Activision | Call Of Duty Companion App
Designing a concept that increases the users' engagement

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Santa Monica College, IxD Program Fall 2020
Design for Community Change

My Role:
Research, UX/Concept Design, User Interviews,
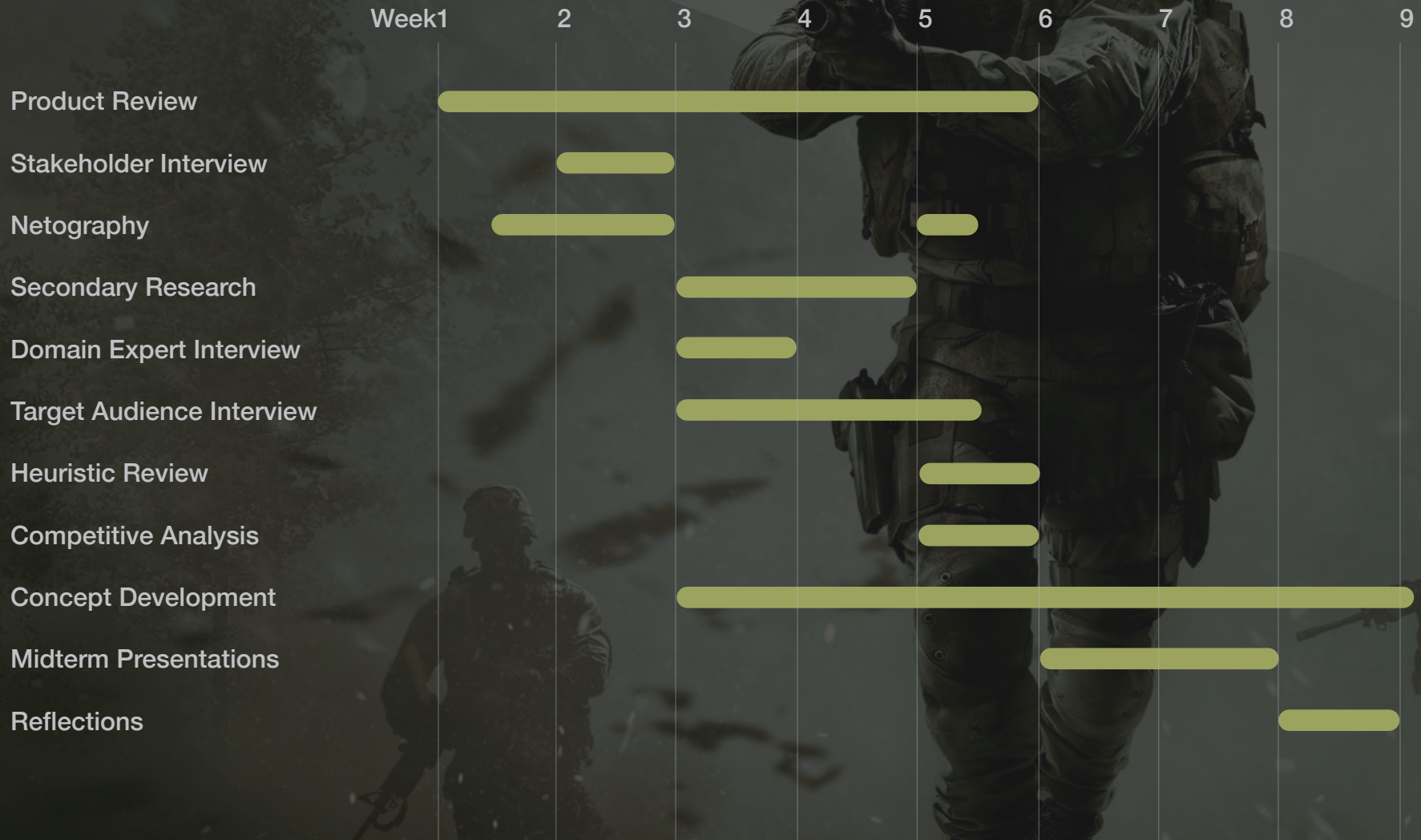User Scenario, Proposal Video

Teammates:
William Gamez

Duration:
8 weeks

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AMI KUBOTA - ACTIVISION 3

Challenge

Our challenge was to find out the users' needs and proposal solution that improves engagement and social offering of the Call of Duty (hereinafter referred to as "COD")'s companion App.

Problem

Our research shows that COD players love to learn. The players desire to perform better, and they are also willing to help other players to level up. They wish the App to be more helpful and efficient to support their gameplay. While some players see great values in viewing their Stats in App, other players feel the App is not for them. Another area we noticed was where the users get information about COD. The users search their questions on youtube, ask on Reddit, or watch gameplay on Twitch to stay connected with the COD world.

How Might We

improve the social offerings of the app to create a more helpful experience for users that advances engagement and expands the user base ?

Our Proposal

At the presentaion, we proposed these three ideas to Activision.

1. Editable Friend List

The users currently see game tag names, which makes it harder to identify other players. Giving the ability to edit the friend list helps them to connect with other players faster and easier. The ability to set a notification for only the players they want to notice is also convenient.

2: Video Feed

The market demand for video feed is incredibly high. The video content ideas about a game are variable (Gameplay, tutorials, or funny moments) and have many potentials. Adopting the feature that refects this market demand could also boost the App's user base.

3: Tutorials

We discovered that COD players are eager to learn and help each other to level up. Providing tutorials in the App helps users keep connecting COD world within the COD platform while it can increase satisfaction, which also makes sense to the App's tag line, "Download free today to play smarter, win more, and stay connected to the world of Call of Duty, wherever you go".

Research

Product Review

To get to know the product, I play COD both with a console and a PC, with friends and myself, and I downloaded and used the COD companion App for 6 weeks. The experiences of playing with friends were more optimistic overall, It was fun sharing the experience in real-time with friends, and I liked I could ask things that I don't know to more experienced players. I sometimes felt hesitant to join some groups since I am not that good player and didn't want to slow them down. I had a hard time navigating the App. Lastly, it was a little challenging to add new friends.

Mark Burmeister
Director

The high-level goal is ENGAGEMENT. Ultimately we want to help players play longer.

Drew Gallo
Senior UX Designer

Certainly, there's a lot of people who are very involved with their stats. They want to know how they're doing, how they can improve.

Alex BenBassat
Senior UI Designer

Call of Duty is a tough game. I think a lot of people jump into the Call of Duty, and just, a lot of people get crushed, and it makes it not very fun. What we typically find is that when you do play with friends and you create more comradery, it doesn't matter if your stats aren't very good because you are with your friends and you are having fun.

We are just trying to find ways for the app to be; how can we put through a community experience that then aids them both playing the game more. and you create more comradery, it doesn't matter if your stats aren't very good because you are with your friends and you are having fun.

Stakeholder Interviews

The meeting with Activision helped us to learn their goals and insights about the App users. Their primary goal is to aids the current player to play longer. So I started to think deeply; what motivates players to play longer or comes back to the game, and how the App can support that? They also wish to see the opportunities for improving the social offer within the App.

We also learned that Stats analysis is currently the most popular feature within the App. From their research, the stakeholder claims that the players want to know how they can want to know how they can improve their performance. At the same time, comradery is the key to lead a positive experience for the Call of Duty. The users have a better experience when they have better comraderies because it creates a fun experience playing.
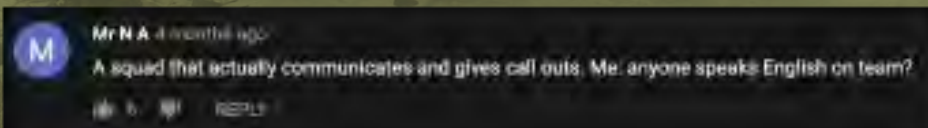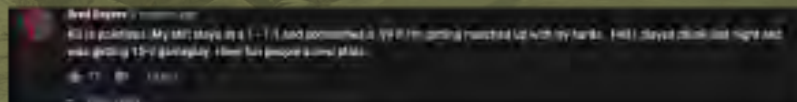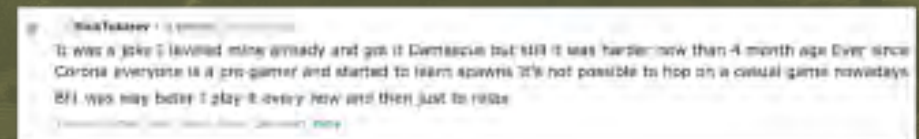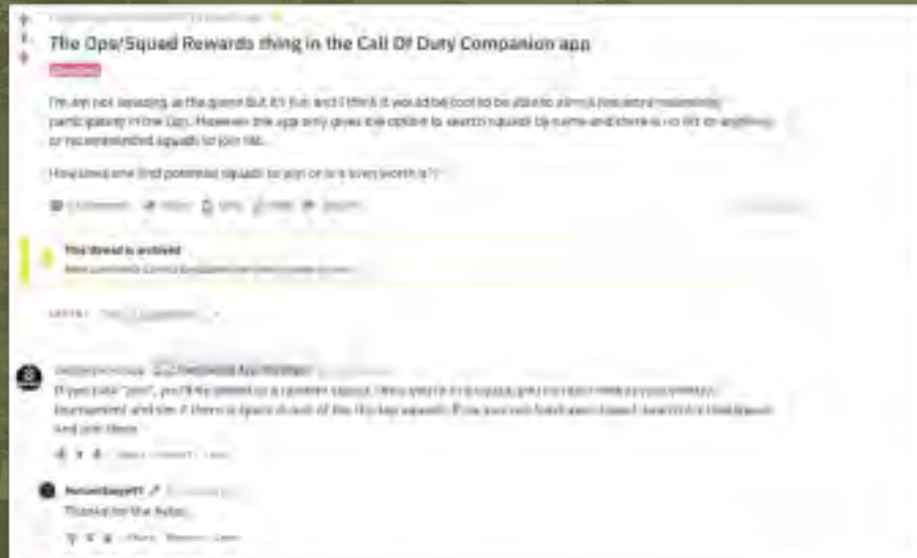
Netography

To know people's concern and voice around the product, I collected the reviews from their official App store page, comments & threads on Reddit, and blogs & articles on the internet. From this, I understand how players are willing to help each other for level-up, some players just want to have fun and not care about stats, and many players go thrid companies' platforms to figure out and ask how it works within the App. Furthermore, many players got back to the Call of Duty after Covid as being able to connect with people is important for people during lonely times of the pandemic.

this art. Thus the music helps to portray the game environment to the player, elaborating beyond the purely visual level of the text, and making the environment seem more aesthetically substantial and verisimilitudinous in the process.

Bioshock exemplifies how the FPS can use diegetic music to texture the game experience by voicing conceptual ideas (what composer Garry Schyman refers to as the communication of 'intellectual aspects' [Larson 2007]), which act as a backdrop to the player's primary gameplay activity. The audibility of the diegetic music in *Bioshock* alters, depending on the avatar's location relative to the music source; the player is thus reminded of his or her character's virtual incarnation. In this way, the setting of the game – both the location of Rapture and the landscape of ideas – is the context against which the small scale gameplay (the avatar's location and player's adopted subjectivity) is set, in order to create epic texturing.

Bioshock's diegetic music may not be directly dynamic in responding to the player's interaction through musical changes, but, in musically texturing the gameworld and creating conceptual scenery for the gameplay, made available to the player through the in-world ears of the gamer's avatar, it nevertheless helps to encourage immersion through creating a compelling context for play. Such musically invoked constructs, however, are not limited to those created specifically for a game.

2 in 1: video combines auditory & visual sense

In essence, video brings together two things that catch our attention like nothing else: **movement and noise**. Both these features play a significant role in conveying an efficient message. As opposed, text relies on a specific choice of words, punctuation and visual cues (i.e. emojis) to set a desired tone.

Our brain **loves** video because it is programmed to retain visual content better than a page loaded with words. According to studies, the average viewer remembers <u>95%</u> of a message when it is watched, whereas only 10% when read.

Introduction and background

In recent years, the online broadcast industry has developed rapidly with the emergence of various live streaming platforms, such as Twitch, YouTube, Douyu, Huya, and so on. Twitch (www.twitch.tv) and YouTube Gaming (gaming.youtube.com) had more than 470 million regular visitor members in 2016 (more than 50% of gamers in the US, Europe, and Asia Pacific) [1]. By the end of 2018, at least 1 million people were watching live streaming on Twitch at any time, and the total duration of viewing time on the platform was recorded at 434 billion minutes. In addition, the number of streamers on Twitch increased from 2 million in 2017 to 3 million in 2018, with nearly 500,000 streamers

dents focused on interpersonal relationships.

dings show that it is a complex mix of desires and motivations that leads ls to play Happy Farm. In addition, the varying degree of importance h the three types of gratification provide evidence in support of the ons upon which U & G theory is based: different expectations and rive people's choices regarding online game involvement.

y, we found a symmetrical relationship between motivation and gratification, with the motivations for playing and gratifications from playing Happy Farm that were ranked first and last among the three types, almost corresponding to each other, and all correlation coefficients strongly related. This finding also provides evidence in support of U & G theory, in that a stronger desire to play Happy Farm may lead to greater satisfaction when playing.

Another issue may involve whether or not greater intensity of use of games always accompanies increased satisfaction or whether level of intensity of use moderates/mediates the relationship between uses and gratifications. For example, Wan and Chiou (2006) found that the psychological needs of players of online games reflected Heizberg's (1966) two-factor theory (satisfaction–dissatisfaction or motivation–hygiene), with differing evaluations on satisfaction and dissatisfaction dimensions. Because addicts' compulsive use of online games appears to come from a reduction in their dissatisfaction rather than from the quest for satisfaction, it is worth examining further whether or not Happy Farm players who are not addicted have different patterns of use and gratification from players who are addicted.

Twitch's audience growth since 2019
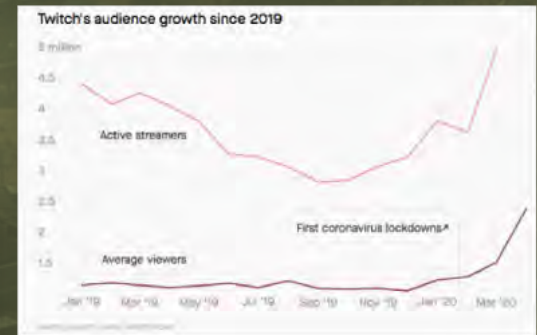
Secondary Research

Especially in FPS, music are used to emphasize the game's storyline and sounds uses to help avoid boring monotonousness. Thus, it could increase user engagement and immersion. Video has similar elements: movement and noise and those get people's attention. Plus, research shows that viewers are more likely to remember video content than text format documents. The video format is also used in Marketing to create a consumer's desires. At the same time, research with an online-game called Happy Farm insists that more players desire the product, the players may feel more satisfaction with the game from their study.

Live Video gameplay streaming has been generating high market demand. YouTube gaming had more than 470 million (2016), and Triwch had more than 1 million visitors (2018). Moreover, the pandemic has affected increasing traffics for video-streaming.

Domain Expert Interview

Meeting with the previous project manager at Riot Games and a current game designer at Riot Games helped us learn how to set strategy for this project.

Contents lead the users to log in and makes user to return to the App

While they feel the App may need to have something

within the App that is more enjoyable for players to log in and stay on the App, they also advise us to consider and motivate them to return to the App.

Understanding what valuable for COD players

Consider about what ideal to the COD players, instad of Activision, might be the path to bring a solution. They also insist COD players would appreciate practical Tips or something that would help to improve their gameplay. They also mention about the potential of the COD league, while noting that its target audience is core-players.

Home Page

From top to bottom, it offers the user to quick view the summary of different sections. While the promotion message goes to the top temporary, the Stats (the most popular feature) is usually set at the top and easy to find.

Navigation

Although the primary navigation is easy to find and responds quickly, some contents under the sub-navigation menus were hard to find. For example, store is located under the player. Plus, some of the sub-navigation menus are hidden from the screen unless the user scrolls horizontally, which might cause the user to miss some pages.

Content Quality

The content tone is Military & formal (it also uses Military jargon), consistent with the brand. Yet, some headings and links are not self-explanatory. It looks crowded, and it is hard to scan sometimes.

Visual Design

Overall the feeling and styles are consistent with the game. Some colors don't match with others, and the numbers of fonts styles can be eliminated more.

Features & Functionality

The App offers many features. Including but not limited to: stats, Ops (weekly challenge to earn Rewards), see who is online, the friend comparison feature which show at a glance information not easily viewable in game.

Heuristic Evaluation

My partner and I conducted a heuristic evaluation of Call of Duty companion App together. In the process, I felt that the App carries so many features & contents and looks little crowded, which can lead the users to feel overwhelm or confused while they navigate through. On the other hand, I thought some section titles or features need some explanations in order to the users to do not wonder what it does or how it works. Although the explanations should not appear on the App to add more crowdedness. I wondered how we can improve this without eliminating the contents & features. That made me think of some UI ideas that we could use when creating a prototype. Which are but not limited to: expand paddings to reduce the amount of infomations when users view it all at once, or use horizontal scrolling containers to maintain the hierarchy on a page.

		COD	Destiny 2 companion app	WoW companion app	Fall out Pip Boy	Blizzard Battlenet
Market Positioning	Business Model	Utilities	Game IQ	Entertainment	Game IQ	Social network
	Game Ganre	First person shooter	First person shooter/Action Role playing	Massively multiplayer online role-playing	Action Role playing	multi genre
	Access	Both app store and Google play	Both app store and Google play	Both app store and Google play	App store, Google play and Windows	Both app store, and Google play
	Rate in App Store	4.8 • 134.3K Ratings	4.8 • 77.4K Ratings	5.0 • 2 Ratings	3.7 • 1.2K Ratings	4.7 • 21.7K Ratings
	Price (For App)	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free
	Target Audience	COD players	Destiny players in Clans	WoW players in guilds	Fall out player who has already purchased Pip boy add on in game	Blizzard Users/community
	Main Feature	Stats from in game play	Provides access to your profile, friends list, notifications and messages, Forums, Creations	Manage missions and campaigns, conduct research about game, guild mate chat	functions as a HUD in game play	coordinate game time, discuss strategy, or just keep in touch
	Seller	Activision Publishing, Inc	Bungie Inc.	Blizzard entertainment	Bethesda software LLC	Blizzard Entertainment
	Age Rating	12+	9+	9+	9+	4+
	Uniqueness	Strong STATS	Featured content/news	Manage and deeply plan events with guild mates while offline	Synchronized to in game experience, meant to function as an addition to in game play	Simplified and specific to connect friends and chat
		Ops: Weekly Challenge using rewards system	Shows what events and activities are live in game	Daily events featured	Mini games in app	QR code to add friends
		View who is online	Code of Conduct on Onboarding	Chat with guild mates	Demo mode, no need for login to enjoy	Filter Mature Language
Feature Comparison	Social — Add friends	yes	yes	yes	N/A	yes
	Social — Custmize Friends List	no	yes	no	N/A	yes
	Social — Group Chat	no	yes	yes	N/A	yes
	Social — Direct Message	no	yes	no	N/A	yes
	Social — Scheduling	no	yes	yes	N/A	No
	Social — Other	View friend's performance & who is online	Access to in game profile from app	view events calendar	N/A	QR code scan for friend add
	Stats	yes	yes	yes	Yes	N/A
	Shop	yes	yes	no	N/A	N/A
	In-Game App	no	no	no	Yes	N/A
	Notification — Y/N	Yes	yes	yes	No	Yes
	Notification — Type	News, When a friend is online, Updates, Recieving a gift	Invites to games from friends, messages, news and info from the app	guild reminders	N/A	Friend Request, Chat Messages
Advantages & Disadvantages	Advantages	Strong Stats	Built in looking for game option to quickly link players	Conducting research in app allows you to unlock rewards in game	Makes in game experience much more robust with on brand theming	It makes it really easy to connect with people who are already blizzard players
		Able to view who is online	Joining other team playing live, also able to see if there are turining on their microphone or not	essentially serves as a planning app, to gather information to support in game progress	In app mini games offer something different that is not available in game	Friends List Sourting is easy
		Chance to earn the rewards	really clean looking, neatly organized layout	manage in game characters and information		Filter Mature Language Toggle Button
		Able to send a gift	featured content	Chat with guild mates in app		
			Clan progress monitoring	Gives information about in game events		
	Disadvantages	Some users feel rewards updates are slow	Limited functionality for those who prefer solo play	If your subscription expires for WoW it limits the features you can use in app	No social features at all, purely a solo experience	If you don't have Blizzard friends it is useless
		Not strong social feature	Notification settings are pretty nested and hard to find	Limited to only chatting with guild mates, seems to operate solely as a planning app	Offerings are minimal, a bit of a uni-tasker as far as apps go	Some term are not familiar and there is no help icon to inform or any description
		Crowded UI		Buggy, says its logged in when it is not		

Competitive Analysis

To conduct competitive analysis, my partner and I downloaded, sign-up, and tried the apps. We also reflected on what the actual users say about the apps from viewing online review sites. Here are the summaries: Destiny 2 and Blizzard Battlenet have a clean UI and layout that navigate easily. Blizzard Battlenet's friend list sorting and filter mature language toggle buttons were thoughtful for users and stood out. Fall out Pip-Boy offers mini-games within the App, which is entertaining. WoW's App shows its purpose, planning, clearly. The App lets the user manage and deeply plan events with guildmates while offline.

Concept Development

START

Brainstorming

After the individual research, I filled a concept poster to explore the concept idea. By reviewing the rough concept idea, we found who has similar ideas. Then, we were paired of two.

User Interview

To understand the user, we conducted target audience interviews to extract users' goals, I research to scope their needs.

Create Concept

As a group (pair), we gathered the each other's research and reviewed insights from the user interview to create concept.

Create Proposal

We learned tips for creating a general proposal, and then we were challenged to create a three minutes proposal video.

Create Story

We illustrated a story of what the users' experience would look like if our concept comes to life.

Concrete Ideas

We focused the pain points and find the opportunities to develop concrete ideas.

Review

We showed our draft video in our class for feedback. In the session, some concerns arise for the possiblity of our concept.

Modify Concept & Proposal

From the feedback, we research father around the concerns. After the research and discussion, we modified our proposal contents and video.

Stakefolder Review

We presented our proposal video to COD Companion App Design team (stakeholder), and received feedbacks.
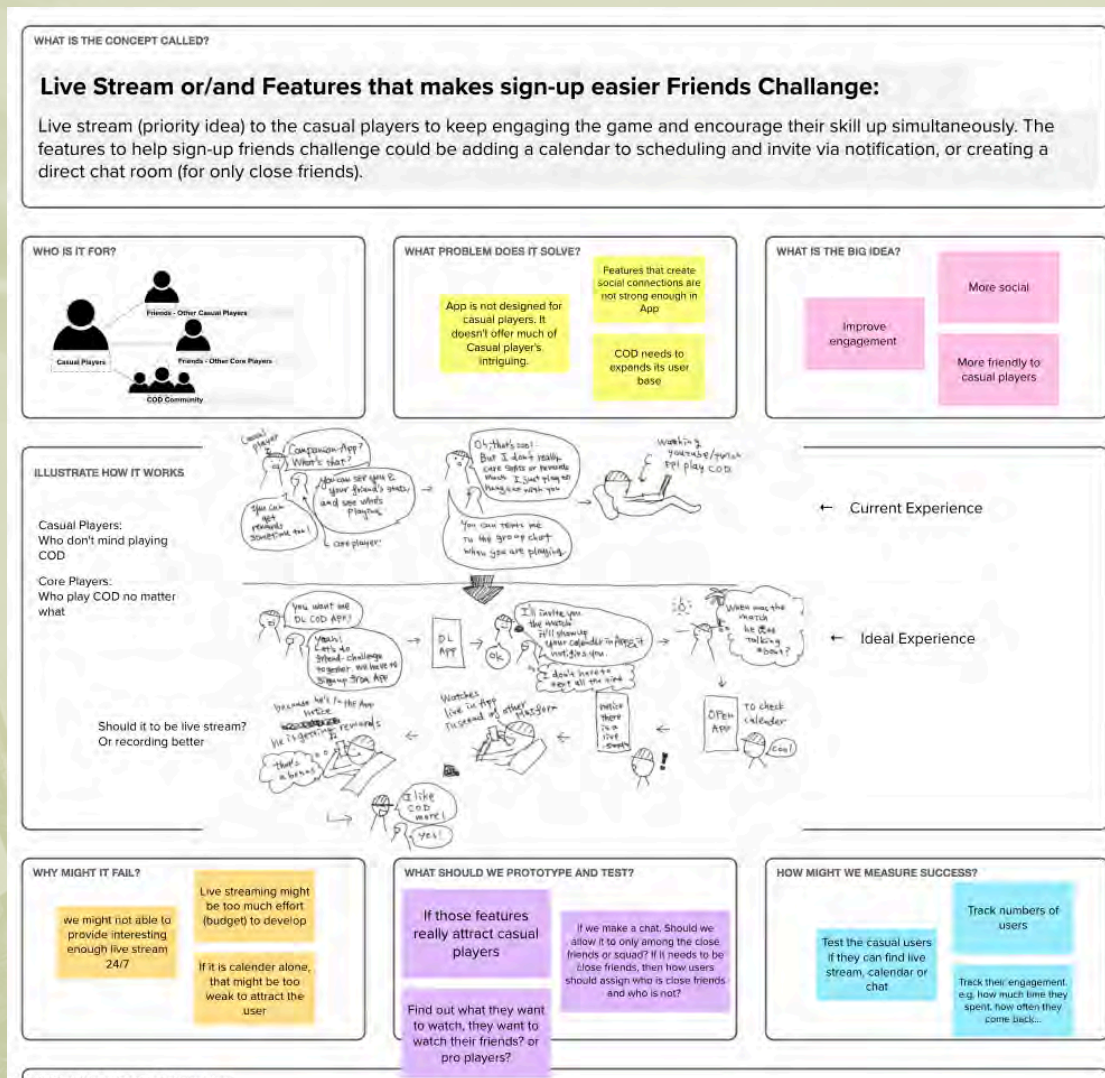
Brainstorming Concept

I filled this concept poster worksheet after the secondary research and before creating an interview guide. Although the ideas here were only initial ideas, this process helped me develop questions that I would want to ask in the target audience interviews.
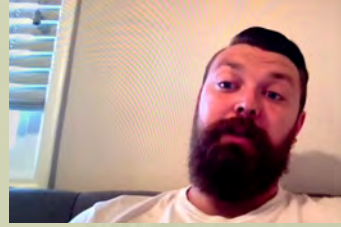
Participant A
David
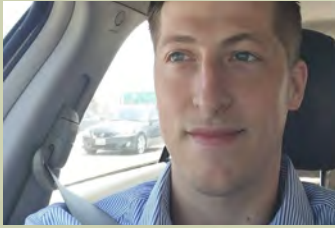
- male / 35
- play: hardcore gamer
- values: functionality, customazation, Learnable contents, friends
- wishes: easier way to add friends and view & manage freind lists

"Let's say I'd like to look for the player I just played with in the App (in the current friend list) I'd feel like I have to look through hundred person list to find out."

Participant B
Blaine

- male / 30
- play: for fun with friends
- values: Stats, friends, funny or leanable contents
- wishes: More contents in App. Suggets friends are the same level.

"I'm starting to watch it (video contents of the game) more and more. Sometimes I'm like just learning, I kind of want to see what other people are doing. And then some people are just fun."

Participant C
Evgeny

- male / 26
- play: for fun with friends
- values: customizing guns, Learnable contents that helps his own game-play
- wishes: contents that helps his game performance or related to custom guns

"I don't open the app because I don't find it useful. what would be useful in the app is to actually be able to see the weapons and their customizations, like, what performance it will give you. That'd be helpful."

Participant D
Ian

- male / 37
- play: solo and friends
- values: focus to play, pratical
- wishes: something that makes him to care about App

"Maybe something on youtube, if there's somebody that you get information from, they send it to you, and you watch it. But I don't seek it by myself."

Participant E
Josh

- male / 33
- play: for fun with friends
- values: Stories behind it, Learnable contents, funny creators, easy
- wishes: less things going on screen

"I feel that the app is for only someone who cares Stats." "I love watching video. I don't want to sit and read. Watching videos makes me wanna play the game again."

Target Audience Interview

To avoid interviewing people who are among my own friend circle, my partner recruited two participants for my interview session, and then I recruited three participants for my partner. As a total, we conducted five interviews on Zoom with a duration of 30-40 minutes. After I interviewed two, I participated in the other three as a note-taker to observe the interview.

The participants were, all males, the age of 26-35, including a previous pro gamer and players who claim themselves casual players who only play to have fun. All of them play COD for over ten years.

User Needs

1. Need editable friends list

Participant A expressed his frustration about the friend list. He sometimes doesn't recognize a player since some players in his friend list are met online through the game, and they don't play together normally. Also, it only shows game tag name. He wishes that if the App allow him to label, rename, or custom his friend list.

2. Need to be more attractive for wider audience

While Participants A and C appreciate track Stats in App, participants C, D, and E, play COD often, but they don't care about Stats so much. Therefore, they feel the App is not for them. Participant D also mentioned that the App's is overwhelming and it doesn't motivate to stay in the App.

3. Need contents that help gameplay

No one tries to gather information about game whitin the App or offical website. Participants A, C, and E often seek information about COD on YouTube, Reddit, or Twitch. Participants C and E express their desire to learn Tips such as how to load the gun they recently get or summarize the new update. They want to play better, and practical and helpful information motivates them to access the contents.

Participants A and C watch Gameplay. They are curious about how other players play. Learnable or funny contents are more attractive. Participants B also mention he would click and watch clips of gameplay whenever it pops up on his Social Media feed. Participants D doesn't seek information himself while he enjoys contents shared by Participants C. Most of the contents that Participants C shares were video format than articles.

Collect Insights

After the interviews, we narrow down the user needs while reflecting on insights from our previous research. Then, we developed our concept. The primary insights that we got are the players are seeking something that practical and helpful for their performance in game or connecting to other players better. Especially from the interview, I was concerned that the players who play call of duty ten years and hours on weeks feel the companion App is not for them because they are not interested in Stats. That led us to think about what features can attract those players and for them to find it helpful? Plus, what no one really tried seek to find game's information within the App or Call of Duty community (e.g. Official homepage) was a surprising point yet stood out.

Concept

The features that increase the users' engagement and are helpful for the player's gameplay which can lead the App to allow the Call of Duty players set up deep roots and develop a strong sense of community.

User Needs 1:
Ability to customize a friend list

↓

PROPOSAL

Editable Friend List

User Needs 2:
Contents that can keep them engaged

↓

PROPOSAL

VIDEO FEED

User Needs 3:
Ability to gather information within the COD platforms
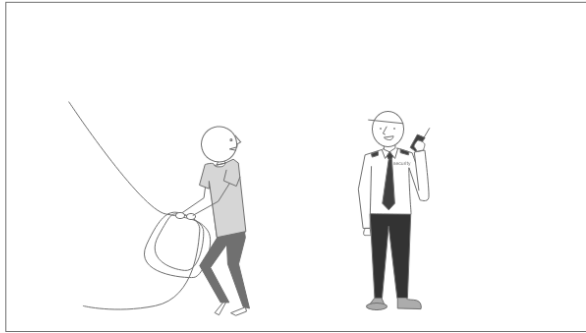
Assigning verified status

Featuring content creators

↓

PROPOSAL

TUTORIALS IN APP

Concrete Ideas

To propose our concept, we grow concrete ideas by focusing on the users' pain points. To decide on the features, we keep in mind which are not only helpful and can increase the engagement but have ability to gain the player to feel sense of community as well.
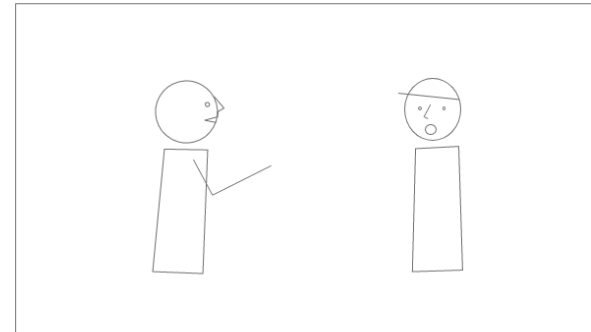
Bob meets Joe while Joe is installing cable at Bob's job.
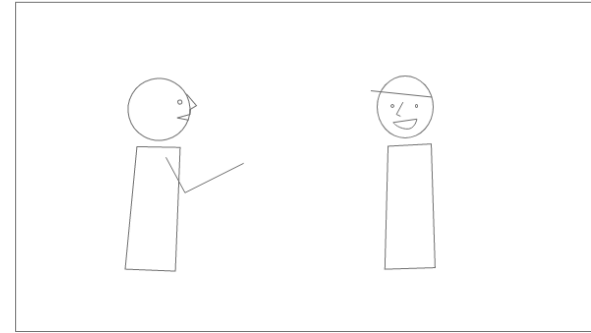
While Bob and Joe make small talk, they discover they both play call of duty.
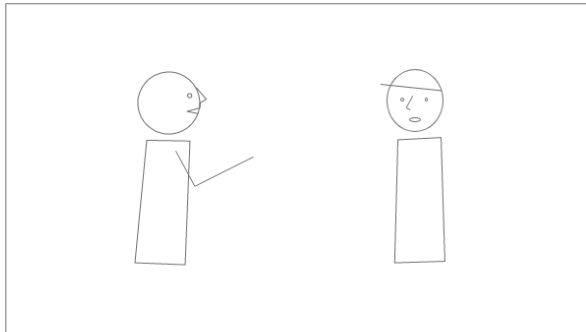
Joe asks Bob if he has tried to ride the train after the latest update.

Bob remarks that he didn't know he could do that.

User Scenario

Using the proposal feature ideas, I created the outline of the story of what interaction might look like for two gamers. Then my partner and I refine the details together. After getting our classmate's feedback, we again modified the stories for the final version of video.

Considerations for content filtration

Data Scientist Recommended

- Convolutional neural networks
- General adversarial networks
- BERT models

These models can interpret and identify negative reviews and undesirable content with around 85% accuracy.

Modify Proposal

We showed our draft then got feedback from the class. The main concern was the possibility of the Video Feed and Tutorials. We learned we need to present our concept ideas more convincing, thoughtful, and realistic to the stakeholder. Next day, we asked the stakeholder what would be the concern or obstacle to embedding video contents within the App. The stakeholders' primary concern was how to ensure acceptable content. Activision wants to avoid contents which are: 1. offensive (language or subject matter) 2. affect negatively to the brand (negative views of COD) 3. content leaks (Publicly reveal information that is not supporsed to be out) we researched a little further and added the consideration of content filtration such as BERT models as it might help for the matter.

Final Video & Presentation

To create the proposal video's outline, we follow the three steps (Need/Obstacle, Proposal, and Solution). Although we created the bone of the proposal (structure & outline) together, we separated the tasks to complete. My partner finished the script and record as the voice over of the video, and I was responsible for the visial of the video. I used Adobe XD to wireframe the scenes and used photoshop and illustrator to create the Graphic assets. Then, I used After Effect to complete the edit.

Reflection

While the presentation and intention for the concept were well received, the stakeholder's interests focused on tutorials. With the presentation's feedback, we learned the filtering models would not be strong enough to ensure the contents. Because of the nature of the game, there is so much toxicity that we can't rely on algorithms. Having a professional gamer, content creator to create content had a positive response.

How to categorize the video contents was another feedback. While we'd like to ensure the feed is meaningful to the player, we also know that each player would like to learn different stuff. Also, there are gaps between players' levels, and I think this should be tested with users. Furthermore, we also know that some users feel there is too much content in the App from research. I also want to make sure that this new feature will not be overwhelming for the users.

Lastly, I wonder what the best way to provide the tutorials. Should it be a regular video, or should it be more interactive to create a more unique experience? The experience or content itself should be attractive enough for the user to login to the App to access it (instead of searching on YouTube).

Appendix

To go to the google drive, please scan the QR code below.