

“I was interested in getting this service because I wasn’t keeping track of movies anywhere”: Cognitive offloading with Letterboxd

Maxwell Keleher

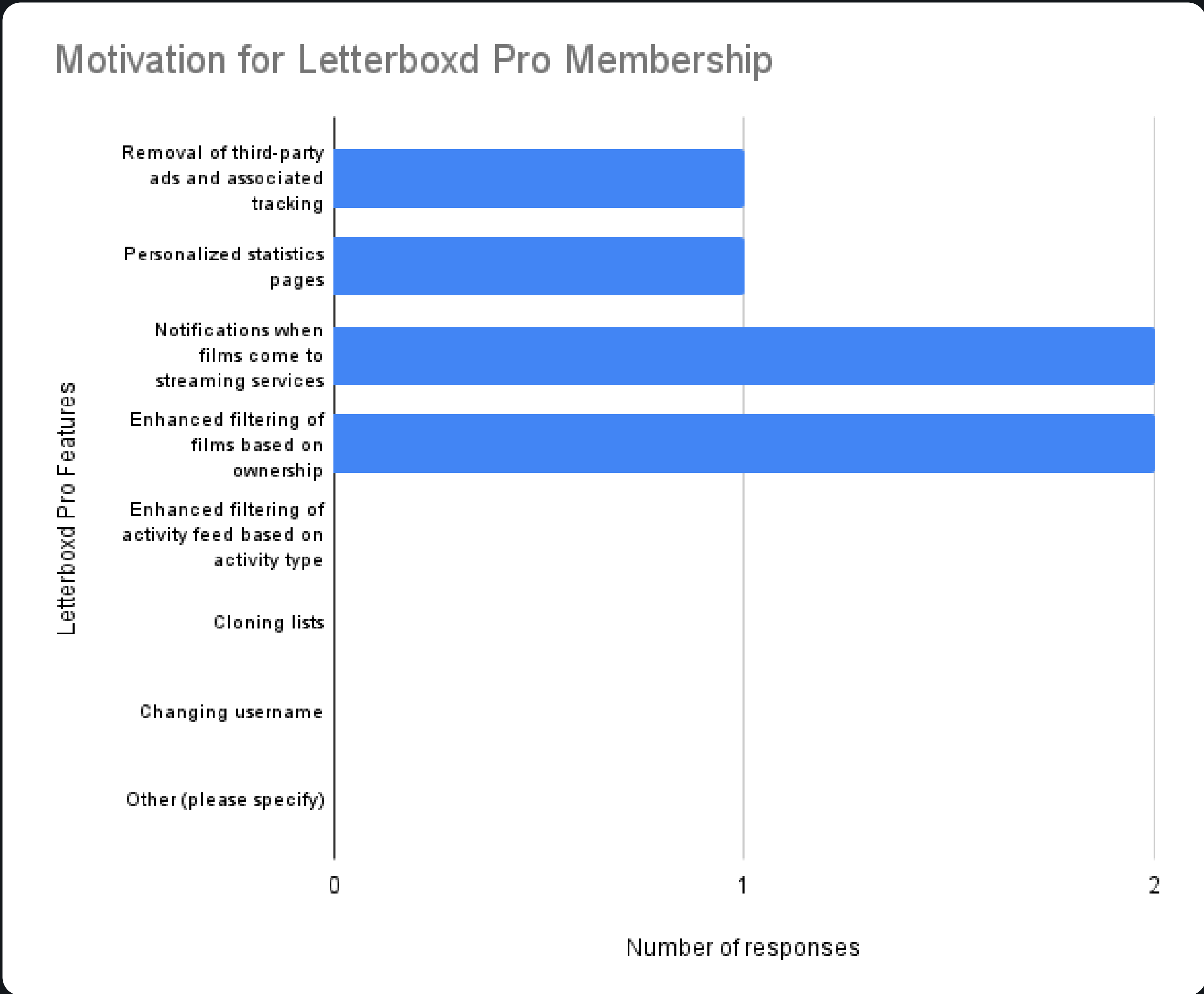
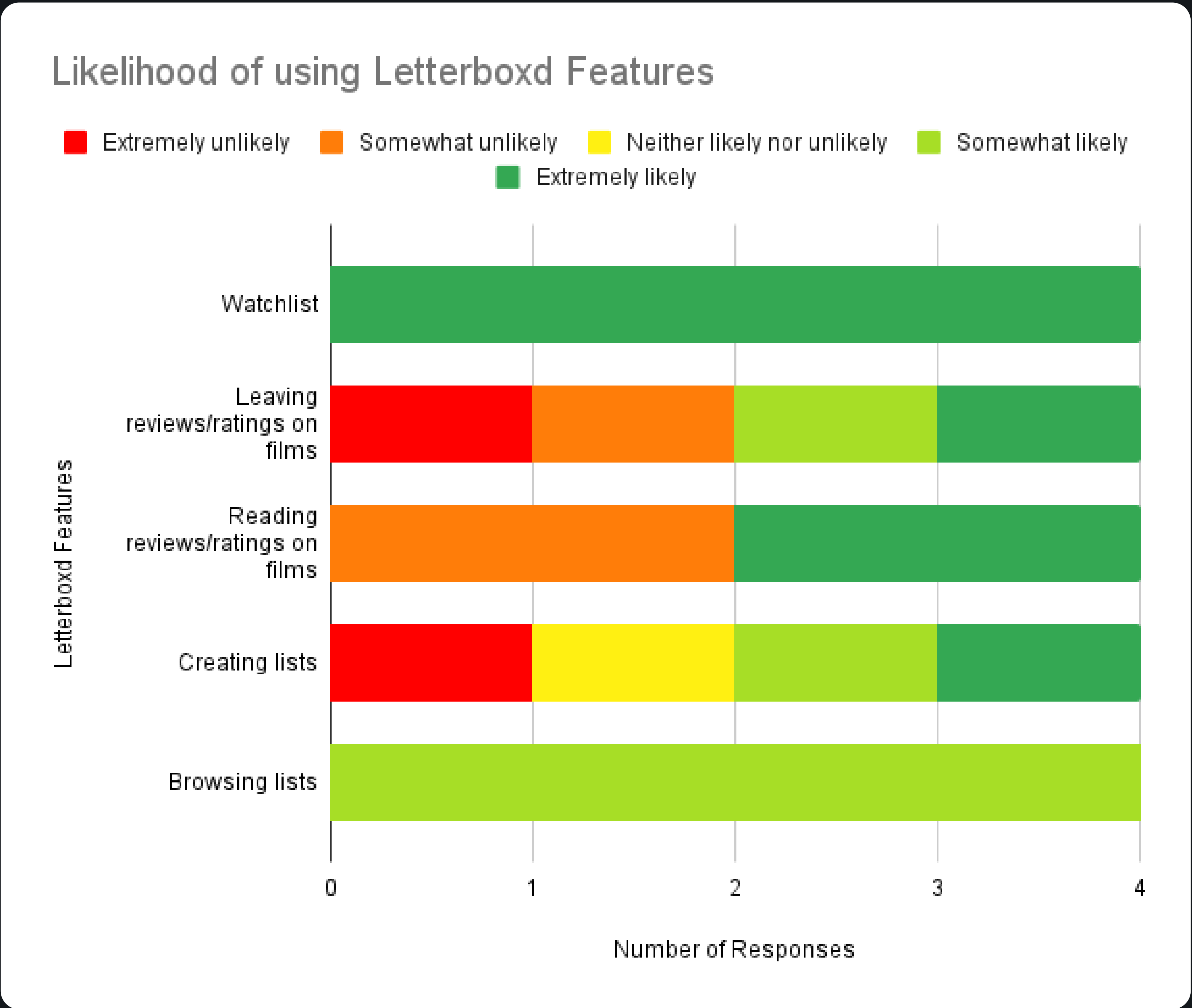
Introduction

Letterboxd is a social-media website which allows users to share ratings and reviews of films they’ve seen, and keep a watchlist of films they are interested in seeing¹. (Letterboxing also refers to the process of adding borders to change film aspect ratio which is demonstrated on the poster).

Cognitive offloading refers to how people use tools in their environment to reduce their mental load². The internet has proven to be an incredibly powerful cognitive offloading tool since it allows for easy searching of vast repositories of information².

I observed, interviewed, and surveyed 4 participants to understand how they use Letterboxd as a tool for cognitive offloading.

Questionnaire Results



- Half of the participants pay for Letterboxd Pro
- Most popular reasons for paying for Letterboxd Pro related to giving users more tools to aid in decisions to watch movies

Observation and Interview Results

Film Logging

All participants used letterboxd to track what films they have watched but there was variance in how much information they kept.

“it was stressing me out trying to come up with a rating” (P3)

“I’ll give [the film] a rating, if I liked it I’ll give it a like, if I wanna give it a review I’ll write a review” (P4)

Memorability

Participants recalled their least favourite films from the past year with little, if any, information from the site such as ratings or viewing history.

“If I disliked it for specific reasons then I think that does have a lasting impression and it’s more common to feel kinda meh about a movie” (P3)

Search Bar

The search bar was the most common method of finding films when logging, but required that they spelled the films correctly

“I find the search is not very forgiving” (P2)

“if you don’t type in the exact right keyword it doesn’t pull up any results” (P3)

Conclusion

People seem to store large amounts of information within Letterboxd, but they still maintain a memory of particularly negative film experiences.

There is a tension between the way the site removes the need for users to recall information about their personal film watchlists and viewing history and the way that the search bar requires users to remember and correctly spell search terms.

Some users seem overwhelmed by the amount of information that can be logged about an individual film however it seems that users are comfortable avoiding particular metrics rather than completely abandoning the platform.

References

1. Letterboxd. <https://letterboxd.com/>.
2. Storm, B. C., Stone, S. M. & Benjamin, A. S. Using the Internet to access information inflates future use of the Internet to access other information. *Memory* 25, 717–723 (2017).