INTERNET JAM
enabling healthy debate and criticism

JUNE 2020 - KYOTO: MIO HATAKENAKA | EMMA HUFFMAN | YUKI HAYASHI

Difficult times demand for extraordinary solutions. Using a tomato sauce to enable protest in a scenario where all digital public spaces are controlled and monitored by the government certainly is extraordinary. While this approach may seem amusing at first glance, the concept behind it and its link to existing protest movements and practices in Hong Kong or the USA raise important questions regarding freedom of speech and political participation with regard to technological enhancements today and in the future.

INTRODUCE YOUR PRODUCT/SERVICE: WHAT IS IT AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

It is the year 2030 and the leading social media website in Japan is called The National Internet. In order to protect Japanese citizen from harmful content online, the Japanese government has passed a law called the Internet Safety Law, which allows the surveillance and control of all digital platforms. Only content that passes the governmental content filtering systems is allowed to be published online, creating an online environment free from allegedly harmful content, but also free of debate.

In the course of this future scenario, we pose the question of, how can we act as citizen when we can no longer speak freely in digital space or in public. Therefore, we propose a new demonstration method for digital spaces, creating the "spaghetti jam" movement.

In Japan, we often lose our internet connection due to microwave ovens blocking our WiFi-Signal. Buying the product "Internet Jam" and heating it in the microwave as described on the packaging will slow down the speed of nearby Internet connections or even block them. When many people are doing this at the same time, it may cause a massive network outage, preventing citizens from being monitored by the government and acting as a form of protest alike.

Since the symbol of the protest is a tomato sauce, people can share it online without being detected or filtered out. In doing so, people can participate in the protest by eating spaghetti safely at home.

WHICH SOCIETAL TOPICS ARE YOU ADDRESSING WITH YOUR PRODUCT/ SERVICE?

Internet Jam is a project to get people to think about losing or having their freedom of speech taken away from them online. The recent celebrity suicides in Japan in the first half of 2020 have spurred a movement to amend and strengthen laws against slander and defamation on the Internet. Many people feel that it is necessary to crack down on slander, hate speech, and other forms of verbal violence that cause people emotional distress. We do, too.
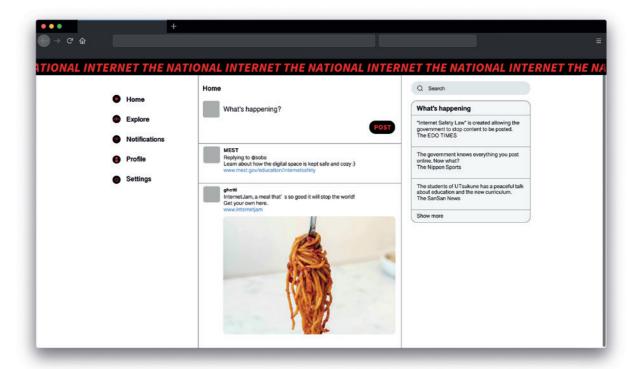
But freedom of speech is an important right that empowers us as citizens. There are many examples of the power that free speech brings to citizens that originated online in recent years. For example, in May of this year, the hashtag "I oppose the forced vote on the amendment to the Public Prosecutor's Office Law" trended on Twitter, causing the Japanese Diet to give up on passing the amendment due to public opinion. The URL for the Prime Minister's Office's opinion form was also shared on Twitter, and people began to express their opinions about politics on the social networking site. Globally, #metoo and Black Lives Matter also had a significant impact on the real world of online discourse.

We want the audience to think about what a desirable digital space would be. What does it take to enable healthy debate and criticism? What do we have to think about today, for our freedom of speech to be protected in the present and in the future?

DESCRIBE WHY YOU CHOSE THE SPECIFIC VISUAL APPEARANCE OF THE PRODUCT/SERVICE. WHAT ARE YOU INTENDING TO TRIGGER WITH THE DESIGN?

We designed three different websites to transport our scenario. The first, "The National Internet", is the main social media platform in our future scenario and all the developments of the scenario can be discovered from here: the timeline of the social networking site is responsible for communicating the changes the Internet Safety Law has brought to the Internet. By scrolling through the timeline, the user can discover some very generic posts with harmless content due to the governmental regulation, but also a governmental website explaining the benefits of the new Internet Safety Law and its historical development. Besides that, the user can discover many posts about spaghetti preparation, leading to the website of the tomato sauce provider Internet Jam, where its purpose can be discovered.

The second page is the governmental webpage that explains the background of the Internet Safety Law. It was inspired by a cartoon about constitutional amendments published by a political party in Japan in 2020. Our webpage explains how the law on regulation of expression in 2030 came about and why people are embracing it. By using cute characters, we tried to make it seem like a seemingly legitimate argument that the regulation of expression is protecting children from defamation on the Internet.

The third is the product website for Internet Jam itself. There were three requirements for this website: first, the product must not be perceived by the government as a protest tool. Second, the user's contribution to the cause of the movement must be recognizable for the user. And third, the page must be able to be loaded even with a slow internet connection. With these requirements in mind, we decided to follow early internet theme visuals for the design. We created a simple UI that references the official website of actor Hiroshi Abe, which can be loaded even with a slow internet connection.