Case Study: Adding Social Elements to OpenTable
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Overview

The objective of this case study is to explore the potential benefits and implementation strategies of integrating social features into the OpenTable app. By adding social elements, we aim to increase booking rates and user engagement.

Understanding the Company Goal and Mission

OpenTable is a leading online restaurant reservation service that connects diners with restaurants worldwide. Founded in 1998, OpenTable's mission is to empower the dining experience by helping restaurants grow and run their businesses efficiently while enabling diners to easily discover and book the perfect table for every occasion. They aim to connect diners and restaurants, fostering community and enhancing the overall dining experience.

OpenTable follows a multi-faceted business model that includes the following revenue streams:

- **Subscription Fees:** Restaurants pay a monthly subscription fee for using OpenTable's reservation management software. This fee varies depending on the features and level of service chosen.
- **Per-Reservation Fees:** In addition to the subscription fee, OpenTable charges restaurants a fee for each reservation made through the platform. This fee can differ based on whether the reservation is made directly through OpenTable or through a third-party site that integrates with OpenTable.
- **Premium Services:** OpenTable offers premium services such as marketing and advertising solutions to help restaurants increase their visibility and attract more diners. These services come at an additional cost.

- **Diner Network:** OpenTable leverages its extensive diner network to provide valuable data and insights to restaurants, helping them optimize their operations and improve customer experiences.

Market Research

I searched for evidence supporting the assumption that integrating social features into mobile applications can significantly enhance user engagement, retention, and overall user experience.

1. **Increased User Engagement:**
   Apps like Yelp leverage user-generated content and social features to drive engagement. Additionally, according to a study highlighted by Amity, social features are proven to increase user engagement by up to 35%. Users prefer apps that allow them to interact, share experiences, and see what their friends are doing.

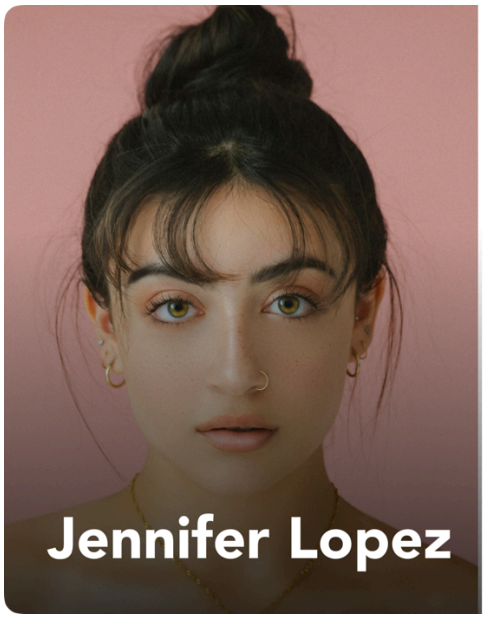
2. **Enhanced Discoverability:**
   Social features help users discover new content through their network. A study by Social Insider found that platforms with social interaction capabilities see higher user engagement and discoverability rates.

3. **Improved User Retention:**
   A study by Nature Communications found that social influence significantly affects user behavior in social networks. Knowing that friends are using an app can increase an individual's likelihood to use the same app more frequently.

Understanding our Users

Our Target Audience: Diners who frequently make restaurant reservations and enjoy discovering new dining experiences based on their friends' choices.

User persona



27 Years Old | UX / UI Designer | Toronto, ON

User Quote

"I want to find a great restaurant quickly without having to sift through countless reviews. It would be great if I could get recommendations I can trust."

Goals

- To find trusted restaurant recommendations quickly.
- To find popular restaurants in Toronto.
- To spend quality time dining out without hassles.

Frustrations

- Spending too much time searching for good restaurants.
- Lack of personalized recommendations.
- Not knowing which restaurants are trendy within her community.

User Needs

- Trusted and personalized restaurant recommendations.
- Insights into popular dining choices within their social circle.
- Enhanced discovery of new dining options based on non-interactive social cues.

Brainstorming and Concept development

With the user needs and market research insights in mind, I brainstormed various features that could add value to our app. My main goals included:

- **Adding Social Proof:** Showing users where their friends have dined.

- **Enhancing Discovery:** Making it easier for users to find popular restaurants among their social circles.
- **Maintaining Privacy:** Ensuring that any social data shared does not compromise user privacy.

After evaluating various ideas using an Effort vs. Value prioritization matrix, I converged the concept of the “Friend Recommended” feature, which combines social proof and enhanced discovery while addressing privacy concerns.

Defining the features

I outlined the specific components and functionalities of the feature:

- **Home Screen Section:** A dedicated area highlighting restaurants visited by friends.
    - Location: A new section prominently displayed on the home screen.
    - Content: This section will showcase restaurants that friends have dined at, highlighting those that are popular among the user’s social circle.
    - Visual Indicators: Use distinct visual elements such as badges and icons to denote restaurants visited by friends.

- **Restaurant Badges:** Indicators on restaurant cards showing the number of friends who have dined there.
    - Badges: Each restaurant card will display a badge indicating how many friends have dined there. The badge will be subtle yet noticeable to avoid cluttering the UI.

- **Contacts Management:** Allowing users to import and manage their contacts.
    - Import Contacts
        - Access Point: Users can access the contact import feature from their profile section.
        - Permission Request: The app will request permission to access the user’s phone contacts.

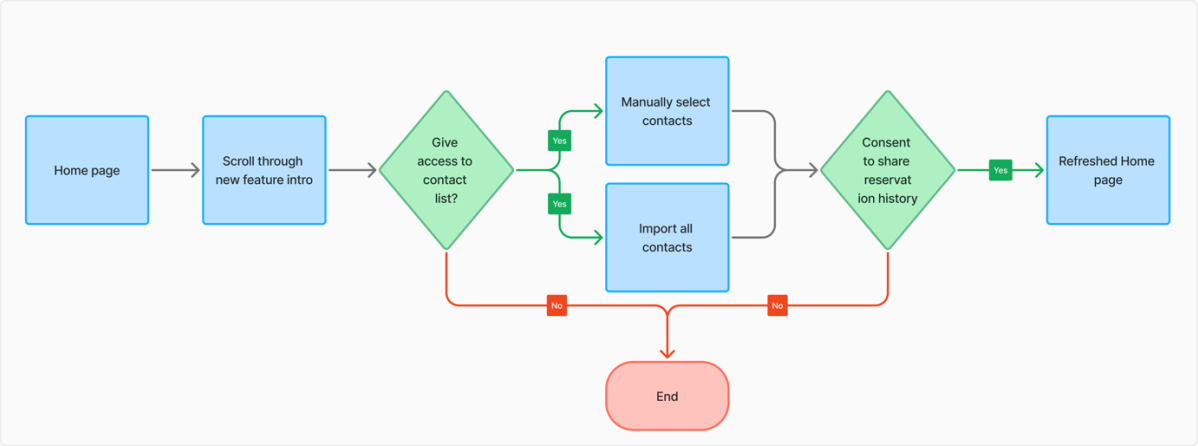
        - Import Process: A simple and intuitive process to import contacts.
    - Manage Contacts
        - View Contacts: Users can view their imported contacts in the profile section.
        - Add Contacts: Option to import contacts by manually selecting them or import contacts all at once. With this I wanted to ensure users can selectively connect with only those contacts who are most relevant to their dining experience, thereby enhancing privacy and personalization. This flexibility helps users avoid cluttering their Friends List with contacts that may not be aligned with their preferences or social dining interests.
        - Delete Contacts: Users can easily delete contacts from their list.
        - Search and Filter: Provide search and filter functionalities to manage large contact lists efficiently.
    - Custom Social Circles
        - Create Social Circles: Allow users to categorize contacts into custom social circles during the import process or afterward.

- **Privacy Controls:** Giving users the ability to enable or disable the feature.
    - Feature Toggle
        - Access Point: Located in the profile section, users can toggle the “Friend Recommended” feature on or off.
        - Confirmation: A confirmation dialog to ensure users understand the implications of turning the feature off.
    - Time-Sensitive Privacy Settings:
        - Delay Options: Allow users to set a delay for when their dining activities become visible to others. Options could include 1 day, 7 days, or 1 month.
        - Temporary Privacy: Introduce a feature where users can temporarily disable sharing for a specific period (e.g., during vacations), after which the settings automatically revert to normal.

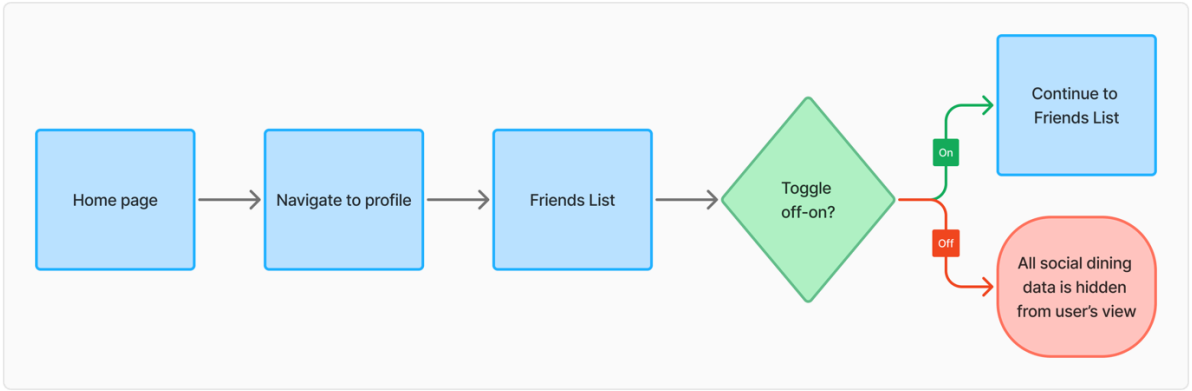
We are not building

- **Individual reservation history:** Users will not be able to view detailed reservation histories of their contacts, such as specific dates and times of visits.
- **Activity Feed:** No continuous feed showing friends' dining activities or updates will be provided.
- **Dining Alerts:** Users will not receive real-time notifications or alerts when their friends make reservations or dine at a restaurant.

User Flows



Importing Contacts - User Flow



Managing Privacy - User Flow

Product Vision

I created a product vision statement to align the teams on the overall purpose and goals of the product using the Elevator Pitch structure.

Vision Statement:

For frequent diners who enjoy discovering new restaurants and value trusted recommendations from their social circle, **the** new social features in OpenTable **are** a set of integrated tools **that** enable users to see where their friends have dined, receive personalized recommendations, and discover popular dining spots based on non-interactive social insights. **Unlike other** restaurant apps that offer generic recommendations, our features provide a personalized, community-driven dining experience, ensuring users feel connected and confident in their choices without compromising privacy.

Success Metrics

User Engagement Metrics

1. Daily Active Users (DAU) and Monthly Active Users (MAU):
   Definition: The number of unique users who engage with the app daily and monthly.
   Goal: Increase DAU and MAU by 20-30% within six months of the feature launch.
   Why It Matters: Higher DAU and MAU indicate that users find value in the app and are returning regularly.

2. **Session Length and Frequency:**

Definition: The average duration of a user session and how often users return to the app.
Goal: Increase average session length and frequency of visits by 25%.
Why It Matters: Longer and more frequent sessions suggest that users are more engaged with the app's features.

3. **Feature Usage Rate:**
   Definition: The percentage of users who use the new social features (Friend's List, Friend Visit Badge, Loved by Friends Section).
   Goal: Achieve a 50% usage rate of the new social features within the first three months.
   Why It Matters: High usage rates indicate that the features are well-received and add value to the user experience.

User Retention Metrics

1. **Retention Rate:**
   Definition: The percentage of users who return to the app after their first use over a defined period (e.g., one week, one month, three months).
   Goal: Increase the one-month retention rate by 20%.
   Why It Matters: Higher retention rates suggest that the app is providing ongoing value to users.

2. **Churn Rate:**
   Definition: The percentage of users who stop using the app over a specific period.
   Goal: Decrease the churn rate by 15%.
   Why It Matters: Lower churn rates indicate that users are satisfied and continue to find the app valuable.

User Satisfaction Metrics

1. **Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT):**
   Definition: A measure of user satisfaction with specific aspects of the app, typically scored on a scale of 1 to 5.
   Goal: Achieve an average CSAT score of 4.5 or higher for the new social features.
   Why It Matters: High CSAT scores reflect positive user experiences with the app's features.

Business Impact Metrics

1. **Booking Rate:**
   Definition: The number of reservations made through the app.
   Goal: Increase the booking rate by 25% within the first year.
   Why It Matters: Higher booking rates indicate that users are finding and booking restaurants through the app more frequently.

2. **Revenue Growth:**
   Definition: The increase in revenue generated from subscriptions, per-reservation fees, and premium services.
   Goal: Achieve a 15% increase in revenue within the first year.
   Why It Matters: Revenue growth reflects the financial success of the new features.

3. **User Acquisition Cost (UAC):**
   Definition: The cost associated with acquiring a new user.
   Goal: Decrease UAC by optimizing marketing strategies and leveraging social features for organic growth.
   Why It Matters: Lower UAC indicates more efficient use of marketing resources.

Guardrail Metrics

1. **Privacy and Safety:**

   Definition: The number of user complaints related to privacy issues.

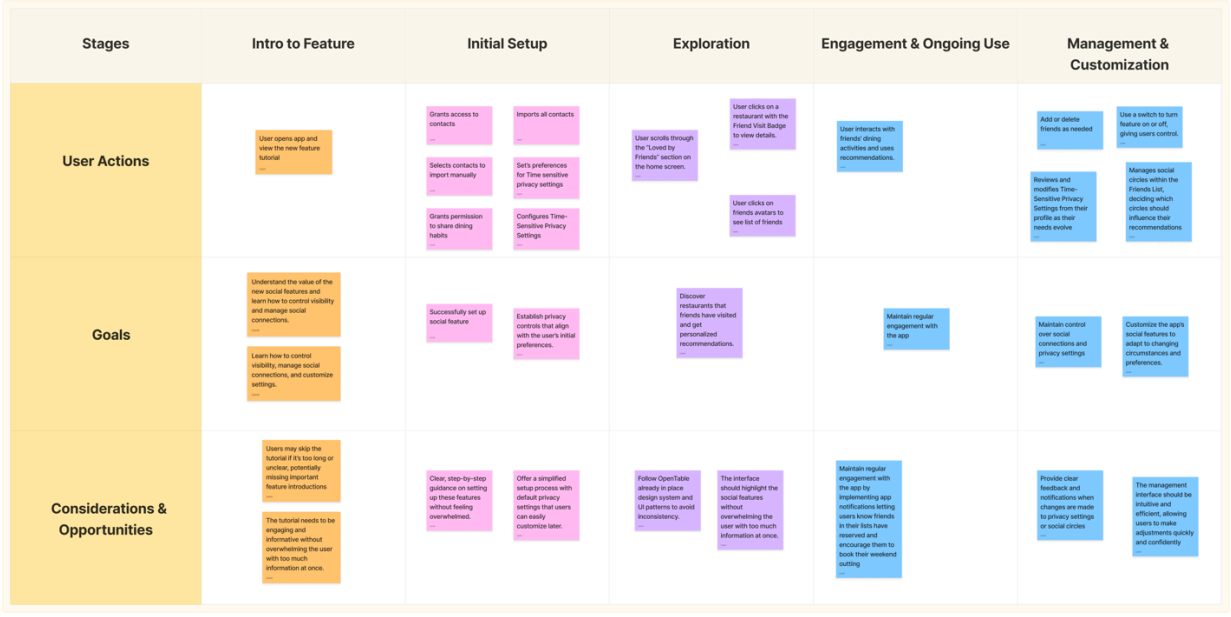
   Goal: Maintain a low number of privacy-related complaints.

   Why It Matters: Ensuring user privacy is crucial for maintaining trust and satisfaction.

Roadmap Planning

Journey Map

This journey map outlines the user experience for integrating new social dining features within the app. It traces the user's path from the initial introduction to the features, through setup and exploration, to ongoing use and customization. Key stages include learning about the value of social connections, setting up privacy preferences, engaging with friends' dining activities, and managing social circles. The journey emphasizes user control, seamless interaction, and personalization, ensuring that the social features are intuitive, flexible, and aligned with evolving user needs.



Increment Canvas

This increment canvas outlines the step-by-step implementation of the app's social features, beginning with the **Basic Implementation of Social Features** as the foundational MVP. This first increment establishes the core functionalities necessary for users to connect with friends and share dining experiences. Subsequent increments, **Advanced Privacy Control** and **Social Circle Implementation & Management**, build upon this foundation by introducing more nuanced controls over privacy settings and the ability to manage social circles. This canvas outlines a structured approach that ensures continuous delivery of value while incrementally enhancing the user experience.

Increment Name	Problem Statement	Intro to Feature	Initial Setup	Exploration	Engagement & Ongoing Use	Management & Customization
1. Basic implementation of social features	Users need better ways to connect with friends and share dining experiences within the app	• User scrolls through introduction tutorial	• User grants access to contacts • User imports all contacts • User selects contacts to import manually • User grants Permission to share dining habits	• User scrolls through the "Friends Recommendations" on the Home screen • User clicks on a restaurant with the Friend Visit badge	• User interacts with friends' dining activities and books recommended restaurants	• User adds or deletes friends as needed • Users use a switch to turn feature on or off, giving users control.
2. Advanced privacy control	Users need flexible privacy settings that adapt to their changing circumstances		• User sets preferences for time sensitive privacy settings			• User reviews and modifies Time-Sensitive Privacy Settings from their profile as their needs evolve
3. Social circle implementation & management	Users want more control over which friends influence my dining recommendations			• User clicks on friends' avatars on the restaurant details screen to see list of friends		• User manages social circles within the Friends List, deciding which circles should influence their recommendations

Conclusion

Through this case study, I have gained valuable insights into the process of incrementally developing social features that are both user-centric and scalable.

By intentionally stopping at the increment canvas, I acknowledge that the next steps in this journey will require close collaboration with the development team and executives. This collaboration is crucial for refining the product roadmap and ensuring that the subsequent increments align with both technical feasibility and business objectives. The work done so far sets a solid foundation for this collaborative effort, ensuring that future development is both strategic and responsive to user feedback.

Future Expansion

Event-Based Recommendations

- Feature: Suggest restaurants based on upcoming events or holidays, considering where a user's friends have dined during similar occasions in the past.
- Privacy & Safety Consideration: The recommendations should be based on aggregated data and not specific past activities of any individual friend.

Example:

- "Looking for a place to celebrate New Year's Eve? 3 of your friends dined at these spots last year."

Prototype