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Hip-Hop Scholar: A New Model of Design for Music Discussion Forums

Kazi M. Smith
ksmith107@siu.edu

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HIP-HOP SCHOLAR: A NEW MODEL OF DESIGN FOR MUSIC DISCUSSION FOURMS

by

Kazi Momo Mose Smith

B.S., Winston-Salem State University, 2011

A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Masters of Science

Department of Mass Communication and Media Arts
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 2013

REASERCH PAPER APPROVAL

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Masters of Science

in the field of Mass Communication and Media Arts

Approved by:

Dr. Narayanan L Iyer, Chair

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
April 5th, 2013

AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESERCH PAPER OF

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TITLE: HIP-HOP SCHOLAR: A NEW MODEL OF DESIGN FOR MUSIC DISCUSSION FOURMS

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Narayanan L Iyer

This research project reviews the current structure of message boards as well as online music discussion and analyzes the current communication flaws in the system while introducing a new system. This study gives a design review of Hip-Hop message board sites and conducts interviews with users of music message boards. The review and the interviews show indicates that comment filtering and receiving feedback on post were most important. The study then proposes a original alternative message board layout that uses topics that are relevant for longer periods of time than many of the current events topics that are used in current message board systems, as well as offers new structure to comment filtering and feedback systems. The proposed message board has a Hip-Hop Music theme; however the layout of the site is capable to be used in multiple different genres.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
ABSTRACT.....	i
LIST OF FIGURES	ii
CHAPTERS	
CHAPTER 1 – Introduction.....	1
CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review	3
CHAPTER 3 – Methodology.....	14
CHAPTER 4 – Results.....	16
CHAPTER 5 – Discussion.....	19
REFERENCES	32
VITA	34

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>FIGURE</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
Figure 1	21
Figure 2	22
Figure 3	25
Figure 4	26
Figure 5	27
Figure 6	28
Figure 7	29
Figure 8	30

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has allowed for instant human interaction across the globe. The web gives any person the ability to talk with friends, family, and strangers alike all around the world seemingly effortlessly. Not only are people allowed to directly communicate with each other, but people can directly communicate with a business or artist, which allows for a new dynamic of interaction that was not possible before.

There are multiple different ways to communicate on the Internet. There is the basic email, through which one may send a message to somebody or a mass of people. There are social networking websites where one may set up a profile and contact others who also have profiles. There is blogging, where one may show or discuss their thoughts with the Internet, allowing anybody to respond. Then, there are message boards.

Internet Message Boards or Internet forums are discussion based web sites. On these sites, members and administrator can post new topics for people to comment on. (Bulletin Boards) These topics, often called “threads”, can from a variety of different subjects ranging from current events to user generated questions. Message boards are a good medium for people to discuss and trade ideas on a subject on a mutual interest, and they often build an online community.

Message boards have hold a unique position in the music industry. Message boards allow for a digital word of mouth music discussion that was only available on a smaller scale until recently. These discussions have led for an increase of record sales in the long tail and also contributed to increase of the preservation of older music (Bruno, 2006).

Many message boards have rating system for their user comments. Some sites give members who subscribe not only the ability to directly comment on a post or send a message to the other subscribers, but members are also able to like, give comments or some sort of points, and often, they can also take points away. This gives people incentive to write well thought-out comments, whether the comments bring up a good point, a popular opinion, or a funny statement.

Message boards are usually updated constantly with news post, new current events, or new questions. With new threads being created every day, threads are constantly being replaced. The comments on a thread are only important for that temporary conversation. To remain relevant in message board communities, users must constantly post on newly made threads due to the high turnover rate.

This project aims to give the comments of web users on message boards more longevity. This project will attempt to give users an avenue to have well thought-out ideas to be reviewed by their peers for an extended period of time. This is in hope that people can start to engage in long term conversations over time with the internet. It will also attempt to create a new type of online community that does not require people to check in constantly or be on the web site at the right time to have their comment make a significant difference in the discussion, leading to an expansion of the current message boarding audience.

This project aims to give a new option to online discussion as a whole. While this project is focused on music message board sites, the design of those websites may allow for a new option of online communication in many different subjects in categories, giving people an even new way of connecting with the world.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Message Boards

Message Boards have evolved from modern day bulletin boards (Feerst). Bulletin Boards are physical boards placed in public places such as universities and libraries. Often made out of cork, bulletin boards made it easy for people to post flyers and public announcements with use of a simple thumb pin. Bulletin Boards were often placed in high traffic areas, where they could be noticed by whomever passed by the object (Bulletin Boards).

A Bulletin Board System or BBS was then formed out of the same idea during the early days of the Internet. First used in Berkley California in 1973, BBSs allowed for users to connect to an online computer system via phone line or modem (Crosby,1995). On these online computer systems, people could download or upload files, read news, play games, and chat with one another. BBSs were usually hosted on the host's home computer, making its connections unreliable. Also, the users had to call in to the line, forcing people to pay long distance phone prices when they were connecting to BBSs in a different area. This caused many BBSs users to only connect to thermals that were local, which often allowed for local meet ups with users of a BBS page (The BBS Corner).

As the number BBSs grew, each one started to gain its own theme such as sports or politics. Public institutions such as universities and libraries also began making their own BBS pages. BBSs were at the top of their popularity in the early 1990's with several BBS magazines being in publication. BBSs soon started to fade away and become replaced by message boards around 1996 when the world wide web became mainstream (The BBS Corner).

Message Boards have been used on the web since 1994. Message boards started off as with the simple ability for users to post and reply comments. However they soon began posting numerous threads on a single message boarding site. Eventually, software became available to create message boards, making the process of creating one more streamlined (Forum Software Timeline,2011).

Message boards are often split into categories. These categories often have sub-categories within them. Each of either these categories or sub-categories is where the topic or thread will be posted. Once here users can view the subject and post or reply accordingly. The threads that appear in these categories are often based on the amount of activity on that thread. The post with higher comments and views during a time period are pushed at the top. Users may manipulate this system by posting something simple to keep the thread at the top of a category for a longer period of time (often the phrase “bump” is used for these posts).

Message Board Characteristics

Posting a comment usually includes the user entering their comment in a textbox that is usually found at the top or the bottom of the page. Replying to posts usually involves the user clicking a reply feature somewhere near the post that the user is trying to comment on. Some message boards allow for BBCode, an HTML code used to enhance the text for features such as bold, text size and text color. Message boards may also have their own costume set of emoticons for their page. The order that each post is displayed differs depending on the website. Some message boards post the comments in order from oldest to newest. Other pages order the site depending on the amount of likes or positive marks each individual post got.

Posting is often reserved for members only. However, several sites allow for non-members to post as a guest or as anonymous. On most sites, non-members can still look at and

read posts made on the site even if they are not able to comment. Some of the site members are given more privileges than standard users and are called moderators or mods. These moderators are usually put in charge of a section or several sections and are responsible for enforcing the rules set for each page. Moderators are also able to ban users, merge or move threads, and close threads so no further comments may be made. The Administrator or Admin is responsible for picking these moderators. The Administrator is also responsible for the look, feel, and overall interaction of the thread.

Music Related Discussion

Music discussion is popular in other online mediums. Youtube has become a popular website for music listening and music video viewing. Songs on Youtube are able to download on iTunes (Zibreg). Google, the company that owns Youtube, has a partnership with Vevo, a company that hosts the music videos for Universal Music Group, Sony Entertainment, and EMI. With the partnership between Google and Vevo, many official music videos can be easily found on Youtube (YouTube,2013). Not only major artists have musical content on Youtube, but many independent artists can post their music on the site as well due to the free membership and simple uploading interface (Cayari,2011).

Youtube permits for comments on all of their videos unless the party that posted the video disallows them. These comments can allow for people to discuss the music and or video. In the case of artists who upload the music themselves, this allows for direct feedback as well as a possible consumer to artist conversation.

Social Networking is also used for online music discussion among other things. Social media allows for social interaction, and sharing amongst individuals. The messages on these social web pages often involve music discussion. Social Media websites have started taking

advantage of this and began to accommodate users on their pages. Social networking site Facebook started a partnership with Spotify, a music sharing service, in 2011, allowing users to be connected to the social networking site and listen to music without directly streaming on the page (Dredge,2012). Myspace has allowed for their users to have their own personal soundtrack of music to play on their page.

Blog websites have been prevalent in online music discussion as well. An example of this would be the website hypem.com. The web page arrogates the most popular mp3s from roughly 1500 different music blog sites into one site, allowing for users to then blog about those songs on the arrogated site (Van Buskirk,2008). The users of the micro-blogging site Twitter has also shown a high interest in music, with 7 of the top ten most followed accounts on the page belonging to musical artists, including the top 4 (twitterholic).

The Need for a New Design

The current model of message boarding has created many online communities, connecting many people worldwide for years. However there are some interactive flaws with this system. The main issue with the current model is that it requires people to make a post or open a thread in a timely manner to avoid their comment dropping to the bottom of the list. Even in formats where the top comment is placed at the top, the newer comments are placed at the bottom, decreasing its chances of being noticed by users. This may discourage users from posting comments in that thread completely. This is especially a problem due to the fact that most of the popular threads that are posted to the top of each category already have a high amount of comments. In order for a user to have a top comment, they must constantly be digging through new threads and posting their comment before other users see them.

Also with this format, the same or a similar subject may be reposted in a new thread. If a user has one popular opinion on a subject, that comment will not transfer over to the next thread with the same or similar subject, causing that user to have to repost if they want their point to be noticed again.

Design Review

To better analyze the interaction of message board websites, a case study was done on 5 different message board and news blog sites. In order to prevent the study and the project from getting too ambitious, the subject of Hip-Hop music was chosen. Therefore, the 5 message board and news blog sites were all related to Hip-Hop. Although the remainder of the study will be hip-hop focused, please keep in mind that the information found on the project interface is not hip-hop exclusive.

The message boards selected were chosen from the hip hop section of the website bigboards.com, a website that tracks the most active message boards on the Internet. Unfortunately, this site has not been updated recently and many of the sites were outdated or no longer active. From this page, two of the more active and creative sites on that list were chosen for analysis.

Finding other hip-hop message board sites that shared the same production level as the two proved to be a surprisingly difficult task. Because of this, this analyze includes two hip-hop blog sites as well. Blog websites are similar to message boards in that they display topics and articles that usually appear in reverse chronological order. Most of the time, these articles have the function of allowing members to comment and discuss the subject directly on the page. However, the articles can only ever be posted by the site administrators. The two blog sites were also chosen for the website http://www.invesp.com/blog-rank/hip_hop which had organized hip-hop blog sites by multiple factors such as RSS subscriptions and Google searches for the site.

Community/allhiphop.com

Community/allhiphop.com is the message board section of hip-hop news site allhiphop.com. The website has all of its content in the center of the page with all of the five main categories in one long column. The five categories the forum covers are Musical Conversation, Collective Argument, IC Talent Arena, Entertainment, and Archives. All of the subsections then directly under the page name with descriptions of what the subsections hold and how many posters there are in that subsection. Threads in the subsections are ordered by most popular and most recent, with the number of replies and views of the thread available before you open the thread. Only members of the website are allowed to comment on the site. There is no rating system for comments, but the amount of posts each member creates is visible.

Community.allhiphop.com contains banner ads in the header as well as ticker ads in the footer of the page. There are also image ads in the sides of the content boxes in the middle that stay relative to the page. The website uses a publishing format from Vanillia Forums.

Slumz.boxden.com

slumz.boxden.com is a hip hop message board site that has been online since 1998. The site puts all of its categories in two different columns side by side. The first categories (hip hop, sports, wild'ish, news, games, movies, gear, eyecandy, rides, cells) have their current and popular 6 threads directly on the front page with the top two articles displaying a small picture with the link. Popular threads are placed on top of the page, below, beside, and above the sites logo in the header. Links to the 10 main categories of the site is also placed in the header and footer.

Users in the threads do not give positive or negative points for the post itself. However, members are allowed to post "reputation" points to other user profiles for reasons of their choice. Reputation points do not change the order in which posts appear in the thread and users are not

allowed to take away reputation points. Users also have the privilege of using "smileys" in their post. These smileys range from normal emoticons of smiley faces to photo cut outs of celebrities and pop culture figures.

slumz.boxden.com uses banner ads in the header and footer of its page and has a custom dark grey background layout. The site's layout is hosted by vbulletin. It is worth noting that many other hip-hop message board sites were also hosted by vbulletin and had similar layouts and features such as the reputation system.

bossip.com

Bossip.com is a hip hop blog site. The page supports one main column of latest blogs from the bossip staff and a sub column directly right of it that features suggested readings and advertisements. Each article has an expanded picture next to the link. Tabs for home, video, exclusive, and tips are at the header of the page above the page logo.

Articles are posted by staff of the website and comments are posted below, using a "disqus" commenter program. This comment program allows to sign in with a twitter, facebook, google plus or discuss account, or simply make up a temporary name to post a comment. Comments have a point system and are ordered from top to bottom from top rated comment down. Article pages also give you the option to post the reading on facebook, twitter, or google plus.

Advertisement is heavy on this site with you being forced to skip an ad before you enter the site. Ads are in the footers, headers, sub column, and in-between the article and comments. Bossip uses a layout provided by wordpress.

2dopeboyz

2dopeboyz is a hip hop blog site that mostly posts new music releases. The main column is the new post with an image that was posted by the staff of the site with a sub column displaying more music, posts that have recently been commented on, archives, and advertisements. The header displays tabs for news, singles, mixtapes/albums, videos, features, interviews, contests, events, misc, and RAof.

The posts are posted by a staff member of the page. Comments can be posted by anyone as long as they make up an identity for the post. There is no rating system for the posts. There is a rating system for articles with it either receiving a "dope" point or a "nope" point. Anybody who visits the site is able to vote on posts and there is no membership for the site.

Advertisement is in the header of the site as well as in the sub column. The advertisement on the header of the front page is at least 3 times bigger than the logo for the website. There are also advertisements in the side bars as well as a ticker at the bottom of the page that is relatively placed on the web page. 2dopeboys does not state that it took its format from a publisher.

These web pages handled user interaction in different and distinct ways. Allhiphop had all of the categories and sub categories readily available. However, there was no attention given to new articles in particular and users could be more distracted by the well placed advertisements. There was also no incentive for posters as far as points go.

Slumz.boxden had much attention on their community posts, with the same post often being placed in multiple positions on the same page. However, the posts were put in a well-organized order, and it was easy to read a popular thread in a certain section. Even though the reputation gives some incentive for posters, it is impossible to see what members are getting

points for. The point system does show how "popular" a member is on the website as a whole. Advertisements were light and were barely notable.

Bossip was very forthcoming with the advertisements, which ultimately distracted you from the content on the blogs. The comment system was easy to use and clearly showed the most popular comments however.

2dopeboyz was a little heavy with the advertisements, and the side column had useful tools, but could have been better organized. The rating system for the page was interesting, putting more focus on the post itself than the comments. However, with no point system on the comments or no membership available, there was no real incentive for making comments.

For the project that I want to work on, the articles or threads themselves will have an importance similar to the ones on 2dopeboyz. Yet, member feedback will ultimately drive the site. The site will also provide an easy access to the threads such as the ones the site slumz.boxden had. Also, its ranking system for comments/threads will be similar to the one that bossip displayed.

Proposal

For this project, I would not like to ask people to comment on an article or work of art but instead, I would encourage people to comment on a single question that has the ability to stay relevant for a long period and can be discussed extensively as time goes on. The question I will ask people is a simple one; How do you feel about "blank" artist.

Hip Hop Scholar will be an online user generated blog site strictly dedicated to the review of an individual Hip Hop artist as a whole. The website will contain a pre-loaded list of established hip hop artists. Each individual artist will be its own topic page or thread. Each artist page will contain reviews that users can write and edit about that artist, or read and rate other

users' reviews. Each user will require a profile to post. The profiles will hold the list of all the artist reviews they have made for easy catalog of blogs users have made.

The list of artists for this website will be selected by the site administrator and moderators if available. Other established hip hop artists may later be added by the administrator, moderators, or by suggestion of users. The page will only be limited to established hip hop artists or artists that have a significant amount of following to keep the numbers reasonable. Blogs on the artist pages on the site with a high number of posts will be ordered from top to bottom in three categories in this order; most recent, recently top ranked, and top ranked of all time. The idea is to make the newer reviews more easily available for review.

Artist reviews will be expected to be well developed and written out by users. Formal language will not be necessary; however, users will be expected to have heard a decent amount of the artist work and to have written out well thought out reviews of the artist. Examples of the caliber of reviews that is asked for will be available. Users will also be able to give an all-around rating of the artist with a 5 star rating system. The administrator and any moderators available will pull any blogs that do not meet the standards of the site. For all reviews that are not as well thought out as any site official may think, there will be an encouraging message sent to the user who made the review, urging them to take more time explaining their artist review as well as some suggestions on how to make the review qualified to be read on the site.

Each artist page will have post made from users expressing their opinions about them. The post will be in 3 different tabs; most recent, recently top rated, and top rated of all time. This is to encourage users to read newer posts, but still attempt to write a well thought out post that could be placed higher than others. Since opinions of artists are ever growing, there will be no new categories being made unless a new artist has become established in the industry. Even

then, opinions of older artists will continue to grow and older threads will be expanded. Users will be able to rate other users' reviews at any time using a "Grading" scale similar to what you would find in academic settings (A,B,C,D,F).

If members would like to keep up with the reviews of a certain user, they will be able to add that users to their "colleagues" list. A user will be able to easily track his or her colleague's activity on the site as well as send private messages.

While people are able to send private messages to colleagues and rate other users' reviews, there will be no public comment section on any of the pages. Hip Hop Scholar wants to encourage people who have an opinion to write their own review rather than look for attention from somebody else's work.

This site is not meant to compete directly with other hip hop message boards or blog sites, but instead exist alongside them. People are free to go to those sites to learn about the artist and their work and come to this site to express and read well thought out opinions about those same artists.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY
In Depth Interview

For this study, an in-depth interview with individuals that visit music discussion websites was conducted. The interview was designed to see what role the users of music discussion sites play, and why they have these online habits. Among the five interviews conducted, three were conducted in person, and the two other ones online. The three ones that happened in real time took an average of fifteen minutes to complete.

Questions of Interview

This is a written interview meant to be used in a study. Answer the questions in a different font and send your version of the interview back to the sender of this when you are finished. Please be descriptive as possible with your answers. You are welcome to decline taking interview at any time.

1. Please write down your Age, Gender, and Ethnicity
2. List your general Hobbies and Interests:
3. How much time do you spend on the web on an average day?
4. What are the different activities you would do on the web on an average day?
5. How much time do you spend listening to music?
6. How would you describe your relationship with music?
7. How do you keep up with your music tastes?
8. What are some websites you visit for music related interests?
9. Have you visited music oriented discussion pages on the web (internet forum, message boards, music blog sites, comments of youtube songs, music news sites, reddit, ect)?

10. Can you name some? And which one is your favorite?
11. What is it that you like about online music discussion?
12. Have you made posts on such sites or do you tend to lurk or just read?
13. If you do post, how often do you post on music discussion pages?
14. Why do you/not post on music discussion pages?
15. On average, how many posts do you read per topic? Why
16. When reading posts, do you ever rate other people's comments or reply to their post?

Why? How often?

17. Have you ever stayed in touch with somebody in a music discussion page?
18. If you could change something about the layout of music discussion pages, what would you change?
19. What kind of music discussion formats tends to be most useful in pursuing your interest?
20. How important is online music discussion in sustaining your interest in music?

Thank You For Your Time

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

All subjects in this study were male. Ethnicity varied with 2 being Caucasian, 1 African American, 1 Asian, and 1 identifying himself as both Asian and African American. Most subjects were in their mid to late twenties with one being twenty-four, one being twenty-five, two being twenty-eight, and one being thirty-nine.

The hobbies of the subjects all included listening to music, three of the subjects actually made music themselves. Other hobbies included sports, reading, videogames, and partying.

Four of the subjects stated that they were on the Internet for an average of two to five hours a day. One claimed to be online pretty much the entire day. Majority of the hobbies online included checking in with social networks and chatting with others, as well as reading blogs, message boards and watching videos. Three of the subjects also discussed doing work-related activities online as well.

Four of the subjects claimed to be very active listeners, with one claiming “music is the love of my life”. One of the subjects claimed to be an active listener only. The amounts music listened to was varied. Two subjects claimed to listen to music for only an hour or two a day, while another claimed six hours a day. One claimed through the whole day while another stated that he listened to five to ten new albums a day.

All subjects seemed to keep up with music through personal conversations and through the Internet. Four of the subjects stated that they also read music reviews. One subject stated that he keeps up with the new releases on spotify while another mentioned that he goes to concerts and late night clubs to hear music as well.

All subjects visit music discussion sites. There was an expansive list of sites that are visited, some examples include: IllRoots, Nahright, Youheardthatnew, youtube, mostlyjunkfood, marblestoop, reddit, Tally-Ho, and Rateyourmusic.

Three of the subjects enjoyed reading other people's opinions about music, with one stating that he was "glad to see other music-obsessed people". One subject liked reading actual posts from the musicians themselves, while another got entertainment reading negative, snarky comments, stating that "they are the best for complements".

Most subjects tended to lurk on discussion sites rather than comment. Two of the subjects stated that they only comment when correcting somebody or have something interesting to add, while the other two only lurk. One of the subjects who only lurked stated in the interview that "a lot of posts lead to arguments and I don't see the point of arguing with a stranger". One of the subjects constantly posts or "spams" as he states. He says he does this because he produces music and wants more people to listen to his work and give feedback. Another subject stated that it is nice to receive feedback on posts, but that it is not a big deal if it does not happen.

The amount of posts read slightly varies. Two of the subjects stated that they read approximately ten to twenty comments before switching subjects, while another two stated that they read a lot during times of boredom, causing them to lose count. One stated that in message boards he will read the first and last page of comments.

The amount of connections made on music discussion sites also varies. Two of the subjects did not keep in touch with anybody in music discussion sites. One subject observed that "some of them are still my facebook friends", while another does keep in touch for networking purposes. One does not become friends with the other discussion board members, but rather keeps track with a few that have interesting or useful posts.

Discussion page format preferences were split, with three of the subjects not having much problem or opinion on how they work, while the other 2 specifically naming Reddit's style of subsections and filtering being the most effective in their opinion.

Finally, most of the subjects stated that music discussion pages were important to keeping up with their music interest, with four of them stating that it keeps them in the musical loop and maintains the importance of the other musical artists. However, one did not think so, stating that he believes that artists who reach out through fan pages and sites such as soundcloud keep his interest more. He went on to be critical of other individuals on music discussion pages, and stated that "Hardcore music fans in general are very critical people and don't always make the most chill acquaintances, myself guilty as charged."

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Insights from Interviews

The most important point the interviews have made is that there is not one type of users on musical discussion sites. While these sites offer a quite similar service, people go there for different reasons. Some may go to find what is going on in the world while others just go in order to find likeminded people. Some like to add to conversations, while others like to see how the conversations play out themselves. Some pick and choose whose comments to read while some will read any comments they have the time for. It is important to keep that diversity in mind when creating a new layout, because it is a reminder that multiple options of enjoyment should be available in order to satisfy as many users as possible.

One of the most important features that was mentioned in the interviews was the filtering of comments. Comments on message board sites can build up and many users appreciate a way to look through the comments without having to read through every single one. Hip Hop Scholar will give a unique way of filtering through comments to help users get the full picture of the discussion.

Another subject that was discussed was the use of comments. Not every user likes to post comments. However, some users do enjoy receiving feedback on their opinions. The format of this website gives users feedback without much commitment. The overall structure of the message board may allow for users who did not post comments before to feel more comfortable due to the quality of comments and the filtering of new comments.

This site will also keep some features that have been successful in previous message board pages. This will include features to keep track of users and have personal conversations with them.

Information Architecture and User Interaction

When users enter the site, they will see the logo, a search bar, a sign in/sign up tab, and a help tab in the header. The logo will lead to the home page whenever clicked on. This header will be available through the site unless the user signs into a profile. Signing up only requires a valid email address, a password, and a screen name. Logging in to the site only requires you to remember your email and your password.

Users that are new to the site will be seeing a welcome page explaining the general purpose of the site. It will also direct users to the sign up page and help page for further explanation on how the site works. Below this will be the recently rated artist section and the recently added artist section. On the the left of these will be a list of all the artists on the site divided in alphabetical order. This bar will always be there as well for easy access. See *figure 1*

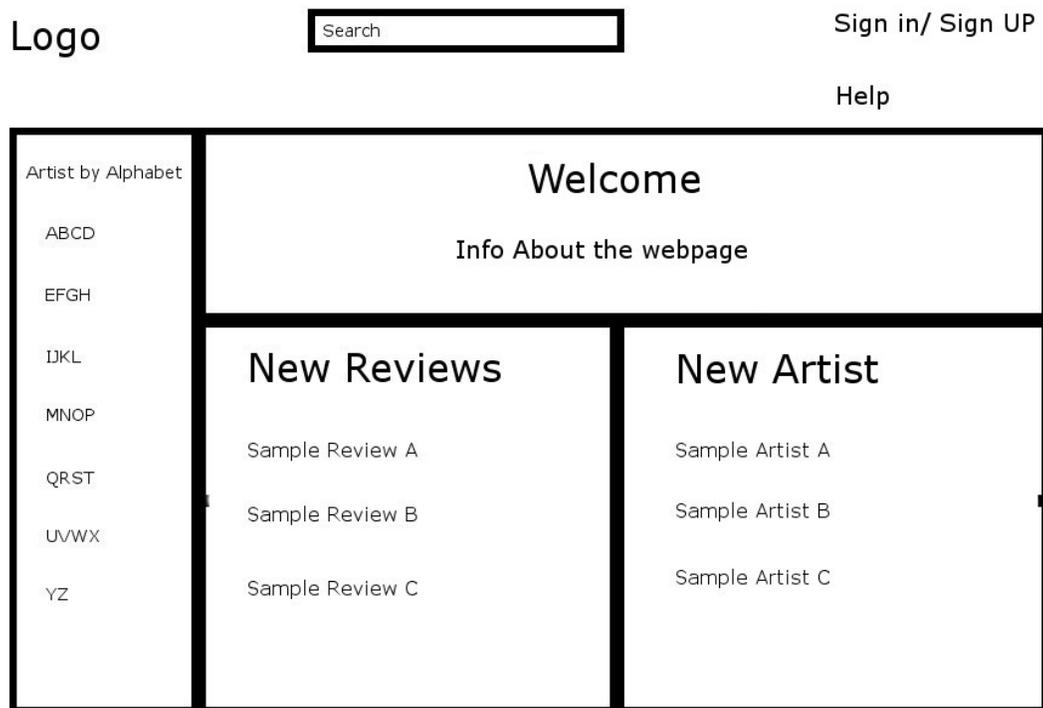


Figure 1

If the user is signed in, the page will look slightly different, with the section now becoming a Colleagues activity section and the sign in/ sign up tab becoming a place where you can enter your profile page. *See figure 2*

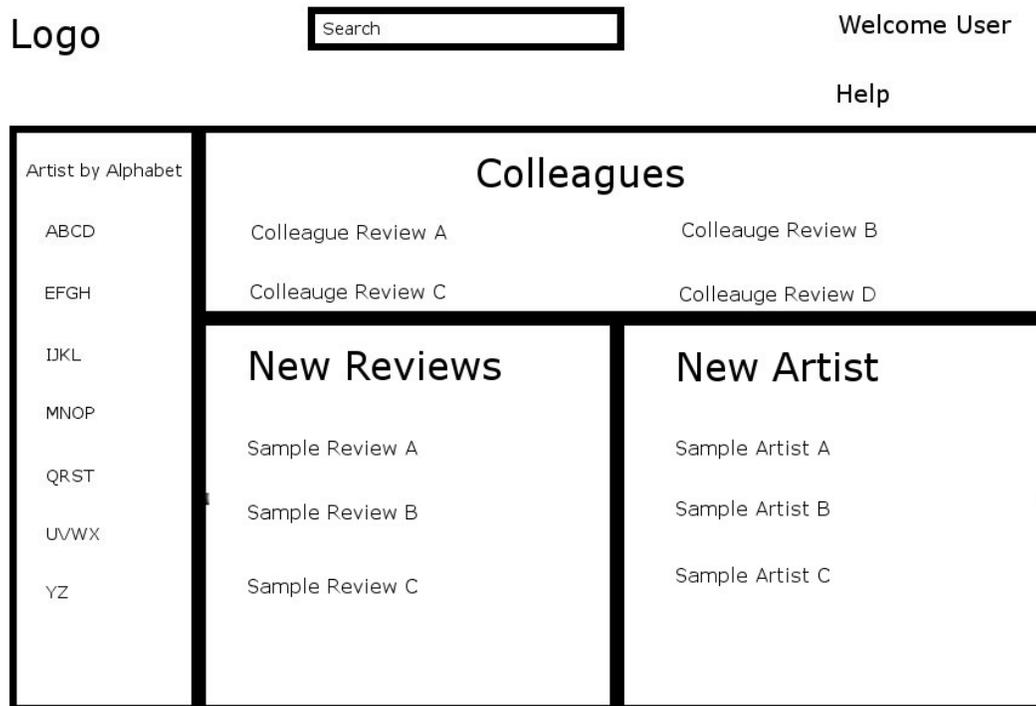


Figure 2

The profile page will be a page where users can change their password, manage their colleagues, and see what artists they have reviewed.

The help page will discuss in depth the rules of the website. It will discuss how reviewing artists and rating reviews work. It will also give examples on what sort of reviews are acceptable and not acceptable. The examples may look as follows:

How to not write a review about an artist you like:

"Artist A is the greatest artist of all times. Artist A has an amazing flow and amazing lyrics that no other rapper is touching. Artist A's one album was the greatest album of all time

and everybody else thinks so. Artist A's new album is going to bring back hip hop and everybody needs to pick it and whoever doesn't is stupid and is part of this dumb generation that doesn't understand good music."

How to write a review about an artist you like:

"Artist A has truly shows how to stay relevant and creative through a musical career. Artist A has started from humble beginnings on Album 1 which was unique and creative for the time with introspective lyrics and mesmerizing production. Artist A's second album wasn't at the same level as his first however there was still a few select stand out songs like "this song" and "that song".

"Artist a took to the criticism of his sophomore release and came out with his third album which is possibly one of the defining albums of the generation and a classic in hip hop. Album 3 found an amazing balance in wordplay in rhythm. The album was able to satisfy Artist A's core fans while opening a new world to new fans young and old alike."

"Artist A's next three projects were strong although not as strong as his first and third albums. Several tracks from his past 3 releases such as "this one song" and "that other song" showed great creativity and insight of his personal struggles". Artist A has become more of a pop icon as of late, however he continues to give us quality music for days to come."

How to not write a review of an artist you don't like:

"Artist B is complete garbage. Artist B relies on stupid hooks and gimmicks to gain his audience and doesn't rely on talent. Artist B has no lyrics and everybody that listens to him is dumb middle school kids. This artist killed hip hop and everybody would be better off without him"

How to write a review of an artist you don't like:

"Artist B often chooses simple, noncomplex lyrics that make him difficult to take seriously. Artist B relies on catchy hooks that often times do not make since and simply rhyme, limiting his reply value. Artist B's singles is often geared towards the party crowd, however listing to an entire album is a struggle.

Artist B does have good production most of the time. He is also a very consistent artist that constantly puts out new material which is respectable. Artist B will rarely show potential such as with his verse on "that one song that he was on" which showed a creative rhyme scheme and flow, however this is not common."

Additional notes will be added on the help pages that go as follows:

- There will also be a pros box and a cons box before your main comment box. Use bullets in these boxes and incomplete sentences (ex: good flow, wack lyrics, good beats, ect)
- There is a set word limit for each post, just write a complete review of the artist
- Academic language is not necessary. Profanity and humorous antidotes are allowed. just make sure you give a complete review
- Only write about artist that you have listened to an extended amount of material from. If you only heard a few tracks from that artist, look up some more of their work to give a better review.
- Please keep in mind the time period that the artist released their work and compare it to the music of that time as well as the present.
- We reserve the right to disapprove you post and nicely ask you to rewrite it. If this happens, we will give you tips on how to make the post up to standard.
- Your final grade is determined by your peers.

Once the user has found an artist to read or write reviews about, they will come to a screen that has all of the artist's reviews split into 3 different zones; most recent, recent top rated,

top rated all time. The user may pick what review to pick from there or choose to write their own review. See figure 3.

a

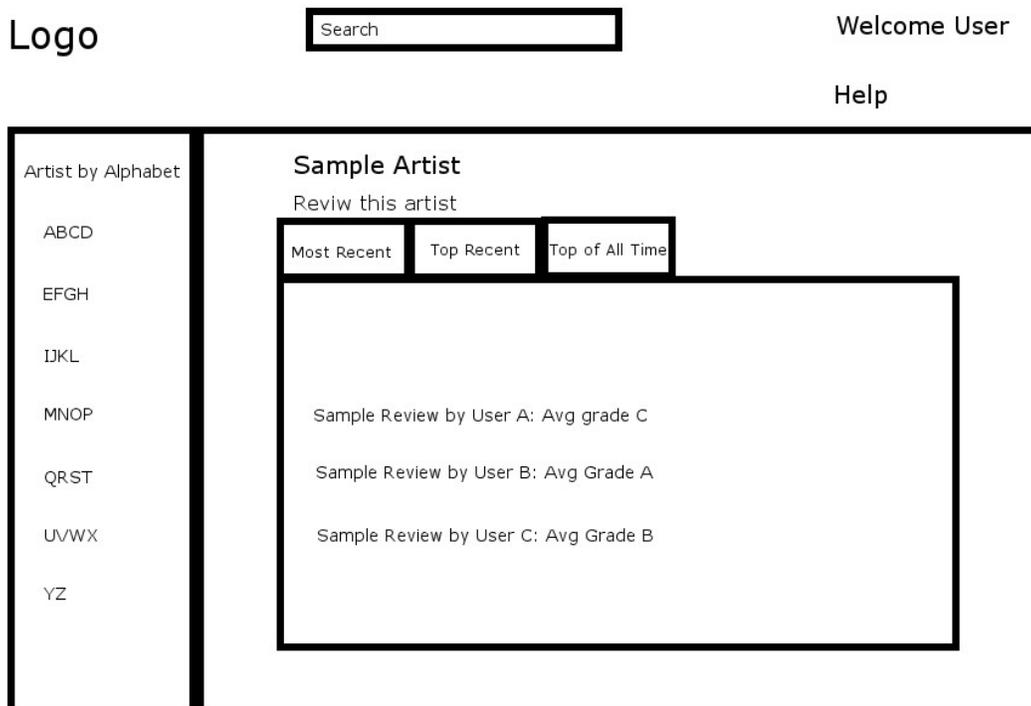


Figure 3

If the user would like to make or edit a review about that artist, they may simply click the “Review this artist” tab. Here, the user will find a forum where they can write a short list of pros and cons for the artist, then give their review. After that, the user can give their personal rating of the artist between 1-5 stars. See *Figure 4*

Any user that edits their post will have all of their previous grades erased and will have to start over however. This is so people will take their time when writing their reviews and say

something worthwhile. If they say something that people like for a long time, then they do not have to change their review for very often if ever. If the review was poorly thought out, they have a chance to start over. Also, reviews for older artists putting out new work will be updated as outdated posts may be seen as less desirable.

The image shows a web interface for writing a review. At the top left is a 'Logo' placeholder. In the center is a search bar with the text 'Search'. To the right, it says 'Welcome User' and 'Help'. Below this is a large rectangular frame containing the review form. On the left side of the frame, under the heading 'Artist by Alphabet', are links for 'ABCD', 'EFGH', 'IJKL', 'MNOP', 'QRST', 'UVWX', and 'YZ'. The main area of the form is titled 'Review Artist' and contains the following elements:

- 'Pros' with a text input field.
- 'Cons' with a text input field.
- 'Review' with a large text area.
- 'Rate' with a scale of five circles, where the first three are filled and the last two are empty.

Figure 4

If the user chooses to read a review, they can click on the review from whichever user they would like and they will be brought to a review page. The review page has a similar format as the write a review page, but now, reviews should be written out in full. Users are able to give the review a grade (A,B,C,D, or F) and submit it afterwards. Users can change their grade for a review at any time. See Figure 5.

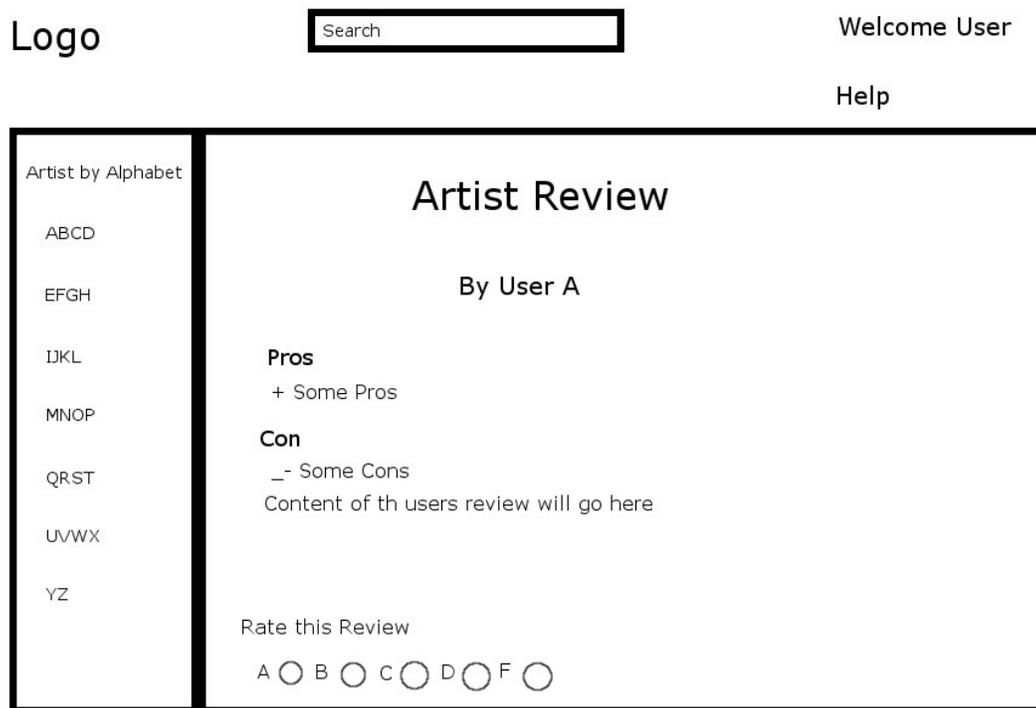


Figure 5

Mock-Ups

Hip Hop Scholar keeps a scholastic theme throughout the webpage. While no graphics are used on the site, many of the colors used are based on common schoolroom objects such as chalkboards and scratch paper.

Figure 6 shows mock-up 1. This design shows a dark green chalk board as well as the Hip-Hop Scholar logo which is written in a chalky font. Any other text outside of the main text box (help, sign in) is also in white to keep that feel. The main content box uses a cream color to represent a yellow notebook paper experience with black text.

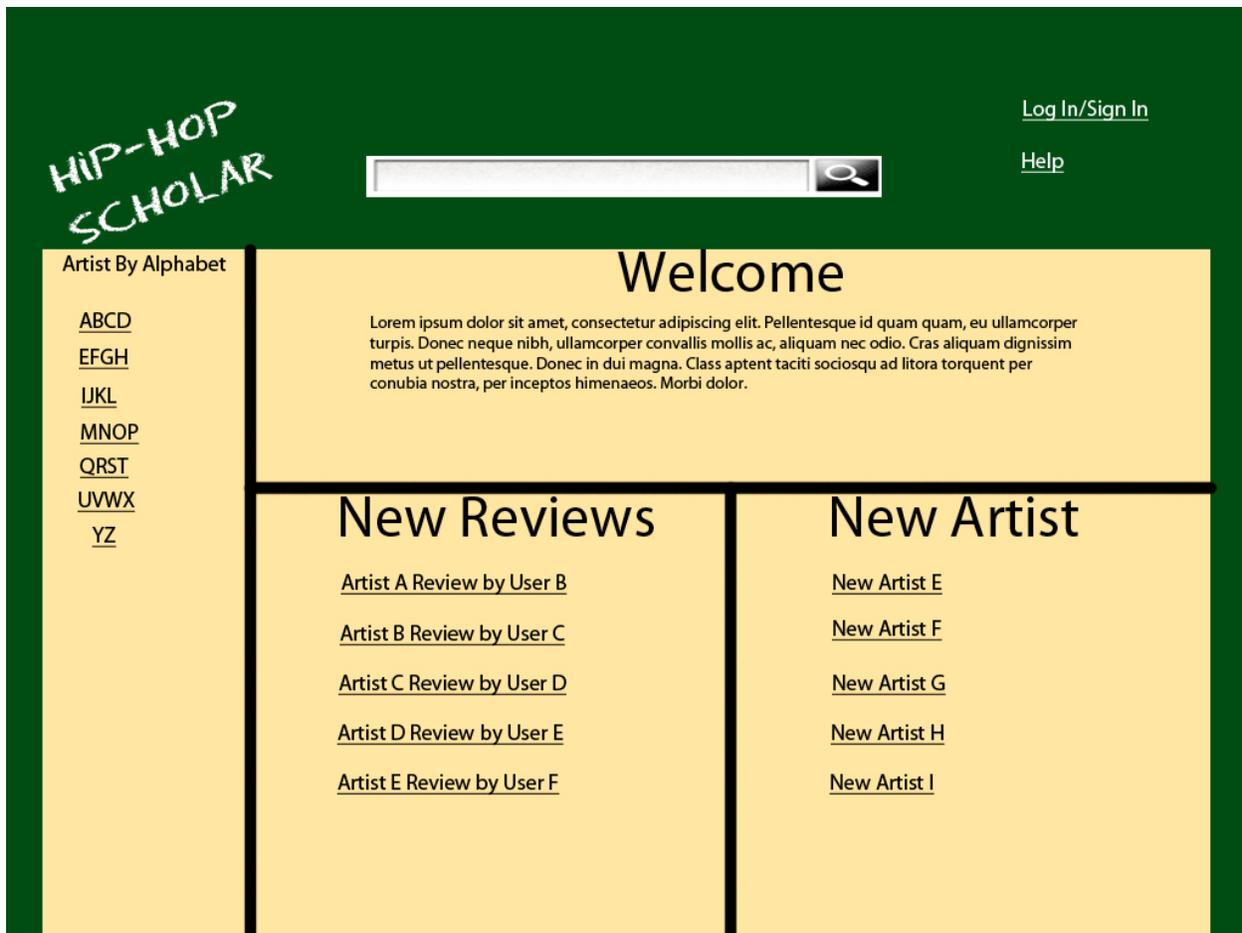


Figure 6

Figure 7 shows mock-up 2. This mock up keeps the same chalk logo. However, the background is now black to represent more of a blackboard look. The content box has been changed to white to feature more of a notebook paper look. The text in this mock up remains the same color. This gives the text a reverse effect from the background from the content box.

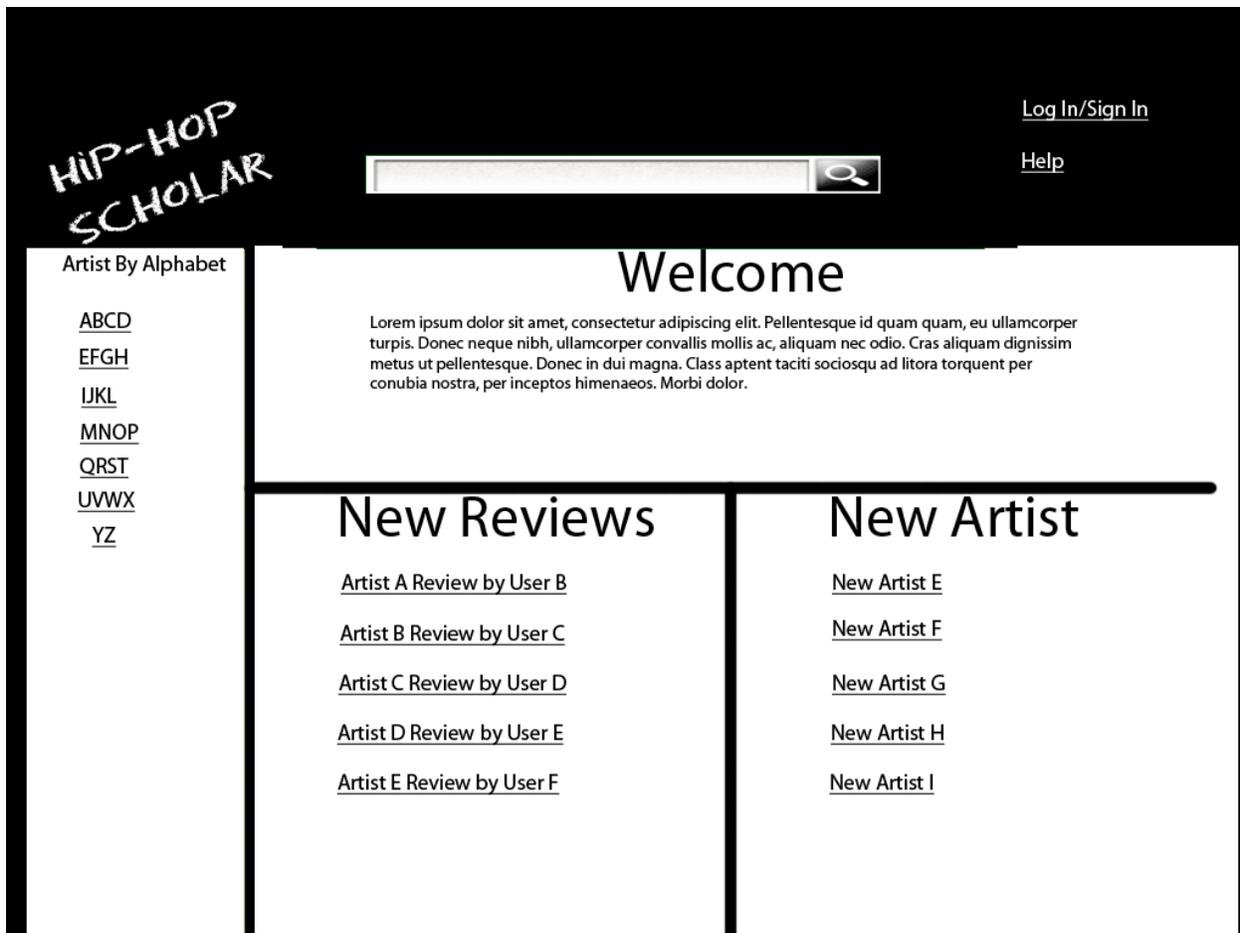


Figure 7

Figure 8 features mock-up 3. This mock up is a combination of the first two. It keeps the chalkboard green background while using the notebook paper white content box, giving the site a more safe and basic look.

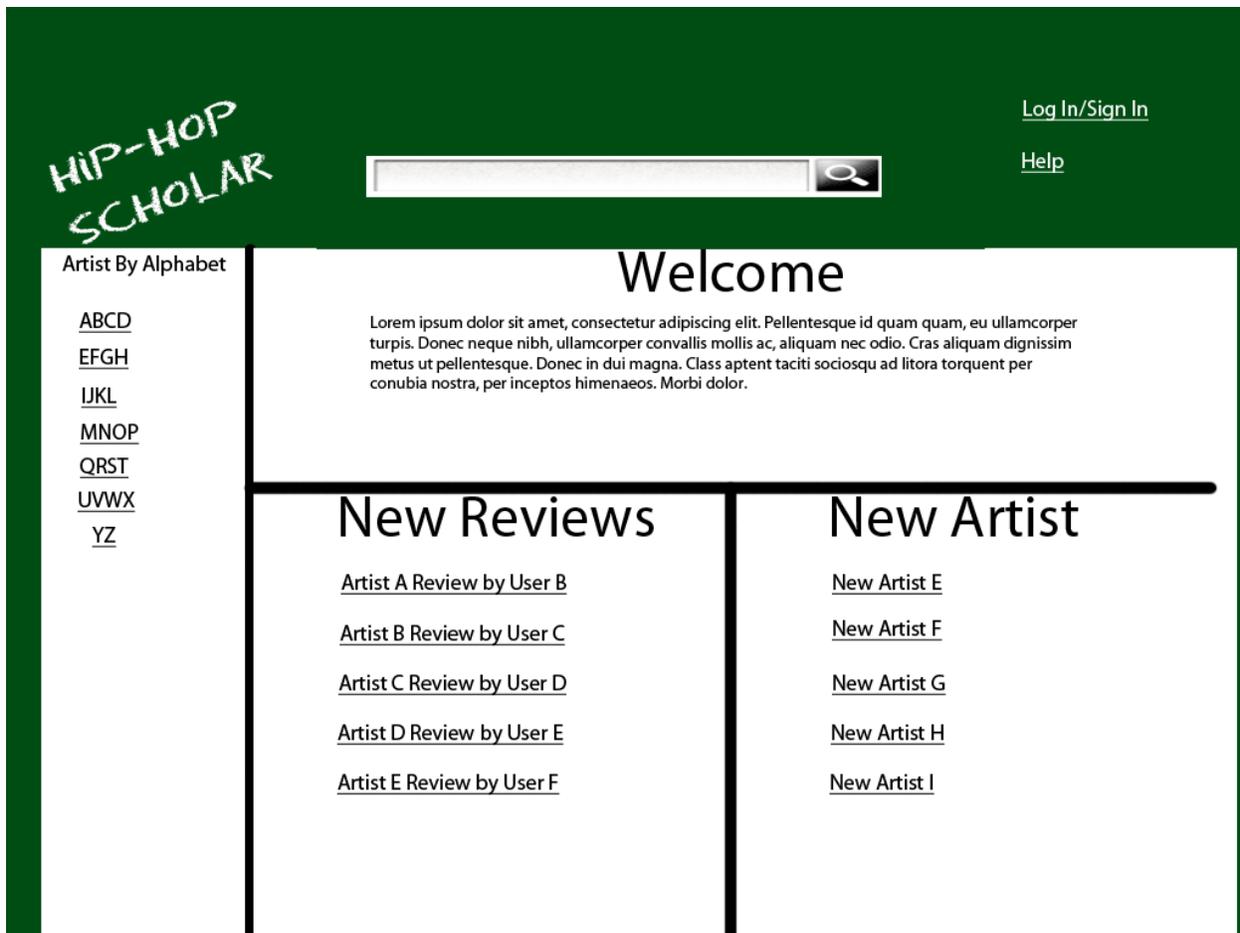


Figure 8

Significance

This layout is designed to give online users a new way of discussing music. Rather than discussing current events in the music field of their choice, users will now discuss their overall feelings about an artist's work which may or may not change over time without a current event prompting them.

Hip Hop Scholar experiments with new ways of filtering content. While some of our interviews stated that a comment filter system such as the one used on reddit was the most convenient, this site aims to improve that system even farther.

Hip Hop Scholar also aims to change the way comments are handled. The website will ask for well thought out responses. The layout of the site does not reward quick comments that may or may not be relevant in the future. The hope is that users naturally build enough of an opinion of an artist over time that they will have a complete view of an artist. The comments are not meant to be a race against time, but rather a comparison of ideas.

The format used in this project was Hip Hop Music. However, this idea is not mutually exclusive. Hip Hop music was a format that was small enough to test the idea out, and simple enough to work in the guidelines of developing idea. This idea can be spread, not only better accustom Hip-Hop fans, but to different genres all together. Sport Athletes, politicians, visual artists, actors, actresses, and other musical artists are just a few examples of how this format can appeal to other genres.

Conclusion

Music discussion forums as well as other music discussion pages have grown in the few decades during which the World Wide Web has been available. Music is discussed by many different people from all around the world, and there is no sign of this slowing down anytime soon.

As the internet continues to grow, it is important that people grow with it. As expansive as the Internet is, there are still many people that do not communicate in the same way as others. It is important that new designs for online communication are being developed to further close the communication gap some people have. While this project had a focus on hip hop music, the idea can be taken in a more global way, in order to connect people in multiple types of mediums. While there is no proof that this new design of online discussion will change anything, it does show that there are ways that people can grow to become even closer.

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VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Kazi Momo Mose Smith

kgkozy@yahoo.com

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Bachelor of Science, Mass Communications, May 2011

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