

Musallah: Prayer Space & Meetup Tool

M&T Integration Lab 2021

Team: Timaj Abdi, Mohamed Aly,
Yasmine Boukataya, Nabeel Farooqui, Fatih Ozer

Advisor: Prof. Victor Preciado

Value Proposition

Stepping aside to pray for a few minutes 5 times a day is a core part of a Muslim's routine. For students and young professionals, finding a quiet and secluded place to pray for five minutes before continuing on with their day is a significant challenge. Musallah intends to create a solution for that need by crowd-sourcing convenient prayer locations accessible for students throughout the day. Musallah makes it easy to find a space by building, by distance to current location, or by particular requirements (ex. Minimal noise, washroom nearby, etc.) Musallah also goes one step further. As a minority on college campuses, Muslim students who do end up finding prayer spaces often find themselves praying alone in between classes and meetings. Musallah aims to bring back the social experience of prayer, making it easy to find other students who can join together to pray in spaces around campus at the same time and creating a sense of community around prayer.

Stakeholders

Our main stakeholders are students since they will be the users and they will populate the app with spaces and interact on the platform. Another key stakeholder is campus organizations such as the Muslim Students' Association (MSA) or the Chaplain's Office that can act as an administrator on the app to approve spaces and maintain quality.

Market Opportunity

We believe there is great market potential in this area, though it is something novel and not tried before. After some preliminary user research and speaking with our target audience, we found a strong desire and unmet demand in the market for this type of product. An overwhelming majority of our users that we interviewed (over 85%) indicated that they could see themselves downloading and using this product at least once a week. We also believe that the social aspect of this project is particularly key. To the best of our knowledge, no other app or tool has ever attempted to make prayer social by giving users the option to create impromptu events/notify others when and where they are praying. The closest alternative students use today is text group chats, which do work but leave out anyone not in the group chat from joining that prayer and tend to spam a lot of notifications around the event time to anyone in the group who can't make it to pray together that particular day.

Estimation of Size & Growth of Market Segment

There are roughly 3.45 million Muslims in the United States, and that number is growing at a rate of 2% per year. Our target market of university students and urban working professionals represents about 52.5% of this demographic, or 1.79 million people. In the college community, the Muslim Students Association National lists more than 650 chapters nationwide. We believe that this app also has international utility in countries where prayer spaces are harder to come by, like the United States, this app makes it easier to find those spaces, while in countries where prayer spaces are in relative abundance, this app facilitates finding others to pray with in those nearby spaces.

Competition

We are not aware of any competition addressing this specific problem. A Kickstarter campaign attempted to solve this problem in 2015 by creating an app listing prayer spaces near each stop on the New York City metro but ultimately did not follow through with the idea. Their team began with an idea and fundraised to hire developers to actually build a solution - on the other hand, we are fortunate enough to have a working app available on iOS and Android from the get go. Also, our solution tackles the issue from a different perspective by focusing on individual campuses to deploy initially and test before expanding. We believe that the campus approach is a good one because the Muslim student community on most campuses in the US is typically quite tight-knit and community-oriented, and board members of the Muslim Student Association are solid existing individuals we can tap for serving as administrators for each campus.

Costs

Our anticipated costs are fees associated with listing the app on the App Store and the Google Play Store, roughly \$99 per year on the App Store, in addition to cloud hosting fees. Based on the user and usage volume we are expecting, these hosting costs should not exceed \$1,000 per year until we reach one million users.

Revenue Model

We are considering a few options for our revenue model:

In-App Advertising Banner and interstitial ads could work for our app, and we can expect a revenue of \$7.20 (iPhone) for interstitial ads and \$0.20 to \$2.00 (iPhone) on banner ads based on an cost per mile model (total earnings / total impressions x 1000)

Student orgs pay for subscription Our team believes this option is a very promising one. Charging Muslim Student Associations \$300/year for their campus to be added sounds like something that would be feasible for student clubs (at Penn at least, such a cost is very typical for a decent-sized general body meeting held once or twice a semester) and allow us to roll out slowly but steadily.

Brand Sponsorships because our user base is a niche audience, we can solicit sponsorships from brands interested in promoting themselves once we reach a sizable portion of our addressable market. This will largely depend on the sponsors we can acquire and the terms we can negotiate based on our number of daily active users.

Local businesses paying for placement The competitor app that launched for a brief time in New York City took this approach, where businesses with prayer spaces could pay for their spaces to be listed or even promoted in order to attract customers.

Premium features for purchase We are considering offering certain features (ex. iCloud/Google Calendar integration) as premium features available for a monthly fee.

Because we believe the social aspect of this app is so critical for gaining traction, in terms of both users adding prayer spaces they know about and using the social prayer events feature, our team agreed that an individual subscription model (ex. A user pays \$5/month for access to the app) would limit the network effects we are looking for.

Engineering

To get our app available on both Android and iOS quickly, our team chose to build the app using Expo and React Native on the frontend. On the backend, we went with MySQL running on AWS. Our team decided that relatively simple technology would meet our infrastructure needs and largely focused on how to design useful helpful features that would best meet our users' needs.

On the engineering side, last semester, our team focused on putting together the foundational backend infrastructure for prayer spaces (thinking through a database model, creating endpoints). We put together some prototypes in Figma then built out features for viewing nearby prayer spaces as a list or map, submitting a prayer space suggestion through a form, logging in to the app with a Penn Google account, and initial support for admins on each campus to approve/reject prayer space submissions.

This semester, we've built on that work by completing an admin space approval feature (primarily for safety reasons, so a space can be checked before appearing for students across campus). We also began work on the social features of the app, where a user can see how many prayer events are happening in buildings across campus today, create an event (simply designating a time and place where she/he is open to praying with others), indicate interest in an event, and more.