Golocal - An Innovative Website Helping Find Home

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Abstract: The Internet is complex, broad, and ever-evolving. Almost 90% of all the data in the world has been generated over the last few years. In this vast ocean of data, how does one find relevant information? How do readers verify the credibility of information? In the realm of real estate, how do house hunters trust house listings? GoLocal is a real estate website that resolves some of these questions. I intend to develop GoLocal – an innovative real estate website to provide services not provided by any other existing websites, such as StreetEasy, Zillow, Trulia etc. GoLocal is primarily for international students looking for accommodations in a foreign place. It will offer hot deals, a personal assistant that will help them in finding a place and other discounts and privileges for students. The website will provide listings based on the user’s requirements. The unique feature of GoLocal is that listings are 100 percent verified and authentic. It will also offer other features like commute estimates, crime rate statistics, contact facility among the owner, and previous tenants to help them understand the place and neighborhood better, as well as virtual tour and 3D model of the property.

Index Terms: 3D model, Commute, Compare, International students, Personal assistant, Real estate website, Virtual tour.

1 INTRODUCTION

The importance of housing covers the all aspects of human life. Primarily, it involves physical protection from hazards, which ordinarily may be regarded as shelter but also provides the setting from many of the basic biological and social processes necessary to sustain life, which permitting the healthy growth and development of the mind (Aluko, 2011). According to Aluko, (2009) housing as a unit of the environment of humans, has a profound influence on the health, social behavior, satisfaction, and general welfare of the community. It reflects the cultural, social, and economic values of a society as it is the best physical and historical evidence of civilization in a country [1]. However, the housing problem is one of the significant issues usually discussed in world today due to substantial change in the real estate market. The task of findings homes in overseas universities and colleges is a daunting challenge among the majority of international students [7]. Not all international universities offer accommodations for students, and the universities that provide on-campus housing are not that budget-friendly. After being selected for a particular university, students are required to determine whether there is an availability of university dormitories or if they need to find off-campus housing. Besides, some of the students have different preferences regarding the choice of accommodation since some may want to lead a private life. For instance, a United States student studying in the United Kingdom may encounter challenges in selecting his or her housing if they want to bring pets. Additionally, there are some guides and international student advising and programs available online for international students to decide choosing on-campus or off-campus options, and the choice is solely dependent on the students [8]. Off-campus opportunities are listed on some well-known websites such as Trulia, Zillow, and StreetEasy [10, 11, 9]. However, international students have a challenge in trusting the listings available on these websites because of so many fake listings and scams on the site, resulting in more difficulties in finding the best and most suitable home. For example, how can someone trust the person putting up the listing on the website is the rightful owner of that particular listing or not?

2 BACKGROUND WORK

The study of Baklashova and Kazakov [2] noted that international students in one of the universities encountered multiple challenges in their first year of education, and the issue of finding a home (housing) was among the leading. The unfamiliar living conditions, such as cultural maladjustment, make it difficult for the students to select the best homes suiting their budget and study constraints [5]. Therefore, some organizations, real-estate companies, and individual universities have or offer programs for informing and helping find off-campus homes for international students. For instance, the Student Affairs Division (HEP) is a unit that helps off-campus students in finding homes around the Shah Alam area [6]. A program such as HEP is limited in helping international students since some may want to order for a house before traveling. Balsas [3] notes that Trulia, Zillow, and Walkscore are some of the online real estate websites, which help students finding homes by listing all the available houses, with images and features of the homes. Online real estate companies, such as Zillow contains offer features such as the search option for students to search for homes using keywords of the zip code, neighborhood, address or city in which they want to live in [11]. On the other hand, Trulia includes features such as the search option, a list of neighborhoods with homes available depending on the user’s search results, and options of purchasing or renting a house based on the locations [10]. Additionally, StreetEasy real estate offers international students homes available within New York City, including sold and rental apartments [9]. Students searching for homes on StreetEasy may specify the minimum and maximum amounts of expenditure (a feature lacking on other online real estate websites), and lists homes within the budget. The cost issue is a crucial element helping students to find affordable houses - some are expensive requiring students to earn a significant amount of money to afford the homes such as the ones listed by Trulia.com [4] — but the common and primary problem this and all other real estate websites have is the trustworthiness of the listings. How can users trust the listings? How do users know that the person putting the listing is not a fraudster? The other disappointment international students face is that there is often a significant difference between the image of a room/house, and the reality.
3 PROPOSED SOLUTION

Considering the challenges, international students encounter while finding homes overseas and all the features of the websites listing the available homes, this research paper proposes to implement a new website. The website will be displaying the landing page (See Fig. 1) first instead of directly taking the user to homepage to show them the features and why this website is better than the other. Why to go with this website and what all features GoLocal is providing which are not present in the current websites to ensure that the task of searching for a house is simplified and stress-free.

3.1 Verified Listings

The listings on the website will be 100 percent verified and authentic (see Fig. 2). Anyone who wishes to post a property available for rent on the website will be required to complete a basic form with personal information and details about the property to be shown on the listing like area dimensions, number of rooms and other amenities as well as pictures and videos, if any, of the same.

After the submission of the property, the team would be contacting the person to perform background verification checks to ensure that he or she is the rightful owner of the property. The team will also visit the property and click high-quality images of the asset and videos along with a 3D virtual tour. This kind of service will ensure that every listing is of the same standard and quality as well as authentic. This feature solves the major problem of inaccurate images for house hunters.

Also, you get to see the information about the owner (see Fig. 3) on the listing page, where you can connect with the owner and read more about the owner. Once you click on the read more button, that will lead you to another page (see Fig. 4) of the website that will give you details of the owner including contact information and social links to connect and know them better. Apart from this you can also view the other listings by that very owner, if any which will help you find the listings by the owners you like and you find friendly.

3.2 Personal Assistant

Personal assistant will be an effective feature for students to help them out at every step and to answer every question they have. This service (see Fig. 5) will be just like a chatbot. Instead of using artificial intelligence, there will be a person answering their questions because apart from so advancement in this artificial intelligence technology, I think...
there are some things that are lacking, which they can't answer. Also, an experienced person can help and understand the feeling a student is going through rather than a machine. The person can feel the emotion and provide the personal touch.

3.4 Hot Deals
Since the aim of the website is to ease the house-hunting process for students as students are the primary market audience of the website. For the same reason, we will be running great deals (see Fig. 7) for students, approved based on their university student ID, to help them find the best and budget-friendly places. There will be a different section for hot deals on the website, in which students can select from mentioned listings.

3.5 Property Statistics
The listing will be inclusive of some more (see Fig. 8) features and information about the property that will help international students to finalize the best home for them.

Virtual Tour - A virtual tour of the property will help them understand the architecture, space better as well as colors and appearance. The tour will also provide them great insights of the property to have a look around without being present physically at the place (see Fig. 9). It's a great feature for the international students as they can look for the place without physically being there. For example, if a student from china is moving to New York, that student can take the tour of the house sitting in china. The house will be exactly the same as shown in the virtual tour, because that is being captured with the 360-degree camera and with the help of Matterport, we were able to come up with a proper virtual tour of the house and doll-house model for the listings.
Fig. 9. Virtual tour feature on the property detail page.

Commute - Instead of going to Google maps or any third-party website to determine the commute distance from your place to the workplace (see Fig. 11), this feature helps you to calculate commute within the site rather than going on another webpage which will make the user experience much better.

Crime Rate – The crime rate (see Fig. 11) feature will help the users, especially international students who are unfamiliar with the neighborhood, to get the crime statistics about the area which will help them know the area better, and whether that specific area is safe for them or not.

Neighborhood - The listing will also provide details for immediate and essential needs (see Fig. 10) such as grocery shops, café nearby, schools, and hospital contacts, if available, because when emergency happens, they should know how far is the pharmacy or hospital.

Fig. 10. Commute, crime rate, neighborhood on the property detail page.

Previous Residents - Previous tenants provide feedback on the listings. In return, they get some credits that they can use for their next booking. Users can connect with previous tenants, if any, to resolve any queries they might have around the listing to decide better. This will users to get more detailed insights about the owner, neighborhood and especially that property.

4 CONCLUSION
This research paper entails a review of the current challenges international students encounter while finding housing during their time of the study. Through assessment of the available features of various real estate websites with listing information about the houses, the researcher proposed the development of an improved and innovative website that will enable students to choose their best homes with informed decisions and in a friendly manner.

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REFERENCES