Assignment M3 (Summer 2021)

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***Abstract*—**In spite of Netflix's explosive growth as a production company and video content platform with millions of subscribers and a nearly endless selection of shows/movies to stream, aspects of the application still need some work. Notably, the "My List" view features a chaotic display of possibilities (as colorful thumbnails), irrespective of modern-day customer preferences for structured, yet customizable experiences that enable more efficient decisions. The interface lacks even the most basic sort and filter commands (plus a host of other functionalities) and, in turn, proves to be a relatively underdeveloped offering when compared to the suite of other Netflix features, especially because many customers claim to continuously struggle in their search for desirable content.

1 BRAINSTORMING PLAN

I set aside three separate 20-minute blocks (Monday A.M. and P.M., plus Tuesday A.M.) to individually brainstorm ideas since my creativity usually peaks early in the day and late at night. I also like to give myself at least one night of sleep, so my brain has sufficient time to process higher level thoughts/concepts. I planned to include additional A.M. and/or P.M. sessions on a rolling basis, as needed (until I surpassed the threshold of 20 unique items in my list of design alternatives). All sessions would take place in my home office, and the only allowable "distraction" would be my favorite study music playlist on Spotify. I planned to create a mind map during the Monday A.M. session to fully flush out the problem space and guide future brainstorming activities. For my purposes, an effective mind map, which identifies relationships between ideas/concepts and only includes words and brief phrases, would simply cover the entirety of the top half of the page. If impossible to achieve in the first 20-minute block, then I would use the Monday P.M. block to complete the mind map, push ideation to the next A.M., and extend the process to Tuesday P.M. As for the list of design alternatives, I would document all possible approaches that come to mind (a type of free-form brainstorming) and, of course, would not allow myself to cross any out. I would only further constrain myself by ensuring I have at least a few ideas aligned to the high-level focus areas of optimization, prioritization, and noise reduction.

2 BRAINSTORMING EXECUTION

Figure 1 (below) is a picture of my brainstorming sheet for the "My List" interface.

Figure 1—My Brainstorming Sheet with a Mind Map + List of Ideas

As recommended in the lectures, these ideas are not each descriptions of a complete redesign, but rather, pieces that can be combined into a more comprehensive, new vision for Netflix's "My List" interface.

3 SELECTION CRITERIA

On the whole, Netflix produces streamlined, user-friendly applications, which earn high marks for their feedback mechanisms, mappings, tolerance, and perceptibility. Feasibility/Cost of implementation should not be a real, critical concern for any of the above ideas (to my knowledge), so I chose to evaluate alternative design concepts against the following criteria:

- **Simplicity:** Countless context-specific variables, like the presence of roommates or children and the tendency to multitask, make the primary goal (to find a show or movie from "My List" to watch based on current interests, emotions, etc.) hard to achieve efficiently. Only simple design elements, which would help to minimize fatigue and frustration, were considered for the prototypes.
- **Consistency:** From the data inventory, we know most users stream on their smart TVs and/or laptops. People interact with countless other interfaces (to include Netflix's other interfaces, like "Home" and "Search") through these devices, so any modifications to the "My List" design must reflect accepted truths/rules and prioritize the discoverability and usability of functionalities.
- **Flexibility:** I previously characterized Netflix's user base (of 200+ million paid subscribers) as incredibly diverse — comprised of both experts and novices, but skewed toward customers in their 20s and 30s. Concepts with the potential to boost active, accessible functionality within "My List" were prioritized.
- **Differentiation:** Needfinding revealed the sizeable effects of competition (from Hulu, Prime Video, HBO Max, etc.) on user behavior. When the search becomes a challenge, most users simply abandon their efforts and switch to another application. "My List" will not be able to eliminate the problem entirely, but the novelty factor of each alternative (from the customer perspective) was taken into account.

Note: The requirements definition from M2 is incorporated into the next 3 sections, as well, to further contextualize analysis of each prototype design.

4 TEXTUAL PROTOTYPE

The current "My List" view is a grid-like arrangement of thumbnails. The only information immediately visible is the title of the video (each formatted uniquely). Additional details appear on hover/selection, but if a user wants access to this

information before making their choice, then the search process becomes highly inefficient. To remediate this problem, I propose the following design for a "List View" to supplement the existent "Thumbnail View":

Say the interface is split into 2 distinct sections: a left-hand "Sort and Filter" pane (25% of the total width) and a second, main section for the "List of Videos" (75%). From top to bottom, the "Sort and Filter" pane includes:

1. Exhaustive sort options (within a single dropdown)
   - A-Z / Z-A
   - Recently Added
   - Release Date (Old-New / New-Old)
   - Rotten Tomatoes Score (High-Low / Low-High)
   - Video Duration (Short-Long / Long-Short)
   - "Recommended for Me" Score (High-Low / Low-High)
2. Multiselect checkboxes for video type (e.g., TV show, movie, comedy special)
3. Multiselect checkboxes for Motion Picture Association ratings (e.g., G, PG, PG-13, R) and/or TV Parental Guidelines (e.g., TV-PG, TV-14, TV-MA)
4. Multiselect checkboxes for genre (**can be exhaustive w/ a vertical scroll bar**)
5. Range slider for Rotten Tomatoes score
6. Minimum/Maximum fields for video duration in minutes
7. Range slider for release date
8. Key word search (for specific actors/directors, locations, subject matters, etc.)

The main "List of Videos" section includes single-row representations of favorited shows/movies, stacked one on top of each other with a vertical scroll bar for easy navigation. Previously watched videos live at the bottom of the stack under a designated header (and with a differently colored background). From left to right, each row includes:

1. Column 1 (12% of total width): Small thumbnail sans title
2. Column 2 (23%): Title and release date (YYYY), Rotten Tomatoes and "Recommended for Me" scores, maturity rating, genre and subject matter tags
3. Column 3 (40%): Content description, plus director and cast information

In the upper left-hand corner, icons for the 2 different views (Thumbnail and List) can be used to toggle back and forth, and a bright red "Clear My List" button located at the top of the "List of Videos" pane can be used to obtain a blank slate.

Figure 2 (below) represents a less visually appealing version of this prototype.

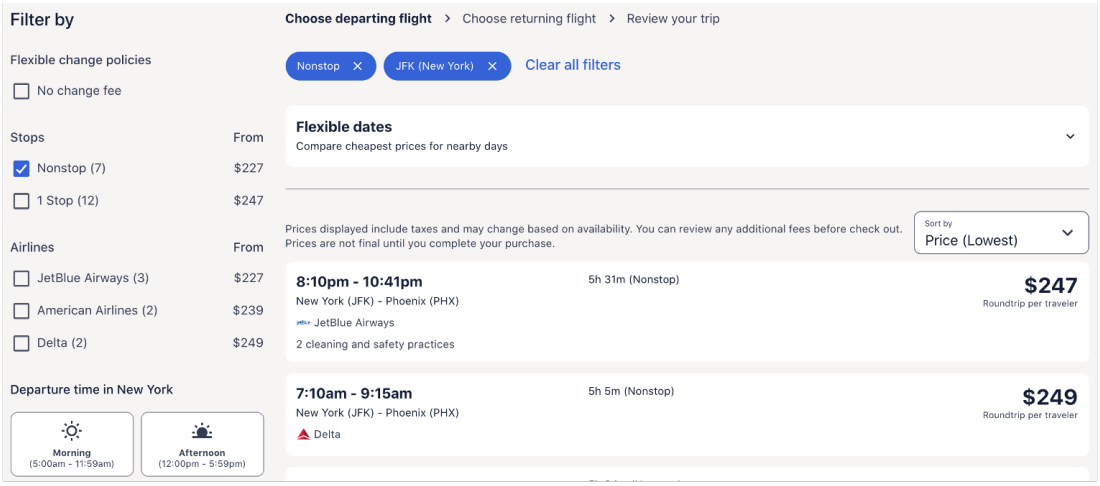

Figure 2—Hand-Drawn Wireframe of the New "My List" Interface

In M2, I highlighted a couple requirements related to optimization (Woska, 2021):

Mature sort and filter controls (plus a "Clear All" button) are an absolute must; these may include filters by type of program, genre, length, release date, average viewer rating, date added to the list, and/or subject matter tags...Watched shows should move into their own section at the bottom of the page.

Each of these requirements for better optimization is met by this prototype. The filters and sort controls have the space to grow extremely robust, but prioritization of content only occurs after the user manipulates the interface. On load, there is a lot of information that the user may or may not want/need. However, this interface achieves both simplicity and consistency. Many online retail websites employ a similar filter/sorting pane on the left-hand side of the page, and all functionalities (though, only a handful) are readily visible within the interface. This is a nice step up from the current organization — still, nothing too shocking — but allowing users to toggle between the existent interface and this new List view allows greater flexibility, depending on the expertise of the user. An additional advantage exists if/when the user's goals (and therefore, tasks and subtasks) change; the new interface should make the search for here-and-now content more efficient, but it will also facilitate more rewarding browsing and easier clean-up of "My List."

5 PAPER PROTOTYPE

Figure 3 (below) illustrates a second prototype of the "My List" interface, which is designed for improved prioritization of on-screen content and active functionality.

Note: Please forgive my dreadful artistic skills (i.e., those "circles") — thank you!

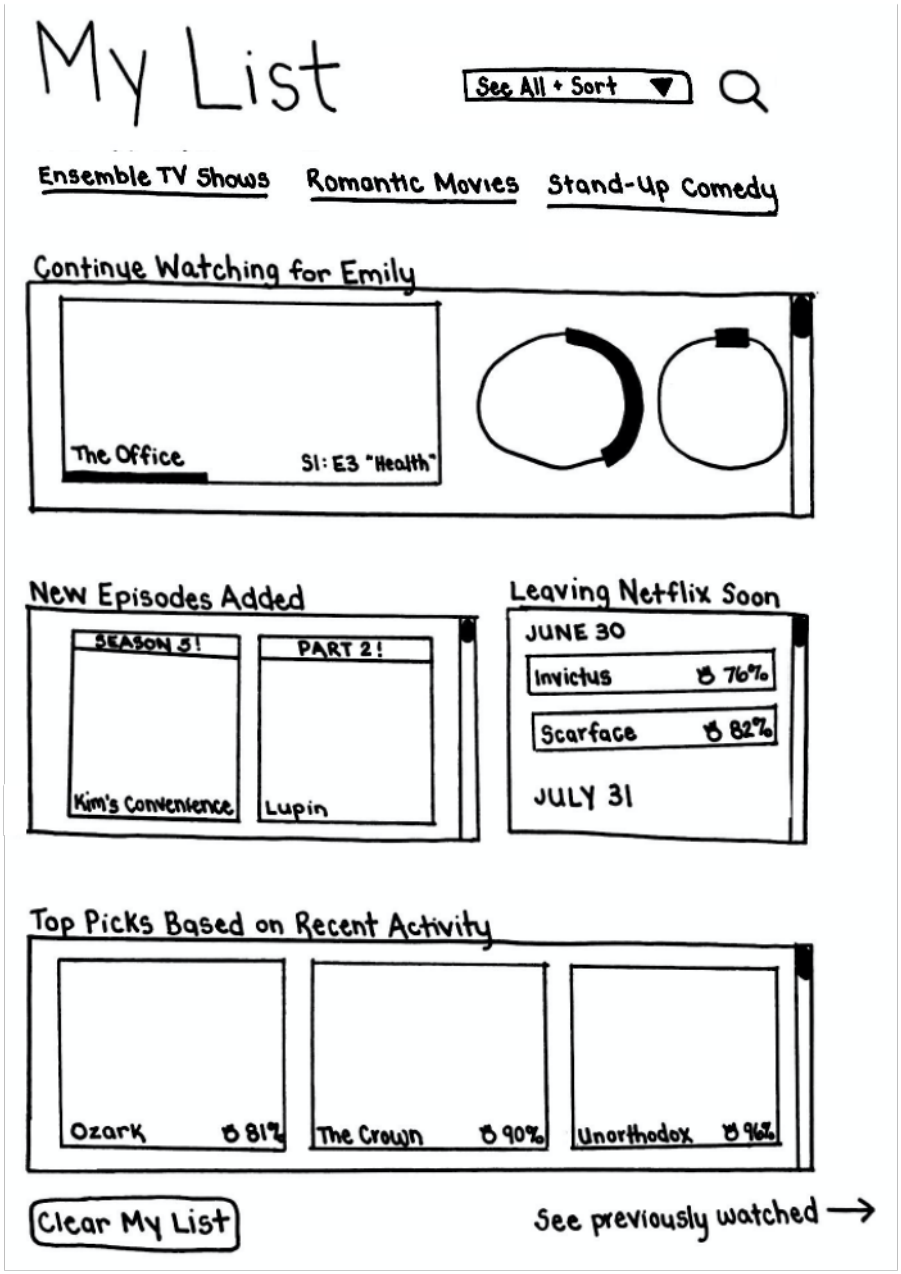

Figure 3—Hand-Drawn Wireframe of the New "My List" Interface

The interface is similar to "Home" but with better prioritization of content. In M2, I emphasized the importance of this in the "My List" redesign (Woska, 2021):

In part, the problem lies in that Netflix does little to help users process all the (colorful!) possibilities shown on the screen, so "My List" needs to function more like the "Home" view, which guides users through the decision-making process with descriptive context clues and personalized recommendations...Content with new episodes and/or programs that

will depart the service soon should be located at the top of "My List" in a designated box — as well as "Keep Watching" and "Recommended for You" sections.

Figure 3 shows how content can be prioritized within buckets (e.g., previously watched programs are housed on a separate page to reduce clutter), which can also be prioritized within the interface, to help the user make an informed decision more efficiently. The primacy of "Continue Watching" is consistent with the "Home" view, but there is still sufficient real estate to include other key details (e.g., "New Episodes Added" and "Leaving Netflix Soon"). The prototype also features some basic sort controls (not pictured due to the dropdown nature of the object, but to include A-Z, recently added, release date, etc.) and filters (to be determined by the content in "My List") at the top of the interface. In terms of context clues and personalized recommendations, the Rotten Tomatoes scores and "Top Picks" section, which is indeed constrained to shows/movies in the list of favorites, should further support the user in their decision-making process.

Finally, I threw in some "nice to have" features based on front-end design best practices and customer needs, as expressed in App Store reviews. These include a search functionality; more natural, vertical (versus horizontal) scroll bars; a "Clear My List" button; and circular representations of in-progress videos to create more separation between the bars that often blend together in a single row.

These features offer flexibility to both novice and expert subscribers without any sacrifice to simplicity and consistency with other interfaces, to include the Netflix "Home" view. Essentially, there is a ton of accessible functionality, but customers are able to pick and choose the features to use. This is a marked improvement from the current organization of "My List" and that of the similar interfaces within Prime Video, Hulu, etc. However, the subpar filter maturity and customization potential (beyond the results of the Netflix algorithm) is where this prototype may fall short.

6 VERBAL PROTOTYPE

This 3rd prototype centers on customization as a means to reduce noise, defined at the user level, within "My List" (as illustrated by the conversation script below).

Q: You have landed on the "My List" view. What do you want to do now?
A: I'd like to be able to move things around and create my own categories.
Solution: Let's add a "My List Settings" icon to let users customize the look/feel.
Q: What should be included in the settings menu to help you achieve your goals?
A: Options to switch to dark mode, disable on-hover autoplay, show critics' ratings,

create new genres/categories (e.g., "Date Night w/ Hubby" and "For a Good Cry"), enable manual sorting by drag-and-drop, share "My List" with friends, etc.
Q: Let's assume all of that. Back on the "My List" screen, what do you do?
A: I reorder the thumbnails according to my current priorities and even drop some into the 2 new buckets I created. I also drag and drop the containers for those categorical groupings into the most appropriate location based on how often I want to see that content.
Extra: It probably makes sense to add "Reset" and "Empty My List" buttons.
Q: Do you need to be able to switch to a different view or sorted list?
A: Maybe a dropdown is added to the interface if the user enables sorting in "My List Settings" and/or certain protocols can be saved like how specific searches on several e-commerce sites can be saved/reused in the future. This would allow the user to create multiple views from "My List" and toggle between them.
Q: What would you want to do with previously watched videos/completed series?
A: I'd like the option, upon completion, to remove it from "My List" and/or send it to a secondary location. Rating it and leaving comments would be helpful too.
Extra: "My List" could even become shareable with friends and family!

This prototype succeeds in that it caters to all types of users, which is the primary requirement obtained from the data inventory. For the novice (or more passive) user, the current "My List" view may be satisfactory, but for experts, a more personalized approach could make all the difference. The obvious limitation is the need for active engagement and input from the user to customize the interface. This may create a barrier to entry that passive users, like those who multitask or those who simply defer to the "Trending Now" selections, will not make the effort to overcome. In other words, the *potential* for differentiation and flexibility is there, but the user must (1) know the functionality exists and (2) proactively configure the interface to be more usable for themselves. Here, the design assumes users know best when, in fact, their choices may create more frustration and noise within the interface.

The design elements are consistent with other sites, but interactions with these functionalities may admittedly be less common (i.e., users may change their Facebook settings once per year, at most). Nevertheless, the interface becomes adaptive to different user goals/tasks over time, and the abilities to sort/filter and to create the buckets described in the requirements definition exist if the user wants to take advantage of the offerings. This is simultaneously a pro and a con; for example, if the user disables "Top Picks", then they are not forced to interact with an unwanted feature, but Netflix is also more restricted in its support to the user.

7 REFERENCES

[1] Woska, E. C. (2021). In: *Assignment M2*. [Unpublished]: Georgia Institute of Technology.