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.

## 3.2 Initial Specification

The initial requirements were an informal list of requirements. The requirements were in two categories functional and non-functional and were set out with shall, should and may. Shall meaning the requirements that should definitely be developed. Should meaning the requirements that should be developed if there is time and may meaning the requirements that may be developed if there is time. The initial requirements proved as a starting point for understanding the applications functionalities. With a list of possible application requirement functionalities gathered from research, a survey was then created to learn more about the demographics for the application and to help prioritise the functionalities and find any new functionalities based on the target markets needs and desires. An example of these initial requirements can be seen in figure 3.

The application shall enable users to create account.

The application shall work offline

*Figure 3: Requirements specification example for functional and non-functional requirements*

## 3.3 Data Gathering

To help better understand the target market and gather specifications for the application a survey was created placed on the website SogoSurvey.com. SogoSurvey was selected over popular survey sites like Google Forms or SurveyMonkey because it was free to use, had a good range of different question types and had useful analysis tools. The survey asked for anyone over the age of 18 who was interested in cooking and cooking with technology to fill out the survey. The survey was distributed via email, on cooking forums and through communication with those interested in the project. The aim of the survey was to understand the applications target market and gather information to help create the applications final specifications. To gain information about the specification there was a section the survey which laid out the 17 possible functionalities that had been set out in the student’s initial specification. The participants were then asked to rate these functionalities in order of usefulness and suggest any other functionalities.

The survey received 19 responses with 13 of the participants being female and 6 being male with the participant’s ages ranging from 18 – 78. Several of the participants in the survey were from a cooking background where their occupations were a pastry chef, dietician and private chef. In figure 4 a summary of some of the responses to questions in the survey can be seen.

*Figure 5: Example final requirement*

**R5 Cookbook Privacy**

**Description:** The user shall be able to set cookbook to private or public

**Rationale:** This is essential as it gives users the choice of who is displayed to the public

**Risk:** High

**Priority:** High

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Question Summary** | **Response Summary** |
| Percentage of participants who frequently use recipe books, apps, recipe websites | 63.69% responded to frequently by selecting 4 or 5 in the scale  1 (Not at all) – 5 (All the time) |
| Percentage of participants who use smartphones or tablets in the kitchen | 78.95% stated they used smartphones or tablets in the kitchen |
| Percentage of participants who were interested in using the project being presented | 47.4% responded yes  26.3% responded possibly  21% responded no |

*Figure 4: Summary of some of the survey responses*

The responses from the survey showed the participants had a clear interest in cooking using technology, the majority liked the idea of the application being presented and they were all from a wide range backgrounds which was useful for gaining a varied response. Therefore the responses relating to the rating of application features were taken into consideration when developing the final specification document. The survey responses were used in connection with the initial requirements document to develop the final specification. The data gathering was beneficial in showing that there was interest in the project being presented and it was worth pursing and having the respondents contribute towards the requirements document helped create a market led specification document. The full survey results can be found in the appendix.

## 3.5 Final Specification

The final specification was created from the data from the survey, the student’s ideas and research. The student examined the ranking of requirements via a frequency table generated by SoGoSurvey. The ranking of the requirements determined the priority in the specification document. Occasionally requirements that were not ranked highly by participants still ended up high in the final requirements document because they were essential to the creation of the application. The requirements marked with shall were the requirements essential to creating a minimum viable product. The full specification document can be found in the appendix and an example requirement can be seen in figure 5.

## 3.5 Specification Flexibility and Managing Requirements

The type of formalised requirements document discussed in section 3.4 is often rigid and fixed. Since the project was the student’s idea and was not a contractual agreement with a client this enabled some flexibility in the specification document. To help create a flexibility with the specifications a technique of using a task board was used which was popularized by the Agile methodology. A task board is “a snapshot of the current sprint backlog allowing everyone to see which tasks remain to be started, which are in progress and which are done” (Bowes, 2014). The benefits of the task board is its simplicity the developer can easily move tasks around if priorities change and add/remove new tasks if the developer realises they are missing a requirement. The task board is so simple it also easily provides a snapshot of progress (Agile Alliance, n.d.). In the project the student used the task board by splitting the formal requirements into smaller requirements in a user story[[1]](#footnote-1) format and then storing them in the online task board called Trello in the same priority as listed in the document. The higher they are on the list then the higher priority they are. The tasks are then marked with a colour – red for todo, yellow for in progress and green for done. This marking helped for an easy snapshot of progress. Trello makes requirements easy to move around and helps make the project more adaptable to change.

When the final specification was set and then moved to Trello then all the requirements were managed on Trello. Using a task board helped create a project that was flexible and was led by information instead of a process where requirements were fixed and based on assumptions made at the start of the project. An example scenario was requirement R1 (Recipe management) was higher priority than R2 (Account creation). At the development stage it was clear creating an account should be developed before recipe management as users account are linked to recipes. So through having Trello the student could easily log on and move the requirements around based on this information. Also by splitting the requirements into smaller and more manageable chunks as seen in figure 6 was really useful because it made tasks easier to achieve and also helped give clarity on the priority of some requirements. For example due to time constraints it appeared creating a recipe and cookbook were important tasks to achieve than deleting a recipe in the time constraints so using Trello enabled the student to easily change these priorities. Often in development it was a clear a new requirement might need to be added which wasn’t though about at the initial requirement stage and using a task board made it simple to easily add or removed requirements based on new information.

**In the document:**

**R2. Account Creation**

**Description:** The user shall be able to create an account.

**Rationale:** This is necessary as it allows the user access to the application.

**Risk:** High

**Priority:** High

**In the task board:**

As a user I want to be able to create an account so I can log onto the app

As a user I want to be able to log in so I can use the app.

*Figure 6: Contrast of document and task board requirements*



*Figure 7: Trello task board for project*

# 4. Project Management

## 4.1 Methodology

A software development methodology is a “framework that is used to structure, plan, and control the process of developing an information system” (IT Knowledge Portal, n.d.). Recipes For Life is a large project and it was necessary to select a software development methodology that would help structure and maintain the project. There are two core software development methodologies – waterfall and agile. Waterfall is the traditional software development process, it is a linear and rigid approach that does not embrace the inevitable changes or revisions that often occur within projects (IT Knowledge Portal, n.d.). Whereas Agile is a set of development processes which are flexible to change, encourages working code over documentation and frequently take opportunities to assess the direction of the project throughout the development lifecycle (Highsmith & Cockburn, 2001). The Agile approach enables a flexible project which can be evaluated honestly and realistically through interaction and collaboration at frequent intervals. An Agile approach was most suitable for this project as requirements, design and evaluation could easily change as the project was explored in more depth and therefore a software development process that enabled flexibility was essential. The most popular Agile methodology is SCRUM which is a very customer centric approach and is based on a lot of customer and team collaboration. This project lacked an official customer and was being developed by an individual so it was necessary to find a flexible Agile development approach that was this less client and team oriented. An Agile approach that was suitable for this was the iterative development process. The iterative development process allows you to develop a system in iterative cycles. The process starts with an initial planning stage where the initial requirements and design are set. Then iterations essentially “mini-project” cycles which occur until the product is ready for the delivery. At the end of each iteration the individual or team has an opportunity to re-evaluate the project and re-organise and change aspects of the project to the fit the needs of the team, individual or client. The iterative approach is very flexible and helps creates a final product that is user centred and information led (Bittner & Spence, 2006).For the needs of the project the iterative approach was built upon to create an iterative methodology strategy appropriate for the project, the diagram in figure 8 outlines this strategy.

1. User Story - A user story is a tool used in Agile development to capture a description of a software feature from an end-user perspective. (TechTarget, n.d.) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)