









Aesthetics and Empowerment

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Abstract. Aesthetics in design are known to be empowering in terms of various perspectives in one's life. This paper aims to discuss innovative approaches, methodologies, and technologies that can further enhance the role of aesthetics in empowering individuals in the digital age. By delving into the relationship between aesthetics and empowerment, we seek to foster discussions and collaborations among researchers, practitioners, designers, artists, and industry professionals. It is worth building up a platform for sharing insights, exchanging ideas, and exploring new and emerging trends in this exciting area.

Keywords: Aesthetics · Empowerment

1 Introduction

Aesthetics refer to the appreciation, understanding, and evaluation of beauty, art, and sensory experiences [9]. In design, aesthetics relate to the visual and sensory elements of an object, space, or artwork that evoke emotional responses and perceptions of harmony, balance, and pleasure [10]. In human-computer interaction, aesthetics play a crucial role in user experience. It encompasses the visual design [11], interface layout, and interaction patterns that enhance user engagement and satisfaction [2]. Aesthetics can also expand to other senses, such as sound, touch, and smell, creating immersive and engaging experiences. In summary, aesthetics can significantly impact how users perceive and interact with technologies, as well as their overall well-being and empowerment.

2 Aesthetics for Empowerment

The origins of empowerment can be traced back to the civil rights movement, particularly in regard to the struggles for overcoming domination in women's rights and minority rights [7]. Individuals can be empowered when they obtain skills or abilities that enable

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them to act independently, thereby leading to success in their professional and personal lives. Empowerment encompasses notions of power, agency, autonomy, and the enabling conditions necessary for individuals and communities to assert themselves, overcome challenges, and strive for a better future [1].

Aesthetics and empowerment intersect in a transformative manner, highlighting the potential for aesthetic design interventions to contribute to individual or social empowerment. Aesthetics play a crucial role in providing individuals with a sense of autonomy and self-actualization to achieve one's potential. The drive for autonomy and self-actualization is a key factor in the design of various technologies, both during the design process and in the design outcomes. Technologies facilitate users by empowering them to reach their full potential and take control of their lives in many perspectives, such as behavior change, education, and health management. Aesthetics is empowering and allows individuals or communities to develop skills and capacities, which enable them to thrive and make meaningful contributions to their lives and society.

3 Case Research and Call to Action

There is a growing interest in understanding immeasurable aesthetic parameters such as sensory experiences and their impacts on satisfaction in urban development and the social environment. Integrating aesthetics into urban planning can significantly empower and enhance the overall quality of cities and communities. Beyond the visual appeal, aesthetics can influence urban spaces' functionality and livability [12]. Researchers investigated designerly ways to trigger behavior change for healthier lifestyles, with solutions contributing to both physical and mental vitality and healthy living, relying on aesthetics of interaction principles and the use of data and connectivity as creative materials [6, 13, 17–21]. In the healthcare domain, researchers explored how an aesthetic atmosphere design of a birth environment affects the experiences of new fathers. They found that the aesthetic birthing room design can empower the fathers to take more active support in the birth process [8]. In the workplace scenario, previous research showcases how arts-based learning interventions have the ability to initiate both individual and collective processes of change [14]. Research in education discovered aesthetics within educational spaces had been noticed to influence learning and teaching positively [3].

The above cases reveal how aesthetic approaches used in various contexts are well suited to trigger actions from the present situation toward a promising outcome. The "non-measurable" aesthetics brought discussions in the field. Böhme argues that aesthetics should not focus on the assessment of art [4]. However, some claimed that many obvious elements (e.g., context, interpretations, cultural conventions) highlighted the existing barriers to generalizing and applying successful aesthetics to other relevant scenarios. Several approaches can tackle the difficulties in terms of operationalizing aesthetics to empower people. For instance, using qualitative research methods [5] to explore users' experiences to fully capture the nuances and complexities of aesthetic factors that are hard to quantify. Researchers can explore ways to engage the involvement of users in the aesthetic factors that matter to them in the design process. A comprehensive understanding of contextual factors (e.g., culture, social norms) that affect users' aesthetic preferences can provide insights that are relevant in the specific context [16].

Considering the emotional and experiential aspects that aesthetics can empower people, techniques such as affective computing [15] can assist designers in capturing and incorporating the emotional and experiential dimensions of aesthetics. We value embracing subjectivity, cultural diversity, and the complex nature of aesthetics and encourage insights sharing and discussions addressing this exciting area.

To effectively implement prior approaches and fully leverage the value that aesthetics bring to empowerment, future research can further explore the relationship between aesthetics and empowerment in HCI. Enriching the cases of aesthetics and empowerment in practice, and examining where the aesthetics can and where they cannot empower. It is worth identifying potential research directions, methodologies, and design strategies for future investigations, and sharing knowledge on generalizing the aesthetics to empower other scenarios.

4 Summary

Aesthetics refer to the appreciation, understanding, and evaluation of beauty, art, and sensory experiences [9]. In design, aesthetics relate to the visual and sensory elements of an object, space, or artwork that evoke emotional responses and perceptions of harmony, balance, and pleasure [10]. In human-computer interaction, aesthetics play a crucial role in user experience. It encompasses the visual design [11], interface layout, and interaction patterns that enhance user engagement and satisfaction [2]. Aesthetics can also expand to other senses, such as sound, touch, and smell, creating immersive and engaging experiences. In summary, aesthetics can significantly impact how users perceive and interact with technologies, as well as their overall well-being and empowerment.

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