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GoodReads App Redesign

This project will be working on a redesign of the app, GoodReads. This app is used for readers to rate and comment on the books that they are currently reading or have finished. It allows for a community for readers to interact with one another, which essentially acts as social media. All the users contribute to the rating of each book, which helps others decide if they would like to read it or not. There is also a filter function that allows readers to find new popular books, as well as search for them based on the genres they are interested in.

The app is incredibly popular amongst readers but has a few problems that might lead to a lack of growth. Firstly, GoodReads does not have an aesthetic interface which doesn't reflect what type of app it is. The app feels dated and not kept up with the modern times of app design. Another issue GoodReads has is a poor user experience. The app has many moving parts, making it difficult to follow and find what the user may be looking for. There is an influx of information on the home page that makes the app difficult to follow and overwhelming. With a cleaner look, the app will be easier to navigate as a user.

Having a community is incredibly important for people. As a reader, having an app to go to is incredibly beneficial and helpful. Currently, the app's interface and experience aren't easy or pleasant to look at. The importance of this project is to make sure the design of the app reflects the meaning behind it, which is a community of people who love books. Some design elements need to be added that reflect the love of reading to feel more directed toward the audience of the app.

A few methods will be used to see if the app itself is effective, or if any revisions need to be made. Author Eeva Raita described user interviews as type of method that "has been utilized for collecting users' subjective evaluations of interactive technology… which evaluate the system's usability" (Raita). According to research done by Interaction Design, an online UX information center, these user interviews are "typically performed with the potential users of a design…" and usually in the

ideation phase or in the early phases of developing the app. At the beginning stages of my app, these interviews will be crucial. With critiques from other designers using my app, I'll be able to make sure it is as efficient and easy to use as possible. The primary goal is to ensure that the app fulfills the design needs of a user. One design principle that I will be focusing on with this app design is user-centricity, defined by Jeff Patton in the article "Understanding User Centricity", the "understanding problems and collaborating effectively with them to help make more informed decisions about what software to build" (Patton). The beginning steps of creating my app are defining the problem and assessing the difficulties with the app. This will be a way for me to identify which problems I feel I should be fixing through the redesign. The current app is difficult to use, and as a user, I find myself getting lost and not knowing where I am in the app and how to get to the page that I am looking for. Having a simple pathway on the app and a good hierarchy will help the user experience flow better.

To have success in the next 7 weeks, I had to create a schedule to follow with the design of the app. During week three, my goal is to identify the problems with the apps and make a list of which areas need the most improvement. The next week will be used to start to focus on the design elements and theme that I would want to be incorporated into the application. Working on the prototype and overall app design will be done during week five. The following week, I will work on the proposal, and then receive revisions from my peers. Once revisions are received, I will need to make edits during week seven. Week eight will be a finalizing week for me, where I tweak a few things on the design of the app and test it out by showing other designers and seeing if it works as efficiently as I have planned. The following weeks will be used to prepare for the showcase and present my senior project.

There are two main graphic communication theories that I kept in mind when redesigning my app, those being the social information processing theory and the aesthetic-usability effect. The social information processing theory essentially explains how online interpersonal communication can help people develop and manage relationships with one another. It was originally titled by Salancik and Pfeffer in 1978, where they stated that individual perceptions and attitudes were shaped by cues such as values and expectations.

One element that this theory argues is that people can experience the same qualities of intimacy online as they do in their traditional face-to-face relationships which is relevant in our current world and trends. According to Joseph Walther in his book, "Interpersonal Communication", "when sufficient time elapses so that ample communicative exchanges are made, CMC facilitates an exchange of personal and relational information sufficient for developing impressions and managing interpersonal relations no less than face-to-face communication…" (Walther, Chapter 31). His research found that online communication was just as profound as in-person communication, which relates to our digital world today. This element of current trends is incredibly relevant to my GoodReads redesign since my goal is to make it more of a social media and allow for people to engage with one another. The social information processing theory represents the importance of community for people, even on digital environments. With places like direct messages or comment sections, readers will be able to leave reviews but also engage in conversation with authors or other readers.

Another major element of the social information processing theory is the processes behind it. Fulk and Steinfield explain that the theory involves choice in their book, "A Social Information Processing Model of Media Use in Organizations", one of them being the decision to evaluate communication options and selecting "appropriate mediums to match the communication requirements of the task" (Fulk, Steinfield). The process that works to ensure apps are being targeted to the correct audience is done by dissecting and understanding every platform, and then deciding on which would perform best for what exact function is necessary. The processing element of the theory is applicable to my redesign because I had to decide whether a website or app would be a better platform for GoodReads. After doing my research and taking surveys from my fellow classmates, it was concluded that the app is what everyone uses the most often, and it wouldn't be used as much on the desktop. In the paper, "Usability Dimensions for Mobile Applications", it was mentioned that "usability has been increasingly recognized as a significant quality dimension to determine the success of mobile applications" (Baharuddin). Mobile apps have become more popular than desktops, leading me to keep it as a mobile redesign and create a website version if time allows.

The last element regarding the social information processing theory is its benefits of it. With an emphasis on social interaction in an online setting, this theory provides enough information to support connections made on mobile applications. Author Nick Haiji wrote, "Consumers use social media, such as online communities, to generate content and to network with other users" (Haiji). Social media is a place for people with similar interests to congregate and build a community. The theory also is able to support that these communities are healthy for users to take part in, and can lead to healthy interpersonal connections. Because GoodReads is one of the largest apps for book lovers, this is a great place for them to build connections and create forums to share thoughts and reviews with one another. As of right now, users can follow one another and comment on books. There isn't much interaction between followers and users, but there are also not a lot of mediums for communication on the application.

I also wanted to mention the aesthetic-usability effect which is another graphic communication theory used in many visual medias. It is defined in the book, "Universal Principles of Design" as "a phenomenon in which people perceive more aesthetic designs as either to use than less aesthetic designs- whether they are or not" (Universal Principles of Design, 20). This effect was first studied in the field of human interaction in 1995 by researchers Masaaki Kurosu and Kaori Kashimura. They did so by asking 252 different participants to rate their experience with different designs and how easy it is to use, as well as how they viewed the design. Mobile apps with more visually appealing designs tend to have a higher probability of being used on the app store because of this effect.

There are many benefits to the aesthetic-usability effect because of it's connection to mobile applications and design. When designs are aesthetic, users will have more positive attitudes towards them and think of them as better than non-aesthetic designs. Having these positive interactions will change the mindset of the user and will allow them to feel more tolerant towards the problems with the design or app itself. They will have a decreased chance of even noticing the problems with the design as opposed to if they did not like the design of the platform they were viewing. In general, aesthetic designs are more easily accepted and used for greater amounts at a time which is a huge benefit. The current GoodReads app has a design that most users do not like. This causes users to see the app as less

usable and creates negative thoughts and feelings toward the app. With a better and more modern design, my GoodReads redesign will be less criticized as people will enjoy the look and will have less of a chance to find what exactly they don't like.

There are also a couple of limitations to the aesthetic-usability effect which need to be understood before designing. Because design is subjective, many people have different opinions regarding what they view "aesthetic" to be. Research is crucial to decide how to design an app, like which elements, icons, and colors would be better suited for the target audience. The book, "International Journal of Applied and Creative Arts" explains, "aesthetic recognition to fortify value in product creation in creation in assisting the product to be more valuable" (Musdi). With regards to my project redesign, I sent out survey questions to the individuals I knew in the design industry and asked which colors they felt fit the book realm, which icons seemed the most usable for the app, and which flow was the easiest to navigate within the application.

The last element of the aesthetic-usability effect that fits into the mobile application realm is the current trends. When creating an application, developers and designers need to stay updated on all the current popular design trends that people are drawn to. According to the International Journal of Modern Education and Computer Science, "swift advances in mobile communication technology have spawned almost unlimited new mobile applications" (Wang, Chande). Because the digital world is one that almost everyone is a part of, it is important to ensure user satisfaction when it comes to what they want to see. Different times mark different periods of art and that is relevant to mobile applications as well. If an app was developed ten years ago and has not been updated since users will be able to tell and will feel negative feelings towards it because of the outdated design. "Technological artifacts express time periods in their visual design" (Silvennoinen, Jokinen). The authors talk about how the art culture changes drastically throughout the years and that preferences are constantly changing for users. For my project, my goal is to ensure the design is liked within the design community but is also as modern and up to date as possible, to ensure that the current trends are met.

Both the aesthetic-usability effect and the social information processing theory will aid me in my app redesign. The elements included in both that I mentioned are all factors that tie in to a successful app redesign. Research is a crucial component of this project, as well as peer review which has assisted me in making changes and revisions. Ultimately, the goal of my redesign is to ensure the quality of the app for the users and centralize it to make it as simple as possible to use.

My completed project consisted of 5 high-fidelity prototypes for the app redesign. In order to ensure it worked properly, I asked my peers to use the app and see if it needed any changes in terms of usability and from there I made the proper revisions. My goal was to ensure the app stayed consistent with color, shapes, and flow. I also strived to make sure it looked as modern as possible while still making sure the book vibe was still there.
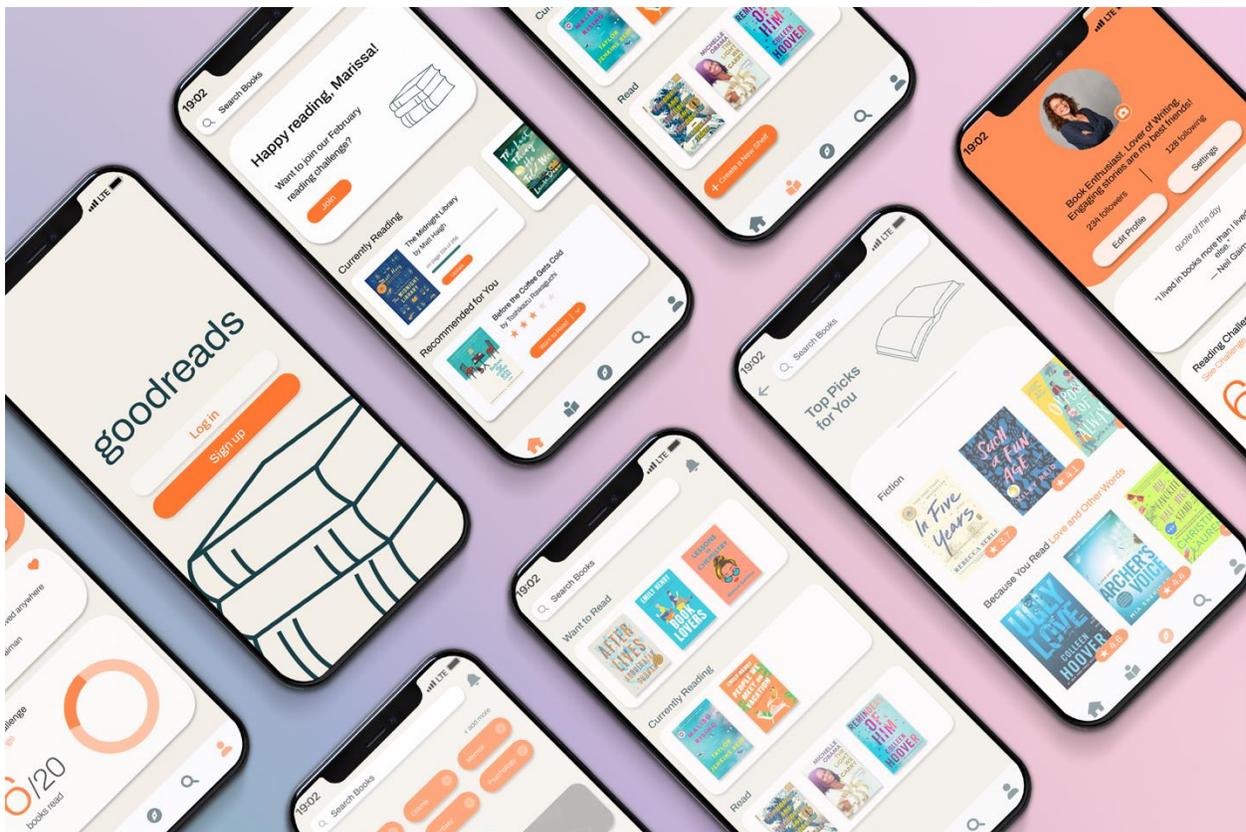
This is the final product for my senior project that I worked on for eight weeks and I'm really proud of the overall design. I accomplished everything that I had mentioned earlier, and made sure there was a seamless flow of the app so that it is now easier to use. The overall motivation behind this

redesign was to keep the vibe of the application while still transforming it to a more modern design. My design guidelines really took me a long way with this project and allowed me to ensure the entire application felt relaxed and clean. Each page leads to another without feeling chaotic, confusing, or overwhelming- which is the opposite of how it was before.

There were some difficulties when it came to this project, the first being my lack of knowledge in Figma. I had to learn the entire program in the span of a week, as well as juggle the rest of the project like working on the sketches and design guidelines. Once I learned Figma, I had to start figuring out what worked in the application and what didn't. I did some research by seeing GoodReads reviews and what application users wanted to change and what was difficult to navigate. I also used user experience theories and methods to ensure my application was where I wanted it to be in the end.

Overall, I finished exactly what I wanted to do with this project, but I have realized there are definitely a few more pages I'd like to add. Because it is now a high fidelity prototype, I would like to expand the application and ensure every button leads to an existent page in order to make it feel more "real". This application has been one of my favorite designs I have done thus far, and I'd love to see it grow into a fully completed application.

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