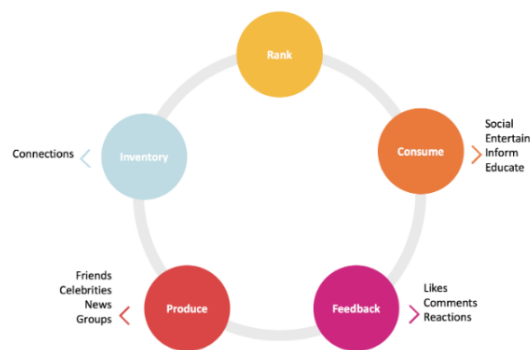Delightful Consumption Drives Engagement

This article highlights considerations and key metrics for content consumption.

Production vs. Consumption

In a healthy activity feed environment, users produce content and potential consumers of that content are effectively connected to the fellow users, pages and groups they care about. Proper inventory is available and the ranking algorithm shows the right content to the right users at the right time.

But even with all of those elements in place, users may not actually consume the content. What if the experience is not optimized for their platform of choice (iOS, Android, desktop, etc.)? What if they don't have the necessary connectivity — WiFi or LTE versus 2G? Most users will not truly engage with your product until you can provide a delightful consumption experience.

Therefore, as you build your product, you should consider the following factors that affect content consumption:

Consumption surface

The space in which a user consumes content, known as the consumption surface, is critical to engagement. Well-designed consumption surfaces are easy to navigate, help users consume different types of content seamlessly, differentiate areas of content (e.g., brand versus friend content in Snapchat), explain who the producer of the content is, and allows intuitive user comprehension of the various actions users can take and the implications of those actions.

Activity feeds, stories, browsing, recommendations and pages are all types of consumption surfaces. In general, your team should understand each type and the use cases it best addresses, but this series of posts focuses on activity feeds, which are best for displaying dynamic activity — content that is timely, relevant, popular and ever-changing. Activity feed environments also pose consumption challenges in terms of audience, social acceptability, feedback, perception, content type, format type, product simplicity and permanence, which are discussed in more detail in our previous post on content production. One example of these considerations is a piece of content about a major life event, such as a wedding, which the producer may want to permanently

highlight. For such posts, a timeline or profile is a better consumption surface than a activity feed, where even prominent posts eventually disappear.

Low-end devices and lower connectivity

As emerging markets continue to grow, low-end Android phones and relatively weak connections such as 2G networks are posing new challenges for product teams. Designing a product that works seamlessly in these regions means developing a activity feed that can load and scroll at lower speeds. Options for addressing these challenges include highlighting more text and fewer videos, offering lower-resolution images and caching videos while users are on WiFi, making them playable at a later time regardless of bandwidth.

As shown in Table 1 below, both year class and connectivity should inform the products you build. For example, you may choose to develop a "lite" version of your product for older devices with limited storage capacity, show high-resolution (including 360-degree) video and photos to users on newer devices and WiFi, and offer primarily text to those accessing your product via a 2G network on an older phone.

Key Consumption Metrics to Track

Note: while the metrics below are helpful in optimizing for a great user experience, this is not a comprehensive list; there are many other infrastructure- and engagement-related consumption metrics to consider.

Time spent/DAU

Time spent is a strong indicator of whether a social product is engaging. The more time a user spends with your product, the more likely it is that they're having a good experience. However, you should consider this metric in the context of your product's expected engagement and use cases. For a product such as Snapchat, Time spent/DAU would be a good metric for engagement. In contrast, Yelp, for instance, the number of sessions would be a better metric to track.

Market share of time spent

For a social product, this metric is generally a good indicator of success from a market perspective. Even if absolute time spent for your product is increasing, losing market share to a competitor is likely a problem.

Number of sessions

This metric is a lever to grow overall time spent and is thus a strong indicator of engagement. It is also the earliest indicator of product-market fit, and a decrease in number of sessions may be an early warning sign that something is wrong.

Time spent/session

Like number of sessions, this metric is a lever to grow overall time spent. It's valuable also to know which of the two metrics is easier for you to move.

Number of views

Because time spent is often skewed toward types of content that are inherently time-consuming, such as video, it is also valuable to know the number of pieces of content users consume relative to their available inventory, as well as whether users are "inventory-constrained" (i.e., they don't have enough posts to consume).

App startup time

Users expect apps that are responsive and quick to load; long start-up times may prompt them to abandon your product. For additional insight, track start-up time relative to cold starts (when the app is "starting from scratch") and hot starts (when the system simply brings the app to the foreground and does not repeat object initialization, layout inflation and rendering). Start-up time metrics are especially important among users with low-end phones.

Pull to refresh time

"Pull to refresh" is the touchscreen gesture in which a user drags downward to refresh the contents of the screen. Long pull to refresh times can have a significant negative effect on user experience, but note there are several possible causes of this issue, and careful diagnosis is required.

Buffer time

We've all felt the annoyance of constant stops and starts and "loading" or "buffering" messages when streaming video. Minimizing this time is key to providing a great user experience.

APK (Android Package Kit) size

Particularly in emerging markets, where spotty 2G and 3G networks and/or pay-by-the-byte plans are more common, users will often avoid downloading relatively large apps.

Storage

At the budget end of the Android market, phone storage is often limited. In these cases, caching information in advance as suggested above may not improve user experience.

Additional Considerations

Ease of navigation

Be thoughtful about how users navigate to and from your activity feed. They may forget, or not know how, to return to your product after clicking on an external link.

Consistency across devices

Many users will consume your product on multiple devices. Offering them a consistent experience can help increase engagement. As an example, Android phones have a back button, which can be used to return to previous screens in the app but iOS does not and so there need to be a way to travel back to the previous screen that is consistent with the iOS experience. If not, people moving from one platform to another may find the experience confusing and inconsistent.

Takeaways

As a product grows, optimizing the product for your fringe users consumption is critical for long term success.

Consistent experience across platforms and focusing on building a fantastic consumption experience is important for product success.