

## A Comparative Study of Minimalist and Maximalist UI/UX Design Approaches for Meal Plan Consultation Application

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### ABSTRACT

The evolution of user interface (UI) and user experience (UX) design continues to shape digital interaction, with minimalist and maximalist philosophies offering contrasting approaches. This study compares the usability, efficiency, and user satisfaction of minimalist and maximalist design strategies in a meal plan consultation application. A high-fidelity minimalist prototype was developed and evaluated against an existing maximalist application using a mixed-methods approach. Data from 140 participants were collected through usability testing, System Usability Scale (SUS) surveys, and qualitative feedback. Findings indicate a strong preference for the minimalist design among the study participants, with 82.1% favoring its simplicity, clarity, and visual balance. In contrast, maximalist design was appreciated for its visual richness but was often perceived as cluttered and cognitively demanding. Younger users (18-25 years) showed the highest inclination toward minimalism; however, the sample was predominantly composed of younger participants, which may influence design preferences and limit the generalizability of the findings. The findings suggest that minimalist design approaches may enhance perceived usability and user experience in this context, particularly for younger and tech-savvy users. The study recommends a balanced design strategy that combines simplicity with selective expressive elements, while highlighting the need for further research using more diverse populations and controlled experimental methods.

**Keywords** - UI/UX design, minimalist, maximalist, usability testing, meal-plan application, user experience.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of digital applications has made UI and UX design as a critical factor in shaping how users interact with and perceive digital platforms. Two main design philosophies, minimalism and maximalism, have become influential in UI/UX design. Minimalist design, often based on the principle of "less is more," focuses on simplicity, clarity, and functionality through clean layouts, limited color schemes and plenty of whitespace (Gumber, 2023). On the other hand, maximalist design leans toward visual abundance, using vibrant colours, detailed patterns and interactive elements to create more expressive user experiences (Campbell, 2021). These approaches represent different ways of structuring user interfaces, and each has distinct implications for usability, engagement, and overall user satisfaction. Minimalist designs are praised for lowering cognitive load and improving efficiency, and maximalist designs are appreciated for promoting emotional engagement and brand distinction. Some users prefer a clutter-free interface with only essential features, while others find a more comprehensive set of features better for managing their dietary habits. Despite the relevance of these design philosophies, their application within health-focused digital platforms, especially meal planning and consultation systems, remains relatively underexplored.

The contrast between minimalist and maximalist design continues to attract attention in UI/UX research and practice. Minimalist designs embrace the principle of "less is more," providing streamlined interfaces that highlight only essential features. This strategy improves ease of navigation and accessibility, making apps more intuitive for users who prefer straightforward experiences. However, minimalism can sometimes result in a lack of feature variety restricting functionality for some users. Minimalism creates an uncluttered space where each element serves a purpose, offering a peaceful environment where users can relax and move easily. On the other

hand, maximalism welcomes with energy, being bold, eclectic, and distinctly memorable (Vaidehi, 2024). Darmawan et al. (2022) employed a design thinking framework to redesign a campus academic system, reporting improved user satisfaction as a result of iterative prototyping and user-centered refinement. This method can also be adapted for meal plan apps to ensure interfaces align with user needs via empathy-driven design.

The increasing reliance on digital tools for meal planning and nutrition tracking has led to the creation of numerous mobile apps to help users maintain healthy eating habits. One of the major challenges in developing these applications lies in the design of their user interface (UI) and user experience (UX). Some applications may favor a minimalist design that emphasizes simplicity and core features for ease of use, while others adopt a maximalist approach with rich visuals, extensive functionalities and interactive elements to boost engagement. Both strategies have their benefits, but there is no consensus on which design approach best improves usability, efficiency, and user satisfaction in meal planning apps.

## **2. RELATED WORKS**

The design of user interfaces (UI) and user experiences (UX) plays a critical role in shaping how users interact with digital applications. Two contrasting but widely adopted philosophies, minimalism and maximalism, have become influential in UI/UX design. Minimalism emphasizes clarity, simplicity and removing unnecessary elements to improve usability, whereas maximalism celebrates abundance, bold visuals and rich details to craft immersive experiences. While both approaches offer distinct advantages, their impact on user engagement, usability and overall satisfaction can vary depending on context. This raises an important question: how do these design philosophies influence user experience within the specific setting of a meal plan consultation application?

### **2.1 Minimalist UI/UX Design Principles**

Atu (2023) discusses practical examples such as Airbnb's booking workflow and Spotify's music player to illustrate how minimalist design supports step-by-step user interaction. In these cases, unnecessary elements are deliberately reduced so that users can focus on completing tasks without distraction. Apparently, research on minimalism uses usability testing and eye-tracking to measure user attention and how efficiently users interact. For example, Zaytseva et al. (2024) employed surveys and case studies to show that minimalist designs lower cognitive load by displaying only essential information, consistent with Cognitive Load Theory.

The key characteristics of minimalist design include simplicity and clarity. Simplicity is achieved through the deliberate reduction of interface elements, often relying on limited colour palettes and clean, straightforward typography to emphasize core features (Talajiya, 2022). This is reflected in the ease with which users can navigate the interface, typically supported by intuitive structures such as flat navigation models with a small number of clearly defined tabs (Johnson, 2014). Research on minimalism often employs experimental designs that incorporate task-based testing and SUS metrics. For instance, a study by Muslim et al. (2019) showed that simplifying the interface of an e-commerce mobile application led to noticeable improvements in both user engagement and perceived usability. This suggests that reducing visual and structural complexity can positively influence how users interact with digital systems.

## 2.2 Maximalist UI/UX Design Principles

Vaneeno (2011) traces minimalism's origins to art and design movements that emphasized functionality and simplicity, shaping digital interfaces that prioritize content over decoration. Maximalism, on the other hand, adopts a "more is more" philosophy, relying on bold colors, complex patterns and vibrant visuals to craft engaging and lively interfaces (Campbell, 2021). Keylime (2020) describes maximalism as an intentional use of visual abundance to capture and sustain user attention through dynamic and engaging design features. However, this approach is not without trade-offs. Botha (2020) argues that while maximalism can differentiate products in increasingly competitive digital spaces, its effectiveness depends heavily on execution. When not carefully managed, the same richness that attracts attention can lead to visual clutter, increasing cognitive load, and ultimately reducing usability.

Methodologically, studies on maximalist design tend to rely on qualitative approaches, particularly user interviews and heuristic evaluations, to better understand how users perceive emotional engagement and overall usability (Saksono et al., 2024). However, maximalism must balance aesthetic richness with functionality. As noted by Botha (2020), maximalist interfaces can become ineffective when excessive visual elements obscure navigation or overwhelm users. In practice, maximalist systems are typically characterized by two key attributes: visual richness and interactivity. Visual richness often involves the use of bold colour schemes, gradients and animations to attract and sustain user attention (Botha, 2020). Interactivity, on the other hand, is reflected in features such as layered menus and dynamic transitions, which are intended to encourage exploration and deeper engagement with the system (Campbell, 2021).

Maximalist design studies often combine quantitative data, like session durations, with qualitative feedback. Although this approach is less frequently explored in health-related applications, there is evidence that visually rich and interactive interfaces can enhance user involvement. For example, Mustafa and Karimi (2021) reported that gamified online learning platforms with vibrant colours and micro-interactions increased user engagement, although such designs required careful balancing to avoid usability challenges. In meal plan apps, similar maximalist features could include colourful food visuals, animated progress trackers, and personalized recipes to create an engaging, immersive experience.

## 2.3 Maximalism in Comparison with Minimalism

Although maximalist design has become increasingly visible over the past two decades, little academic literature has examined the meaning of "maximalism" (Templeton, 2013). Minimalism is characterized by simplicity and essential forms, whereas maximalism involves extreme complexity and chaotic forms, creating a "totalizing deluge of content," making it the opposite of minimalism. As Templeton (2013) observes, maximalism is undefined and is frequently interpreted more as an extreme style than a clearly bounded design framework (Cuito, 2002).

As illustrated in Figure 1, Google Trends data show that interest in minimalism is increasing, whereas maximalism shows no significant upward trend over the past few years, based on search history from 2004 until now (2025). This might be because minimalism has evolved into a new style that has spontaneously become a trend.

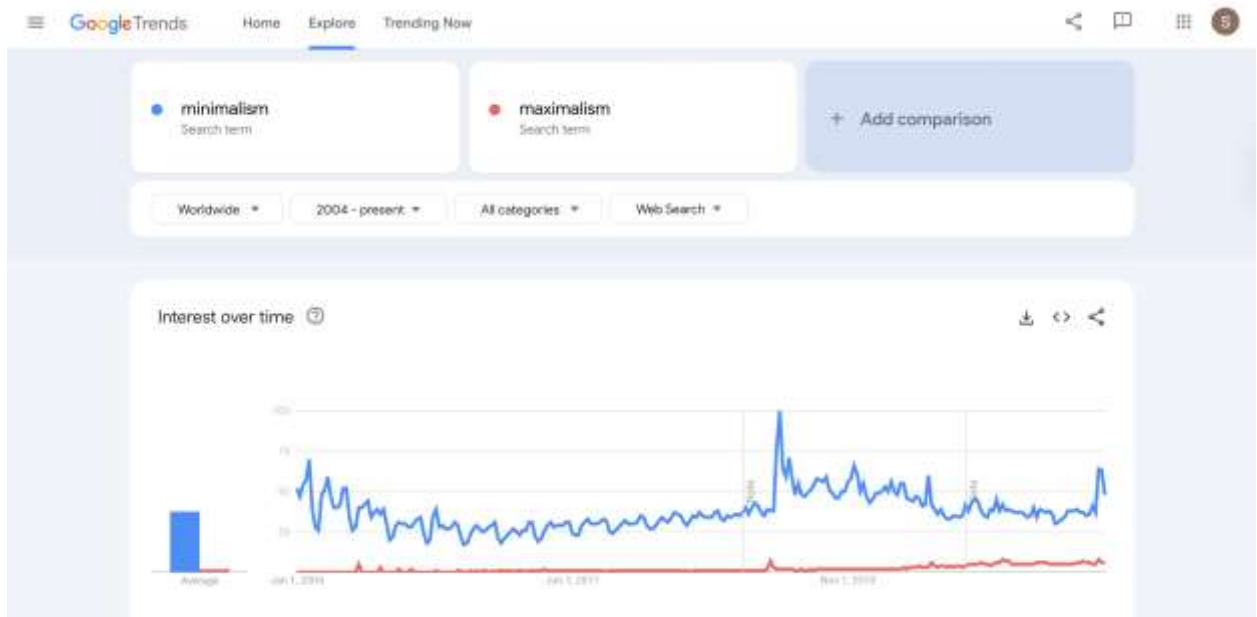


Figure 1: Comparison of search volumes for minimalism and maximalism terms on Google Trends from 2004 to 2025.

Gonzalez et al. (2024) emphasize the role of User-Centered Design (UCD) in improving accessibility in agricultural data visualization, a focus that may also be relevant to meal plan apps. In this context, minimalist designs naturally support UCD as they prioritize simple typography and high-contrast features, aiding users with visual impairments. Similarly, Zamakhsyari and Fatwanto (2023) explore the application of design thinking in UI/UX and suggest that hybrid strategies blending minimalist clarity with maximalist engagement could enhance results, although concrete evidence remains limited.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In response to the research question (RQ), this study examines a mixed-methods design to compare a newly developed minimalist meal plan prototype with an existing maximalist meal plan application.

The study involves three phases:

1. Prototype design and selection of an existing maximalist application,
2. Data collection through usability testing, surveys, interviews and
3. Data analysis using quantitative and qualitative techniques. This details the study population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, questionnaire design, data analysis procedures, ethical considerations, system design for the minimalist prototype, and expected outcomes. The inclusion of system design ensures a practical foundation for comparing the two design approaches, contributing to both academic discourse and practical application in health-focused UI/UX design.

To ensure methodological comparability, the existing maximalist application included in this study was selected using clearly defined criteria. First, priority was given to domain relevance, meaning that the application had to function as a meal plan. This ensured that it aligned closely with the context of the study and allowed a meaningful comparison with the proposed prototype.

Second, the selection was guided by its design characteristics, which clearly reflect a maximalist UI/UX style, such as the use of vibrant colour schemes, multiple interface elements, and rich visual presentation. Third, functional comparability was carefully maintained. The selected application provides features similar to those implemented in the minimalist prototype, including user authentication, meal plan creation, and profile management. By aligning the core functionalities of both systems, the study was able to focus the comparison primarily on differences in design philosophy (minimalist versus maximalist), rather than differences in functionality. Participants interacted with both systems using the same set of predefined tasks. The evaluation environment, instructions and data collection instruments were standardized across all participants in both interfaces.

### 3.1 System Design

Although the study does not involve app development, a system design and architecture framework has been established to guide the creation of high-fidelity prototypes and ensure they accurately reflect realistic app functionalities. The system design adopts a user-centered design (UCD) process, structured into three phases: Wireframing, Prototyping, and Usability testing. The prototype architecture is modular, simulating a mobile app's front-end structure, which includes the UI layer and data flow simulation. Key features of the design include a sign-up page, a sign-in page, an onboarding screen, meal plan creation, a follow-up page, and user profile. The tools and technologies used for design and evaluation are Figma, Google Forms and Google Sheets. A high-fidelity minimalist prototype is developed using Figma, a popular UI/UX design tool, while an existing maximalist interface is utilized. The maximalist application selected for this study is Noom, a commercially available meal-planning platform, which is widely recognized for its feature-rich and visually expressive interface, making it suitable for benchmarking against the minimalist prototype. The two applications share identical functionalities but differ in their design approach, embodying minimalist and maximalist philosophies.



Figure 2: Sign-in page of the minimalist prototype design

Figure 2 and Figure 3 are images that illustrate the minimalist user interface design adhering to the minimalist rule of 'less is more'. A limited colour palette (white, grey, yellow) and simple, legible typography (Montserrat) were used.

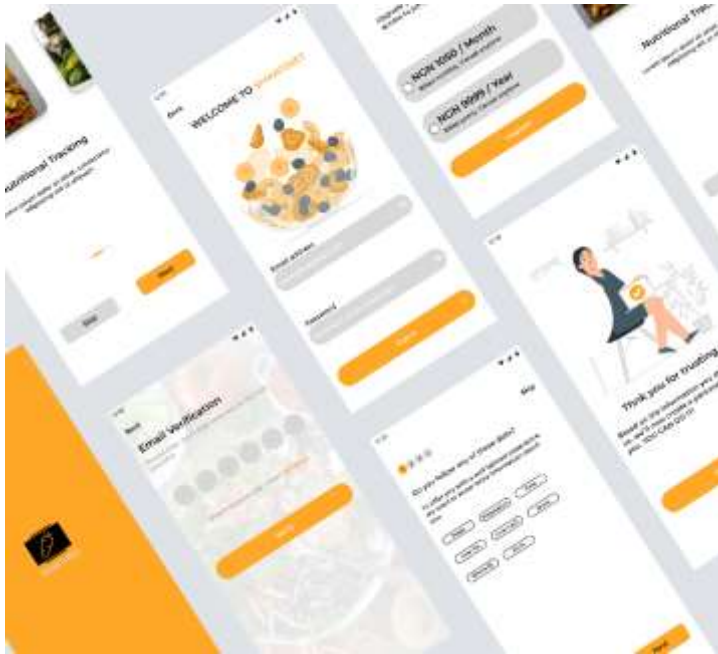


Figure 3: Image showing the designed minimalist wireframe

The image in Figure 4 shows the sign-in page of an already existing maximalist user interface of a meal consultation mobile application.



Figure 4: Sign-in page of the existing maximalist

### **3.2 Population and Sampling Techniques**

The target population includes individuals aged 18 to 45 who use mobile apps for meal planning such as students, tech professionals, health workers, and typical users with moderate to high mobile app familiarity. A sample of 140 participants was chosen to ensure strong statistical power for quantitative analysis and enough depth for qualitative insights. Although prior research suggests that 20-30 users are often sufficient to identify most usability issues, a larger sample was considered necessary in this case, considering different dietary preferences, tech skills, and also to improve the reliability of comparing two design approaches (Nielsen, 2000). The sample size is sufficient to support statistical comparisons, including differences in System Usability Scale (SUS) scores between the two interfaces. It also helps to mitigate the impact of potential participant dropouts and strengthens the depth and reliability of qualitative feedback obtained from interviews. In addition, this larger sample enables subgroup analyses, such as by age or tech proficiency to examine variation in design preferences.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

To get a clearer picture of how users experienced the system, both quantitative data and qualitative feedback were collected and analyzed. User Experience Questionnaires (UEQ) were distributed as a survey, which included the System Usability Scale (SUS), custom Likert-scale questions (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree), and open-ended questions to gather qualitative feedback. Participants were required to interact with both the minimalist and maximalist interfaces in a controlled sequence and the order of interaction was kept consistent to ensure uniform exposure. This standardized procedure ensured that differences in user responses were attributable primarily to interface design rather than variations in testing conditions.

## **4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

The implementation included creating a high-fidelity minimalist prototype in Figma, comparing it to an existing maximalist design, conducting usability tests with 140 participants and distributing Google Forms questionnaires.

### **4.1 Demographics by Age Group**

The age group is divided into four classifications: under 18, 18-25, 26-35, and 36-45. There are 44 people (31.4%) under 18, 83 people (59.3%) in the 18-25 range, 10 people (7.1%) in the 26-35 range and 3 people (2.1%) in the 36-45 range. About 91% of the population is under 25 years old, reflecting the age distribution of the sample population.

### **4.2 Demographics by Gender**

The distribution of participants across gender groups: 45 (32.1%) male, 94 (67.1%) female, and 1 (0.7%) preferred not to say, highlighting the sample's age composition and its influence on design preferences.

### **4.3 Demographics by Occupation**

Distribution of participants by occupation: 130 (92.9%) students, 14 (10%) tech professionals, and 5 (3.6%) health professionals, showing how professional backgrounds may influence design preferences. This indicates how many times different individuals selected each occupation and does not represent the total number of respondents, as this was a multiple-response question.

#### 4.4 Quantitative Analysis

As shown in Figure 5, data collected from 140 questionnaire responses indicate that 115 participants preferred the minimalist design, 9 preferred the maximalist design, 15 favored both equally, and 1 chose none. The percentage for the minimalist (Smart Diet) is 82.1%, the maximalist (Noom) is 6.4%, both equally is 10.7%, and none is 0.7%.

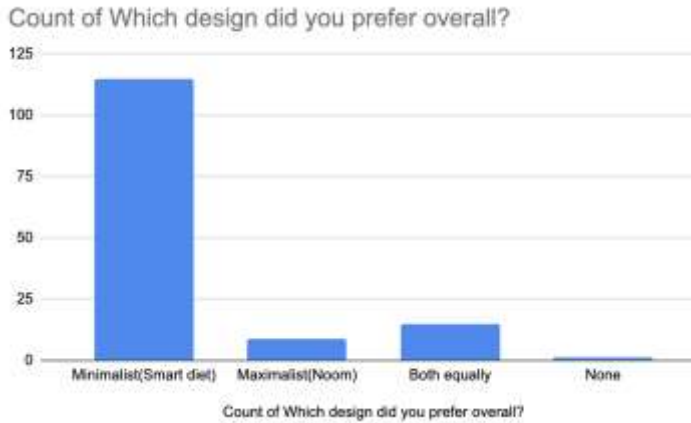


Figure 5: Bar chart showing the design preference by the participants

Table 1 presents the mean Likert-scale ratings for minimalist and maximalist designs, as determined by the participants' preferences using the given metrics.

Table 1: Mean Likert-Scale Ratings for Minimalist and Maximalist Designs

	Metrics	Minimalist	Maximalist	Both
Minimalist	Clean & Visually Appealing	3.56	3.44	3.13
	Pleasing Colour Scheme	3.45	3.00	3.27
	Regular Use	3.37	3.00	3.27
Maximalist	Crowded/Overwhelming	3.10	2.89	2.87
	Interface Appealing	2.50	3.22	3.00
	Regular Use	2.37	3.11	2.60

The design preference by gender shown in Figure 6, depicts that most of both genders prefer the minimalist design based on the given metrics in Table 1.

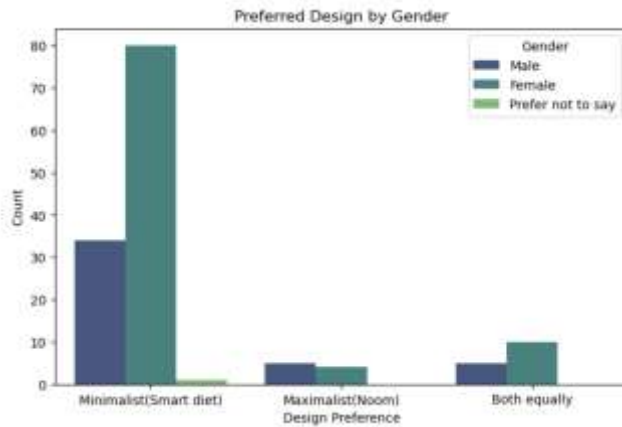


Figure 6: Design preference by gender

The demographic variations in age group design preferences are presented in Table 2, facilitating targeted design decisions. It depicts a consistent minimalist preference across ages, with younger users showing unexpected simplicity bias.

Table 2: Design Preferences by Age Group

Age Group	Minimalist	Maximalist	Both	None
Under 18	36(81.8%)	3(6.8%)	5(11.4%)	0(0%)
18-25	68(81.9%)	5(6.0%)	9(10.8%)	1(1.2%)
26-35	9(90.0%)	1(10.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
36-45	2(66.7%)	0(0.0%)	1(33.3%)	0(0.0%)

114 (81.4%) tend to recommend the minimalist (smart diet), 8 (5.7%) to recommend maximalist, and 18 (12.9%) tend to recommend both designs. The distribution of participants by recommendation likelihood: 74 (52.9%) very likely, 48 (34.3%) likely, 17 (12.1%) neutral, and 1 (0.7%) unlikely. This shows strong user confidence in recommending the preferred design (mostly minimalist), reflecting the minimalist design's appeal.

#### 4.5 Qualitative Analysis

Themes: Gotten from 40 non-empty comments:

Simplicity (40%): "The minimalist is simple and elegant."

Colour Appeal (30%): "I am attracted to colours."

Visual Clutter (20%): "The texts in the maximalist are too much."

Modern Layout (10%): "The UI for Smart Diet looks more modern and professional."

Participants of this study valued minimalist designs for ease of use and clarity, while maximalist designs were critiqued for text overload but praised for colours. The strong preference for the minimalist design (82.1%) suggests that meal planning applications may benefit from prioritizing simplicity to enhance user cognitive load and navigation time.

Although a strong preference for the minimalist design was observed in this study, this outcome should be interpreted with respect to the sample composition. The participant pool was heavily skewed toward younger individuals, with approximately 91% under the age of 25, and the majority were students. This imbalance describes a potential sampling bias, as younger users may be more inclined toward minimalist and modern interface styles due to greater familiarity with contemporary design trends. As a result, the findings may not fully represent the preferences of older users or individuals from more diverse professional backgrounds.

Another factor to consider is the possibility of novelty bias in the comparative evaluation. The minimalist interface was newly designed as a prototype specifically for this study, whereas the maximalist interface was already an existing application. This difference may have influenced participants' perceptions, as newly introduced interfaces often appear simpler, cleaner or more appealing due to their unfamiliarity. Such effects can unintentionally shape user preference. Furthermore, although both interfaces were designed to support similar tasks, the evaluation was not conducted under a fully controlled experimental setup in which all external variables were managed. Therefore, the observed differences in user preference and usability should be interpreted within the study context, as indicative rather than definitive evidence of causal relationships.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study reveals a strong preference for the minimalist design (Smart Diet) within the sampled population, particularly among younger users, over the maximalist (Noom) design, mainly due to its simplicity, clarity, and modern look. Both quantitative data and qualitative themes show that the minimalist design was associated with higher perceived usability in this study. Interestingly, 81.82% of participants under 18 and 81.93% of those aged 18-25 preferred minimalism, indicating changing design preferences among younger users.

However, these findings should be interpreted within the context of the study's demographic composition. The sample population was predominantly composed of younger participants and students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings across broader demographic groups. Future studies may incorporate a more diverse and balanced sample, which means including older adults and users from varied occupational and technological backgrounds, to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of design preferences across different user segments. Additionally, the inclusion of advanced evaluation techniques, such as eye-tracking, may also provide deeper insights into user attention and interaction patterns.

Despite these limitations, the study provides useful insights into how different UI/UX design philosophies influence user experience in health-related applications. The results suggest that minimalist design approaches may be particularly effective for younger and tech-savvy users,

especially in contexts where clarity and simplicity are critical. At the same time, incorporating selective maximalist elements such as engaging visuals or interactive features may enhance user engagement when applied judiciously.

## 6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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