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CS- 360-H7057 Mobile Architect & Programming

11/1/2023

User Components and Data

The app that I chose to analyze for this project is the official NASA app. The NASA button for the home screen is a picture of the official NASA logo. When you first load the app there are seven widgets displayed on the home screen of the app. Each widget is titled with a subject category related to the information that NASA is intending to share with the user. The categories are, “All News”, “Images”, “TV and Audio”, “Videos”, “Missions, Schedule and Sightings”, “Tweets” and “Featured”. There is an app bar that includes an image of NASA’s logo to the far left of the bar, the name NASA directly centered in the middle and to the far right is a three-bar icon to represent a list of optional in-app user settings. The home screen layout is simpler than you would expect the app of NASA to be. The widgets are plain squares with no specific design features other than if you are idling on the home screen each square automatically shuffles through a series of images that are related to the widget’s subject.

When you click on a widget, the layout of the content within the subject is the exact same at the home screen. Except, there are thousands of widgets. For example, if you click on the “Images” widget, there are 21,191 other widgets loaded, all with a distinct picture for the design. When you click on a certain widget, the image is displayed full screen without the app bar or status bar. If you tap on the image again, the status bar appears with an added back button, a screen sharing option button, a play button, to “play” the image (which also takes away the status bar and picture description again), a heart button (to like the image) and a share button. There is also a transparent widget that takes up about a third of the screen and overlaps the image. The descriptions are often long, so a user can scroll within that widget to read the whole description. Another feature is that a user can swipe right or left to scroll through next and previous images.

While the layout of the UI in the app is very simple and boring, the data and features within the app are nothing short of amazing. The image section allows you to view some of the most amazing pictures of space and real time NASA events that will blow your mind. If that is not enough to sell you, the app has the most amazing Augmented Reality 3D models of real space equipment that NASA has created. You can literally place the models directly in your living room and examine the objects however you want with your phone camera. The details of the models are amazing, and the experience is surreal. There is another cool feature within some of the widgets is that there is an Interactive Solar System. Within the Interactive Solar System, a user can visit any planet, moon, satellite etc. and view the whole solar system from that POV.

I imagine that the amount of data needed for the amazing features in the NASA app is immense, and it comes directly from NASA. Some data such as images of planets from earth or images of earth phenomena within the image’s widget are taken by photographers that are not associated with NASA, but the choice of what image is acceptable for the app is still determined by app managers (a user cannot simply post a picture on the app at will). The data that is needed for the 3D models and the interactive features most likely comes from all of the data gathered by scientists and engineers at NASA.

I think that the main goal of a user interested in the NASA app is to simply see what NASA is doing. NASA provided a plethora of data that displays all their past and present accomplishments as well as future missions. The data provided for each feature is so detailed and documented so well with images, 3D models and immersive truly accurate, scalable, interactive features that a user can almost feel like they are a part of the NASA team themselves or that they have the whole solar system/ universe at their touch.