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Color and Sound (The color system, n.d.)

Color goes a long way when it comes to designing applications for the user, not for the designer. In my own experience, the use of colors is something I subconsciously look for in an app. Warm, inviting colors make it easier on the eyes and draws me in with a soft palate that may be more relaxing to use for extended periods of time. As I write this paper in Microsoft Word, I have an all-black background, where the pages are a dark grey, and text is white. This helps me stay focused and allows for less “blue light” on my eyes, especially when I’m doing homework for hours up until time to sleep. But in another sense, apps on my phone that produce many colors help entice me to use it more by keeping common themes. What comes to mind is the “Target” app by the department store Target. It is very well known to see that two-ringed, red and white, bullseye. In the app, red and white are the main colors used. In an article at material.io, colors and themes are “… designed to be harmonious, ensure accessible text, and distinguish UI elements and surfaces from one another”(Material Design). Harmonious is a fantastic word to describe the “Target” app as it is consistent with the colors you would see if you were in the physical store. If this app was black and white, it may not sell the Target brand as well as it just won’t feel like you are “in the store”. A real effective way for colors to be used in designs could be for progress bars or meters. How boring would it be if you open your favorite game on your phone and as it loads, it is a black screen with and white progress bar? Now if you take a game like Candy Crush Saga, which is full of bright colors from all over the color wheel, it is more enticing to wait for that app to fully load.

Truly, I never realized how much *actually* goes into UI/UX design and it is honestly quite astonishing. Going forward, color is a large tool in developing a successful application. In my short 25 years on this planet, I have always stayed clear of bright colors, seeing them as “obnoxious”. But now I see they may serve a purpose in an application and how certain colors may allow for a user to perceive content in different ways. It has made me open to the perspective of using colors that compliment one another, not just the ones that I, the designer, think look good. By understanding the best practices of UI/UX design and having users’ natural instincts in mind, I can effectively serve users by making applications easy to navigate and visually appealing. This ranges from using color to indicate that the user has interacted with the application by selecting a box, to using color to draw attention to different elements by contrast.

Sound is probably one of the most prominent forms of communication on a mobile device and we may not even realize it. When a phone rings, a user may set a tone for a text, call, or FaceTime. They may even go in depth as to set certain tones for specific people in their contacts list. This way, when the phone rings and they hear “My girl” by The Temptations, they know their significant other is calling. This association with sound is extremely common throughout UI/UX design. As you scroll through a menu on a video game, you may hear some sort of sound effect to indicate that you are changing current options. A lot of devices incorporate sound into their functionality like fire alarms, cell phones, smart watches, microwaves, digital cameras, and dog collars. All of these use a sound in a way to convey some kind of message, like pizza being done reheating or a dog getting too close to its invisible fence. In a UI/UX concept, these sounds can help a user navigate an app by alerting them to what may be going on as they interact. If they are scrolling through options, maybe a clicking type noise as each option is passed is made. Or as they type a text message, each letter has a certain click to affirm the user that the phone has received input and output the letter to the text message field. “Sound design can communicate information, express emotion, and educate users about interactions” (Material Design).

In an app to help learn new languages, spoken word as a sound that works incredibly well to help the user reach their goal of learning a new language. By hearing how it is supposed to be spoken, it is easier to repeat it after practicing. In the same app, if the user is given a quiz, maybe a buzzer will sound if they hit a wrong answer which will be one of many indications that it was incorrect. Little things like this can sway a user into selecting the correct answer to hear a more pleasing sound, which may help them succeed in their goal of learning a new language.

Like color, sound is really something I have taken for granted when it comes to UI/UX design. Material.io mentions “Sound communicates helpful feedback in ways that express a product’s personality and aesthetic” (Material Design). In my anecdote about a language application, sound is one of the most important factors in learning a new language. A user needs to hear how it is spoken, and when the user is quizzed, the sounds played when selecting answers will give that positive or negative feedback to help the user learn. In my future career as a developer, I’ll be sure to add these seemingly little features that will just make the user experience enjoyable with sound that will provide feedback to their actions. This has been one of the greater perspectives from the resources I’ve read, and how sound can help point a user in the right direction.

Although both color and sound are incredibly strong tools in conveying messages to users, whether subliminal or literal, there can be some limitations to them. There can be impairments on the user’s side to no fault of their own; like colorblindness or deafness that can essentially make these tools useless. On the other hand, some colors may not be supported in a “dark mode” setting, so if a user switches over to dark mode the overall experience can be ruined because the appropriate colors are not accounted for. Sometimes, too much sound can just annoy a user, where if whenever they interact with an element, it will just make them either not want to use the app or silence it permanently which will ruin the user experience. Depending on the application, my approach is as goes; color and sound needs to have a balance. Color needs to help the purpose of the app and make it attractive, and sound to give the user positive feedback about their interactions.

References

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