Task 1

Part A

a well-known pop musician,

a little-known independent musician,

a fan of the well-known musician,

a fan of the little-known musician,

and the product manager of the recommender system at Spotify.

1. What might be the role of Spotify’s recommender system in each of these people’s lives? What might the system make easier or make more difficult for each person? Try to consider how Spotify compares to other means of distributing music (e.g., vinyl, compact discs, live music, other platforms like Bandcamp or SoundCloud, etc.)

Spotify’s recommendation system is an AI system known as BART (Bandits for recommendations as treatments). It plays and suggests music you are usually listening to while also introducing new and unknown music to you. The three methods they use- Collaborative Filtering (based on user feedback), NLP (connecting songs and artists) and Audio Models (analysing raw audio data).

(https://blogs.cornell.edu/info2040/2018/09/17/how-does-spotify-know-you-so-well/)

For a well-known pop musician:

MarketWatch reported that there is billions of dollars to be made in the music streaming market. All major labels in the music producing industry spend considerable investments to increase their Spotify streams. For established artists, Spotify can be an incredibly profit boosting tool. With its availability in over 60 countries, Spotify is able to gather and look at music listening data for over 40 million users. As album sales are not the least popular method of purchasing music, well-known musicians are able to substitute album sales with subscription services like Spotify to reach and earn from a very large audience. If their music is streamed more, they are able to earn more royalties from it. In light of live event shutdowns due to the pandemic, streaming on Spotify is a profitable stream to be on. Another use to well-known artists is Spotify’s ability to make playlist submissions. Even if the music is unreleased, artists can submit it to Spotify and this can help stream your music to more fans or to newer audiences.

A little-known independent musician:

Very simply if you are a new artist your main profit making goal is to reach a wide audience. If the only availability of your music is through albums, then ylu have already limited your reach. Physical albums are not just constraining in terms of location but also costs. They are far more expensive than online streaming platforms (even subscriptions). So for a new listener, it is a matter of choosing whether to spend on an artist they already known or risk a new artist they might never listen to again but own a physical album of. Therefore, for new artists there is a abundant scope in profiting both monetarily and in terms of listeners over an online streaming platform. What 20 years ago a radio (plus all the transmission fees as well as the trouble to get recognised and picked in the first place) would be, now is made extremely simple through Spotify.

A fan of a well-known musician

As a consumer of online music streaming, there are a few advantages I see myself,

1. Albums were difficult to get a hold on. I am from India and while an active consumer of Western music, it is still a niche within the country. It is not too profitable to produce the same number of albums for India as you would for Uk or USA. This would make it extremely difficult to find music of artists that I liked, and it would get sold out within minutes. The prices were always too high and didn’t seem worth it.
2. As a listener, there is far larger influencing factor on charts as a streamer. The audience can contribute to which artists are on top of charts as streams are now a counting factor. It allows for greater participation.
3. For big artists, piracy has been a problem for years. Studies into Subscription services have proved piracy rates have dropped. (for example 80% in Norway, Australia by 20%)

A fan of a little-known musician

Firstly, you can discover new artists. We are not dependent on the television or radio to play that one song you like by a lesser-known artist. You can stream it at any time. It contributes to the artist becoming more known in the sense of audience as well as producing music that their fans like. For a fan it is easier to explore new artists, listen to just one song or entire catalogue that they have, download it, all while on a single site.

the product manager of the recommender system at Spotify.

For a product manager at Spotify, the most useful factor in his/her job is the availability of vast data. Their main aim, according to the website is “to anticipate the products and features our listeners and creators want-and then help deliver them.” For a product manager, it would be crucial to look at what listeners want and then recommend music based on that. This will benefit users as they are able to discover more music as well as creators as they get active screen time and plays with wider audiences than anticipated. By making this data available, creators can benefit knowing where they are liked the most, where they need to improve and where they can risk selling physical copies and merchandise that become other sources of revenue.

Something else that is useful is as Spotify is a profit-making business, knowing what features to sell and what recommendations to push can help Spotify make better informed decisions about which artists to sign and approach. They can avoid anything that they’ve seen now work in the past.

1. This exercise is abstract and imaginative. If you were a data analyst at Spotify, how might you try to achieve more specific and grounded answers to these questions?

I think while Spotify already has a good hold on its data analysis it can always do a lot more with the insights they have. Something that has struck out to me is the limited payment options. I think varied options will help them better understand the churn rate and truly and accurately represent active users.

Suppose you wanted to improve Spotify’s recommender system, and that you were committed to following the Design Justice Principles covered in the lecture (stated again below).

PART B

1. For each of the principles, describe in one or two sentences how you could incorporate this principle into a process for developing the specification of the new system.

Design Justice Principles

* We use design to sustain, heal, and empower our communities, as well as to seek liberation from exploitative and oppressive systems.

This principle can be incorporated by allowing artists from lesser-known communities/minorities to get the same push and recommended just as any bigger artist. By removing the monopoly within recommendation systems- an artist (no matter their popularity) stands to gain.

* We center the voices of those who are directly impacted by the outcomes of the design process.

Recommendations help artists figure out what their audience wants to hear and what works and what does not work. By allowing audiences to build up their own recommendation system algorithm by choosing songs they like and then recommending more such songs-an audience is heard and catered to.

* We prioritize design’s impact on the community over the intentions of the designer.

The audience here is the master of their own will. They are recommended things they like to hear and not forced to hear only the trending or top artists. The designer’s main aim could be profit making for the company or making the website the best but the focus should remain on the audience and how best their needs are catered to-as returning and long time users-will decide the fate of the company.

* We view change as emergent from an accountable, accessible, and collaborative process, rather than as a point at the end of a process.

Change should be incorporated and accounted for throughout the life time of the app. It should involve taking into consideration that preferneces, likings, and way of using by audiences changes constantly and continual updates are key for the long term functioning of the design process.

* We see the role of the designer as a facilitator rather than an expert.

Designers are able to build from scratch several features and options for users. The designer then needs to review the current version of his design to understand what works and what does not. Then through trial and error or through a data analysis method-they need to change upgrade their design to meet the needs of the audience.

* We believe that everyone is an expert based on their own lived experience, and that we all have unique and brilliant contributions to bring to a design process.

A group of designers coming from several different backgrounds are always able to come to an end product that encapsulates several different perspectives. Being able to listen to different experiences and take something from them-can lead to a very wholesome end result. The designers should almost be a mirror of the audiences who are very diverse and varied.

* We share design knowledge and tools with our communities.

This is key to building a transparent and collaborative environment for your staff as well as your consumers. By letting them know how the final end product came into being- is an exciting journey not only for the designers but also for the audience as it helps look at the company as a group of individuals working to better a process rather than a large corporate looking to exploit customers.

* We work towards sustainable, community-led and -controlled outcomes.

For any design process to work optimally, it needs to have an impact on the community it is designed for. The outcomes must be tangible and for the better. And all this while being able to build a sustainable and long-term process. By breaking the problem down into smaller tangible goals have help understand short term and long term benefits of the process. By reiterating a process several times-you can understand the results of each iteration and what is the most sustainable process can be decided.

* We work towards non-exploitative solutions that reconnect us to the earth and to each other.

According to me this is one of the most important principles which should become norm across business. If your organizations process and ideas exist outside of the community you are part of or that you impact, there is no real value you bring to the table. Exploitation of any kind can lead to grave situations where the people are impacted the worst. No business should aim at doing this. By looking at consumers as people with experiences from a range of backgrounds with varied stories to tell, you are able to look at them as a part of the solution rather than the problem.

* Before seeking new design solutions, we look for what is already working at the community level. We honor and uplift traditional, indigenous, and local knowledge and practices.

Any kind of design process starts from first looking at what’s been done up till now. Whether a healthcare initiative, a government scheme or something as commonplace as a social media app. By understanding the gaps in what’s been done and what can be offered more, design processes come into existence. By researching and honouring the steps taken till now and then reworking/drawing from them- a method can be grounded in real data and research and made more cohesive for the current consumer.