

DisneyPlus Recommender System

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Disney+'s Recommender System

As Disney shifts its focus to digital streaming, it's a good time to look at how they are actually doing with their digital products. For a service that is less than a year old, Disney+ has over 50 million paid subscribers. My family (especially my two boys) has used the service extensively since day one (November 12, 2019). We will now do a scenario design review of Disney+.

Who are the target users?

Disney had a goal of 60-90 million total digital subscribers between its digital platforms (Hulu, ESPN/ESPN+, Disney+) by 2024. Disney has blown past this number based on the Q3 earnings call this past week and is now over 100 million paid subscribers. Disney+ accounts for nearly two thirds of those subscribers (some users subscribe to two or more of the digital platforms). Disney+ is projected to end the fiscal year at over 72M and looks to be 123M paid subscribers by the end of 2024. While that is short of Netflix's 190M current userbase, it is a significant gain in marketshare considering it was at zero paid subscribers a year ago.

Disney+ is able to target their users with recommendations from the account creation process forward as they allow users to create avatars (profiles) which enables Disney to personalize individuals in a household. Disney does not want to serve up R rated movies to a 3 year old nor does it want to initially recommend "Muppet Babies" to an adult without kids. The initial setup of the service starts the recommendation process for the end user.

What are the key goals?

The Disney+ goal is to serve the viewer with the age appropriate videos and recommend shows that are personalized. Disney is able to do this right off the bat due to the avatars that the end user creates when starting the service. From there, Disney+ continues to monitor the viewing habits of the consumer to understand what they watch, what they don't watch, how they watch it, and when they watch it to serve up new recommendations.

How can you help them accomplish those goals?

The avatars along with the recommend systems utilized allow for the personalization of the video mix while also allowing for branding of franchises and key stories to be served up to the subscribers. The site utilizes natural language processing (NLP) along with multiple other algorithms including machine learning to go along with segmentation to provide the best viewing experience and design possible. The site also focuses on a "simple, elegant experience" to make it clean and easy to navigate.

Recommendations

While the site does a reasonable job of recommending videos, there are some holes that need to be tweaked. First, even though there are “avatars” that help differentiate whom is watching, kids have a habit of using adults avatar. This messes up the algorithms and thus serves up kid options to the adults, ruining the overall recommendations. There needs to be a way that the end user can “cleanse” the data used to serve up the recommendations. I don’t want to see “Mickey Mouse Clubhouse” recommended to me because my kid watched it under my name. I also don’t want to see the “Because you watched Mickey Mouse Clubhouse” recommendations in the other recommendation area as it ruins the experience. A thumbs up/down, star/non-star, or don’t track type of option should be utilized to enhance the end user experience.

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