

ImpACT: Restoring the “Act” in Activism

University of Virginia

Amayr Babar (Team Leader) & Ali Sareini | May 17, 2021 - August 31, 2021

Charlottesville, Virginia, United States of America

Context: As recent events in the United States have unfolded, it has become evident that there needs to be a solution for de-escalating and promoting peaceful measures for change across the country through a means that ensures that the voices of constituents are heard and acknowledged before violent protests begin. The frustration of constituents have driven the recent conflicts in America regarding race, politics, division, and hate; there have been a myriad of petitions and crowdfunding efforts to make a call to justice, however no single platform exists to catalyze peaceful change effectively. With no centralized campaign platform focused on executing an organized plan of action, millions of activists can easily be left unanswered by the government and business organizations, resulting in rising tensions. Struggling to realize change from unverified signatures and supporting petitions with nonaction oriented plans, supporters often – from frustration and desperation – resort to violent measures to unsuccessfully martyr their cause.

Leading petition platforms, such as Change.org, foster a false perception of activism where anyone can become an “interested bystander” for a particular cause where their “Slackivism’s” main effect is to increase their own feel-good factor, rather than creating real life impact on the cause.¹ In a thorough review of online petitions spanning ten years in Europe, it was found that although the campaigns were positively received, they had no solid evidence of yielding significant results.¹ However, it is worthy to note that occasionally, online petitioning has brought forth public policy on a national scale, for example, the Unlocking Consumer Choice and Wireless Competition Act. Regardless, on Change.org, ninety-nine percent of petitions eventually fail² because they are improperly organized, addressed, and executed, therefore actively silencing and disregarding those who express their support.³

Through implementation of moral, cognitive, and emotional success patterns, this project aims to revolutionize online campaigns by transforming the inactive role of participants through organizational unity, a “Smart Petition” focused framework, and blockchain functionality to facilitate diplomacy of all people, thoughts, and ideas.

Qualifications: Amayr Babar and Ali Sareini together have a total of eight years of coding experience and seventy-eight thousand application downloads in one-hundred-seventy-two countries. In 2020, they won first place in the U.S. Congressional App Challenge, handpicked by Congressman Donald McEachin, to unveil their concept application at the U.S. Capitol, during House of Code, for innovating the paper-pencil Cohen Mansfield Agitation Inventory to assist medical professionals with recording agitated behaviors of Alzheimer's patients. Last year, they spearheaded a revolutionary independent political campaign placing the youngest mayoral candidate in the history of Chesapeake city on the official ballot in order to bring awareness to issues within their community and to urge young people to register to vote through supporting the campaign; this effort to gain youth support successfully skyrocketed civic engagement in the least politically involved age-range and created a framework that allowed young voters to stay involved for future political events. It is from their invaluable experiences that they aim to develop a software solution to create unity in today's politics.

Solution: Our cross platform mobile application “ImpACT,” built upon Google's Flutter application SDK, will serve as a central, comprehensive platform that will act as an intermediary between government officials, organizations, and constituents. In most cases, middlemen are seen as an obstacle, however, ImpACT will serve its role to connect voters and government officials, rather than restrict any flow of information. ImpACT will have a starting hub where one can find fact-based and cited information on issues regarding injustices, conflicts, and global affairs that is presented in a digestible manner. Aswell as providing credible information, ImpACT will innovate the outdated and untrustworthy process of lobbying by directly connecting concerned citizens with their local and national public officials and legislators. There will be a well-developed framework in place to allow for transparent communication between organizations and users. Further, ImpACT will additionally innovate on the age-old petition process through “Smart Petitions.” Smart Petitions differentiate themselves greatly from standard petitions by utilizing organized, scalable action plans and a tiered system to gradually increase effectiveness by pushing accountability on office holders. It is through this act of holding public officials liable that allows ImpACT to truly cause change, forming an effective social campaign unparalleled by either online petitions or social media platforms.

Features of ImpACT

- Centralized platform to host a multitude of fact-based and uncharged information pertaining to local and global issues.

HOW: Though an objective vetting process, campaigns will be prescreened for violence, hate, and etc, however, still ensuring that the voices of both the majority and minority are not censored. This process allows users to become educated on issues without any preconceived notions, allowing them to form their own opinions.

- Multi-phased, scaled “Smart Petitions” with quantifiable, progress-based goals that are centered upon daily continuous actions which can adapt to ensure campaign success.

HOW: Based on the campaign type, the option to utilize variable and quantitative milestones to customize a Smart Petition will be available. These multistep phases can be set by the petition organizer to be progressively harder the closer a Smart Petition comes to completion. An example set of phases could begin by collectively sending 100,000

¹Aragon, P., Saez-Trumper, D., Redi, M., Hale, S., Gomez, V., & Kaltenbrunner, A. (2018). Online Petitioning through Data Exploration and What We Found There: A Dataset of Petitions from Avaaz.org.

²Noshokaty, Ahmed & Deng, Shuyuan & Kwak, Dong-Heon. (2016). Success Factors of Online Petitions: Evidence from Change.org. 1979-1985. 10.1109/HICSS.2016.249.

³Hopper, T. (2019, May 13). Why petitions are (almost always) a staggering waste of time. Retrieved January 26, 2021, from <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/why-petitions-are-almost-always-a-staggering-waste-of-time>

emails to legislators, followed by 1,000 phone calls to congressmen, and eventually collecting 100 separate fundraising donations to support the cause; these phases provide campaigns with an organized plan of action with measurable results, while also ensuring consistent support for a cause that will not waiver as just a few days pass. Smart Petitions can additionally gain enough support from verified signatures to organize protests, acting as a safeguard so the liable party must acknowledge the cause and begin the legal process of conflict resolution.

- A platform that is separate from current social media platforms that focuses directly on active involvement to highlight community issues so users can have consistent updates and opportunities to express ongoing support that coincides with a campaign's progress-based goals.

HOW: Through implementation of dedicated campaign pages, users will have a “task” checklist of daily actions to complete in order to actively support the goals of a campaign, such as clicking a button to send an automated email to a political figure. The utilization of push notifications will serve to remind users to stay involved in the campaign, rather than simply endorsing the campaign with their signature like Change.org.

- Platform-based campaign donations are verified and directly sent to the endorsed organization/legal entity to avoid fraud and successful appropriation of funds.

HOW: Donations will be mediated through a 3rd-party platform and verified through direct contact with campaign organizers. An extra level of transparency will be added with block-chain implementation.

- Transparent and expedited responses between office holders and constituents to increase and expand transparent accessibility and diplomacy.

HOW: Office holders have the ability to create a profile, comment, and publicly respond to community issues which fosters a direct link with registered voters to make legislative decisions that accurately reflect the views of their constituents.

- Ability for organizations, entities, and office holders to visibly endorse and promote trending issues to express their community support for a common humanity and to bring people on opposite sides of issues together.

HOW: Similar to a verification check, profiles of public officials and organizations will be embedded in posts for all users to see. This allows for these entities to proudly display their support for a cause, thus enabling it to attain greater traction and increasing its chance of success.

Objectives and Timeline: Every feature of ImpACT was meticulously designed to provide the end user with a intuitive user experience all while addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 5 (Gender Equality), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), & 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) to advance statesmanship and prevent conflict. Utilizing Adobe's streamlined Creative Cloud suite and Google's efficient Flutter SDK, ImpACT's development brief will quickly pass strict macro-deadlines with a three-pronged approach to break development into phases: prototyping and testing with user experience to create a beautiful user interface, developing with Flutter SDK and porting assets/information into functional instances, and releasing a closed-beta with updates based on user feedback. Each phase in the development plan will take 4 weeks to complete each, with 2 weeks to cover any unforeseen conflicts. As of now, all layouts have been rendered and created, thus allowing us to start the development process immediately to the end of July. Using this methodology, a polished open beta release will be published by August 31, 2021. This release will include the core functionality on ImpACT outlined within this document along with a scalable backend system capable of providing a platform for individuals globally.

Sustainability and Outcomes (Conclusion): Our extensive prior experiences with mobile app development will be a tremendous aid in the realization of ImpACT. Additionally, once properly developed, ImpACT will be able to semi-autonomously run with mediation and have the ability to scale to millions of users nationwide. The outcome of this project is to completely revolutionize the relationship between citizens, businesses, and the governments built upon the framework of care ethics. We plan to fully utilize the Projects for Peace Grant before the submission of the final report to account for costs associated with front end development, back end development, hosting, hiring expenditures, and non-profit entity formation. In short, the funding will be utilized to kick start the creation of the project, with further funding coming from a non-profit monetization strategy for promoting campaigns on the platform. We intend that this four plus month long beta development of ImpACT will be the beginning of continued sustainability through forming a nonprofit organization to provide long term ongoing support and development on the project.

ImpACT was inspired by, and designed around, the consistent failure and neglect activists feel from public office holders and businesses. Inadequate platforms operate users with a false sense of effectiveness; ImpACT strives to allow anyone, regardless of their differences, to achieve real change through their political and social involvement. Kathryn W. Davis once said that her first memory was of walking in a suffragette parade with her mother as they waved their yellow flags in support of equal rights for women. The funding of ImpACT would honor that memory by providing a platform for those who are marginalized within the digital era, so they too can support the change they want to see in the world.