

Affective information design for patients

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This is a position paper that discusses information design for patients in terms of potential emotional impact. The academic and practical focus of information design for patients has previously oriented towards legibility and comprehension of information (Houts et al, 2007; Dixon Woods, 2001). This paper argues the need for an additional focus - that of positive affect. Given the often emotionally-sensitive subject matter of the information and the existing emotions experienced by the patient, the issue of positive affect is a complex one. How do we help designers to acknowledge and design for positive affect? Currently there is little guidance produced regarding positive information design for patients and little published academic discussion into its use, despite a plethora of material designed for patients.

This paper critically examines current models of affective design for products (Desmet,2003; Desmet, 2012; Norman, 2004) and analyses how usefully these models can be applied to the field of information design for patients. Case studies are discussed, including examples of designs developed by the author and others, highlighting key concerns in designing affectively, as well as effectively. Designs discussed include the recent Design Council project, reducing aggression in NHS A&E departments and graphic designs to combat feelings of helplessness in chronic pain patients. Conclusions suggest that new models are required and that certain triggers of positive affect in existing models such as attachment and social belonging are particularly challenging in an information design context. The paper also concludes that cognitive, not only affective processes of patients still need to be a fundamental focus when designing for positive affect and that in order to achieve this we need to focus on content choice, order, and level of detail as well as positive visual appeal.

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