

Integrating Gratitude Into Social Media

RESEARCH REPORT BY

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Executive Summary

General

In this report, we cover how we conducted research to discover how people document and share gratitude.

Method

- Our team is following the process of Goal-Directed Design, or GDD. This process offers solutions that achieve the users' goals.
- The Research Phase is important to GDD because it supplies us with qualitative data about our potential users for the app we are designing. The qualitative data we obtain will provide us with strong design ideas. Research is the foundation for our app design.
- All of our team members worked together through in-person meetings or remotely. We gathered information online and through interviewees to analyze multiple sources of data to strengthen our Goal-Directed design process.

Key Findings

By modeling our user research, we observed these primary user behavior patterns:

- Desire to quickly see and share gratitude with friends and family
- Desire for social media without comparison culture
- Desire for a tool that merges different gratitude methods like journaling and voice affirmations

Recommendations

- Designing for our app must center around the primary user behavior patterns to ensure we satisfy our users' needs and goals.
 - We need to keep in mind that people are less likely to practice gratitude when:
 - Told to practice gratitude
 - Social comparison gets in the way
 - Practicing in a way that doesn't fit with their culture
-

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Kickoff Meeting	2
Literature Review	3
Competitive Audit	7
Stakeholder Interviews	11
User Interviews	12
Persona	21
Conclusion	23
References	24

Introduction

The aim of this report is to examine how people practice gratitude and what their motivations and goals are to make the practice easier. All of the findings in this report help guide the design team in making research-driven decisions for our app.

The report comprises of the Research Phase and the Modeling Phase, the first two phases of Goal-Directed Design, or GDD.

The first step of the Research Phase is the kickoff meeting, which is the first section of this report. Next is the literature reviews where you'll get a deeper understanding of the domain of gratitude.

After the literature reviews, you'll read about the competitive audit which gives insight into who our competitors are.

You'll then get into the stakeholder interviews, which is a summary of our stakeholder assumptions.

The last part you'll read about for the Research Phase are the observations of user research interviews.



Following the Research Phase is the Modeling Phase where you'll read about Presley Cooper, the persona we created that communicates our users' goals and motivations.

Kickoff Meeting

A kickoff meeting is a standard element in a business project process. The goal of a kickoff meeting is for teams to convene and become aligned with the stakeholders' plan and goals for a product. Since this project was prepared for an Interaction Design I class at Kennesaw State University, it is important to note that there were no real stakeholders, and subsequently, a theoretical kickoff meeting was held. This meeting was held on FigJam, an online collaborative whiteboard, and completed by filling out a kickoff meeting template. The template consisted of a problem statement that stood in place of a problem a real-life company would have. There was also a collection of questions that produced assumption statements made by team members about the app and its users. We completed this kickoff meeting template to imagine and imitate what a kickoff meeting with stakeholders in real world settings might be like. We took on the role of stakeholders and defined our problem statement.

During the kickoff meeting, the stakeholders informed us that we would be designing a social media app focused on the practice and sharing of gratitude. The outcomes of the kickoff meeting were as follows:

- Executive stakeholders believe existing products and services fail to address how moments of gratitude can be easily shared with loved ones as opposed to solely remaining private or taking a longer time
- Executive stakeholders want some type of social media app prototype that centers on users capturing and quickly sharing exact moments of gratitude with loved ones. A social media format was favored because of the popularity of social media usage in daily life.

Literature Review

After the Kickoff Meeting, our team understood that the stakeholder goal is to help people practice gratitude. We then had to get a deeper understanding of gratitude to aid us in designing an app that helps people practice gratitude. To do so, we reviewed any literature that relates to the domain of gratitude. This way, we will have the knowledge to make research-driven design decisions.

For our research, we focused on the overall benefits of gratitude to get an idea as to why people find it useful to practice. We then looked into the benefits of sharing gratitude with others since we know that our app is a social media app. After looking at the positives of gratitude, we looked into the limitations of gratitude to comprehend why people struggle with gratitude. Lastly, we researched the need for well-being related apps to understand what people expect out of wellness apps.

Benefits of Gratitude & When to Practice

Gratitude has worked in a multitude of ways in making beneficial changes to people's mental health. It has been found that those who count their blessings tend to be much happier than those who don't (Brown and Wong 2017). Curiously enough, the lack of negative terminology – not the amount of positive terminology – shows more significant difference in bettering mental health. Even though the benefits of gratitude take time to take effect, the effects are long lasting.

The effectiveness of gratitude practices can be subjective based on the conditions of each individual. Some individuals are more likely to recall positive events than negative events and others vice versa (Harbaugh and Vasey 2014). The former could be categorized as being high in trait gratitude and the latter being low in trait gratitude. This can effect the optimal time of when to practice gratitude.

In Harbaugh and Vasey's study, there was a large increase in positive mood among the participants after the gratitude exercise. Gratitude exercises can help those with low trait gratitude to maintain positive emotions at similar levels to those with higher trait gratitude (Harbaugh and Vasey 2014). However, the study did note that those lower in trait gratitude are less likely to feel grateful for things in a 24-hour period. This may affect the times when it is effective for individuals with lower trait gratitude to practice gratitude. It is also important to note that people who merely performed the daily gratitude exercise experienced decreased happiness and a decline in positive emotions over time opposed to those with low trait gratitude who engaged in the exercise (Harbaugh and Vasey). It is of great significance to examine the optimal frequency of gratitude exercises and avoid exercises that are difficult to repeat over time.

Sharing Gratitude

An important part of our initial research on gratitude is understanding how people share their gratitude; a crucial method we need to have developed for our

app idea. To get a hands-on, personal experience of how people share and interact with other people's gratitude stories online, we monitored and followed along with users in a Reddit subgroup called "Be Grateful."

In this reddit subgroup, users came together to share their gratitude habits in an online discussion forum. Many users' posts are short 1-2 sentence long moments from their day where they experienced joy and gratefulness. Users also frequently created response threads to other users' comments to encourage and add on to that users' gratitude.

The subpage is very active and provided insightful interactions on how users on a certain platform shared their grateful moments. We further understood how users can and would be willing to publicly share and encourage other users to share their moments.

Another way we researched how to practice sharing gratitude was through an article, "How to practice Gratitude" from the website, Mindful. In the article, ways to practice and share

gratitude were broken down into digestible steps. While most gratitude is written down in journals and quietly practiced through meditation, another important way we wanted to see how gratitude could be shared was through verbal affirmations and vocal sharing. In step four of the article, it states that expressing gratitude can strengthen relationships (Staff 2023). This method of sharing gratitude reaffirmed how sharing grateful moments does not have to be done privately, and if done through public expression, can lead to just as much fulfillment and garner positive results such as relationship building and strengthening.

Limitations of Gratitude

Though there are many positives to gratitude, if practiced incorrectly, gratitude can diminish happiness. There are four factors that can cause people to struggle with gratitude. The four factors are: disliking being told what to do, social comparison, and culture.

The first factor is that people don't like being told what to do. In addition to that, they don't want to hear about how lucky they are. According to Cornell researcher

Dr. Tom Gilovich, people who are told that they are lucky, feel that the effort of their achievements are being diminished (Greenberg and Thomson 2018). Considering this fact, we need to avoid pushing users into practicing or telling them to be grateful because "they should know that they are lucky".

Social comparison is the second factor that can cause gratitude to trigger unhappiness. Thinking of gratitude can quickly lead people to thinking about how wonderful everyone else's lives are compared to theirs, which can immediately bring their gratitude thinking to a halt. To combat this, UC Berkeley Professor Dr. Laura Kray suggests having people compare their current lives with the imagined version of ourself who has less (Greenberg and Thomson 2018). Keeping this in mind, we need to know that some people may be prone to social comparison and may need certain functions to avoid comparison.

The third factor is of culture. People from individualistic societies greatly benefit from gratitude while those who are from more collectivistic societies feel indebtedness and guilt from

gratitude (Greenberg and Thomson 2018). Even though people from collectivistic societies may find gratitude more harmful than good, the study discovered that these people found benefits by practicing acts of kindness. We need to keep in mind that for certain people, there are other methods that work better than traditional gratitude.

Gratitude Apps

Self awareness and self care are increasing priorities for many people in today's society. While there is no definite evidence that wellness apps have health benefits, there are more than 350,000 apps focused on wellness improvement (Harvard Health Letter 2022). Many users see wellness apps as a tool for improving their mental health. Most apps that focus on emotional wellbeing include affirmations, gratitude journals/trackers, meditations, etc. (Harvard Health Letter 2022).

Individuals look to apps as an accessible method as a step to improving themselves.

Research suggests that 40% of happiness is under your control and these apps aim to assist users with cultivating happiness and gratitude (Harvard Health Letter 2022). Activities like gratitude journals and gratitude tracking are associated with improving your mood.



After gaining knowledge on the context of gratitude, the next GDD phase of research is competitive auditing, where we looked into the pros and cons of three specific apps to know what we should consider or avoid doing for our app.

Competitive Audit



There are multitudinous gratitude related apps already developed that help people with their practice of gratitude. However, many are solely focused on the journaling method of gratitude. Since our app is a combination of social media and gratitude, we audited from the range of social media apps to gratitude apps.

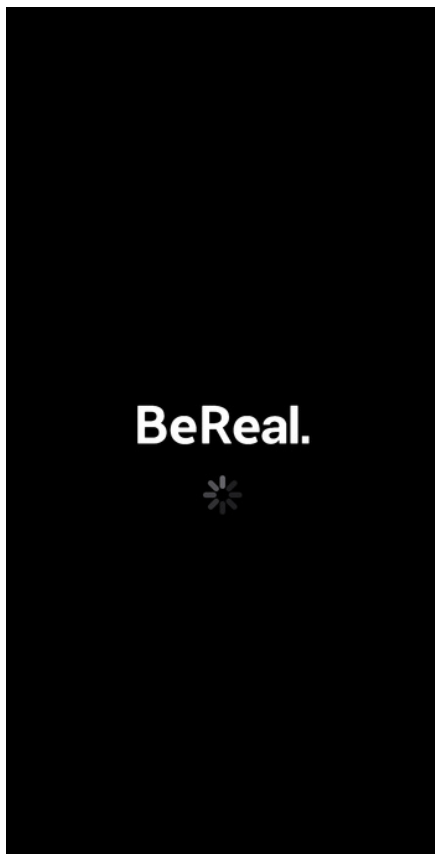
We audited the social media app, BeReal, which was what inspired our app idea. Though it has many great qualities, its purpose is not for gratitude.

We then looked into the gratitude app, Happyfeed, which is gratitude focused. Finally, we audited the video diary app, 1 Second Everyday, which is neither a social media or gratitude app, however it allows video capturing and many of their users find themselves practicing gratitude with the app. Each of these three apps have many great elements, however, these elements will need to be combined to create an app that is a mix of social media and gratitude.

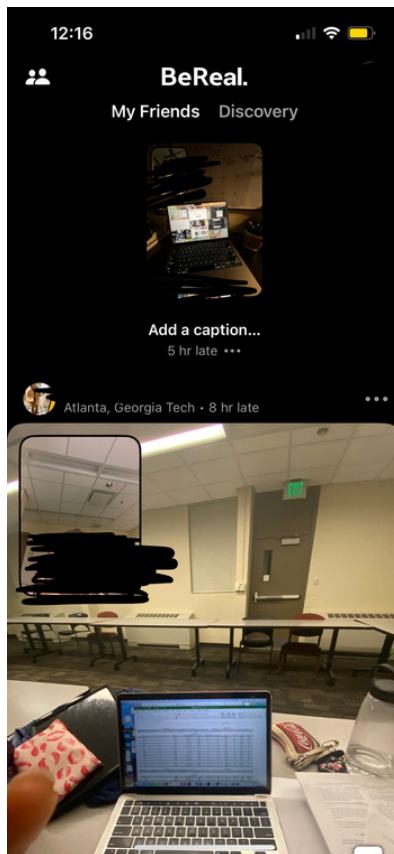
BeReal

The purpose of this app is to capture a moment of your “real life” with a photo and share it with others. Some positive aspects of this app are that it is a more authentic form of social media, you’re able to share your moments with others, and everyone has to post simultaneously, which makes it fun. Some negative aspects would be that people don’t post when they’re supposed to, notifications can be aggressive, and strangers are able to see where you are at the moment of your post.

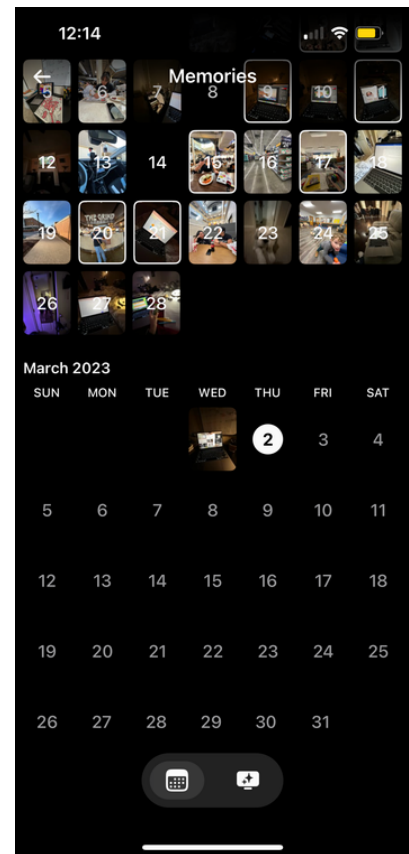
- Type of App: Social Media
- Gratitude Method: Capturing mundane moments to look back on
- Photo/Video: Photo



Loading Screen



"My Friends" Screen

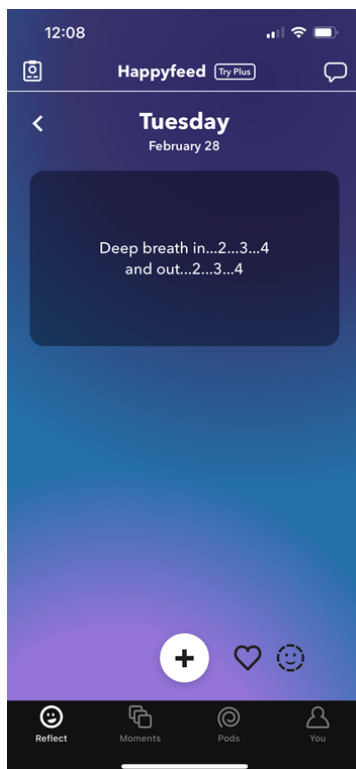


Memories Screen

happyfeed

The purpose of happyfeed is to help users reflect on the good things that happen throughout their day to help create more joy and happiness in their day to day lives. happyfeed allows users to capture happy memories from their day and share it with their friends and in groups known as “pods”. Some positive attributes of the app include photo capture, photo-journaling, recurring memories, and a well designed user interface. However, happyfeed does contain some negatives such as a lack of brand identity, overuse of Apple logos and emojis, and new concepts such as pods that don’t follow user interface laws. Users could become confused with some of these new features they have not seen in other apps or online websites.

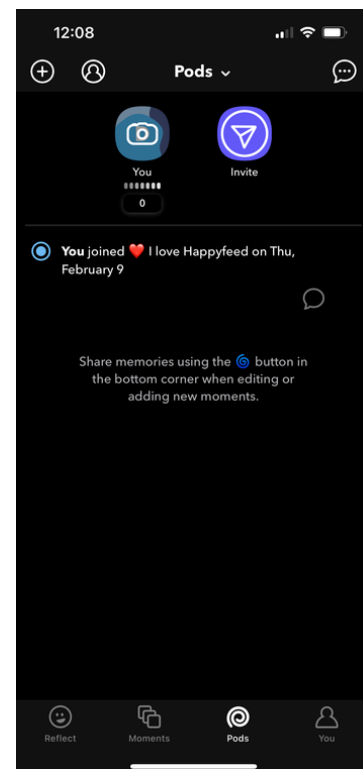
- Type of app: Gratitude Journal App
- Gratitude Method: Capturing happy memories to share
- Photo/Video: Photo



Home Screen



Moments Screen



Pods Screen

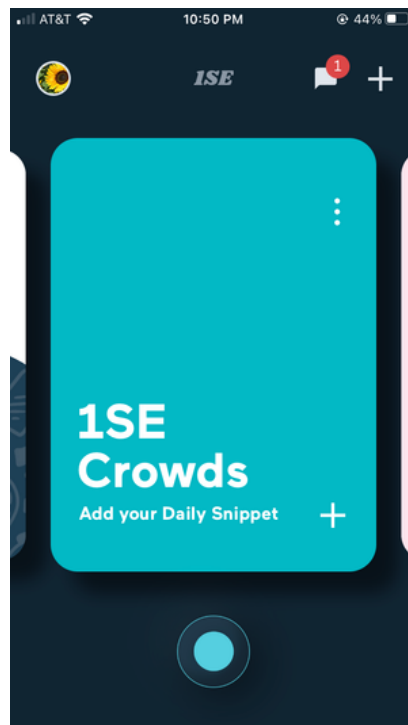
1 Second Everyday

The purpose of this app is to capture daily 1-second videos to look back on or share with friends. Eventually, users can chronologically edit all their clips together to appreciate the year they had. Some positive features of this app are that users can reflect on moments in the short term. For the long term, there's a journal entry feature to write positive aspects of your day, and you can choose when you would like to be notified. Some negatives about the app are that the interface hides a lot of its features at first glance and that most advanced features require payment.

- Type of App: Video Diary
- Gratitude Method: Documenting moments to look back on
- Photo/Video: Video



Journal Screen



Crowds Screen



Calendar Screen

Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews are meetings between the design team and those interested in the design or project. Here, the design team would usually record, explain the project, and ask the stakeholders questions to gather information relevant to the topic. This gives an opportunity for the design team to gain insight that leads said project to success.

As stated in the Kickoff meeting section, this project is for a class and we did not have any stakeholders present. Therefore, our design team took the role of stakeholders to imagine what might occur.

We came up with a variety of assumptions. Here are a few:

- Our product would be used whenever users feel moments of joy. They would capture their moment and reflect on it.
- Our app would improve the practice of gratitude by making it a quicker and easier process
- The #1 value a user would want to take away from our product is finding joy in the mundane
- Some additional benefits would include helping people live in the moment, helping people look at life from a different perspective, and helping people improve their mental health.
- We assume our users would want to share small joyful moments in their day. However, users might not care to post about their happy moments. They must care to post for our app to be successful.

After our team concluded this portion of the Research Phase, we transferred our focus into user research so that we could see how our assumptions align with possible user goals.

User Interviews



Before getting into interviews, our team must consider what kind of users would use our app. The GDD user Research Phase recommends creating a persona hypothesis to help decide who our candidates are for interviewing.

We started our persona hypothesis by stating that we have one main type of user: people who want to use the app to capture moments to practice gratitude. Even though we believe we only have one type of user, we believe that this

type of user may vary in two ways. We labeled these two sorts of people as gratitude invisible and gratitude intentional. Gratitude invisible people are those who want to use the app to not necessarily practice gratitude, but to have fun and show their friends and family good parts of their day. On the other hand, gratitude intentional people are those who intentionally want to use the app to practice gratitude.

We hypothesized that gratitude invisible people would only use the app to share and see their moments with friends and family, similar to how they would use the social media app, BeReal. The app can have the gratitude practice of taking pictures of positive moments and sharing it with people, but it can't say that what they are doing is gratitude. Gratitude must be made invisible to them, as in, what they are doing in the app is gratitude, but they don't feel that it is. We are assuming that they would not use an app that is specifically for gratitude since it'll make them feel that they are being pushed to practice. Since they aren't intentionally practicing gratitude, they most likely don't want to spend much time on the app. They'll simply snap and share pictures.

We assume that gratitude intentional people post with the intention of practicing gratitude and would probably like to know that the app they are using helps with gratitude. They probably expect the app to help them get into the habit of practicing, so they might require notifications. Additionally, this type of user may expect to have more forms

of gratitude expression available to them. Therefore, they might want to spend a bit more time on the app to savor each moment.



With these two kinds of hypothesized users, our team looked for interviewees who practice gratitude and those who don't intentionally practice gratitude, but may practice once in a while. With these interviewees, our team needs to observe to see whether the two variations of users exist.

Interviews were either held online via Zoom or in person. In these interviews, we asked interviewees their views on gratitude and questions on how they practice gratitude in their day to day lives.

Here is some context on each of the interviewees before getting into the observations of user research:

Eliza's Interview



Our first participant, Eliza believes that gratitude has made a big impact on her life by changing her perspective on life and her way of thinking. She got into the practice when people from her church created a group chat for the purpose of sharing five things they're grateful for every day. Additionally, she likes to write the five things she's grateful for in her journal.

Since joining the group chat and sharing her daily gratitude, Eliza noticed her current view on life is very bright. In addition to the group chat method, she journals as well. She knows that continuously practicing gratitude will continue to benefit her life.

Sienna's Interview



Our second participant, Sienna, believes that gratitude is showing acts of kindness, not only to herself but to others. She expresses this by giving, whether it's by complimenting others, gift-giving, or by writing letters. Her preferred way to practice gratitude is by journaling and meditating at least once a week as a way to vent without having to "burden" others.

Even though at times Sienna struggles to find the positive moments within bad days, she believes that practicing gratitude will improve her mindset and her current perspective on life.

Julia's Interview



Our third participant, Julia, believes that gratitude is a way to express appreciation for where you are in life and what you have. She practices gratitude through verbal affirmations of things she is grateful for. This practice started after going through a rough time during her first year at college and someone suggested using affirmations.

Grateful affirmations helped and continue to improve her well-being during hard times. To her, social media can breed comparison and is a space where people tend to “flex” on each other. Despite this, Julia does not mind sharing grateful moments with others when it fits the occasion. She believes the presence of others in positive spaces can brighten up her days.

Valerie's Interview

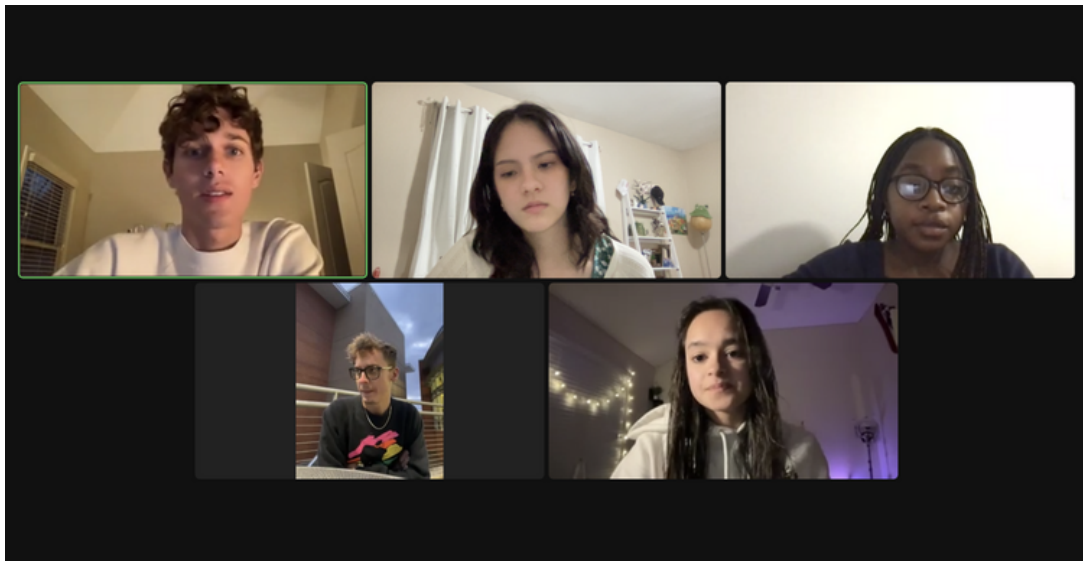


Our fourth participant, Valerie, has a relatively neutral outlook on life. Due to the stress of school and work, she recently started practicing gratitude. Her main method is journaling, which was recommended to her by her therapist. Valerie usually keeps her grateful moments private, but if she experiences a particularly bad day, she likes to be around friends and family. After she started practicing gratitude, Valerie noticed she handles stress and bad

moments easier and can now find good moments out of them.

Valerie views gratitude as a way to improve her current life and situation. She believes gratitude would improve her happiness. Valerie is already seeing improvements on her perspective of life through gratitude and journaling and hopes to see more improvement the more she practices.

Carson's Interview



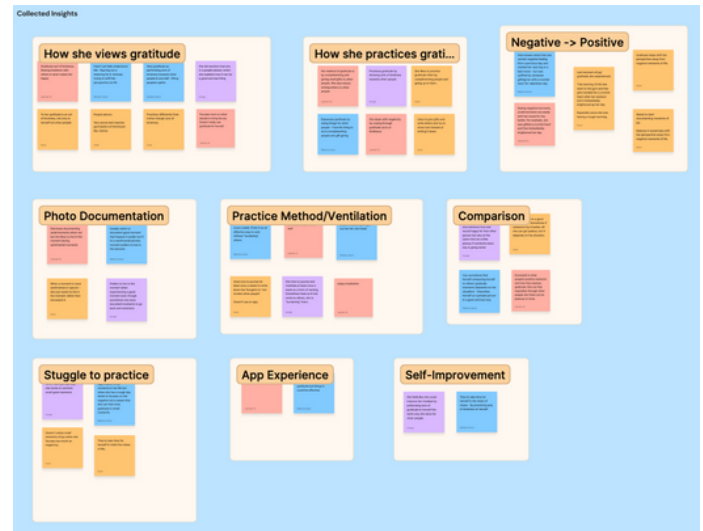
Our fifth participant, Carson, expressed a well-balanced, relatively positive outlook on life. He is swamped with the stress of school and work, but is content with where he currently is. Carson expresses his gratefulness mainly through verbal affirmations and sharing moments with his friends.

He loves to live in the moment and capture those moments through photography, Snapchat, and BeReal. He believes that practicing gratitude more consistently would help improve his life more. He finds it easier to practice gratitude when he expresses it to others, but wants to start journaling.

Affinity Mapping

After each interview, the design team came together to complete affinity mapping sessions. Affinity mapping gives designers a visualization of important relationships by simplifying the large amounts of information received from interviews. The purpose of affinity mapping is to get insights from team members and organize those insights into themes or patterns.

Our team completed affinity mapping on FigJam due to many interviews being online. Each team member typed out their important takeaways onto sticky notes. After spending around ten minutes generating notes onto sticky notes, one team member would talk about each note while the other members reflect and discuss similar notes. Sticky notes with the same ideas get clustered together which develops a common theme or pattern.



Affinity map completed after Sienna's interview

Common groupings that emerged among all interviewees:

- How they view gratitude
- Their methods of gratitude
- Their views on sharing gratitude
- The importance of photo documentation
- Struggles they face while practicing gratitude
- Their experience with gratitude related apps

Observations

Before completing any interviews, we assumed that gratitude doesn't hold a lot of importance to our interviewees. However, we found that every person we interviewed practices gratitude frequently in subtle ways. Sienna views gratitude as sharing kindness, so she practices everyday by giving people compliments. Julia, Valerie, and Carson practice everyday through affirmations. Unlike the others, Eliza is more intentional with her practice by writing five things she's grateful for in her journal everyday.

Another commonality among the interviewees is that they are all willing to share their joyful moments with people they are close to, however, there are some moments they would rather keep private. Eliza shares the most out of all participants because she shares her daily gratitude in a group chat with people who also share their gratitude. Carson is quite public with his gratitude as well since he prefers sharing his gratitude through conversations.

All participants often take pictures of little moments that make them happy. Eliza, Valerie, and Carson are more likely to post these pictures on social media apps like Snapchat and Instagram through their stories feature. Julia dislikes the social media environment due to comparison culture, so she is on the opposite spectrum of social media use compared to the other interviewees. Even though Julia differs from the rest on her social media usage, almost all interviewees struggle with comparison. Everyone but Eliza said that if they saw other people having a better time than them, they would feel some jealousy. On the other hand, Eliza contrasts from the rest because she said she would feel motivation rather than jealousy when seeing other people's grateful moments.

Persona



After the completion of the research phase of GDD, the next phase is the Modeling Phase. In the Modeling Phase, behavior patterns from user interviews are synthesized into user models, or personas.

Personas are not real people but are design tools assembled from the behaviors, aptitudes, attitudes, and motivations we saw from our user interviews in the Research Phase.

Personas help us understand and communicate how potential users of our app behave and the goals that they have. They are crucial for validating design decisions and informing designers and stakeholders what our users' needs are to keep our focus centered on users throughout the whole design process.

Looking at our user research, we identified key behavior patterns. As a result of our research modeling, we assembled one primary persona, Presley Cooper.

Presley Parker

Primary Persona

- 20 years old
- Sophomore in college
- Journalism major
- From Chicago
- Loves photography and taking pictures of friends especially on film



End Goals, wants to be able...

- to quickly share her gratitude w/ close friends and family
 - to see friends' and family's grateful moments
 - to use a social media without comparison
 - to be able to choose between different features like journaling, photo sharing, and voice affirmations
-

Life Goals, wants to be...

- someone who shares gratitude to maintain a positive well being
-

Persona Narrative

Presley is a sophomore studying journalism at the University of Chicago. As the head photojournalist for her school newspaper, she often visits the surrounding areas of Chicago to document and review the food, culture, and sites. While traveling around the city, she likes to take photos of little moments that make her happy to reflect on either through vocal affirmations when she doesn't have much time or writing in her gratitude journal when there's more time to do so.

She would like to post these little moments onto her Instagram account to share with her friends and family, but these pictures always end up sitting in her camera roll because she feels that they aren't Instagram-worthy. She feels pressure to post perfectly crafted and edited photos to fit in with everyone on Instagram.

Due to the competitive social media environment, she hopes to find a space where she can publicly post her grateful/joyful moments with her friends and family and express her gratitude to the fullest without feeling anxious about what others think.

Conclusion

Performing research is essential to making design decisions for the app.

We started off with the kickoff meeting where the foundation of research was built. Team members became aligned with the stakeholders' goals for the application.

In reviewing literature, we focused on the positives of gratitude to gain an understanding of why users may find it useful. We were also mindful of the limitations users may experience in practicing gratitude.

Team members then took on the role of stakeholders using assumption statements to gain insight of the information that is relevant to the app.

We then transferred our focus into user research to see how our assumptions would align with possible user goals. Conducting user interviews was vital to determining

what type of users would benefit from our app. Goal-Directed Design, or GDD, recommends using a persona hypothesis to determine the ideal candidates for interviewing.

Our observations were different from what we assumed before the interviewing process. We discovered each interviewee practiced gratitude in subtle ways daily and this was important to their well-being.

Due to the conducted research, we were able to note the importance that sharing gratitude has on our primary persona. Continuing forward, we must focus on creating an app that satisfies our primary persona's goals to ensure that all of our users can practice gratitude to maintain an overall positive well being.

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