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Walk Around The World

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Abstract

For many, cardiovascular exercise is an activity that we do not get enough of¹. Studies have shown that physical exercise between 1 hour a day for children over five years of age and as little as 2.5 hours a week for adults has a huge positive impact on our physical and emotional wellbeing^{2,3}.

This project aims to encourage users to do outdoor cardiovascular exercise by positive encouragement through a Mobile Application. By tracking the distance the user travels in each exercise session through device GPS and translating this into well-known outdoor pursuits allows the user to quantify their exercise in terms of well known physical and cultural achievements. These achievements will take badge-like form and other metrics of success such as leaderboards will also exist.

Outdoor pursuits will contain: actual routes such as the West Highland Way and the climb to the top of Everest; popular culture references such as “Route 66” and the (approximate) distance that *Frodo* and *Sam* travelled in J.R.R.Tolkein’s “The Lord of the Rings”; and Global distances such as the distance between capitol cities and simple metrics such as the first one hundred miles.

The user will exercise with a compatible device on their person. During exercise the device will track and log the distance that the user has travelled and add this to their accumulators. If this device is their smart phone then the Mobile Application will notify them immediately when they have completed an outdoor pursuit, otherwise they will be notified when data is collected from the dedicated hardware.

This application will encourage social exercise through outdoor pursuits that can only be completed through teamwork with other users that have met in real life. This intends to extend the influence of rewarding exercise by encouraging users to include their peer group in exercising with them and sharing their successes. For a user, this is incentivised by unlocking achievements only achievable through this social interaction.

An analysis of user trends such as: frequency and duration of exercise with regards to duration of application use; change in exercise duration when achievements are awarded during exercise; and quantity of social interaction with regards to application use life cycle will be used to indicate whether or not gamification techniques could have a valid application in cardiovascular exercise.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Motivation / Context

The number of smartphones being sold per year is increasing^{4,5} and nearly three-quarters of exercisers use technology to support their workouts in some way.⁶ This project aims to utilize this mass market acceptance of technology in exercise and combine it with game like elements to begin an evaluation on the effects of games and exercise. Specifically, this project will look at outdoor cardiovascular exercise where the user is required to exercise with their phone with them.

The main problem I aim to address is the boredom that can arise through exercise or the reluctance to do so in the first place.

Consider a frequent exerciser who repeatedly travels the same route, or the same collection of routes when exercising. This individual may easily tire of the journey or bad weather may discourage the individual just enough that they decide to move their exercise to a controlled environment such as a gym where the benefits are not as profound.

Also consider a different individual who has a relatively short distance to travel and who doesn't exercise regularly. This individual could either travel this distance on their own accord or use a service such as a car or take public transport. With no outside encouragement, and low self control, the individual may be likely use the service based travel method and lose out on all benefits of exercise.

Both individuals above would benefit from positive encouragement for exercise. I intend to provide this positive encouragement through bringing game like elements to the exercise routine in such a way that it can cater for heavy and casual users alike.

The project will allow users to travel along a "virtual route" while they traverse the physical route they are exercising on and will gain achievements for completing these "virtual routes".

1.2 Research Questions

The application of game like elements to exercise is nothing new. As discussed in Section 2.1, other applications have taken different approaches to incentivising exercise. To the best of my knowledge no other product uses exactly the same game experience as the one I propose in this dissertation, so the main points for analysis are with regards to the distinctive features of this experience.

This dissertation aims to analyse the main two following points within the scope of the project:

1. How valid is the application of badge-based gamification to the context of outdoor exercise? I intend to gauge this through measuring the distance travelled and length of exercise duration of users and determine if a change occurs.
2. How valid is the platform for this kind of encouragement? With user feedback as a basis, I will propose whether or not mobile phones are a suitable platform based on preferences of users and ease of use.

1.3 Summary of the Contributions

Applications or Systems developed as part of the work Particular Novel findings from the results
Creation of datasets, code, etc Methodologically: suggesting a new process or way to do things ?

1.4 The Structure or Outline of the Report

Chapter 2

Related Work or Background

2.1 Comparison of related applications

Incentivising exercise is not a new concept in the mobile market. From simple applications that mimic a pedometer to immersive alternate realities, there has been a varied approach to encouraging exercise. These approaches can be shown through the following applications.

2.1.1 Charity Miles

Charity Miles encourages you to exercise by facilitating you to raise awareness of charities and help others as you exercise. For every mile that you run or walk \$0.25 is donated to a charity of your choice, and for every mile you cycle \$0.10 is donated. The money currently comes from a pool of \$1,000,000 gathered by the parent company so you as an end user don't have to pay anything.

The money you accrue during an exercise session is called your "sponsorship" and is only passed onto your charity when you share your success to a social network (facebook or twitter).⁷ Charity Miles say this is to increase awareness of the charity, but it is also a good advertising tool for them.

The incentive here is clear - run to donate. In essence, you are both being paid to exercise and exercising to help out a charity. The monetary backing allows you to quantify your exercise in terms you are very familiar with whilst generating the feeling of satisfaction about helping a charity.

The main drawback here is that there is no defined behaviour for what happens when the \$1,000,000 pool runs out. From a business perspective, the app could easily be re-purposed for non-centralised pool funding where the end user could find local sponsorship, but this entirely changes the experience.

2.1.2 Zombies, Run!

Zombies, Run! is a companion app that encourages you to exercise through audio cues, rich story and a base-building game. As you run you are being "chased" by a hoard of zombies that get closer

and further away from you as you exercise - the closer they are to catching you the louder they become.

In the app you have a base from where you defend yourself from the zombie hoard and are required to leave the base to gather supplies. The story narrative tells you what you need to gather and you find these supplies based on the distance you travel and the route you take. Your success is measured by the fortifications of your base, which you can improve by running faster/further than before.

You are required to wear headphones and carry your mobile phone while exercising. The headphones give you audio queues to immerse you in the story, but it is a requirement of the game experience that you listen to the soundscape provided - you cannot listen to your own music. As endearing as groaning zombies may be, it is understandable that users may tire of hearing it. Also, a user may be used to listening to their own music and use that to zone out of the exercise so adoption from some users might be reluctant.

2.1.3 WalkJogRun

WalkJogRun helps you discover new routes that are geographically close to where you are and record your favourite routes to share with your friends. From your current location it finds and proposes new exercise routes given a certain route length. It can provide turn-by-turn direction help when you are exercising to ensure you do not get lost and will also record an exact route as you run so you can create a new route with the minimum of effort.

Your workout is saved and can be later analysed so you can accurately monitor your progress.

Since the routes are user provided, there is no guarantee that the routes are safely traversable or applicable to all types of exercise - a route that can be walked may not be applicable for a runner due to terrain type, for example.

There is no clear gamified experience in this application, so the incentive is self-provided. The user can only use this to improve their exercise experience and there is not much in the way of encouragement.

2.1.4 Fitbit

I have included a comparison with Fitbit products to display other mediums in which this application can be used. Although it is not mainly based around a mobile phone use it is an interesting comparison.

Fitbit provide a collection of dedicated hardware devices capable of accurately measuring your distance travelled (and in some models the height you have ascended in terms of “flights of stairs”) as a means of tracking your activity. At the core, it is a glorified pedometer with web and phone apps to accompany it and display progress. The devices and apps also make a prediction about the calories you burn each day based upon the distance you travel when wearing the device, weight and stride length.

Each device can show you the progress toward your daily goal (either steps taken or predicted calorie burn) with various visualisation techniques - the simplest of which is a row of five LED

lights that fill up as you near your goal. Synchronization with compatible phones, or through a computer if your device is not compatible, allows a more in depth visualization of your progress.

The gamification aspect is inherent in the design of these products - you set your own goal and you can easily view your progress at a glance. Upon completion of your goal the device vibrates and lights up to notify you. You are also awarded badges for daily completion such as walking 10,000 steps a day and lifetime completion goals such as travelling 100 miles in total.

There is a clear downside to this - you are required to purchase a bespoke device to fully utilize the experience provided by Fitbit. When compared to an app that may be \$1.99 or thereabouts it is a much larger startup cost than the previous examples. However this larger startup cost may be an encouragement unto itself: the user may feel obligated to commit to using the device since they are more financially invested, which may help with the onboarding required to fully benefit from these systems.

Most of these devices are reasonably discreet, the more advanced the devices get the larger they become. Since these devices must be worn mainly on the wrist there are social implications involved. Does the user want everyone to know they are using a fitness tracker? The other applications are more discreet by design, since they are a mobile app they can be hidden easier.

Name	Interface	Requirements	User base
Charity Miles	Mobile App	App and GPS	10K - 50K (A)
Zombies, Run!	Mobile App	App and GPS, headphones	1M - 5M (A)
WalkJogRun	Mobile App	App and GPS	unknown
Fitbit	Dedicated hardware and Mobile App	Dedicated Hardware	1M - 5M (A)

(A) - Android "Play Store"

Chapter 3

Design and Specification

3.1 Aim/vision

The idea of the game is to travel around the world without physically having to be there, inviting the user to realise the scale of the world whilst gaining the positive benefits of outdoor exercise. A user may decide to run around areas in Scotland (the Scotland Mission) and this is achieved through routes such as Glasgow to Edinburgh. Each route is further broken up into manageable stages of a few kilometres and users are awarded badges based on stages/routes completed and overall distance and time. Therefore the user can gain short-term success while working towards the satisfaction of larger goals.

This approach is to test whether or not this type of encouragement could potentially work with outdoor exercise. Metrics will be tracked for individual users to monitor their exercise duration and frequency and will be used to encourage that user to exercise. These metrics will then be used to form the basis of our conclusion.

The physical aims of the project are then as follows:

1. To provide incentives that become intrinsically rewarding. Rewards are primarily linked to stage and route completion and these accumulate to the completion of the entire mission - every achievement brings the user closer to a larger success.
2. To provide long and short term goals to fulfil the sense of achievement. The long term goals are Missions which are achieved through the medium term goals of Routes and easily achievable short term goals of Stages - for example the Scotland Mission has a Glasgow to Edinburgh Route which has a Falkirk to Linlithgow Stage.
 - (a) Stage completion - unlock a photograph of the stage or of a key landmark near the stage. This is achieved by completing a specific stage.
 - (b) Route Completion - stamp in the travel book for that mission relating to route completed. This is achieved by completing all the stages in the route.
 - (c) Mission Completion - travel book for mission is “framed”, certifying that the user has completed all routes in the mission.

3.2 Specification

3.2.1 N-Tier Diagram

The high level components of this system are reasonably simple (figure 3.1). The user requires a mobile phone with GPS enabled and the mobile application installed. This communicates with a Django Webserver with a REST-style API (with a small number of bespoke views since some behaviour does not fit well with the REST specification) which in turn uses Django's Object Relation Model (ORM) to persist these to a database.

The mobile application communicates with the devices GPS location management system to get accurate location information for the user.

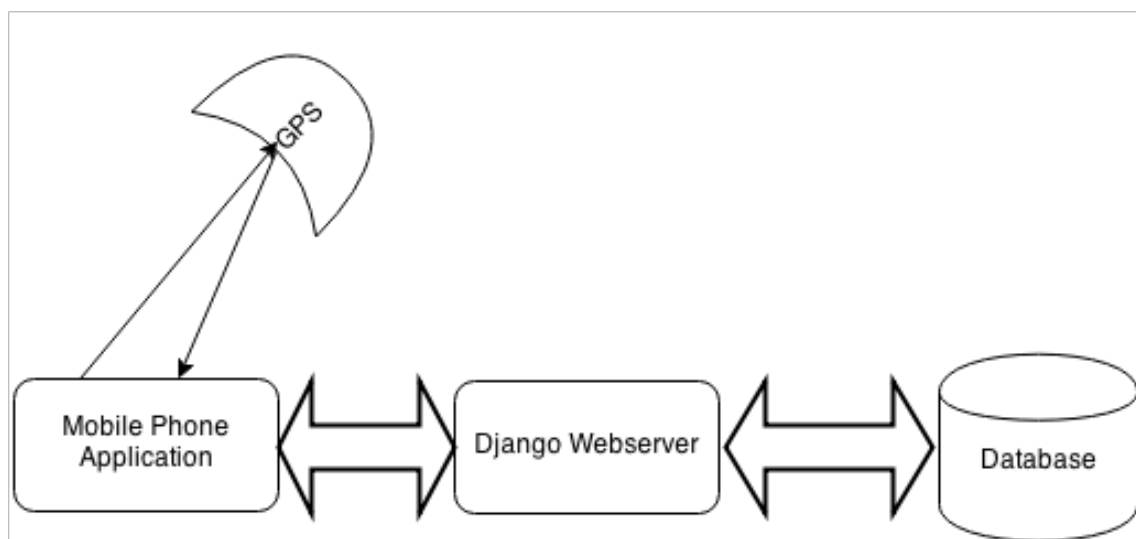


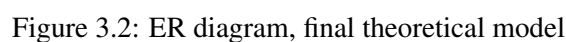
Figure 3.1: N-Tier diagram

3.2.2 Entity Relation Diagram

There have been two significant iterations of the Entity Relation (ER) diagram in this project - the first is the final theoretical ER model and the second is the real world implementation with modifications and extra linking for data transfer optimisation.

The main reason for the implementation modifications is to keep data transfer low between the mobile device and the API. Since the mobile device will be using non-wifi based communication methods the number of bytes transferred will be logged by their network provided and will cost the end user. The application requires many data objects of the same type (when picking a route to travel down from a list of all routes for example) so it makes sense to bundle all the requests into one and reduce the data transfer overhead.

Do implementation ER diagram



The mobile application is developed using PhoneGap which packages a web app into mobile app. The decision to use PhoneGap instead of building a native app is primarily because I come from a web development background but also so we can deploy to multiple platforms easily without needing to change the code base.

The server will not hold state outside the supporting database and will be used solely as a REST API. This is a decision to keep the sever implementation clean and simple. There is also no real gain to maintaining state as the underlying database objects all ready hold the required information.

3.2.4 Walkthrough of Wireframes

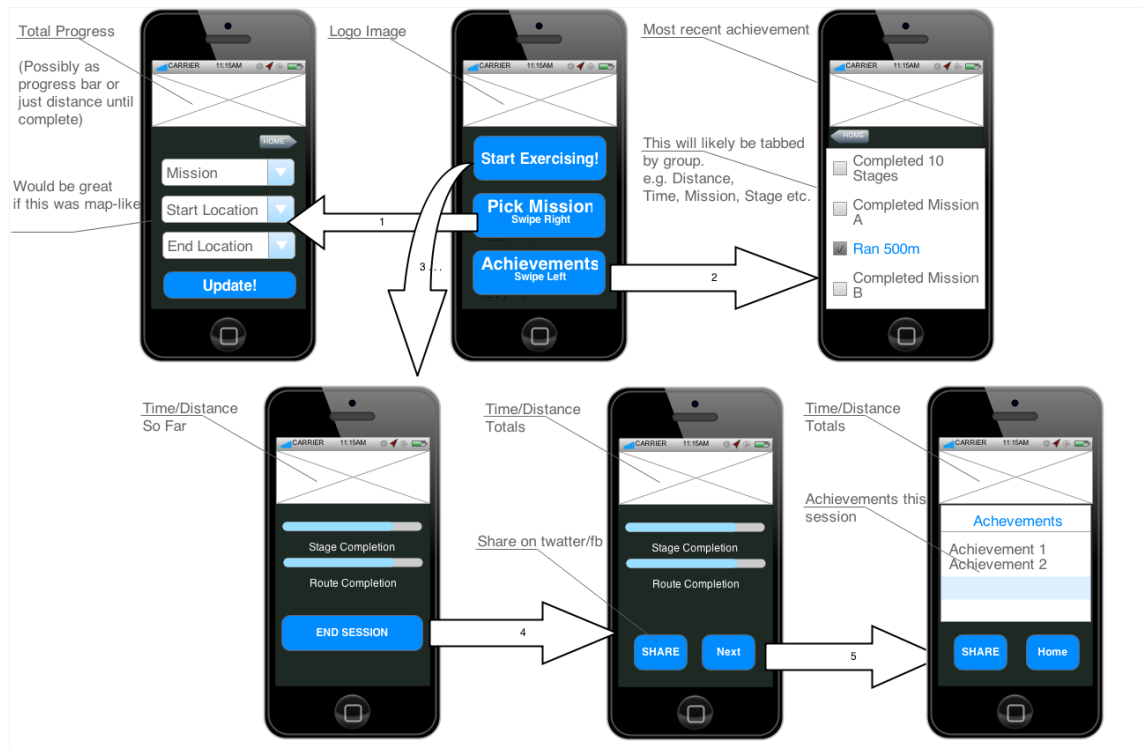


Figure 3.3: Wireframes, initial design

When the app is launched it silently registers with the server allowing the user to use the app immediately. The user is then shown the middle-top screen.

1. From the middle top screen, the user can follow arrow 1 by clicking on the middle button “Pick Mission” to pick a Mission (Run around Arran or Egg for example) and then pick a start and end location. After confirming these choices, the user is taken back to the middle top screen, or at any time can click the “Home” button to return.
2. The user can also view their current achievements by clicking the “Achievements” button on the middle top screen, following arrow 2. These achievements will be grouped by tabs by category - Distance, Time, Stage and Mission based achievements.
3. The user can follow arrow 3 from the middle top screen to notify the app that they are starting an exercise period, telling the app to track their distance. If a Mission and start and end location are not picked (as in point 1) then they will instead be redirected to this screen and are unable to start exercising until this choice has been made. Once they have successfully advanced to this screen, it will display their current progress as they move showing the user how close to completion of their current stage and overall route they are.
4. When the user has finished exercising, they will click the “End Session” button and be taken to the first summary screen - following arrow 4. Here statistics from their exercise will be shown and the option to share this on several social media outlets.

5. The user can then move to the second and final summary screen, following arrow 5, where they will be shown any achievements they were awarded during that session. The user will also have the option to share these on social media outlets. From here, the user can click the “Home” button and be taken back to the middle top screen.

3.3 Notable design decisions

3.3.1 Explicit caching

As was mentioned in Section 3.2.2, the minimisation of network traffic is of great consideration when dealing with mobile devices. I did not want the mobile device to make repeated API calls for resources that will not change in the short term - resources such as what missions are available, what routes belong to what missions and what stages belong to each route.

The main case for this is as follows. A user may open the app for the sole purpose of browsing all missions and their routes, and any progress they have on these routes before they start using the app for exercise. In an unmanaged situation the app could call the API each time it lands on a menu to pick a mission or the routes for a mission - if the user is browsing then they may see the same information provided several times.

If we remove data transfer from the equation all together and focus solely on the user experience then caching will give a better user experience in terms of loading speed. Since caching means we do not have to hit the API each time we want to see something we have seen before, we can load selection menus faster.

Note that I only intend to cache data endpoints that are unlikely to change in the short term or those that cannot feasibly change in a situation like this. The “progress” endpoint which provides the data about a users progress along given stages will not change if the user does not initiate an exercise session as there is no data provided to show otherwise.

These caching services are used as singleton-like facilities in the application to ensure consistent data throughout the application, and also to allow the addition of new data from any point in the application and use that new data in a different part at a later time.

3.3.2 Exercise Session Management

Due to the environmental implications brought on by GPS, a user may drop out of connection for finding their location. The user should not be penalised for this as it is outwith their control and is not a direct error on their part. Something as simple as running through a tunnel could initiate the loss of signal.

To counter this, I have designed the exercise session object (herein referred to as just a “session”) to accommodate for this.

When a user decides to exercise, a new session is created through the API. The users device is then given a unique ID for that session that only they have a knowledge of (in the first iteration of this

implementation this ID is a direct mapping to the ID of the object in the database, but in a future version this could be something more obscure). Only this user can update this session and it can only be updated if you know the unique ID for that session.

When you have a GPS location and are ready to update, you know the unique ID and are able to update the session. If you do not have a GPS location, then as long as you are still polling for a GPS location the app will hold onto that unique ID so when you eventually get a GPS location you can update easily.

The method for updating handles completion of many stages. This implies that if you update a session and the stage you are currently exercising on completes you will be immediately moved onto the next stage on the route, if one is available. This also handles a use case where you drop out of GPS connection and travel far enough to complete more than one stage on the route you are on. Then the method will log your progress on your last known stage, completing it, and then will complete as many of the next stages as are available and that you have enough accumulated distance to complete.

When you end the exercise session or close the app, the unique ID for the session you are on is lost and so cannot be updated. This effectively “ends” the session without explicitly doing so.

This should allow the user to drop in and out of GPS connection without being penalised for doing so.

3.3.3 Distance Verification

Need to actually implement this

Chapter 4

Results and Analysis

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Acknowledgements

I would like to thank ...

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