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Cart 360

Critical Reflection 2

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Taste Your Emotions: An Exploration of the Relationship between Taste and Emotional Experience for HCI is a research paper that explores the connection between human's emotional states and specific tastes using 3D printed food. The designers and researchers conducting this study tested how certain websites made people feel based on how easy and inviting the sites were and how they correlated with specific flavours. The research found that more positive experiences correlated with sweeter tastes and negative experiences correlated with sour and savory tastes.

The experiments conducted in the study confirms that there is a mental link between the user's emotions and the taste they percieve in their mouth. However, the data does not explore whether or not the same effect would be had outside of a laboratory setting. In order to continue this experiment it would seem appropriate to conduct it in an area where food consumption is quite common and where elements like the spatial design and communication with other people might affect the overall results. To be more accurate, does the link between taste and mood also correlate with the relationship between taste and dining setting? In this text, I would like to theorize the possibility that the connection established between taste and emotional state can positively or negatively affect a person's dining experience at a restaurant.

To begin, one must understand the variables that create a positive dining experience. Unfortunately the study conducted was much more simple and contained, and stated that while the "study was focused on real life scenarios [it] was nonetheless abstract from participant's real

life usage" (1287). Thus, there is no way to accurately prove this theory until someone is able to recreate the experiment in a proper everyday dining environment. Furthermore, there are countless types of dining environments that people experience every day. These differences are often influenced by economic class, personal taste in food and cultural influence from a person's upbringing and surroundings. Nevertheless, I believe that there is still value to trying to examine if it is possible to achieve the same results in this study in an environment outside of a test lab.

To continue, there are many arguments surrounding what creates an enjoyable dining experience. Many would argue that the quality of the food is the most important aspect of a successful restaurant. In a New York Times article, Moira Hodgsen wrote that "an inspector for Guide Michelin once said that if the food was good enough he would give three stars to a restaurant that had Formica tables, neon lighting and blaring music in the background"(*The New York Times*). Thus, even the most prestigious group of food critics would award a restaurant a strong title if the only redeeming quality about it was the excellence of the food being consumed. On the other hand, many people argue that ambiance and customer service play an equally important role in the overall effect it can have on a dining experience. This brings us back to the question: if the ambiance and service are bad, can it affect the way people taste their food similarly to the way the quality of websites affected the participant's taste?

Furthermore, many also argue that the ambiance and customer service in a restaurant contribute greatly to how well a diner responds to the experience. An article by *Mashed* describes some of the most unpleasant aspects of bad dining, including things like unresponsive wait staff, unpleasant smells and badly cleaned facilities can contribute to the patron's experience. The overall unpleasantness of the environment is quite similar to the experiments created in the study where the unpleasantness of a website/digital space affected the user's taste.

With this is mind, it is not unreasonable to assume that if the study was conducted in an unpleasant environment, the mood of the participant would be directly affected.

However, the final variable to consider may be the reason we may never fully be able to quantify this data perfectly. The variable in question is the fact that people all have different relationships to different textures, tastes and contexts that surround food, including 3D printed food. Even restaurants that serve 3D printed foods seem to be aware of these stipulations and provide their own ambiance within a certain context. For example, Food Ink still takes into consideration the plating of the food and the way it is consumed by the restaurant patrons. Thus, while it may be possible to draw a direct line between emotional state and taste in a lab, there are still too many variables that make it difficult to reach a perfect conclusion.

To conclude, while the computational data conducted in this research paper does support the emotional relationship between the consumer and the taste, there are still many factors that contribute to the real life settings of this type of relationship that may hinder the recreation of this study. Overall, it will be fascinating to see if this research can be replicated in a more complex form in the future.

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