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How do end-users perceive the designs of healthcare waiting environments?

A growing body of research shows evidence that the design of a physical environment can impact on people's health and well-being (Devlin and Arneill, 2003, Huisman et al., 2012). Much effort is spent on improving the functionality of healthcare environments but the visual aspect of design and its impact on end-users is often neglected. Getting the design right for healthcare waiting areas is significant since they are one of the first interaction points between end-users and their healthcare journey, and where early impressions and quality judgments take place (Bitner, 1992, Ulrich, 2006).

The appearance of healthcare waiting environments often reflects the style of decision-makers, designers and architects. Consequently, the purpose of this study is to establish how various designs of healthcare waiting environments are perceived by the end-user. This is necessary to create more user-centric environments in the future.

66 participants were recruited to evaluate a series of 14 images showing a variety of designs of healthcare waiting environments. The evaluation was made on 28 emotional, cognitive and associative perceptual semantic scales which were developed from a previous study. Visual analysis of the images and quantitative analysis of the obtained rating scores provided a holistic understanding of end-user perception. Using their mean values, the images were used to construct visual scales. Figure 1 gives an example of such a visual scale. The design and healthcare communities can benefit from this study in the following ways:

1. The study provided indications for future hypotheses investigating which design aspects can contribute to a better end-user experience of healthcare waiting environments. 2. The developed scales can be used as a visual map to guide those involved in the design process.

Figure 1: Visual Scale of "Pleasantness"

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