QUALITY OF AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND IMPLICIT MODULATING FACTORS

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Since the Dadaist refusal of conventional standards in art, followed by several movements rejecting art as a commodity and, recently, the popularity of Internet and digital art, artworks have become difficult to recognize as artworks in themselves. Modern works of art are no longer readily only seen today, more often fully experienced. The processing of an aesthetic experience needs a new understanding in terms of the changing context of art and the experiential perspective of art recipients. In the multimedia arena, the valid assumption is that evaluations of aesthetic experiences are mostly based on the accessible information on the surface of the medium. Several research groups in psychology, marketing and philosophy question the singularity of exterior-level assumptions, demonstrating that there are implicit variables that are contributing to an individual's experiences.

The aesthetic evaluation of contemporary art or digital media presentation involves a complex interplay of various factors in any aesthetic encounter. Since the latter 1800s, empirical aesthetics has had a tradition of examining the influence of visual or surface features on aesthetic judgments. However, the influence of implicit variables and aesthetics on the perception of quality remains largely unexplored, especially in the fields of computer graphics and human computer interaction. This thesis is addressing this shortcoming. It investigates the effect of various implicit features and modulating factors, for instance the use of color in eliciting emotion, the presence of familiar characters or alter ego, prior experiences and mental concepts (food craving versus pleasure technologies) contributing to the final quality evaluations and formation of aesthetic experiences in digital media. The current work is multifaceted and examines several factors known to influence aesthetic quality evaluation. Several stimuli were produced to facilitate these studies, most of which were actual artistic digital installations exhibited in various art festivals and exhibitions (i.e. Chroma Space, Flick Flock and Candy).

The results of all studies in this dissertation extended the literature by showing that the level of vividness of the prior implicit experiences and oblivious mental concepts taking part in the experience of digital media does not produce a disqualifying effect; full attention (yet unconscious bias towards the presence of familiar characters) and vague awareness (e.g. subtle visual features, implicit experiences and mental concepts influenced by food craving) are parts of the experience's aesthetic quality and are therefore significant in shaping the tenor of the aesthetic experience.