

UX DESIGN - ASHANTI

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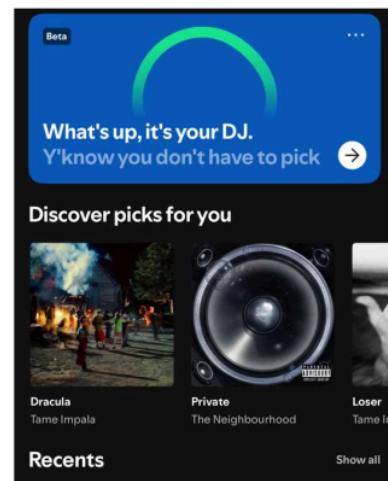
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INTRODUCTION

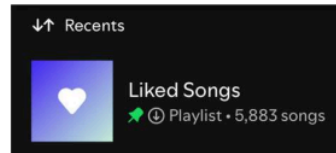
Spotify [1] was founded in Stockholm, Sweden in 2006 by entrepreneurs Daniel Ek and Martin Lorentzon. It was created to be a legal, convenient and premium alternative to the rampancy of music piracy in the early 2000s. It met the current industry demands of record labels wanting legal routes that would stop or lessen piracy and generate revenue for themselves, whilst consumers wanted on-demand music anyplace, anytime. Today, Spotify is the largest music streaming platform, holding over 30% of the global market share alongside Apple Music [2] and Tencent Music [3]. In recent years, Spotify has expanded their platform into podcasts and audiobooks, offering users an expansive, well-rounded experience outside of music.

INITIAL REVIEW

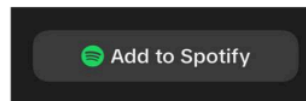
Famously, Spotify offers a 'freemium' (premium, but free) option for casual users of the platform. In this model, users will get access to the vast music library that Spotify offers, but will be subject to intermittent adverts between songs, and limited mobile control in the form of a restriction on how many times a user can skip songs, and the inability to download music to listen to offline. Spotify utilises this method of user acquisition to introduce new users to the system and application itself. Once a user becomes engaged (which comes naturally, with music being a source of emotion and connection for most audiences, and frequent adverts becoming a nuisance to audiences in time), they are inclined to upgrade to Spotify Premium to gain access to ad-free streaming, unlimited skipping and on-demand playback, higher sound quality, and the ability to download music for offline listening. Both the Freemium and Premium models of Spotify offer the ability to create curated and unique playlists for oneself, and if the user decides to publicise their playlist, other users will be able to find and listen to the playlist. Spotify also offers a system they call 'Spotify DJ', which is currently in its BETA state, but offers premium users an AI-generated voice assuming the role of a DJ that narrates the category of music it picks to play. It combines the user's complete listening history with generative AI and human editorial insights to create a personalised radio mix and even offers song recommendations via spoken commentary. Users also can directly request 'what they are in the mood for' via a text request system, as well as simply 'switching it up' which randomises which set of songs the DJ will play.



I am conducting this report through the Premium service that Spotify offers, both because I am a pre-existing customer, as well as the fact of wanting to deconstruct the full scope of services that Spotify offers to ensure a fair and thorough overview of the platform. I find the overall user interface experience to be intuitive, interactive and fun. I most enjoy the ability to create, find and share playlists, and the ability to listen to Spotify in the background (e.g. on the web app, you are able to work or play video games, with uninterrupted music from Spotify playing in the background). The homepage offers a user's 'pinned' playlists (a maximum of 4 playlists that users can pin to the top of their library lists) at the top, moreover it offers visual cues to podcasts recommended to users, Spotify DJ, recent activity and discovery picks based on a user's listening habits and history and more.



A new feature that Spotify has recently implemented is the ability to see your listening statistics from each week, it is conspired that this feature was directly inspired by AirBuds [4], a platform that links to your Spotify application, and displays a user's or a user's added friends' recent listening activities. Contrasting with this notion, Spotify Wrapped [5] was a feature within Spotify originally created in 2015 as "your year in music" containing basic statistics on a user's top artists and songs, but was rebranded in 2016 as its current name, and a decade later, has become a globally anticipated phenomenon that offers in-depth statistics, personalised videos from a user's favourite(i.e. most listened to) artists and other interactivities such as 'clubs' that Spotify categorises their users into based on their most listened to music genres. This generates both hype and opens a discussion between users and their clubs, prompting club patriotism and light-hearted rivalry on social media. Overall, I thoroughly enjoy the Premium experience that Spotify offers and it is integrated into my everyday life. In recent years, Spotify has integrated into other applications, such as TikTok [6] and Instagram [7], in which users may connect their Spotify accounts and can tap or click a single button in either app to add the desired song into their liked songs playlist within Spotify itself.



Spotify's simplistic layout is easy to navigate, the ability to discover new music is easy through Spotify's 'shuffle' (where Spotify plays randomised songs) and 'autoplay' (where through past listening habits and the playlist in question, Spotify plays songs after a playlist's duration has passed, allowing users to discover music within a similar genre/cadence to a playlist they created) features, and its easy integration through other apps, creates a smooth, pleasant experience for the majority of users. It is worth noting that when controlling Spotify from one device to another (such as a phone to a speaker), there is a slight delay in controlling the music, however that is often remedied by using Spotify's queueing feature (where users can queue a list of songs they choose to play automatically that are not necessarily a part of their liked songs or playlists, this is particularly helpful when users are driving or working) and instead of manually changing the music continuously. Another new feature that has been widely enjoyed is the 'Spotify Jam' feature. This allows users to collectively listen to music remotely, letting any member of the 'jam' to queue songs. This propagates engagements amongst friends, families, etc, as well as motivates others who are not using Spotify to use it, in fear of missing out.



UX DESIGN

PRINCIPLES WITHIN SPOTIFY AND UX ANALYSIS

As aforementioned, Spotify excels at creating unique, tailored experiences for users, through Spotify DJ, curated playlists through 'Discover Weekly' (a Spotify-algorithm generated playlist where it recommends songs weekly for users to discover) easily accessible listening statistics and Spotify Wrapped. The interface prioritises content that each individual user will enjoy based on the Spotify algorithm and data collected from a user's activity, both recent and past. It encourages engagement and makes Spotify feel personalised to a user.

Spotify's interface is clean and in 'dark mode' (in which, the darker background reduces visual load and strain, whilst its clean interface reduces cognitive load), with core function controls being large, ensuring they are easy to access at a moment's notice. This is in accordance with psychologist Paul Fitts' 'Fitts Law', which states that the amount of time required for a person to move a pointer (cursor, or finger) to a target area is function of the distance to the target divided by the size of the target. Thus, the longer the distance and the smaller the target's size, the longer it takes [8]. Fitts' Law is widely applied within user experience design, and an example in Spotify of this is the play button. Against a dark background (usually black), the play button is a big, bright, white icon, drawing the user's attention to it easily. On the mobile application, it is also played

at the bottom of the screen, and many phone users hold their phone with their right hand, with their thumb(s) hovering near the lower half of the phone for the keyboard and home button/swipe up. Every small detail feels considered within Spotify's user design.

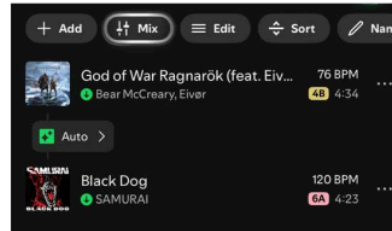


There is also a consistency and predictability within the icons in Spotify—users and artist's profiles are consistently in circular frames, whilst albums and playlists are portrayed in square frames, subconsciously aiding users to distinguish the content forms. This follows the Law of Similarity [9], where elements that are visually similar will be perceived as related, and elements that are visually deviant from one another will be taken as different. Spotify also sought out to create an emphasis on emotional connection with its users, achieved through features that trigger nostalgia such as Spotify Wrapped, DJ-recommended music 'that users have not listened to since x amount of time' and listening statistics. This emotional connection is also weaved into the Spotify Jam feature, as well as Spotify's "blend" feature. Blend playlists are personalised and auto-updated merges between 2-10 users' music tastes into one listening experience. They also offer 'taste music scores', in which users can see how much their music taste matches via the percentage score that Spotify's algorithm determines.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Spotify had previously gone 17 years without changing the formula for liking songs and adding them to a user's liked song playlist, but in late February of 2023, they changed the heart symbol of 'liking', to a plus sign of 'adding'. This has been widely disliked since its inception; however, their intention was to create a more well-rounded and easily understandable method of liking songs. Instead of literally 'liking a song', it is now 'adding a song to your liked song playlist'. As a user before February 2023, I found this change to be jarring and unfamiliar, and it is a popular belief amongst users that the heart symbol is still superior despite Spotify's intentions with this alteration. When a user wants to put an already liked song (a song in their liked song playlist) to the top of their liked song playlist, previously users would simply like and unlike the song. Now, with the addition of the plus symbol, users must unlike the song and manually scroll through their playlists to add the song back to their liked song playlist. This is more tedious, adding an extra step to the action. If Spotify was to revert to the heart symbol, this would minimise the number of clicks or taps users would have to make to get to their desired outcome, refining and streamlining the overall process of finding and liking songs.

There is also a notable lack of an 'undo' button for removing songs in playlists, and no form of a pop-up message when users click or tap to clear their queued music, leading to mild frustration within users over having to queue their music again. However, as a platform, Spotify is consistently gathering user feedback and adding more features to the platform. The latest addition was a DJ-like mixing station, where users can mix (or 'automix') songs to create seamless transitions between them. It is in its infancy, but there have already been multiple popular TikTok videos posting about this feature and utilising it. As for user feedback, when Spotify Wrapped 2024 was released, audiences shunned and threatened to cancel their subscriptions over the usage of generative AI to simulate a podcast-like conversation between two AI-generated voices. It was dubbed as lazy, uncreative, and directly antagonising the very market the platform propagates and advocates for. In Spotify Wrapped 2025, they stripped the AI podcast feature, and instead created a more interactive, graphically stunning Wrapped for users to enjoy.



CONCLUSION

Spotify is an overall user-friendly, interactive and enjoyable platform to use daily. Due to its intuitive, personalised interface that adapts to users' listening habits, clear visual cues and use of the Law of Similarity, seamless integration of cross-device and offline use, and its ability to intertwine engagement between people through music, Spotify has garnered a vast, dedicated audience from all ages, locations and lifestyles. It is an irreplaceable subscription in my own life, and millions of others.

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FINAL GRADE

72/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

This is a confident and engaging analysis that demonstrates strong understanding of UX principles and how they are applied within Spotify.

The discussion is well grounded in theory and effectively linked to real features, particularly around personalisation, consistency, and user psychology.

At times the writing becomes overly personal and descriptive, and the evaluation would benefit from a more critical, academic tone and tighter focus on analysis rather than user preference.

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