Heuristic Evaluation

CS147

November 8, 2019

Prototype

Ballit is a mobile application geared towards Gen Z users that aims to increase political awareness and educated voting through an informative, fun, fresh, and personalized app experience.

Violations Found

1. H8 Aesthetic and minimalist design

The logo in the top menu bar seems to be neither left-aligned nor centered. Because the standard for most apps is having the name and logo at the top-center, the aesthetic seems a little bit off. Additionally, on the home screen, the logo and name of the app take up a lot of space on the screen and draw away from the more relevant information on the screen (images, Tweets, etc).

Fix: Reduce the size of the name and logo and center-align it.

2. H3 User control and freedom

For the second task, once I choose an upcoming election, I am taken to the menu showing me different options regarding the elections (candidates, propositions, ballot…) but since there is no back button, I can't choose a different upcoming election if I made a mistake. The user would be forced to quit the app or navigate to an entirely different screen and task to start again.

Fix: Add back button to the screen shown after you select an election to explore.

3. H1 Visibility of system status

On the rating screen where I am supposed to rate my level of agreement with a statement from 1 to 5, I wish there was some sort of feedback on what happens after I select a level. I found myself wondering, did the rating get added to my profile? Did the information go through? It feels jarring to make a selection and have the screen disappear without really knowing what happened.

Fix: Add a feedback message letting the user know that information has been submitted and added to their profile.

4. H3 User control and freedom

I think it can be expected that users will change political interests, especially as elections approach. User might want to re-examine their policy preferences and learn about policies they said they weren't interested in so perhaps there should be a way to do this.

Fix: Add a settings buttons in the top menu bar or in the profile tab that allows you to see which policies you have marked as interesting or not and let users change these preferences.

5. H2 Match b/w System & World

While the use of emojis helps create an aesthetic geared to younger generations (which I understand is the target audience), I think they are perhaps used in too many places and detract from the message you are trying to convey. Having the watergun emoji next to the title "Gun Control" makes the topic seem playful and although I understand the app is supposed to be light and enjoyable to use, it could be seen as insensitive. I think the relevance of the topic needs to be better acknowledged because there is a disconnect between those emojis and what the actual attitude in the world around the topic is.

Fix: Perhaps remove emoji use around policies or double-check that they are used appropriately.

6. H10 Help and Documentation

While the third task is really valuable and can really help young voters make decisions during an election, this is an extremely sensitive subject and there is already a lot of distrust on tech and politics (given situations like that of Facebook and Cambridge Analytica). Because of this, as a user I want to understand what it means to "match" with a candidate, how is the algorithm determined and how accurate is it? Additionally, the user might be curious to know how all of this data is being protected and where, if anywhere, it's going.

Fix: I know the algorithm might not be developed for this class but at least having an idea of how it would be done or having a help section describing what the app is doing will be valuable in creating trust and allowing the user to understand what the app is doing in the background. I would also add some information on privacy and how you are storing all of this political data you'd be gathering through the app.

7. H7 Flexibility and Efficiency of Use

It seems like "Choose Candidates" and "Swipe on Propositions" are options that allow you to curate your preferences for the election while "Your Ballot" and "Find Polling Stations" are more related to your profile, and are things you will need when the election actually happens. Because of this, the user might want to access this information in a quicker way and even in a different tab since "Your Ballot" and "Find

Polling Stations" are less about exploring the elections and your options and more about just actually voting and getting the action done.

Fix: When a user picks candidates and creates their ballot, the ballot can be moved to their profile tab where they can access all elections they have explored, access the ballot directly, and look at the nearest polling station. Alternatively, the app can remain as it is but those two menu options can be moved to the top of the screen.

8. H5 Error prevention

When you say you are interested in a policy and are directed to the rating screen, your eyes are immediately drawn to the bolded statement: The right to own guns should be revoked. Then you look at the stars but since the stars don't have a clear instruction on what to do, the user might feel some confusion and wonder what 5 and 1 mean in this context. Even though there are instructions on what to do at the top, it isn't an intuitive flow.

Fix: Label the star diagram so you have the numbers 1-5 at the bottom in smaller font and then on the left-most star have a text saying "Strongly disagree" and at the right have text saying "Strongly agree". The color gradient for the stars could also be linear with darker orange showing stronger agreement.

9. H6 Recognition rather than recall

Also, when you are rating a policy, the name of the policy you said you were interested in is nowhere on screen so the user might make a mistake or forget what policy they are rating.

Fix: Have selected policy name at the top menu bar instead of "Choose policies" so user knows what policy they are rating.

10. H4 Consistency and Standards

When the user is switching tabs, from homescreen to policies to elections, the new screen transitions in with a left swipe (as if appearing from the left). This could be jarring to the user for a couple of reasons: 1) the tab you are clicking on was to the right of the tab you were in in the lower menu bar (like you were on home and selected policies) so you'd expect it to be an activity to the right, 2) it makes it seem as though that screen was already active and kind of just waiting on the side even if you had never clicked on it before, 3) it's very different from the sort of fade-in transition we are used to with mobile apps.

Fix: Change screen transitions so they swipe in a more logical direction (from left if you are switching from policies to home, from right if you are switching from home to policies) or just change to a fade-in transition.

11. H6 Recognition rather than recall

For the second task in which users discover polling stations, it seems as though the user needs to input their zipcode and then the app remembers it to give them nearby polling stations. This can be inefficient because the user has to do more work to input their zipcode and if the user is on the go, away from home, and trying to find a polling station nearby, they might not even recall what zipcode they are in. If the user didn't want their location automatically inputted, they could override it but I'm assuming most users would be ok with their current location being used.

Fix: Instead of needing users to input their zipcode, you could use location services to identify where the user is and find nearest polling stations and allow users to override it if needed.

12. H4 Consistency and Standards

Throughout the app, there is a lot of text that is italicized. While the homescreen has no italics, the policy screen is all italics besides the description of the policy, for example. To a lot of users, italic font is a way to emphasize and draw attention to certain things so it can be confusing when a lot of the app is using this style of font.

Fix: Make text have regular style unless necessary to italicize for emphasis.

13. H7 Flexibility and efficiency of use

The current format of the homescreen makes it so elements are sized differently and in ways that are not the most efficient for the user. The first Tweet has a really big picture but the text and user, which actually give some of the most relevant information, are very small and hard to read. The user might thus have trouble taking in all the important information.

Fix: Make less relevant information smaller on homescreen and make text bigger. Also information might not have to be constrained within those squares that seem to be laid out on the prototype since squares with rounded corners are a difficult shape for all this different type of information.

14. H5 Error Prevention

For the third task, when I'm making my ballot and choosing candidates, I click on the like button under one and I am immediately taken back to a different screen. The user might be confused because there are no instructions on the selection screen so it is unclear what to do — can you select more than one candidate, for example? Also if I accidentally click on a candidate I didn't like, there is no way to undo the action and I have no feedback on where the information goes.

Fix: Add instructions to this screen so user knows what actions to take and what effects these actions will have.

15. H3 User Control and Freedom

Also for the the third task, when comparing candidates, the user needs to make a really big decision by choosing from the different options yet the information they have is minimal. While you have the "matching" category and "age", you don't really know in which ways you match, what exactly the politician has said, what relevant experience they have, etc. The user might want the freedom to learn more about these candidates, hopefully without having to leave the app, so that they may actually do a good selection of candidates for their ballot.

Fix: Add an option for users to "read more" that expands the information on each candidate and gives a more thorough examination of who they are and what they propose.

Summary of Violations

Category	# Violations
H1: Visibility of System Status	1
H2: Match b/w System & World	1
H3: User Control & Freedom	3
H4: Consistency & Standards	2
H5: Error Prevention	2
H6: Recognition not Recall	2
H7: Flexibility & Efficiency of Use	2
H8: Aesthetic & Minimalist Design	1
H9: Help Users with Errors	0
H10: Help & Documentation	1
Total Violations	15

Recommendations

While I believe the app succeeds in creating a young aesthetic that makes politics seem more approachable to a young Gen Z audience, there are some issues that I think could be fixed to make each task easier for the user to accomplish, and then a bigger issue that I address in the second paragraph A problem that I found throughout the app is a lack of user control. There were a couple of times when I

wanted to change a decision I made, for example a policy I selected or an upcoming election, but there was no back button which forced me to restart the entire prototype. There were also times when I made a selection I didn't actually want but there wasn't a way to undo it and so I was stuck with a decision I regretted. Adding back buttons and undo options throughout the app could allow for way easier user interactions. There were also some aesthetic and consistency problems throughout, most notably are the small size of the Tweet text in the homescreen, the use of italic style font when nothing needed to be signaled by it, and the screens transitioning with left-swipes. All of these can be easily solved by giving more space to Tweets in the homescreen and making the font bigger, standarizing text throughout the app to be regular style, and making fade transitions rather than swipes.

Beyond these smaller details, I think the underlying bigger issue that I felt was that the app didn't seem to acknowledge the relevance and sensitivity of its content. There are three main issues that lead to this overall statement. First, the aesthetic of the app is fresh and necessary for the type of audience its intended for but sometimes it can feel out of touch. The biggest example of this is using emojis when describing policies and having a water gun emoji next to description of gun control, a topic that is incredibly serious and affecting millions. While the app should keep its fun branding, I think it is important to go back and reassess where these images should be used. Second, candidate selection seems reductive. Helping users make informed decisions on the elections is what I believe to be the most relevant task of this app and yet the information we are given on each candidate is very limited, with only their age, name, and a list of things we "match" on (which they might not match on anything if the user skips the policy tab and navigates straight to upcoming elections). Asking users to select candidates based on this information seems simplistic and even dangerous if the app were to become popular. I would suggest having more information on each candidate and linking to relevant outside sources to make sure users actually have all the information they need. Finally, because all of this information is so sensitive, I think users need to have a good understanding of what is happening on the back-end. How are "matches" being determined? How different are the outcomes if I rate a particular statement with 5 stars rather than 3? And where is all this data going to, who is protecting my privacy? While the questions seem outside of the scope of the class, it's critical to think about them because it seems misguided not to consider the impact that technology can have on democracy, especially after 2016.