

# An iOS Application for Intelligent Creator-Talent Discovery and Collaboration Driven by Design Thinking

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## ABSTRACT

The creator economy, estimated to be worth more than 2.1 billion dollars and expanding rapidly, has enabled individuals to monetize their skills. However, one of the most critical challenges remains finding collaborators with complementary abilities and aligned creative goals. Reports indicate that approximately 71% of creators (around 50 million globally) struggle to discover suitable talent, which affects project ambition, efficiency, and long-term sustainability. To address this gap, we present Creatist, an iOS application developed using design thinking principles and focused on intelligent collaborator discovery and streamlined collaboration workflows. Beyond networking, the platform integrates intelligent search and filtering, portfolio discovery, project management, deadline-driven task control, centralized file sharing, and real-time communication via chat and calls. These capabilities support meaningful partnerships, improve execution quality, and increase visibility of both individual and team outcomes. By improving collaboration workflows, Creatist contributes to stronger creator productivity and economic opportunity, with prior studies showing collaborative projects can earn up to 30% more than solo efforts.

**Keywords:** Design thinking, creator economy, talent discovery, iOS application, collaboration platform, intelligent search, SDG 8

## I. INTRODUCTION

Current market studies estimate the creator economy at over 2.1 billion dollars, with strong growth driven by platform expansion and changing digital consumption behavior [1]. Around 50 million people globally now treat content creation as a primary or secondary source of income [2].

Industry reports further show that nearly 71% of active creators face significant difficulty in finding compatible collaborators [3]. At the same time, empirical observations suggest collaborative projects generate, on average, 30% higher revenue than solo projects [4]. Ma et al. [5] also describe the hidden labor burden of multi-platform creator operations.

Design thinking offers a practical approach for solving such human-centered, workflow-heavy problems through iterative prototyping and user feedback [6]. Based on this,

we propose Creatist: an iOS platform for intelligent creator discovery and end-to-end collaboration with integrated project management, communication, portfolio presentation, and file sharing.

The central research question is: How can design thinking principles be applied to build a mobile application that effectively addresses creator discovery and collaboration challenges?

This work contributes by:

- Applying design thinking to creator-economy collaboration problems.
- Building a multi-criteria discovery engine with genre, location, and preference matching.
- Integrating project, task, file, and communication workflows in one mobile system.
- Validating usability through structured user testing.
- Creation of a smart discovery engine with an inbuilt genre-based filtering, geolocation matching, and preference matching to create meaningful connections with creators.
- End-to-end collaboration tools such as project management, tasks, files and real-time communication integrated into one mobile platform.
- Usability testing to prove its effectiveness in specific target groups of users.

This paper continues in the following way: Section II will review related work in creator platforms and design thinking applications, Section III will elaborate on the design thinking process and system architecture, Section IV will give specifics on implementation, Section V will discuss evaluation methodology and discussion, Section VI will discuss implications, and conclude by outlining the future directions.

## II. RELATED WORK

### A. The Creator Economy Ecosystem

The appearance of such platforms as YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and Twitch has radically altered creative labor markets [7]. Bleier et al. [8] thoroughly examine the mediating role of social media platforms in the support of creator activities. The scholars that study the topic of creator entrepreneurship single out such

success factors as the importance of branding the individual, building the audience, diversifying revenue, and choosing the platform wisely [9].

Craig and Cunningham [10] also discussed the governance infrastructures in social media entertainment in which they recorded how platforms dispose control by way of policies, algorithmic decisions of visibility and monetization conditions.

### B. Multi-Platform Creator Practices

Modern artists can hardly afford to limit their activities to one platform. According to the survey research, 96 percent of creators have presence in two or more platforms, and 82 percent use four or more platforms at the same time [11].

According to Ma et al. [5], the notion of creator ecology was coined by the authors to explain the way creators arrange and navigate various platform relations.

The issue of navigation on the platform is applicable to the context of collaboration as well. Weber et al. [12] reported the development of informal workarounds to collaborate by food influencers on Instagram, proving to be direct messages, comment threads, and off-platform communication via email and messaging applications.

### C. Design Thinking in Application Development

Design thinking has become one of the most effective approaches to the design of solutions aimed at human welfare in technology [6].

Patient engagement and adherence are better with health-care apps that are developed using design thinking [13]. Technological innovations in education built based on the principles of design thinking prove to be more effective in terms of learning outcomes [14].

### D. Collaborative Software and Innovative Processes

The studies on creative collaboration have revealed some of the most important success factors such as assignment of roles, proper communication channels, and common creative vision [15].

Wohn and Freeman [16] examined the process of managing collaborations among Twitch streamers, finding that their specific partners were managed through detailed manual partnership tracking systems, schedule coordination, and joint content organization.

### E. Research Gap

The review of literature indicates a definite gap: although studies have recorded issues resulting to the creators in the discovery and collaboration, and design thinking has been proved to be effective in developing human oriented solutions, existing literature has not employed design thinking methodology in specifically developing created creator collaboration platforms.

## III. DESIGN THINKING PROCESS AND SYSTEM DESIGN

### A. The Application of the Design Thinking Methodology

Creatist was developed through a systematic design thinking process modified to fit a mobile application development. All the phases provided some input that developed the ultimate system design.

Empathize Phase: The first studies were semi-structured interviews with 15 creators in five areas. Interviews also examined the existing collaboration practices, areas of pain with existing tools, and their hopes regarding ideal collaboration support. Key findings included:

- According to creators, they spent an average of 6-8 hours per week on coordination of the collaboration with fragmented tools.
- 73% of the participants cited discovery of compatible collaborators as the major obstacle to ambitious projects.
- 87 percent wished to have platforms that are integrated to include networking, project management, and communication.
- It had to be mobile-friendly and 92% of them wanted to use smartphone-based options instead of desktop programs.

Define Phase: The resulting problem statement of the synthesis of empathy research is the following: crafters are seeking an integrated mobile platform, which smartly pairs them with compatible partners and offers end-to-end project support.

Ideate Phase: Brainstorming sessions came up with more than 40 possible features which were screened across user value, technical feasibility and differentiating with existing solutions.

Prototype Phase: It consisted of three phases of iterative prototyping; (1) navigation flow validation and verification through low-fidelity paper wireframes, (2) visual testing and interaction testing through interactive Figma prototype.

Test Phase: The refined prototype was tested on 12 subjects and the results of the formative evaluation helped to inform the final implementation priorities. The information about such an assessment is represented in Section V.

### B. System Architecture

The design thinking is present in the architecture since it focuses on the user experience without being technical weak. The system has three major layers:

Presentation Layer: The SwiftUI-based iOS application provides the user interface and controls screen model, user input, and local state.

Application Layer: The business logic is stored in a FastAPI backend service and it is used to authenticate,

validate data, use smart matching algorithm.

Data Layer: PostgreSQL offers a persistent data storage of user profiles, projects and content. Supabase is an extension to basic database capability, which provides authentication service, media asset file storage, and real-time subscriptions (instant updates). Redis caching helps to optimize frequent data.

### C. *Intelligent Discovery System*

The discovery feature is the most essential innovation of Creatist as this is a solution to the main pain point that was identified during the empathy research. The system has a multi-dimensional matching system on multiple criteria:

Genre Matching: The platform has 18 creative genres which are grouped into four categories:

- Visual Arts: Videographer, Photographer, Graphic Designer, Editor.
- Music: Vocals, Singer, Guitarist, Pianist, Drummer, Violinist, Flutist, Sitarist, Percussionist, Composer.
- Performance: Dancer, Actor.
- Visual Effects: Visual Effects Leader, Visual Effects Team Leaders, Visual Effects Team Members.

In the process of creating a profile, users choose both the single and multiple genres, allowing them both to match exactly (find a specific skill), and to explore (browse related disciplines).

Geographic Filtering: Location-aware matching Geographic matching is based on Haversine formula to determine the distance between users on the basis of the stored coordinates. This allows the creators to seek local partners to work together in a physical setting, but still have the option of adapting to long distance relationships. Search radius is set by the users to 10km up to global.

Preference Alignment: There are also other dimensions of filters, such as preference on mode of work (remote, in-person, hybrid), expectations on payment (paid, collaborative/free, negotiable), and an indicator of availability.

### D. *Vision Board Project Management*

Vision Boards offer strong project management frameworks in an artistic process. The hierarchy is to deal with the complexity of multi-creator projects:

Project Definition: Within each Vision Board, there are project metadata (title, description, have a start and end date, and status tracking (Draft, Active, Completed, Cancelled)). Color coding can be used to visualize customization so that creators can have many parallel projects.

Role Specification: Projects specify required roles by gen-res taxonomy with minimum and maximum participants in each role. As an example, a short film may need: 1 Director, 1-2 Videographers, 1 Editor and 2-4

Actors.

Assignment Management: Individual assignments match creators with project roles, a status of invitation (Pending, Accepted, Declined), work arrangement (remote/in-person), and terms of compensation (paid amount, or collaborative). The invitation process involves the notification and in-app acceptance, which simplifies the recruitment process.

Task Control: Granular tasks management has title, description, priority (Low, Medium, High, Critical) status tracking (Not Started, In Progress, Completed, Blocked), due date, and time estimates. The logical workflow sequences are imposed on task dependencies with a set of standard project management relationships (Finish-to-Start, Start-to-Start, Finish-to-Finish).

### E. *File Sharing and Communication*

Intensive communications remove the use of external communication platforms:

Real-Time Chat: Websocket-based one-on-one real-time chat provides message persistence, typing cues and read receipts. History of chats is cross-session and cross-device available.

Voice Communication: Supported inbuilt audio calling makes it possible to discuss in real-time without changing platforms. The call feature is combined with project context, so one can easily coordinate in the middle of the working process.

Centralized File Sharing: Supabase Storage offers the opportunity to share project assets inside the application. The assisted formats are document, audio, video, and images. Attachments are made to the particular projects and they preserve the organizational context.

### F. *Portfolio Showcasing*

The social feed allows the creators to present finished work and gain professional visibility:

Post Creation: Multi-media posts provide support to images and videos in the form of captions, hashtags, and collaborative attribution. Partnerships can be seen as a collaboration can be credited by several contributors through posts.

Discovery Feeds: Content is displayed in two formats, Trending and Following. The Trending algorithm presents quality content to new creators.

Interactions: There are typical social functions such as likes, comments with replies, and view counts, which allow interaction in the community.

## IV. IMPLEMENTATION

### A. *Technology Stack*

The choice of technology focused on high productivity of the developers, features of the platform and scalability:

TABLE 1.  
TECHNOLOGY STACK COMPONENTS

| Component               | Technology                                        |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| iOS Framework           | SwiftUI 4.0                                       |
| Programming Language    | Swift 5.0 (iOS 15.0+ target)<br>Backend Framework |
| Database                | PostgreSQL through asyncpg                        |
| Authentication          | JWT tokens + Supabase Auth                        |
| File Storage            | Supabase Storage                                  |
| Real-time Communication | WebSocket (native implementation) Caching Layer   |
| Geolocation Services    | geopy library                                     |
| Push Notifications      | Apple Push Notification Service (APNs)            |
| iOS Framework           | SwiftUI 4.0                                       |
| Programming Language    | Swift 5.0 (iOS 15.0+ target)<br>Backend Framework |
| Database                | PostgreSQL through asyncpg                        |

SwiftUI was chosen due to its declarative paradigm that lets developers quickly iterate a UI-needed by the design thinking prototype-test cycles. FastAPI is an API framework that has a high code performance, has automatic documentation, and allows agile evolution of the backend.

### B. Authentication Architecture

The authentication scheme compromises to both security and user experience by providing a variety of sign-in options:

Email/Password & OTP: A classic credentialbased authentication that has been supplemented with one time password authentication on email.

Phone Authentication: SMS-based OTP allows one to sign into the device with the help of mobile numbers.

Social Authentication: Google Sign-In using OAuth 2.0 minimizes the onboarding torment of users with current Google accounts.

### C. Network Layer Design

The NetworkManager singleton offers a centralized API access with a number of important features:

Generic Request Handling: GET, POST, PUT, PATCH and DELETE have typed operations that automatically provide support in terms of JSON serialization.

Smart Token Management: The TokenMonitor component will monitor token expiration and proactively refresh them.

Error Resilience: Fully detailed error handling gives fruitful feedback to network failures, server errors and broken responses.

Date Format Flexibility: Custom decoding allows a

variety of date formats (ISO8601 variants, date-only formats) that allow API response variations.

### D. Intelligent Discovery Implementation

Multi-criteria matching is provided by the discovery engine:

Query Construction: Database query can be written in the form of user-defined filters.

Computation of the Distance: The implementation of Haversine formula,

$$d = 2R_{arcsin} \sqrt{\sin^2 \left( \frac{\phi_2 - \phi_1}{2} \right) + \cos(\phi_1) \cos(\phi_2) \sin^2 \left( \frac{\lambda_2 - \lambda_1}{2} \right)}$$

(1)

where R is the radius of the Earth (6,371 km),  $\phi$  represents latitude, and  $\lambda$  represents longitude. Great-circle proximity filtering is accurate with this formula.

Result Ranking: Matched creators are ranked based on composite scores that include filter match quality, profile completeness, and recent activity.

### E. Real-Time Communication Implementation

Websockets architecture supports real-time messaging:

Connection Management: Enduring WebSocket connections are supported via the ChatWebSocketManager that does connection reconnection in the event of network failure and session revival.

Message Delivery: Outbound messages are sent instantly in the socket connection when local optimistic updates are received.

Presence Indicators: Indicators of presence such as online status and typing are used as sources of awareness to make conversations more responsive.

### V. UI SCREENSHOTS OF THE APP

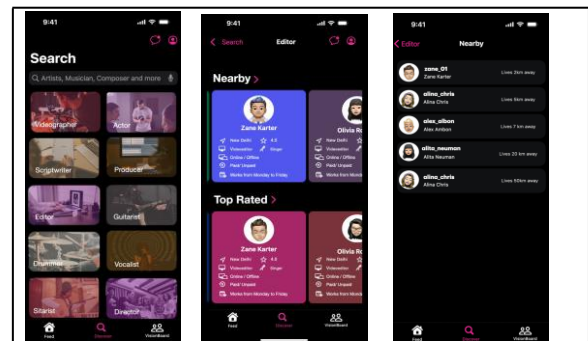


Fig. 1. UI screenshots 1 of the Creatist iOS application.



## VI. EVALUATION

### A. Methodology

Testing was done using a mixed-methodology including quantitative measures of usability and qualitative user feed-back, in line with the principles of design thinking of user-centered validation.

Participants: Twelve students (7 men, 5 women) aged between 19 and 28 years ( $M = 22.3$ ,  $SD = 2.8$ ) were selected in creative arts and media courses at universities.

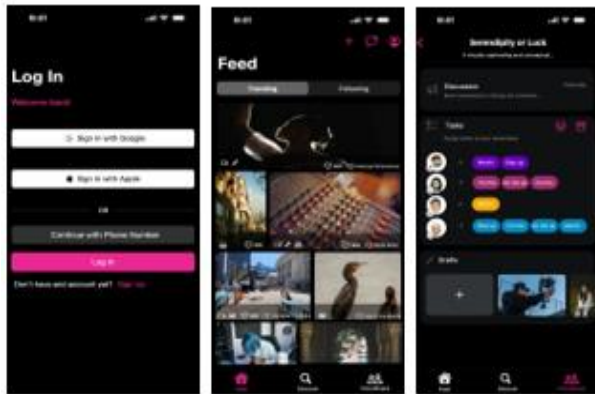


Fig. 2. UI screenshots 2 of the Creatist iOS application.

Procedure: Each session was about 45 minutes, and divided into three stages:

1. Introduction (10 minutes): Fill-in of demographic questionnaire and short introduction of application with main features description, no instructions.
2. Task Completion (25 minutes): The participants were given five standardized tasks to complete and the researchers were observing and recording the time of completion, error and verbal commentary.
3. Assessment (10 minutes): The completion of the System Usability Scale, rating of feature satisfaction, and semi-structured interview exploring the experience and highlighting and suggestions of improvement.

Tasks: There were five tasks that were core functionality:

- T1: Creation of an account with the completion of a pro-file with genre and location choice.
- T2: To discover creators: filters on genre and location to discover photographers in 50km.
- T3: Vision Board preparation such as project set-up, role definition, and invitation of collaborators.
- T4: Social post interaction (like and comment) and feed browsing.
- T5: Starting a chat and communicating with a fellow user.

### B. Task Performance Results

The metrics of quantitative tasks are presented in Table II.

TABLE 2.  
TASK PERFORMANCE METRICS

| Task                  | Success Rate | Time (min) | Errors (mean) |
|-----------------------|--------------|------------|---------------|
| T1: Account Creation  | 100%         | 2.6 (0.9)  | 0.25          |
| T2: Creator Discovery | 100%         | 1.9 (0.6)  | 0.08          |
| T3: Vision Board      | 91.7%        | 6.4 (2.1)  | 0.92          |
| T4: Feed Interaction  | 100%         | 1.4 (0.4)  | 0.00          |
| T5: Chat Message      | 100%         | 1.3 (0.3)  | 0.00          |

The definition of success was completion of the task in 10 minutes without interference of researchers. Findings indicate high rates of completion of tasks in each of the features.

Time taken was in accordance with the expectation of the tasks. Tasks with a duration of less than 2 minutes (Feed Interaction, Chat) were done on average less than 2 minutes. The longest time was the Vision Board task ( $M = 6.4$  minutes).

### C. System Usability Scale Results

Standardized usability was offered by the System Usability Scale (SUS) [17]. The average SUS score was 76.8 ( $SD = 11.2$ ), that is above 68 which is the industry standard and it lies within the good usability range as per adjective scale by Bangor et al. [18].

At the item level, it was found that:

TABLE 3.  
SYSTEM USABILITY SCALE ITEMS SCORES

| Item                        | Mean | SD  |
|-----------------------------|------|-----|
| Would use frequently        | 3.9  | 0.8 |
| Not unnecessarily complex   | 4.1  | 0.7 |
| Easy to use                 | 4.0  | 0.9 |
| No technical support needed | 4.2  | 0.6 |
| Functions well integrated   | 4.0  | 0.8 |
| Consistent design           | 3.8  | 0.9 |
| Quick to learn              | 4.3  | 0.6 |
| Not cumbersome              | 3.9  | 0.8 |
| Felt confident using        | 4.1  | 0.7 |
| Low learning required       | 4.0  | 0.8 |

The top rated one is the “Quick to learn” ( $M = 4.3$ ) which confirms the design thinking approach focus on intuitive interfaces. The lowest rated one, “Consistent design” ( $M = 3.8$ ), provides a point of improvement to the future development.

### D. Feature Satisfaction

The ratings of post-task satisfaction on a 5-point scale:

The best rating was on Intelligent Discovery ( $M = 4.6$ )

with the participants particularly appreciating the genresbased filtering and location features.

**TABLE 4.**  
**FEATURE SATISFACTION RATINGS**

| Feature               | Mean | SD  |
|-----------------------|------|-----|
| Intelligent Discovery | 4.6  | 0.5 |
| Real-time Chat        | 4.4  | 0.6 |
| Vision Board          | 4.3  | 0.7 |
| Portfolio/Feed        | 4.0  | 0.8 |
| Profile Management    | 3.9  | 0.9 |

### E. Qualitative Findings

Interpretation of the interview responses through thematic analysis revealed several themes that were consistently used:

**Integration Value:** The participants always appreciated the integrated platform strategy:

“Lastly, something that deserves creators indeed. I do not want to have five apps in order to collab-orate with someone to work on a project.” (P6, Graphic Designer)

**Discovery Effectiveness:** The smart discovery system solved the recorded pain points:

“The genre search is brilliant. I use the search term photographer on other platforms and find random accounts. Here I can really get one who does the style I require, in my city.” (P2, Videographer)

**Vision Board Utility:** Collaboration needs were inline with project management features:

“The Vision Board is so much sense regarding creative projects. I am able to know precisely who does what and what is to be done at what time. Much better than the mess I have now in a spreadsheet.” (P9, Director)

**Improvement Recommendations:** The participants gave such improvement opportunities as calendar synchronization (7 respondents), notification customization (5 respondents), and portfolio templates (4 respondents).

### F. Comparative Analysis

Comparison of features with competitor websites:

Creatist is a unique intelligent discovery, end-to-end project management and communication, to solve the fragmentation that creators currently have to navigate among various unlinked tools.

## VII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have introduced Creatist, an iOS application based on design thinking and solving the

urgent issues of discovering and collaborating.

The intelligent discovery system targets directly the recorded statistic according to which 71 percent of creators cannot find the necessary partners.

Vision Boards are an important addition to creator-based management of projects.

The philosophy of integration that has saturated the design of Creatist reacts to the research that has documented the high levels of invisible work done by creators [5].

**Alignment with SDG 8:** The application is directly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) of the United Nations and its inclusion of digital creators in the applications can be considered significant [19]. Key contributions include:

- Reducing the obstacles to the formation of collaboration with the help of clever discovery.
- Professional tools are offered irrespective of creator scale or creation.
- Promoting economic development by effective collaboration processes.
- Surfacing emerging creators as promoted on the discovery and feeds algorithm.

The 30 percent revenue growth between the collaborative and solo projects that is recorded [4] highlights the economical role of good collaboration support.

**Limitations:** There are a number of limitations that should be mentioned. The evaluation sample though suitable informative usability assessment was selected based on a university population and it might not include a full representation of the greater creator population.

**Future Work:** The future work would be based on evaluation results and user response, the improvements that are planned are:

1. AI-Recommendations: Machine learning processes that interpret the history of projects, creative style.
2. Calendar Integration: Integration with the iOS Calendar and Google Calendar to manage deadlines and coordinate their availability.
3. Payment Processing: Built-in payment processing of paid collaboration agreements.
4. Android Platform: Host Android application to reach further than iOS users.
5. Longitudinal Study: Long-lasting studies on the topic of Creatist being integrated into the professional work-flow by the creators over time.

**TABLE 5**  
**FEATURE COMPARISON WITH EXISTING PLATFORMS**

| Feature             | LinkedIn | Instagram | Behance | Trello  | Creatist |
|---------------------|----------|-----------|---------|---------|----------|
| Creator Profiles    | No       | Partial   | Yes     | No      | Yes      |
| Genre Discovery     | No       | No        | Partial | No      | Yes      |
| Location Filtration | Limited  | No        | No      | No      | Yes      |
| Project Management  | No       | No        | No      | Yes     | Yes      |
| Task Dependencies   | No       | No        | No      | Partial | Yes      |
| Real-time Chat      | Yes      | Yes       | No      | No      | Yes      |
| File Sharing        | No       | Limited   | Yes     | Yes     | Yes      |
| Portfolio Display   | Partial  | Partial   | Yes     | No      | Yes      |

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