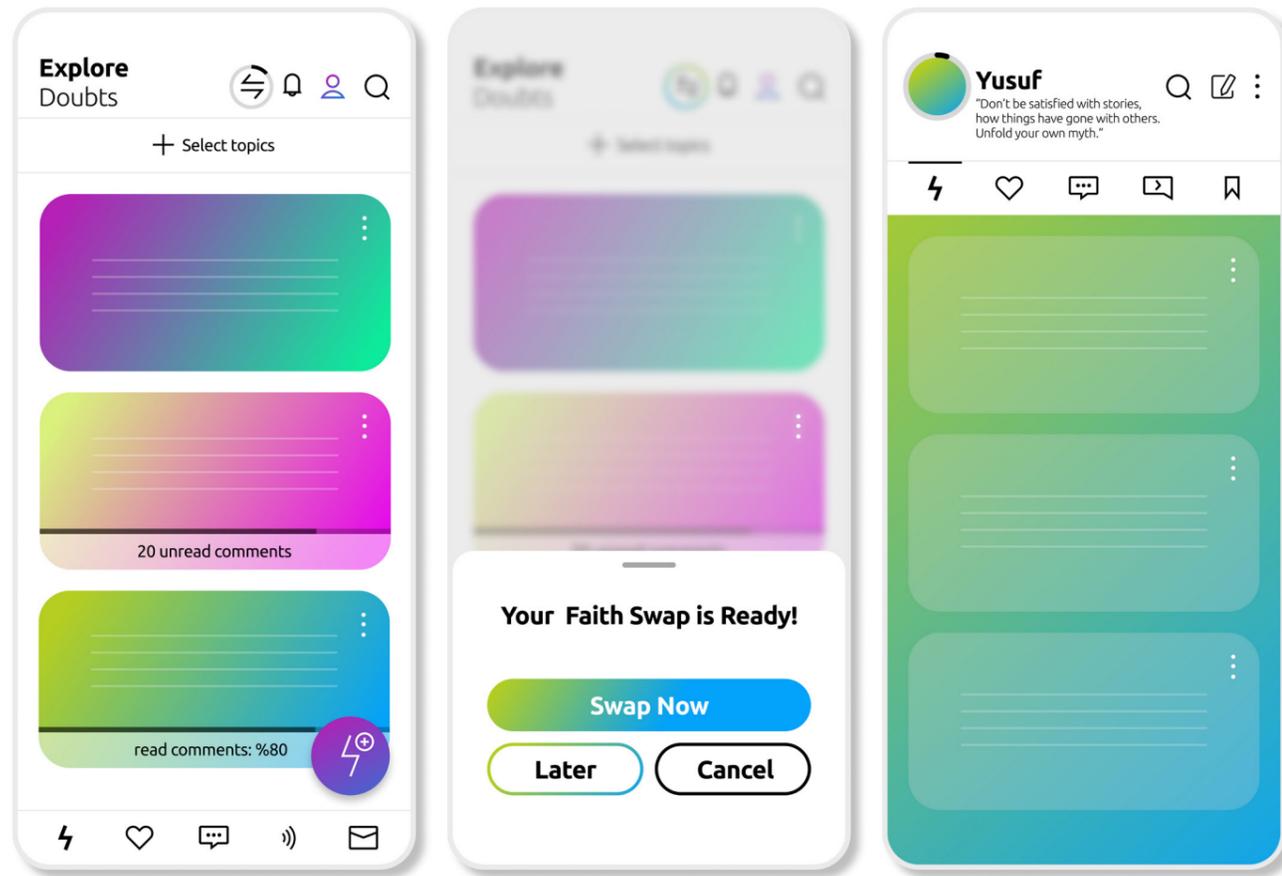


Figure 6.17 Illustrations of (1) progress of 'Faith Swap' search, (2) swap notification, and (3) Swapped profile

User Profile

The sixth main function is the profile section of the app. Here the user keeps their content: doubts, heart-warming content, thoughts, talks, and reflection. The rest of their content (e.g., saved, following etc.) is accessible through the sandwich menu. Next to the personal colour gradient, the users can add content to their bio (e.g., a favourite quote).

If there are new comments to a doubt content, it is indicated with a red circle that

contains the number of recent comments. When one needs more comments and perspectives on their doubt post, the doubt can be pinned as 'burning'; moving to the top and appearing first to others who visit the profile.

When opening one of their own doubts, the user directly accesses the comments they have received. The tension that comes with each doubt can be adjusted using the 'Adjust tension' feature. By receiving various comments and learning about different ways of thinking, the doubts can become

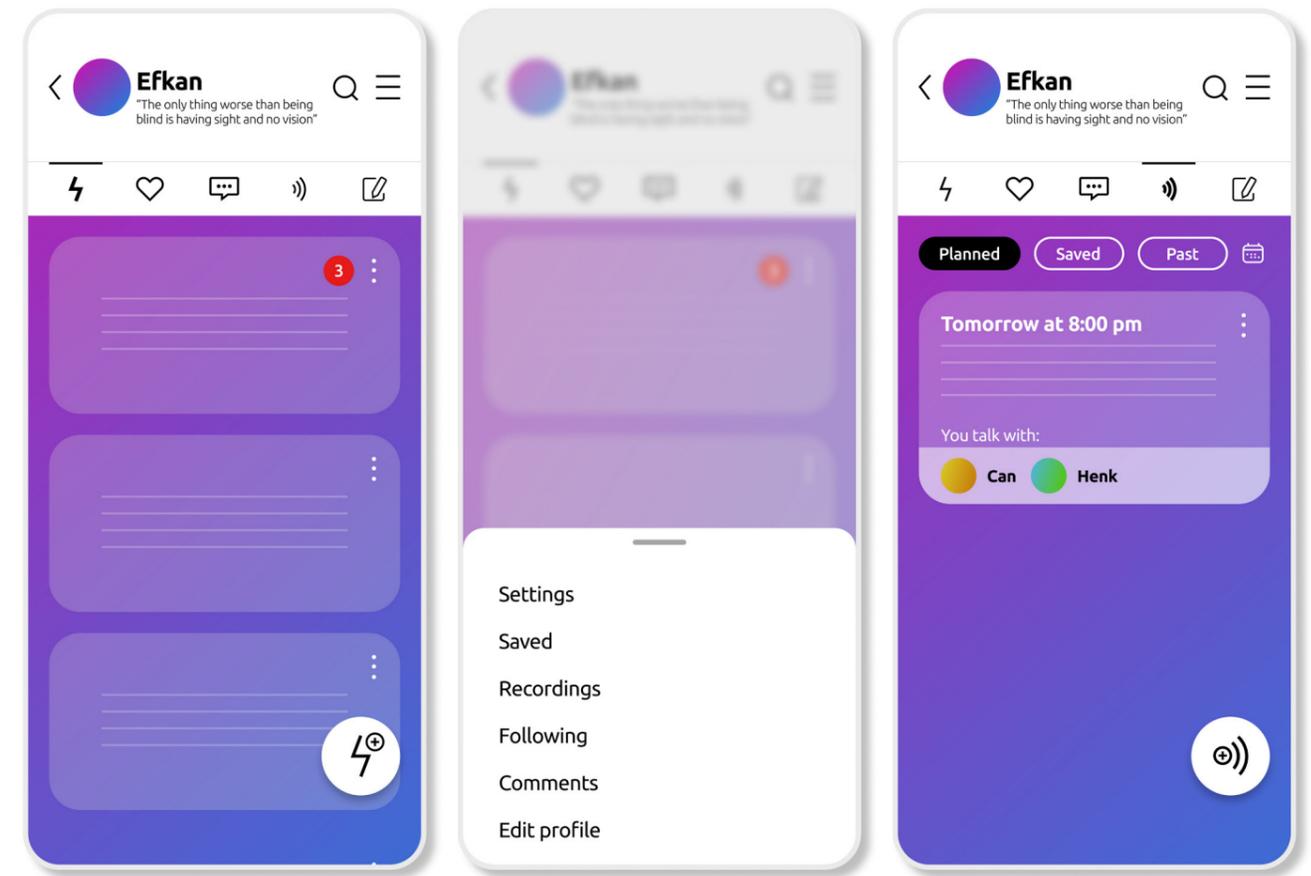


Figure 6.18 Illustrations of (1) comment notification, (2) hamburger menu content, and (3) talk section in the profile

less tense and less disturbing. This feature provides a feeling of progress and control. This feature appears when tapping on the three dots menu of each doubt content. Before any adjustments, the doubt icon has sharp edges; the more the tension is lowered, the softer it becomes. And this change in the tension is shown on the doubt page – the doubt icon on the page gets softer as it is adjusted.

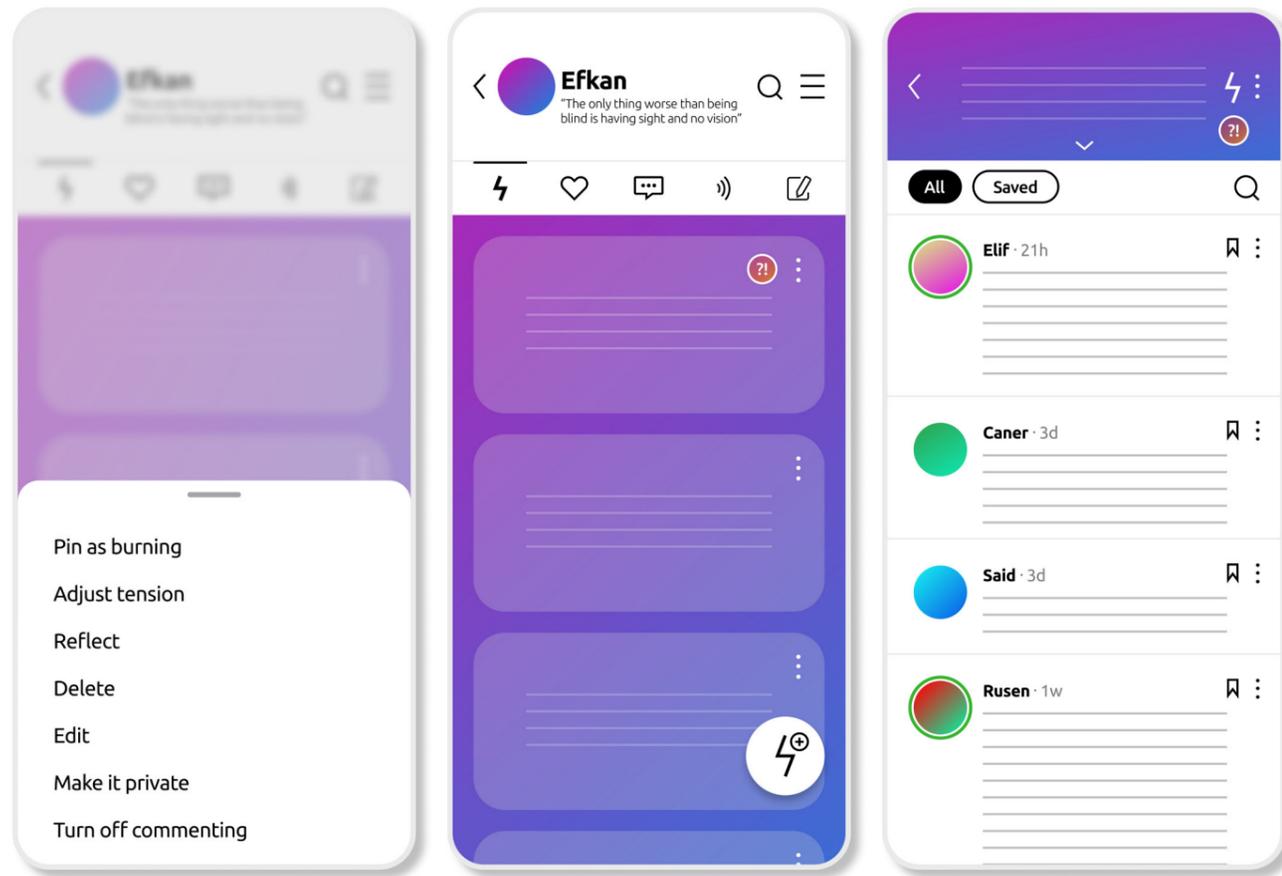


Figure 6.19 Pining a doubt as burning and burning doubt icon appearance

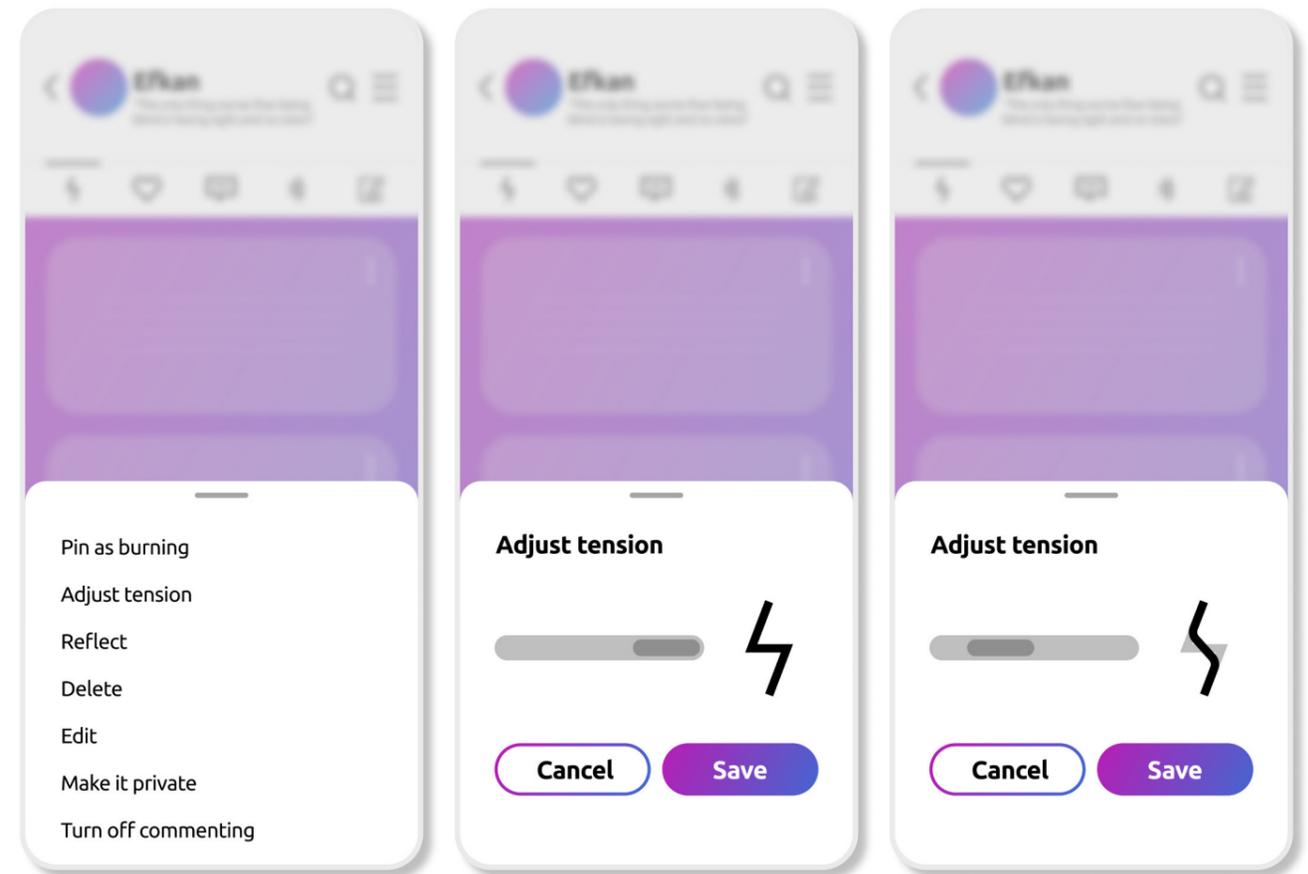


Figure 6.20 An illustration of doubt tension adjustment

Message

This function works like the conventional social media apps' chat menus. The user can search and find people to send direct messages to. Besides, conversation history can also be found here.

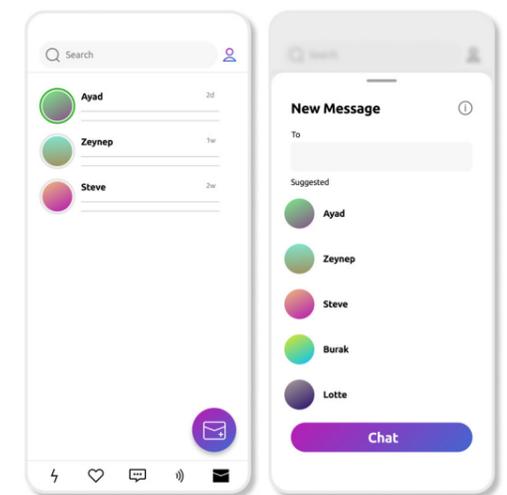


Figure 6.21 Message section

6.5 Initial User Evaluation

A formative user evaluation research was conducted to determine the desirability and functionality of the result of the first iteration of the concept development to inform the design process.

6.5.1 Approach & Participants

The initial online user evaluation research was conducted with three participants via Zoom. Two of the participants were the participants of the primary research study of this project. Besides, they were involved in the creative session, which was conducted as part of the ideation phase. One has a Christian background, and the other person has an Islamic background. The second participant with an Islamic background experienced religious doubts in Turkey. A medium-fidelity prototype with clickable areas was used for the research.

A session plan was created to guide the evaluation session. With the participants' consent, each session was recorded. At the beginning of the test, the participants were reminded of the design goal. Later, a brief introduction of the main functions was made since the app design was comprehensive and had various features in detail. After the introduction, the participants were asked to share their first impressions:

- What is your first impression of the concept?

The detailed explanation of each feature followed. End of the explanation of each feature, the participants were asked about their thoughts and remarks.

- What are your thoughts?

- Is there anything you prefer to be different?

- Is there anything you could think of that would improve your experience?

After elaborating on every function, the participants were asked to share their overall impression of the concept:

- What is your overall impression after hearing all about the concept?

A Miro board was created to take notes during the evaluation interview. Even though the most important remarks were noted during the research study, recordings from each interview were rewatched not to miss any other important feedback from the participants. Moreover, rewatching

the recordings helped to capture relevant quotations. After reworking the recordings, the Miro board material was updated with all the insights. Next to the insights from the participants, comments from the supervisory team were added to the same Miro board.

Table 6.1 Overview of the participants

	Religious Background	Age	Gender m/f/d	Place of Birth and Upbringing
Participant 1	Islam	27	male	Ede / The Netherlands
Participant 2	Islam	35	male	Mersin / Turkey
Participant 3	Christianity	29	female	Middleburg / The Netherlands

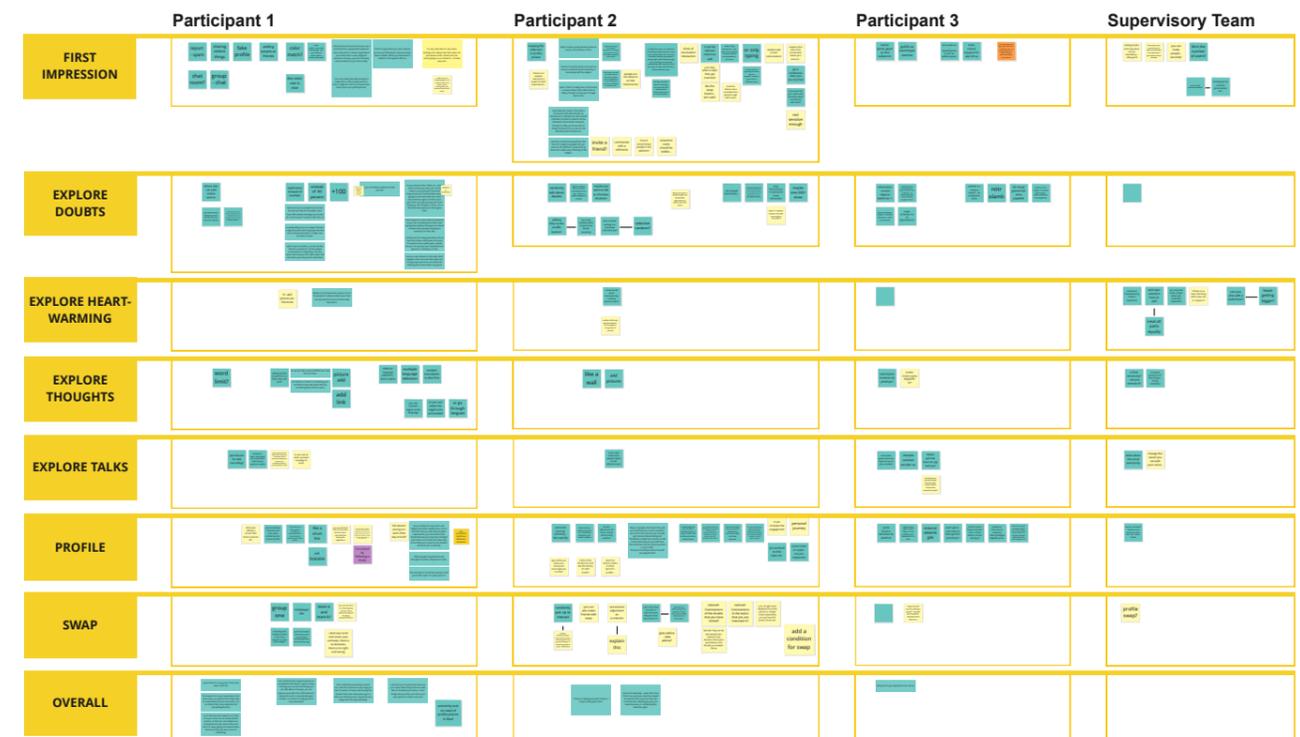


Figure 6.22 An impression of the data collection and analysis on Miro

6.5.2 Key Takeaways

Below, insights gathered from the interviews are listed. 'Possible improvements' involves the recommendations from the participants as well as my implications and ideas. The 'Appreciation' represents the participants' interest in the concept and its functions. The feedback helped to develop the concept further, but not all the insights informed the design improvements.

First Impression

Possible Improvements:

- Reporting the users who share violent content or harass others can be necessary.
- Chat rooms can be helpful in communication with other doubters.
- The reflection in the profile can be private so that others cannot access it. It is very personal.
- There can be a button for instant conversation with another doubter: textual or verbal.
- Adding doubts can be mandatory as a safeguard.

Appreciation:

- The concept was liked by the participants.

"I think it is exactly what you'd want to have as someone who's doubting or has already left the religion."

"I think it is beautiful. If it were out there, I would use it!"

"You made a different, original, and emotional app."

- It was found appropriate not to put a profile picture.

"I think it's good that you don't have to put up a profile picture because what you look like doesn't matter in this specific app."

- The look of the app was found clean and easy to understand.

"It's very clear like it's very clean looking, and I always like that, when it's just obvious and... there's not too much going on, so I think it looks very nice."

- The colour usage was found convenient.

"It makes personalisation neutral."

Explore Doubts

Possible Improvements:

- Users can also add online sources to the doubts they review.
- Number of unread comments can be indicated when it is above a specific number, for example, 100. When under 100, show 'read more' text.
- Indication of unread comments should not be pushy. It should be neutral. It is important not to feel obliged to do something for the user.
- Random talks about doubts can be available.
- A shuffle button can be used for random doubt search.
- The religion filter should be added to all the functions.
- Doubt icon can be reconsidered. It seems people interpret it differently. For example, one participant understood tension as sharpness: being sharp about an idea.

Appreciation:

- The comment history can help understand changes in the views of others.

"You can follow someone in their process"

- It makes it safe if others cannot put comments under one's perspective on

a doubt. One-on-one communication is encouraged.

"It's safer for someone to just see something from their own perspective without having to be afraid of what other people are going to comment on that."

"Keeping things personal level in conversation is nice; otherwise, discussions are going nowhere."

Explore Heart-warming

Possible Improvements:

- Random talks can be enabled about heart-warming, inspiring positive aspects of the religion.
- The name of the function can be reconsidered.
- The topic selection should be added to this section as well. All main functions should be treated equally.

Explore Thoughts

Possible Improvements:

- A word limit may be considered.
- Adding files can be useful when entering a thought, such as pictures, articles, or a picture of a part of a book.
- The necessity of the function should be reconsidered. The content may go out of

context; therefore, the function may lose its relevance.

- The colour gradient can also indicate the person's mood.

Explore Talks

Possible Improvements:

- If people don't feel comfortable asking questions or commenting on a talk verbally, they should be able to type their questions or thoughts.
- It can be enabled to communicate one-on-one during a talk by texting.
- The notes one takes during a talk can go to the personal reflection part.
- The necessity to show the other listeners in the foreground can be reconsidered. Instead, the app can show the questions being asked.
- Vocal anonymity can be considered.

User Profile

Possible Improvements:

- When adding doubt content, adding pictures or links can be possible.
- Making the bio part collapsible can be considered so that one can add more personal content.
- The app can periodically provide a summary of the user's activity; therefore, it will be easier to keep track of personal

journeys. The summary can be a source for reflection.

- Adjust tension makes sense, but it needs to be explained.
- The necessity of the tension adjustment feature should be reconsidered. How can you quantify something spiritual?
- People can be encouraged to keep their doubt content in their profile even after resolving the doubt. Therefore, their progress can keep inspiring others.
- The doubt icon can be the app's logo (when reconsidered).

Faith Swap

Possible Improvements:

- What if one can match with multiple profiles?
- Direct interactions during faith swap can be enabled.
- The tension adjustment can be used as a criterion to find a tailored match.

Overall Impression

Possible Improvements:

- Multiple languages can be selected; therefore, the user can have access to a larger network.
- The languages can be linked to regions.

Appreciation:

- The overall concept was found desirable.

"I think it is really good. I hope it really gets there."

"This is definitely something I would use. I would be very happy to use it if I were having doubts that I was a few years ago or that I still have now. I would be very happy with this app."

"I think there's a good variety of things you can do and talk about and ways you can express yourself in this app without it being too much or overwhelming or unclear, so I think it's really good. I'm very impressed."

- The user interface design was found clean and easy to use by the participants.

"The layout is just very clean and looks very good and easy to understand, easy to work with. I think that's very important for something like this."

- The use of colours as personal expression was appreciated.

"I like the colour aspects, and I like that you chose not to do a profile picture so that you can be as anonymous as you want to be."

6.6 Further Development

After considering all the feedback (including feedback from the project supervisors), various decisions were made to develop the mobile application design further. First, it was decided to reduce the number of functions and remove the 'Explore Thoughts' section. It was because the content of 'Explore Thoughts' could become irrelevant; it could be out of the scope of what's strived to be accomplished with the design.

Another function that was eliminated was 'Faith Swap'. Faith Swap was a feature that offered a limiting, indirect interaction with other users. It is limiting because the function gave certain hours to the user to examine other users' faith content while blocking all the other app functions. The user doesn't need such a function to go and visit another person's profile and examine their content. The comprehensiveness of this examination should be up to the user, and there should not be a time-bound.

Next, the use of scale to determine tension that arises from doubts in the app was removed. It was decided not to quantify spiritual terms such as faith, doubt, or an inspirational aspect of one's religion. Instead, a feature that provides information about their activities in the app was considered (i.e., Your Wrap-up).

After many iterations on the naming of the app, it was decided to call the app 'Explore Your Perspective'. The doubt icon was changed from a thunder-like illustration to

a circle with a dot inside. It represents a bug in a whole as well as a pupil for perspective. Therefore, this icon is also used as the logo of the app.



Figure 6.23 Change of the doubt icon

The 'Explore Heart-warming' was changed to 'Explore Inspiration'. Content-wise, each section was enriched: For the 'Explore Doubts' section, the user has an option to reach doubts that they are following under the 'Followed' tab, and the 'Suggested' tab provides doubts that the system recommends according to the user's search history, and the 'Shuffled' tab offers access to random doubts in the app. For the 'Explore Inspiration' section, the sub-sections are 'Pinned' inspirations, 'Suggested', and 'Shuffled' inspirations. A similar structure was also considered for the 'Explore Talks' section. Besides these sub-sections, a new talk feature was added. The 'One-on-one' talk feature enables the user to find others to have a conversation with. The user can post a 'One-on-one' talk with a brief explanation of the topic that they want to talk about. Later, other users can request to join the conversation.

The topic selection feature was also added to the 'Explore Inspiration' section. Moreover, the interaction with the content

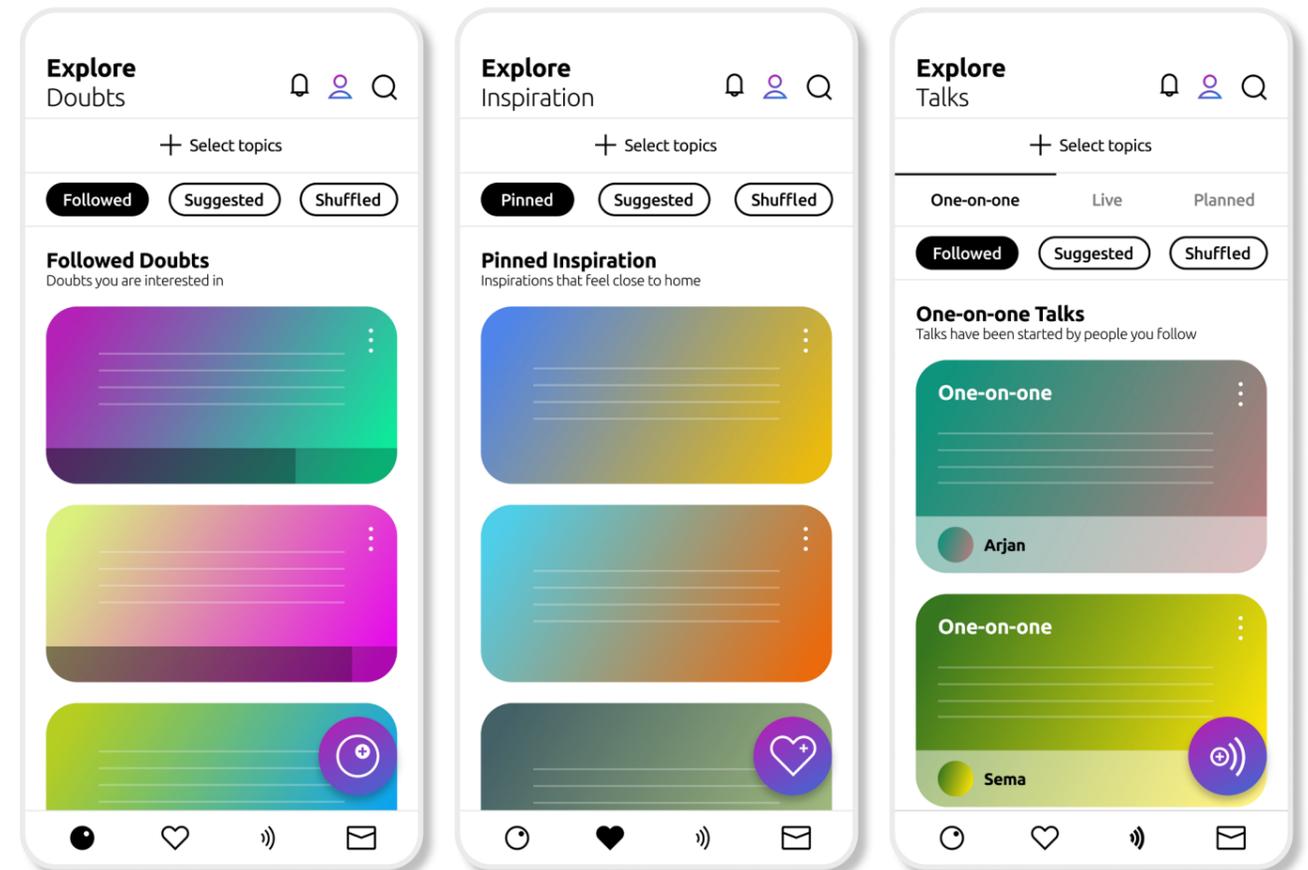


Figure 6.24 Illustrations of various content options

in the 'Explore Inspiration' became identical to the 'Explore Doubts' section; the product shouldn't underestimate the importance of positive experiences compared to doubts.

The comment process bar was revised. It was decided not to place any numeric or textual feedback on the process bar to make the users feel obliged. The user can control how much of their content they want other people to see when their profile is visited; they can review their profile as others to check the content they let others see. Anonymity is key in this product. The user can stay private not only with their personal

information but also with their voice. Since the user can interact with others verbally, the user is given an option to change their voice on the app upon registering the app.

6.7 Usability Testing

This research study aims to observe how the user interacts with the product and assess the usability of the user interface. The design proposal contains several menus and sub-menus accompanied by various features.

Research Questions:

1. How understandable is the user interface for the user to obtain desired output?
2. What are the flaws and opportunities in the user interface?

6.7.1 Participants

Three participants were recruited through convenience sampling. Due to the project's sensitivity, it was decided that user representatives with experience using social media apps on mobile phones were sufficient for the usability testing. The participants must have adequate English knowledge to complete the study.

6.7.2 Prototype

A Mid-fidelity clickable prototype made in Figma was used for the usability testing. Instead of real doubts or inspiration content, placeholders (rows of grey lines) were used. This aspect of the prototype helped make the participants comfortable with criticising the interface since fully functional prototypes may cause the participants to be hesitant to criticise the product as their feedback will not change anything (Lazar et al., 2017). The prototype was operated by users on their computers while having the interface fit in an actual mobile phone size template on the screen. The participants utilised the circular, semi-transparent cursor of Figma as a projection of their fingertips.

6.7.3 Procedure

Before the online study (via Zoom), a brief introduction of the concept was provided without revealing details. The participants were reminded that they were not being tested; they were testing the interface. They were also encouraged to think aloud

while performing the tests. This was found appropriate since the study didn't measure the time required to complete tasks. There were 24 tasks in total (See Appendix J) which covered the four key sections of the app: (1) Explore Doubts, (2) Explore Inspiration, (3) Explore Talks, and (4) Profile. Each section was tested separately, and a semi-structured interview followed upon completion of the section-specific tasks. In the end, the participants were asked to share their overall experience using the interface. Interview questions asked after each section:

1. How would you describe your interaction with the app regarding the tasks you have completed in this section?
2. Is there anything you could think of that would make the usage better?

Pilot Test

A pilot session was conducted with one extra participant, and the session helped improve the research set-up. The pilot test was treated as one of the primary tests; the feedback received was used to formulate new requirements.

6.7.4 Results and Adjustments

The participants completed almost all the tasks, and the product was used in the expected ways. Overall, the interface functioned clearly with ease of use for the participants. The layout was found clean. Despite the app's complexity, it was easy for the participants to navigate it.

Table 6.2 The overview of the participants

	Age	Gender m/f/d	Social media apps used on mobile phone
Pilot Participant	24	female	WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, Messenger
Participant 1	29	female	WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest
Participant 2	27	female	WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook
Participant 3	34	male	WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Behance

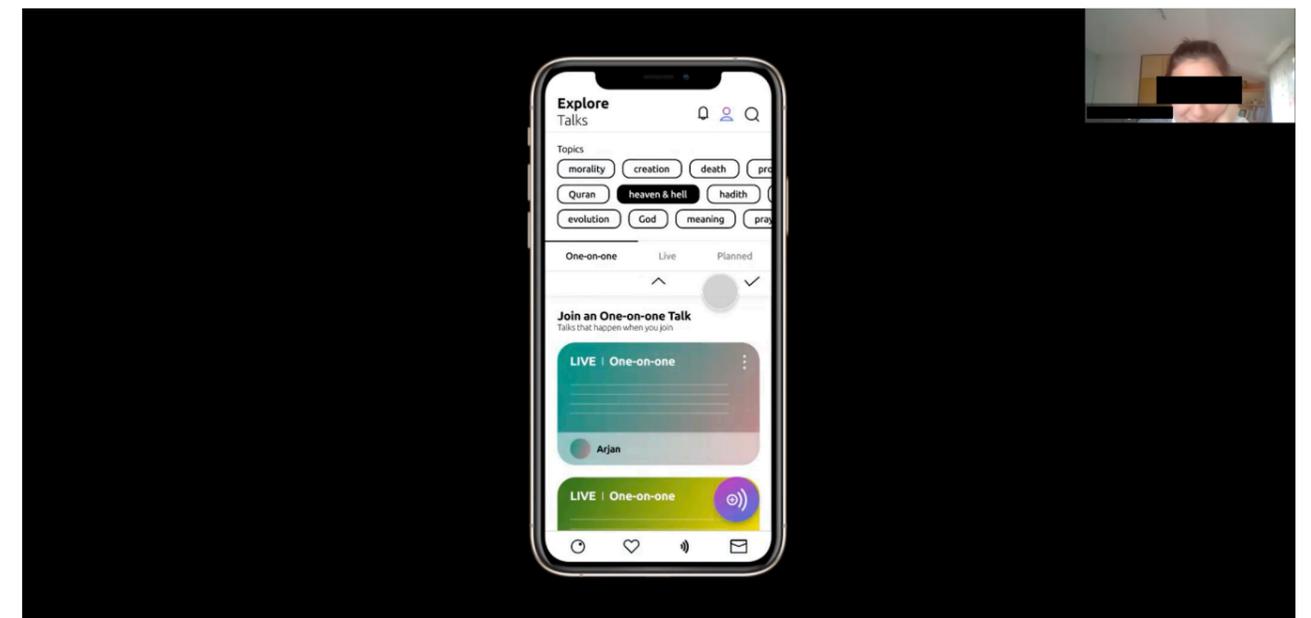


Figure 6.25 A participant testing the interface

Explore Doubts

In this section, two tasks couldn't be completed. The first error occurred when a participant was asked to complete task number 4 (You want to learn more about the first doubt you see on the screen, and while browsing the comments, you want to reflect on the doubt. How would you go through with that?). The participant could not select between two items by clicking one of the circles placed at the corners of the frames. Another participant realised the circles, but before doing that, she clicked on the frames to select. The last participant completed the task successfully in his first attempt. It was decided to remove the selection circles and enable users to choose the items by tapping on the frames.

Next, the task two participants had difficulties with was task number 8 (You want to check the doubt among the ones you follow, especially the one you read little comments about. How would you do that?). The participants were expected to recognise the process bar on the doubt content frames and choose a doubt they read the least comments about. Their interaction with a pre-filled (with content) app was a barrier for them to understanding that feature. According to the participants, they would understand what the process bar stands for if they were to start using the product from scratch. Moreover, the comment process bar positioned in the frame where people see others' comments were also hard to recognise. It could have been because the limited comments were presented; therefore, the progress on the process bar was subtle. It was recommended to make this process bar larger. The design was adjusted accordingly,

and the bar colour was tuned into the colours appearing on the doubt frame.

It was hard for some participants to recognise the "Add Doubt" button due to its colour blend with the colourful doubt frames. Adding a white gradient rectangle above the navigation bar was suggested, which could help the button pop up. This suggestion was utilised to improve visibility.

When the participants searched for doubts about different topics, all of them removed the topic tags from the top bar by clicking on the tags. It was clear for them how to clear up their search because they were used to this interaction, but it was decided to add an "x" icon in the topic tag to make it clear for everyone.

There were different opinions regarding the shuffle button, which helped the participants get to the following comment when they visited a doubt. Some found it confusing to have a shuffle button and arrows together; for others, it made sense since it helps to go back to the previous comment when needed. Some indicated that it would be better to have the shuffle button and arrows close to the comment; in the current version, they are too much apart, and it was found hard to relate them to each other.

Therefore, it was decided to keep these elements closer to the comment. Lastly, the current look of the arrangement of the comment element was considered traditional, whereas accessing the comments one by one was something new to the participants. It was decided to rearrange the elements central to the page. It now puts a better emphasis on the

importance of each comment and supports the logic behind the arrangement, which is about the uniqueness of each comment/perspective.

Explore Inspiration

All the tasks in this section were completed successfully by all the participants. One of the comments was to add a written description of the tabs/sections people find when they visit someone else's profile. The changes were made accordingly. This suggestion was regarding task number 12 (You want to see the profile of the person who you have just reported, especially the other comments which that person gave. How would you do that?). One of the participants asked what happens if a comment contains multiple history items. The current design shows only one item. This aspect was improved by adding a swipe function to the text when reviewing history items. Some participants pointed out that the icon for Inspiration made them first think that that section was about liked/favourite content, as it is in some mainstream apps. One participant said it would be fine as he knows now that the heart icon represents Inspiration. Therefore, it was decided not to make any changes in this regard.

Explore Talks

All the tasks in this section were completed successfully by all the participants. During task number 16, where the participants were asked to send someone a message during a talk, some participants indicated that they expected an interaction when they clicked on the person's profile picture to whom they wanted to send a message. This

tendency was considered, and the profile picture and name turned into clickable items. By tapping on the clickable items, the user accesses the buttons to follow the person or chat with them.

User Profile

All the tasks in this section were completed successfully by all the participants. The name of the feature that provides information about the user's activities in the app, 'Your Wrap-up', was found not to fit well. Instead, one of the suggestions was considered, and the name was changed to 'Activity History'. After completing task number 21 (You have a planned talk with Jos and Hakan tomorrow at 8.00 pm; due to your illness, you want to delete the talk. How would you do that?), some participants suggested adding another option next to delete. It was said that deleting a talk without notice can be mean to the other people in the talk. Therefore, the "Withdraw" function was added.

6.8 Conclusion

The concept development phase consists of extensive research studies. Each study informed the design in a different respect. The benchmark study helped structure the app in a way that people are familiar with; the initial user evaluation interviews validated the desirability of the concept and provided valuable insights for development; the adjustments based on the usability testing improved the interface in terms of operation and clarity. All these insights were utilised in the creation of the final design.



FINAL DESIGN

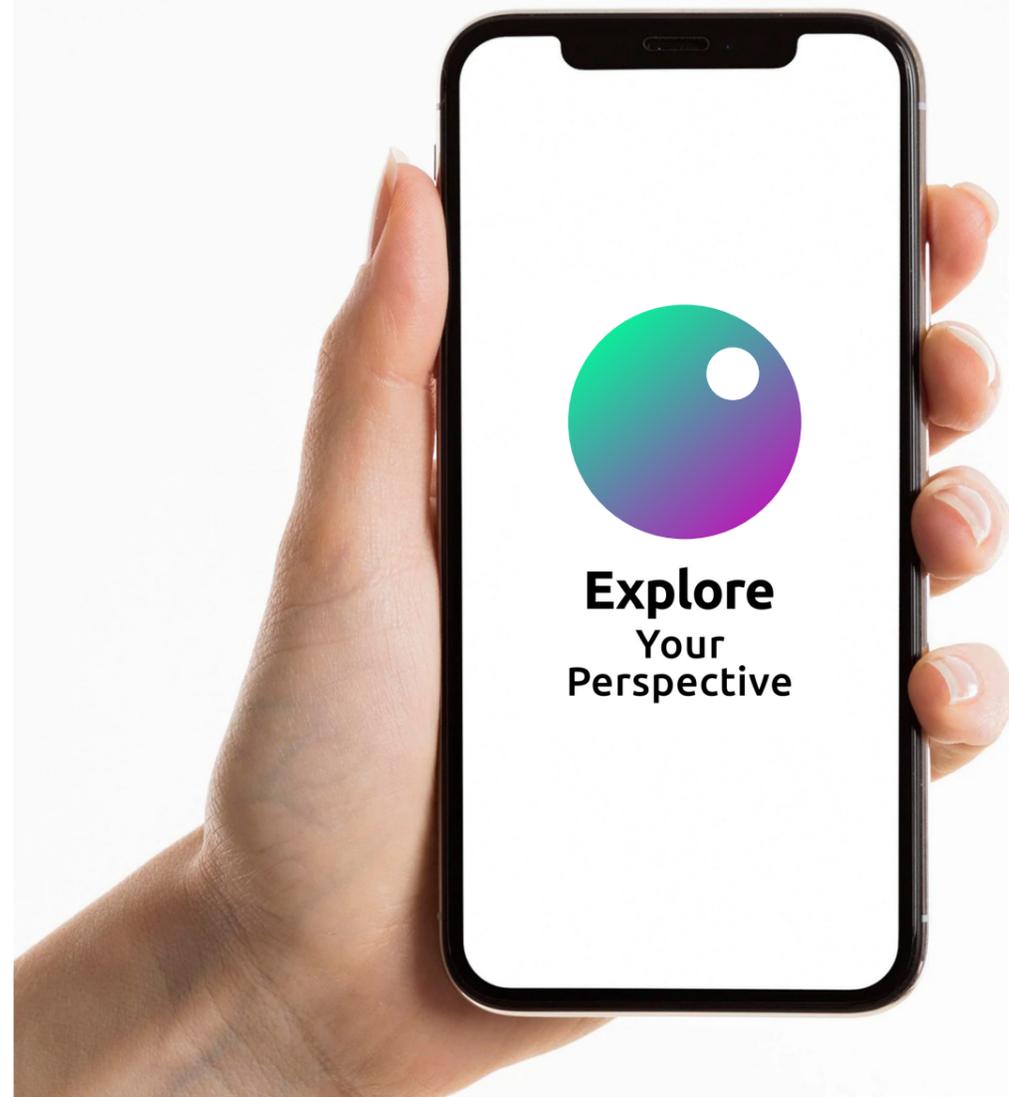
This chapter presents the final design outcome: Explore Your Perspective, and its features in detail. The chapter starts with the overview of the final product. Then the product's main functions and features are explained.

7.1 Design Overview

'Explore Your Perspective' is a mobile application designed for people doubting some aspect of their religion. The product aims to support people in the exploration of whether they would be at peace with their religious faith by providing them with a safe space to create their own unique understanding of their religion. Due to the similarities in struggles in their religious transition processes, the target users for the application are people with Abrahamic religious backgrounds (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) in the Netherlands.

The app connects people who doubt their religion and help them to share their experiences and opinions and learn from each other. The exploration that the product offers does not limit to searching for opinions for one's doubts or discovering that of others; it also provides a space to explore what others find inspiring about their religion. Thus, the app aims to balance the tension that comes with doubting. The product contains various functions and features to support people in their transition process.

Figure 7.1 The starting frame of the app



7.2 Design Details Discovering

The Explore Your Perspective app is easily accessible to the target audience. People who are doubting some aspect of their religion usually go online to find answers to resolve their doubts. Thanks to the relevant keyword usage, the app's website can be found easily when one is searching for content about religious questions. The website contains information about the app and its purpose. Visitors can see the reviews from the people who had experience with the product and access the download links.

Positive Start

The potential users of the app are welcomed in the app with a short description that explains briefly what the design solution offers to them. This introduction consists of three frames: The first frame aims to comfort the users by acknowledging and validating their critical stance about their religion; The second frame illustrates the collective nature of the platform and puts emphasis on the aspect of safety; The last page of the introduction highlights the goal of the product implicitly and how to get there.

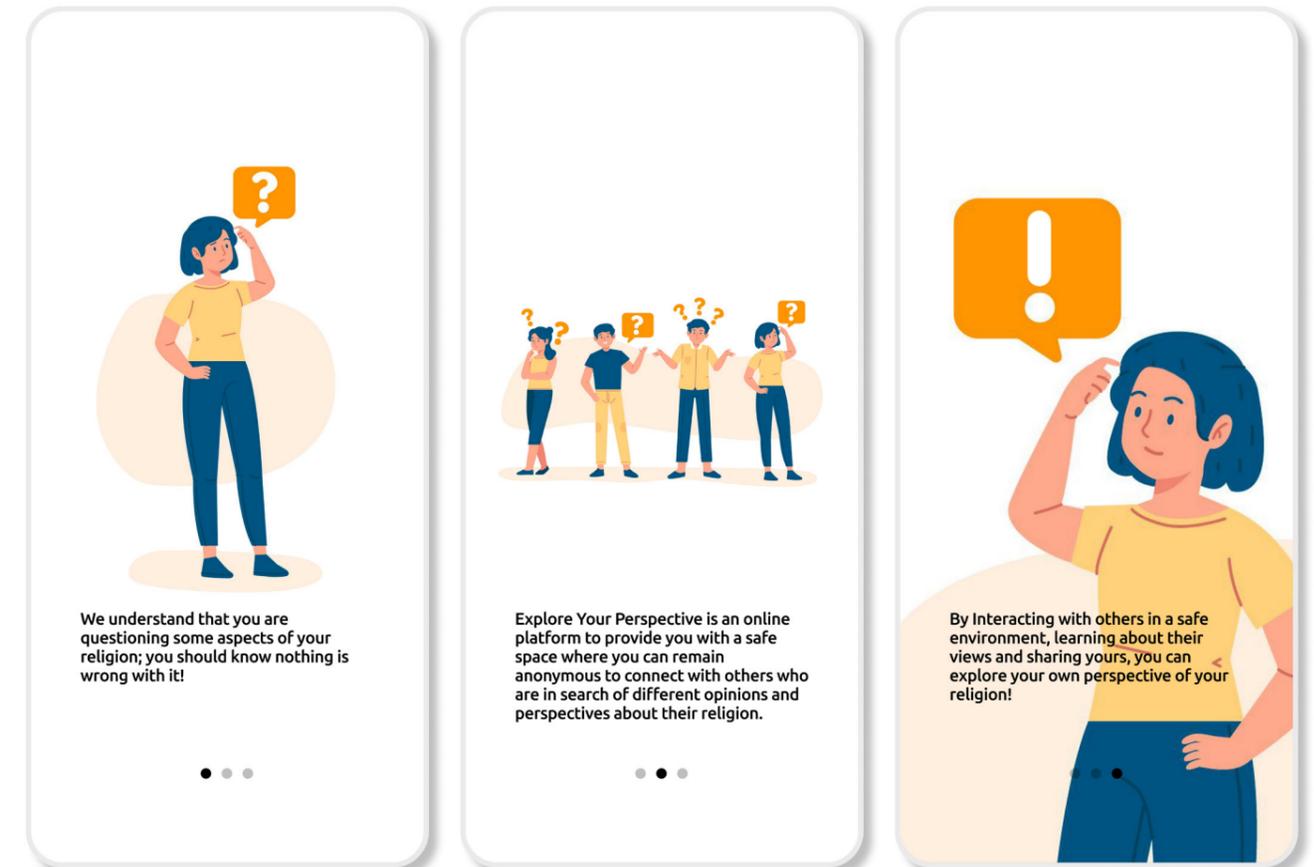


Figure 7.2 The introduction frames of the app

Personalisation & Anonymity

After the introduction frames, the user is asked to sign-up and register in the app. An optional indication of religious background follows the sign-up. This step can help the app optimise the search settings for the user according to their religious background. They are free to skip this step. Next, since anonymity in the platform is very important, the user is asked to enter a public name. The user can also add biographical content that says something about them, a quote from a favourite quote or a personal note.

In the next step, the user learns about colour customisation in the app. The colour representation is one of the protective measures to enable a safe environment for people to be active in the app. Next to their public names, each user can choose a colour gradient consisting of two colours. There is no need to upload a profile picture; the system generates one from the user's selected colours. After the colour selection, as another protective measure, the users are asked if they want to edit their voices when verbally communicating with other users on the platform.

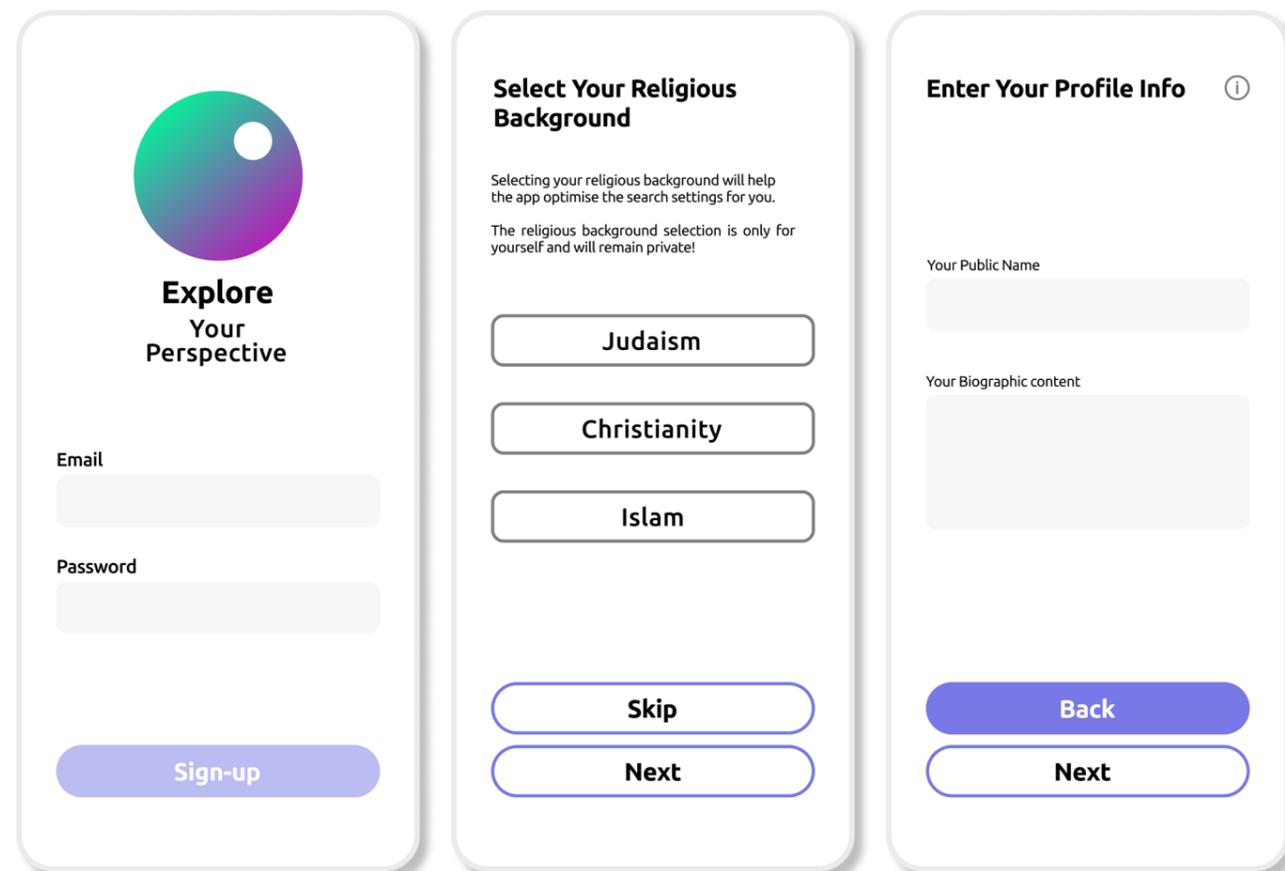


Figure 7.3 The registration, optional religious background selection, and profile entry frames

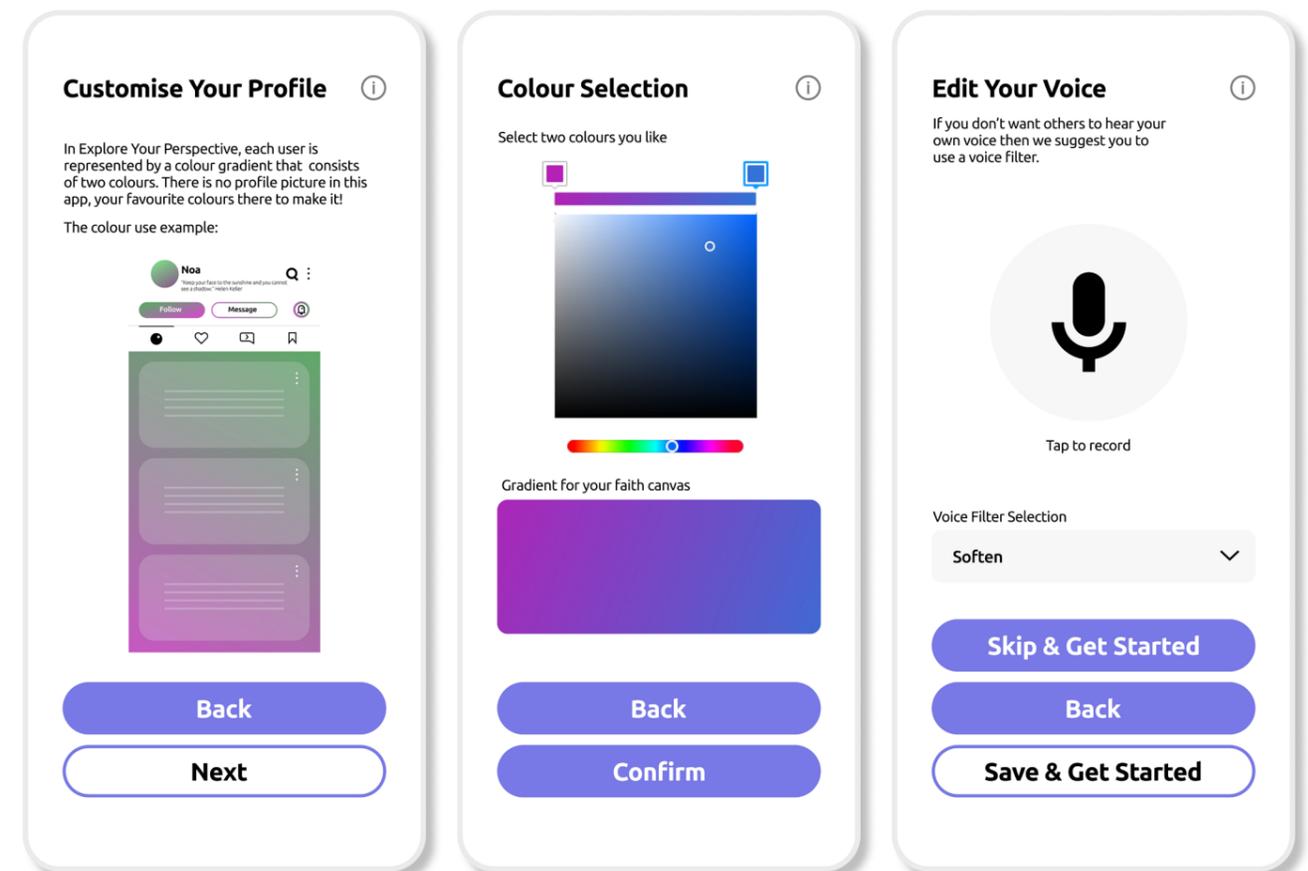


Figure 7.4 The colour customisation and voice edit

Explore Doubts

'Explore Doubts' is one of the main functions of the application. In this part of the app, the user can discover other people's religious doubts and what others think critically about their religion. The 'Explore Doubts' contains three sections: 'Followed', 'Suggested', and 'Shuffled'. The user can follow doubts they are interested in; these doubts are accessible under the 'Followed' section. The process bar indicates how many of the comments entered for a certain doubt are read by the user. When the bar is complete, it means there are no

new comments to read. The 'Suggested' doubt section provides the user to explore relevant content based on their search history. This feature helps the user explore more opinions and viewpoints they might find insightful and interesting. Furthermore, the 'Shuffled' section offers a random doubt discovery to access even more perspectives that might help the user formulate their unique views on their religion.

When tapping on one of the doubts, first, the user accesses the detailed description of the doubt. The user can read or listen (with an embedded text-to-speech reader)

to the content. The user can reach the comments by sliding the doubt description up. The comments are viewed one by one with a shuffle button; there is no chronological order. The user can add their opinion of a doubt they view through the button on the bottom right corner of the screen. In addition, the user can reflect on doubts or any of the comments they find interesting by tapping on the reflection button positioned above the comment entry button. As part of the personalisation approach of the product, every content entry button (except the ones in the profile) has the user's representing colour gradient

on it. Besides, As the user reads comments, the linear process bar below the 'Comments' and the 'Online Sources' buttons fills up and shows how many of the comments the user has read.

Next to the comments, the user can view the online sources regarding the doubts. These online sources provide more perspectives to the doubt owner and the doubt visitors. The doubt owner or other users can enter online sources.

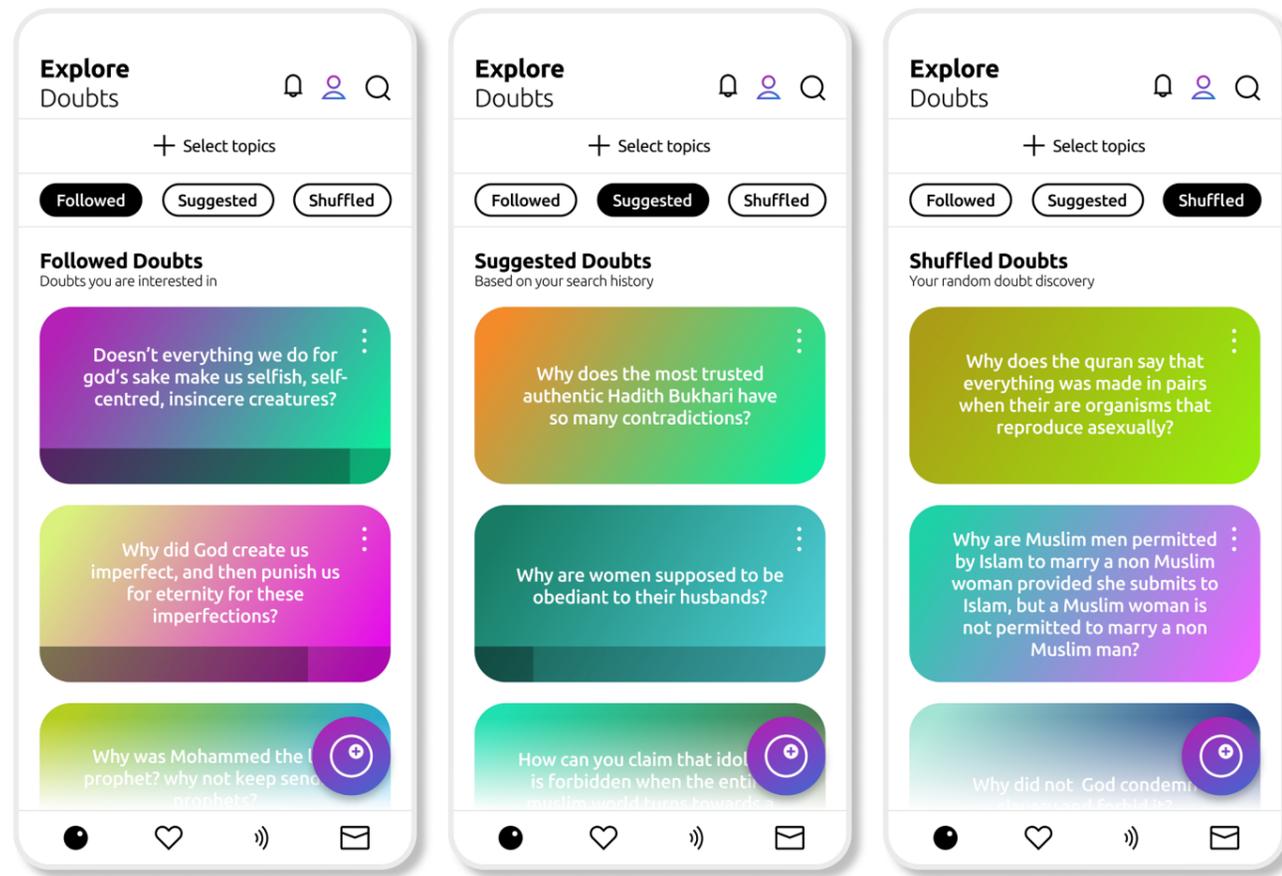


Figure 7.5 The three sections of the 'Explore Doubts' function

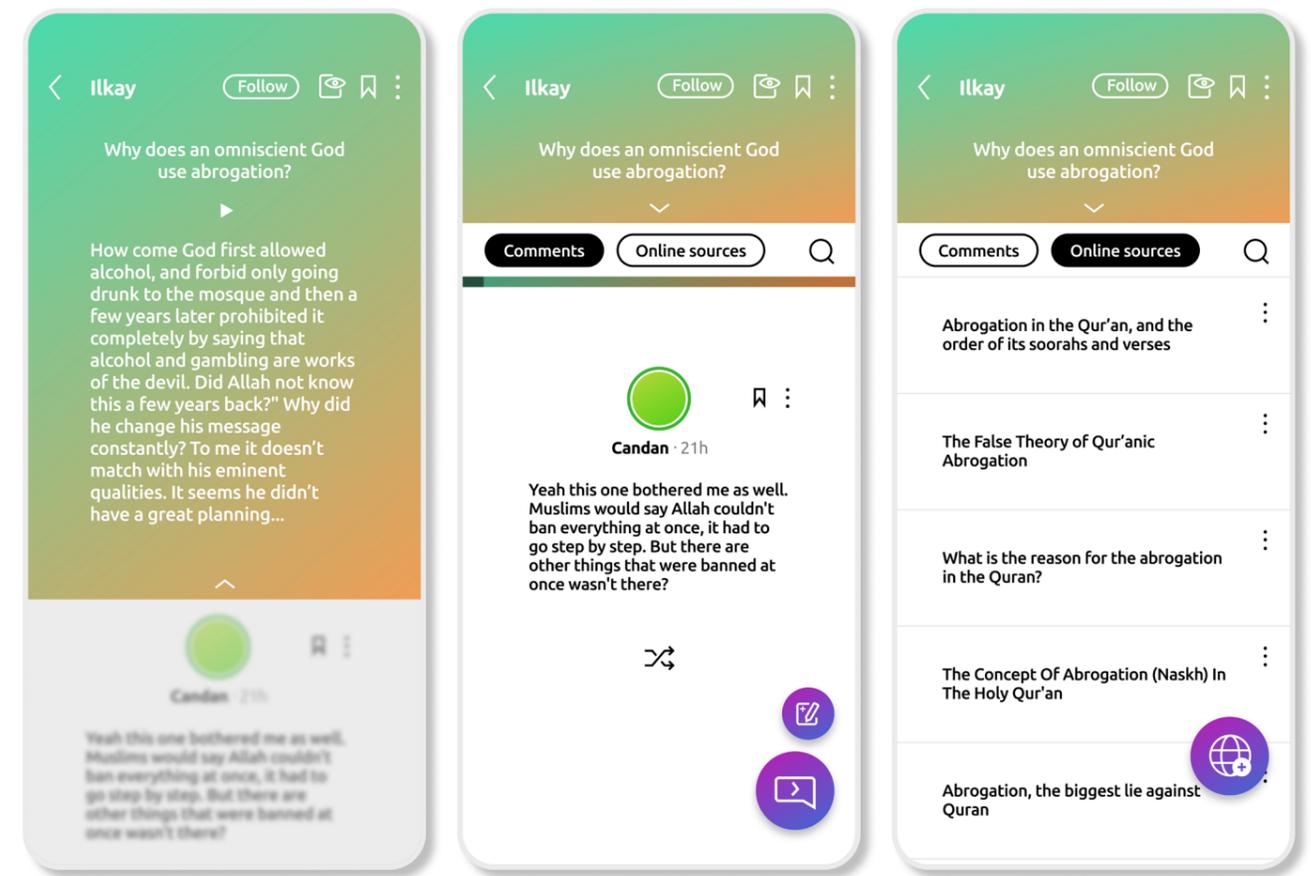


Figure 7.6 Viewing a doubt content posted by Ilkay

Explore Inspiration

The 'Explore Inspiration' provides the user with a space to discover others' positive religious experiences and what they find inspiring about their religion. Like the 'Explore Doubts' part of the app, The Explore Inspiration also has three sections: 'Pinned', 'Suggested', and 'Shuffled'. While the suggested and shuffled sections work the same way in the 'Explore Doubts' part, the pinned section serves a different purpose. The 'Pinned' section is for the others' inspiration that resonates with the user; these are the inspirational contents

that feel close to the heart. The process bar works the same way it functions for the doubt content.

When tapping on one of the inspirational contents, the user first views the detailed description of the inspiration. The owner of the inspirational content can also add visuals to make others understand better what they mean with that particular inspirational aspect of their religion. The user can also review comments and online sources here. If the user feels the need, they can share their opinion about the inspiration and add a comment. Besides,

the reflection option is also available for inspirational content. Moreover, the user can pin inspirational content by tapping on the pin icon on the top right corner of the screen.

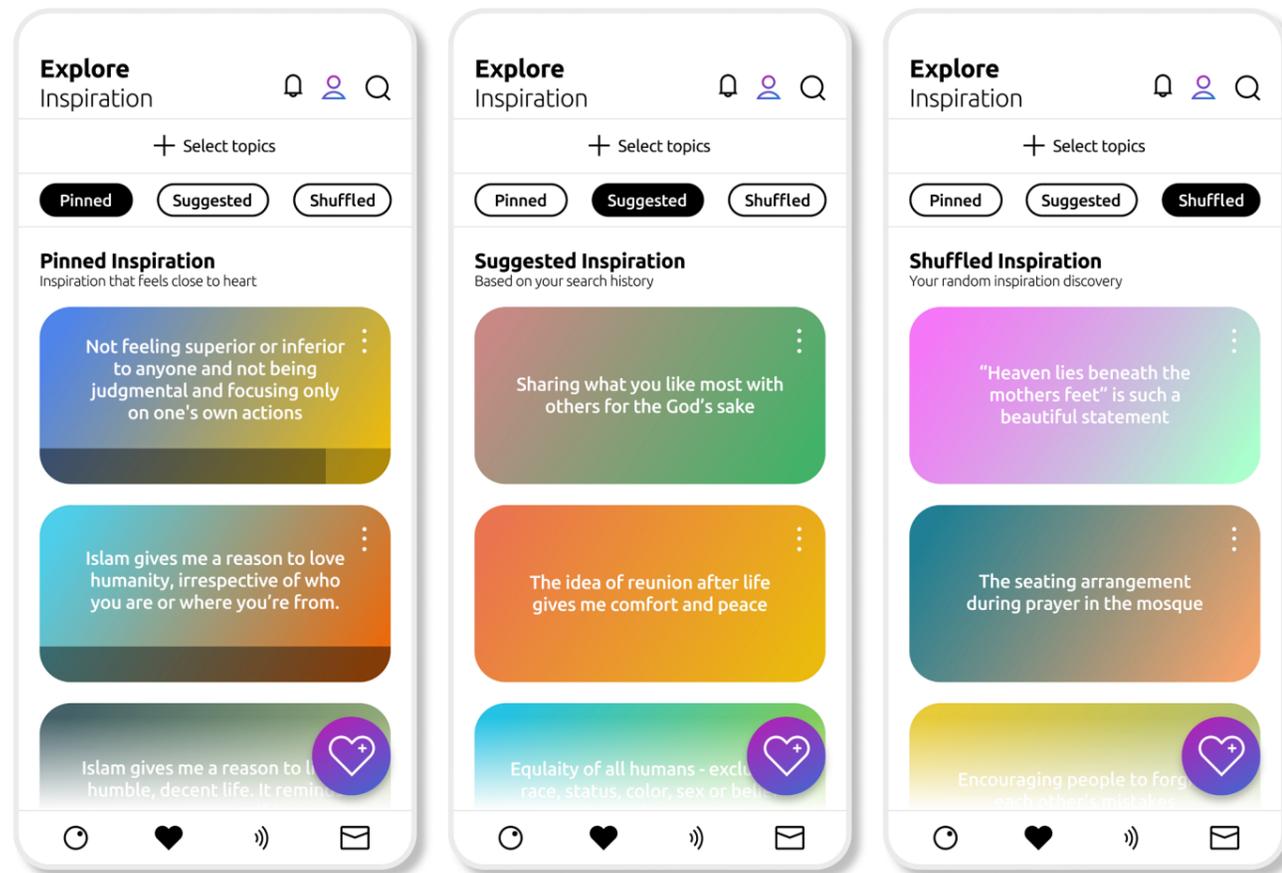


Figure 7.7 The three sections of the 'Explore Inspiration' function

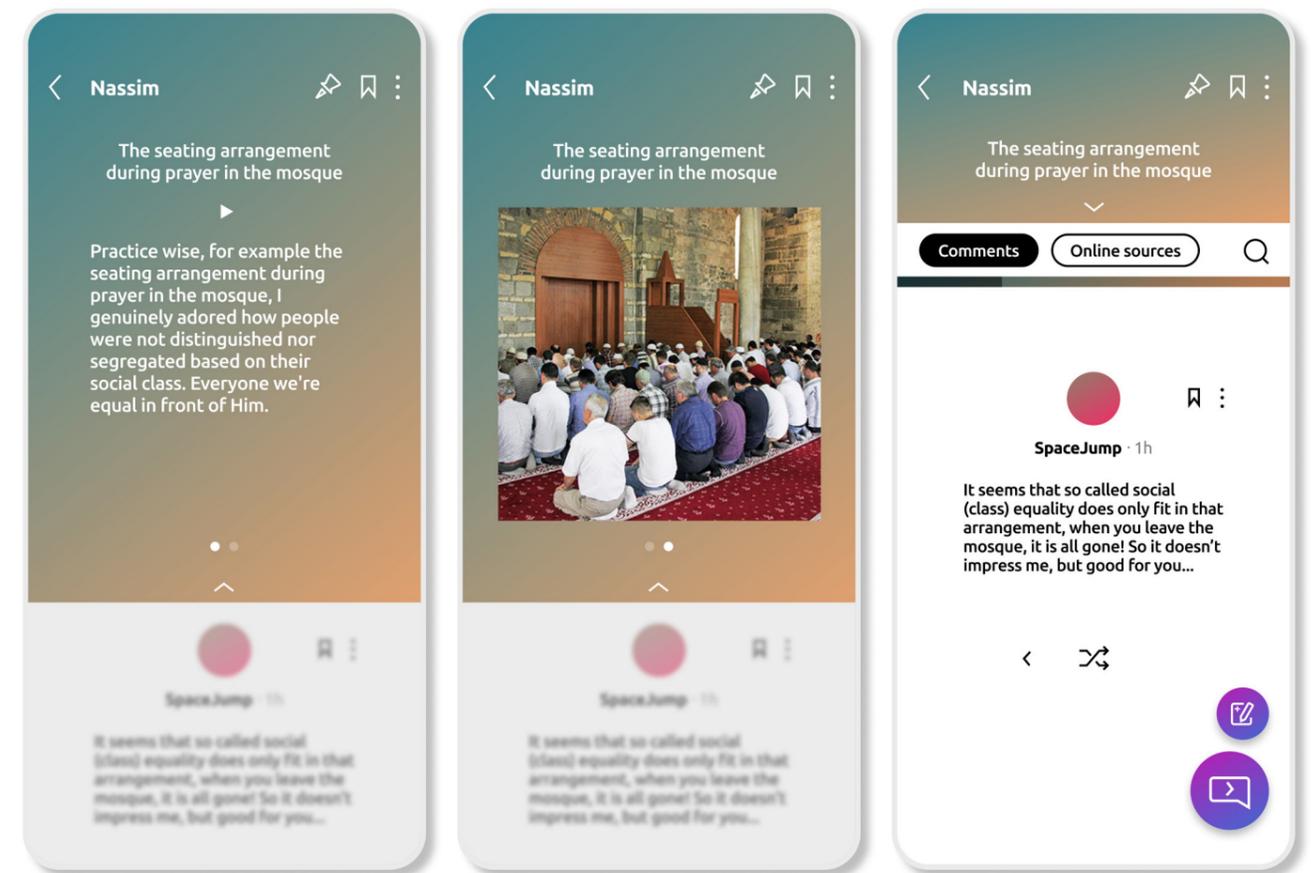


Figure 7.8 Viewing an inspirational content posted by Nassim

Explore Talks

Another key function of the app is the 'Explore Talks'. In this section, the user can verbally communicate with others to discuss specific topics and exchange ideas and opinions. The 'Explore Talks' contains several content sections. There are three main sections, and each main section has three sub-sections. The 'One-on-one' is the first main section. It is the place to find others who are looking for people to talk about specific issues that bother them regarding their religion. The following section is 'Live'. Unlike the One-on-one talks,

the 'Live' talk section provides talks in which multiple people come together to discuss a topic while others can join as listeners. The listeners can ask questions and participate in the discussion. The user can access the scheduled talks via the 'Planned' section. 'Planned' talk content frames contain information about talks: the date, host's name, and the number of speakers. Besides, the user can set a reminder by tapping on the bell icon or adding the planned talk to their schedule (e.g., Google Calendar) via the schedule icon.

As mentioned, each main section has its sub-sections: 'Followed', 'Suggested', and 'Shuffled'. While the 'Followed' sub-sections stand for content posted by people the user is following, the 'Suggested' sub-sections provide content based on the user's search history. And the 'Shuffled' sub-sections offer a random content discovery.

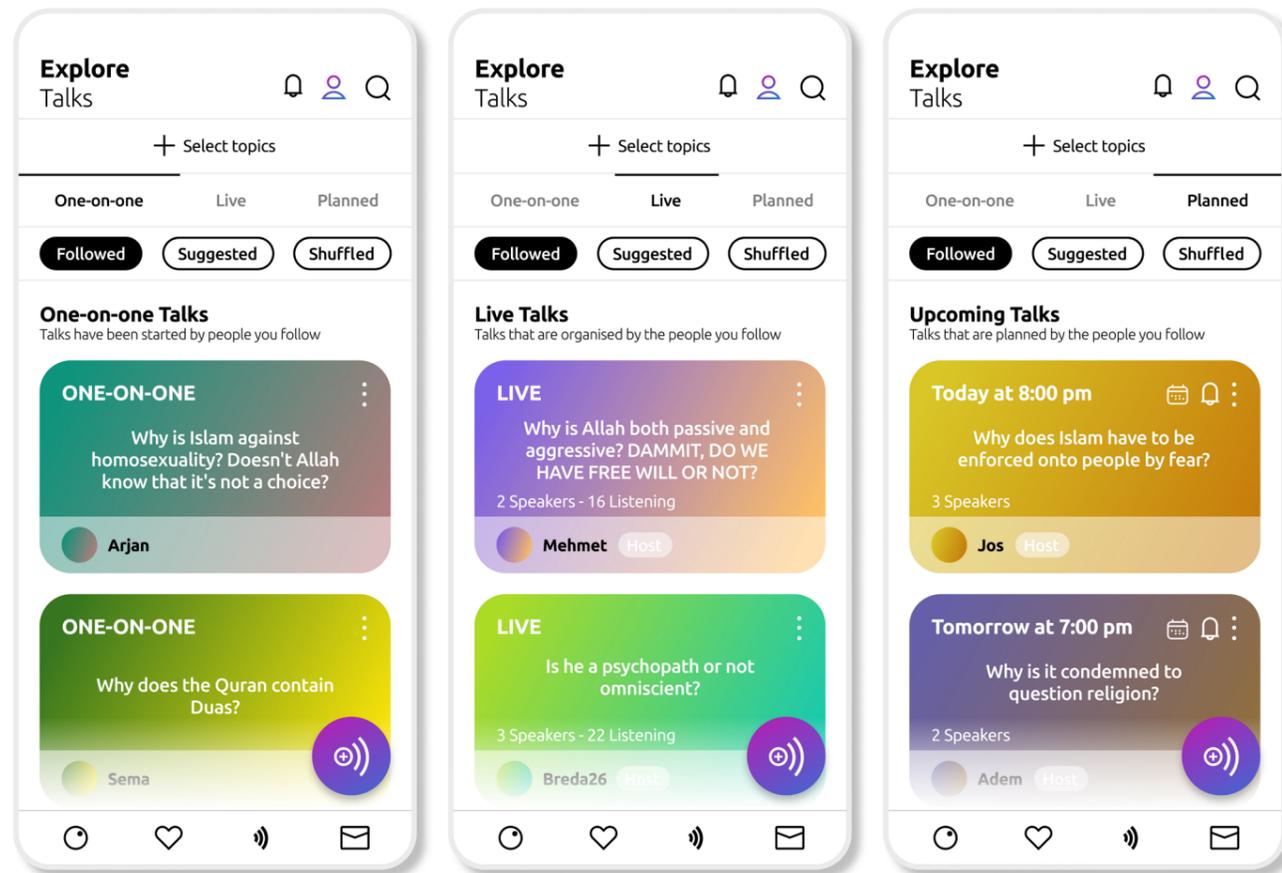


Figure 7.9 The three main sections of the 'Explore Talk' function

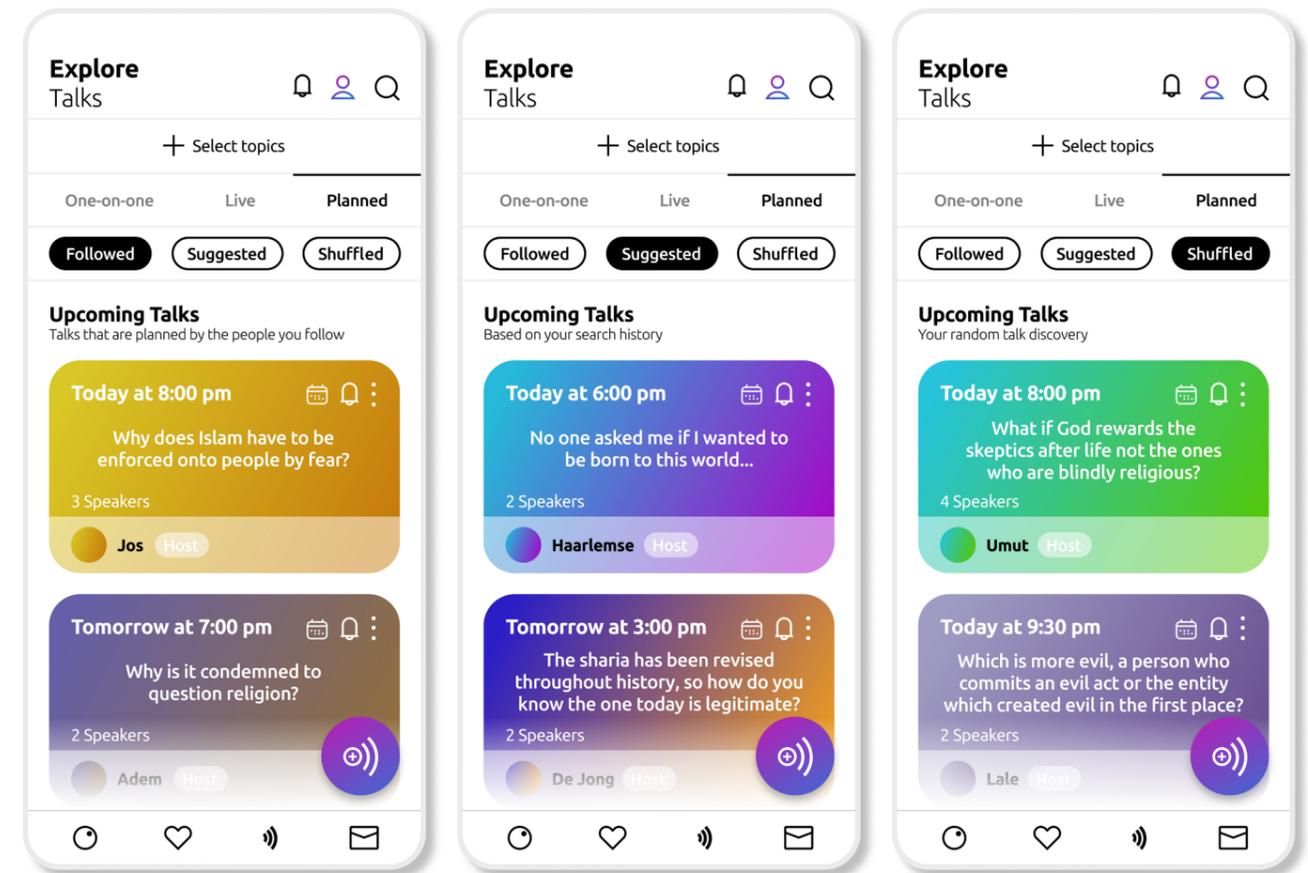


Figure 7.10 The three sub-sections of the 'Planned' section

When tapping on one of the live talks organised by the people that the user follows, an overlay menu appears. The menu contains information about the speakers as well as the listeners. The user can also find a detailed description of the topic in this menu. After joining a talk, the user can listen to the discussion and request to involve in the talk. The app enables peer communication during live talks.

If the user wants to send a message to another listener because of the question that person asked, all the user needs to do is tap on the person's name and then select the 'Chat' button. The user may want to take notes during a talk because of some insightful or interesting comments. In this case, the user can take notes on the app without leaving the talk.

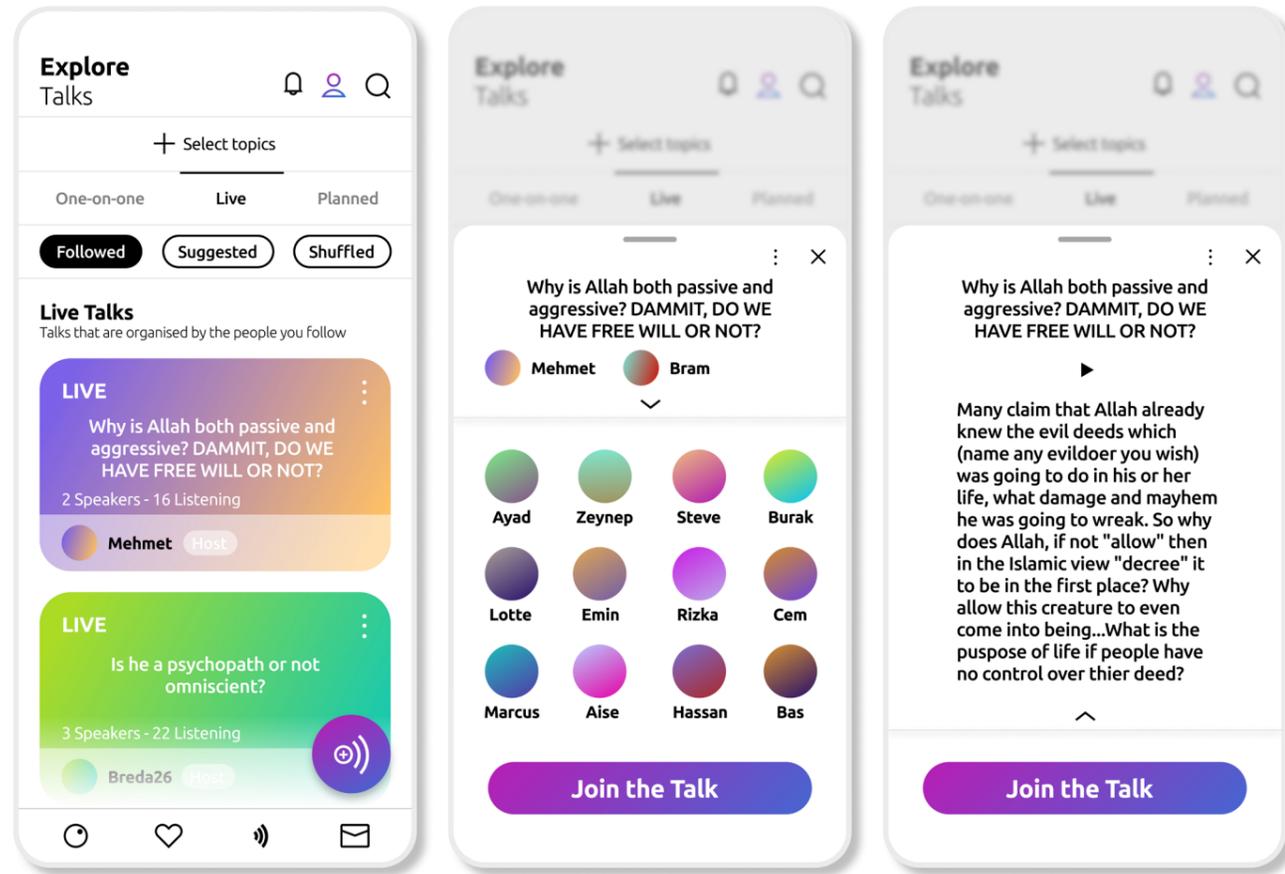


Figure 7.11 Reviewing a live talk

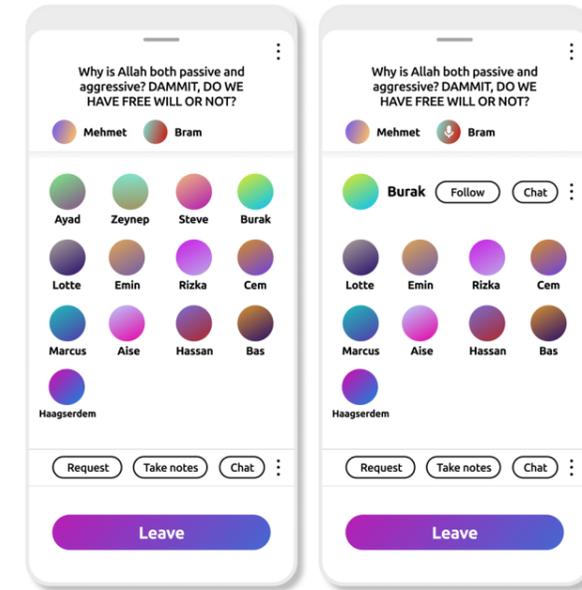


Figure 7.12 Revealing 'Follow' and 'Chat' buttons

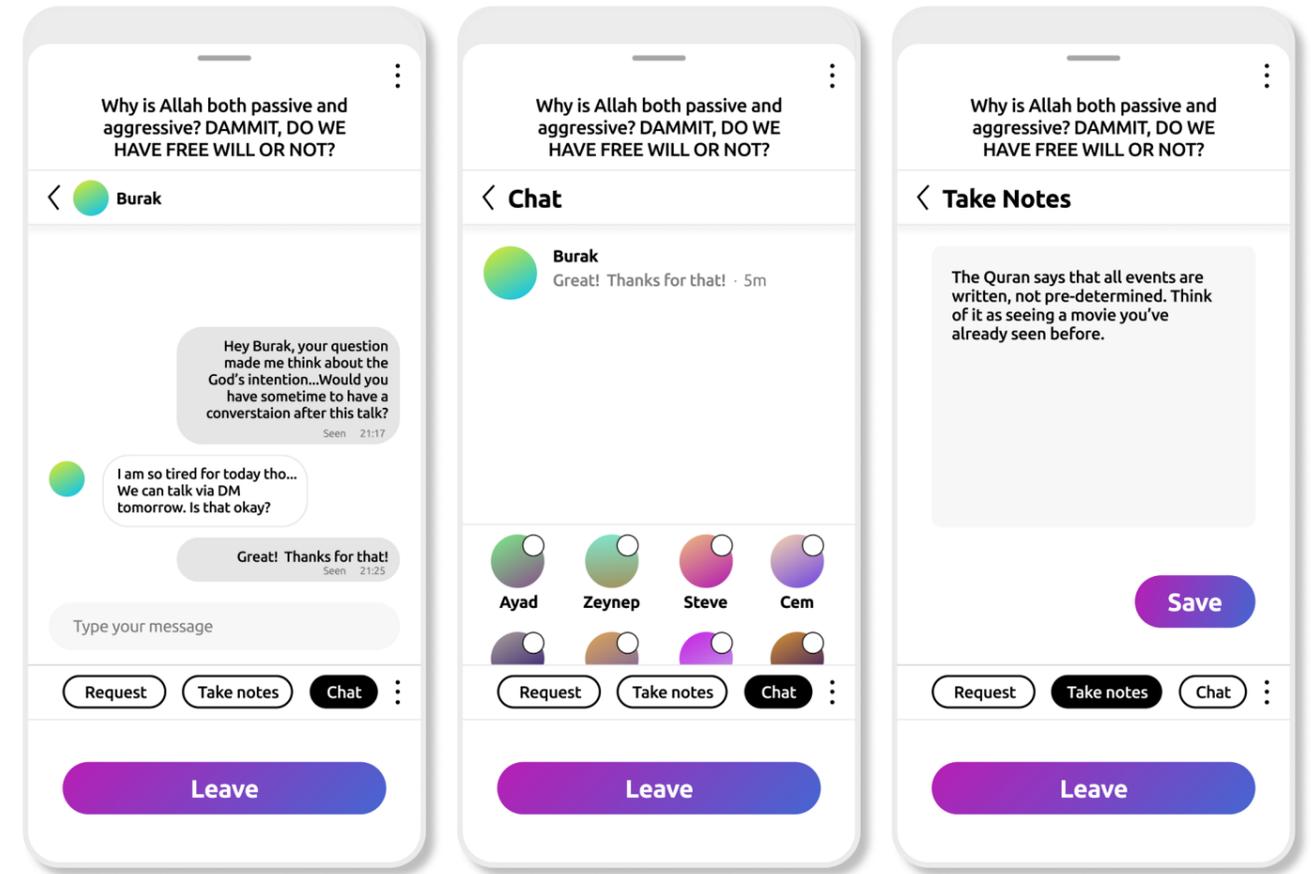


Figure 7.13 Peer communication during a live talk and taking notes

To join a one-on-one talk, the user must send a request to the person who posted the talk. When the request is approved, the user receives a notification. During one-on-one talks, the user can put the dialogue on speaker or mute themselves or send a message to the other person.

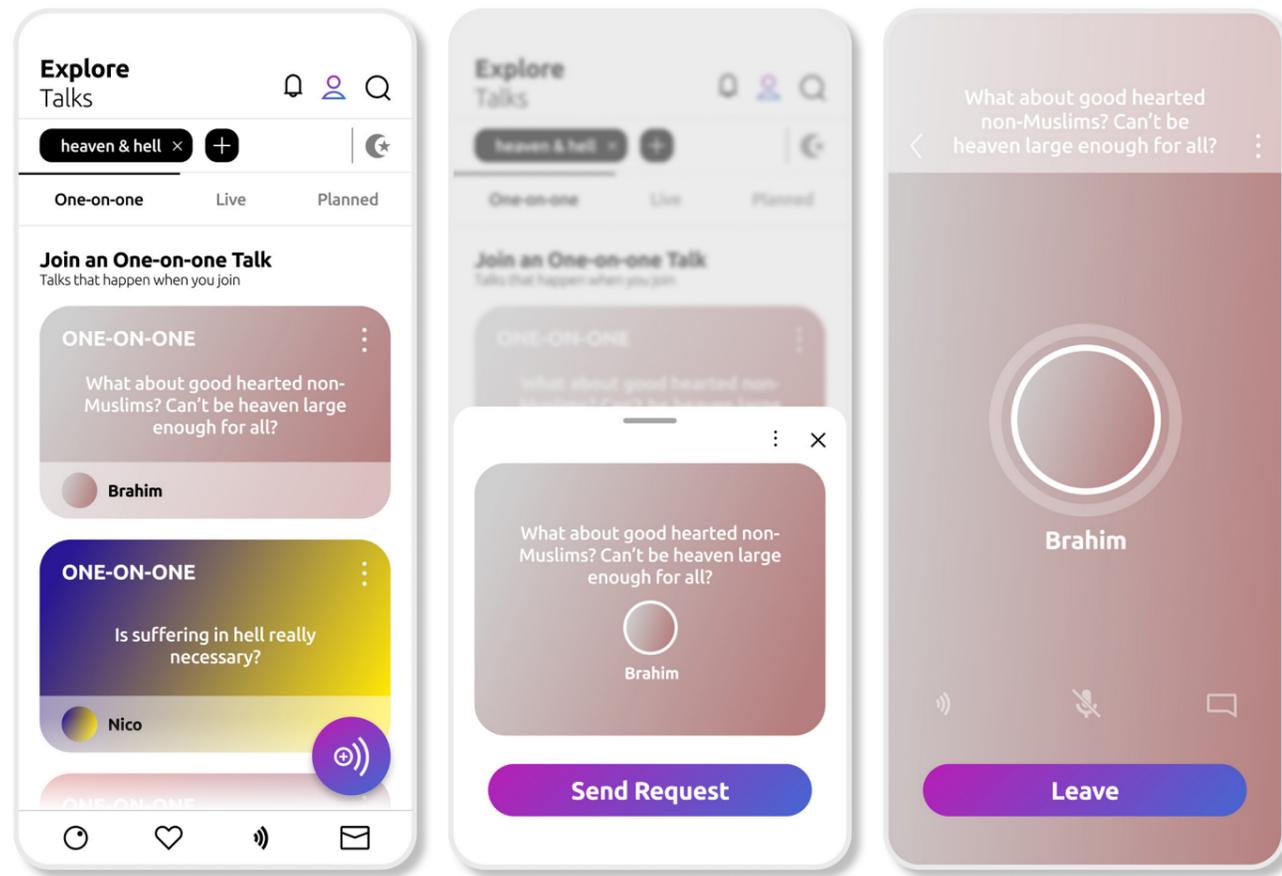


Figure 7.14 Joining a one-on-one talk

User Profile

The user can access the content posted by them in their profile. The profile consists of 5 sections: 'My Doubts', 'My Inspiration', 'My Talks & More', 'My Saved Content', and 'My Reflections'. In the 'My Doubts' tab, the user can see the doubts they shared with the community. The doubt details, the comments received, and the online sources can be reached when a doubt content is opened. Unlike the comment arrangement applied to the 'Explore Doubts' and the 'Explore Inspiration', the user views others' comments in the profile linearly and

chronologically. As the user receives more comments and learns about different views on their doubt, their own perspective of their doubt evolves.

This change can be documented by the user in the form of reflection. The user can access the reflection page via the reflection icon on the top right corner of the screen.

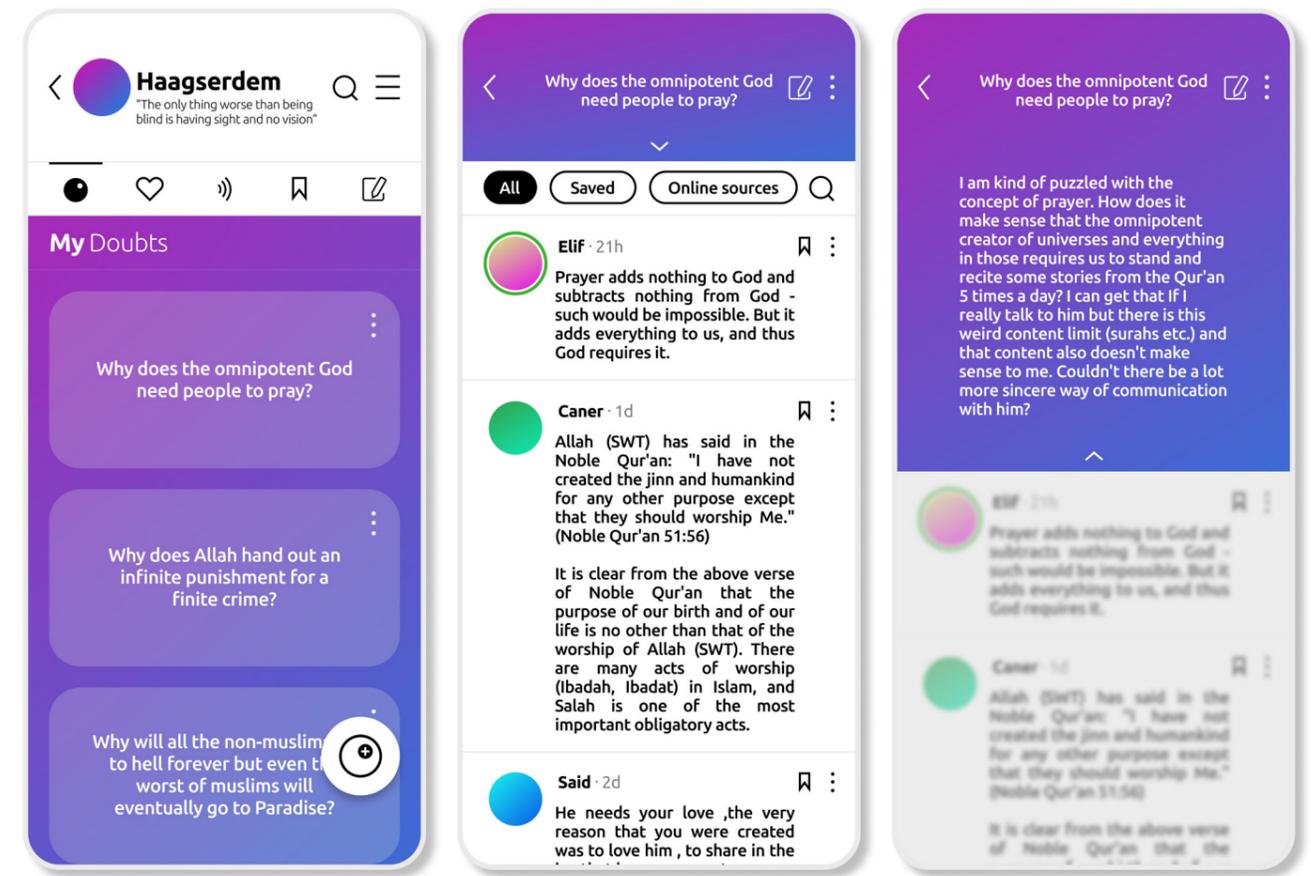


Figure 7.15 Doubt content in a profile

'My Inspiration' is where the user's inspirational content is listed. Like the 'My Doubts' tab, the user can find inspirational content details here. In the 'My Talks & More', the user can view their planned and saved talks. The notes the user took during the live talks can be viewed under the 'Saved' tab. Moreover, the user can withdraw a talk that they host by sending the other speakers in the talk.

The user's saved content is stored in the 'My Saved Content' section. In the 'My Reflections', the user keeps all their reflections.

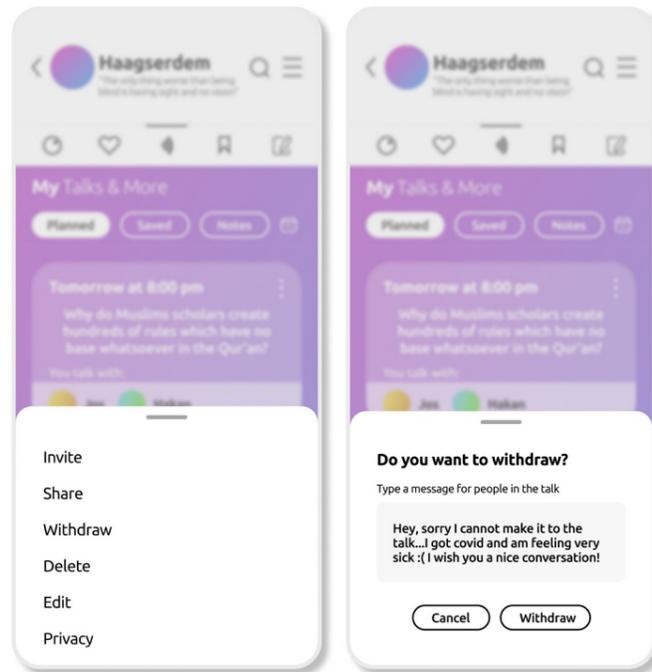


Figure 7.16 Withdrawing from a talk

Searching

There are various ways to search for content in the app. First, the user can use the search button to do a specific search. Another way of looking up a particular content is topic specific search via the select topic button. All the main functions (Explore Doubts, Explore Inspiration, and Explore Talks) have the same structure for searching.

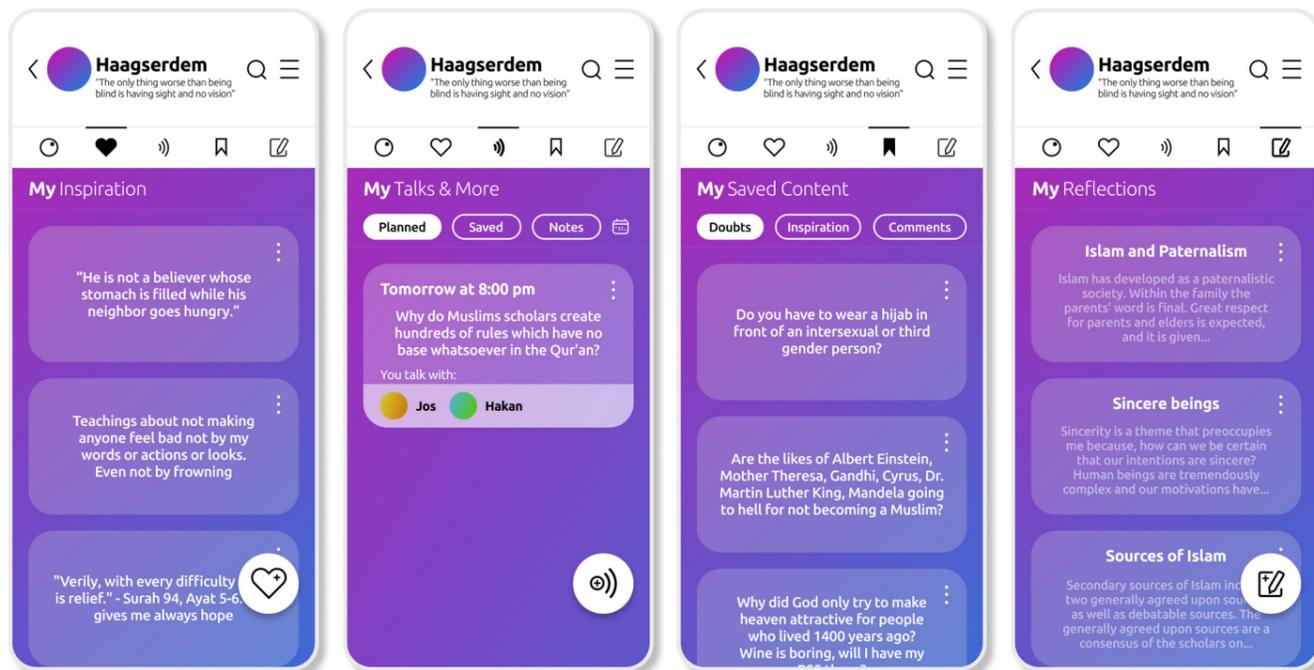


Figure 7.17 Other sections of the profile

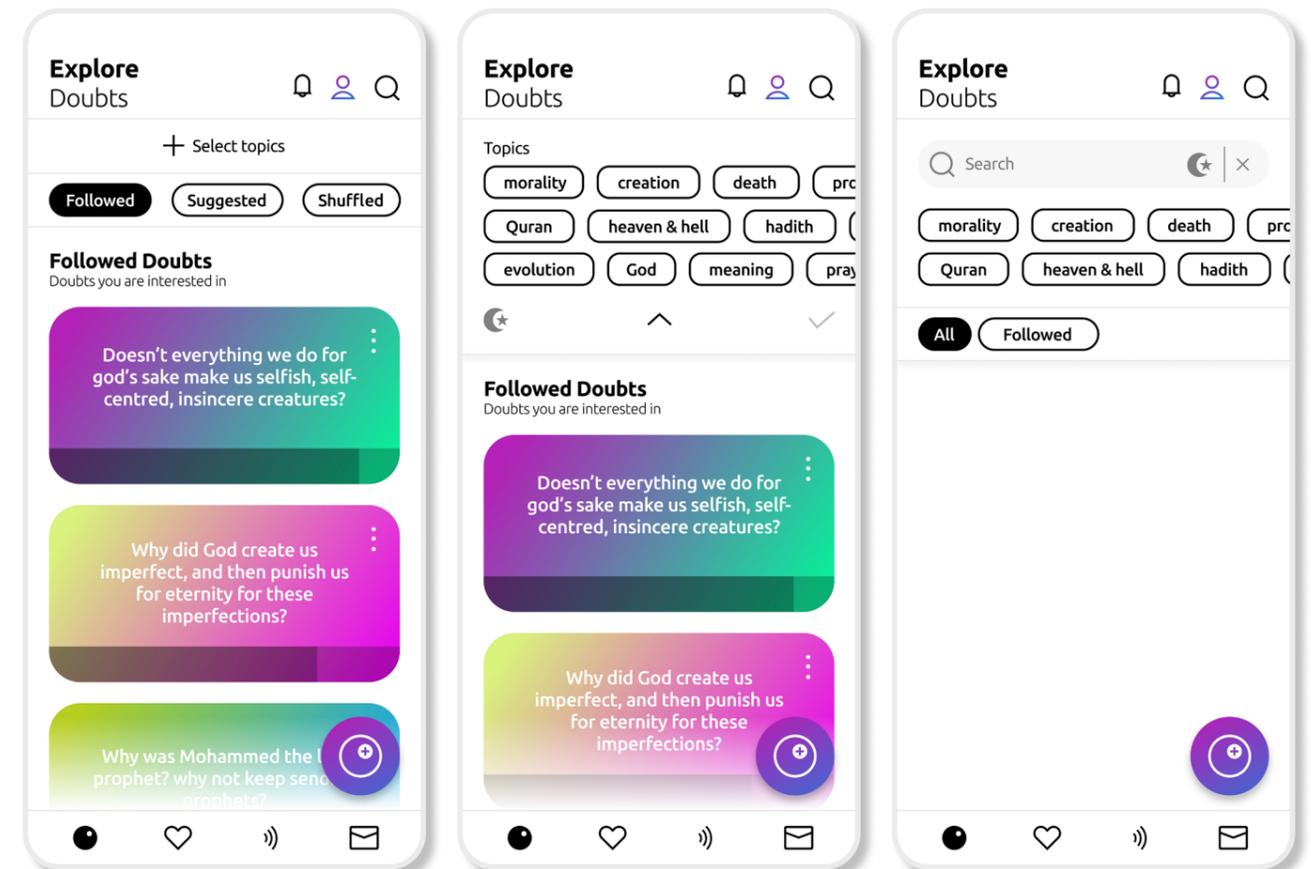


Figure 7.18 Different ways to search for content

Cross-Religious Exploration

The 'Explore Your Perspective' allows people to explore not only content related to their religion but also the doubts and inspiration posted by people from other Abrahamic religions. For example, the user can explore the doubts regarding Christianity by switching the religion on the topic selection menu. When the religion is changed, the topic list also changes to provide categories related to Christianity. The user can choose multiple topics to explore various contents. When topic-specific search results are displayed, the

system informs the user about the relevant talks happening now as well as the planned ones.

The user can also share their opinions and perspectives on the doubts and inspiration related to other Abrahamic religions. In the app, there are no signs that indicate people's religious background or their current orientation. It is an important factor that may encourage people to go beyond the 'us & others' mindset to expand their knowledge and perspectives.

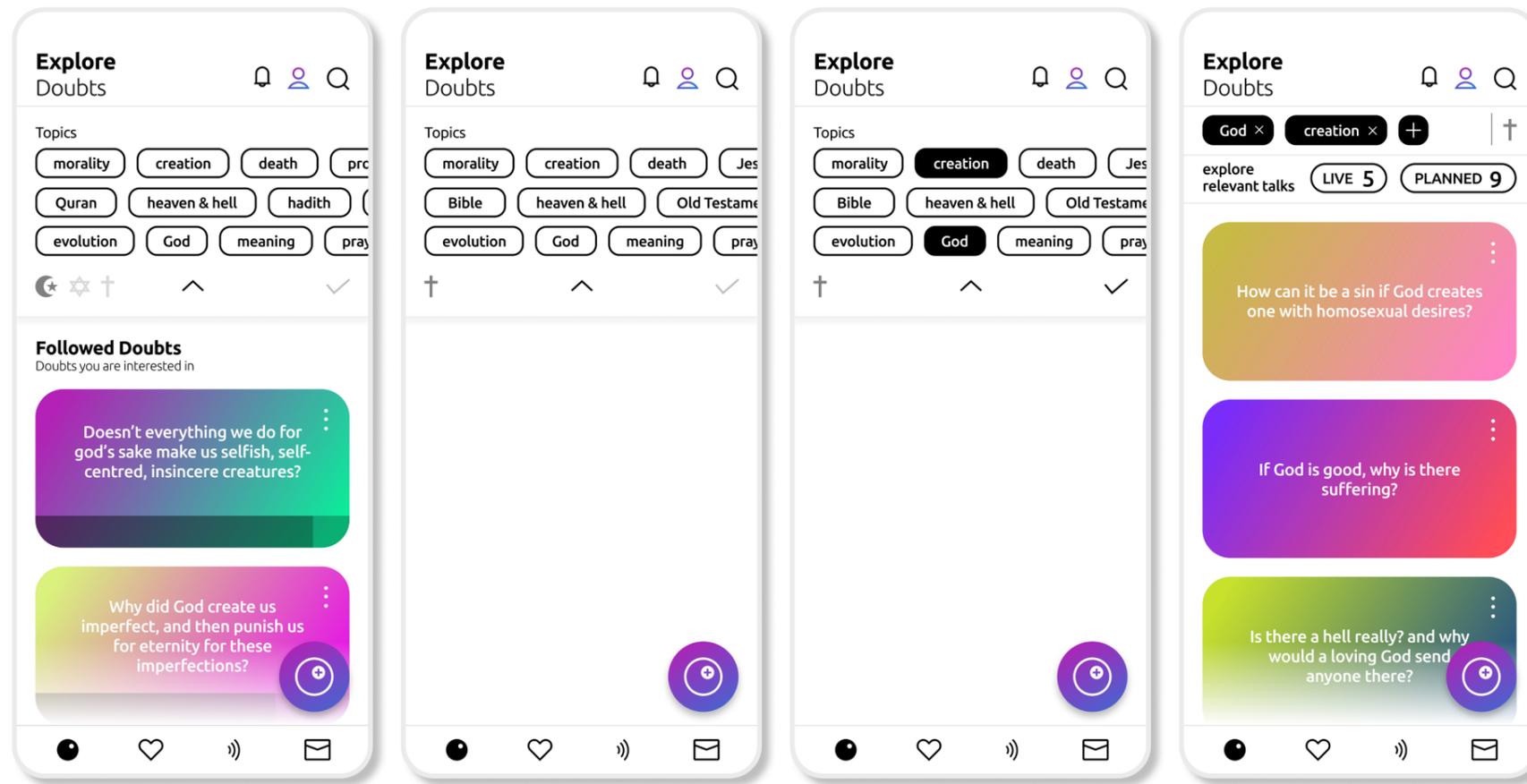


Figure 7.19 Switching religion and searching content via topic selection

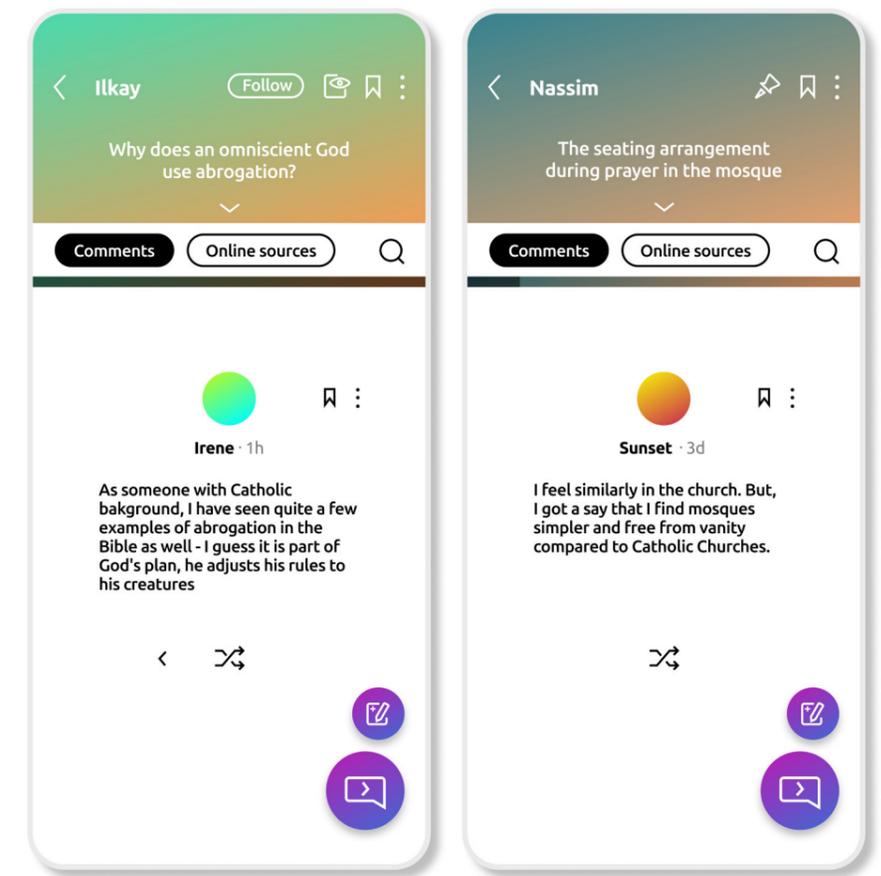


Figure 7.20 Cross-religious comments

Direct Communication

To enable its users to have deeper and more sincere conversations and discussions, the 'Explore Your Perspective' app promotes direct communication among the users. It is because of the sensitivity of their situations and their vulnerability. With direct communication strategies, the app aims to lower the tension that comes with the feeling of judgement and make people more comfortable when sharing their thoughts or when asking someone's opinions. Therefore, the product doesn't offer linear discussion threads; for example,

if the user is interested in a comment on a doubt, they can directly send a message to the person. Thus, their communication will not be disturbed (as in linear discussion threads), and the user has a space to share more with others.

Next, the product has a message section where the users keep track of their conversations with others. Besides, it is also possible to form rooms to chat as a group.

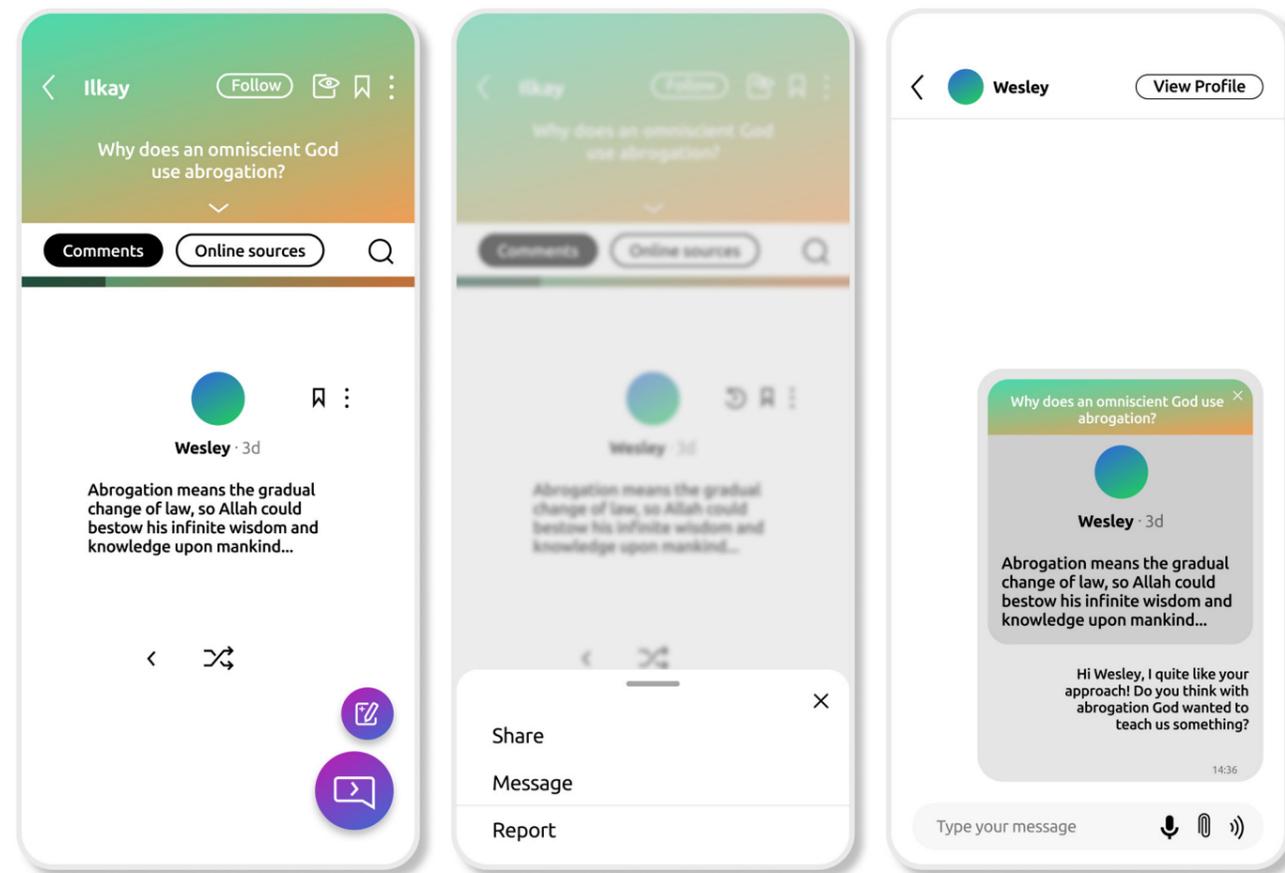


Figure 7.21 Example of a direct communication

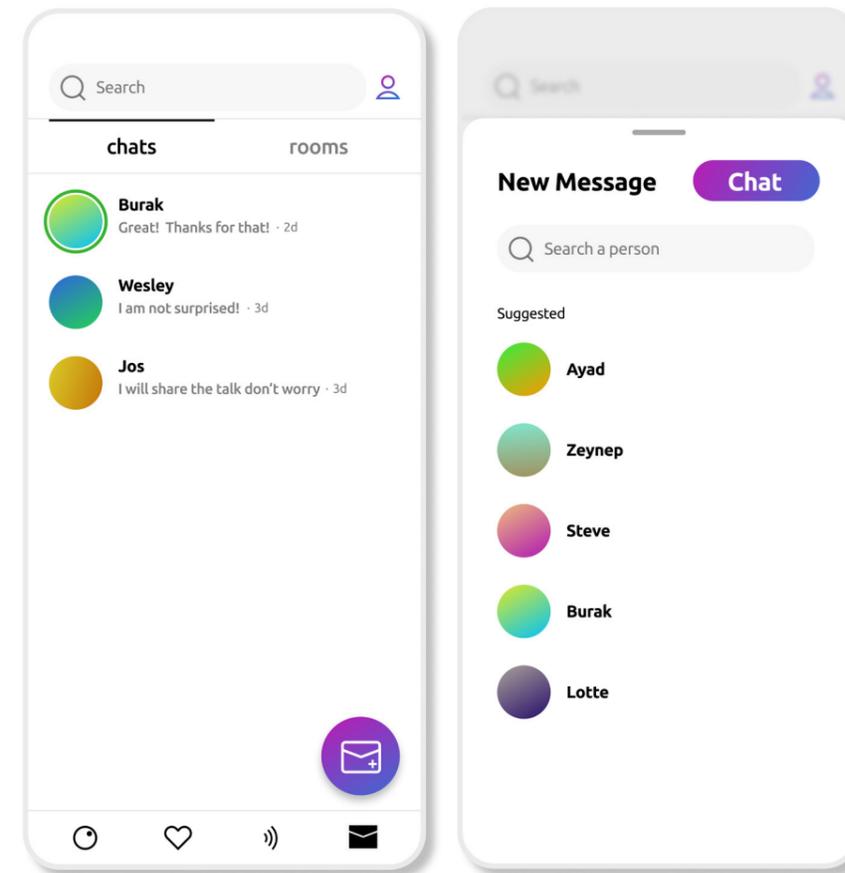


Figure 7.22 Message section

Reflection

Since there are many ways to learn about different perspectives and opinions in the app, the user's own perspective of their religion is under the constant influence. To help the user have better control over their changing thoughts and opinions, the product offers multiple ways to reflect.

As mentioned earlier, the user can keep their reflection in the 'My Reflection' section in their profile, and they also have a chance to reflect on their doubts as they receive more comments or explore content

in the app. The reflections on own doubts are kept in the 'Doubt reflection'. Doubt reflections can be accessible to other users; when visiting a doubt, the user can access the doubt reflection of another user by tapping the 'view reflection' icon that contains an eye illustration on the top right corner of the screen. The viewed doubt reflection may consist of multiple reflections written on different dates. These reflections can be viewed by simply swiping the content left.

In addition to reflecting on their doubts, the user can reflect on the other's doubts,

inspirations, or comments. For example, when viewing comments for a doubt posted by another user, the user may be triggered by a comment. In this case, via the reflection button, the user can choose which one of the contents (the comment or the doubt) they want to reflect on. After the selection, they can type their reflection on the comment and save it.

Lastly, the user can change and edit the comments they shared with others. This change can also serve as inspiration to reflect on and learn from.

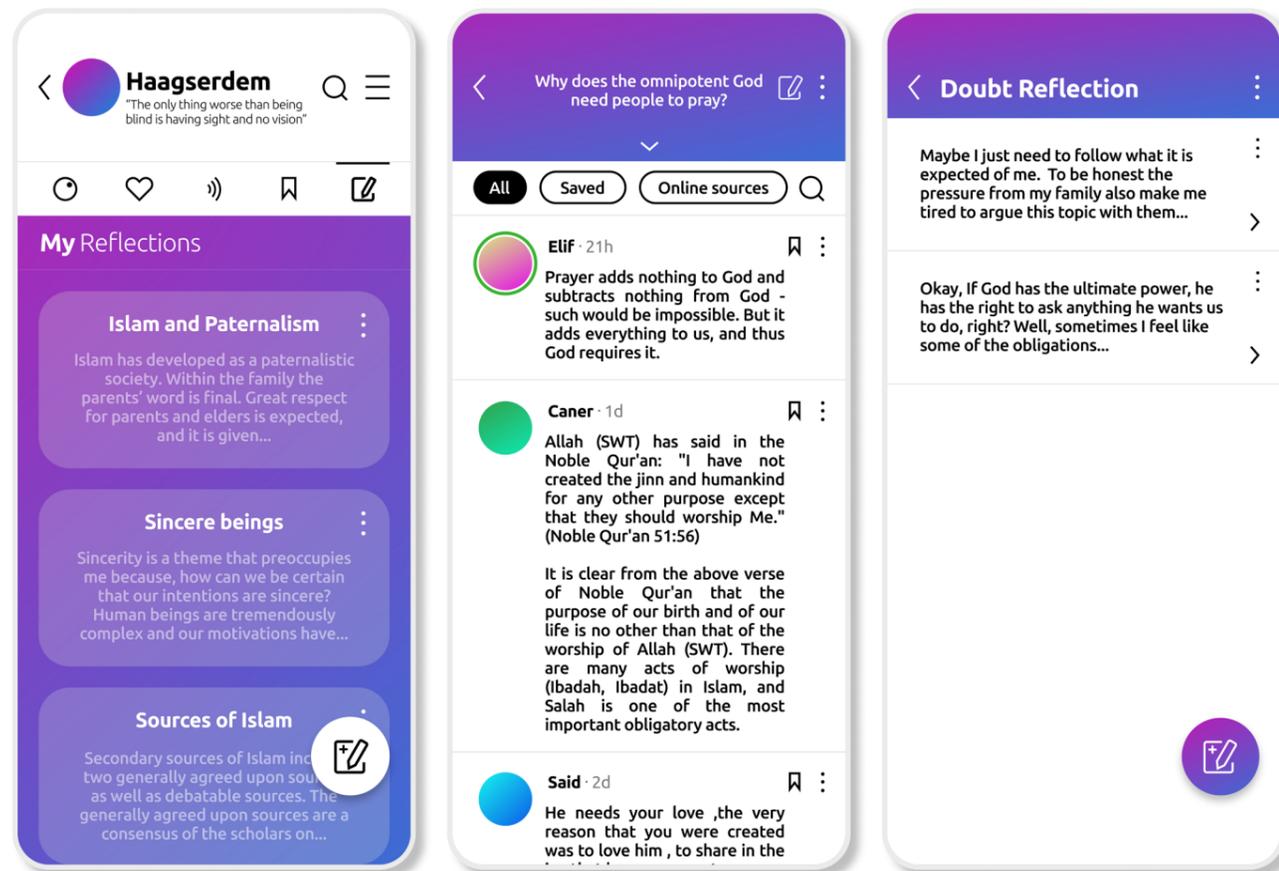


Figure 7.23 'My Reflection' section and viewing own doubt reflection

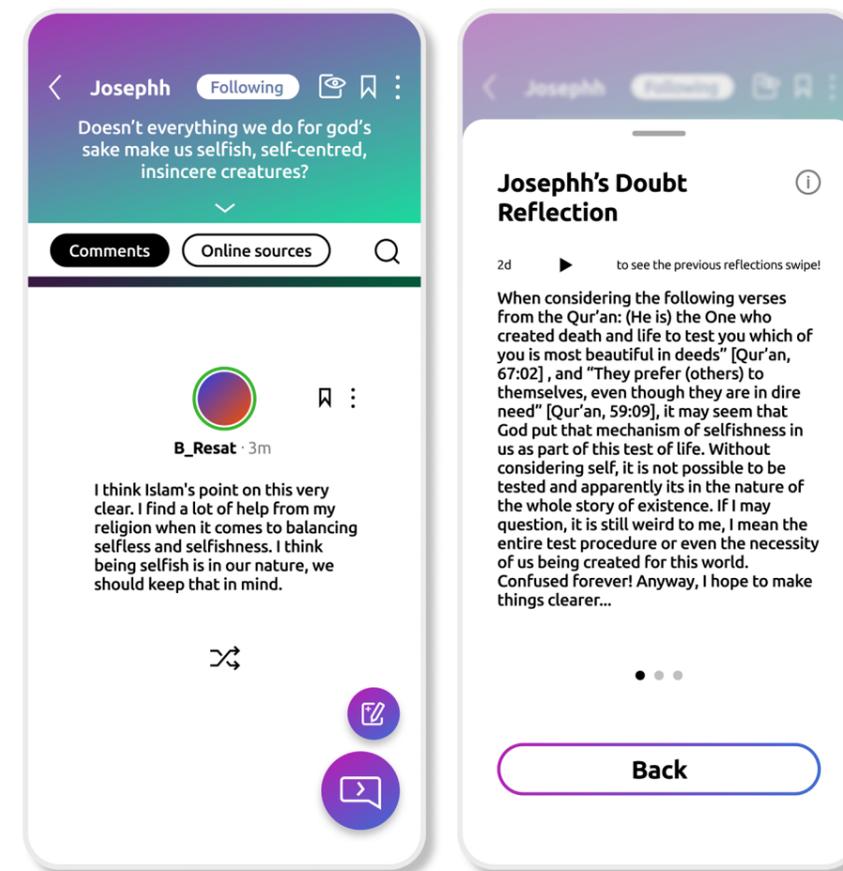


Figure 7.24 Viewing a user's doubt reflection

In addition to reflecting on their doubts, the user can reflect on the other's doubts, inspirations, or comments. For example, when viewing comments for a doubt posted by another user, the user may be triggered by a comment. In this case, via the reflection button, the user can choose which one of the contents (the comment or the doubt) they want to reflect on. After the selection, they can type their reflection on the comment and save it.

Lastly, the user can change and edit the comments they shared with others. This change can also serve as inspiration to reflect on and learn from.

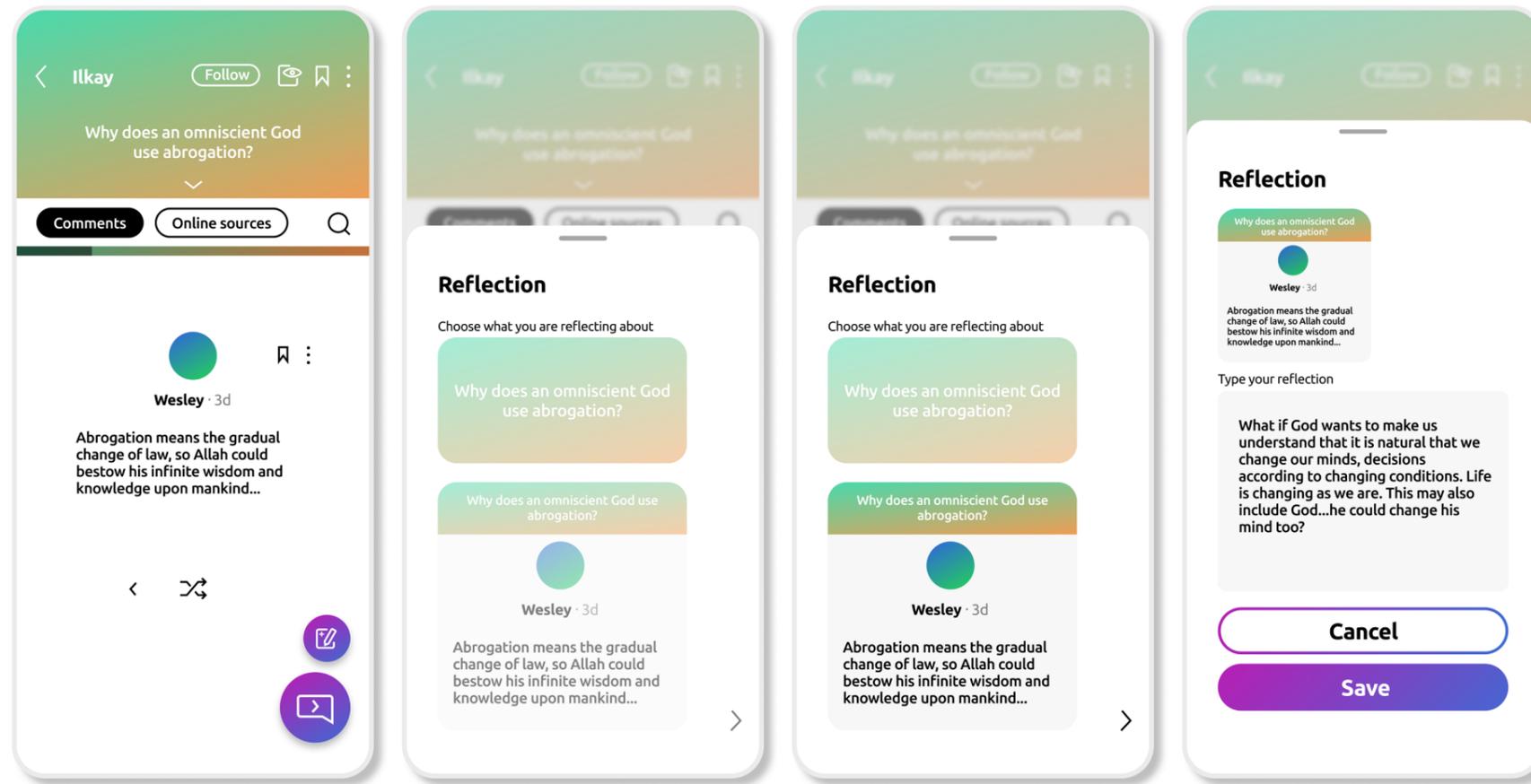


Figure 7.25 Selecting a content to reflect on

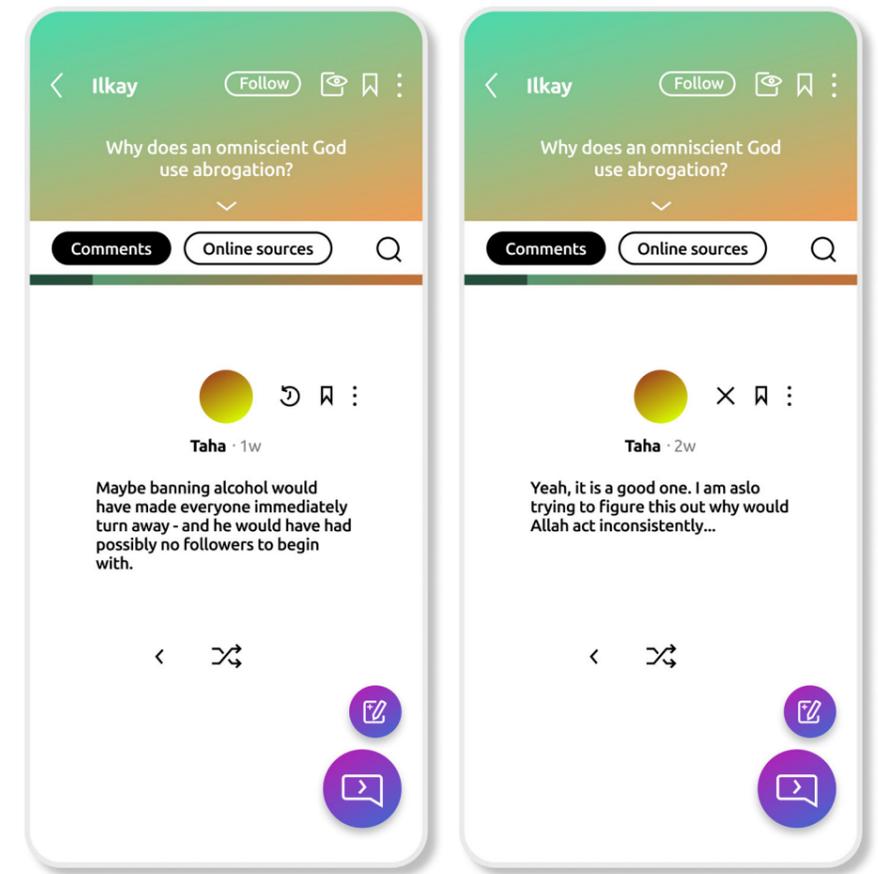


Figure 7.26 Viewing a comment's history

Content Entry

There are several types of content that the user can enter the app, from doubt to a live talk and doubt reflection to online sources. The content entry icons were designed to be compatible with the existing icons that are used in the app. Therefore, the user knows beforehand what a particular add icon refers to.

The user can add new doubts, inspirational content, and talks via the add icons placed in the profile and the 'Explore' functions.



Figure 7.27 Content entry icons

The app guides the user through the process of adding new content. For example, when entering a doubt, the app asks the user to add their doubt in a question format and then describe their doubt. Next, the user is asked to indicate the concerning religion. Lastly, the user needs to select the topics the question relates to and add tags to help others find the doubt easily. Besides, it is possible to add an image alongside the description. Further content entry details can be found in Figures 31, 32, 33, and 34.

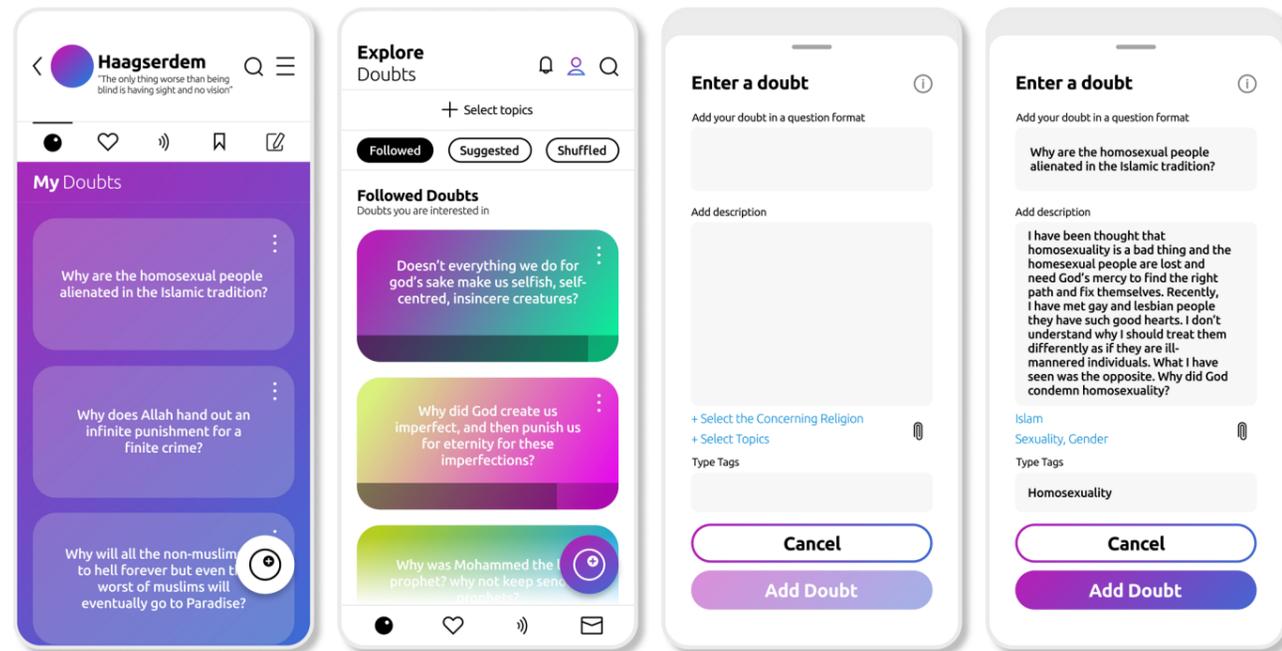


Figure 7.28 Entering a doubt content

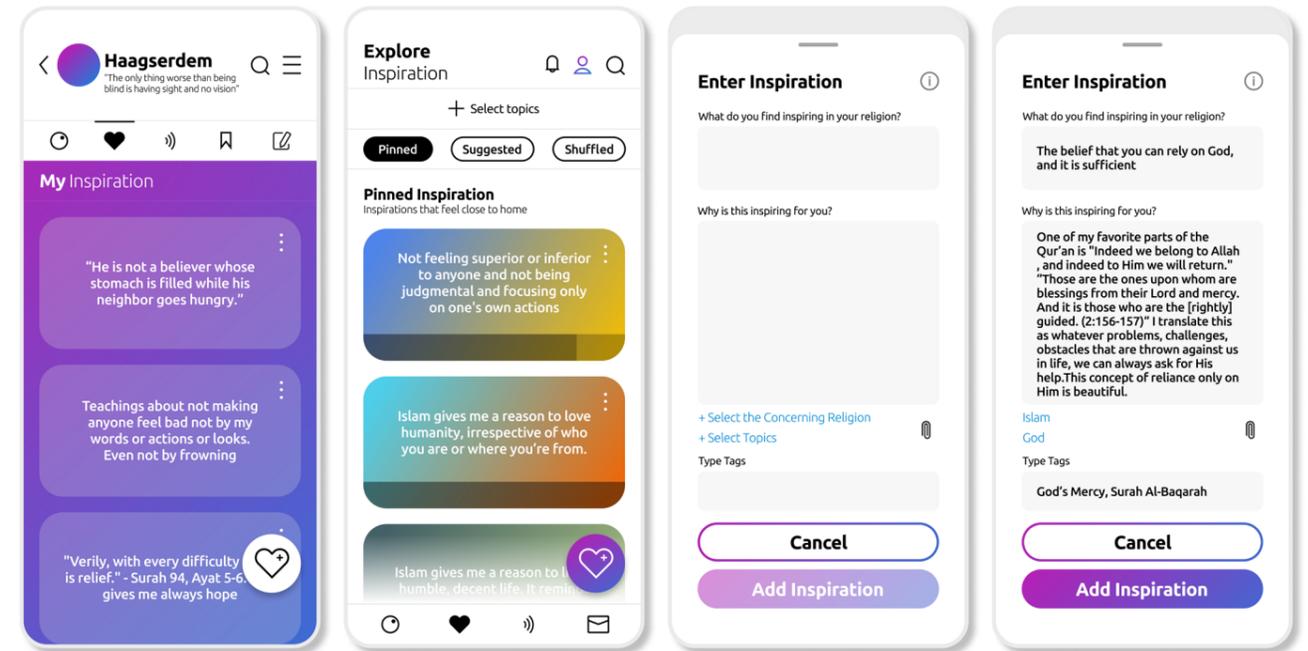


Figure 7.29 Entering an inspirational content

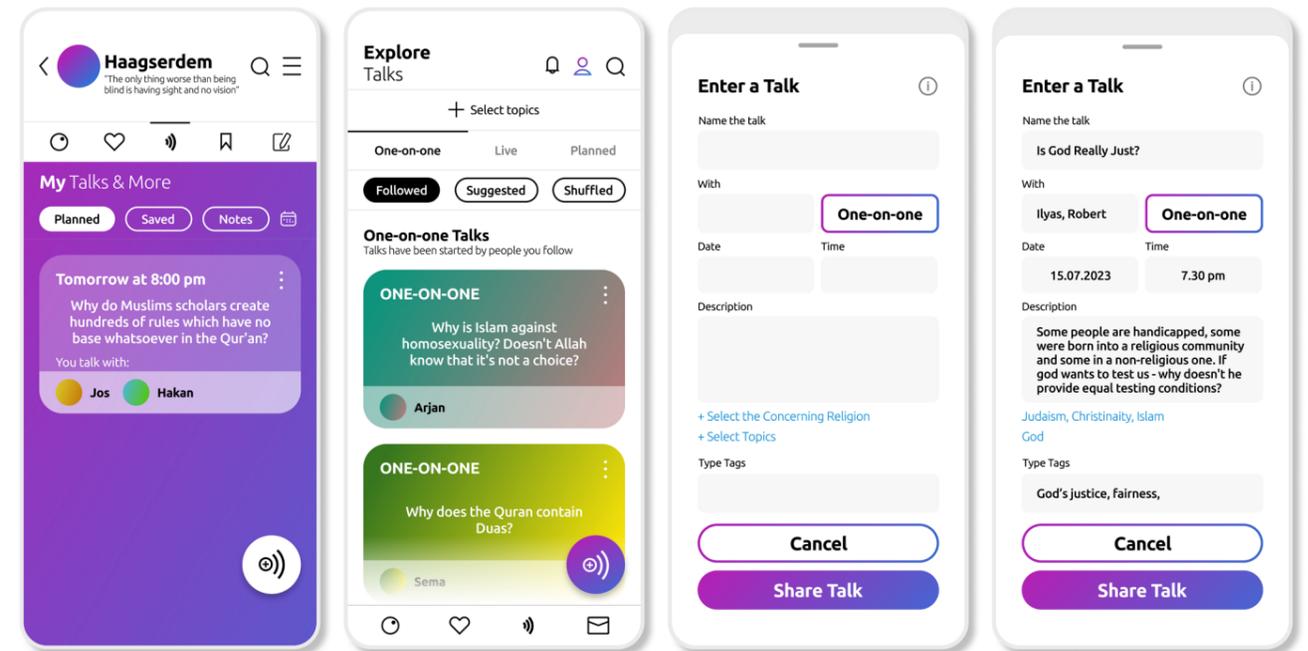


Figure 7.30 Entering a talk

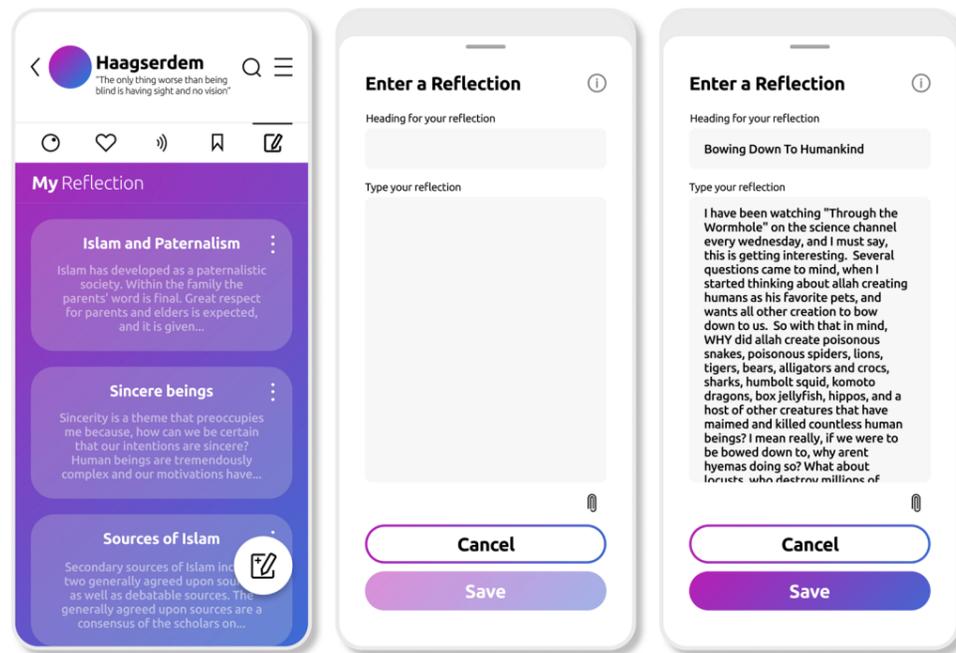


Figure 7.31 Entering a reflection

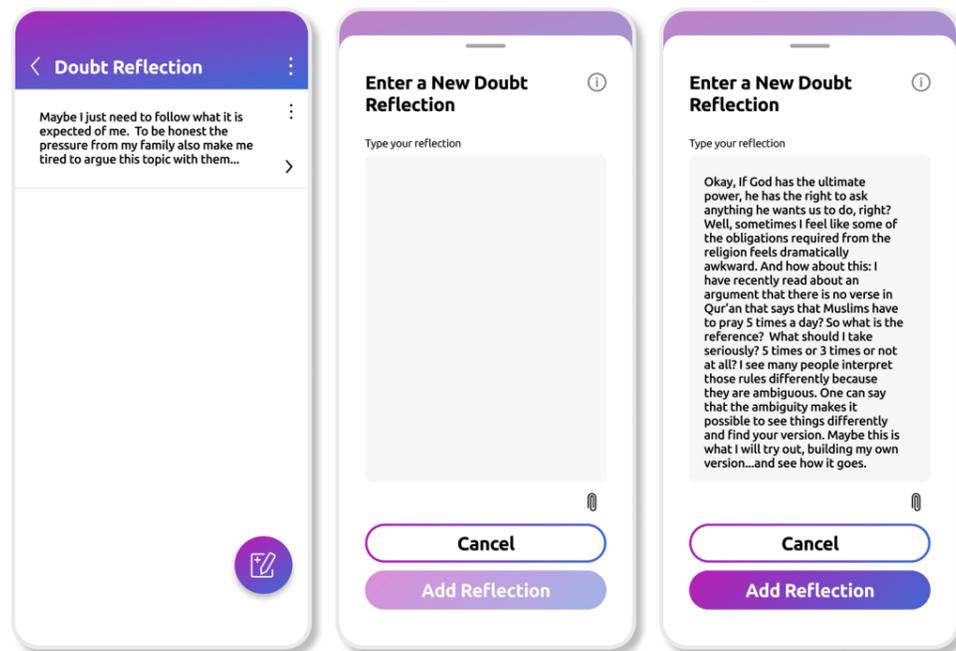


Figure 7.32 Entering a doubt reflection

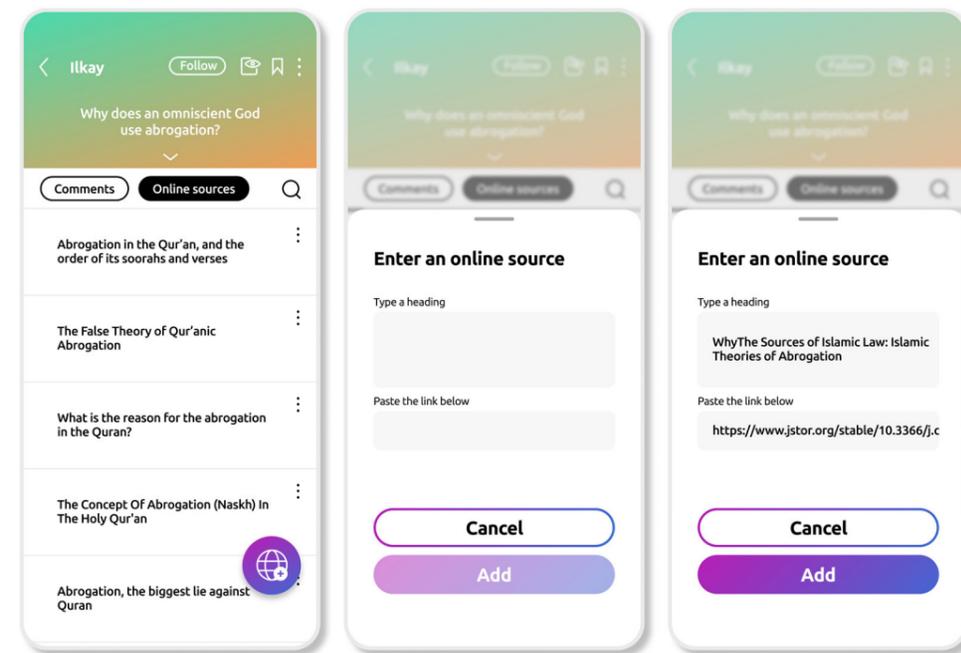


Figure 7.33 Entering an online source

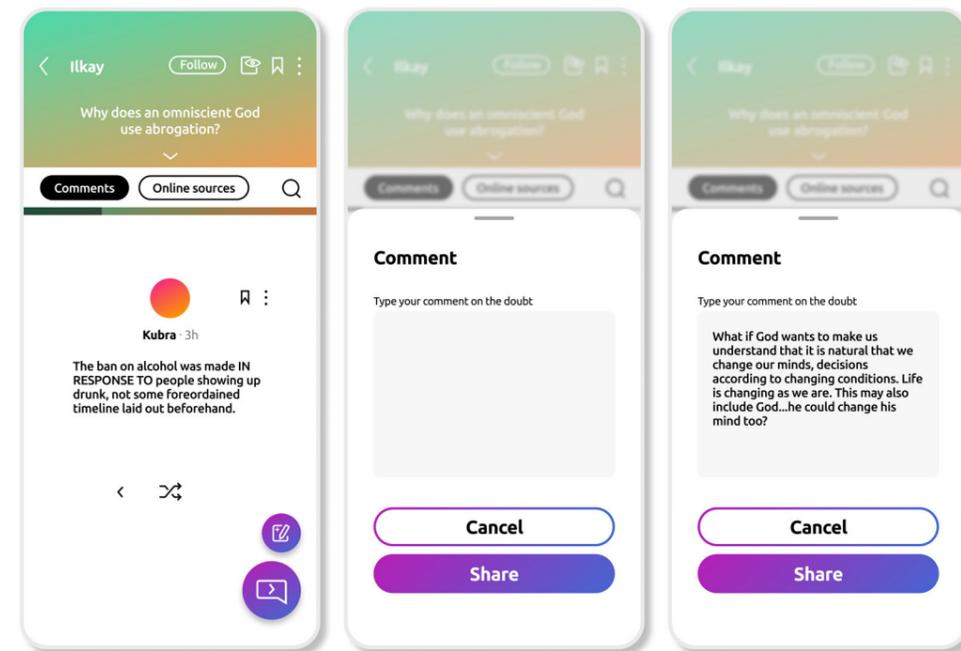


Figure 7.34 Entering a comment

Control & Privacy

The 'Explore Your Perspective' enables the user to control their content's visibility in different ways. The control mechanism for own doubts works in two ways: first, the user can increase the visibility of a doubt content in their profile by pinning it as burning; by that, the doubt will appear first with a flame icon when someone visits the user's doubts; second, the doubts that are open for public view can be turned into private contents that only the user can see. When a doubt content is put in private mode, a lock icon appears.

Doubt reflections can also be hidden from the public if the user doesn't feel comfortable sharing them. Moreover, the user can report content that is violent or insulting.

When it comes to profile content visibility, the user has complete control over it. The user can access the feature 'View as other' when in their profile via the hamburger menu. This feature lets the user see how others view their profile once they visit it and allows them to decide to what extent they are willing to share their content with others.

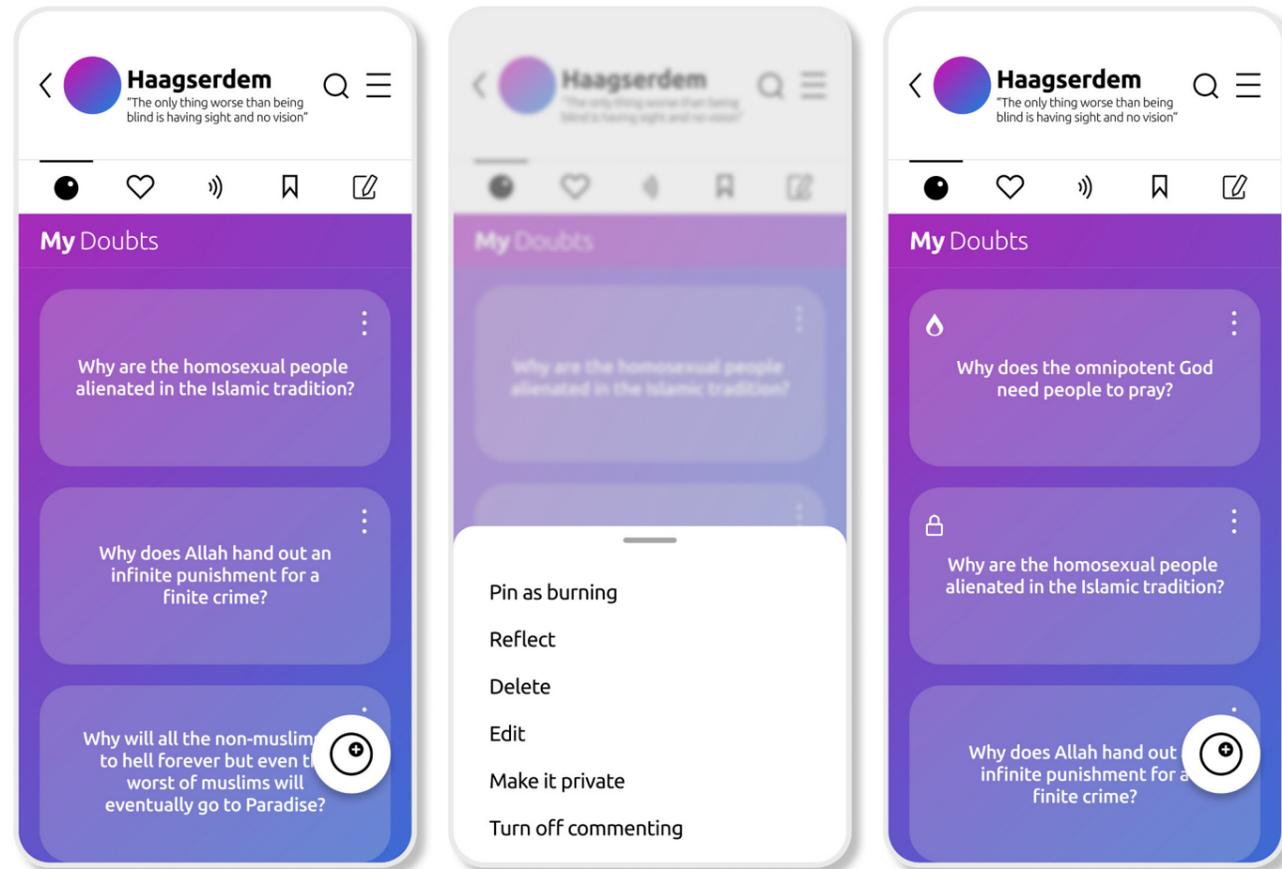


Figure 7.35 Pinning a doubt as burning and making another private

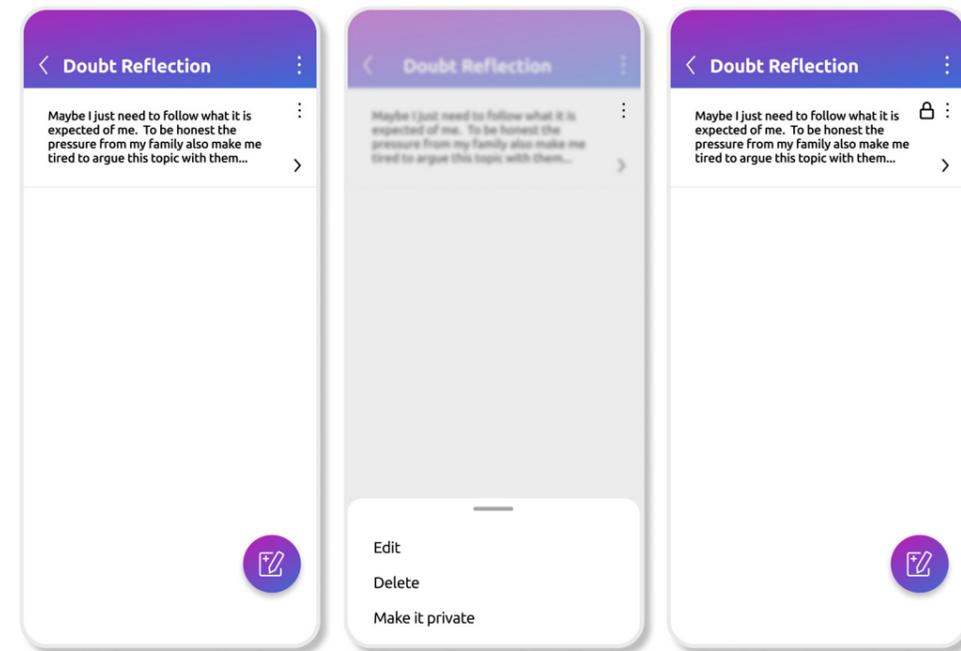


Figure 7.36 Turning a doubt reflection into private

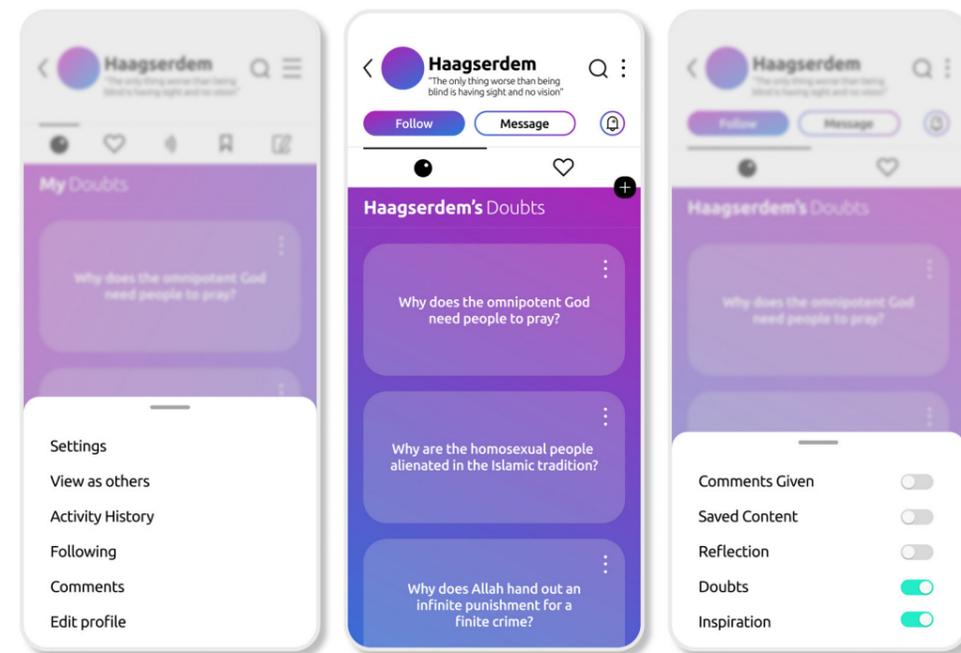


Figure 7.37 Seeing profile as others and content visibility adjustment menu

Notification

The user is notified of the activities that concern them. For example, when there is a new comment on a doubt that they follow, or if another user starts following one of their doubts or pins their inspirational contents, or simply someone starts following the user.

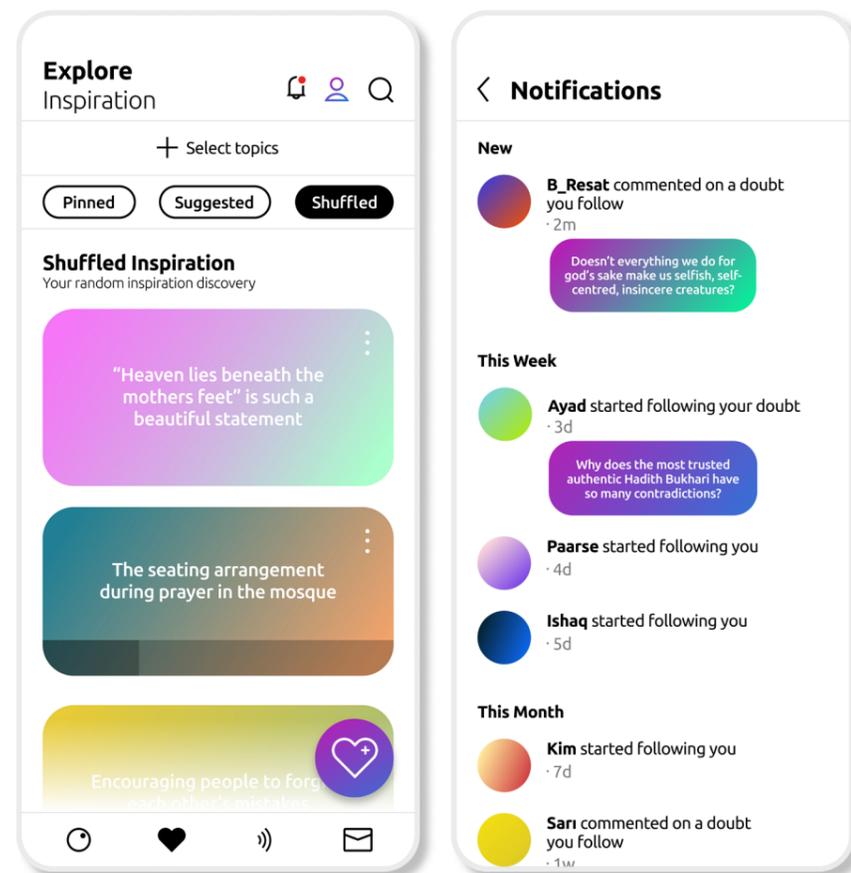


Figure 7.38 Example of notification content

Activity History

The app provides the user with their statistical activity review in the Activity History tab. This tab can be reached through the hamburger menu icon in the user's profile. The results can show the activity overview for a month or a year. The user can check their activities regarding doubts, inspiration, talks, and reflection.

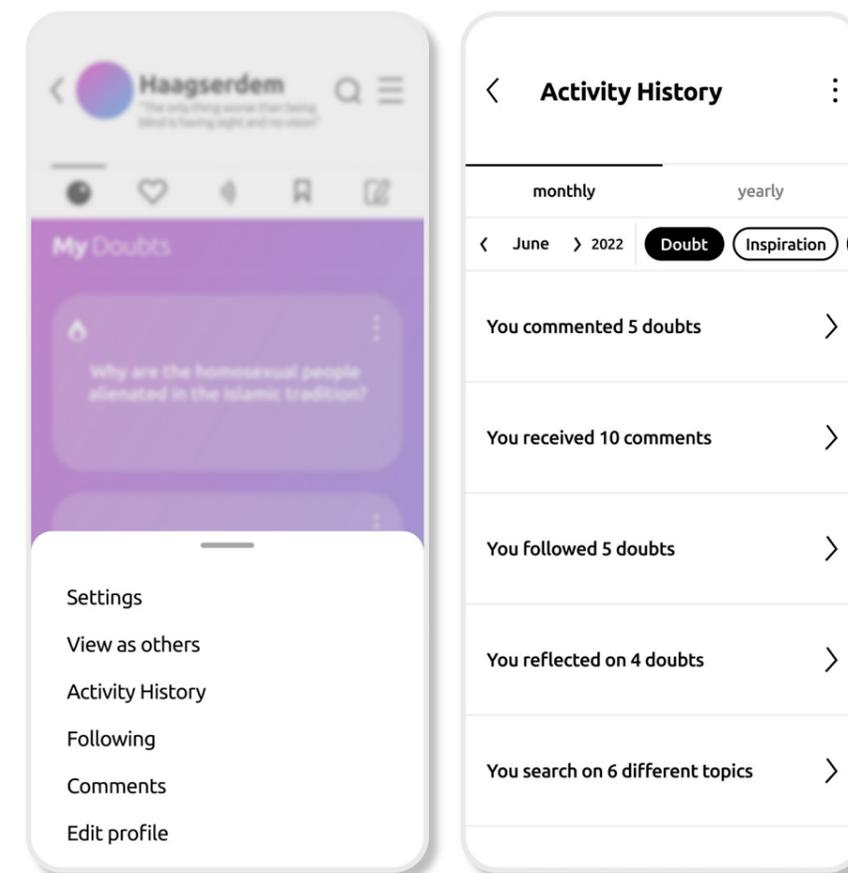


Figure 7.39 Viewing activity history



EVALUATION OF THE FINAL DESIGN

This chapter describes the final research study of this thesis project where the final design was evaluated by the potential users. The chapter includes recommendations for design and for future research.

8.1 Approach

This study aims to understand the desirability of the final design, determine if the design goal and interaction and product qualities presented in Chapters 4.3 and 4.4 are achieved, and collect insights for design and research recommendations for further improvements.

8.1.1 Participants

The final design aims to support people in their religious transition process regardless of their background in Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Since this process can be recognised as a non-linear spectrum of experiences containing different stages, it was essential to have the final design evaluated by people representing this variety of experiences.

The participants were found via various channels: first, the interviewees of the primary research were informed about the evaluation study and were asked if they knew anybody struggling with their religious faith due to their doubts (because some of the interviewees were part of the initial user evaluation, they were not asked to participate the final evaluation interviews); secondly, some of the student WhatsApp groups of the Industrial Design Engineering (IDE) faculty were notified about the research study; lastly, Studio Lab community of the IDE faculty was informed by the project mentor via email.

Before starting the evaluation interviews, the participants were asked to describe themselves briefly, especially their position towards their religion or former religion. Some of them shared uncertainties they

are experiencing regarding their relativity towards religion.

While participant 1 (P1) identified herself as a non-believer, she indicated that there are still many things that make her come back to believing in God again.

Participant 2 (P2) shared that she identifies herself as a non-Christian but not an anti-one. She believes that if God exists, he accepts her disbelief for now (the fear of God and related mental health difficulties that made her stop believing in God). Besides, she is open to the possibility that God may exist and eventually may find her again. The participant concluded her position by saying, "So, I'm still in between, I'm not a non-Christian and I'm not a Christian, I do not believe anymore, so that's, sort of, the position for now."

of the application, the participants were asked if everything they heard was clear. After the introduction of the final product, the evaluation questions were posed to the participants.

A high-fidelity prototype of the final design was used in the interviews. The prototype was made on the software program called Figma. Next to clickable menus, the app contained content that was mainly gathered in the forum of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain (e.g., Councilofexmuslims, n.d.) and the social question-and-answer website Quora (e.g., Quora, n.d.). Next to the online sources, the results of a survey conducted with six people regarding doubts and inspirations helped to create the content. Lastly, my personal experiences supported the content-making process.

Interview questions:

1. What is your first impression of the Explore Your Perspective app?
2. To what extent do you think the app will provide a safe environment for you to explore your own perspective regarding your religion?
3. How much do you think the app will support you to formulate your own unique perspective of your religion?
4. To what extent do you think that the app will support you to be comfortable with your doubts?
5. How much do you think the app will allow you to dive deep into your doubts and inspirations?

Table 8.1 The overview of the participants

	Religious Background	Status identifies as	Age	Gender m/f/d	Place of Birth and Upbringing
Pilot Participant	Islam	an agnostic	33	male	Izmir / Turkey
Participant 1	Islam	a non-believer	23	female	Amsterdam / The Netherlands
Participant 2	Christianity	a non-Christian (but not anti)	25	female	Kampen / The Netherlands
Participant 3	Christianity	Christian	30	male	Barneveld / The Netherlands
Participant 4	Christianity	a spiritual	28	female	Ukraine

8.1.2 Procedure

Since the final product is a digital intervention, it was found more practical and effective to conduct the evaluation interviews online via Zoom. Each session was recorded with the interviewees' consent (See Appendix K). Before the interviews, an interview script was created to guide the research study. The interviews started with a conversation with the interviewees; they shared their religious experiences and their current position towards their religion. Before introducing the final design, the purpose of the product was briefly explained.

The description of the final design was narrated in a way that made it easier to understand for the participants. After explaining a use case regarding each section

6. How much do you think the app will make you curious about exploring your own perspective of your religion?
7. To what extent do you think that the app will encourage you to explore your own perspective of your religion?
8. How much do you think that the app will make you feel hopeful about your spiritual uncertainty?
9. To what extent do you think that the app is caring about your spiritual uncertainty?
10. How much do you think that the app is explorative?
11. Is there any other remark that you want to make about the Explore Your Perspective app?

8.2 Evaluation Results

The data was analysed qualitatively. The most important parts of the interviews were transcribed. The results are themes related to the research questions.

First Impression

The final design was appreciated in terms of aesthetics, user interface, and user experience. One participant indicated how easy it would be to use the app since it bears some resemblance to the apps that people have used. The participant found the app much easier to operate compared to some social media apps she uses. One of the participants shared her excitement about the app and wondered when it would be available so that she could try it out. The same person said that if the app had been available when she was younger, it would have helped her sooner to realise that she doesn't fit into her religion or that another religion would be a better fit for her. For her, the app provides a safe space to find this out.

"It would be so fun for me to try it out."

"It is very well designed, I think, in terms of visuals and the user experience and the navigation."

"It's very practical for me; I can literally, within an explanation of 10 minutes, already kind of know how this app works, so I think it's really well made so far."

On the other hand, some participants shared their critical views on the design as well. They shared their concerns about confronting many "very good doubts, very valid ones". Therefore, the place that they entered to resolve their doubts may turn into a rabbit hole of doubts which may eventually lead them to lose their religious faith. Besides, it was stated that the explore inspiration function would balance out the negativity that may come with viewing others' critical questions. Moreover, the same participant pointed out the fact that even though one loses their faith in the app, the app gives people a social network to talk about it with other people that can understand.

"If you start doubting, you're not feeling okay with doubts, and it (the app) would be a sort of rabbit hole for me because all the doubts I read are all very good doubts, very valid ones... So, I think you will definitely lose your faith here."

"If you're losing your faith and you know you're losing it, then it would be nice to talk about it with others, so it is also sort of making a social network that's experiencing the same."

Another concern shared was the extreme content in the app; some of the questions posted on the app can be considered blasphemy by other users who have genuine doubts, so this might make some turn away from the app.

"Some of these questions might be blasphemy to some people who have some genuine doubts. I guess for some people, homosexuality is a huge problem and is a reason to doubt, but then the existence of heaven and hell is something; if that is questioned, that would be a huge problem or might make them turn away from the app."

Safe Environment

The participants have discussed whether the platform is a safe environment from various perspectives. The features (colour use for profile picture, use of pseudonym, and the voice edit) to enable users to remain anonymous in their communication with others were found very supportive of a safe experience in the app. However, one of the participants shared his concern about the fact that some people may use anonymity as an excuse to be aggressive in the app.

"Anonymity can also be an excuse to be aggressive. Many people on Twitter are anonymous, but still, it can be a hellhole."

All participants addressed the importance of moderation on the app to prevent violent and aggressive content. Besides, it has been indicated that moderation can also be needed for users who carry out missionary duties, attempt to impose certain ideologies on other users and even try to convert them to a certain religious orientation.

Moreover, the absence of conversation threads under the doubts and inspiration

contents was considered a contributing factor to a safe environment in the app. One participant mentioned the importance of being able to select who she wants to communicate with for her doubts: instead of people bargaining on her profile with their perspectives and opinions. According to her, it also makes the app safe in the sense of her mental health.

“I think it is a very safe environment because you have many options to stay anonymous on the app.”

Furthermore, one of the participants indicated that with the anonymous features, the app provides a safe space to explore different directions without the fear of ostracism.

“It is indeed a safe environment and also a place in which you can make progress or sort of move to a few different directions without being cast out like some communities.”

Moreover, it was stated that not having any religious signs (a cross or a star of David) helps to feel safe when approaching others or their content. This way, the bias towards people with different religious backgrounds can be avoided or at least minimised to explore others' views more comfortably.

Formulating a Unique Perspective

It was difficult for the participants to imagine to what extent the app would support them in formulating a unique understanding of their religion since they didn't have a chance to experience using it. It was said that it depends on the comments one receives, and the content shared by others.

“I don't think that it won't help, but... It depends on what kind of answers I will get on the doubts.”

For some, the app would help them to shape their own understanding because of the diversity of opinions and their probable depth and openness in the app compared to the Christian websites that only contain answers from a preacher or the forums that become battlegrounds of extreme atheists and extreme Christian. According to one participant, she would subconsciously make a new image of her religion by finding out what others have to say about her doubt and then having a conversation about it or their doubts.

“It would have helped because now, you have to Google it, and there are only like, for me, Christian websites with question & answers, and then always the preacher was giving the answers...The answers probably will be more in-depth on this app and more open...”

Having a chance to access other perspectives and opinions was found

helpful to broaden one's way of viewing religion altogether and clarify some aspects of one's belief. Moreover, one participant pointed out that writing things down and sharing them with others can consolidate and help him reframe things and decide on what he really thinks about them. According to the participant, anonymous space can be helpful in that process.

Comfort with Doubts

According to some participants, the app would make them more comfortable with their religious doubts and feel better. This is because they would know that they are not the only ones doubting and trying to figure out their position regarding their religious beliefs.

“I think it will help me to be more comfortable with my doubts because more people have the same doubts.”

It was stated that the app would be helpful to find out what one feels more comfortable with regarding their religious faith. By frequently using the app and gathering more information about a religion that one is doubting about and getting more and more answers and discovering what others have to say about it, one can get more and more emotional feelings towards it.

One of the participants mentioned that the app would make him too comfortable with his doubts that coming out to his family to share his critical opinions and beliefs can be even more difficult. It is because he would move so far by using the app, and his family is not ready for that big of a change.

Deep Dive

Because of the diverse functions and features that support one to explore different views and perspectives, the app was found helpful in diving deep into one's doubts and inspiration in their religious faith. One of the participants stressed the importance of personal conversations via text or one-on-one talks to go deeper in one's journey. On the other hand, another participant found all the functions and features provided in the app useful for everyone, whether introverted or extroverted, to do an extensive exploration.

“If you are like an introvert or an extrovert, it has both ways for you in the app. Everyone can do it in their own way, so I feel like everyone has a safe way, and also a personal way to do that.”

Curiosity to Explore

Having the opportunity to immerse in the content on the app that one has never thought of and finds interesting was accounted for an aspect of design that makes people curious about exploring other views; therefore, exploring their own perspective. Besides being able to talk with other people about their doubts and learn what others have to say about the participants' doubts and religion in general, were found other reasons to be curious about the content.

“When I'm going to scroll through the app, I would see more and more things that I haven't even thought about and I'm like, Oh, this seems

interesting, I didn't know that. "

It was mentioned that curiosity would depend on the doubts one has and the urgency to have answers to these doubts. Moreover, one of the participants stressed that this feeling (curiosity) depends on phase one in their transition. For example, the participant indicated that 10-15 years ago, when he was very much in religion, he would have found some questions, doubts taboo or confrontational in the app.

Encouraged to Explore

For one of the participants, being able to take personal notes and reflect was a salient aspect of the app that would help him to be encouraged to explore his own perspective of his religion. For another participant, the app not only encourages people in the content of the app but also to look outside of the app to see if some of the discourses of others on the app reflect reality (e.g., references from Quran etc.). Besides, the same participant added that the online sources on the app would also encourage her to explore more and more. It was said that the app would also encourage people to learn about the different interpretations of the Bible.

Hopefulness

The participants' answers varied regarding feeling hopeful about their spiritual uncertainty when using the app. One participant indicated that the app would make her more hopeful than the state she is in at that moment because she is communicating very little about her religious difficulties with others. She mentioned the fact that her conversations with someone around her don't help her

much because they both have similar biased opinions, and the talk cannot lead somewhere that gives her some hope. However, according to her, the app would make her more hopeful by enabling her to engage in more views and see others speaking about the same issue. For her, this would help to form a better feeling or opinion about a particular issue, and that way, it would take some of her uncertainties away. Similarly, another participant stated that seeing many other people having the same doubts would have helped her to believe that God is okay with doubts.

"I guess if I read other people have the same doubts, it would have helped me to believe that God is okay with doubts because there are so many people. Is he going to put them all in the hell?"

On the other hand, the fear attached to doubting one's religion was considered a potential barrier to experiencing a feeling of hope while using the app. Another potential barrier that was stated is constantly interacting with people that are having doubts and questions rather than with people who found more stability and peace in their religious beliefs. However, the same participant stressed that this would depend on the people on the app so that interaction with people with some stability can be possible.

Caring Characteristics

The app was found to be caring and very soft around people's religious uncertainties. Especially the features for anonymity were the reason given for that. Besides, not being forced to go in any direction and having a space to find your own spiritual path freely depending on what one decides were indicated as important aspects of the app that makes it care about people and their spiritual states.

"The app is here to help you find your spiritual path or not find it, depends on what you decide, or what you will find on the app as an answer for yourself."

"I think it is very soft around it, so it is very nice... it is like a zen app."

Explorative

All the participants indicated that the app provides many ways to explore. It was mentioned that the explorative character of the app would depend on the diversity of the content. Besides, it was liked that there is no fixed ID that influences and limits the type of content one interacts with, and people can access very different content via shuffled sections and religious switches; therefore, "people can go outside of their bubble".

"It feels like there is no fixed algorithm in it that you're going to get the same stuff the whole time."

8.3 Suggestions for Improving the Design

During the evaluative interview, the participants also shared their opinions and ideas that can be considered when improving the design. The suggestions were collected in the form of themes that contain the most relevant feedback for design improvements.

Vocabulary

One participant found it disturbing that the app shows her "Suggested" doubts. According to the participant, when doubting, one wants to resolve and move away from doubts. Her recommendation was to replace the word "suggested" with an alternative that triggers less of this negative emotion.

"It feels a bit weird to get a suggested doubt."

Privacy & Personalisation

There were several remarks about privacy and personalisation on the app. Since some religious families may not be okay with a member interacting with such an application, for some, it can be beneficial to hide the app on their phone or change its icon and name. Therefore, people can free themselves from the fear of disclosure.

"Could you like hide it from your phone? I know that some families in some communities would get angry if they find out that their children have this app on their phone."

One of the participants said she would prefer to have control over the visibility of her comments' history because she may not feel comfortable sharing her previous thoughts.

"It would be nice if I could choose to show my comment's history...maybe I feel ashamed about my previous comment."

Some participants shared their opinions regarding the colour gradient profile pictures; it may not be enough to distinguish others and may not give enough room for reflecting the personality. The suggestion was to provide some avatar instead or next to the gradient profile picture. While sharing their comments on the colour representation, the participants indicated that for some, it might not be desirable to make their profile more personalised than it is right now.

"I think it would be fine to have an avatar, like Nintendo; you can choose your avatar. Some-thing like that, I think, says more about your personality, but I don't know if it's nice to have your personality up there."

Besides, one participant shared her desire to be able to change the profile colours later.

"Maybe it's because I'm a perfectionist that I would not know which colours to choose, I would just pick something, but then I wouldn't

feel like it would identify me."

Intimacy

Since the "Explore Inspiration" function of the app is there to balance the tension that comes with religious doubts, one of the participants suggested being able to add a voice record when sharing inspirational content to make it more intimate and sincere for others.

P4: "If you hear it from a person talking, then maybe inspiration barks for you. This is a better way to inspire other people and is more intimate."

Next, it was suggested to reformat the reflection part in the profile to make it more like a diary and more prominent where people can keep their thoughts all together instead of fragmentary. Similarly, one participant mentioned that reading people's spiritual journeys in a diary format could be much more effective than reading others' comments.

Other Suggestions

It was suggested to record the "Live" talks in a podcast format to be able to listen to them later.

"If it's (a live talk) recorded, I could listen to it on my own time when I am biking, on a train etc."

Another suggestion was to make the sacred books available on the app and link people's comments and interpretations to related chapters.

"I think it would help to explore the text of the Bible because people who are in doubt refer to it, and they start to discuss it, so maybe the text also should be there."

Lastly, one participant indicated that she would be interested in finding similarities among the religions on the app. She suggested creating a new section where all the observed similarities (content-wise) can be stored.



CONCLUSIONS

This chapter concludes the project by discussing the impact of the final design, highlighting the limitations of the project, and making recommendations for further research and development of the design. The chapter ends with a personal reflection.

9.1 The Impact of the Design

The project started with the goal of supporting people with Islamic backgrounds in their religious disaffiliation experiences in the Dutch context. The literature findings revealed that there are significant similarities between the religious transition experiences of people with Abrahamic religious backgrounds. Therefore, the project scope was widened to involve people with backgrounds in any divine religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). The primary research results showed that people who started questioning their religion suffered from discouragement from religious others as asking questions was considered a transgressive act that one should avoid. Consequently, it led to a lack of acceptance and loneliness for the participants.

On the other hand, after disavowing their religion, some can still be open to having a different angle on their former religion to find out if they would be at peace with it; this includes learning about what others find positive in their religious experiences. All these findings caused another shift in the design focus to formulate the design goal and interaction vision. Eventually, the Explore Your Perspective app is designed to support people doubting some aspects of their religion in the exploration of whether to be at peace with their religious faith or not. The product provides people a safe space to create their unique understanding of their religion.

The results of the evaluation interviews showed that the Explore Your Perspective app can support people in the exploration of their unique perspectives to find out whether to be at peace with their religion:

- Thanks to, especially, its measures for anonymity and the features to encourage direct communication with others (absence of linear discussion threads), the product provides a safe environment to explore others' views and opinions and eventually form their own perspectives of religion.
- By enabling people to interact with others who doubt their religion and see those doubts that others have, the product helps people be more comfortable with their doubts and gives them hope for their spiritual uncertainty.
- The product supports people going into deep dives into their religious doubts and inspiration with its diverse functions and features for accessing a wide variety of content.
- This wide variety of content triggers people's curiosity to explore what others say and think about specific topics.
- Being able to reflect on your own process and taking personal notes encourage people to explore their own perspective of their religion.

9.2 Conclusions on 3 Pillars

Feasibility

The cost estimation of the product implementation was made using an online estimator (EstimateMyApp, n.d.). It is 48.150 EUR for each mobile platform (IOS & Android) without any cost related to design service, and it requires 107 days for a single platform (see Appendix L). More realistic cost estimations should be done by parties that provide developing services. Considering the sensitivity of the topic and the vulnerability of the people who may use the product, it seems promising to look for ways to collaborate with non-profit organisations in the Netherlands to implement the product. Since the app requires moderation and yearly maintenance, there will be ongoing costs to keep the app running. The users can help cover these expenses through donations. The acceptability of the implementation costs (i.e., whether the product is feasible) needs to be discussed with the potential organisations willing to invest in the product development.

Desirability

The desirability of Explore Your Perspective app, from the concept phase to the final design proposal, was assessed several times. These assessments helped make the product tune with the needs and desires of the target audience. The evaluation interviews showed that the product achieves the design goal and fulfils the interaction and product qualities defined earlier. With its rich functionality and well-thought-of details, the product provides a

safe space for people to explore views and perspectives regarding their religion and other Abrahamic religions to formulate their own unique understanding of their religion. Because the Explore Your Perspective app doesn't have any intention to make people become more religious or cause them to lose their religious faith, it seems to appeal to people that are in different stages of the religious transition process.

Viability

Considering the religious landscape of the Netherlands, the potential users of the product would have mainly Christian and Muslim backgrounds, and they constitute 40 % (State, 2022) of the whole population of the Netherlands, estimated at +17.7 million (CBS, 2022). Even though it is impossible to know how many of the approximately 7 million people (including Jewish) have religious doubts, this can be said that the design would attract considerable attention from the religious spheres both in the short and the long term.

As long as users find the application helpful and feel connected to the network provided by the product, it can be assumed that people would have the willingness to finance the application through donations.

On the other hand, introducing the app in other countries may create wider networks of finance to sustain the product. Besides, the product can be launched in English regardless of location to target a wider audience.

9.3 Limitations of the project

The design process, from the literature research to the evaluation of the final design, harboured several limitations that may have affected the outcome. First, the 20-week project period made the very technical constraint of the project. All project activities were carefully planned and adjusted according to the given time. Nevertheless, this time constraint might have hindered obtaining more profound and more extensive insights throughout the process.

Due to the high sensitivity of the situation, it was a big challenge to reach out to people who left their religion (Abrahamic religions) for the primary research interviews. It was as if people who left their religious faith were invisible. Due to the controversial nature of leaving religion, especially the Abrahamic religions, only a few people from “De Vrijdenplaats” showed interest in the interviews. With more time, a more diverse constellation of interviewees (including people with Jewish backgrounds) could have been reached.

Another limitation was the lack of time and resources needed for an extensive evaluation of the final design. The participants evaluated the final design after hearing about it for 15 minutes rather than using a fully functioning prototype for a couple of weeks with other test users. It was difficult for the participants to envision what the product would bring and how it could influence how they perceive and understand their religion.

9.4 Recommendations for Development

Testing with a diverse group

It is recommended to test the design with a fully functioning app with a diverse group of participants, including people with Jewish, Christian, and Islamic backgrounds and people who are in different stages of their religious transition process. The test may involve using the app for weeks while being able to interact with other participants. The participants can be encouraged to post content and share their opinions and perspectives. Therefore, more relevant, and accurate insights can be obtained from the participants. Collecting insights from a diverse group of people will help make the design as inclusive as possible and increase its desirability when the research findings lead to good design changes.

Improving the vocabulary

The appropriateness of the terms used in the app is of great importance. The words used in the app should not evoke any negative emotion and be disturbing for the users, who may be very vulnerable and sensitive due to their spiritual uncertainties and challenges. For example, as indicated during the evaluation interviews, instead of “Suggested” doubts, it could be “Related” doubts or “Similar” doubts. The current use of “Suggested” seems not sensitive enough to the target audience. Therefore, the wording should be improved, and the iterations should be tested with the target users.

Defining relevant topics

The religious topics mentioned in the product were inspired by the app called Room for Doubts and by the insights gathered from the research throughout the design process. Though, there is neither a complete nor comprehensive list of topics that can be used for further iterations. The relevant topics should be investigated for each religion: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Extensive benchmark studies of the websites and apps that answer religious questions (some of these apps are mentioned in Chapter 6.2) and comprehensive literature research about religious transition (more than the literature used in this thesis project) can support the making of the list of topics.

Privacy and anonymity

The final design provides various ways to remain anonymous when interacting with others. As the evaluation feedback indicates (see Chapter 8.3), people may have different preferences about to what extent they are willing to share their personality or personal choices with others. Therefore, it is recommended to investigate more about people’s preferences regarding privacy and anonymity in the app. One of the approaches can be providing multiple options for different degrees of anonymity for the users to choose. For example, for some, stroke-based avatars that appear on gradient-coloured profile pictures can offer a good balance of personalised appearance and anonymity.

Language and region

Even though the final design’s content is English, the language of the product needs to be Dutch. On the other hand, the product

can be introduced in other (pluralist) countries with their official language/s. It is recommended to investigate in which countries this product can be launched; some countries with strict religious regimes may not permit it. However, people can easily bypass the block with the help of a virtual private network (VPN) app on their mobile devices (Dunaway, 2020). Using VPN may come with latency problems and cause a poor user experience (Kelly, 2020). Besides, English can be an overarching language for the app; regardless of their region, the users can interact and share their opinions around the globe in English. When adding another language (e.g., English for Dutch users), users’ local content may need to be accessible for others who have become accessible because of changing the language settings and vice versa. Therefore, content translation options should be considered. And it is important to pay sufficient attention to the correctness of these translations.

Running a beta version and finalising

After developing the product considering the extensive user research, a beta version of the app should be released. The beta version lets the public test the app and provide insights to the design team and the developers (Padgalskas, n.d.). One of the biggest help of the beta version might be learning about the moderation issues to take necessary measures. When the design and software issues are solved, the final, non-beta version can be released to the general public. After the release, user satisfaction should be tracked, and insights should be gathered to improve the app for a better user experience.

9.5 Personal Reflection

After completing this thesis project, it is time to look back and reflect on my experiences throughout the design process. I will talk about how the project helped me to grow personally and as a designer.

Personal growth

This project helped me grow personally; I have become more open to different perspectives and understandings on religious matters myself. I have realised that it is hard to challenge and break certain patterns of thinking that bring biased dispositions, especially for people whose childhood socialisation dictated relying on absolutes, recognising us and others, and seeing the world binary. While, at first, these biased dispositions may function as protective measures that help people to sustain their religious faith, the same tendencies may initiate the process of turning away from the religious faith. Relying on absolutes leaves little room to navigate uncertainties; it makes you believe that everything should have an answer, and only all those answers make the comforting truth. When you cannot find a satisfying answer, it may shake the whole landscape of your religious faith.

Throughout the process, I have realised that this is not the sharpness of thoughts that would make religious experiences comforting. On the contrary, the blurriness, uncertainty, possibility of more than one truth or the absence of the notion of truth altogether would make the religious experiences more experimental

and more enjoyable. When not relying on absolutes, everyone can find something for themselves in their religious experiences, and I believe the individualisation of religion is a significant factor in enabling this. Not having to fit in certain boxes and understanding in a way you want would help people find peace with their religion, either ending up with their own version or abandoning it altogether.

Growth as a designer

Before I started my master's at the IDE (Industrial Design Engineering) faculty of TU Delft, I worked as an industrial designer in the home appliances industry. During my work experience, I was always interested in experimenting with different methods and techniques. This is how I met with Delft's way of designing. It was five years ago that I was exploring the 'Delft Design Guide'. I was fascinated with all the methods, techniques and knowledge generated by the faculty researchers. My fascination even grew when I used some of these methods and techniques for my professional work and saw how they helped me to achieve successful designs that received appreciation. In 2019, I became interested in culture's role in design and enrolled in the online 'Culture Sensitive Design' course. The course was led by Annemiek van Boeijen, the mentor of my thesis project. I learned a lot in that course, and it broadened my perspective as a designer and human being. All these factors made me decide to apply to the Integrated Product Design (IPD) master's program to enrich my knowledge of designing human-centred, meaningful products.

This thesis project was an excellent opportunity to push my limits as a designer to design a solution for such a controversial and sensitive topic in the Netherlands. It was full of learning and challenges that made me grow exponentially. Before I started my search for a thesis topic to work on, I knew that I wanted to design a solution that would fall at the intersection of social design, behaviour change, and design for well-being; I wanted it to be human-centred. I think the result very much fulfils this goal of mine. To design such a product, I needed to learn more and improve my skills. Before setting up the interviews for the primary research, I learned about how to research sensitive topics (Lee, 1993), how to and how not to approach the interviewees, and the limitations of the methods and techniques. I wanted to use generative techniques to obtain deeper insights from the interviews, so I studied the 'Convivial ToolBox' (Sanders & Stappers, 2013).

By utilizing my learning from the 'Vision in Product Design' elective course given by Paul Hekkert and studying the Vision in Product design book (Hekkert & Dijk, 2011) in-depth, after many iterations, I formulated an interaction vision that resulted in interaction and product qualities. Together with the design goal, these qualities were the critical elements to guide the design development. It was the first time I worked with an interaction vision, and I found it very useful to achieve the desired effect with the design.

The experiences I gained during the 'Creative Facilitation' elective run by Katrina Heijne enabled me to conduct a co-creation session to obtain inspiration for the ideation phase of the project. The methods

in the book called 'Road Map for Creative Problem Solving Techniques: Organizing and facilitating group sessions' (Heijne & Meer, 2019) inspired the session set-up. Moreover, I needed to develop technical skills as well. I learned to use the software program called 'Figma' to design the final product. Lastly, I had a chance to test the usability of a digital product. As an IPD student, I have experience setting up and conducting usability testing for physical products; in this project, I had a chance to enrich my research skills by conducting a usability test for a digital product. I learned a lot about usability testing of digital products from the book called 'Research Methods in Human-Computer Interaction' (Lazar et al., 2017).

Overall, I am pleased and satisfied with the final design and the design process. It was a great opportunity to learn and grow!

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