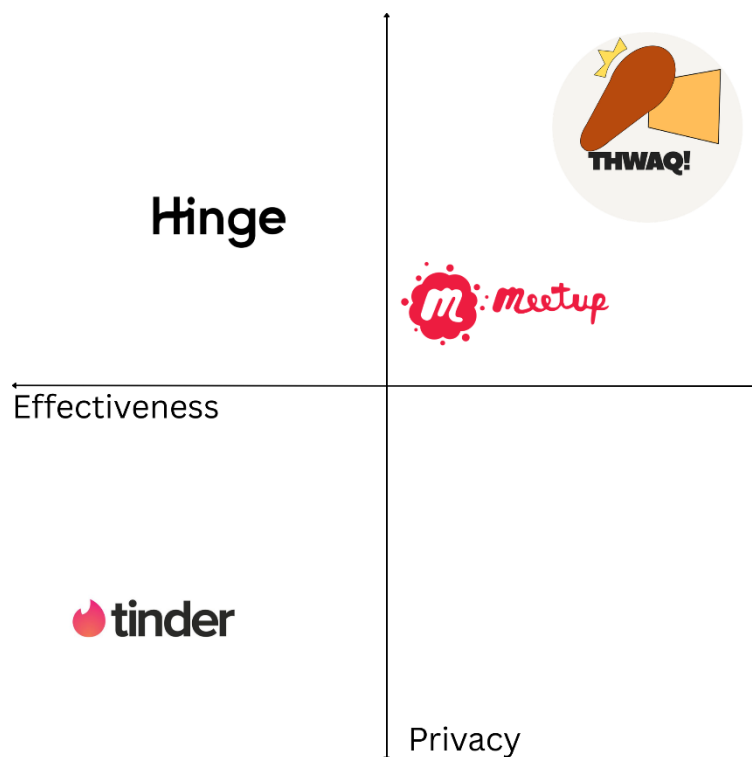


Positioning Grid - Thwaq

Zach Comerford

For this assignment, I built a positioning grid that compares my proposed club/organization meeting app with currently available competitors. I individually interviewed a group of peers who meet my ideal client criteria: people in their 20s who self-identify as post-graduates and have found that finding communities to engage with has become significantly more difficult after leaving a university environment. Thwaq will be designed with a dating-app-style approach for searching nearby groups that match users' interests, so I used the opinions of the surveyed peers to map their consensus on various dating/meetup apps along two axes: privacy and effectiveness.



Explanation of Grid

The axis that surprised me the most was how much the interviewees prioritized privacy in choosing which apps to use. This seemed odd to me, given that the general model of these apps is to upload personal information so it can be used to match with people. When I was given this answer, I would ask them to clarify, and they generally agreed that their main concern was not privacy from other users, but instead the possibility that their personal data would be collected and sold to advertisers and other corporate entities. Much of their concern stemmed from the interconnected nature of most dating apps, as most major players in the industry fall under the umbrella of Match Group. Hinge, OkCupid, and Tinder are all subsidiaries of Match, and the corporate structure connecting these companies is so muddled that users may not feel comfortable trusting any part of it with their data. These companies have also recently ventured into AI technologies, which my interviewees generally distrust, especially in applications that heavily rely on users entering potentially sensitive personal data.

The other axis, effectiveness, stems from my interviewees' experiences with specific apps. If they generally felt they spent most of their time swiping through photos rather than talking to people and meeting in person, then they would consider those apps ineffective. Having control over the effectiveness of this type of app relies on ensuring that a large number of people know about the app and that it has a positive reputation, because it needs many users to be effective at connecting users. To reach this wide an audience, any marketing campaign needs to be broad and focused on presenting Thwaq favorably over the competition in a concise manner.

Throughout our conversations, my interviewees repeatedly brought up three apps that I currently consider competitors to Thwaq: Hinge, Tinder, and Meetup. Regarding the two established axes, the consensus was that Tinder was the worst on both. Most people who used the app considered it both ineffective at helping them meet people and dubious about its privacy because it was a branch of Match Group. There was a prominent pattern of users already dissatisfied with Tinder learning about its ties to Match and promptly deleting their accounts. Hinge took a similar stance on privacy, since Match also owned it, but users generally had a better experience with the app than on Tinder and were more willing to continue using it. Tinder's existing reputation as an app primarily focused on casual hookups contributed to this divide. In contrast, Hinge's non-romantic matching options led most of my interviewees to have positive experiences with the app. The last app, Meetup, was mentioned less than the previous two, but it is the one that most closely matches Thwaq's intended use. Meetup is an app that focuses on connecting people with groups near them, and the interviewees who knew about it thought that it was most effective at fulfilling its purpose. The main criticisms leveled at it were that the app was less effective at finding people outside densely populated areas and that it was part of a larger corporate entity. Meetup is owned by Bending Spoons, a company that acquires and manages tech startups, mostly based in Europe. With this organizational structure, the users I spoke with were hesitant to trust it fully, but were more willing than they would be with a Match-owned app.

Key Takeaways

I was expecting cost to be a higher priority among the people that I interviewed. Still, because most apps have functional free versions and relatively similar prices for their premium services, price was not generally considered a concern. The interviewed peers thought that the free versions of these apps had artificially imposed limits that led to an overall worse experience than they expected from the premium versions. Still, they were generally satisfied enough not to warrant paying for the upgrade or dropping the app entirely.

Based on the complaints I heard about major dating and group meetup apps, I know which aspects of Thwaq I need to emphasize to convince people it is a worthwhile product. By far the most important factor to consider is how Thwaq will use user-submitted data. Selling user data to advertising agencies and AI companies is a highly lucrative business model, but it poses a severe risk of eroding the trust users place in the app. Because I want this app to be a trusted tool focused on connecting people, I want to make sure that ethical data use is the most prominent point in the app's marketing campaign. There are many people in my target demographic who are so tired of AI and data brokers intruding into their lives that they would be more likely to try an app that actively avoids such tactics. The second factor, the effectiveness of time spent, is more difficult to control directly, but marketing strategies can be implemented to achieve this goal. Specifically, people tend to be worried about how useful these apps are in less densely populated areas, so I want to make sure that digital marketing campaigns can reach people outside major cities, where apps like Meetup are usually seen as more effective than in the suburbs. Using existing social media platforms to advertise will likely be the most effective way to reach such a

widely dispersed target demographic, and advertising campaigns that emphasize the company's data-use policies are the message I believe will attract the most potential users.

Positioning Statement

For people who want to connect with local communities, Thwaq offers a platform where they can meet others nearby who share their interests, while knowing that their personal information is kept safe.