Diep final report

During this semester's Design and New Media module I have had the opportunity to assess and improve my design practice through projects that have challenged my creativity, problem solving and technical skills. This report reflects on my individual performance, focusing on Project 2 and 3. It also applies the DIEP framework to analyse my strengths, weaknesses and strategies for improvement as well as personal reflections.

In this module, I have learnt and practiced three complete project exercises, the most significant of which are Project 2 Being Human and Project 3 APP360, in which I have designed the task management application ‘pudding time’ and gained a deep understanding of how to design the functionality and user interface of the application to consider the user's behavioural habits and emotional needs. I gained a deep understanding of how to design the application functions and user interface that consider the user's behavioural habits and emotional needs. Initially, I thought it was enough to consider user behaviour and add more features to enhance the functionality of the application. However, after conducting methodological research in User Observation Methods and Usability Testing (Hass, 2019), I realised that emotional design is also important. For example, by adding an illustrated story of the pudding brand character (Figure 1: Project 2 illustration, Author’s own work, 2024) to make users feel friendly and cared for by the brand, it was also able to increase the user's favourability. However, in this project, I haven't fully addressed the challenge of seamlessly integrating the illustrated storytelling interface with the app functionality. In contrast, project three (a smart desk app designed to control smart desk functionality) presented different challenges and insights. Originally, I underestimated the various needs of the target users, with different study habits and ergonomic preferences. However, interviews with international students revealed key insights. For example, I designed personalisation

features and custom desktop layouts (Figure 2: Project 3 illustration, Author's own work, 2024) Project 3 illustration) that not only catered to users' individual preferences and emotional needs, but also improved usability and reduced clutter. My main challenge was to integrate all desktop features into a unified interface without overwhelming the user. Simplifying navigation and using intuitive sliders for control can be an effective solution to this problem. Through the design process of these two projects, I learnt to prioritise user needs, adapt to challenges and adopt a structured approach based on observation and testing. These experiences have greatly shaped my understanding of user-centred design and emotional engagement in application development.

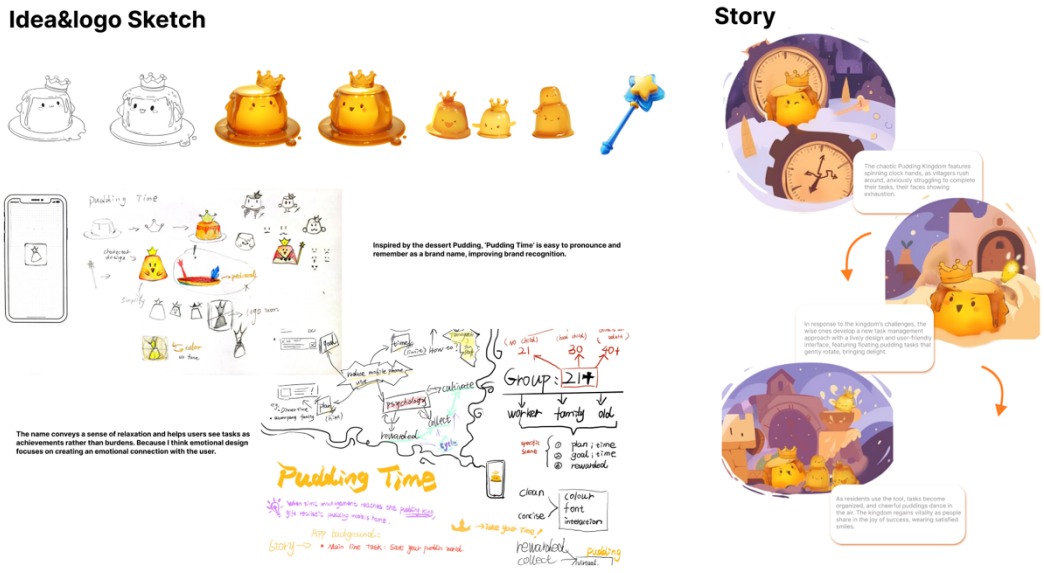

Figure 1: Project 2 illustration

Figure 2: Project 3 illustration

In both projects it made sense because during the design process I applied what I learnt about the ‘Problematic Interactive Systems Design Method (PACT) (Benyon, Turner and Turner, 2005) to all my project practice (Figure 3: PACT illustration, Author 's own work, 2024). Furthermore Garrett (2003) said ‘User-centred design means understanding what users want, how they think and how they behave, and incorporating that understanding into every aspect of the process.’ Having created user models as part of my work on both Project 2 and Project 3 (Figure 4: Personas illustration, Author's own work, 2024), I realised the importance of combining emotional design with functional requirements to create a user-centred experience. Firstly, it highlights that designing for behaviour is not enough; emotional engagement plays a key role in user satisfaction. For example, in Project 2, I initially focused on the interaction functionality, if the task management functionality would fulfil user needs. However, observing how users emotionally connect with brand elements revealed that creating a warm and friendly feeling could significantly enhance the user experience. This realisation is in line with the concept of emotional design (Norman, 2007), which emphasises that aesthetically pleasing and

emotionally resonant interfaces can increase user trust and engagement. Second, this insight challenges my previous belief that adding more functionality increases the value of an application. Instead, it suggests that simplicity combined with emotional connection is more effective. For example, the ‘pudding’ character in Project 2 fosters a sense of caring and playfulness that motivates users to use the app, especially given the importance of understanding ‘people’ and their emotional needs during the design process.’ A good application design is intuitive and user-friendly in addition to being visually appealing. It should fulfil the emotional and practical expectations of the user while reinforcing the image of the product (Hoi, 2024). Finally, the understanding from Project 3 deepened my understanding of the complexity of emotional design and catering for different user groups. Although I initially underestimated the range of international students' preferences for ergonomics, the user interviews revealed how cultural and environmental differences can influence user needs.

Here I realised the importance of designing aspects of adaptive features (personalisation modes). The usability of the product was improved through these features that could address the different learning habits and environments of the students. Despite, the fact that the product I designed is a virtual product that is not available on the market, I was able to incorporate features such as adjusting the lighting and desk height into the design. I learnt how to use convenient buttons and interface layouts to create a different user experience. These realisations may have influenced my future application designs and have certainly motivated me to focus more on integrating emotional design and user diversity into the design process. Therefore, these two projects confirm that a focus on user-centred design cannot be about a single function; it also requires a deeper understanding of human emotions, activities and environments. These methods are applied to deal with the

difficulties that may be encountered, ensuring that each idea considers the reality of the world context and the needs of the user.

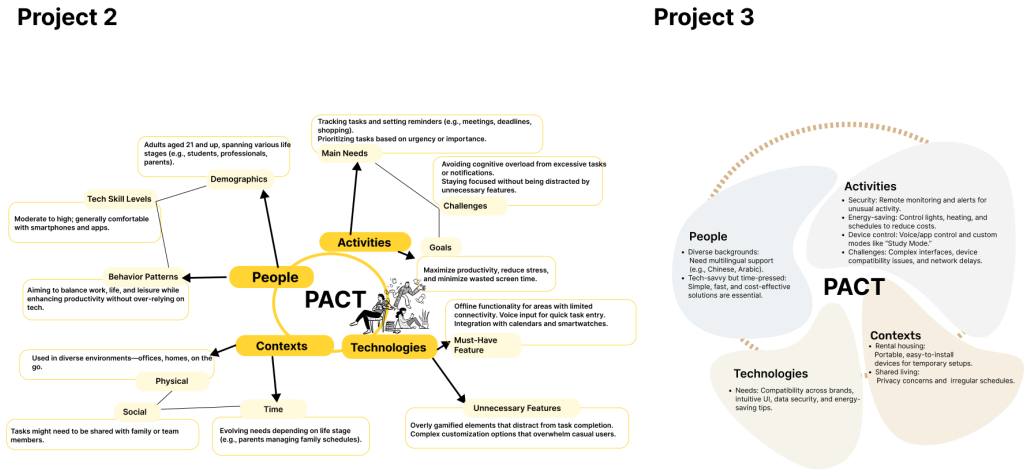

Figure 3: PACT illustration

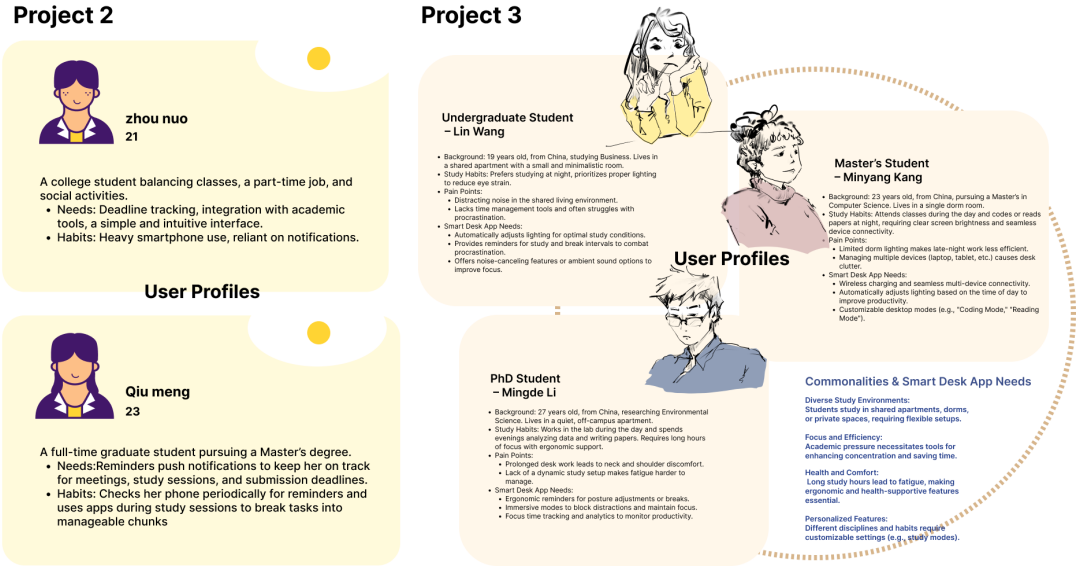

Figure 4: Personas illustration

During the course of these two projects I discovered how helpful it was to gain a deeper understanding of the course system and what I had learnt. Firstly, I

was able to apply the PACT framework (Benyon, Turner and Turner, 2005) that I had learnt to both projects to ensure a user centred design process. This method was also based on allowing me to effectively design for user emotions as well as the layout of functionality. Secondly, I was able to incorporate the observations from the user testing into the design in a way that was effective and provided a better understanding of the user's behaviour and preferences. I also found shortcomings in my practice compared to the methods I learnt. Regarding the integration of visual and functional elements; in Project 2, despite my efforts to seamlessly integrate the storytelling elements with the core functionality of the application. This shortcoming indicates a shortfall in my ability to balance aesthetic appeal and usability. While the ‘pudding’ illustrations were effective in creating emotional engagement, they detracted from the task-oriented functionality of the application and were abrupt on the page when designing the layout. This also highlights the need for a better understanding of how to integrate emotional design (Norman, 2007) with functional goals. With regards to user testing integrity; in project 3 I spent a lot of time designing the icon and interface and only conducted one user test. This suggests that I need to improve in this area; planning processes within effective time management to ensure that all aspects of the project receive adequate attention. These practices overall have improved my approach to design. Realising that it is important to focus on the user's emotional design input in addition to being user-centred, I then plan to apply these methods in further depth to better integrate with application prototyping. For example, I plan to explore more great case studies to better integrate skills and methods in my future designs. I will prioritise the emotional user experience to ensure that my work meets the needs of a diverse range of users.

The two projects completed during the course will be of great benefit to my future career plans. Applying the PACT framework of methods (Benyon, Turner

and Turner, 2005) in this course will enable me to design more comprehensive solutions for future tasks as well as enhance the user experience of using the application. This is because it will help me to create projects that are not only practical but also emotionally resonant. In particular, the lessons I learnt about the integration of mapping stories and functionality in Project 2 and the need to plan my time properly in Project 3 will give me food for thought for future projects. In the coming sessions, I plan to build on these experiences and lessons to deepen my skills and refine my project ideas, for example, by strengthening my Figma skills and coding abilities, and learning to integrate creative ideas with storytelling projects. Skill enhancement will enable me to create more interactive and high-fidelity prototypes, ensuring that my work will pass both academic assessment and practical application. The storytelling project will be to improve my ability to organise my thoughts on the project to ensure that I am truly applying emotional design (Norman, 2007) to solve users' problems and improve the user experience. By applying what I have learnt from Project 2 to Project 3 and applying this experience to my subsequent learning, I believe that I am able to provide impactful designs that resonate with users and effectively meet their needs.

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