

# Miguel Declan - UNIT 12 Evaluation – STUDENT #1490375 -- 1554 words

For this project, the main research question is 'Why would someone use a dog walking app and how can it make their everyday life better?' After creating the theoretical question, I started to plan out the whole research process starting with asking more questions about the users. I required app functions that would be needed to achieve the goals of making dog owners' and walkers' lives easier when it comes to walking dogs and keeping track of all fitness (this would include detailed info such as steps, calories burnt, distance travelled, live location and more). Starting with 'why would someone return to the app?' allowed me to really focus on the key points of the app's functionality and what would overall bring users to the app; the main methods of research started with User Personas, by creating these, it gave me something to go off and by creating very different personas, it made me think of many aspects of the app and ensuring inclusivity across all different age ranges.

Diving in a little on user personas, I decided to create 2 very different user types, a 60-year-old man who is a retired teacher, needs large font sizes and likes simple intuitive interfaces, he also mainly wants to keep track of his dog's health; Looking further into this user, I instantly recognise that accessible design will play an important role, and an option for adjustable text sizes can be implemented to achieve this user's needs. On the other end, we have a 40-year-old Marketing Manager, she requires easy scheduling to fit around her busy days ensuring she can always fit walks in where possible, and wants GPS tracking to see where her dog is, the goals for this user is to always go on efficient dog walking routes that are able to slot into her tight schedule whilst offering the best walk; this shows how important the route generation based around time schedules is and allows busy people like this user to still go on walks and not have to worry that they might miss a meeting for example; these personas also strengthen the feedback from the questionnaire I created where people valued their time with the majority only taking their dog's for a walk for around 30 to 60 minutes; the reasoning for creating older user personas is that they are generally more restricted than the younger generation, so as long as 40 – 60 year olds are being catered for, the younger users should have no problem as things would've been perfected for anyone to understand and use, further improving the goal to create an accessible and user friendly app.

Moving on to competitor analysis surprisingly, there wasn't much competition, not a lot of apps to track your dog's health or walks, the closest thing to the Walkies app is either a generic dog route app called Biscuit Pet Care that seems to calculate the amount of time walked and distance travelled, or a vet app providing an easy way to manage bookings, medication and more, but by integrating both into one unified app would be beneficial for the end user creating a single place for all of their pet needs. I then carried out a dog owner questionnaire helping me to gain insider knowledge on everyday pain points with users' dog walking experiences by doing this, the feedback received gave me areas to focus on when planning and designing the app where I managed to gain quite a wide variety of submissions and began to notice patterns in responses and features that people really wanted to see, along with some proposed ideas which certainly sounded like a useful addition to the overall app, this would help to further differentiate Walkies from our competitors or similar apps out there.

I then came up with the following: 'Makes new walking routes tailored to the area', this would constantly spice up the user's walking experience by generating new routes based on their location and time constraints, and as a dog owner myself, walking the same routes over and over again gets tiring, boring and repetitive, especially during time restricted walks; 'Earn rewards / point', this would offer an incentive to keep going and creating a community feature allowing users to connect with other dog walkers and owners to compete against others in the area; 'Check up on local discounts, activities and generally keep users in the loop on local events and more', this feature is critical to creating a community centred experience and providing all dog owners a way to easily access local info and attend events; 'Checkup on daily weather updates tailored to walking routines', by providing weather updates tailored to the user, the app is able to be useful in a way that could promote exercise because there's nothing worse than walking out the house for it to be raining, this feature would check the forecast and provide the user with the best time slots to walk where the best weather conditions are; 'Checkup on vet information', Vet appointments are essential to any pet owner and providing an easy way to checkup on appointments, medication and other info provides a central hub for dog owners and allows them to easily track any other task they need to their dog's health and wellbeing'. After getting the information needed from all these questions and more, I began with the general app planning in terms of what pages and features the app needs to have, along with rough user journeys, after that was complete, was when I began on the visual side of things, looking into a wide variety of different app designs specifically layouts and the way

information is displayed, by gathering all of this information, I managed to gain a good understanding on general app designs that are common and are understood, by not restriction myself to just pet app research allowed me to take a more creative approach from different apps, for example, the Calm app which uses cards quite a bit with it being a content heavy app and allowed for section segmentation whilst remaining on the same page and being easy to understand.

Key Findings: Route generation, by implementing a tailored route generation feature, provides the user with something that's constantly new, the generation of these routes is also a perfect feature for people who have time constraints so by planning a walk that will take a certain amount of time is appealing to those users. Another key feature is the health tracking of their dog, with smartwatches being very widely used and advanced, a lot of people now like to use these watches to track their fitness and their own walks, but now with the smart dog collar, users are able to track their dogs too including heart monitoring, step count, steadiness notes and calorie burn, this I believe is one of the main features allowing app users to also stay on top of their dog's health along with their own. Looking further into vets and the benefits of tracking pet's health is shown in this quote "Pets instinctively hide their symptoms until it's too late. PetPace can help facilitate timely detection of disease." This is indeed a competitor but they make a good point on why we need to start tracking out pet's health using smart devices such as smart collars as it helps us understand any issues without furry friends and give us a heads up on any changes or just simply to monitor their fitness.

During the project, I did face some challenges such as very few competitors resulting in a 'reinventing the wheel' situation when designing the app and looking at what to propose, what strategies to take, design decisions and the information needed; I also focused quite heavily in the modularity of the app design, basically futureproofing the app in-case new features are added in the future, they can easily be integrated with the current design language and slot in seamlessly.

The impact of the app is to generally improve fitness, motivation and health tracking of both the user and their dog by taking walks custom-made for their routines, weather and fitness, along with providing users with a hub-like platform centralising all the user's needs for their dogs.

As we are currently in an AI age, I also experimented with the idea of using Artificial Intelligence to generate tailored routes to the user's location whether that may be in their local area or somewhere where they plan on going for a walk, this ensures the route is always fresh and adds variation and hits their fitness goals in the day which positively benefits the user and their dog(s). This could extend throughout the app presenting more dynamic elements that could create a more personalised experience for each individual user.

In conclusion, I would have liked to have further extended the research by creating more questionnaires targeting different aspects of the app, and the users, and gained more insights on what users want to see in an app, not just for walking their dogs but anything else the app might be able to help them with, and by doing this, it increases the chance of user retention giving a reason to come back. I'd also like to have looked further into the sustainable side of things by researching different ways how to earn off the app; the main ways I can think of would be the following: tiered subscriptions, advertisement revenue, one-off payments and more. Further investigating these different ways of monetisation would make the app viable for a real-world scenario. I enjoyed the research I carried out and was able to benefit from the responses given such as how many people track their fitness and walking routes meaning that there is also a gap in the market that could be further explored.

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## **Design Accessibility Resources**

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"Provide sufficient contrast between foreground and background; Don't use color alone to convey information."

Princeton University (2023) How To Design For Accessibility. Available at: <https://digital.accessibility.princeton.edu/how/design> (Accessed: 25 January 2025).

"Accessibility requirements relevant to visual design generally cluster around issues of legibility, color perception, and device independence."

Material Design (2023) Accessibility in Material Design. Available at: <https://m2.material.io/design/usability/accessibility.html> (Accessed: 30 January 2025).

"Accessibility in design allows users of diverse abilities to navigate, understand, and use your UI successfully."

## **User Experience Research Methods**

Nielsen Norman Group (2022) When to Use Which User-Experience Research Methods. Available at: <https://www.nngroup.com/articles/which-ux-research-methods/> (Accessed: 5 February 2025).

"The field of user experience has a wide range of research methods available, ranging from tried-and-true methods such as lab-based usability testing to those that have been more recently developed, such as unmoderated UX assessments."

Maze (2021) 11 UX Research Methods and When to Use Them. Available at: <https://maze.co/guides/ux-research/ux-research-methods/> (Accessed: 12 February 2025).

"You can use research methodologies like user interviews, surveys, focus groups, card sorting, usability testing to identify user challenges and turn them into opportunities to improve the user experience."

User Interviews (2021) UX Research Methodologies: The Complete Guide. Available at: <https://www.userinterviews.com/ux-research-field-guide-module/user-research-methods> (Accessed: 8 February 2025).

"You'll learn about the differences between different kinds of user research methods—quantitative and qualitative, generative and evaluative, attitudinal and behavioural, moderated and unmoderated."

## **Moodboard & Inspiration Assets**

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