

Project Description: find your home

Younghun Lee

Problem Statement.

There are a lot of University of Michigan students who came from outside of the state and the number of these students is rising (Allen, 2015). About a half of total students are from outside of the state and most of these students need a place to live. These students have to rely only on searching on the Internet unless they visit Ann Arbor and walk around to see houses. There are several house searching websites and they are providing critical information about houses such as monthly rental rate, location, room type, etc. However, they are not well-organized and not enough for students to make a good decision since their needs and priorities vary. So students who live in out of the state normally have difficulties in finding a proper house for them. This is the reason why I came up with the idea of solving difficulties in searching off-campus housing for University of Michigan students.

Solution Overview.

As a solution, I would like to build online communities for sharing information about off-campus houses. The biggest difference of these communities from other websites is that they are based on each school or major so that new students can easily get information which is critically related to their school life. In the community, current students are going to leave structured reviews about their own house and get some benefits. At the same time, new students can easily search for houses with filtering options and they also can post questions about houses in their mind.

Design Description.

A. Functionality

1) Home: This is a main page of the application and users can see all posts sorted by posted time. Each item contains abstracted information – address, average review score, type, monthly rate, best and worst aspect of houses, and resources – within a snippet view.

2) Search: This function lets users to search houses by putting address (search by location) or using a filter (search by filter). ‘Search by location’ option is about getting information about specific house, while ‘search by filter’ makes users to set their needs and priorities and find places which fit for them.

3) Post: Current UM students who live in off-campus house can leave a review about their own house. They specify the address at first, and then fill out structured review form. As a last step, users also can add resources like images, videos and links.

4) Profile: In this tab, users can see their basic information – department, major, degree level, and so on. Also, there’s a list of user history and it includes all questions and reviews that have been posted so far.

B. Design Flow

Task1: View Profile

After logging in, you will see the home screen. Check your information on the profile tab.

Task2: Post Review

From the home screen, move on to the post tab. Put your address and fill out a review with structured form. You can click '?' button to get a description of each option in the form. As a last step, add images and text comment.

Task3: Search by location

From the home screen, move on to the search tab. Select 'search by Location' and search reviews for a house by putting address.

Task4: Search by filter

From the home screen, move on to the search tab and go into the 'search by Filter' feature. Select several options as filter conditions and search results. Click 'view more' to see all categories and score the review – 5 for helpful review and 0 for not helpful one.

C. Unimplemented features

There are five tabs in the app – Home, Search, Post, Favorite and Profile, and I didn't implement Favorite feature. This tab is for viewing all items which are selected as favorite ones. I skipped this feature to implement because this is not directly related to user flow and interfaces in this feature are almost same with snippets in the home screen. What I mainly focused on in this project is interactions of first-time users, and 'favorite' feature is for skilled users. This is also the reason of not implementing this feature.

D. Tools used for the project

I used Sketch for drawing and editing all screens and InVision for making them interactive. The reason why I chose Sketch is I found out that I can make a high-fidelity prototype and visually appealing screens very easily by using Sketch. Also, Sketch has a large set of libraries for mobile app layouts. Later, I also found out that I cannot make screens interactive by solely using Sketch. So I exported all screens into separate image files, imported these image files into InVision, then made them interactive by creating links between screens.

Design Process.

When I thought about the problem to solve, there were a couple of solutions came up with my mind and they were about aggregating implementing high-tech features to improve details of searching function. This is because most of other services I analyzed for competitive analysis were emphasizing their intelligent search features.

However, I had a chance to think about different solutions throughout the sketching alternatives session. The number of solutions I had to come up with was quite intense, so I had to think with different perspectives in order to avoid duplicates. This helped me to figure out a new solution – building communities for helping students.

Throughout other consecutive sessions such as creating personas, design defense, synthesis and general discussions, I had a lot of positive feedbacks on the idea of building communities rather than aggregating and implementing high-tech search features. Sharing opinions with others helped me to validate my own idea and figure out the value inside of it. After I got a solid confidence in the idea, figuring out and thinking about detailed interfaces through reflection and QOC analysis were not a big challenge.

Creating a paper prototype enabled me to think about the real appearance of the application. Also, feedbacks I've got from the paper prototype were very detailed and directly related to the easiness of the interactions. For example, I suggested a drag-and-drop interaction in choosing categories and building a filter, but I figured out that this interaction was not easy for other potential users. So I changed it into a simple clicking interaction and also added simple descriptions on the top of the feature. I was also inspired by other famous Social Networking Services applications like Facebook or Instagram in terms of basic layouts, ways to organize items, and usage of icons.

Design Philosophy.

The philosophy of the application mainly focused on building communities naturally and integrating students to use the system. I thought that the most important thing to build communities and bring students into the system is having abundant resources to use. For this, I decided to provide benefits to current students for leaving reviews. At first, I didn't think about benefits because other famous services which are also related to leaving reviews such as Amazon or Yelp don't provide benefits and people are still love to leave comments. But I think this is because they already built their own solid community so that users are willing to participate voluntarily. However, as in a launching state, I thought that the system should have something to attract potential users and giving them benefits would be the best way.

Also, providing neat and informative search interface would be important for prospective students, and I focused on designing the filter system with description about each option.

Lastly, I thought that it would be better to have similar layouts with other market leading Social Networking Services applications for making users to consider this application as a social application and willing to join their own community. So I adopted basic layouts of other applications like Facebook and Instagram.

Impact.

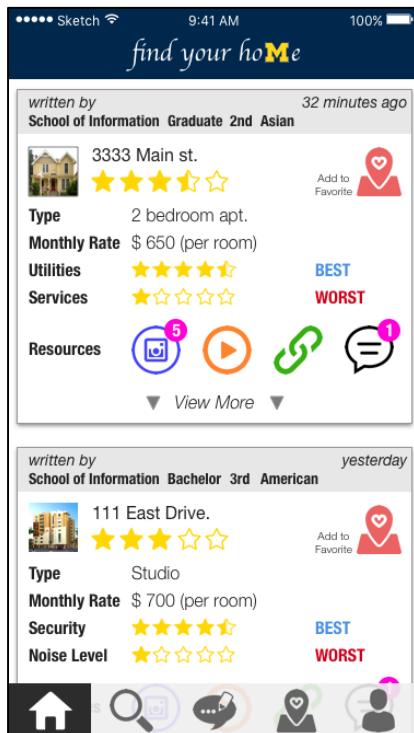
While there are a lot of other platforms or SNS applications to build up a community and share information, the number of platforms or services to share

housing information is quite few. I think that this is because most of house seekers tend to be older than those who actively uses social applications to share and get information. However, the number of young people looking for place to live is large especially in US, and I wanted to provide a platform for them to share and get enough information.

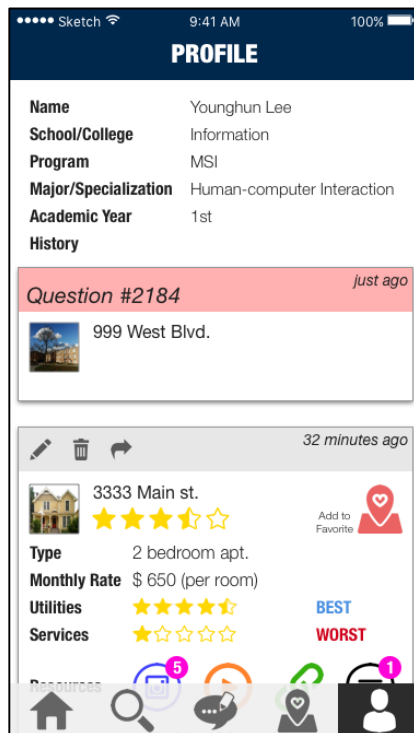
At first glance, this application would make prospective students to reduce a lot of efforts on searching their house, and current students to get benefits. But there is one more big value resides in – making a bond between prospective students and current students. This bond would make prospective students to leave reviews about their house in the future in order to help next year's prospective students, and this virtuous circle will maintain the community. In short, this application creates social communities and eventually makes users to be willing to help other members in the community.

Appendix.

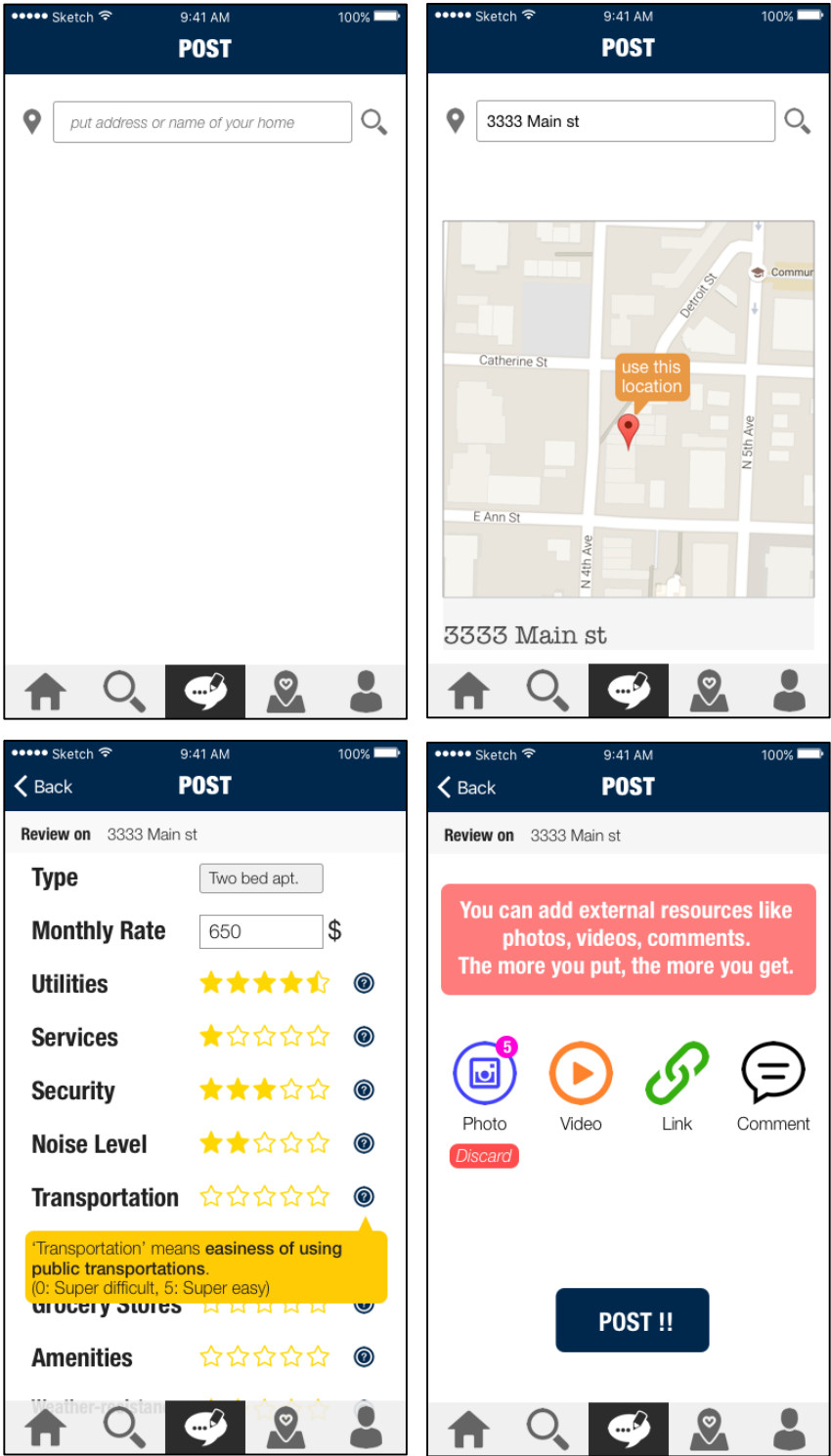
A. Home Screen



B. User Profile



C. Post



D. Search

