Escaping the emotional blur: Design tools for facilitating positive emotional granularity

In human–product interactions, pleasure has many different shades. We can, for example, be proud of using an eco-friendly detergent, be all aflutter in anticipation of a planned trip when looking at a calendar application or experience a feeling of cathartic relief when playing a mobile phone game. Although these experiences are all pleasurable, each is different from the other in terms of the feelings they engender, the conditions that evoke them and how they influence people's thoughts and actions. Some people are more aware of these nuances and better able than others to articulate positive emotional states. This difference is called 'Positive Emotional Granularity' (PEG). PEG reflects the degree to which a person is able to represent positive emotions with precision and specificity.

This thesis focuses on designers' PEG, and proposes that having an awareness of nuances between positive emotions can be advantageous for designers in their endeavour to generate positive emotional experiences. Design research has traditionally focused on generalised pleasure or liking, paying little attention to nuances in positive emotions. Consequently, little is known of either the implications of differentiating positive emotions in design processes or ways to support designers in this endeavour.

The aim of this thesis is to develop an understanding of how designers' nuanced understanding of positive emotions can be harnessed and how doing so can contribute to design processes. The research question was, 'how can designers be supported in developing and applying a systematic understanding of nuanced positive emotions?' The overarching approach encompassing the research activities was 'research through design', in which the act of designing new solutions and reflecting on the processes is regarded as a means of generating knowledge. A series of design tools and techniques that explained the distinctiveness of positive emotions was conceptualised for the purpose of this research and tested by designers.

This research contributes to the field of experience design by elucidating how PEG can add value to design processes, and by providing tools that support designers in developing their understanding of positive emotions and their abilities to select and design for nuanced and distinct positive emotions.