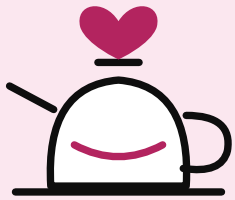
Theory

Emotional design

A theory that explains how a product stirs emotions on three levels at once: what you feel when you see it, what you experience when you use it and what it means to the person who owns it.



In Spanish
Diseño emocional

Origin
Norman (2004)

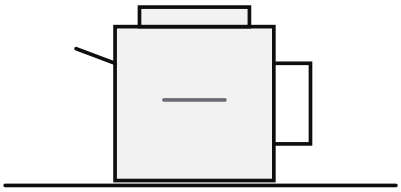
What problem it addresses

It explains why two products that work the same aren't experienced the same, and why an attractive object seems easier to use.

An example

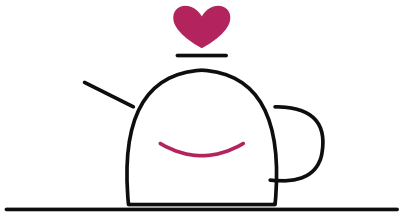
An illustrative example: two kettles that heat water equally well.

It just works



It boils water, but it's clunky and nobody leaves it on display. **It goes in a cupboard.**

It works and it pleases



It does the same, but it's a pleasure to look at and use, and it says something about whoever chose it. **It stays in the kitchen.**

With the same function, the one that stirs emotions gets used more, forgiven more and kept longer.

Why it happens

1

At first sight, shape, color and touch trigger an immediate reaction.

2

When you use it, feeling that it works and that you're in control is satisfying.

3

Over time, the object comes to say something about its owner and their memories.

Applications in design

Use it like this

Review your design on all three levels, first impression, use and meaning, not just function.

Avoid

Covering up a hard-to-use product with an attractive finish.

Don't fall for it

Looking easy doesn't mean it is: check it with people who use it.

0.59 → 0.92

What the research says

With 26 ATM designs, the more attractive a design looked, the easier people believed it was to use. The relationship was 0.59 in Japan and 0.92 when the study was repeated in Israel (Kurosu and Kashimura, 1995; Tractinsky, 1997).

●●○ **Debated evidence.** The studies measure how easy the product seems before it is used, not how easy it really is. And the strength of the relationship changes with culture and task.

Connections

Used in

- Color, material and finish (CMF) design
- Experience design
- Brand design
- Packaging design

Related to

- Aesthetic-usability effect
- Design hierarchy of needs
- Form follows function
- Usability

Authors and works

2004	**Donald A. Norman**	Proposed the three levels at which a product affects us: visceral, behavioral and reflective, and argued that attractive things work better.
1995	**Masaaki Kurosu and Kaori Kashimura**	Asked 252 people to rate 26 ATM designs and found that perceived beauty went hand in hand with perceived ease of use.
1997	**Noam Tractinsky**	Repeated the study in Israel with the same designs and found an even stronger relationship.

Sources

Original sources

- Norman, D. A. (2004). Emotional design: Why we love (or hate) everyday things. Basic Books. View source (https://jnd.org/emotional-design-why-we-love-or-hate-everyday-things/)
- Kurosu, M., & Kashimura, K. (1995). Apparent usability vs. inherent usability: Experimental analysis on the determinants of the apparent usability. In CHI '95 Conference Companion (pp. 292–293). ACM. View source (https://chi1995.chistatic.hosting.acm.org/proceedings/shortppr/mk_bdy.htm)
- Tractinsky, N. (1997). Aesthetics and apparent usability: Empirically assessing cultural and methodological issues. In Proceedings of CHI '97 (pp. 115–122). ACM. View source (https://chi1997.acm.org/proceedings/paper/nt.html)

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