

Designing for Emotional Impact

Highlights

- Designing for emotional needs.
- Creating an emotional impact design.
- Mood boards.

18.1 INTRODUCTION

18.1.1 You Are Here

We begin each process chapter with a “you are here” picture of the chapter topic in the context of The Wheel, the overall UX design lifecycle template (Fig. 18-1). In this chapter, we describe how to design for the top layer of the human needs pyramid—for emotional impact.

In [Section 12.3](#), we discussed how emotional needs occupy the top layer of the user needs pyramid and are about being satisfied, enriched, and being able to form long-term emotional relationships with a product or system. In this chapter, we go about designing for emotional impact to satisfy those needs.

18.2 DESIGNING FOR EMOTIONAL NEEDS

18.2.1 What Designing for Emotional Needs Is About

Designing for emotional needs means designing for satisfaction, meaningfulness, aesthetics, and joy. A design that satisfies emotional needs is endearing and timeless, with the potential for becoming a meaningful part of users’ lives.

Pyramid of User Needs

An abstract representation as a pyramid shape with the bottom layer as ecological needs, the middle layer as interaction needs, and the top layer as emotional needs ([Section 12.3.1](#)).

Emotional perspective

The design viewpoint taken from the emotional layer of the user needs pyramid, on top of the interaction layer and the ecological layer at the base. The emotional perspective focuses on emotional impact and value-sensitive aspects of design, including aesthetics and joy of use and how users are emotionally and culturally satisfied and enriched as they use the product ([Section 12.3.1](#)).

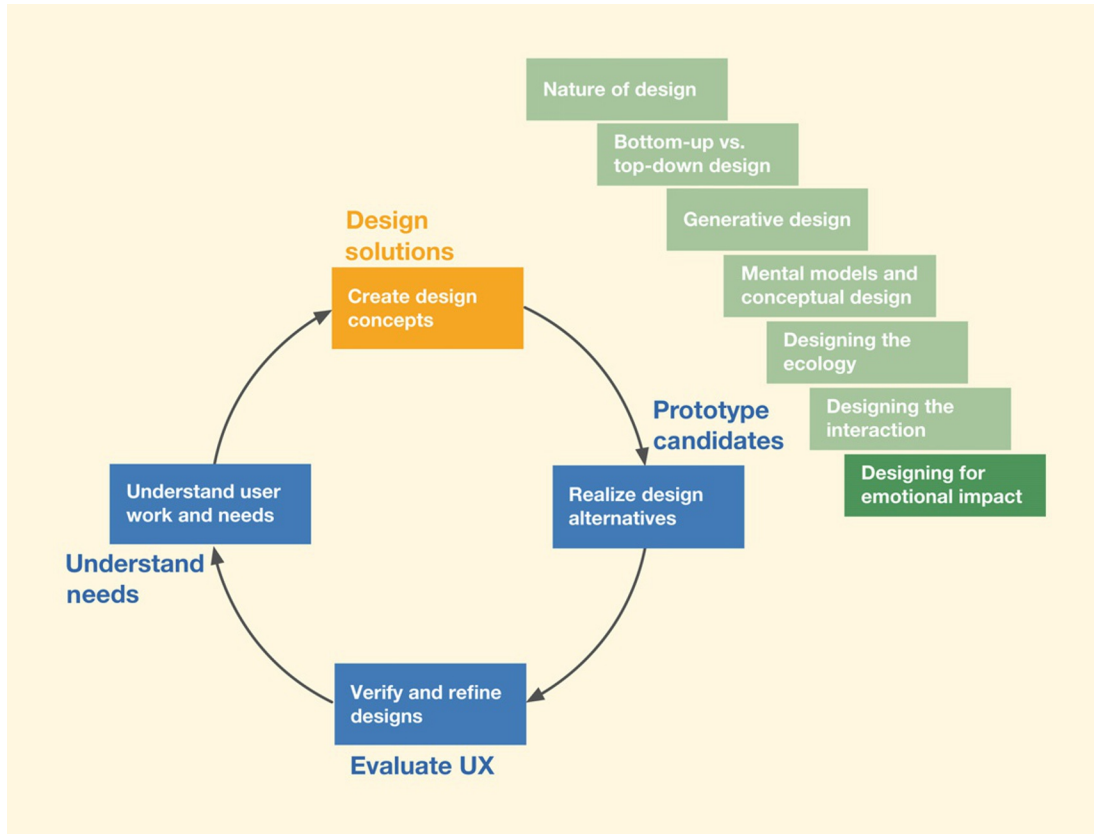


Fig. 18-1

You are here in the chapter describing designing for emotional impact within the Design Solutions lifecycle activity in the context of the overall Wheel UX lifecycle.

18.2.1.1 What users feel when interacting with the system

Humans have a broad range of feelings that are informed by what we see, hear, touch, smell, and taste. In the design of digital products with today's technology, we focus on influencing how users feel by designing what they see, hear, and touch.

For example, if the goal of the design is to delight the user, say, for a children's tablet app, a playful visual palette with bold colors combined with the right animations and screen transitions and generous use of audio cues can induce that emotion. On the other hand, if the goal is to communicate stability and

reliability, say, for a stock trading application, a more restrained visual style where colors are used only for encoding information can induce an emotion of seriousness and being productive. For example, you could use green to show gains in the price of a financial instrument and red to show losses. In such systems, the use of audio will also be relegated to task-focused issues such as communicating error states and notifications.

18.2.1.2 Distinctiveness is a factor when designing for emotional impact

For some products, the goal is to elicit an emotional response in users by producing something different and noticeable, to craft an artistic design for the coolest and best piece of art a product can be. Examples include furniture, jewelry, fashion clothing, and architecture. These domains are full of everyday products that satisfy ecological and interaction needs, but what the world adores are the creations by designers who infuse unique emotional perspectives into their work. Who wouldn't like the cachet of owning custom designer clothing? Or a home designed by Frank Lloyd Wright? Or an original Charles Eames chair?

The emotional perspective in UX design. *The emotional UX design perspective is a point of view that focuses on emotional impact and value-sensitive aspects of design. It is about social and cultural implications as well as the aesthetics and joy of use.*

18.2.2 Designing for Emotional Impact Is Often Neglected But can be a Market Differentiator

In the day-to-day designs for products and systems, particularly enterprise software, business stakeholders focus on supporting the middle (interaction) tier of the needs pyramid, and to a lesser extent the bottom (ecological) tier. The top (emotional) tier is usually neglected. Designing for emotional needs may not even be mandated in the design brief, but it may end up becoming the differentiator that offers the potential to be a market leader.

A product or system that satisfies the emotional needs can distinguish good from “insanely great” products.

18.3 CREATING AN EMOTIONAL IMPACT DESIGN

Of the three types we discussed, designing for emotional impact is perhaps the most difficult to operationalize and externalize as a process. Unlike the ecological or interaction design efforts, there are no straightforward work activity models that directly inform emotional impact attributes. These must be carefully gleaned and nurtured from the users and the usage research data.

Moreover, emotional response targets vary—for example, in consumer products, responses such as delight and joy are important whereas in institutional or enterprise products, the goals are more toward reducing boredom in repetitive tasks and engendering satisfaction during task performance.

18.3.1 Start with Inputs for Emotional Impacts

In Fig. 18-2, we show a few common factors to think about while designing for emotional impact.

The purpose of the model in Fig. 18-2 is to get started on identifying and organizing user needs of various kinds. So, we need to express user needs in the indicated subareas of emotional impact. In this model, for each “ray” coming into the center, we identify the specific kinds of needs for users with respect to this product. For example, for the fashion factor, what is important to users about this product? Is it being avant garde? Being retro? Being modern? Once this is identified, designers can address in ideation, sketching, and critiquing how to achieve each specifically in the design.

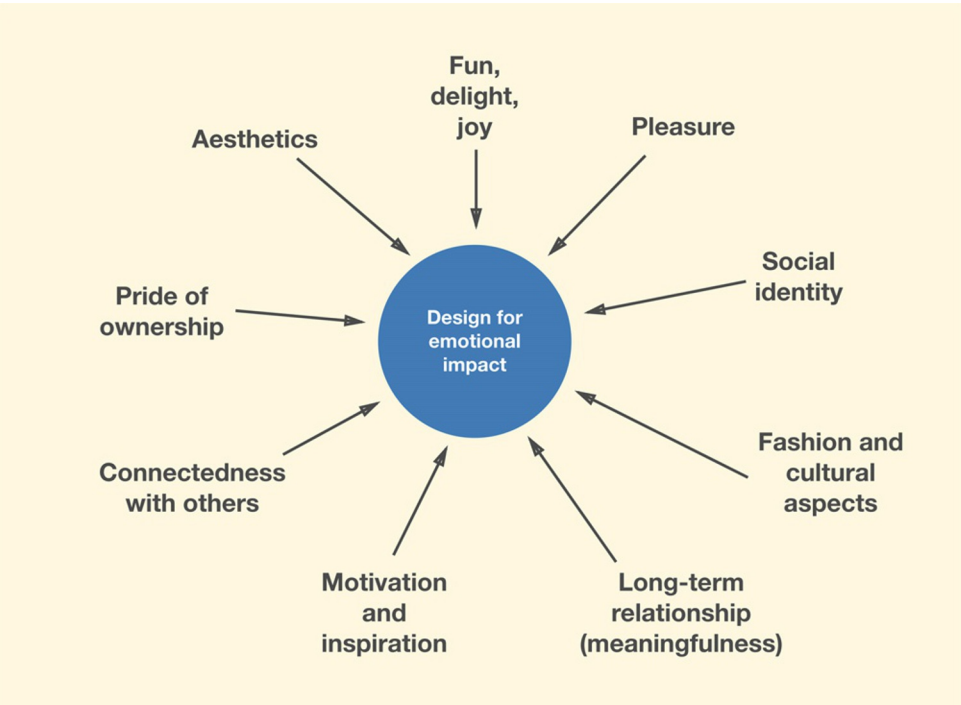


Fig. 18-2
Inputs for emotional impact
and meaningfulness.

18.3.2 Conceptual Design for Emotional Aspects

Conceptual designs for emotional aspects are often more abstract and difficult to articulate. They span concepts for branding, visual or graphic design, sound, motion, and even the tone of language used. It is an abstract theme centered around an idea or a factor.

For example, take the Mini Cooper automobile. The small boxy look could have ended up being plain and utilitarian. But they made it a distinguishing feature. The very idea of the car engenders fun and excitement with its distinctive looks and interior design. The designers use controls and toggle switches that are inspired by airplane cockpits. The location and shape of the central information console follows this concept as well. The result is a fun and adventurous theme that is consistent with their famous “go-cart like handling.” Ask any Mini driver about what their Mini means to them and they are likely to describe it in these terms.

Metaphors can be used to articulate an emotional conceptual design. An example is seen in advertising in *Backpacker* magazine for the Garmin handheld GPS as a hiking companion. In wording that ties the human value of self-identity with orienteering, Garmin uses the metaphor of companionship: “Find yourself, then get back.” It highlights emotional qualities such as comfort, cozy familiarity, and companionship: “Like an old pair of boots and your favorite fleece, GPSMAP 62ST is the ideal hiking companion.”

Metaphor

An analogy used in design to communicate and explain unfamiliar concepts using familiar conventional knowledge. A central metaphor often becomes the theme of a product, the motif behind the conceptual design (Section 15.3.6).

18.3.2.1 Mood boards: Creating a conceptual design for emotional aspects

Use ideation to come up with the various themes and metaphors you think are appropriate for the product being designed. For each theme, create a “mood” board—a collage of artifacts and images showcasing or illustrating different aspects of that theme. Create a mood board for each emotional impact theme under consideration for the design. A mood board can include sketches of shapes, colors samples, pictures, sounds, typefaces, or any other artifacts. There are no rules on how it should be structured; the goal is for the various elements together to carry the feeling of the abstract idea being communicated.

Example: Mood Boards for the National Parks Website

See Fig. 18-3 for an example of a mood board based on the theme “vibrant nature.” This mood board was constructed for the national parks product introduced in Section 17.5.2. This is one of the many themes the design team explored for this exercise. The various pictures and sights depicted in this mood board illustrate the vibrancy and energy of nature, making it attractive for potential park visitors and campers.

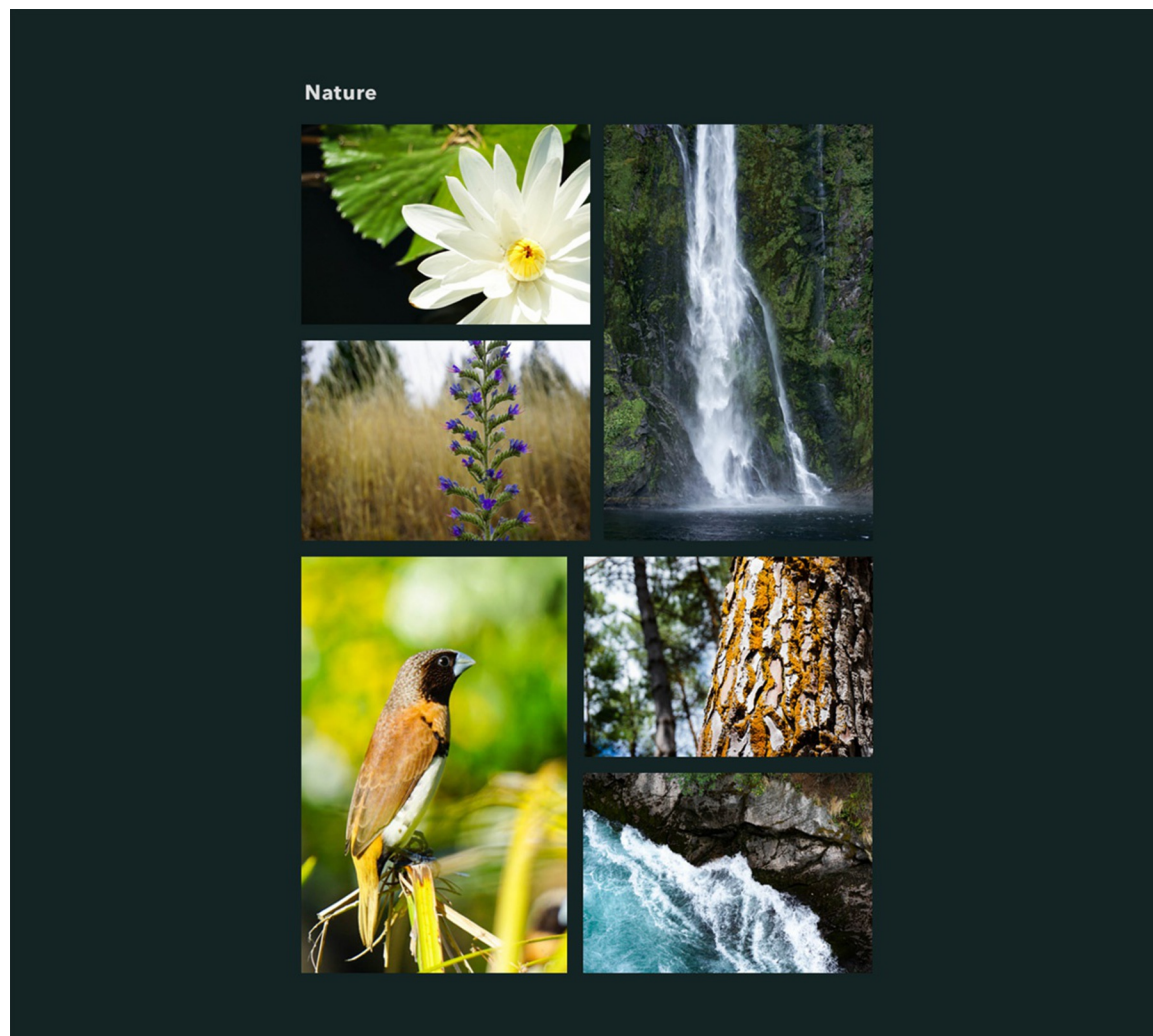


Fig. 18-3

Mood board for the theme “vibrant nature,” to be used as a concept for the visual design of a national park website (mood board courtesy of Christina Janczak, UX Designer, Cloudistics, Inc.).

18.3.3 Intermediate Design for Emotional Impact

After a conceptual design is adopted, develop it further by elaborating each channel of the concept (e.g., visual, auditory, tactile) through more detailed mood boards, ideation, and sketching.

18.3.3.1 Define the visual language and vocabulary

Visual design is perhaps the most common channel used in practice for emotional impact. In this case, mood boards are modeled and represented to give a flavor of the visual language to be used in the system.

We were once tasked to design for an emotional response of boldness and dynamism for a mobile application. One of the themes we considered was New York City. We created a visual mood board with images of iconic New York City themes: yellow cabs, metro signs, skyscrapers, and movement (captured via blurry shots of people on the street and Times Square). This was later developed into specific visual aspects such as typography by using the font families found on the city subway signage.

Start defining your overall visual theme by creating a mood board for each of the themes you think are appropriate for the system being designed. Make sure it includes typography and iconography.

The typography styles include font families, how and if they will be different across different devices in the ecology, and how the various styles such as headings, body, callouts, and button labels will look. A team member with a strong graphic design background is an asset for this.

Identify all ideas that will be represented as icons or other images in the design and define the style for iconography. Create sample views of key screens if appropriate to get a sense of how the visual style contributes to the overall concept for the emotional design.

Example: Color Scheme for the National Parks Website

In [Fig. 18-4](#), we show how the color scheme was derived from the mood board in [Fig. 18-3](#). The designer picked a key image of the mood board and extracted various aspects such as the green color of the leaf, the white color of a full flower petal, the yellow color of the flower center, and the dark shadow of the water to derive the primary color palette (top left of the image).

Another set of colors was picked from other images in the mood board to create the secondary (extended) palette (center left of the image). The designer also derived textures (center right in the image) from other areas in the mood board that will be used in the design to evoke the theme of tranquil nature.

Ecology

In the setting of UX design, the ecology is the entire set of surrounding parts of the world, including networks, other users, devices, and information structures, with which a user, product, or system interacts ([Section 16.2.1](#)).

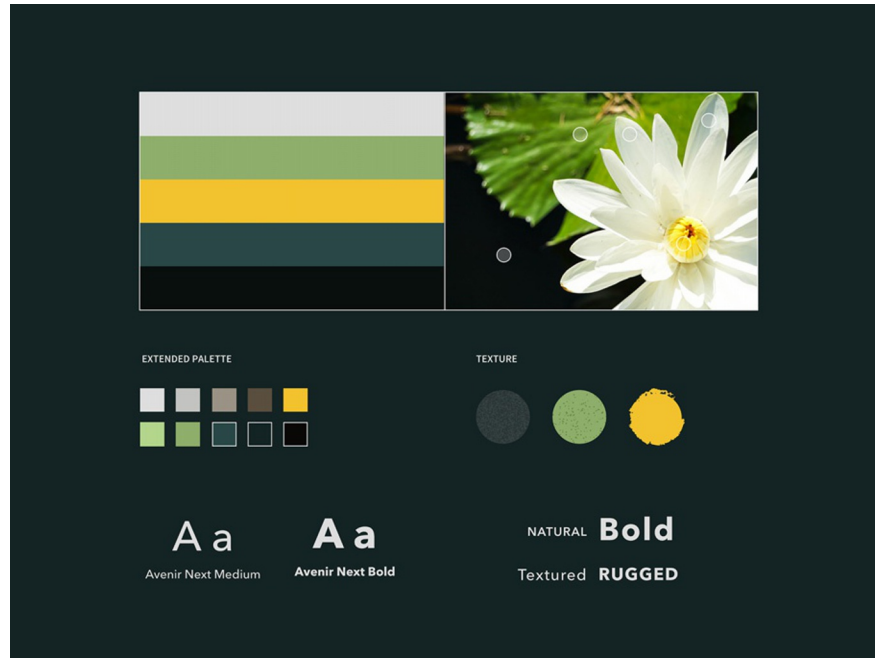


Fig. 18-4

Formulating color palette, typography, and visual language from the “vibrant nature” mood board (courtesy of Christina Janczak, UX Designer, Cloudistics, Inc.).

Example: Iconography for the National Parks Website

In [Fig. 18-5](#), we show the iconography the designer created as the next step.

As these designs were critiqued, the issue of texture was brought up as a way to “make the visual language more organic.” The result was the icons shown in [Fig. 18-6](#).

18.3.3.2 Define the motion styles and physics of interaction for each design

For each device in the ecology, define the styles and physics for the animations and other transitions to be used. This will include ideas on using animations, scrolling, and screen transitions as well as descriptions of how the motions will occur. Having people with a motion design background on the team helps. They sketch ideas for these kinds of motion to describe accelerations, timing, etc.

We talked about the use of animation in an iPad iBooks app that simulates physically turning a page in [Section 17.3.3](#). What are the opportunities for using animations in your application? For example, look for places where the system is performing long operations, places where a loading animation can help.

Think of how the physics of the interaction will work ([Section 15.3.6](#)). If there are two panes of content, which one is the primary and which is the secondary?

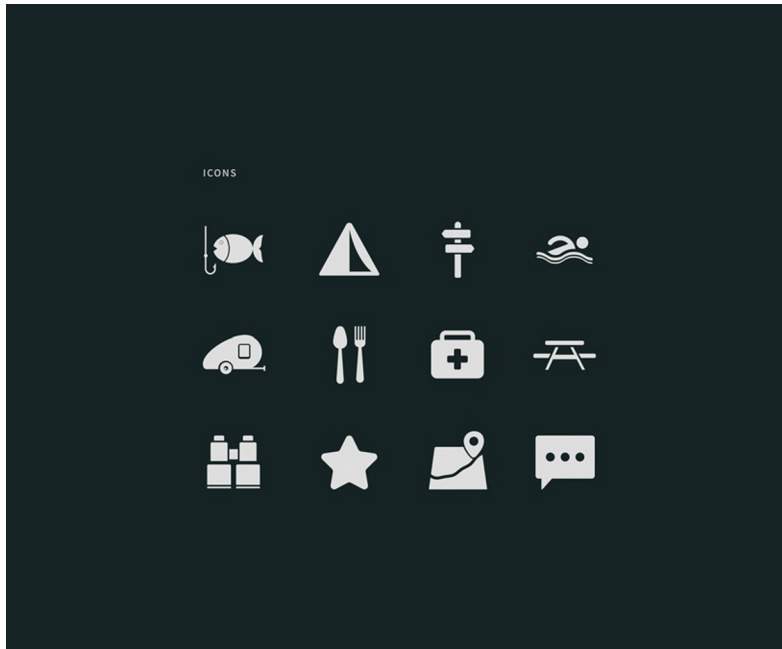


Fig. 18-5

Iconography for the national parks product, using the visual themes from the “tranquil nature” mood board (courtesy of Christina Janczak, UX Designer, Cloudistics, Inc.).

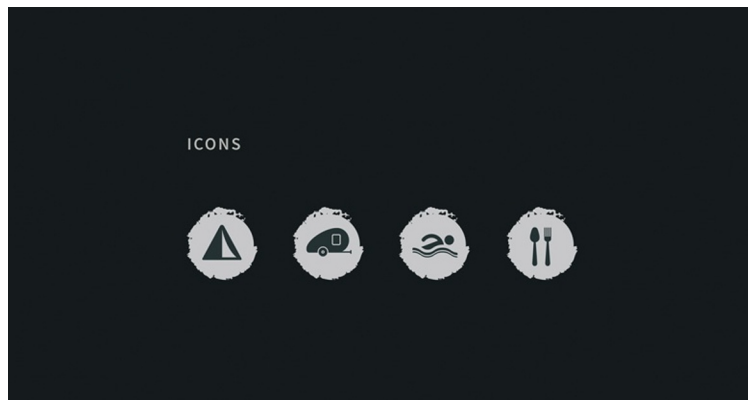


Fig. 18-6

Applying texture to icons to make them seem more natural (courtesy of Christina Janczak, UX Designer, Cloudistics, Inc.).

Which pane will slide over the other? Will it slide in from the left or the right? Which is more consistent with the way the application widgets are arranged?

18.3.3.3 Define the tone of the language to be used in the design

Another avenue that designers use for emotional impact is the tone and style of the language. Use of humor and anthropomorphism to imbue a personality in certain domains such as kids learning, adult gaming, and entertainment is

Style guide

A document fashioned and maintained by designers to capture and describe details of visual and other general design decisions, especially about screen designs, font choices, iconography, and color usage, which can be applied in multiple places. A style guide helps with consistency and reuse of design decisions (Section 17.8.1).

common. This is captured using samples and textual descriptions of the tone to be achieved on a mood board.

For the overall ecology, what is the tone of the language used in all dialogue with the user (UI, video, and audio interactions)? Will it be conversational and informal or terse and formal? Will it use humor? Will it have a “personality” or will it be neutral?

Keep updating the product’s style guide for language and tone. List words, phrases, and themes that should be avoided and examples of what should be used.

18.3.3.4 Define the audio characteristics to be used in the design

For the design of sounds, come up with ideas for appropriate actions that can be augmented by using sounds. The enclosed user space of a kiosk is perfect for gentle surround sound, which will add much to the feeling of immersion. What are the opportunities for providing feedback to the user during interactions? What is the overall theme of the sounds? Uplifting and playful? Or sober and serious?

Start by identifying themes and use samples of music to put together a palette of sounds corresponding to the different categories of tasks. For example, alerts will have one tone whereas positive feedback for actions will have another. For the national parks application, the nature mood board can include a variety of nature sounds, and those sounds can then be used to derive the audio vocabulary for the design.

18.3.3.5 Leverage social and psychological aspects in the design

Designers should be on the lookout for opportunities from the usage research phase through the evaluation activity to structure the design to take advantage of social and psychological factors. For example, if we are designing a fitness application, aspects in the work domain such as motivation and feedback can be structured to help the user succeed emotionally by showing the number of steps they take each day and comparing it with friends and family.

18.3.4 Emotional Impact Design Production

The final design candidates for emotional impact are subjected to evaluation (Part 5). Any ideas identified in the evaluation kick off another round of refinements and modifications. Once the design is finalized, it is described in detail in a phase called design production. The objective of this phase is to define

the design in enough detail so that it becomes a specification for software engineers to implement.

In Fig. 18-7, we show the detailed design specification of a part of the visual design for the national parks application. Details such as padding, sizes, and exact color specifications are detailed for all visual elements used in the design.

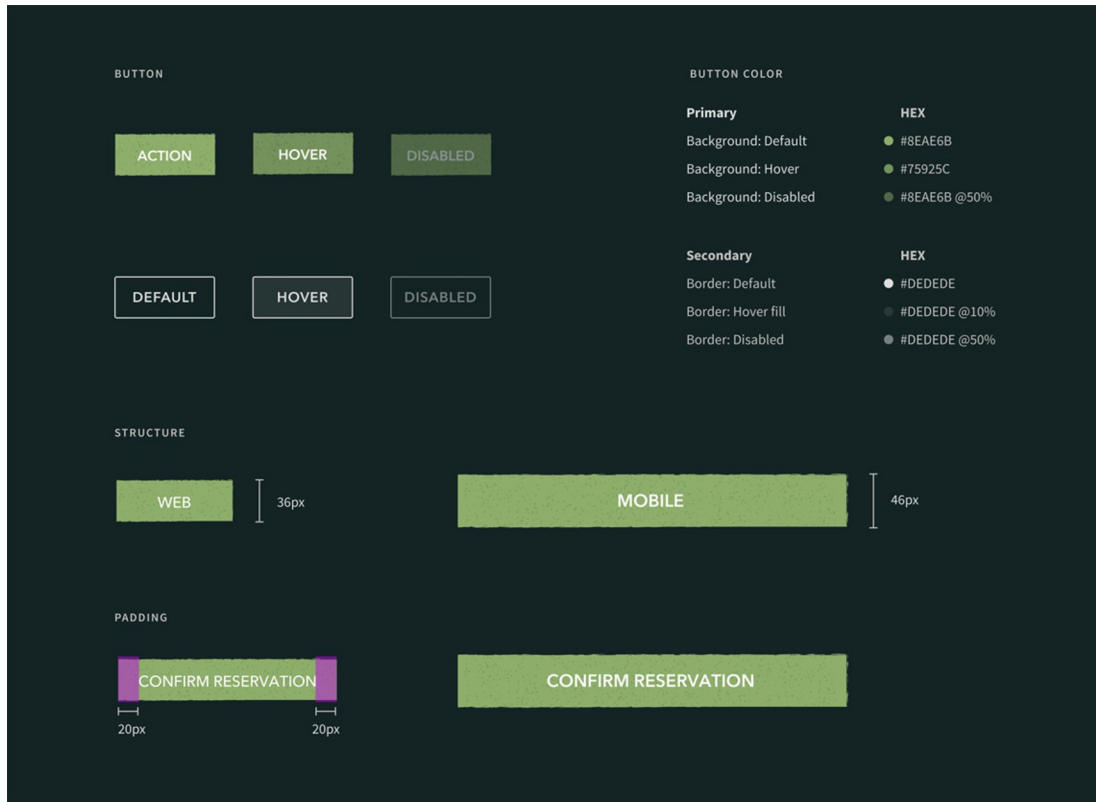


Fig. 18-7

Part of detailed visual design specification of the national parks application (courtesy of Christina Janczak, UX Designer, Cloudistics, Inc.).

Exercise 18-1: Conceptual Design for Emotional Response for Your System

Think about your system and contextual data and envision a conceptual design in the emotional perspective. Try to communicate a vision of how the design elements will evoke emotional impact in users.