FRONT COVER TO BE MADE

**Recipes For Life:**

***Bringing the tradition of cookbooks to the 21st Century***

**Kari McMahon**

**AC4001 Honours Project**

**BSc (Hons) Applied Computing**

**University of Dundee 2015**

**Supervisor: Dr Keith Edwards**

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*Abstract - This project details the design and development of Recipes For Life an Android application for collaborative recipe management. For generations collaborative cookbooks and recipes have been a way for people to express themselves and share experiences and traditions with others through the alternative format of cooking. But as society increasingly moves more and more into a digital age the concept of the collaborative cookbooks could soon be lost in the onslaught of digital information if it is not brought into the 21st century. Many recipe management applications are on offer but none offer the possibility to collaborate on cookbooks and recipes with friends, family and communities - a tradition which has been ingrained in society for many generations. Therefore this project aims to fit this gap in the market and presents a solution which brings the tradition of recipe books to the 21st century through a collaborative recipe management application.*

# Introduction

A recipe book is defined as a “book of directions explaining how to prepare and cook various kinds of foods” (Merriam-Webster, 2014). Although many successful cookbooks do not just represent directions but they represent people’s experiences and their traditions which we can identify with and get excited about often through tantalising pictures, interesting descriptions and innovative ideas (Ruhlman, 2012). For generations collaborative cookbooks and recipes have been a way for people to express themselves and share experiences and traditions with others through the alternative format of cooking. But as society increasingly moves more and more into a digital age the concept of the collaborative cookbooks could soon be lost in the onslaught of digital information if it is not brought into the 21st century. Currently there is no applications on the market that offers collaborative recipe management and therefore this project presents a solution to this an Android application called Recipes For Life. This solution aims to bring the tradition of recipe books to the 21st century through collaborative recipe management. The following report outlines design and development process of the solution as well as reflecting on the successes, challenges and lessons learnt from the various aspects of the project.

# Background

Recipes and cookbooks inextricably link with fond memories. Whether it’s an individual’s memory of their favourite apple pie recipe they baked with their grandma, a delicious chocolate chip cookie recipe they picked up at a charity bake sale or their beloved secret penne arrabiata recipe. Much of society stores these memories away by placing them recipes on pieces of paper in the back of cookbooks, creating their own cookbooks and increasingly placing these recipes on technological devices. By storing these recipes it allows them to keep the recipes to look back on and alter as well as share with friends and family to develop new experiences and memories together. Although as society reach a point where many individuals are storing and sharing recipes using technology the possibility of collaborative cookbooks and recipes between groups of people could soon been lost. For generations recipe books have enabled others to view our cookbooks and alter and add new recipes but as society moves into this digital age we appear to be losing this tradition. This can be seen when browsing through the Apple and Android application stores there is a large amount of cooking and recipe management applications but none of these apps offer the possibility to collaborate on cookbooks and recipes with friends, families, clubs or even with strangers who have similar interests. The recognition of this sparked interest into the research into traditional cookbooks and the benefits they provide as well as research into the current recipe applications on offer to help understand the viability of the project being presented.

## 2.1 Cookbooks As A Historical Document

Recipes have been a part of society for thousands of years with the earliest recollection of recipes being the De Re Coquinara which dates back to the 5th century AD. Since then recipes have played a major part in society for so many years with cookbooks now being seen as informal historical documents. Many papers have explored this topic including Mitchell’s paper Cookbooks As A Social And Historical Document – A Scottish Case Study. The paper examined whether Scottish cookbooks published between 1890 and 1990 are historical markers of major events and technological advances in society. The paper found that “although cookbooks might not record events in society as historical facts nevertheless their contents are often a response to historical events.” (Mitchell, 2001). Similarly in the book Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives Through The Cookbooks They Wrote - the author examines cookery books from the US and UK from the 17th to mid-twentieth century. The book documents how women from “diverse backgrounds have found the homely cookbook a suitable place to record their stories and thoughts as well as their recipes.” The book aimed to tell untold stories of these women from the cookbooks. The author used the book to examine these stories to get others to consider cookbooks as worthy objects of serious textual analysis through demonstrating how the recipe books told the history of that time. As well as this the author also demonstrated how recipe books could be used to maintain a connection with the individual who wrote the book even if they were from a different century from the individual who was reading the book and this connection was formed all through the medium of cooking - “How deep are the connections between us – a 17th century mother and myself –despite the time that has elapsed.” (Theophano, 2003). These papers and books mentioned demonstrated how cookbooks can be seen as a historical documents which can tell the story of the time and be beneficial in helping others understand that time period through the analysis of these documents. It is clear that cookbooks appear to stand the test of time and that individuals can still connect with documents that are hundreds of years old. Losing cookbooks would mean losing documentation that can tell the story of a specific time period whether learning about an individual’s specific story or learning about the varying diets or food/cooking trends for cultures all around the world in that specific time period.

## 2.2 Traditional Cookbooks And Their Benefits

Recipes have been a part of society for thousands of years with the earliest recollection of recipes being the De Re Coquinara which dates back to the 5th century AD. Since then recipes have played a major part in society for so many years with cookbooks now being seen as informal historical documents. Many papers have explored this topic including Mitchell’s paper Cookbooks As A Social And Historical Document – A Scottish Case Study. The paper examined whether Scottish cookbooks published between 1890 and 1990 are historical markers of major events and technological advances in society. The paper found that “although cookbooks might not record events in society as historical facts nevertheless their contents are often a response to historical events.” (Mitchell, 2001). Similarly in the book Eat My Words: Reading Women’s Lives Through The Cookbooks They Wrote - the author examines cookery books from the US and UK from the 17th to mid-twentieth century. The book documents how women from “diverse backgrounds have found the homely cookbook a suitable place to record their stories and thoughts as well as their recipes.” The book aimed to tell untold stories of these women from the cookbooks. The author used the book to examine these stories to get others to consider cookbooks as worthy objects of serious textual analysis through demonstrating how the recipe books told the history of that time. As well as this the author also demonstrated how recipe books could be used to maintain a connection with the individual who wrote the book even if they were from a different century from the individual who was reading the book and this connection was formed all through the medium of cooking - “How deep are the connections between us – a 17th century mother and myself –despite the time that has elapsed.” (Theophano, 2003). These papers and books mentioned demonstrated how cookbooks can be seen as a historical documents which can tell the story of the time and be beneficial in helping others understand that time period through the analysis of these documents. It is clear that cookbooks appear to stand the test of time and that individuals can still connect with documents that are hundreds of years old. Losing cookbooks would mean losing documentation that can tell the story of a specific time period whether learning about an individual’s specific story or learning about the varying diets or food/cooking trends for cultures all around the world in that specific time period.

## 2.3 Current Recipe Applications

AllRecipes.com an extremely popular recipe site states that one-third of online cooks use smartphones to look up recipes. They found that 44% of cooks preferred using cooking websites over 19% who preferred to use traditional cookbooks and in the past 15 years the use of cooking websites have surged 207% (All Recipes, 2012). It is clear that technology is becoming the top cooking resource and although traditional collaborative cookbooks have been seen to have many benefits, they are beginning to be lost in the mass offerings of technological cooking resources. Especially with tablets now being used as the replacement of the traditional cookbook with AllRecipes.com in 2013 stating that social referrals from tablet devices to their website was up 787% from 2012 to 2013 as well an increase in page views on the website from tablets (All Recipes, 2013). The popularity of tablets in the kitchen can also been by the vast number of kitchen accessories on offer for tablets such tablet kitchen stands, covers to protect from spillages and styluses to use when cooking instead of touching the screen with dirty hands, an example of this can be seen in figure 1. With accessories like these making their way onto the market and the statistics seen from AllRecipes.com tablets seem the way to go when creating technology applications for the kitchen.



*Figure 1: Belkin Kitchen Tablet Mount*

To help the student understand if there was room in the market for the collaborative recipe application being proposed research was focussed on current popular applications available for tablets. The student explored a few apps from big name companies and a smaller indie apps this is because the student would be more likely to be competing against the available indie apps. Figure 2 outlines a few of these applications with their features and downfalls. Many of these applications are very popular with a high amount of downloads and star ratings. But all of these applications lacked a collaborative feature that enabled users to set up and maintain shared cookbooks. The research showed there is room on the market for the project and also showed that recipe apps are highly desired and used by a large amount of the population. The research also enabled the student to also see the successes of the current apps and what users currently like and didn’t like about these apps which could be possible features that would work in addition to the collaborative features of this project.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Application Name** | **Description** | **Features** | **Downfalls** |
| All The Cooks | A social cooking application | Enables users to find new recipes, write reviews as well as add new recipes and a few neat features like shopping lists and conversion features | No collaborative feature |
| Big Oven | A strong recipe management and discovery application. With over 8 million downloads and has won several awards. | Import recipes from websites  Take an image of a recipe and convert to a recipe. | No collaborative feature.  You have to pay for some functionalities. |
| RecetteTek | A simple recipe application that enables you to create a recipe library and manage them. | Import recipes from a website.  Free text recipe adding.  Search recipe features. | No collaborative feature.  Not very stylish. |

*Figure 2: Current applications research*

# 3. Specification

This project was the idea of the University of Dundee Applied Computing student Kari McMahon who also undertook the design and development of the project. The core aim of the project was to create a minimum viable product that enabled users to collaborate on recipes together in shared cookbooks.

Since the project was the student’s idea there was no client interaction to gain the specifications for the minimum viable product. Therefore student created the specifications based on a combination of own ideas, data gathering and research.

## 3.1 What Is A Minimum Viable Product?

*“A minimum viable product (MVP) is the the most pared down version of a product that can still be released. An MVP has three key characteristics:*

* *It has enough value that people are willing to use it or buy it initially*
* *It demonstrates enough future benefit to retain early adopters*
* *It provides a feedback loop to guide future development*

*The catch to this development technique is that it assumes that early adopters can see the vision or promise the final product and provide the valuable feedback needed to guide developers forward. “*

* (Technopedia, Unknown)

A minimum viable product (MVP) is a way for developers to create a product that is a market led and desired by consumers through accelerated learning. An MVP is producing a product that has just enough functionality to gauge whether there is a market need for this product. The challenge is that there is a significant amount of recipe applications already on the market often with a large amount of features therefore this already sets the bar quite high for market expectations. So the challenge in creating the product specification is that it should mainly be focussed on the specification of the apps core aim which is the collaborative features but also have enough specifications that add additional functionality to the app so it can be put on a level playing field with current recipe applications on the market.