Individual Field Observations

Observation 1

Location Layout

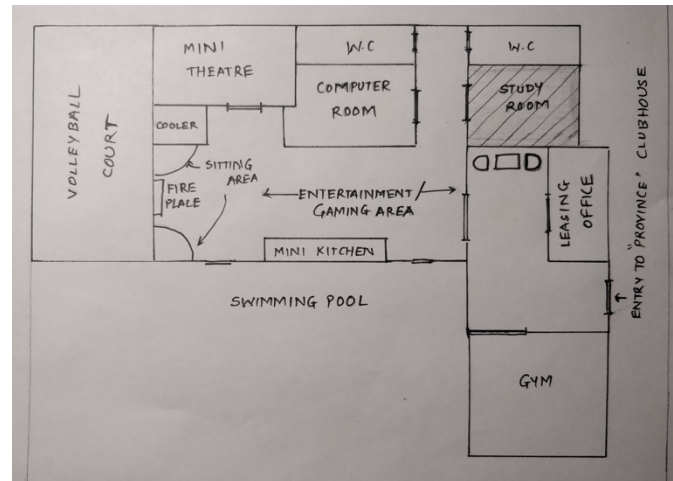*Figure 1: Study area of the Club House at The Province*

Figure 2: Layout of the clubhouse at "The Province"

Location: Study area of the apartments at *The Province*
Date: 19th of October 2019, Saturday.
Time: 8:30 pm
Duration: 30 minutes (15 minutes each)

Physical environment: The apartments at *The Province* are located within walking distance of Rochester Institute of Technology and is often favored by most of the students as a housing community. Within the community and at the center of the apartments there is a clubhouse which includes a computer center and a study area. I chose to observe and interview my subjects in the study area (highlighted in Figure 2) as one of them was completing her assignments and simultaneously listening to songs on her phone. The study room was compact, brightly lit and well isolated from the living area as we could not hear the music that played in the background. It had a table which covered most of the room with four chairs around it, two occupied by my subjects and one by me.

Social environment: There were two people playing table tennis in the living area but were not visible to us while we were in the study room. All other rooms were vacant and there were no visitors during that hour. One of my subjects was completing her assignment on her laptop while listening to songs on her earphone and was sitting across the table whereas the other sat next to me surfing through her phone, as we waited for her to finish the assignment.
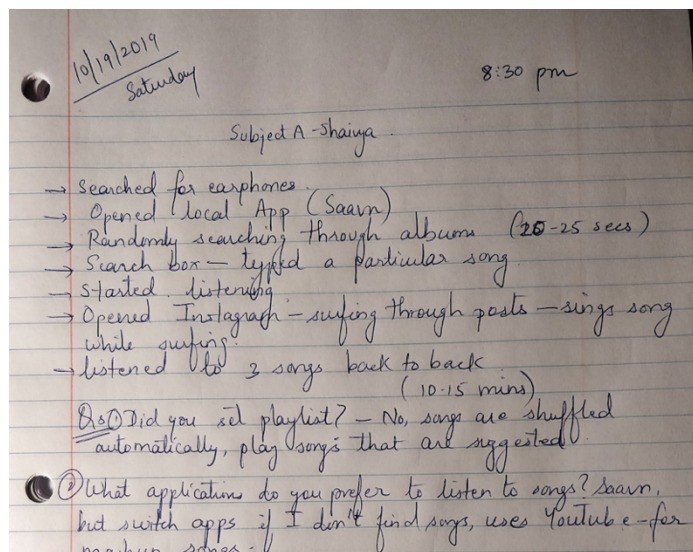
Original notes from the field:
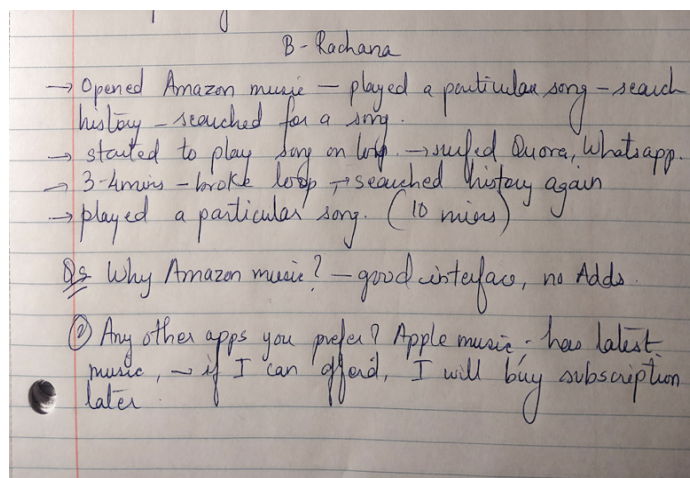

Figure 3: Notes for subject A

Figure 4: Notes for subject B

Summary:
I would refer the one completing her assignment as Subject B and the one sitting next to me as Subject A. It was an impromptu decision to observe Subject B first since she was already listening to songs. After 5 mins, since I started my observation, she lifted her phone, surfed probably for another song, placed the phone back on table and got back to her assignment. After few minutes I chose to observe subject A instead by assigning her a task rather than continue observing subject B since she was busy with some other task and it was difficult to observe her surfing through her phone as she sat across the table. I asked Subject A to play any song on her phone. She first spent a minute to look for her earphones. She then opened a local music application (used back in India) and randomly started searching through albums for about 20-25 secs. She typed a particular song in the search bar and started listening to the first song that appeared in the playlist. After few seconds, she opened Instagram and surfed through the posts. She smiled and started singing the song while surfing through the posts. This continued for 10 mins as I did not want to interrupt her.
Subject B had completed her assignment by now and was watching our interactions.

Subject A noticed this and removed her earphones, searched for a mashup song on *YouTube* and started playing it. She further added that she prefers *YouTube* for the songs she can't find, as it has all the songs and she especially likes to play mashup songs. She also mentioned that she likes to surf through other apps while she is listening to songs, but *YouTube* does not allow to do so. I then asked Subject B to perform the same task of listening to any song on her phone. She grabbed her earphones besides her phone, put them on, and opened *Amazon* music on her phone. She looked for her search history and started playing a particular song. She nodded her head with a look of disappointment and after few seconds, typed a song on the search bar and set it to play on loop. She then looks at me and says" This is my favorite song". Meanwhile she surfed other applications on her phone such as Quora, *WhatsApp* etc. This lasted for about 8-10 minutes. She then broke the loop, searched for a song in her search history again and started playing another song from the list. The observation lasted for 4 minutes.

Observation 2

Location Layout

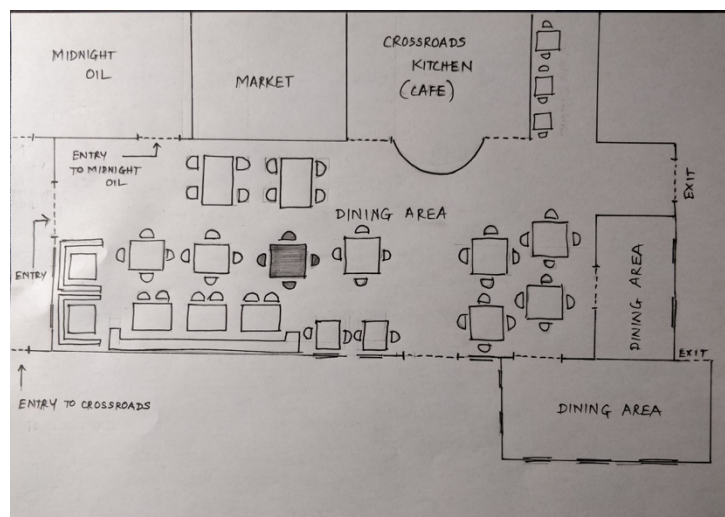Figure 5: Dining Area of The Café and Market at Crossroads
Source: https://www.rit.edu/fa/diningservices/caf%C3%A9-market-crossroads#7

Figure 6: Location of the meeting

Location: Dining area of *The Café and Market at Crossroads*
Date: 21st October 2019, Monday.
Time: 5:00 pm
Duration: 30 minutes

Physical environment: The Café and Market at Crossroads features a market-style food court and convenience store and is located in the crossroads building in Global Village at Rochester Institute of Technology. I met my subject in the dining area and we occupied one of the tables to conduct the observations/interview as highlighted in figure 6. Soft music from the speakers placed all over the restaurant was drowned out by the constant drone of visitors coming in to have a chat and a bite.

Social environment: There was no rush at this particular hour, but there were enough people to fill most of the tables. 2 students on the adjacent table were discussing something on their laptop whereas a group of 3 behind us was chit-chatting and enjoying their meal. My subject sat across the table, with a box of noodles in his hand which he bought from one of the counters.
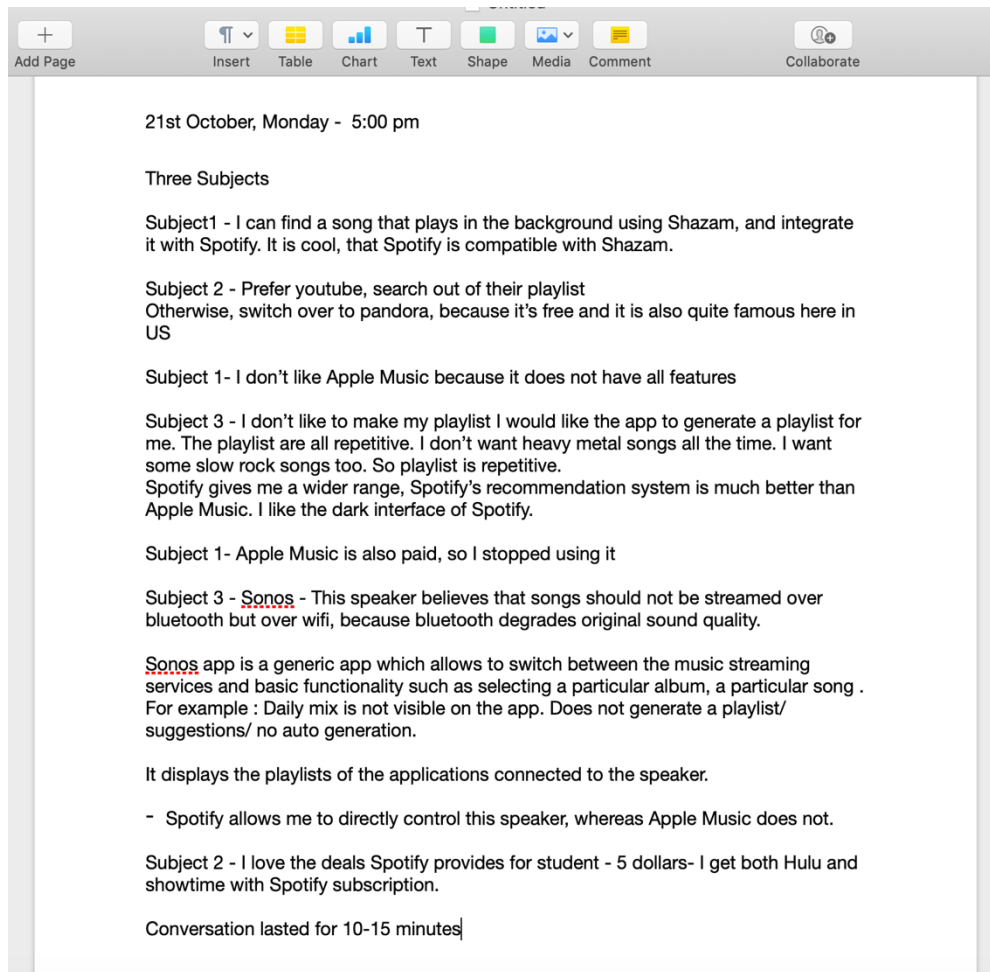
Original notes from the field:

Figure 7: Observation 2-Original notes

Summary:
It was difficult to observe and take notes of minute details of my subject's interaction with a music streaming application, without informing him about my objective. I thus assigned him a task similar to the one in the previous observations, where I asked him to play a song he likes. He placed his cellphone on the table next to the box of noodles and opened an application named "Shazam". I had never heard about this application before. He then lifted up his phone and tried to carefully listen to the song that played in the background. After few seconds, he checked his phone and read something on the screen. Smiling, he passed his cellphone to me asking me to read the same. I noticed the sentences on the screen were the lyrics of the song that played in the background. He then explained me that this application interprets the lyrics of the song that plays in the background and thus identifies the song. He further streamed this song to *Spotify* and mentioned that he really likes *Spotify* and its ability to integrate with other applications. After some time, two other friends joined the conversation. I chose not to interrupt the conversation since it was both interesting and valuable for my study and I took notes of the same on my laptop.
Two of my subjects expressed their dissatisfaction towards *Apple* music since it does not have all the features, has limited songs and requires subscription.

One of them prefers *Spotify* over *Apple* music since it gives him a wider range of songs. He also mentioned that he likes the interface of *Spotify* as well as its recommendation system. The overall conversation lasted for about 10-20 minutes.

My conclusion and initial thoughts about research questions:

Observation 1: Subject A switched applications to find the music she wants to listen to whereas Subject B used a single application to listen to the song she likes. It was interesting to know that if they want to listen to a specific song, they search the same in the application-either in their playlist, their search history list or the search bar and if they want to find new music or try different songs of a particular genre they switch to *YouTube*. For example, to listen to mashups, subject A preferred *YouTube.*

Observation 2: This was more of a conversation than an observation, but it gave me few significant insights into user's perspective of using a music streaming application. It helped me understand why people prefer a particular application over another. Users especially like it when they can share music between different applications, such that they do not have to create another playlist for each of the applications.

After these observations and having a conversation with them, I noticed there exists some kind of motivation to use a particular application. The motivation includes some or all of the following factors:
   a. Ability to find the songs they want
   b. Cost/Payment plans
   c. Number of deals the application provides
   d. Look and feel of the application
   e. Compatibility of the application with other applications or devices.
   Thus, it would be interesting to know up to what degree do each of these factors contribute to provide a powerful user experience.

Research Questions and Interview Questions:

From our list of research questions and the following discussion, we decided to look into how people discover new music on their preferred music streaming application, as we found that most of our field observations somewhat touched upon how users find or search for new music. As a secondary research question, we will also consider why people may prefer one music streaming platform over another, since our initial observations included a variety of music streaming applications. We would like to collect this data to identify any potential specific or common problems that music streaming platforms may have in helping users find new music and to start considering solutions. We want to keep our findings open to different music streaming platforms that our users may use as well as the different devices on which they may listen to music.

Research Questions:
- How do people find new music?
    - Secondary: Why do people prefer one platform over another?

Interview Questions:

Demographic-
1. **Date of Interview:**
2. **Time:**
3. **Location:**
4. **Age:**
5. **Gender:**
6. **Occupation/Academic level:**

Questions-
7. **How often do you listen to music?**
8. **Which device do you prefer to listen to music on?**
9. **Do you ever change from device to device?**
10. **What types of music do you listen to? Genre?**
11. **What is your average duration of music listening in a day?**
12. **Which music platform(s) do you prefer?**
13. **What is your motivation for using this music platform?**
14. **How often do you search for new music?**
15. **How do you keep track of the songs that you liked?**

Interviews, Task Walk-Through, List of Problems:

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a. Interview Section:

In this section I present an overview of my interview with a working professional. I chose to interview and observe a professional who uses two different music streaming platforms rather than a student as his approach would considerably vary and provide me a distinct scope for analysis.

Recruitment:

I contacted my subject 4 days prior to the interview, explained him about my chosen context and about his contribution towards this assignment. Further, after taking his consent, we scheduled a video call on hangouts.

Participant demographics:

My participant is a 25-year-old male graduate engineer currently working in a healthcare IT company as a software engineer in India.

Details of the interview:

      a. **Location**: Telephonic/video call on hangouts.
      b. **Date of Interview**: November 3, 2019
      c. **Time**: 2:18 pm (EST), 11:30 pm (Indian standard time)
      d. **Duration**: Interview- 10 mins
                    Task walk-through – 10 mins

With subject's permission, the session is recorded, and necessary notes are taken. The subject did not permit to take pictures of the interaction.

Overview:

The interview mostly centered around the outlined questions, but I preferred the interview to be as open ended as possible. My subject likes listening to music every day while travelling to office and back home as well as while working. He primarily listens to music on his phone but at times uses his personal computer to play music if he is working on it. He also prefers using an earphone rather than playing songs on speaker. There are set playlists for each occasion- he likes to play anime soundtracks while travelling, EDM songs while coding and mixed songs which includes rock, EDM and anime songs (such as *Metallica, Avicii*) when he is bored. He uses two music streaming applications depending upon the songs he wants to listen to – *Spotify* and *Amazon* music. He is motivated to use *Spotify* over *Amazon* music because of numerous reasons as stated below:

1) User Interface of *Spotify* is much better compared to *Amazon* Music
2) He can easily access anime soundtracks and other regional songs.
3) The most important feature which he specifically likes about *Spotify* is the ability to follow a person and access their playlist. He can also follow artists to keep a track of their latest releases.
4) The *recently played* songs are easily visible on *Spotify* which saves his time to find and remember the songs that he played last.

He specifically mentions that he likes the recommendation system of *Spotify* and the idea of "Discover weekly" that offers him a playlist of 30 new songs based on the songs he listens to. Discovering new music on *Spotify* according to him, is effortless too, as he follows the artists and checks their latest releases.
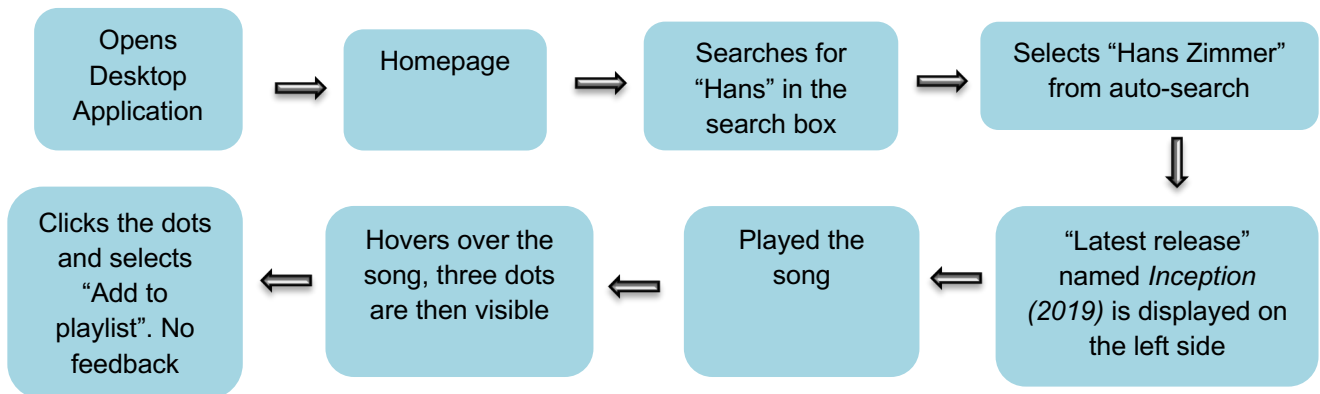
He simply uses *Amazon* music to listen to *Linking Park* songs which are not available in India on *Spotify* due to license issues and also because *Amazon* music is complementary with *Amazon* prime membership.
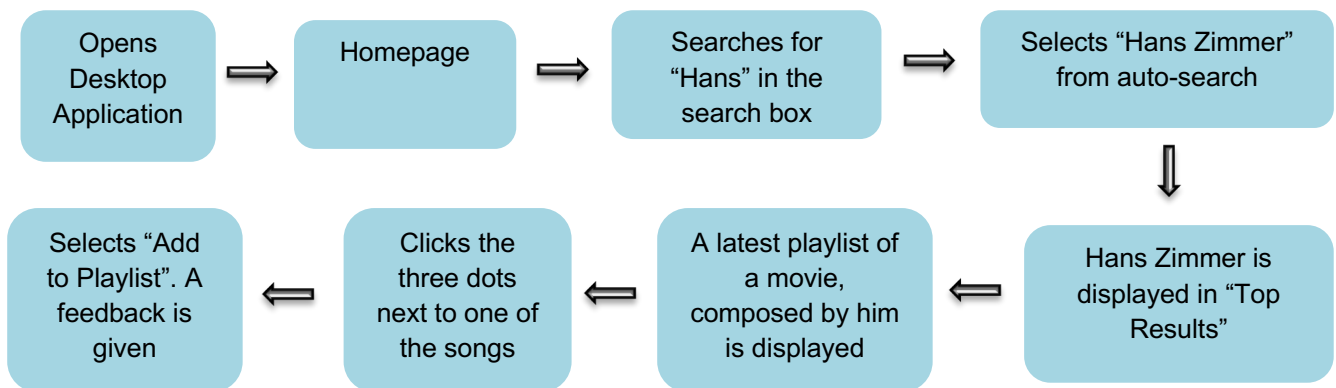
b. Task Walk Through Section:

For this activity, I asked my subject to find new music on both the music streaming applications- first on *Spotify* and then on *Amazon* music. This is because our primary research question focuses on how users find new music followed by our secondary objective of understanding why users prefer a certain platform over another. I also did not specify any particular tasks for the user to follow neither any album, artist nor genre to provide wide scope for user interaction.

Following is a diagrammatic representation of my subject's interaction with both the platforms.

1. *Spotify:*

Opens Desktop Application ⟹ Homepage ⟹ Searches for "Hans" in the search box ⟹ Selects "Hans Zimmer" from auto-search

⟱

Clicks the dots and selects "Add to playlist". No feedback ⟸ Hovers over the song, three dots are then visible ⟸ Played the song ⟸ "Latest release" named *Inception (2019)* is displayed on the left side

2. *Amazon Music:*

Opens Desktop Application ⟹ Homepage ⟹ Searches for "Hans" in the search box ⟹ Selects "Hans Zimmer" from auto-search

⟱

Selects "Add to Playlist". A feedback is given ⟸ Clicks the three dots next to one of the songs ⟸ A latest playlist of a movie, composed by him is displayed ⟸ Hans Zimmer is displayed in "Top Results"

c. List of Problems Section:

For both the applications, my subject utilized the search bar to find new music. I noticed few differences between the two interactions, and they are as mentioned below:

1. *Spotify*:
   Positive:
   a. *Spotify* has a desktop application other than an online website.
   b. When my subject searched for the artist, his latest song released on 1st November 2019 was displayed at the center of the interface.
   Negative:
   c. To add the song to the playlist, my subject had to hover over the song, click the three dots which were then displayed and select "Add to playlist".
   d. The application provides no feedback after this action. He has to check the playlist for the newly added song.

2. *Amazon Music*:
   Negative:
   a. Amazon music has no desktop application, which according to my user is inconvenient.
   b. Search results displayed a list of playlists composed by the artist from a recent documentary film released on 23rd October 2019. My subject was already aware of these songs.
   Positive:
   c. Unlike *Spotify*, the option to add the song to playlist is mapped just next to the song such that the user does not need to hover over a song to find an option to add the song to his/her playlist.
   d. The application does provide a feedback after this action.

After the task walk-through section, I asked my subject few questions regarding the overall experience and his most favored application to find new music. As evident from the task walk-through, he prefers *Spotify* over *Amazon music* as it helped him find the latest single of his favorite artist as opposed to *Amazon music* that displayed movie soundtracks, he was already aware of. In addition to this my subject searches for new music by following the artists on twitter and then checks *Spotify* for those new releases. Alternately, he follows artists on *Spotify* to get updates about the releases, but unfortunately is not notified about it. He has to search for the artist specifically, to find his new songs or albums.

From a designer's perspective, an application should be designed in such a way that it is possible for users to achieve their goal with the least number of steps. Using this principle, *Amazon music* provides an easy option to the user to add the song to the playlist, but *Spotify* does not. This seems to not bother my subject much, as *Spotify* does a great job in finding new music than *Amazon,* which eventually gives him a good experience. Thus, user's end goal should be considered as a priority.

Based on my observations and this interview, following are the prevalent issues which I noticed:
1. Limited number of songs and repetitive playlists.
2. Database of the application is not updated to display new releases.
3. Users have to make use of multiple platforms to find new music, which is time consuming and inconvenient.
4. Users are not notified about the new releases.
5. Users are unable to find new songs because they do not have the application's subscription and are compelled to listen to the playlist automatically created by the system.
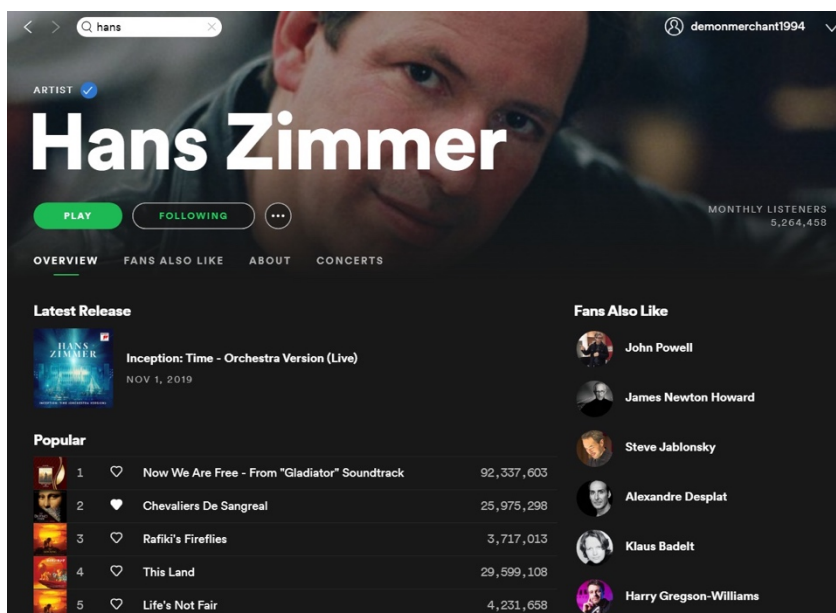
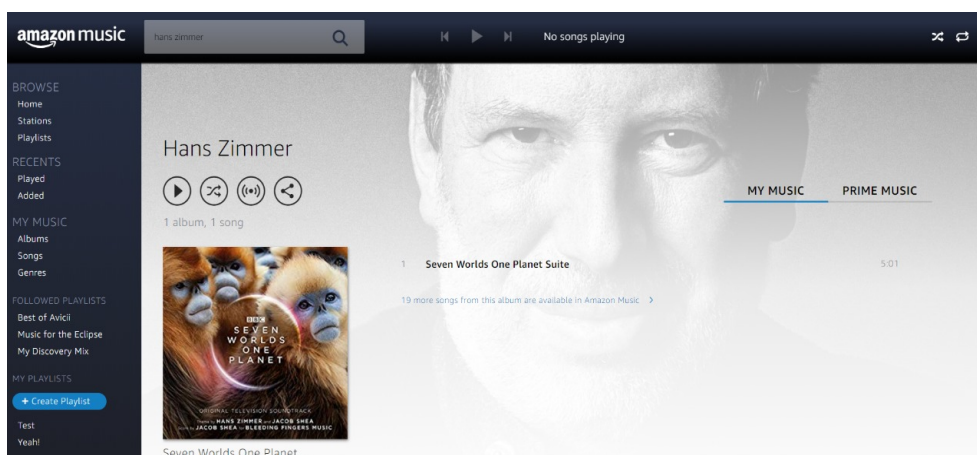**Photos of the interaction**:

Figure 8: Interaction with Spotify

Figure 9: Interaction with Amazon music