

User Interface Design for Online Social Media

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify implementation techniques of a successful user interface for an online social media application. Interviews were conducted with three employees from three separate social media applications to compare how designers approach user interface design differently. The working professionals were asked a series of user interface design questions about the social media application for which they work and help design. The interview responses were compared to the results of the Voice of the Customer (VOC) survey where 100 online social media (OSM) users were surveyed at random about their user interface design preferences within social media applications. The results of this study can be used to determine how user interface designers should approach the interface design in order to achieve the highest level of user satisfaction and therefore guarantee the future success of the social media application.

Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

An important question in the development of social media applications is, what key features and concepts of the user interface/user experience design help to make apps engaging and efficient for the user? UI (User Interface) design refers to the actual layout or composition of the page, while UX (User Experience) design refers to the feeling a user gets while navigating the page. Together, they create the overall experience for the user while in the application. Not all social media applications are as successful as others due to factors such as popularity, amount of exposure and comfort level of the user. By analyzing all the components that make up an interface, user interface and user experience (UI/UX) designers can learn how to best design for the most engaging and enjoyable user experience. Problems that occur with complex user interfaces are confusion and a delayed reaction time, which can both lead to unsatisfied users. In order to avoid these problems, UI designers must know what makes the user interface easily navigable.

As the mobile application world rapidly develops, designers must stay updated about current trends in the industry and know how to best adapt their applications accordingly. One trend in particular is designing interfaces according to the users' needs. This design concept helps the user feel comfortable and allows them to navigate quickly, even in an app they have never used before. Since the user experience in OSM (Online Social Media) applications varies from user to user, it is important that the UI/UX designer consider the simplicity of the interface.

Significance of the Problem

My intended audience includes programmers and designers for social media applications. Since programmers and designers often collaborate in order to develop a well built, and esthetically pleasing application, both parties must understand what makes a social media application interface successful. Users with less experience using OSM applications are more prone to confusion while navigating through the application. As the app's purpose is for users to communicate and exchange thoughts and information via the social network, it is important that the interface clearly displays the main features. Research and testing of what satisfies users with beginning to advanced experience will provide programmers and designers the information they need to create an effective interface that revolves around the needs and wants of any user.

Interest in the Problem

I have a vast background in UI/UX design. I worked for a startup mobile application in the Silicon Valley and had the opportunity to work first-hand with the team to improve the user interface. As many of my friends use the application, I was aware of what buttons and features were the key elements of the app's success and of the app's failure (which came later). Also, I have designed two Android applications with computer science majors. Due to my experience in mobile application, I have developed a strong interest in what makes an app thrive. As I plan to potentially work for another application company in the future, I want to expand my knowledge in the field of user interface design. This will help me not only design more apps, but improve the functionality of those apps. By focusing in the field of social media and researching trends and key

features, I will be able to determine what makes the users engaged, comfortable, and ultimately, keep coming back for more.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

When designing a successful user interface for a social media application or website, there are many factors that need to be taken into consideration. By analyzing past and current trends of social media, cyber friendships, patterns, and new features, discoveries have been made as to what makes a user interface for social media flourish. In order to understand what satisfies the user, application and website designers have taken a closer look at the key features and what those features bring to the users. The user interface (UI) of a social media application thrives on these key elements by strategically designing the interface in a comfortable, consistent and user-friendly manner.

Current Mentality

According to UI professional Michael Cummings (2010), user experience design is defined by looking at the bigger picture of the aspects of the interface in which the user comes into contact. As shown in figure 1, it is important to consider the interface as it is “apprehended and used as a unified whole” and that the “whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” This is a modern mentality when designing any user interface of a website or mobile application because it helps focus on the end result of the interface and not just its

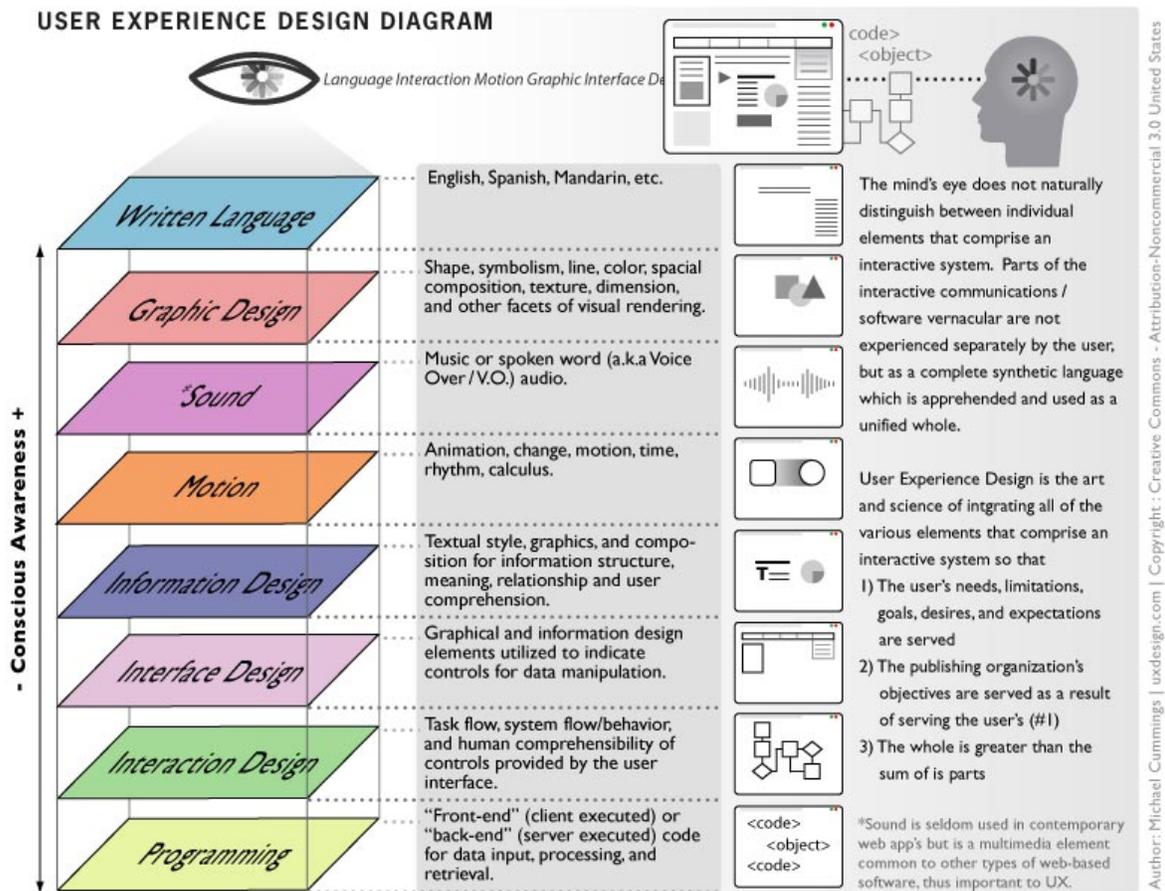


Figure 1. User Experience Design Diagram, Michael Cummings, "User Design Defined"

individual parts. Another concept that has recently come into play has been the cultural aspect of a design. For example, Cummings (2010) also talks about the consideration for "cultural assumptions, beliefs, memes, and shared expectations that color our personal experience while using an interactive system." He highlights the importance of cultural differences when he states that cultural "assumptions people bring with them are not to be ignored if we seek success."

Relationships/ Interactions

Besides the visual aspect of the user experience, social media experts have begun researching the social and communicatory aspect of OSN (online social networking).

Arnaboldi, Guazzini, and Passarella (2013) partook in experiments to find out how offline relationships (face to face) differ from online relations (via an online social network). Results show that most Facebook users are only able to “actively maintain a limited number of social relationships and this number is close to the well-known Dunbar’s number, 150, found in offline social networks” (Arnaboldi, Guazzini & Passarella 2013). In order to track online interactions and friendships, they observed “recency of contact between individuals,” which had the “highest relevance in the prediction of tie strength” (Arnaboldi, Guazzini & Passarella 2013). Interestingly, when compared to offline social networks, there was not a huge structural difference. The OSN experiments have lead to the conclusion that “even if OSN like Facebook and Twitter give us many new and different ways to communicate, our social behavior and our capacity to maintain social relationships with others seem to remain unaltered” (Arnaboldi, Guazzini & Passarella 2013). This shows that we tend to speak with the same people and behave in similar ways as offline relationships.

UI Modeling/ Patterns

After taking into consideration the user’s wants in terms of social interactions, another key component of the design is the actual model of the user interface itself. According to Eric Nilsson (2009), a computer scientist, there are three main problem areas when designing a user interface: “utilizing screen space, interaction mechanisms and the design at large” Nilsson (2009). Nilsson discusses multiple ways of making the most of the small screen space, including creating lists, groups, horizontal scrolling, using portrait and landscape mode, and the ability to run the application on multiple screen

sizes. Nafaa Jabeur (2013), computer science Professor at Universite Laval, discusses that it can become a challenge to meet user expectations for performance on a social media application. He explains, “Users expect the same level of service on their mobile devices they enjoy on the desktop. Performance depends on available bandwidth of current cellular networks” (Jabeur 2013). The second problem area, interaction mechanisms, analyze potential problems that users might run into while entering information into an interface such as cursor control or the order of entry. The third area is the design at large. In this section, Nilsson (2009) states the importance of a design that “supports the brand, is aesthetic, is a solution for searching large amounts of data” and has an easy interface for logging in and out.

Trends

The modern trends in user interface design have become more and more sophisticated with the increasing amount of ways that users can interact with one another as well as share files easily and for free. Social media sites, such as Facebook, allow the user to send long messages and attach files, which in essence has begun to take over the need to email a friend. Jabeur (2013) discusses the new trends of the “interesting services and ways of engaging in social interaction and collaboration through mobile devices” as well as use of “location-based services and data-sharing services (such as photos)” (Jabeur 2013). These location-based services include the ability to recommend a place or a deal to a friend through the means of communicating via the social network. Also, data-sharing services enhance the user’s engagement by being able to share a part of an individual’s experience with his/her friend via the network.

The trend is to have everything you need all in one place. Application developers and designers, and businesses such as Apple, strive to make things as easy as possible for the user by designing products that have easy access to features that enhance the user's life. The value of all the aspects coming together in one interface is what has driven many application and website designers into continuously updating the user interface of social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Pinterest, and Google+, in order to attract and retain the most users. Cheung, Chiu and Lee (2011) state "Purposive value, self-discovery, entertainment value, social enhancement, and maintaining interpersonal connectivity are the key values (or needs) that are widely adopted to determine the use of virtual communities." This shows that when all the aspects of the Facebook user interface come together, they bring different types of value to the user, whether it is through communication or visually appealing aspects of the site.

UI Variables/ Features

In order to know which elements are most useful in a social media application, research must take place to a large group of application users. Stephen, Grodzinsky and Gumbus (2012) discuss the importance of specific Facebook features stating,

Facebook is especially prized for sustaining primary social relationships and for entertainment but is less valued for gaining knowledge and for consumer behavior. For example, respondents were much more likely to indicate that Facebook is 'very important' or 'absolutely crucial' to keeping up with what is happening with family and friends (69 percent) and sustaining friendships (59

percent) than it is for exposure to new fashions/trends (19 percent) and exposure to good things to buy (13 percent).

This illuminates that the key elements of Facebook are those that are communicatory, rather than those highlighting commercial goods. The users are online to communicate and this is why the user interface needs to be simple, navigable, and less commercial.

Making Updates to the UI

It is important that user interface updates are done in a strategic manner. The design and branding must remain comfortable and consistent through out the different user interface upgrades. Jackson (2012) states “Facebook will give users the option to update to a new feature before rolling it out across the entire site. This works to minimize the disruption caused by the new feature, as well as giving the company engineers more time to tweak the design.” When a user is exposed to a new interface it can be overwhelming as the user is accustomed to certain elements in certain places. By giving users an option to convert to the new site early, this will help create a smoother transition and in the end lead to less frustration and more communication. Jackson (2012) also discusses that “engineers often have to design for the least common denominator” because if engineers make features too complex then the “adoption rate would be too small to make the work worthwhile.” This illuminates the importance of simplicity through out all social media applications. If the user is not able to keep up, or cannot naturally figure out how to navigate the application, then the design of the user interface is faulty.

Three Features

Besides making users feel comfortable, some social media sites, beginning with Facebook, allow the user to ‘like’ a piece of artwork, photograph, or text string. According Majety (2013), “one in five websites uses the Facebook like button, which adds up to more than 125 million websites around the world” (Majety 2013). The second key feature of Facebook is the news feed. No matter which social media application the user is using, the news feed allows for a continuous stream of updates from all of your friends. Once again, all the information needed from our friends is all in one place in a long feed of information. The third key feature is the ability to share photos, which allows the OSM application user to upload a photograph or piece of artwork from their mobile or desktop photo album and have it instantly seen by hundreds of their friends. These three features are very powerful in the OSM world and help attract and retain users through their ability to stay updated on their friend’s adventures and show off his/her individual life as well.

Conclusion

Due to the research that has been done on the importance of a clear, consistent, navigable user interface design for social media, UI designers around the world can improve the functionality of each user interface they design. It is important to focus on each feature individually and to consider what that feature will bring to the user’s life and then examine the entire interface to make sure it is consistent. By analyzing trends, online relationship patterns and key variables, social media application designers can understand the underlying importance of each aspect of the user interface. At the end of the day, user

interface designers want to engage the users by implementing key social features in the most strategic manner possible so the users will keep coming back for more.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The goal of this study was to find out the qualities and features that make a social media application engaging to the user. With the increasing use of social media applications on mobile devices, the implementation of a successful and engaging user interface design has become critical. In a social media application, the UI designer must consider factors such as effective interaction between users, simplicity of design, areas for improvement, and the user attraction and engagement level. The objective of this study was to:

Find out how user interface designers can achieve the most effective implementation of features within their app to provide the best experience for the user.

Data Collection Plan

This research explored the different methods of implementation of features into a user interface. An online voice of the customer (VOC) survey was sent out to 100 users at random in order to gauge the user's needs in social media applications. Interviews were also conducted with professionals working in the social media field in order to contrast and compare their opinions to those of the users. It is important that UI/UX designers understand the needs and wants of the users in order for the users to be engaged and satisfied with their experience. The interviewees were from three separate social media applications: LinkedIn, Facebook, and OptTown. The three working professionals were asked questions about the application's user interface and what makes it successful or not

(Appendix A). The questions revolved around the overall user interface/user ability of the app and how it affected the engagement and attraction level of the users.

In addition, questions were administered to gather information about each individual in order to fully grasp his/her background knowledge in user interface design. These questions included information such as position title and years of experience in the field.

Data Analysis Plan

The names of both the survey participants and the three interviewees were kept anonymous. However, the demographics and background information of the interviewees provided insight to their past and current jobs and to their experience levels. The results of the VOC survey were used to determine what the user values in the UI and what makes an overall good user experience. The responses from the interviews were used to determine a strategy for implementation of specific qualities and features that bring the highest level of user engagement and help guarantee the future success of an application. The strategy was determined by taking the responses from the three interviews and the VOC survey into consideration and analyzing how these results compare and contrast one another. If UI/UX designers understand what users need then they will be able to design successful applications. In addition, opinions and novel responses were noted in the results.

Chapter 4

Results

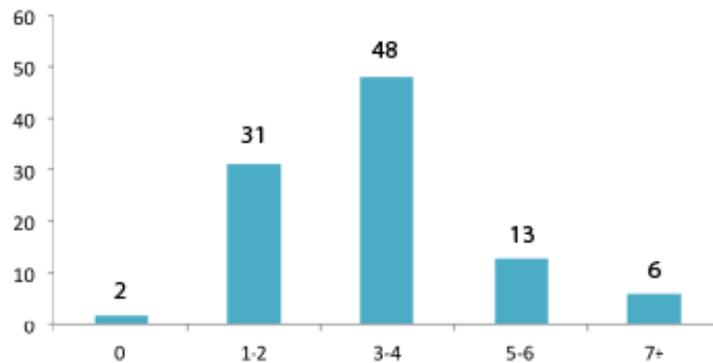
Voice of the Customer Survey

One hundred individuals were polled at random and asked a series of 10 questions to gauge the voice of the customer for user interface design for online social media. Participants preferred the simplest interface and layout to a slightly more complicated user interface to perform the same function. Also, the majority of the participants preferred a smaller mobile screen size to perform basic social media tasks such as messaging and sharing photos. Overall, simplicity proved to be a key factor in satisfying the customer. Below are questions asked in the voice of the customer survey.

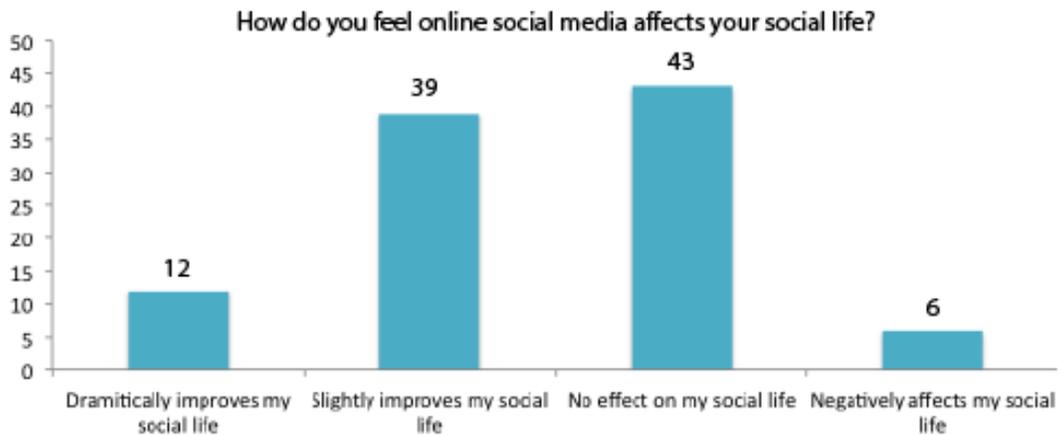
1. How many social media apps do you use?

Participants were first asked to declare the number of social media apps they use. This helped gauge the experience level of the participants to make sure that they are all social media users themselves and therefore are aware of the basic functions. A total of 79 individuals responded that they use at least one social media application. Only two people out of one hundred responded that they do not use social media apps. This helped prove that the results of the survey were accurately gauging the voice of the customer as users themselves. Results show that the majority of the participants use 3-4 social media applications.

How many social media apps do you use?

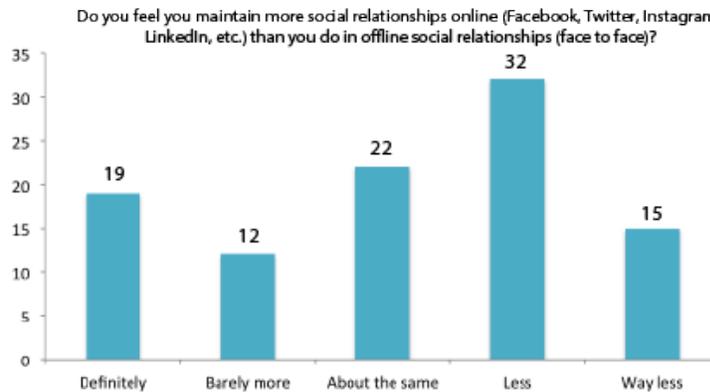


2. How do you feel online social media affects your social life?



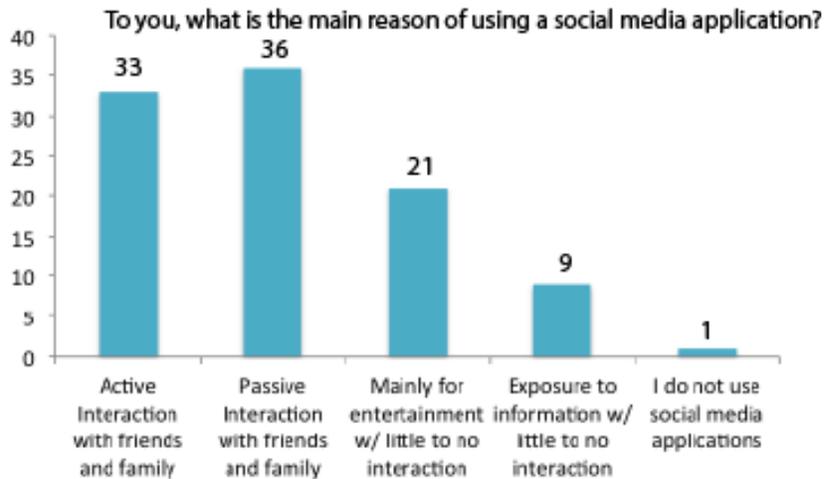
In order to gauge the users' attitudes towards social media and how they feel social media affects their social life, 82% responded that they believe social media has little to no impact on their social life. Overall, users remained fairly neutral with more positive responses than negative ones.

3. Do you feel you maintain more social relationships online (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.) than you do in offline social relationships (face to face)?



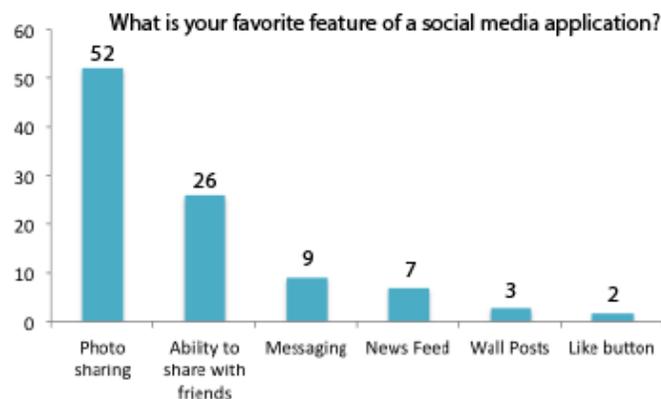
Results indicated that the majority of the respondents feel they maintain more relationships face to face than they do using online social media. Even though results showed a wide variety of responses, most of the users felt that they are able to maintain fewer relationships online that they can in person. Second, 22% responded that they feel they maintain the same number of relationships online than offline. Overall, results show that in-person relationships are still valued higher than those online.

4. To you, what is the main reason of using a social media application?



36% responded that they mostly partake in passive interactions while using social media. This includes almost little to no interaction with friends and family, but rather for exposure purposes. Most of the surveyed users use social media to keep up with the happenings and latest news of their friends and family. 33% responded that they use social media to actively interact with friends and family. Since the main purpose of social media is to network and interact with others, it was surprising that active interaction was not the most prominent response.

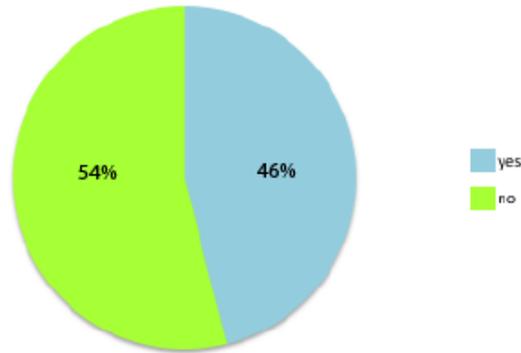
5. What is your favorite feature of a social media application?



Overall, users favor the ability to share photos. 52% were most attracted to the visual aspect that social media offers. They enjoy seeing photos and having the ability to instantly upload a memory from their life and have it displayed for all their friends to see. On the opposite end, only two users responded that they favor the like button most.

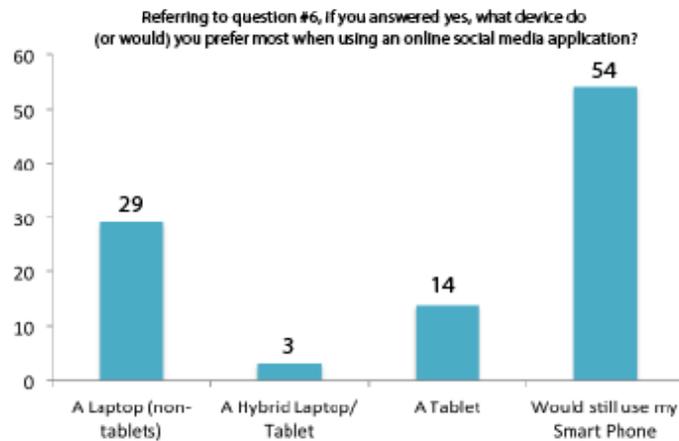
6. While using an online social media application on your mobile device, do you ever feel the screen size is too small for the functions that it offers?

While using an online social media application on your mobile device, do you ever feel the screen size is too small for the functions that it offers?



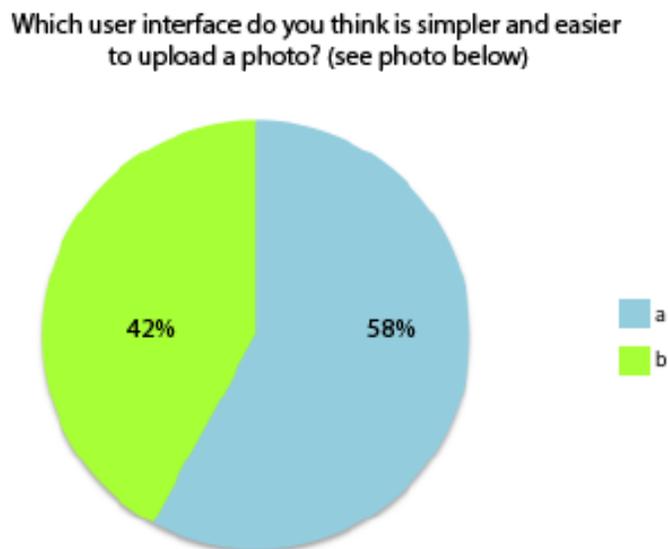
When participants were asked if they feel the screen size is too small for the functions that a social media application offers, 54% of respondents said no. They are not bothered by the screen size like the other 46% of the users are. Overall, the results were slightly favoring the functionality of a smaller screen size.

7. Referring to question #6, if you answered yes, what device do (or would) you prefer most when using an online social media application?



After referring to the previous question, the exact number of users that responded with “no” in question six also responded that they prefer to use their smart phone when using a social media application. This means that 54% of respondents prefer to use their smart phone as they do not mind the smaller screen size and actually prefer it to any other device. The second highest number of users responded in favor for the screen size of a laptop over any other screen size. This leaves the remaining 17% that preferred a non-laptop device, such as a tablet, and therefore favoring a smaller screen size for their social media experience.

**8. Which user interface do you think is simpler and easier to upload a photo?
(see Figure 1. below)**



a.



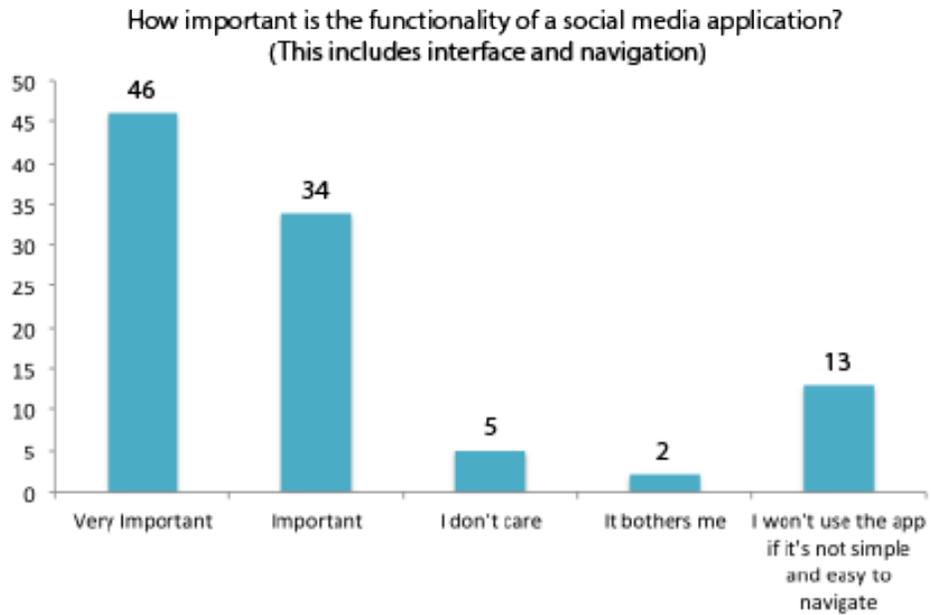
b.



Figure 2. User interface design choices for photo upload (a or b)

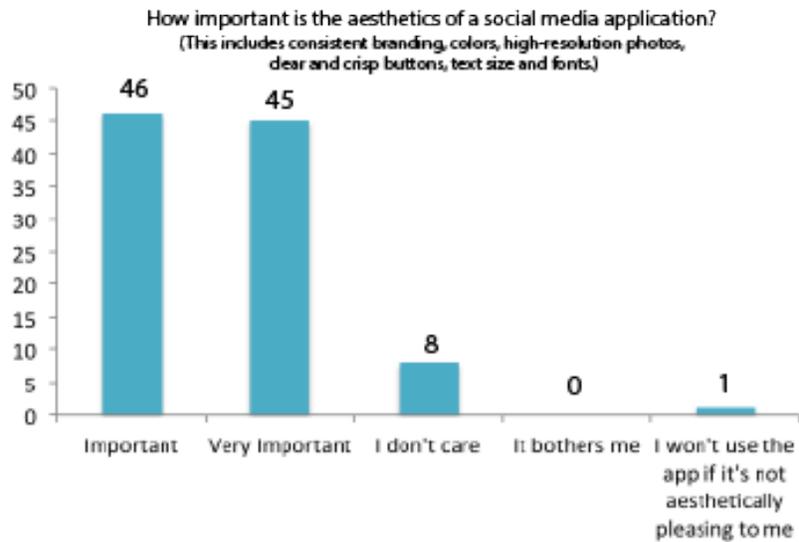
Results indicated that the majority of users felt the user interface of option a. was easier for photo upload and sharing. Option a. has more color contrast on the photo upload button and provides the user with a simple and clear navigation; 58% of the users responded that option a. was easier. Option b. provides an example of a user interface where the upload “+” button is slightly more difficult to see immediately.

9. How important is the functionality of a social media application? (This includes interface and navigation)



Users were asked about the importance of functionality of the interface and navigation. Forty-six people responded that the functionality is very important. Results show that 93% believe that functionality of the interface and navigation is of somewhat importance to them. Only five people showed no preference.

10. How important is the aesthetics of a social media application? (This includes consistent branding, colors, high-resolution photos, clear and crisp buttons, text size and fonts.)



After gauging the level of importance of functionality, the participants were then asked about the importance of aesthetics of a social media application. 92% responded that aesthetics are important to them. Only eight people responded that they do not care what the app looks like as long as it works.

Interview Results

Three interviews were conducted with working professionals in the social media field. The first interview was with a 25-year-old female, who was the co-founder of OptTown, a mobile application that lets users add their favorite businesses to their “town” on the application. Users can get the latest deals, ‘like’ the deals and share their favorite deals with their friends. When asked what makes the application successful, she answered, “the ability to ‘like’ messages and see what messages your friends have ‘liked’ (passive interaction), sharing a deal on Facebook and commenting on those deals (active interaction), and also seeing friends that have added a place to their town (passive interaction).” Her responses directly support the results to question 4 in the VOC survey. Survey results showed that most users prefer passive over active interaction.

When asked about the user interface of OptTown, she mentioned the importance of simplicity, an easy and intuitive navigation, and a consistent brand. Her response is supported by question 9 of the VOC survey. Results showed that 93 out of the 100 respondents found the functionality of the interface and navigation to be important to them. The co-founder of OptTown was also asked what feature of the app could be better implemented in order to increase user engagement? She replied with the need for consumers to have their own OptTown home page that displays a newsfeed of all their favorite places. This home page could be implemented into the interface by creating a home button in the navigation. This would draw attention to the importance of the page and therefore force users to stumble upon it. This would not only increase the social aspect of the app, but also allow for more active communication between users.

The second interview was conducted with Mr. Gutierrez, a designer in the Ads/Commerce department at Facebook. He has 3.5 years of experience in user interface design and has worked on three other applications before working for Facebook's gift giving app, called Karma. When asked about the most engaging elements in Karma, he replied that the interface played heavily on the product photography. He also talked about the importance of the specific color pallet used in the interface. Bright, highly saturated colors are used in order for users to associate the brand with fun gifts that show personality. This shows that a user interface relies heavily on the visual aspect and the relationship the user has with the colors, photos, text, navigation, etc. Mr. Gutierrez highlighted this importance by explaining the strategy behind the color scheme and large photos of the gifts in order to engage the users in the app.

As Karma is a part of the Facebook interface it can be difficult for users to stumble upon. Mr. Gutierrez commented, "The gifts were hard to find, buried in the UI of Facebook's desktop and mobile applications." Eventually the user interface evolved and Karma "was able to take over a very important section of the desktop (top right hand column, the birthday box), but the functionality remained difficult to surface in the mobile UI." As the VOC survey results stated that 93% of users believed the functionality of the interface and navigation of a social media application is important to them, Facebook must display Karma in the navigation in order for it to be more noticeable in the interface. Mr. Gutierrez also mentioned "the product would have been more successful if the experience was simplified." He explained that users complained about having to find and select an appropriate card for their gift. This forced the users to spend more time to make a "relatively unimportant decision" and therefore "potentially

increases confusion and frustration.” As simplicity has proven to be an important factor in the UI by the users, this is a complaint that needs to be taken into consideration and fixed. As the VOC survey showed that 54% of users prefer to use social media on their smart phones, this highlights the importance of designing a simple user interface for the Facebook mobile application.

The third interview was conducted with a web designer/developer on the mobile team at LinkedIn. Mr. Becker has worked closely with UI/UX design for four years and has worked on three other applications before getting hired at LinkedIn. When asked about the most engaging element of LinkedIn, Mr. Becker responded that the suggested news section in the application helps draw in users to articles and companies that LinkedIn thinks the user would be interested in. This aspect of personalization helps engage users without them even realizing it. Mr. Becker was also asked about how the user interface could be improved to attract more users. He stated, “Small things like button animation, smooth scrolling and transitions, even color contrasts are all things that can have a lasting effect.” The connection that users have with the app “can take place subliminally.” These are all simple aesthetics that help the interface become more appealing to the user. The value of aesthesis in a social media application was confirmed in the results of the VOC survey with 92% of users confirming its importance. Overall, the three interviews provided additional support to the VOC survey results by adding a professional perspective from those who help design the OSM apps themselves.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to find out how user interface designers can achieve the most effective implementation of features within their app to provide the best experience for the user. Conclusions were drawn by analyzing the responses of three working professionals in the user interface design world and by comparing them to the VOC survey results. By comparing and contrasting the insight from the UI/UX designers with the needs of the users, this study examined the situation from both perspectives. The voice of the customer (VOC) survey asked 100 social media users at random about their interface design preferences. UI designers cannot design an application successfully if they do not understand the needs and wants of the users. This study helped illuminate what these needs are and how UI designers of social media applications are approaching and adapting the user interface accordingly.

The main purpose of online social media is to create a network and interact with friends and family, it was surprising that the majority of survey respondents responded that they prefer passive interaction with friends and family over active interaction. As Facebook has been around since 2004 and users have become more comfortable with the capabilities to connect with whom ever they wish around the world, it may not be as exciting for them to keep in constant contact with friends. In question three on the VOC survey, users were asked if they feel they maintain more relationships online vs. offline (face to face). Results showed that users feel they maintain more offline relationships than online relationships, which directly supports the desire to have more passive interactions online and more active interactions offline. This shows that users still value

offline relationships and that an online social media application cannot and will not replace face-to-face contact.

Survey results show that users value the visual aspect of an online social media application. When asked about their favorite feature, 52% responded that they favor the ability to share photos. This was not surprising as it could contribute to the passive interaction that the majority of the users preferred. One of the interviewees, Mr. Gutierrez, a designer in the Ads/Commerce department at Facebook, stated, “The Karma Facebook gift app was product driven, so the UI played heavily on the product photography.” A successful and intuitive interface depends on the content and main functions of the application, but results from the survey and interviews show that users prefer an image heavy, visual experience in an OSM application.

When asked about which interface they prefer to upload a photo, 58% chose the interface with a big blue camera button in the center signifying photo upload. Users preferred the simpler interface with a bright blue button that stood out more than the photo upload “+” button in option b. As the majority of survey respondents preferred to use OSM on their smartphones, it is important that the interface is clearly designed with contrasting colors that highlight the key features. Question 8 in the survey, which had users select which user interface they prefer for photo upload, was designed to test the user for their preference of simplicity over comfort. Option b. was the Facebook upload button which most users feel comfortable with, and option a. was from a less popular OSM application called Flickr that is simple and easy to use. This shows that users prefer a simple interface over one that they feel comfortable with. Surprisingly Flickr (option a.

and the less popular social media app) still won making the simple interface design easier and more intuitive for the user.

Mr. Gutierrez stated, “The product would have been more successful if the experience was simplified.” If a function is buried in the interface it leads to decreased use and increased confusion for the user. Mr. Gutierrez highlighted the importance of the top right corner of the page as being a hot spot for functions to be easily noticed. He discussed that more users used the Karma Facebook gift-giving app when the link was placed in the top right corner of the desktop site, but that it got lost in the mobile interface. This caused the users to forget about Karma while on their mobile devices. Simplicity and consistency have proven to be key concepts while creating a mobile interface for any application and Facebook needs to integrate Karma in a simpler, more noticeable manner. In the VOC survey 93% of users believed the functionality of the interface and navigation of a social media application is important to them. Some users might not realize what functions are displayed on a smartphone screen size compared to a desktop screen size, and this is why it is important for UI/UX designers to keep the interface simple and relatively consistent between desktop and mobile. If not, features such as Karma, will get lost and buried in the interface.

The next important topic is the aesthetics of an OSM application. VOC survey results showed that 92% of respondents value the aesthetics in an OSM application. Aesthetics mentioned in the VOC survey included consistent branding, colors, high-resolution photos, clear and crisp buttons, text size and fonts. Mr. Becker, a web designer/developer on the mobile team at LinkedIn, commented on the importance of the aesthetics: “Small things like button animation, smooth scrolling and transitions, even

color contrasts are all things that can have a lasting effect.” Although some users might not realize the subliminal effect that the aesthetics has on their user experience, it is important that UI designers take all aspects of the user experience into consideration. This includes testing new interfaces, navigations, color schemes, buttons, etc. on a variety of users in order to understand how the user interacts with the application.

Overall, by combining the users preferences from the VOC survey and comparing them to those of the UI design professionals, it shows that designers are taking the users needs into consideration and not just their own design preferences. It is important that UI/UX designers are able to adapt to the current trends in the industry by constantly surveying the needs of users of all ages. Designing simply for the lowest common denominator ensures that all users will understand and navigate smoothly through the app with out confusion or frustration. After surveying and discovering these needs, user experience tests need to be conducted to highlight areas for improvement and unclear navigation. If these steps are followed and the user is valued as the most important, UI/UX designers will be able to design online social media applications that engage the user and this will result in a successful user experience and therefore a successful application.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

If time permitted, it would have been useful to mock up many different user interface designs that perform the same function. This would help gauge the design preferences of the users to a higher degree. As many users feel comfortable with the Facebook user interface as it has been around longer than Flickr, there was room for a small bias in asking the user if they prefer the Facebook photo upload interface or the

Flickr photo upload interface. They might feel more comfortable with one or the other due to the time they have spent in the application. If new user interfaces were created that perform the same function, this would eliminate any bias or previous experience that the user has had with an interface.

Two people who took the VOC survey are not online social media users. The survey should have prevented them from submitting their answers if they answered that they use zero online social media applications on the first questions. The survey results could have been skewed drastically if more non-social media users took the survey.

To continue this study, it is recommended to survey a larger body of individuals and perhaps separate by age or generation to get a feel of what certain users prefer. UI/UX designers could benefit from not only knowing user preferences but also knowing user preferences based on age so they can design the application to best fit their target audience.

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Appendix A.

Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

1. What is your position title?
2. What department do you work in?
3. How many years of experience do you have in user interface design?
4. How many social media applications do you use? Please name them.
5. Before your current job, how many other apps have you work on where your position involved user interface related work?

Questions

1. What are the most engaging elements/features in the app that you work for? Why?
What makes them engaging?
2. What makes the app successful? Why do you think this is?
3. How could the user interface be improved to attract more users?
4. What's the most successful feature? Explain how it was implemented in the app.
5. What feature could be better implemented in order to increase engagement for the users? How would you do this?
6. What are your thoughts on this matter?