Case Study By Ralph Buan

Call of Duty Companion App

Fall 2020 | Design for Community Change

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Project Kickoff

Ideation Phase

Activision Pitch

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Research Phase

Prototype Phase
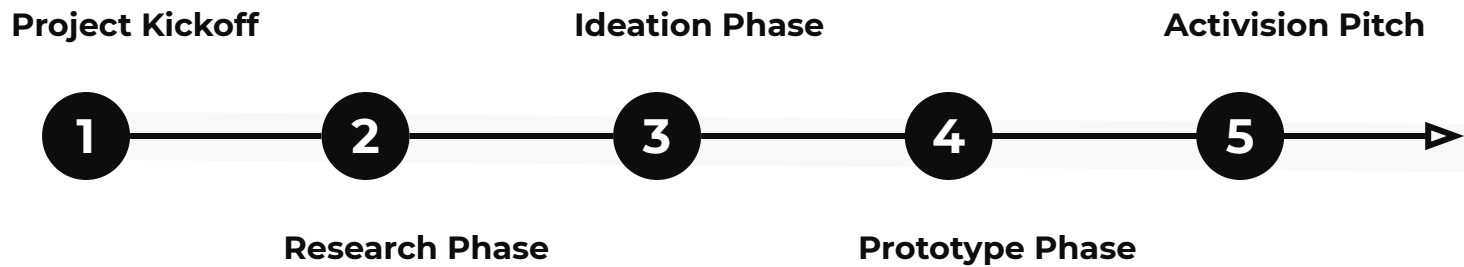
Project Challenge

Challenge

Activision's Consumer Technology team challenged us to create an engaging social feature for the Call of Duty companion app that helps players connect with one another.

Role

User Researcher | UX/UI Designer

Team

Ralph Buan | Christian Enriquez

Christian and I worked collaboratively throughout the course of the project and took turns leading interviews and ideation sessions.

How might we incorporate a player rating system that rewards positive behavior and encourages new relationships?
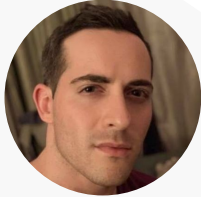
Stakeholder Interview

Mark Burmeister
Director

"We want players to play together, work together, socialize together."

Drew Gallo
Senior UX Designer

"Finding someone you enjoy playing with through random games is extremely rare"

Alex BenBassat
Senior UI Designer

"How can we get users to play using their stats as collateral?"

The companion app team wants to **create a new experience** that serves the main game in a way that doesn't require studio approval or implementation. They want **a social feature, unique to the companion app**, that they'd have full control over.

To jumpstart the research process, they guided us through possible ideas and topics, mainly around social interactions, such as squads, rewards, friend challenges, stats, and LFG.

This initial meeting set **expectations**, **limitations**, and **considerations** for potential directions. We asked questions that pertain to both design and business goals.

For this brief, Activision's immediate goal is to **help players play COD longer so that they are more likely to spend money.**

COD: Modern Warfare

- Steep learning curve for beginners.

- Voice chat enhances the play experience especially in team games like Warzone.

- Strategy plays a role to a team's success.

Companion App

- Overwhelming amount of features, disorienting to navigate through.

- Lack of content focus.

- Easier to manage friends across platforms.

Secondary Research

I began my research by looking for journals and articles about the **positive aspects of video games**. For this project, I hoped to **leverage the cooperative aspects of Call of Duty** to **encourage new social connections**. Here are some of my key findings.

1 The values of a good game liken to that of a good home: embracing interactivity, learning from failure, striving to be better, and being conscious of one's decisions and how they affect people and the world around us.
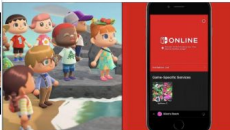
2 Guilds are formal group structures within MMORPGs. These in-game communities encourage lasting relationships and promote cooperation among members.

3 Game mechanics that facilitate cooperation among players can lead to stronger social bonds .

Competitive Analysis

Competitors				
Developer	Nike Training Club	Los Angeles Lakers	Bungie	Nintendo
Industry	Health & Fitness	Sports	Destiny Companion App	Nintendo Switch Online
Price	Free	Free	Free	Nintendo membership needed $2.99/month $19.99/year
Purpose	This app includes guided workouts and training advice. Users are also able to purchase Nike gear and shoes.	The Lakers app is a hub for fans that shows game schedule, updates, news, stats, and more.	News, rewards, and team management	Keep track of things. Splatoon keep track of stats Animal Crossing has chat function, really diffuclt to use
Readability	Big, bold white text for titles against images. Less important information is greyed out but still easy to read against the white background.	The grey text is readable against the white background.	White text on black background makes it easy to read	Seamless on readabily. Great visuals and simplicity
Responsiveness	Very responsive. No lag during or between workout videos.	Interactions are quick but not consistent throughout the app.	No delay. Has animations that are smooth. No glitches found yet	Great and seamless response. Very smooth and delay free.

Heuristics Evaluation
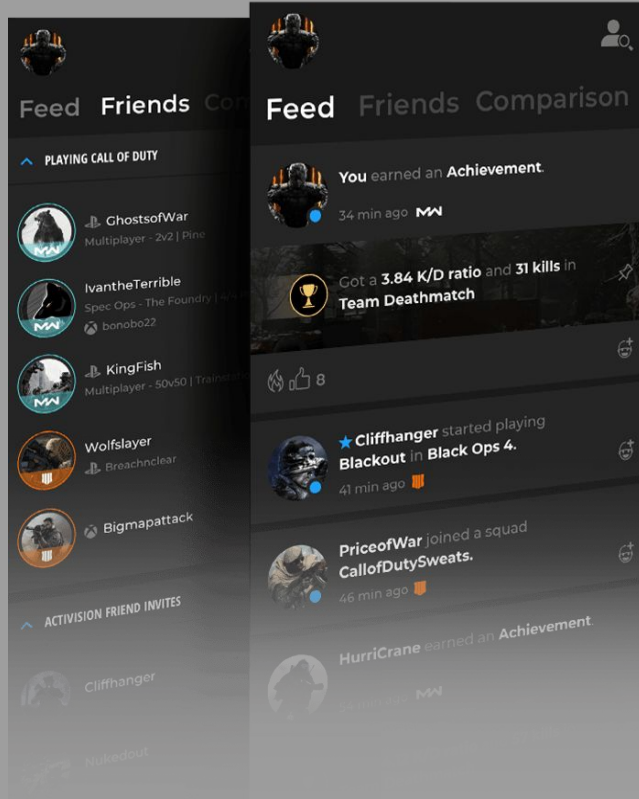
Homepage

No indication of app's purpose

Cluttered with content and text

Lacking visual hierarchy

Unclear distinction between content areas

Navigation

Primary nav bar uses jargon

Sub nav blends in, easy to miss

Buttons don't contrast to background

No app wide search, only player search

Features and Functionality

Easy to manage friends

No clear distinction between reaction icons

Automatic add to squad

Comprehensive, not focused

Visual Design

Consistently bland styling

Lacking visual appeal

Many flat, text-heavy sections

Heavy use of emphasis

Content Quality

Heading unclear, poor visibility

Densely packed content, not scannable

Catered toward core user

Action-oriented copy, serious tone

Netnography

Screenshot	Link	Source	Keywords	Kind of user	Description of the context	Insights	Opportunities
Take a screenshot of an interesting comment or post that represents a relevant conversation and behavior; insert it in the cell	*Insert the link of the entire conversation or post from which you took the screenshot*	*Insert the source from which you took the screenshot; write down the channel and the specific group*	*Write down the words you used to find the topic and other keywords that help to describe it*	*Describe the user/users involved in the conversation; might be a student, a parent, a professor, etc...*	*Explain the context of the entire conversation/topic, what is it about and how the community interact*	*Write down all the findings that came up in your mind, they can be related to users behaviors, needs, values*	*Write down design opportunities you see related to the findings you identified*
Traveling to Dortmund for GoFest	https://bit.ly/2FTLGo9	Reddit forum r/Pokemongo	GoFest Travel info Security	Mother of a little child pokemon fan	US mother of a 7 yrs old child ask for information about travelling expenses and security as she never travelled to Europe and doesn't know if it will worth for the GoFest. Participants are very active in giving advices on how travel with a lower budget. Other parents exchange their perception about the country and experience for children.	1. No dedicate page about travelling to Dortmund for foreign travelers. 2. GoFest as an opportunity to visit other places 3. Enjoy pokemon catching while traveling	Develop a webpage where helping players to organize their staying in the city
IS THE MP5 THE BEST GUN IN CALL OF DUTY HISTORY?	https://estnn.com/is-the-mp5-the-best-gun-in-call-of-duty-history/	PCGamers site was the source They had a forum talking about Meta weapons https://forums.pcgamer.com/threads/what-is-the-best-weapon-youve-ever-used-in-a-game.3462/page-2#post-39773	COD Gamers Assets	gamer talking about best weapons in COD	There were a lot of talks about the best weapons ever used in games. What were the meta weapons for gameplay. Many people talked about different games such as battlefront. But lot's of players talked about COD and how there were a times assault rifles that trumped everything.	Have to be careful with what weapons you bring in the game. People can take advantage of wepons and can possibly ruin the game Many people call certain weapons hackks because they shoot through walls one way, but your personal weapon might not shoot the other.	Have the ability to make decisions that will not leave players feeling as if it is so unbalanced, as well not make them feel as if players can expoit things easily. Can ruin the game for everyone.
	https://www.codforums.com/threads/is-it-just-me.14003/	COD forum where there seems to be a person experiences some imbalance usuals that are effecting old gameplay habits	COD Forums Is it just me?	Really good COD player that has dimished themselves in play	COD player that has always been pretty good. But for some reason now gets easily one shoted, is dying from battles that are supposed to clearly be extremely easy for them. Is dying in ways that should'nt occur. Feels extremely frustrated and is not sure if they are still playing the same game. Looking for other players possibly having same issue.	This could be happening because Activision is not taking the time to possible increase power in previous weapons or NERF the new weapon. A lot of times there's a balanced curve that developers need to remember in making sure everything stays balanced. a weapon can't dip so far under the line that it is unusable and forgotten. But also new weapon can't be so powerful that it makes any other weapon in the game useless.	Detect ways that you can have conditional scenarios when using powerful weapons.
ANGELS OF DEATH	https://www.codforums.com/threads/plunder-with-no-vehicles-game-mode-ruined.14004/	COD forum focused on removing vehicles in plunder	COD Ruined No vehicles	Players who play plunder mode often no longer being able to use vehicles	There were apparently a lot of people taking advantage and exploiting vehicles in COD, so they decided to remove them in an update. It got a lot of people enraged. This caused them to trash talk the studio and say that instead of fixing the situation they blew the thing up and removed it. Making the game no longer enjoyable.	Try to fix issues before removing them. Usually if something takes longer than it needs to is the only reason to make adjustments.	Find out some ways to replace things temporarily if there is an issue thats too grand to do something about at the moment.
	https://www.trueachievements.com/forum/viewthread.aspx?tid=1214540	True achievements website Fcused on gaming news	COD Rewards XP Sales	Player who is finally happy that they are allowing special on double xp and weapon xp	They love the fact that they are doing this. But hate that they do it towards the end of the seasons trying to make people pay money or grind really hard in the game for it. Activion trys to make make their money as aggresively as possible only to after a period of time say, now that you spent your money and time, We willnow stop getting peoples money and give you opportinity the get tyhe stuff you wanted in a way that should have been done in the first place.	Players hate it when companies do this. It's almost like an employee putting in their 2 weeks notice at a company, only to finally have the money decide to pay the employee what they are actually worht. Why is this not done in the first place?	Seek ways for players to receive opportunities for double xp through using the app. Make it optional, instead of a lottery. Which could frustrate people.
WARZONE	https://www.trueachievements.com/n42008/call-of-dutys-racist-content-should-have-been-stamped-out-a-long-time-ago	True achievements	COD Racist Removed	Players talking about article that has been placed out in the net talking about how Activion and Infinity Ward are finally going to try and stop acism in the game. Why was this not done before?	It frustrates a lot of players in the forum seeing that only now after the George Floyd incident is the company actually doing something about Racism. People have had emblems and other stuff showing sweastikas and kk symbols. The toxic environment should have been removed a long time ago	Finding ways to remove toxic players can help with introducing others to game People may try to play game and then remove themselves from it after seeing racist content from other players	Have ways to promote equality in the game through companion app content. Have months or weeks dedicated to causes out in the world.

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Domain Expert Interviews

Geoff Moore
Senior Manager Product Creative
Homer By Begin

Brandon Caiting
Game Designer
Riot Games

Types of COD Players

1 The stereotype homophobic misogynists who are a vocal minority.

2 The 30+ year old nostalgia players.

3 The younger "kids"

4 The other. Smallest demographic but a very diverse group of people.

"Don't make it parasitic. Let it be interesting by itself."

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Target Audience Interviews

"When it comes to playing games, where you're dealing with strangers, that if you meet a person who's rather cool, you can tag them for special traits that they have that will be useful for later gameplay."

- Sean

We conducted **remote user interviews** with Call of Duty players to better understand the game's **social dynamics and mechanics**, specifically noting **problem areas** and **opportunities**.
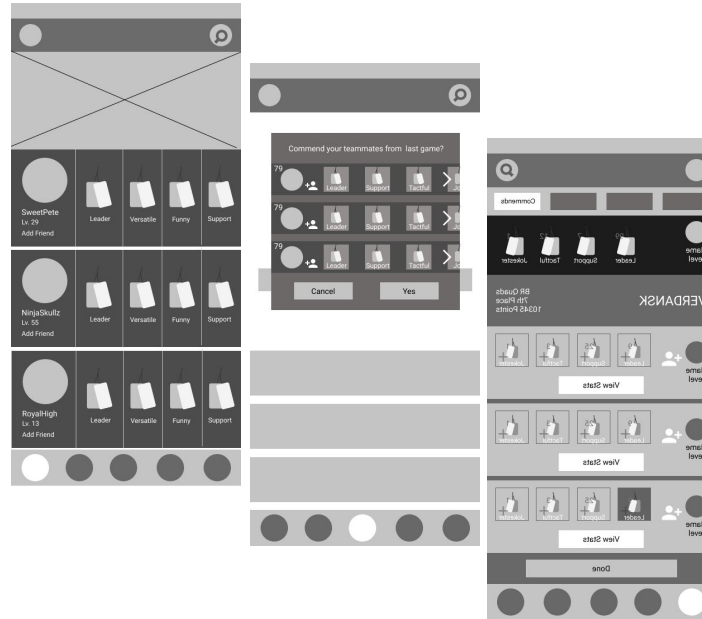
What stood out to us from these interviews is the idea of **commending** or **tagging other players** using special attributes, something we would continue to explore and research.
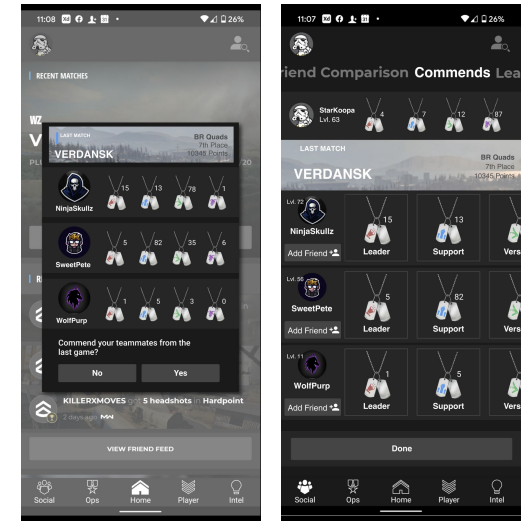
Concept Development

1   Abstraction Laddering
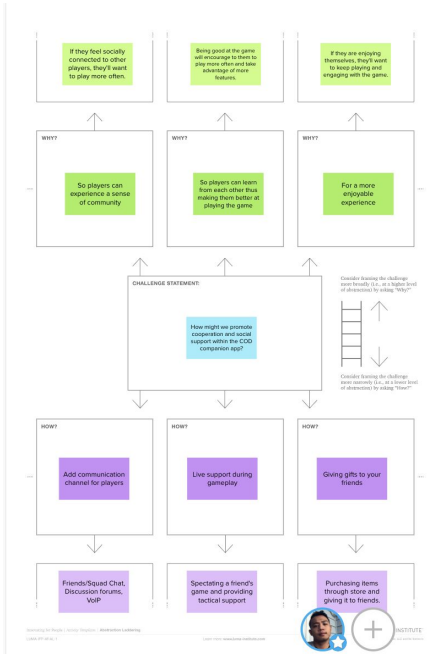

2   Wireframes

3   Hi-Fi Prototype

Midterm Presentation

Results

The Activision stakeholders liked the idea of assigning positive attributes to other players. They imagined alternative use cases for the commend system (i.e. a good way for squad leaders to rate people in his squad.) This solution could be an effective way to combat toxicity and help high-quality players find other high-quality players.

Value Propositions:

- **An easy and fast way to befriend other players.**
- **The validation one gets after being commended.**
- **A way to identify others' playing styles and roles and to use that information for later gameplay.**
- **Formation of new teams and alliances.**
- **Combat toxicity and harassment.**
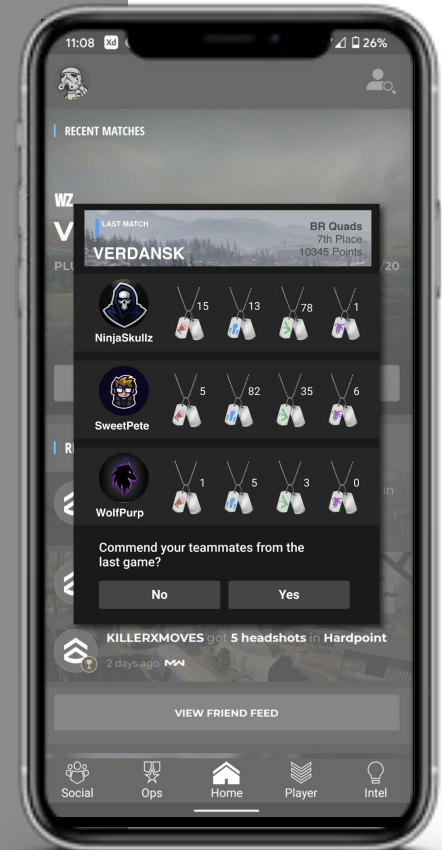
Reflections

Our idea is strong and pointed in the right direction. However, there were some things that we overlooked and failed to address such as the possibility of overwhelming users and the incentives for rating.

We spent too much time building the high-fidelity prototype when we could've used that time to develop the solution more and address potential pain points. We also tried to cover too many bases instead of keeping it focused around a central goal.
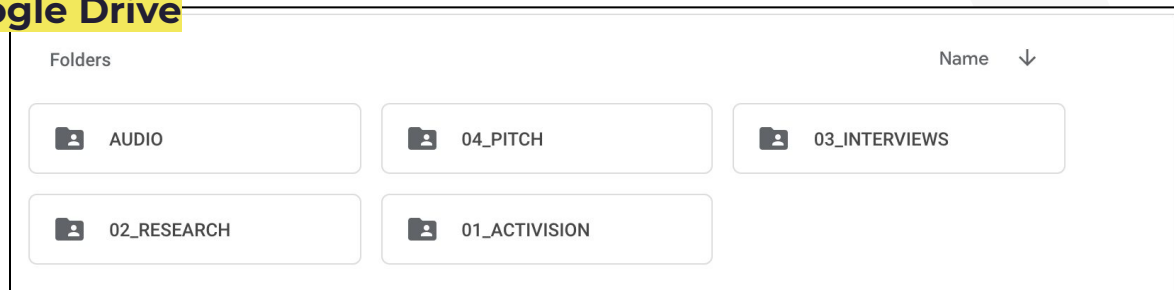
Questions for further exploration:

1. **How do we get players to engage with this feature?**

2. **What are the various triggers and rewards?**

3. **What are the different points to prompt to rate?**

4. **What's the incentive to rate other players?**

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Appendix

Google Drive

Folders   Name ↓

| 📁 AUDIO | 📁 04_PITCH | 📁 03_INTERVIEWS |

| 📁 02_RESEARCH | 📁 01_ACTIVISION |

Miro