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3-2 Assignment: Colors, Sounds, & Motion

When building the UI/UX of a project, there are countless moving parts that all interact with one another to, ideally, create a fluid, engaging interface and experience that is satisfying to use and meets the needs of the user. I will be touching on three key aspects of UI and UX design in this paper- colors, sounds, and motion. With each aspect being individually important in their own ways, they all come together to create a cohesive and coordinated final product.

Color! According to Hailey van Braam, “color is vital to the human experience. Through color, we feel; we communicate; we heal. Those in advertising use it to sell products; those in schools and offices use it to increase productivity (2021).” We see these effects all around us- from fast food, to makeup, and in products and applications we use everyday! There are three principles that can serve to guide the direction and focus of color use in projects. Color themes should be hierarchical, legible, and expressive (Material Design, n.d., Color Principles Section). How do we know a button is a very serious button? Perhaps it’s big, red, and says “DO NOT PRESS”. When we see a big, red button with capital letters on it, we automatically assume it’s a very important button! In applications, we often know what buttons can be pressed because of their contrast to the background. If interactive elements all blended in with the colors around them, they would be difficult to identify and not very intuitive! Finally, color schemes can create a lasting memory with the users. Yellow and red conjures up a McDonald’s for many people. They have built their brand around those colors, and people have built this connection, perhaps subconsciously, in their mind. Knowing what colors compliment each other, and what colors can elicit certain emotions contributes heavily to my own approach with color themes.

In a crowded room, a person’s phone begins to ring. A few of the people in the room, without thinking, begin to pull their phone out of their pocket to check if it’s their device. Similar to how we build a relationship in our mind with colors, we do the very same with sounds, too. Many people recognize the iconic iPhone “chime” for a text or the chipper melody of the ringtone. Sound design principles, even when very simple, serve a number of purposes: they are informative, honest, and reassuring (Material Design, n.d., Sound Principles Section). Many people know when they hear that specific iPhone chime that they received a text. We know the importance of our phone notifications based on how they sound, too. An email blip is often very different from a text. It gives us a sense of action or reassurance- “hey, I was waiting for my husband to text me back, now I can reply.” Another good example of sound use is, again, McDonald’s. The iconic “bum bum bum bum bum, I’m loving it!” is a sound many people recognize as McDonald’s. It represents their company in a way that people understand. It is synonymous with the brand’s identity. Sounds, like colors, can elicit emotions from people. Subconsciously and consciously encouraging specific feelings and actions. Similarly, they can enforce behaviors or encourage specific actions. The sound of the Mercedes-Benz G-Wagon’s doors, for example, is a very satisfying “CLUNK”.

The final piece of UI/UX I will be touching on will be motion. This is something I have personally witnessed evolve over the last 10 years in smartphone interfaces. Menus have become more efficient, streamlined, and satisfying to scroll through. Motion principles serve 3 purposes: they are informative, focused, and expressive (Material Design, n.d., Motion Principles Section). How do we know a window minimizes on the Windows OS? Well, it looks like it shrinks down to the taskbar. Similarly, motion can be used to represent progress- it focuses on what is important. We know how far along a download or install is because the progress bar is moving in a way that makes something look “more full”. It looks like it is progressing. Motion can create expressiveness, too. A fitness app may have an achievement badge jump out at the user, celebrating their journey to achieving that goal. It creates a sense of character and joyfulness in using the interface.

When we pick up and use an electronic device, play a video game, or even turn on a car nowadays, we are experiencing a multitude of factors working in cohesion to make the experience unforgettable for the user. The interactions between motion, sound, and color are almost everywhere in today’s digital landscape, even if we don’t realize it. Cars make fake engine noises inside the cabin that make the driver think “wow, this car sounds fast!” Our alarm apps that wake us up in the morning have a pulsing visual on them, emphasizing the time or complementing the sound coming from the speakers. Loot boxes that cost real money in video games make satisfying sounds and open dramatically, to a splash of specific colors indicating how exclusive it is to spend real money on virtual objects. Whether good or bad, every part of the UI and UX coordinate to engage and create a response to the person using it.

References

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