Olivia Oplinger, Cara Pangelinan, Robert Bennett November 19, 2018
HCDE 318

HatchedUX

P7: Experience Evaluation Plan & Simple Evaluation

Part 1: Basic Evaluation Plan

Purpose:

Hatched is an application that aims to help recently empty-nested parents adjust to their new lifestyle changes by facilitating reflection, connection, and action. The application provides resources for holistic growth via:

1. Reflect on their mood, goals, and thoughts
2. Connect with other empty-nesters for guidance or emotional support
3. Discover nearby events and activities to utilize their free time and spontaneity

Our goal in conducting this paper prototype evaluation was to discover how intuitive the design layout is, receive feedback on how useful the participants finds the application to be, and gain insight for potential areas of improvement.

Methodology:

We designed a paper prototype of an application for tablets, a platform our user interviews demonstrated is preferably used by our target empty nest audience. The set of tasks we set for our participants will enable them to explore one aspect from each of the three main functions (reflection, connection, and action).

Following a prepared script, we created a list of instructions required to complete each task. These instructions were designed to tell the user what to do, but not how to do it. If the participant successfully completed the subtasks, the moderator would “update” the application page and present the user with the next subtask to complete. A task was marked as complete when the participant successfully completed the set of instructions. We would then reset the prototype and repeat the process for the each task.

Before the test, participants were briefed on the following criteria:

- The evaluation ultimately aims to test the design of our product and not their capabilities as a user.
- We would not provide them with help unless they were absolutely unsure how to solve a task.
- While completing the instructed tasks, users should “think aloud” what processes or challenges they encounter

After the completion of all three tasks, the participants were asked for their initial thoughts and feedback. Test were executed individually by group members and synthesized in person with detailed notes, photos, and videos. We shared and analyzed our findings as a team to find common design flaws and strengths.

Scenario Background:

You are a recently empty-nested parent who is having trouble adjusting to the changes of your child/children moving out of the house. You are looking for resources to make the emotional and lifestyle transition easier.

Task 1: Reflect Scenario, Updating Mood

Description: The user opens the application and is in a reflective mood. They navigate to the Reflect page and set it on the "Mood" tab. They select "content" as "Today's Mood," but want to add another descriptor. They add "tired" as another mood. Then they write a note on their day and submit "Today's Mood." Next, they navigate to the "Mood Map" to review this week's mood data.
Gauge for completion: User has successfully updated their mood with a note and additional mood and has viewed the updated mood map.

Task 2: Connect Scenario, Following Discussion

Description: The user wants to connect with other empty nesters for advice. They open the Hatched application and navigate to the connect page. They scroll through the trending discussions in the empty nest community and select a discussion on "College Kid Budgeting." They expand the first reply to the discussion, like it, and follow the discussion.
Gauge for completion: User has interacted with the intended thread and successfully followed the discussion, indicated by and updated My Threads following que.

Task 3: Go! Scenario, Sharing Activity

Description: The user has free time in the upcoming weekend and wants to find something to do. They navigate to the Go! Page and change the activity results filter from "Happening Now" to "Happening This Weekend." They select the featured activity in the "Eat" category. They review the activity details, favorite the activity, and share the event.
Gauge for completion: User has successfully discovered the intended event, added it to liked events and share the event via email.

Participants:

Our target users are recently empty nested parents, which tend to be adults in their 40s-50s. Our test group included two mothers who have become empty nested in the last few months and one young adult who has a close relationship with her recently empty nested parent. The participants had a range of comfort with technology which allowed us to gain deeper insight on the intuitiveness of the application's design.

P1: Participant 1 is a mother of four; her youngest child recently left for college approximately three months ago. She has 3 jobs, working evenings as a masseuse. Her experience with technology is somewhat limited, however she is comfortable using smart phone devices and desktop computers.

P2: Participant 2 is a mother of one; her child moved out to attend college approximately two months ago. She works full time at a retail nursery as a supervisor. She has experience with basic computer systems at work, as well personal experience sending text messages via an Android smartphone and sending emails and browsing the web via an Android tablet.

P3: Participant 3 is a 21 year old college student studying Biochemistry. She is close with her mother who is recently empty nested. While she is proficient in interacting with digital applications herself, she is also familiar with her mother's lower level of comfort with digital technology. After she completed the tasks, we consulted her on both her experience and how her mother might react to the application design.

Part 2: Simple Evaluation

General Outcomes:

We were surprised to find that each participant had a unique interaction with the paper prototype. For example, Participant #1 easily accomplished most of the tasks, but—when completing task #1—was unable to add an additional mood and needed assistance. Participant #2, on the other hand, found that to be the simplest of all of the tasks, but had small issues with everything else. Lastly, Participant #3 also struggled with this task as well as opening the mood map, but was able to accomplish the remaining tasks with ease. Although each participant had different experiences when interacting with the prototype, common issues and patterns surfaced after analyzing all of the results and feedback.

Suggestions for Improvement:

Improvement #1: Consistent Navigation and Formatting

One of the design flaws that become apparent after conducting the prototype tests, was the lack of navigation consistency. Participant #2 struggled to find a way to submit/close the date selection drop-down menu in the Go! portion of the application and became noticeably frustrated with the task before requiring assistance to move on. The drop-down menu did not include a text-based close button like the other pop-up interfaces the user experienced in the app, thus causing the confusion. Participant #3 expressed they were looking to filter the Go! Query results in the method they used while adding moods in Task #1.

Common actions found throughout the app—such as closing popups, submitting data, etc.—should be standardized so that previous learning from other screens can be used to easily navigate other aspects of the app.

Improvement #2: Providing Value for Each Function

One of the participants commented that, while the application has the potential to be useful, she did not see the point of some of the functions. Making a habit of logging moods and being able to track emotions, for example, does not have an obvious purpose. Another participant stated that she personally would not have a need for the application since she is busy with work, but knows of a friend who could benefit from some of the functions. She did not know exactly how the application could help, however.

We have a clear design decision for incorporating each of the main three functions of our app. Firstly, reflection is meant to make empty nesters think critically on their past identity as a parent and their emerging identity as they take on a new parental role. Connection provides parents with a support community to offer advice and emotional support when necessary. And lastly, action enables users to discover new activities to try or pursue hobbies they did not have

time for previously. The application is a cyclical process that ultimately aims to help parents transition into a new chapter of their life. This process was not evident to our participants, however, so a suggested design improvement is to add value to every step of the process.

In order to address this issue, we proposed the idea of incorporating a start-up tutorial when first using the app. The tutorial will navigate users through the application as well as explain the the purpose behind each function. When going through the Reflect page, for example, users can try each of the different reflection options (tracking moods, adding an entry to a prompt, or setting goals). Throughout this process, users will also be notified on the benefits of each reflection aspect and are encouraged to use the ones that best suit them. We also plan to add an information icon to each page so that users can be reminded of the value behind each function.

Improvement #3: Identification of Applications Primary Functions
Participants were initially confused about the application's primary categories and their overarching purposes while reviewing the category labels before performing completing the evaluation tasks for each category. Although completion of the tasks made the purpose of each category clear to the users in the test, further efforts to introduce new users to each category would help to prevent initial confusion.

Possible remedies include the introduction of tutorial splash screens when the user first opens the application and/or each category and the introduction of help/“Why Should I Do This?” buttons to make the tasks and goals of each category clear.

Design Strengths:

Idiomatic Icons:
In our design, idiomatic icons were used as a way to perform certain features. For example, hearts were used to “like” an event/reply, a share icon was incorporated to spread the word about an activity/event, and arrows were strategically placed to indicate more options (e.g. drop down menus, sliders, etc.). All of our participants were able to recognize these icons and easily maneuvered tasks that utilized these features.
Moving forward with our future designs, it would be beneficial to be considerate of common icon associations that our user group is familiar; especially since the tasks that were easily performed likely has something to do with the users’ prior knowledge of icons. We should not only retain the icons that were easily identified, but also consider changing any images that may not have been as intuitive.

Straightforward Interactions:

Although a number of micro-interactions in our design were revealed to need improvement, as a whole the participants were able to navigate through the tasks presented to them without hesitation. The extensive use of simplistic tapping used to perform most tasks was instantly familiar to all participants, and the carousel utilized in the Go! portion of the application caused no issues with any of the user's tested—including Participant #2 who is has a low familiarity with technology. When revising the micro-interactions that require changes, we should utilize the same basic gestures to ensure that new complications are not introduced in the app.

Moving Forward:

From this paper prototype test we were able to highlight a bigger picture issue in our application design: introducing the users to its purpose. Each feature of the application is intended to facilitate a different step in overcoming emotional and lifestyle adjustments, a concept we cannot assume users are accustomed to. In addition to minor layout adjustments, the biggest takeaway from this exercise is the need to provide the story and meaning behind the application's features to more effectively guide them through the application experience.