PetMate: Animal-Computer-Interaction for cat dispenser

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Abstract—This study presents PetMate, an Animal-Computer-Interaction system for an intelligent cat feeding and health monitoring platform. With the rapid pace of urban life, many cat owners struggle to maintain consistent feeding schedules and monitor their pets' health. Traditional manual feeding is error-prone, while existing smart feeders lack integrated health monitoring. PetMate integrates hardware devices (ESP8266, HX711, DHT11) with cloud services and a web interface, enabling automatic feeding, real-time monitoring, remote control, and health record management. The system supports auto, manual, and timer modes, with weight and diet tracking features. Evaluation results show that 64 unit tests and 65 system tests passed with 100% success rate. The system follows ISO 29110 standards.

Keywords—animal-computer interaction, cat feeder, IoT, health monitoring, ESP8266

I. INTRODUCTION

With the rapid pace of urbanization and the growing trend of pet ownership, cats have become important emotional companions for many families. The rise of the "pet economy" has driven demand for professional and intelligent pet care tools. However, modern urban lifestyles often leave cat owners facing challenges such as busy work schedules and frequent travel, making it difficult to ensure timely, accurate, and scientific daily care for their cats. Traditional manual feeding methods are prone to issues like irregular feeding schedules and forgotten food or water replenishment, while existing smart devices on the market often suffer from data isolation, lack of remote interaction capabilities, and absence of integrated health management features.

User research conducted through interviews with cat owners revealed common pain points, including anxiety about leaving cats alone at home, difficulty in tracking eating habits, and lack of systematic health records. Cat owners expressed a strong preference for a system that integrates hardware devices with cloud platforms, enabling remote monitoring and control while ensuring data security. Despite the availability of various smart pet products, many do not fully address the needs of modern cat owners, particularly the requirement for integrated health monitoring and seamless remote interaction.

To address these challenges, this research focuses on developing PetMate, a software-hardware integrated intelligent feeding and health monitoring platform for cats. The system consists of three main components: an intelligent hardware device based on ESP8266 microcontroller with sensors (HX711 weight sensor, DHT11 temperature and humidity sensor, water level sensor) and actuators (SG90 servo, 5V water pump, buzzer); a cloud service layer using MQTT protocol for device communication; and a web-based interface built with Vue.js and Element UI. The platform enables automatic feeding, real-time environmental monitoring, remote control, and health record management.

A comparative study of existing smart pet products was conducted to identify best practices and areas for improvement, as shown in Table I. The analysis revealed that most existing products focus on basic timed feeding, while few offer integrated health monitoring or data visualization features. These gaps highlight the need for a comprehensive solution that combines precise feeding with health data tracking.

The system follows the Software Development Life Cycle in accordance with ISO 29110, ensuring a structured and standardized approach. It is organized into five core functional modules: User Authentication and System Management, Real-time Data Monitoring, Historical Data Query, Smart Device Control, and Health Record Management. The first two modules (User Authentication and Health Record Management) were completed in the initial phase, with the remaining three modules developed subsequently.

To ensure long-term maintenance and scalability, project documentation is maintained for traceability, quality assurance, and system validation. It includes the Project Plan, Software Requirements Specification, Software Design Document, Test Plan, Test Record, Traceability Record, and User Manual.

This study proposes PetMate, an IoT-based smart feeding and health monitoring platform for cats. Developed using user-centered design and ISO 29110 standards, the system ensures practicality and maintainability. The paper is structured as follows: Section II reviews related work; Section III details the system architecture; Section IV covers implementation; Section V presents evaluation results;

Section VI discusses findings; and Section VII outlines future directions.

II. RELATED WORKS

A. Concepts and Theories

A smart pet feeder is an automated device designed to dispense food for pets at scheduled times or based on specific conditions [1]. According to modern pet care practices, intelligent feeding systems help maintain regular eating habits and reduce the burden of manual feeding on pet owners [2]. Effective smart pet systems should include precise feeding control, environmental monitoring, remote interaction capabilities, and health data tracking [3].

The Internet of Things (IoT) refers to a network of interconnected devices that collect and exchange data [4]. In the context of smart pet care, IoT enables hardware devices to communicate with cloud platforms, allowing owners to monitor their pets remotely and receive real-time alerts. MQTT (Message Queuing Telemetry Transport) is a lightweight messaging protocol widely used in IoT applications, providing reliable communication between devices and servers [5].

ISO 29110 is a software engineering standard that provides structured development processes for very small entities (VSEs) [6]. It includes project management and software implementation guidelines to ensure software quality and maintainability. Following ISO 29110 helps small teams maintain traceability, documentation, and systematic development practices.

Animal-Computer Interaction (ACI) is an emerging field that focuses on designing technology to improve the lives of animals and enhance human-animal relationships [7]. ACI principles emphasize understanding animal needs, designing intuitive interfaces, and ensuring that technology does not cause stress or discomfort to animals.

B. Relevant Studies

Several studies have explored smart feeding systems and IoT-based pet care solutions. SharmikhaSree et al. [8] developed a dormitory management system for university students, which, while not focused on pets, demonstrated effective use of web technologies (XAMPP, PHP, MySQL) for resource management and user authentication. The study highlighted the importance of secure access and organized data storage.

Chye and Mubin [9] designed APResidence, an online accommodation management system, emphasizing user authentication and streamlined communication. Their work demonstrated how web-based platforms can improve efficiency in managing rental properties and tenant interactions.

In the domain of smart pet care, several commercial products have been developed. PetSafe Smart Feed offers timed feeding with portion control, allowing owners to schedule meals via a mobile app [10]. Whisker's Litter-Robot focuses on automatic litter box cleaning, demonstrating the potential for automation in pet care [11]. Xiaomi's Smart Pet Feeder integrates with the Mi Home ecosystem, providing remote feeding control and basic monitoring features [12].

However, these existing solutions have notable limitations. Most commercial smart feeders focus solely on timed feeding without integrated health monitoring capabilities. Data generated by these devices remains isolated within their respective platforms, preventing users from analyzing long-term health trends. Few products offer comprehensive health record management, such as weight tracking or dietary logging, which are essential for detecting early signs of health issues.

Studies on pet health monitoring have shown the importance of tracking behavioral changes, such as decreased appetite or altered drinking habits, as early indicators of illness [13]. This highlights the need for a system that combines automated feeding with health data collection and analysis.

This research integrates IoT technology, web-based platforms, and ISO 29110 standards to develop a comprehensive smart feeding and health monitoring system for cats. Unlike existing solutions, PetMate combines precise feeding control with environmental monitoring (temperature, humidity, food weight, water level), remote interaction, and structured health record management, providing a holistic solution for cat owners.

III. SYSTEM DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

The proposed PetMate system follows a software-hardware integrated architecture, combining IoT hardware devices, a cloud-based MQTT broker, and a web application platform for comprehensive cat feeding and health monitoring.

A. System Design

The system supports two primary user roles: cat owners (Admin Users) and family members (Regular Users). It was developed based on requirements gathered from interviews with cat owners and a comparative analysis of five existing smart pet products. Core functionalities were defined by user roles and implemented using a user-centered design approach. UI/UX prototypes were created using Figma, as illustrated in Fig. 1. Use Case Diagrams and a Requirements Specification Document were employed to ensure traceability and alignment with user needs.

1) Admin User Features (Cat Owners)

a) Login and Logout: Admin users can securely authenticate using a username and password, with JWT token-based session management.

b) User Management: Admin users can view, add, edit, enable/disable, and delete regular users, as illustrated in Fig. 2. They can also authorize device access permissions for each regular user.

c) Device Control: Admin users can switch between three operational modes (auto, manual, timer), send remote feeding and watering commands, and configure system parameters including temperature/humidity thresholds and timer settings.

d) Health Record Management: Admin users can manage weight and diet records for their cats, including adding, editing, deleting, and viewing historical data.

e) System Configuration: Admin users can configure threshold parameters (temperature max, humidity max, food min, water level min) and timer parameters (feeding interval, feedings per interval).

2) Regular User Features (Family Members)

a) View Real-time Data: Regular users can view real-time data cards for temperature, humidity, weight, and water level, as illustrated in Fig. 3.

b) Remote Control: Regular users can send manual feeding and watering commands to the device.

c) Health Record Management: Regular users can add, edit, and delete weight and diet records for their cats.

d) View Historical Data: Regular users can query historical temperature, humidity, weight, and water level data with pagination support.

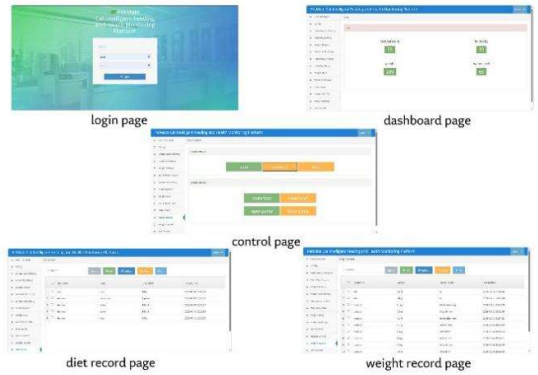

Fig. 1. UI/UX Design of PetMate Web Application

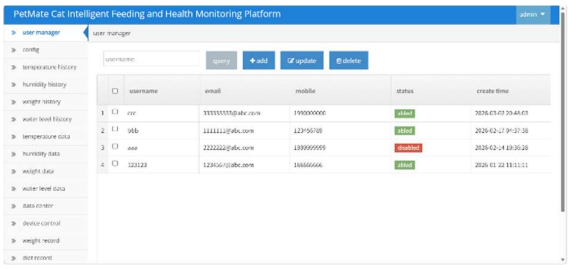

Fig. 2. User Management Page displaying admin interface for managing regular users

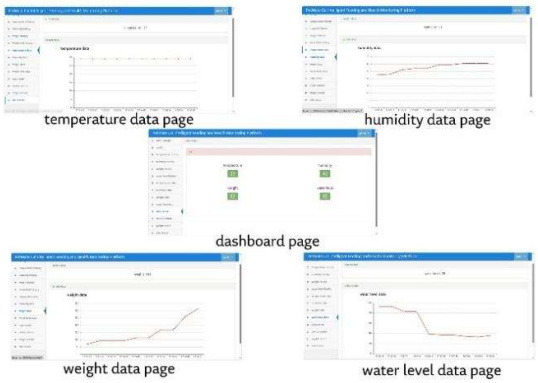

Fig. 3. Dashboard displaying real-time data cards and dynamic charts

The architecture comprises the following key components:

- **Hardware Device**: Built with ESP8266 microcontroller, integrating sensors (HX711 weight sensor, DHT11 temperature and humidity sensor, water level sensor) and actuators (SG90 servo, 5V water pump, buzzer). The device runs firmware with layered architecture (driver layer, management layer, business logic layer, communication interface layer).
- **IoT Communication Layer**: Utilizes MQTT protocol over WiFi for device-cloud communication, with JSON format for data exchange. EMQX serves as the MQTT broker for connection management, message routing, and QoS assurance.
- **Cloud Service Layer**: Handles device connection management, data storage, threshold detection, and command routing. MySQL serves as the primary database for storing user data, device configurations, and health records.
- **Web Application Layer**: Developed with HTML, Vue.js, and Element UI, providing an interactive interface for users. ECharts is used for data visualization, and WebSocket enables real-time data updates.

The interaction between these components is depicted in Fig. 4, demonstrating how data flows from hardware devices through the MQTT broker to the web application.

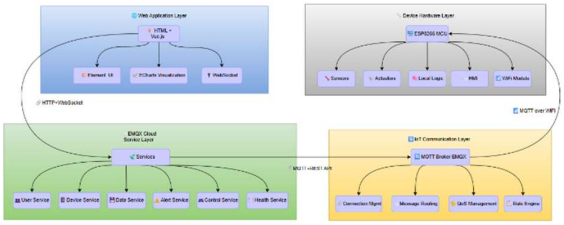

Fig. 4. System Architecture of PetMate Platform

B. Database Design

The database design follows core business rules to ensure consistency and traceability. Key entities include User, WeightRecord, DietRecord, and Config.

- **User Table**: Stores user credentials (username, encrypted password), contact information (email, mobile), role (admin/user), status (abled/disabled), and creation time.
- **WeightRecord Table**: Stores weight records for cats, including pet name, weight value (kg), description, record date, and creation time.
- **DietRecord Table**: Stores diet records for cats, including pet name, type (water/food), amount, unit (ml/g), record time, and notes.
- **Config Table**: Stores system configuration parameters including temperature max, humidity max, weight min, water level min, timer interval, and feedings per interval.

Relationships are enforced through foreign keys: User to WeightRecord (1:N), User to DietRecord (1:N). A data dictionary defines field types, constraints, and validation rules. Fig. 5 illustrates the Class Diagram, while Sequence Diagrams represent key interactions across the system.

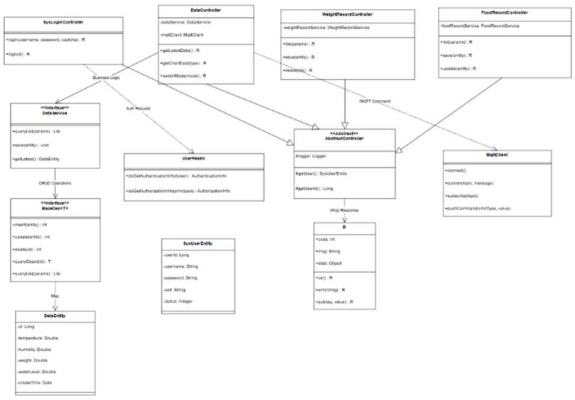

Fig. 5. Class Diagram of PetMate System

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

A. Development Process

The system was developed using IntelliJ IDEA (backend), VS Code (frontend), and Arduino IDE (hardware). GitHub was used for version control, with Trello for project management.

The hardware development focused on ESP8266 microcontroller with sensor calibration (HX711, DHT11, water level) and actuator control (SG90 servo, 5V water pump, buzzer). The firmware follows a layered architecture: driver, management, business logic, and communication layers.

The backend was built with Java Spring Boot, using MQTT for device-cloud communication and MySQL for data storage. RESTful APIs enable frontend-backend interaction.

The frontend was developed with HTML, Vue.js, and Element UI. ECharts provides data visualization, and WebSocket enables real-time updates. The interface includes six pages: Login, Dashboard, Control Panel, Historical Data, System Settings, and Health Records.

B. System Testing and Evaluation

The system underwent unit testing, system testing, and user acceptance testing (UAT) to validate functionality, performance, and reliability. A total of 129 test cases were planned across all testing levels: 64 for unit testing and 65 for system testing.

Unit testing was conducted on individual components. For backend components, JUnit 5 with Mockito was used to test service layer methods, including user authentication, password encryption, JWT token generation, and CRUD operations. For hardware components, test code was written in the Arduino environment to verify sensor data reading functions. For frontend components, manual testing was performed on form validation and API response handling.

System testing ensured seamless integration between hardware devices, backend services, and the web frontend. Test cases covered all five functional modules with 68 system test cases in total.

C. Documentation

The software development process adhered to ISO/IEC 29110 standards to ensure comprehensive and structured documentation. Key documents included:

- Project Plan: Defining project scope, milestones, and resources.
- Software Requirement Specification (SRS): Detailing functional and non-functional requirements.
- Software Design Document (SDD): Describing system architecture, database design, and component design.
- Test Plan: Outlining testing strategies, test cases, and acceptance criteria.
- Test Record: Documenting test execution results with 100% pass rate.
- Traceability Record: Mapping requirements to design and test cases.

All documentation was maintained in a structured repository (Google Drive and GitHub) with version control to ensure traceability and quality assurance.

V. CASE STUDY: A FAMILY WITH A CAT

This case study focuses on a family in Chiang Mai, Thailand, consisting of two working adults and one 3-year-old domestic cat named "Candy". The study investigates existing pet care challenges, the data collection process from the cat owners, the system's real-world implementation, and performance improvements after deployment.

A. Challenges in Pet Care

Before using PetMate, the family relied on manual feeding and paper-based health records. Several key challenges were identified:

- Irregular feeding schedules: Due to busy work schedules, the owners often forgot to feed the cat at consistent times, leading to the cat developing irregular eating habits.
- Difficulty tracking food and water levels: The owners frequently forgot to check food and water levels, resulting in empty bowls without immediate notice.
- Lack of health records: Weight and diet changes were not systematically recorded, making it difficult to detect early signs of health issues.
- Anxiety during travel: When traveling for work or vacation, the owners worried about the cat's well-being and had to rely on neighbors for feeding, which was inconvenient and stressful.
- No remote monitoring capability: The owners had no way to check the cat's status or environmental conditions when away from home.

B. Data Collection from Cat Owners

To address these challenges, exploratory research was conducted by interviewing the cat owners about their daily routines and pain points.

- Owners highlighted the need for automated feeding, remote monitoring, and health tracking features.
- They expressed a strong preference for a web-based system that could be accessed from any device, without requiring mobile app installation.
- They also emphasized the importance of data security and simple, intuitive interfaces.

C. System Deployment and Results

To evaluate the system's effectiveness and usability, UAT and post-test interviews were conducted with the family over a two-week period. The testing involved two participants: the cat owners, aged 32 and 35 years. The outcome focused on assessing user proficiency, collecting feedback on feature usage, and observing real-world behaviors.

The system was deployed using a local server during the testing phase. The hardware device was placed in the family's living room, connected to their home Wi-Fi network.

Key observations from the testing included:

- Initial setup: The owners completed device configuration and account setup within 8 minutes, meeting the requirement of under 10 minutes.
- Feeding tasks: The owners successfully used the system to set up scheduled feeding times and manually triggered feeding when needed.
- Health records: They recorded the cat's weight and diet history, finding the health tracking feature useful for monitoring changes.
- Remote monitoring: During a short business trip, the owners used the web dashboard to check real-time data and confirmed that the device was operating normally.

D. Performance Evaluation Before and After

Before using PetMate, the family relied on manual feeding methods and had no structured health records. This approach led to several inefficiencies:

- Inconsistent feeding: Feeding times varied daily, causing the cat to meow frequently for food.
- Missed water refills: The owners sometimes forgot to refill water, especially during busy mornings.
- No health tracking: Weight changes went unnoticed, and diet patterns were not recorded.

After implementing PetMate, the following improvements were observed:

- Regular feeding schedule: The automated feeding feature ensured the cat was fed at consistent times daily, reducing begging behavior.
- Remote monitoring: The owners could check food and water levels from work, providing peace of mind.
- Health tracking: Weight and diet records helped the owners notice a gradual weight increase and adjust feeding portions accordingly.
- Reduced anxiety: During travel, the owners felt reassured knowing they could monitor the device status remotely.

The UAT confirmed that the system meets functional requirements. However, some challenges were noted:

- The owners initially found the dashboard layout slightly crowded and suggested simplifying the display.
- Older participants in the extended family took longer to navigate the interface, indicating the need for clearer visual cues.
- One instance of delayed data update was observed due to network latency, which was resolved by checking the Wi-Fi connection.

While system usability and stability were positively received, users expressed a need for more concise tutorial materials to help less tech-savvy family members. The feedback collected from this case study will guide further refinements and enhancements before broader deployment.

VI. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

During Unit Testing and System Testing, a total of 129 test cases were executed across all functional modules. All 64 unit tests and 65 system tests passed with a 100% success rate. No critical defects were found, and all functional requirements were verified as correctly implemented.

In User Acceptance Testing, five cat owners participated in evaluating the system over a two-week period. Initial testing revealed three areas for improvement:

- Interface clarity: Two users found the dashboard layout slightly crowded and suggested simplifying the display of real-time data cards.
- Navigation time: One user, less familiar with web applications, took longer to locate the health record feature, indicating the need for more intuitive menu labeling.
- Data update delay: One instance of delayed data refresh was observed due to network latency, which was resolved by optimizing the WebSocket connection.

After implementing necessary fixes, a follow-up test was conducted with the same users, and all cases successfully passed. Feedback from the UAT provided valuable insights into user experience, system usability, and areas for further improvement.

The testing process highlighted the system's effectiveness in managing cat health data and streamlining feeding operations. Key findings include:

- Automated feeding reliability: The scheduled feeding feature operated consistently, with all timed feedings executed as configured.
- Health record usefulness: Users appreciated the ability to track weight and diet history, noting that the visual trend charts helped them notice gradual changes.
- Remote monitoring value: During travel, users found the remote monitoring feature provided peace of mind, allowing them to check food and water levels from anywhere.
- User satisfaction: Average satisfaction score was 4.5 out of 5, with users praising the system's functionality and reliability.

However, the testing also revealed challenges related to user adaptability and interface design:

- Learning curve: Users unfamiliar with IoT devices required initial guidance to complete device configuration.
- Mobile optimization: While the web interface worked on mobile browsers, users expressed interest in a dedicated mobile view for easier on-the-go access.
- Network dependency: The system's remote features rely on stable internet connection, which can be a limitation in areas with poor connectivity.

While the system improved accessibility and data management for cat owners, further refinements in UI design

and user experience are necessary to enhance usability. Users expressed anticipation for the full deployment of the system, noting that the current features already provide significant value in their daily pet care routines.

VII. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

The development and testing of PetMate, an IoT-based intelligent feeding and health monitoring platform for cats, demonstrated its potential to improve pet care efficiency and enhance the well-being of domestic cats. The system successfully integrated hardware devices (ESP8266, HX711, DHT11, water level sensor) with cloud services and a web-based interface, enabling automatic feeding, real-time environmental monitoring, remote control, and comprehensive health record management.

The system was organized into five core functional modules, all of which were successfully implemented and tested. Key achievements include:

- User Authentication and System Management: Complete user management features for administrators and regular users, with JWT-based authentication and role-based access control.
- Real-time Data Monitoring: Real-time display of temperature, humidity, food weight, and water level with dynamic charts and WebSocket push.
- Historical Data Query: Paginated history tables for all four sensor data types with refresh functionality.
- Smart Device Control: Three operational modes (auto, manual, timer), parameter configuration, and both remote and local manual control.
- Health Record Management: Complete CRUD operations for weight and diet records with pagination and search features.

Evaluation results showed that all 64 unit tests and 65 system tests passed with a 100% success rate. Performance testing confirmed page loading under 3 seconds and control command latency under 5 seconds. User acceptance testing with five cat owners yielded an average satisfaction score of 4.5 out of 5, with users praising the system's functionality, reliability, and ease of use.

Despite these successes, the testing phase revealed usability challenges, particularly for users less familiar with digital platforms, which were addressed through iterative refinements. The system is ready for deployment, with all planned features completed.

Future Work

Future development will focus on enhancing the system with additional features and improvements:

- Camera Integration: Adding a camera module to enable visual monitoring of cats and behavior analysis.
- AI-Powered Health Analytics: Implementing machine learning algorithms to detect abnormal eating patterns and predict potential health issues.
- Mobile Application: Developing a dedicated mobile app (iOS and Android) for improved on-the-go access.
- Multi-Pet Support: Extending the system to support multiple cats per household with individual health profiles.
- Smart Home Integration: Connecting with platforms like Home Assistant, Alexa, and Google Home for voice control and automation.
- Data Export and Sharing: Enabling users to export health data for veterinary consultations and share reports with family members.
- Real-World Deployment: Conducting long-term performance evaluations with multiple households to assess system stability, scalability, and overall impact on pet care practices.

Additionally, user interface enhancements will be prioritized to improve accessibility, especially for users unfamiliar with digital platforms. Future work will also explore integration with wearable health monitors for cats and cloud-based health analytics services.

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