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SHARED SENSORY EXPERIENCE
A DESIGN STRATEGY FOR DISSEMINATION

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Abstract

This study explores the theory of *emotional contagion* and then offers insights as to how communication designers could practically apply aspects of this theory to a communication campaign. Schoenewolf (1990) describes emotional contagion as “a process in which a person or group influences the emotions or behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes” (p. 50). A significant aspect of this theory involves joint consumption. This suggests that an experience of an event differs when more than one person is involved. Ramanathan and McGill’s (2007) recent study suggests that a stronger positive or negative evaluation of a shared experience is achieved through the creation of emotional contagion. When considering this, an opportunity exists to establish recommendations for the design industry to employ in order to enhance an audience’s response. In order to be successful in constructing a pertinent strategy it is critical to consider the way in which people perceive experiences; central to this theme are the five senses.

Research into the five senses which include sight, sound, smell, touch and taste, indicates the significant impact over an individuals’ emotions and decision making process. To date the human senses have been largely neglected within the design industry due to conventional use of mainstream media. Through using non-traditional media, participants could be connected on a more sensory level through means of interactive involvement.

From a holistic perspective the overarching methodology will be that of research for design (Frayling, 1993, as cited in Downtown, 2003). The emphasis will therefore be on providing insights and ideas as to how the design industry could, through non-traditional media, embrace emotional contagion.

Supporting methods will be a combination of the following:

1. Case studies. These will include an analysis of precedents
2. A self generated design campaign. The focus will be tourism. This has been chosen because of its experiential and shared nature.
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