The most important theory I have learned while working on this module and designing the user interfaces is the self-determination theory (SDT). I first learned about the SDT theory in a psychology paper while exploring ways to make my projects more user-centered. To better understand the theory, I read more papers and found it a comprehensive framework often used to research human motivation and personality in multiple domains. The idea makes a distinction between internal motivation—doing something because it is personally significant, worthwhile, or entertaining—and external motivation, which is doing something to obtain a reward or stay out of trouble (Lynch, 2020). It argues that better results are linked to intrinsic motivation as opposed to external incentives. According to the SDT, an individual's motivation for an activity in a certain area is more significant than their level of motivation (Ryan and Deci, 2017). It postulates that the individual's perception of autonomy, relatedness, and competence can have a positive impact on their incentive, performance, and persistence in engaging in activities. Following this concept, people are more likely to participate or perform better in activities in environments where their inner needs can be satisfied. As I learned more about this theory, the more I unconsciously examined my projects to see if they shared the features mentioned above and provided users with the appropriate feeling.

I had never prioritized the user needs so much in my design until I learned about this theory. Instead, I put a lot of time and effort into thinking about the colors, simplicity, and typography of my projects. The SDT, however, has broadened my views and reshaped my thinking structure. It encourages me to think from different perspectives, especially from the user's perspective, rather than using my own ideas and experiences as the inspiration for my design. Even though I intentionally think outside the box, the colors and concerns I currently use in my projects are still limited by my gender, personality, and age group. For example, a lot of pinks and low saturation grays are used in my Project 3. Besides, I choose a cute, two-dimensional bunny motif as the main graphic character. It frames my audience in the group of 20-30-year-old young females and makes it difficult for me to truly understand my user pain points. The SDT, on the other hand, provides me with multiple perspectives on the users' psychology, enabling me to better understand people who are physically far from me and helping me to design my project in a more inclusive and diversified way.
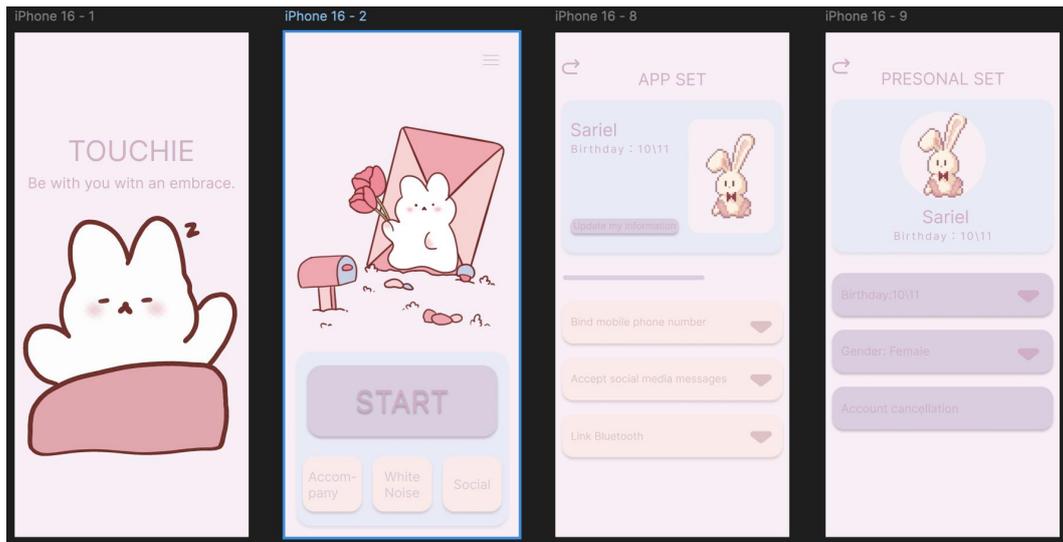
Project 3

Furthermore, the three psychological needs emphasized in SDT -- autonomy, competence, and relatedness -- can assist me in creating more engaging user experiences. In the field of new media, autonomy refers to people's need to be in charge of their own actions and choices and requires user-friendly interfaces and personalized content. Competence entails feeling capable in one's effort. Thus, in practice, the projects need to have clear instructions and achievable tasks. Relatedness refers to the desire to be linked to others so I would better bring timely feedback and some community-building features to my projects (Deci and Ryan, 2020). After learning the SDT, I have come to realize that if my design could have addressed the three psychological demands of users, people would probably feel respected and appreciated when they are using the app. Thus, more people can be attracted to and be active in my projects and will return in the future. On the contrary, if my design fails to give users a sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competency, they may feel dissatisfied with a bad experience and turn to others. Besides, I realized from the SDT that to create a great user-centered product, the designer should have a strong ability to empathize with others by putting themselves into others' shoes over and over again and caring about users' intrinsic needs. Only in this way can we design works with humanistic glory.

As I progressively understood and familiarized myself with the SDT, I tried to focus on my potential users in accordance with the three psychological dimensions embedded in the theory. First, I identified my user community before I started designing and analyzed their needs when I was working on Project 2. By preparing questionnaires and interviewing them in advance, I took into account the likelihood that they would choose to use my app on their own, and also got a quick understanding of their pain points when using

the app or web page. Therefore, I drew a portrait of my users in my preliminary work, giving me a clear direction for my design.
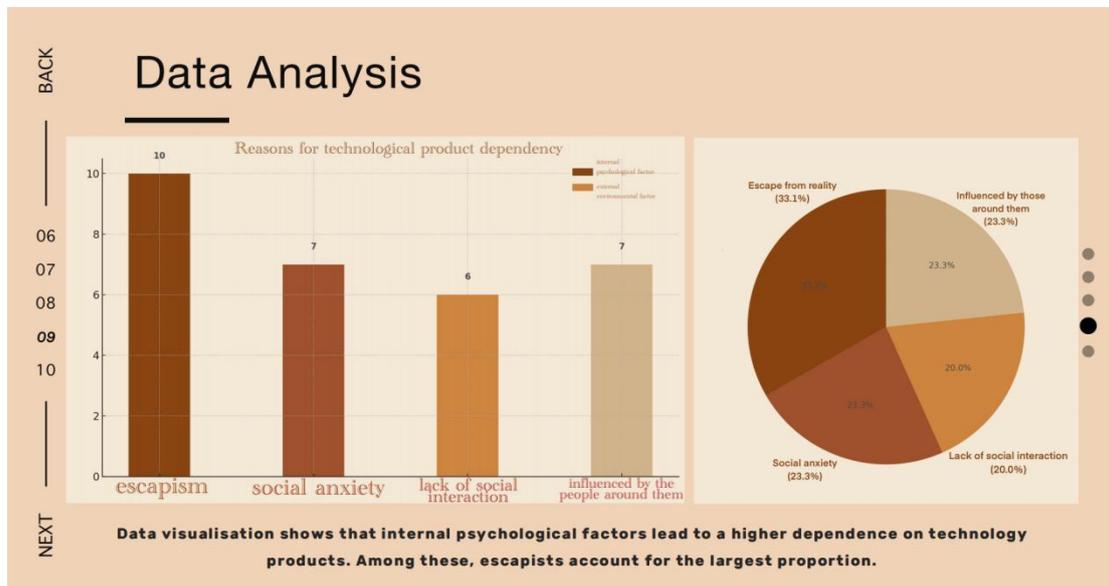

Project 2

Since I have good empathy skills, I also pay extra attention to the users' feelings when I design, and think about the logic, possible experiences, and performance of my product from their perspectives. In Project 2, I have created simple and clear instructions for users to help them visualize their competence in reducing their dependence on electronic devices. In Project 3, I built a social platform for my users, who live far away from their homelands and have similar experiences, to share and communicate with each other, so that they can find an echo, be related to each other, and not feel lonely.
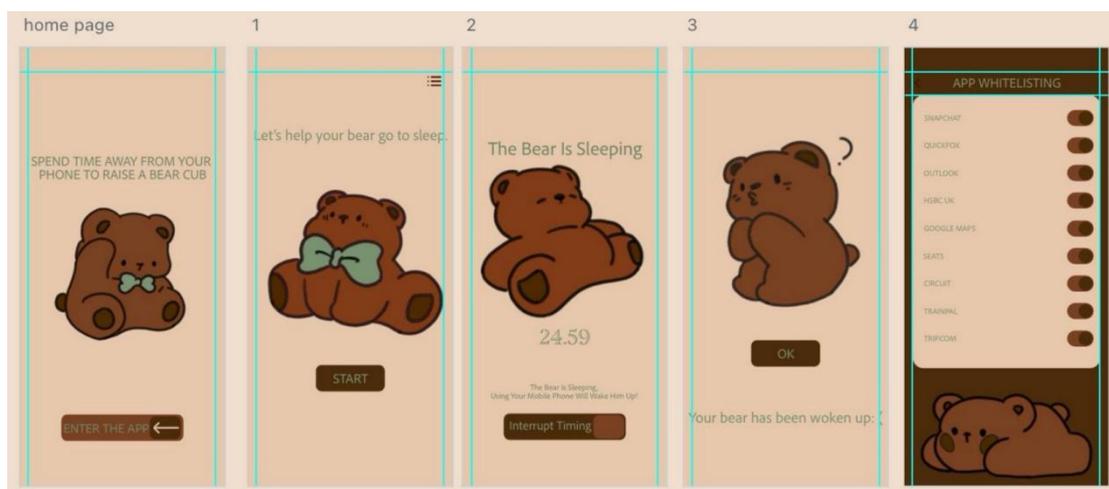
Project 2

What's more, I take advantage of my knowledge of colors to give my users

emotional support in visual design. I used a low saturation gray color in Project 2 as it can ease the anxiety that users feel when they are not using technology products from a design psychology perspective. In project 3, I chose a cute pink and blue color scheme because most of the users are young students who are studying and living by themselves. This color scheme gives the user a warm and welcoming feeling. I want my users to feel not only connected inside their community but also related to the website/app designer.
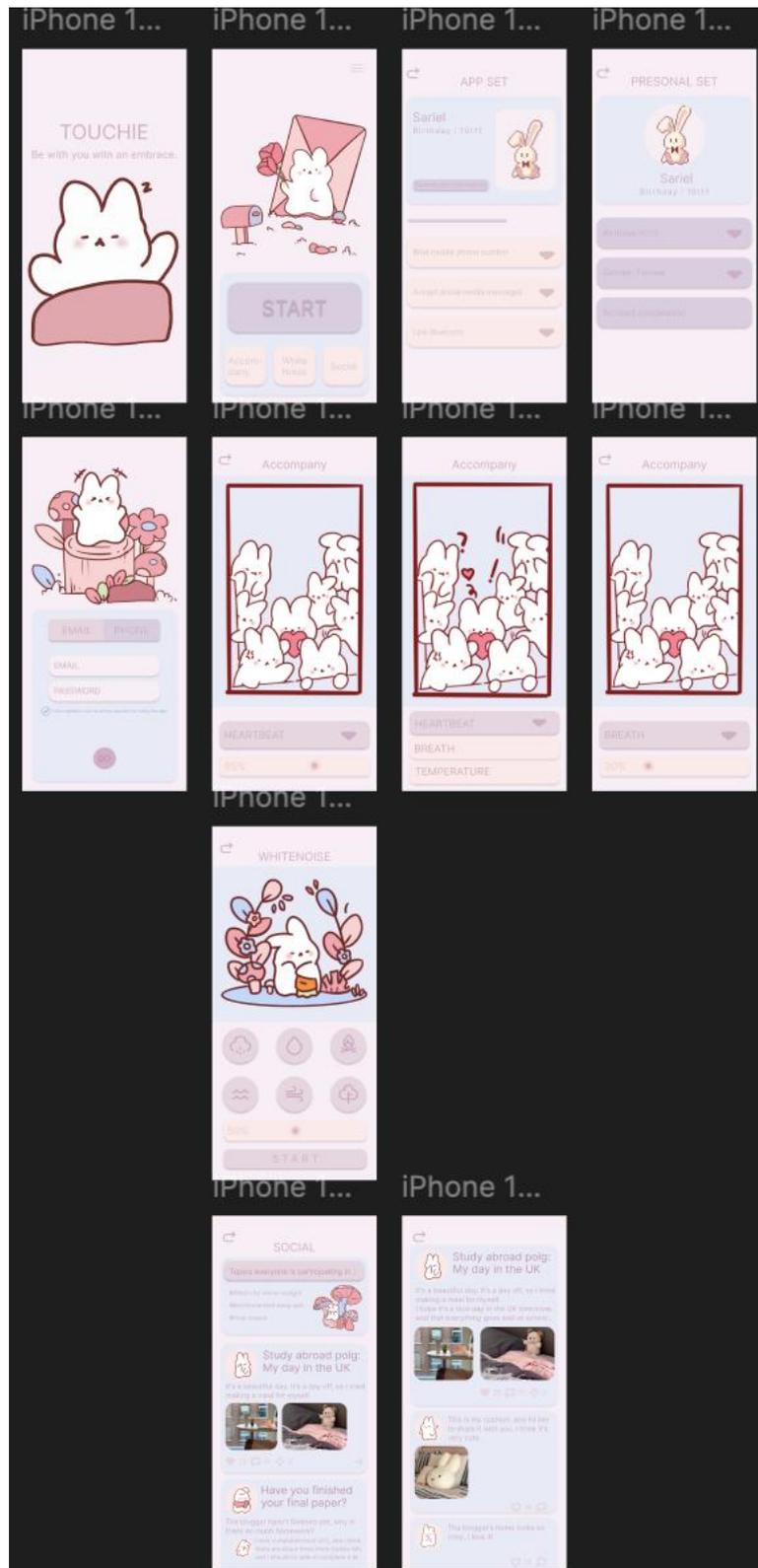
Project 3

Nevertheless, following the SDT, many parts of my projects can be enhanced. First, I have applied SDT little in my design so far, with only an understanding of the user needs at a surface level. In the preliminary research of Project 1, I

tended to focus only on the user behavior itself, ignoring the deeper reasons behind them. After obtaining the research data, the summary and analysis were also limited by my subjective thinking, making it difficult for me to draw clear and objective conclusions for further design. Second, my work was not refined enough. In the process of designing the projects, I seldom satisfy the need for autonomy of the users by providing them with free choices and personalized services. Besides, even though I tried to reach the user's perception of competence and relatedness, the current ways I am using to realize it and the performance of them are still inadequate. Users struggle to find encouragement after accomplishing some tasks or getting immediate feedback on my design, let alone strong connections with other users.

To provide better experiences for my users, I need to think harder from their points of view, catering to their needs to use the app while also focusing on their psychological demands, what SDT calls autonomy, competence, and relatedness. If I could have more time to enhance the projects I've already done, I'd start with the prep work and get to know the inner world of my user base better. For example, in the preliminary research of Project 1, I will choose cafes in different areas with different price ranges and conduct interviews with customers to understand the diverse behavioral motivations of various groups of people coming to the cafes. I will also improve the analysis of these interviewees to create more visualized content so that I can get more intuitive and clear conclusions.

In designing, to meet the autonomy, competence, and relatedness of my users, I will incorporate the findings of preliminary research to give my users more choices, incentives, and opportunities to socialize. For example, in Project 2, I will set up milestones and give out bonus points when users complete them, which can be used to redeem e-bears' clothing and accessories. Users can collect these items to dress up their own bears, which will give them both the joy of success and personalized experiences. In addition, I will also create a social area for the bears, so that users can encourage and compete with each other in their own well-dressed ways in that place.

According to SDT, as long as I fully consider the psychological needs of my users, and give them enough respect, understanding, and space, my users will have a better experience in my project. I will also continue to explore their inner world and do good iterative testing while planning carefully.

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