

TWINS: A Slow Social Twiniverse for Scientists—*Or for Everyone?*

Audio Discussion: <https://tinyurl.com/y9zzawbj>

It was late in the evening when Adam leaned back in his chair, rubbing his eyes after another intense brainstorming session with Ella, Conor, and Matej. The three Northeastern research assistants had been working closely for over a year on a novel concept—*digital twins* that could interact in a virtual space, mirroring real-world people, places, and events. What began as a niche idea to support *scientific collaboration* had evolved into something much bigger—and possibly, much more complicated.

Originally incubated in Professor Kevin Boudreau’s lab, the *Twins* project aimed to reduce friction in how scientists connected, discovered common interests, and built working relationships. The platform allowed users to create virtual “twin” versions of themselves—miniature avatars powered by public data, user input, and AI. These twins would move through a parallel digital world, encountering others, surfacing shared interests, suggesting connections, and even initiating early-stage conversations. The goal was to enable *slow social*, low-pressure acquaintance-building among researchers, particularly those who were unfamiliar with each other but shared overlapping interests or environments. Ideally, this would gradually result in more scientific collaborations with growing familiarity—or at least scientists better understanding who their peers around the university were. They might also learn more about interesting places and events in and around the university and city while they were at it! This could be little nooks to read on campus, or up and coming restaurants, or perhaps a heads-up about a comedian coming to town that twins could go see (and users might do so in real life, having learned about his event).



But now, after months of building and refinement, and initially promising feedback, the team faced a larger, more open-ended question: *Should this platform be adapted and launched more broadly. The team pondered launching the platform a wider set of non-scientific regular users who might be interested in this slow-social digital twin platform—with the question being whether to first create a twiniverse for Northeastern students and recent graduates. Was it a good idea to attempt to serve this distinct user and use case?*

¹ This case was prepared by Prof. Kevin Boudreau kevin@northeastern.edu, April 2025.

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1 A Platform for Socializing & Networking among Research Scientists

The original idea for *Twins* was deceptively simple: help researchers get to know one another without the usual awkward social overhead and the amount of time it often takes to meet with colleagues. Academic collaboration, especially across disciplines or institutions, was frequently constrained by proximity, timing, and sheer happenstance. Conferences were expensive. Cold emails often went unanswered. And longstanding social and institutional hierarchies made spontaneous, horizontal interactions rare.

Yet for years, many policy makers—and a small but growing body of research—have speculated that fresh and unexpected scientific collaborations could be key drivers of breakthrough innovation. When researchers from different domains or methods collide, new ideas often emerge. But making those collisions happen—especially in a non-forced, serendipitous way—remains one of the great unsolved problems of academic life (and research into the institutions of science).

Even more fundamentally, simply getting to know one’s professional peers and neighbors—whether within a department, across a school, or at a shared institution—might just make the daily experience of being a scientist better. Not every encounter has to lead to a collaboration. Some might just lead to a hallway chat, a new book recommendation, or a feeling of belonging that makes the research grind more pleasant.

Twins offered a possible solution: let a digital “mini-me”—a “twin”—move through a virtual space that corresponds to your real academic context: your institution, your field, your city, your shared events. Twins could “bump into” each other, surface shared interests or mutual connections, and begin to build low-friction, ambient familiarity over time. Users earned coins or points by tending to these relationships, investing moments of attention, and building “circles” of connections that accumulated and grew gradually. It was like a slow, structured, gamified version of professional and social life and connections—one that lowered the social costs and time spent doing so—and which would lead to more direct familiarity. Hopefully, it would eventually lead to more real life connections among the users themselves.

The Twiniverse

While *Twins* resembled a social platform on the surface, its core design leaned heavily on structured progression and behavioral nudges—what the team jokingly called its “social game engine.”

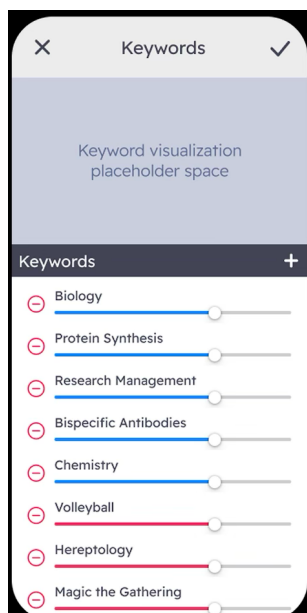
The team believed that passive presence wasn’t enough. People needed light incentives to engage, and to see visible progress that mirrored the emotional and social journey of getting to know someone. The following mechanics were central to the experience:

2 Constructing a Twin and Its Profile

Each user’s experience in the *Twins* platform began with the creation of a digital “twin”—a cartoonified, semi-autonomous representation of the user, designed to roam the Twiniverse and act as a proxy in forming new social and professional relationships. Unlike traditional avatars or social media profiles, the twin was **not built manually** from scratch, but rather **constructed algorithmically** from a fusion of public and private data, enriched through natural language processing (NLP), machine learning (ML), and generative AI.

The construction process began with an initial **data aggregation pipeline** that drew from a range of sources. For students and professionals alike, the system pulled structured and semi-structured data from platforms such as **LinkedIn**, **departmental directories**, **course rosters**, **event RSVPs**, and, in the case of researchers, **Google Scholar**, **PubMed**, or other academic indexing platforms. These sources revealed job and education histories, institutional affiliations, topical keywords, skills, and past collaborations. Academic CVs were scraped or uploaded directly by users, parsed using entity recognition models to extract degrees, research domains, methods used, and co-authorship graphs.

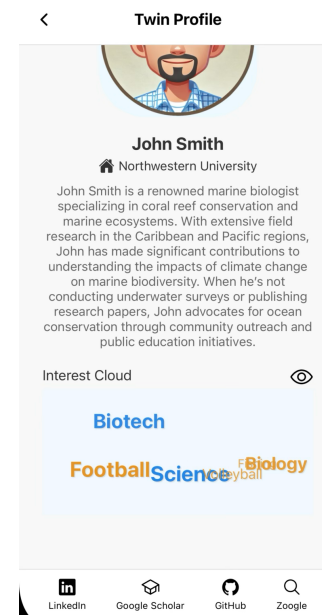
Public publication records offered particularly rich features: not just article titles and co-authors, but latent topical vectors derived from embedding models trained on abstract-level language. For instance, a researcher’s work on “spatiotemporal modeling of ocean warming” would be associated with clusters like climate science, geospatial analytics, and marine systems—data that informed downstream matchmaking and social navigation.



To supplement public data, users were invited to provide **self-tuning inputs**—tags of interest, preferred conversation topics, descriptors of their communication style (“low-key listener,” “curious question-asker”), and social context preferences (e.g., “open to new friends,” “focused on collaborators only”). These signals helped shape both the behavioral model of the twin and its conversational tone.

Importantly, the Twins profiles were deliberately designed to unify dimensions of identity that, throughout the 2010s and early 2020s, had been fragmented across digital platforms. Where LinkedIn emphasized résumés and career history, and platforms like Instagram or BeReal highlighted lifestyle and personality, academic sites like Google Scholar or GitHub showcased intellectual output—but in isolation. Twins sought to integrate all of these: professional

achievements, academic work, and personal interests, into a single coherent narrative. A twin might be surfaced for their expertise in machine learning (gleaned from GitHub commits or recent conference papers) and also for their love of Korean food and long bike rides. A doctoral candidate might be recognized not only for research on renewable energy, but also for showing



up to the same weekly yoga class. Rather than segment identity by platform or context, *Twins* was built to reflect the full person—how they work, what they know, and who they are becoming.

This holistic model reflected a deliberate critique of the **fragmented online identity architecture of the 2010s**—where individuals curated and maintained multiple disjointed selves depending on the platform, context, and audience. *Twins* aimed to reverse that trend by emphasizing the **multiplicity of the individual**, and the idea that meaningful encounters often stem from a blend of shared *intellectual, social, and human affinities*.

Once data was collected, it was transformed into a multidimensional **user profile vector**, combining latent semantic representations (via transformer-based language models) with behavioral and categorical features. This representation of the person effectively becomes a “model” of the twin or “mini-me” that engages in interactions on the site.

From this model, a on-app user profile is automatically constructed, consisting of a **free-form, conversational summary**,

“Ethan is a PhD student in cognitive robotics, exploring how machines interpret human social signals. He’s part of a multi-institution team building open-source robotic learning tools, and he enjoys mentoring undergrads who are just getting started. Outside the lab, he’s usually found biking along the Charles or playing jazz piano in his dorm’s common room.”

Each profile was rendered in third person, with tone optimized for friendliness, warmth, and relatability. Profiles could be regenerated, edited, or tuned at any time by the user—either by writing in free text, editing the raw structured tags, or responding to prompts like, “How do you want others to encounter you?”

Profiles also presented twins as “cartoon” version of their own image, a dynamic word cloud to show both professional/academic and personal/interests and relative importance. Links to real world profiles of the real person (academic sites, google scholar, LinkedIn, etc.) also appeared on a twin’s profile.

3 “Encounters”: Genuinely Gaining Familiarity with People, Places, and Ideas IRL

At the heart of *Twins* was a weekly rhythm centered on one core activity: **encounters**.

Twins were programmed to “wander” through a virtual world that closely mirrored the user’s real academic and social environment. Each encounter brought together four key elements that grounded the interaction in scholarly life and everyday plausibility:

- **People:** Digital twins were drawn from the user’s extended research universe—faculty from other departments, graduate students with overlapping methodological interests, early-career researchers working on adjacent problems, or postdocs from a nearby lab. These twins might represent someone you’d seen on a grant panel, passed in a hallway, cited in your last article, or never met at all. In many cases, your twin could begin forming a relationship before you ever had the chance to in real life.

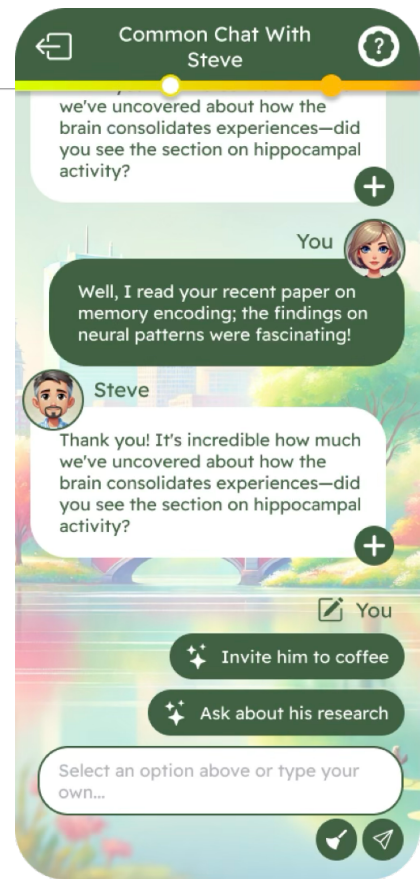
- **Places:** Locations were grounded in real research and academic spaces. A Boston-based scientist might encounter others in a virtual version of the BU Law Tower lounge, the courtyard at Harvard’s Center for Government and International Studies, the MIT Media Lab’s atrium, or a coffee line at Tatte near Kendall Square. These weren’t abstract or fantastical—they were stylized reflections of places scholars already move through, attend talks in, or grab lunch after meetings.
- **Events:** Encounters were embedded in real academic calendars and public-facing programming—like department speaker series, visiting scholar lunches, research symposia, faculty forums, or interdisciplinary workshops. They might also take place at more social or hybrid events—an after-hours gallery talk, a book launch at the Brattle, or even a quiet jazz night at a venue in Somerville. While some encounters leaned into professional domains (e.g., shared interest in climate data or design theory), others opened the door to shared hobbies, musical tastes, or writing routines.
- **Social Context:** Each encounter was framed by what made sense socially for that relationship stage. First meetings were light and low-commitment—passing remarks outside a seminar, brief conversation while waiting to present a poster, or informal overlap in a hallway between sessions. The system avoided unrealistic scenarios (e.g., a first meeting over karaoke or an overnight hike). As familiarity grew, suggested contexts evolved as well—co-working in a shared space, attending a niche colloquium together, or casually exploring a café known for great lentil soup. Twin relationships could progress even if the actual humans had never met—gently blurring the boundary between online familiarity and real-world connection.

By combining a plausible person, a real-world setting, an event drawn from a shared calendar, and a contextually appropriate social frame, each encounter created a lightweight but believable moment of possibility. Over time, these micro-interactions could add up—gradually building familiarity, awareness of one’s academic community, and social momentum that made future real-life interactions easier and more meaningful.

Weekly “Encounters”

Each encounter unfolded as a short, asynchronous conversation—typically around ten back-and-forth exchanges—designed to mimic the texture of early academic or collegial dialogue. The baseline interaction was handled by the twins themselves: autonomous AI agents modeled after the user’s tone, expertise, and conversational style.

Encounters appeared on the user’s calendar as scheduled events during a real week. Users could view the profile of the other twin and prepare—or simply let the interaction unfold. If they checked out the profile, they would see a text summary of the person with whom their twin was meeting. This included a dynamic depiction of what professional/academic interests make them tick, and personal hobbies, pursuits, and interests. Connections to the real person’s academic and professional



profiles were also shown in the profile to gain still more familiarity. This included, for example, LinkedIn and academic websites.

Conversations among twins within an encounter could touch on research methods (“What modeling technique did you use for your mobility data?”), topical debates (“Are you following the reproducibility work in social psych?”), or local habits (“I keep seeing your twin at that coffee shop near the Volpe building—worth it?”). Other exchanges might surface shared human quirks: a love of early mornings, a distaste for panel formats, or an appreciation for weekend cycling.

The direction of the conversation evolved organically based on the shared context, back-and-forth flow, and personality of the twins. While guided by AI, each conversation was an opportunity to gain a bit of professional and personal insight into the other person.

User Actions in Encounters

While twins could operate entirely on their own, users had several chances to shape the interaction.

First, they could choose to **respond directly** during the encounter. At random points, the user would receive a prompt offering them the next turn, with a brief window—typically three hours—to submit a message. The system provided a few AI-suggested options, which the user could edit, rewrite, or replace entirely. The other user never saw which responses were AI-generated and which were human-written; the interaction flowed either way. If no response was submitted, the twin continued autonomously.

Second, at the end of each encounter, users were offered a brief **reflective prompt**—a low-stakes question about what they’d learned. These might focus on academic details (e.g., “What department is the other person in?” “What dataset are they using for their project?”) or more casual cues (“What neighborhood do they like to write in?” “What night is the open jazz mic they mentioned?”). These prompts helped reinforce details, shape future encounters, and let users accumulate points or coins for attentive engagement.

Relationship Progress and Coins

Relationships in the Twiniverse developed gradually, based on signals of mutual attention and engagement. Progress was tracked not just by whether a conversation occurred, but by the quality of the interaction: Did either user respond directly? Were follow-up questions answered correctly? Did someone propose another encounter, and was it accepted?

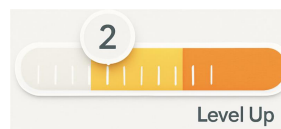


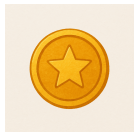
Exhibit: Advancing the Relationship (No. indicates number of prior encounters)

Each connection between two users was represented by a *level color*, echoing martial arts progression. A given relationship will tick or notch forward based on added interactions and

investing in a relationship—on both sides of the relationship: follow up encounters, demonstrating knowledge o the other person, etc.. (The app makes no assumptions about how close or distant a relationship is IRL, but just characterizes the twins relationship as a result of user steering and investments.) At each level, the blend between AI-driven and Human-Driven interactions shifts.

Level	Social/Relationship Meaning
White	Just met / new connection
Yellow	Early interaction, curiosity
Orange	Mutual interest, low-stakes sharing
Green	Meaningful exchange

The team had also considered that after some period of “slow social” interactions where the twins’ relationship leveled-up, that the actual people—the humans—might have a chance to more directly interact and message. Or perhaps be awarded a shared coffee for conversation, etc.. The team also speculated there might be ways to have “confirmed IRL” interactions that granted credit on the app.



Coins were earned by the individual based on engagement and building connections, e.g., responding to turns, finishing an encounter, answering questions correctly, and proposing thoughtful follow-ups encounters all generated coins.

Coins were planned to be spent in the game (e.g., extra follow-up slots, invitations to special twin events, ability to introduce other twins, etc.) and for spending in real life (e.g., pay for Starbucks for IRL encounter, after having progressed). These features of game play needed to be further considered and designed.

4 Tending to Your “Circle” of Connections

In *Twins*, relationships deepen gradually, but users can take specific actions to help them progress.

Each user has a visual Circle made up of concentric rings, where closer-in twins reflect stronger familiarity. Belt levels—from white to yellow, orange, green, and so on—are synced with this positioning and are visible across both the Circle and encounter history. Relationships advance when users engage meaningfully: by responding to turns in a conversation, completing an encounter, answering end-of-encounter questions, or inviting a follow-up. Each user receives two follow-up invitations per week. If accepted, the interaction continues and the relationship progresses. If not, little or no progress is recorded. Coins accumulate most consistently in relationships where both sides contribute. Using invitations on twins who do not engage may be a signal of effort, but is rarely rewarded.

While the core mechanics of relationship growth are transparent, the team speculated there could be other ways to build relationships and accumulate coin. Outside of scheduled encounters, perhaps users could



also tend to their Circle through small, purposeful gestures-- sending a short greeting cards, writing a quick message to acknowledge a previous conversation, or sharing an article that touches on a mutual interest?

5 The Generation of Weekly Encounters

Each week in *Twins*, every user's twin participates in up to **three encounters**—short, conversational meetings that unfold in real time or asynchronously, always grounded in plausible social context. While these interactions often feel serendipitous, the underlying logic is a structured mix of **algorithmic chance**, **user-initiated invitations**, and, eventually, **earned influence** over one's social trajectory.

The foundation of encounter generation is what the platform calls **virtual chance**. Once per week, the system assigns at least one encounter to every twin through a semi-randomized algorithm. Drawing on a mix of user profiles, overlapping interests, shared affiliations, and recent location or event patterns, the algorithm selects a conversation partner and setting. A Boston-based researcher working on housing policy, for example, might find their twin bumping into a design scholar at a Kendall Square lunch talk on equitable urban planning. These matches are designed to be loosely relevant, lightly surprising, and always plausible.

In addition to this baseline encounter, users can **invite up to two additional twins per week** for follow-up or intentional meetings. Invitations can only be extended to twins already in a user's Circle—people they've encountered at least once before. These follow-up encounters may deepen a scholarly conversation (e.g., “Want to revisit that causal inference thread from the panel?”) or explore a shared interest outside of work (“I keep seeing you post about bike trails—want to meet at the Arboretum loop?”).

Crucially, the platform avoids awkward social pressure by quietly enforcing **limited weekly slots**. Every user's twin is allowed only three encounters per week. If someone receives an invitation but has already filled their encounter quota—whether through system assignments or other accepted invites—they may automatically appear “unavailable.” This design ensures that declining invitations can happen passively and gracefully, with no hard rejections or negative feedback loops.

Moreover, *Twins* relies on a key design philosophy: **if the user doesn't act, the twin will decide**. If a user does not explicitly accept or decline an invitation within a reasonable window, the twin may opt in on their behalf—depending on fit, timing, and past behavior. This ensures continuity and social fluidity, even for users who are distracted or disengaged that week. Users retain control, but they're not punished for stepping away. Their twin keeps things moving forward.

As users accumulate **coins and credibility**, they unlock the ability to guide the algorithm more directly. Advanced users can input preferences or priorities: wanting to connect with someone using a particular methodology (e.g., “I'd love to compare spatial regression models with someone in environmental economics”), asking for a conversation with someone outside their discipline (e.g., “Can I find a curator working on 20th-century protest art?”), or proposing a time

and place where they'd like their twin to meet someone (e.g., “Set me up with someone interesting for coffee at Pavement on Wednesday afternoon”).

These influence mechanisms don't override the encounter logic—they tune it. Users don't dictate exactly who they'll meet, but they can **nudge the direction**. As the system learns from these inputs, and as twins accumulate more data and more history, the rhythm of encounters becomes more tailored and meaningful—without losing its sense of discovery.

6 Where to Go from Here? Strategic Questions

After a long day in the lab, the team—Ella, Conor, Adam, and Matej—gathered in their shared office, surrounded by whiteboards half-filled with sketches, logic flows, and half-erased feature ideas. The platform was rapidly developing and nearly at a point of being a fully working version.

Ella raised the question that reframed everything. “Look, if this is really about reducing social friction, building familiarity, and helping people slowly discover others in their world and perhaps cool places and events,” she said, “why stop at scientists? What if this could work for everyone—not just across disciplines, but across life stages? What if we started with students or maybe young working professionals?” Matej chimed in, “Hmmmm. It's not like a dating platform. It's just about gaining familiarity... and who knows... making friends? Or, at least, acquaintances?” Conor had been spending time developing data sets on scientists and felt that it would be smarter to simply focus energies on generating interactions among scientists—a smaller and more focused twiniverse.

That hypothesis—using *Twins* as a general-purpose **slow social platform**—triggered a wave of debate. Could the same structure that helped researchers build ambient professional connections also help undergraduates make friends, reconnect after co-op, or navigate the social sprawl of a large university like Northeastern?

Adam was immediately intrigued. “Honestly, it might make sense. The architecture's already built for asynchronous, indirect connection. If you're a new student, or someone who's just moved to a new campus—or a city—you don't need another app that forces fast messaging or endless scrolling. You need a way to slowly get to know the people, places, and events around you. I don't think we are ready to think about an wholly open twiniverse. But maybe we could have a defined twiniverse around Northeastern students and maybe recent grads—people who are already in a real community together?”

Matej raised the key design question: **would the current architecture hold?** Would the Circle model, belt levels, reflection prompts, and coin system still make sense outside the academic and research context? Would the encounter engine still generate the right kinds of conversations and experiences?

A. Designing Value Creation and Value Delivery

Was it the right move to build a **Twiniverse** beyond scientists? Could *Twins* create real **value** for **students and young professionals** as a **slow social platform**? For which **users** and which **use cases**? What was the actual **problem being solved**? How might that translate into a clear **value proposition** and specific **Dimensions of Value (DoV)**? Did the platform's existing **Features and Functions (F&F)** and overall **game mechanics** support those targeted DoV? Or would the system need to be **augmented**? For example, could the **gradual advancement of relationships** in the Twiniverse eventually lead to people actually getting to know each other in **meaningful, helpful** ways? The current model was based on 2-person encounters. Would this be enough? Would the existing model of interaction and game mechanics be nearly enough to serve a viable value proposition?

B. Designing an Effective Launch and Reaching Critical Mass?

If *Twins* was going to deliver value for students and young professionals, it also needed a credible plan to **launch at scale**. Ambient social discovery only works when the Twiniverse feels populated, active, and grounded in familiar people, places, and events. But how do you break the **chicken-and-egg problem** of network effects? How do you create meaningful encounters in week one—when only a small number of people may have signed up?

The original idea for researchers had sidestepped this by **pre-loading the world**. The team had mapped the scientific community at Northeastern using publicly available data—department websites, ORCID profiles, Google Scholar pages—and built out digital twins for nearly every scientist, ready to be claimed when the real person signed up. This approach gave the Twiniverse immediate depth: users entered a world that already felt full, with familiar names and relevant connections.

This approach was not clearly useful in the case of students and young professionals, even if this were a relatively fixed, closed and known population with public profiles. Could other ways be used to break the chicken-and-egg problem and effectively scale the platform to serve this population?

C. Designing a Pricing Strategy?

As *Twins* began to show promise, a core operational question emerged: **how do you fund a system designed to be low-friction, non-addictive, and slow—yet powered by meaningful AI infrastructure?**

Each user generated an average of **two encounters per week**. At scale, this meant that for every 100 users, the system had to produce 100 unique conversations—each involving two digital twins, with separate AI agents simulating tone, memory, and context. In addition, the platform used generative AI to construct and update profiles, ingesting structured and unstructured data (LinkedIn, academic pages, publications) to keep each twin realistic and responsive. While costs could vary, the team estimated that operating costs, particularly for running AI, could be even as high as about **\$1 per user per month** (far above zero), assuming modest optimization and fixed infrastructure costs. This did not include team fixed costs.

This was not a prohibitively expensive system—but it was not free. And since usage scaled linearly with engagement, growing the platform meant **growing operational costs**. That raised the question: **how to cover those costs while reinforcing the platform’s design philosophy?**

The answer appeared to lie in the **coin system**, which was already core to the user experience. Game mechanics revolved around two parallel structures: first, **relationship advancement**, tracked by the growth of individual twin connections inside each user’s Circle; second, **individual coin accumulation**, reflecting attention, engagement, and social contribution across the platform. Coins were earned through meaningful participation—responding to encounters, recalling details, initiating follow-ups—and could be spent to unlock privileges, such as extra invitations, advanced customization, or twin-guided recommendations.

But in principle, coins didn’t have to be earned exclusively. They could also be **purchased**, allowing users to buy access to these same privileges directly. This opened the door to a **hybrid pricing model**, where the platform remained free-to-use for most users, but allowed others—especially alumni or power users—to **purchase coin packs** as a form of opt-in monetization. Buying coins wouldn’t override the game’s social rules, but it could help subsidize free access for students or allow institutions to sponsor coin-based access for their communities.

The idea raised further design questions: Would buying coins erode the meaning of earned ones? Would it distort social signals? Could limits or safeguards ensure that coins conferred privilege, not power?

Ultimately, pricing wasn’t just about recovering costs—it was about shaping behavior. The coin system offered a flexible layer to **incentivize engagement**, **discourage abuse**, and **support premium features**, all while staying aligned with the platform’s ethos of slow, meaningful, ambient social interaction. The challenge ahead was to ensure that **economic design** and **social design** remained mutually reinforcing—so that the system could grow without compromising what made it feel different in the first place.

Could a pricing system be developed to reconcile these various competing ideas?

D. Should the Game Coin Be Real—a Crypto “nucoin”?

From the beginning, *Twins* included a coin system—a way to reward thoughtful engagement and unlock in-game privileges like extra invitations or match customization. It was designed as an internal credit system, similar to point systems used in games or rating platforms: visible, earned, and symbolic.

But the team began to ask: **should this coin be minted as a real, blockchain-based token—*nucoin*?**

If *nucoin* were on-chain, users could hold real tokens, and in theory, even transfer or trade them. But would users care? If the coin had no market value, it might be seen as just a clever twist on points—a novelty. On the other hand, **might it be “cool”** to know that your reputation in the system was backed by something technically real and transferrable?

Should coins be **spendable inside the game** for added features—and also **transferable among users**? Could that open up new behaviors, like gifting, tipping, or collaborating on shared invitations?

The looming question was what would happen **if the coin gained value** outside the platform. Would a user holding 1,000 coins—originally meant to unlock a few in-app privileges—suddenly possess something with real market value? Would that be a problem? Could it undermine the “slow social” logic of the system? How to manage the possibility that nucoin could escape the game and be traded outside?

In the case Ripple, the value of XRP did not matter, so long as the price was constant during the short duration of a transaction. That might not be true here, where users in fact held coin—in a sense they “mined” coin in the game, where the coin risked appreciating, gaining real value.

The team hadn’t reached a conclusion. For now, coins remained just an internal, like other games and apps. The team was busy building the core game engine and now struggling with this major question of possibly addressing a new UxU, but this question of nucoin was intriguing.

Was this a good idea or a distraction? How should it work?

E. Other Questions?

By the end of the session, the whiteboards in the Twins office were filled with loops, arrows, cost models, value maps, and layered relationship diagrams. The team—Ella, Conor, Adam, and Matej—had pushed hard to articulate the key strategic questions facing the platform: What was the value proposition? Who was it for? How could it scale? How should it be priced? Could the coin become real?

But even as they debated, they also knew something else: **they didn’t know what they didn’t know**.

There were likely other questions—perhaps more foundational ones—that had not yet surfaced. Were there ethical concerns about modeling real people? Should there be constraints around which users could invite others or view certain types of information? Would network dynamics evolve differently than expected, producing unintended outcomes? Could the game’s visual metaphors—belts, circles, twin avatars—carry cultural or emotional meanings the team hadn’t considered?

They had focused on scientists, students, and young professionals. But might *Twins* serve entirely different use cases someday—community organizations, cross-generational networks, remote teams? Or did the whole premise of slow social only work in specific environments, with certain kinds of people?

The team wasn’t sure. But they recognized that **the design of a social system is never finished**. New behaviors, unexpected needs, and unanticipated dynamics would inevitably emerge.

And so they left the last column on the whiteboard blank—an open space for the next big question. One they hadn’t asked yet, but might prove to be the most important.

If you have any other question you would like to probe. Please simply send an email. I will most likely say “yes.”

Appendix: Design Principles of the Twiniverse: A Slow Social Platform

1. Lower the Social Cost of Connection

Make it easier to begin knowing someone without the pressure to impress, perform, or be “on.” Allow people to start relationships indirectly, quietly, and asynchronously.

2. Let the Twin Do the Work

Free the user from constant input. Let the digital twin carry the burden of presence, initiate encounters, and maintain continuity—so users can participate without being always online.

3. Prioritize Familiarity Over Speed

Build relationships the way they form in real life: gradually, through repetition, shared context, and ambient exposure. Avoid features that create artificial urgency or superficial interaction.

4. Value Curiosity and Recognition

Reward users not for being popular or prolific, but for being attentive: remembering what someone studies, where they work, or what jazz night they like. Coins should reflect care and awareness.

5. Reflect Real People in Real Contexts

Encounters should be grounded in real-world events, places, and professional settings—cafés, talks, labs, offices—not generic or virtualized abstractions. The game mirrors real life, not escapes from it.

6. Encourage Low-Risk Exploration Across Boundaries

Help users explore ideas, people, and places beyond their immediate field or network—without fear of judgment, rejection, or commitment. The platform is for intellectual and social wandering.

7. Keep Encounters Gentle and Asymmetric

Don’t force balance. Allow one person to respond and another not to. Let the system tolerate partial engagement. Slow social works best when no one feels pressure to perform reciprocity in real time.

8. Make Progress Visible but Subtle

Use visual metaphors (belts, circles) to show relational growth—but avoid gamifying it. Let users track movement without competing, comparing, or optimizing for advancement.

9. Enable Real-World Connection—But Only When It’s Ready

Design toward the possibility of human-to-human contact, but never require it. Real meetings should emerge from digital familiarity, not be forced by the system. Let the loop close itself, if and when it wants to.

10. Let the System Learn, But Don’t Let It Take Over

Use AI to power structure, tone, and discovery—but give the user control over what’s seen, said, and steered. The twin is a proxy, not a replacement.

11. Design for Absence, Not Addiction

Encourage stepping away. Reward long-term participation, not frequency. Make it feel safe to disengage—and effortless to rejoin.

12. Make the World Feel Already Alive

Populate the Twiniverse with real people, places, and events—even before users arrive. Let the system feel full and meaningful from day one, not dependent on early adoption to feel real.

13. Treat Identity as Holistic and Multidimensional

Don't separate professional from personal, or academic from social. Let users show who they are as a whole: their work, their ideas, their quirks, their routines, their rhythms.

Appendix: Internal Deck

A "**slow social**" platform based on a universe of **digital twins** interactions

- * Twins reflect IRL people, places, and events
 - * Build acquaintances, relationships and circles
- * To support scientific research collaboration (other UxU?)

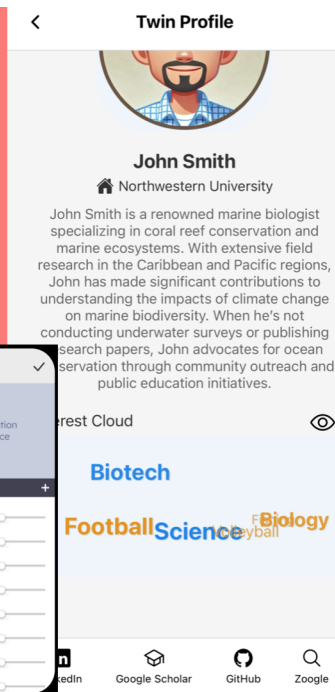
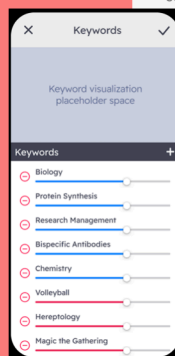


My twin mini-me will go out and encounter people (from my real universe)



A TWIN

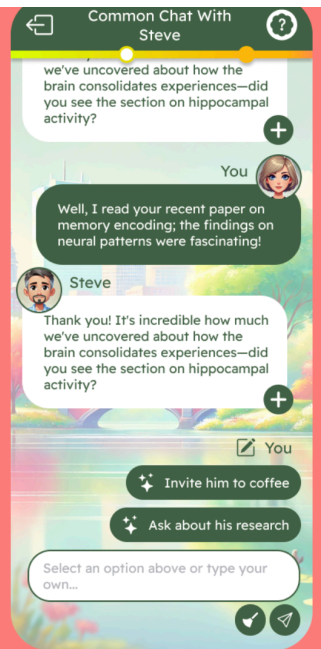
- Twin mini-me built with:
 - Publicly-available data/profiles
 - ...and edits/inputs



TWINS HAVE "ENCOUNTERS"

- Place
- People
- Context
- Conversation

...everything is virtual, but based on real



...AND GRADUALLY RELATIONSHIPS & CIRCLES

- Relationship/familiarity progresses
 - When one/both "invest in relationship"
- Circle accumulates
- Individuals accumulate coin/points
 - Tending to relationships
 - Being good citizen of the twiniverse





- * Twiniverse mirrors real people, places, and events
- * Lowers social costs

- * Gradually, meaningfully...
 - Build greater familiarity with peers, places, local events
 - Build IRL acquaintances
- * With twin doing most of the work (less screen time)

