

2.1 Case study: emotional design

Objective

This exercise aims to explore how we read a product from an emotional point of view. We ask you to observe and compare two different designs of the same object regarding the emotional response that the designs evoke. You can choose any product that is available in a variety of shapes by comparing a more classic/conservative version with a more informal/innovative variety. For example, students can compare a sports watch such as aviator chronographs and a classic dress watch, a conventional teapot versus an Alessi Kettle, a Corelle Open Hook Handle cup versus a more traditional coffee mug, different types of coffeemakers, etc. Whatever your choice will be, you must have physical access to the two versions of the product for observation and testing purposes (consider objects that you have in your home or visit a store and ask to examine and try the product as a customer). The exercise can be performed individually or in small teams, and results can be presented in a class in which different students or teams have analyzed different products.

To perform the comparison, we suggest using the model proposed by Don Norman in his book *Emotional Design* (Norman, 2004). According to this model, emotions affect how we process information at three levels: visceral, behavioural, and reflective. At the visceral level, we process information very rapidly (gut feelings) regarding how good or bad the stimulus feels. When we assess a design at the visceral level, the focus is primarily on the product's appearance. At the behavioural level, emotions are associated with the pleasure (or frustration) that we experience when using the product. At the reflective level, design features are assessed in light of high-level intellectual concepts such as cultural values, social norms, individual biography, memories, self-image, etc. Students can refer to the recommended readings in the references below for a more extended description of Norman's framework). The three levels are arranged in a hierarchy, but information flows in both ways (from the visceral to the reflective and vice versa). The overall emotional assessment combines information gathered and evaluated at each level, with each level influencing the other.

Instructions

1. Select two alternative designs of a same product.
2. Compare the two designs at each level (some elements are suggested in the following checklist but feel free to choose the ones that are most appropriate for your product or add others).
 - a. Visceral (observe the product and record your immediate feelings): aesthetic pleasure, look and feel (colours, weight, shapes), immediately noticeable features, etc.
 - b. Behavioural (test the product): easy to understand, easy to use, effective/useful, efficient, quality of materials (e.g. durability, sturdiness), enjoyable to touch/manipulate, etc.
 - c. Reflective: social desirability and status (coolness), trendy versus outdated, style, metaphors, cultural factors (e.g. Italian coffee versus American coffee, geeky, representative of a certain social group/tribe ...)
3. Report your main observation as notes in the table below.

4. It is important to remember that: i) the emotional assessment is subjective, so there is no right or wrong, and ii) for the successful completion of the exercise you have to make an effort to map your emotional evaluation over specific design features.

	Model A	Model B
Visceral (appearance)		
Behavioural (use)		
Reflective (rationalization)		

References

Komninos, D. (2020), **Norman's Three Levels of Design**

available at <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/norman-s-three-levels-of-design>.

Norman, D. A. (2004). *Emotional Design: Why we love (or hate) everyday things*. Basic Books.