Thesis Report 2020

Submitted by Mian Talha Moeen

Registration: F2016-569

EMOTIONAL CONTAGION

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1.1 KEYWORDS:

Visual communication Design, Visual Culture, Material Culture, Quantitative Research, Qualitative Research, Media & Communication Studies, Sustainability, Archival, Art & Design Curation, Community Engagement, Accountability, Public Policy, Social Awareness, Environment, Global South, Clinical Psychology, Philosophy, Expressionism, Anatomy Art.

1.2 ABSTRACT:

Born and bred in contemporary Pakistani society, I often felt the conscious need of being relevant to certain groups of people following fixed views socially. These groups naively or ignorantly forced me to think/do with certain filters on. This phenomenon is known as Emotional Contagion, which is a behavior found in humans, other primates, and dogs. Professor Elaine Hatfield, who teaches social psychology at the university of Hawaii presented a view on EC as the phrase "emotional contagion" embodies the idea that humans synchronize their own emotions with the emotions expressed by those around them, whether consciously or unconsciously.

This exists globally, in every individual's mind which manipulates them to act in a certain manner. Eventually, the state of questioning

led me into talking surveys to understand this phenomenon in detail. After that process, I focused on the similarities found in each of them which helped me understand the fact that during the process of emotional contagion, the victim is never able to maintain a single expression and that is exactly what I went through myself. His/her expression varies as it is forced. In my work I am presenting variations of different expressions (of myself) which are designed using the technique of line art and dismantled which makes it hard to understand.

Concluding my project, I have visualized the awful feeling felt during the constant shift of expressions on my face caused during the act of emotional contagion.

1.3 PASSION:

1. I was clueless that Emotional Contagion is a psychologically explained term
2. People claimed my analysis as overthinking
3. My degree helped me explore my fears.
4. Found the edge to research about Emotional Contagion

Back in time I had trouble holding on while participating in group gatherings. I was young and clueless about the fact that this feeling is psychologically explained and has a huge part in developing our personality. With the help of distractions, this feeling kept going on ignored but then eventually I started to talk about it. There were some friends who experienced similar feelings but the rest disregarded whatever I felt by claiming it as overthinking.

During all these years, my personality became weaker and weaker. By weaker I mean extensive loss of confidence and indecisive with majority of decisions. Up until last year, this feeling was still there but this time I found the edge to work and research upon it as a developing communication designer. In the beginning of my thesis

project, I had a rough idea in the back of my head that this is something I want to do. On the road to discover this phenomenon existing as a psychological term I found a French Marxist theorist: Guy Debord as my inspiration as his words helped me question each and everything present around me.

1.4 PROJECT SCOPE:

1. Found similar feelings within my friends and family
2. My idea is very personal as I wanted to explore the act of Emotional Contagion within myself
3. My final piece aimed to cause rapid confusion for the viewer

As I mentioned earlier, this feeling was present with a few of my friends who found it hard to tackle as well. This was a challenge for me to get into the roots of the phenomenon known as emotional contagion. My topic is a very personal experience based project. While researching and expanding my knowledge towards the topic, I had a few but similar goals. To understand how emotional contagion works, how it shapes who we are, how we can tackle it and finally how I can spread awareness regarding this term using my work as a medium of explanation. But with my work up there visually, I wanted to create this sense of confusion and cluelessness for all the viewers to feel what the victim of emotional contagion feels during the act of it.

1.5 DESIGN STATEMENT:

1. Adaptive design exploration
2. Research + end visual talks about how we all are a victim of Emotional Contagion

This project focuses on identifying one of the wicked social problems faced in the Pakistani contemporary society. The research explores a specific genre of visual communication design known as adaptive and systematic design, my research and end product talks about how everyone has somehow been a victim of the phenomenon

known as EC and how the majority of us have been in the situation where we struggled to maintain a single expression. There are two main objectives in the research; what is the origin of EC in our society and what we go through during this entire process which includes the fact that EC controls our facial expressions a long with shaping our personalities. My aim was always very personalized since the start where I wanted to get something out of this research in order to understand and study the problems I faced myself. The process of reaching the point where I started making visuals was again, personalized but after sharing my work with my surroundings, I realized this is something which might be helpful for those who find it hard to understand that what they feel is not a preconceived notion but a clinically proved phenomenon. In my final visuals I have created a set of dismantled expressions using illustration as a medium of display. These visuals contain my own face with a range of expression shift which are mixed and unrecognizable just like the feeling of enforcement during the act of EC.

1.6 TARGET AUDIENCE:

As my research is personalized and restricted to me, I have not targeted any specific audience for it and for a psychological concept such as mine, the visuals are quite confusing to look at but a lot many people in my surrounding are familiar and aware about what enforced feelings can do to us. So for my work is open for everyone

who can relate and understand what I've done. But to be more precise, it is not preferable for children to look at as it might intrigue the sense of fear in them thinking this is harmful.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW:

As my research began, I had a few keywords which were considered to be the center of my work and that is how I ended up reading about Guy Debord's 'Society of the Spectacle.' I came across an article published by 'Emerald Group Publishing Limited' which expanded the process of research for me. In this article, I read about philosophical terms which gave a shape to my research. Ever Since **Karl Marx** introduced his **theory of capitalism** in the nineteenth century, intellects have updated the theory gradually to capture the extensiveness of commodity relations in modern society. Impacted by **Georg Lukács** and **Henri Lefebvre**, the individuals from a French avant-garde group, the **Situationist International (1956-1972)** created an evaluation for the consumer culture roused by the idea of the scene. In the display, the impact of media and buyer conduct replaces the lived understanding, the detached look of pictures overrides dynamic social cooperation, and new types of estrangement incite social deconstruction at a more theoretical level than in past social orders. We try to create two theoretical contributions: First, we focus on the contributions of the **Situationist International**, highlighting the fact that how they edited the **Marxian** types of alienation, commodification, and reification in order to understand the ways of the twentieth century

1. Terms and philosophies which made a way for my research
2. Karl Marx
3. Theory of Capitalism
4. Georg Lukaes
5. Henri Lefebvre
6. Situationist International
7. Made by avant garde artists and intellects

capitalist approach and to enhance these concepts on another level. Second, we create a reproving theory of consumer capitalism that adds the theoretical assumptions and arguments of the **Situationists**. Today, critical theory can cause a massive change to sociology by surveying the variety of spectacles and their concrete demonstrations.

1. Studied about an experiment held by James A. Russell
2. How forced emotions work
3. How enforced expression can be differentiated from an actual expression

Moving on, I read an article '**Forced – Choice Response Format in the Study of Facial Expression**' by **James A. Russell (University of British Columbia)** which is a process note on a potential problem with a forced-choice response scale in the study of facial expressions of emotion. For example, a majority of subjects categorized **Matsumoto and Ekman's (1988)** reported facial expression of "anger" as contempt when using one forced-choice format, as disgust, with another format, and as frustration, with a third. When shown the anger expression and given a choice among anger, frustration, and other labels, few subjects (12.5% on average) selected anger. If contempt, disgust, and frustration are considered wrong answers, then forced choice can yield consensus on the wrong answer; if anger is the right answer, then forced choice can fail to yield consensus on the right answer.

1. Read about Elaine Hatfield
2. Professor at University of Hawaii

This is where I learned about the phenomenon of **Emotional Contagion** when I read about Professor **Elaine Hatfield** who is an American **social psychologist** and a professor of Psychology at the **University of Hawai'**. An experiment held at the **University of**

1. Changed the roles of students to teachers and teacher to students
2. Experiment was recorded
3. Shift in behavior and expression was recorded

Hawai' by Professor **Elaine Hatfield** "**The effect of power on susceptibility to emotional contagion**" helped me move further with my project. This experiment explored two questions: Do people tend to display and experience other people's emotions? If so, what impact does power have on people's susceptibility to emotional contagion? Participants speculated that the powerless should pay more attention to their superiors (than their superiors pay to them) and should thus be especially likely to "catch" their superior' emotions as well. College students, given the role of "teacher" (powerful person) or "learner" (powerless person), observed videotapes of another (fictitious) subject relating an emotional experience. They were asked what emotions they felt as they watched their partner describe the happiest and saddest event in his life. In addition, they were videotaped as they watched the tape. As predicted, clear evidence of emotional contagion was obtained in this controlled laboratory setting. However, a direct (rather than inverse) relation between power and emotional contagion was found. Powerful subjects were more likely to display their subordinate's feelings than subordinates were to display those of the powerful other. Several possible explanations for these unexpected results were proposed. With video references of this experiment, I observed how the participants struggled to maintain single expression hence that became the focal point of my project.

The EC film genre is not an important part of contemporary popular culture. It cannot be clearly seen in many films but with my observation I interpreted the act of EC to be seen in many notable works that later came along in the form of film in the last few years like **Mary Harron's** *very* famous '**American Psycho'** which is a 2000 American Psychological Horror Film, And another made by **Stanley Kubrick** in 1977 known as **'The Shinning'**. Similarly, **'Taxi Driver'** a 1976 American neo-noir psychological thriller drama film by **Martin Scorsese**, another 1990 American film '**The Awakenings**' directed by **Penny Marshal** which is a drama film based on **Oliver Sacks'** 1973 memoir of the same title.

1. Watched films which are not directly connected to Emotional Contagion
2. But unintentionally they contain the act of EC

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:

Initially as the process of research began, there were two keywords used as a center of research: Emotion and Identity. I came across many projects revolving around similar keywords which led me into reading about a few philosophical terms connected to my project. As I began with the desktop research I watched **Society of the Spectacle** by **Guy Debord** which is a critique to the consumer culture. That documentary and people's reviews upon it helped me understand how the power of media decides what we consume. I understood how our identities are shaped with the act of propaganda and consumer culture. It manipulates our behavior and turns us into something we are not. I ended up looking at more projects done by **Guy Debord** and one of them was the **Situationist International**.

Situationist international was an international organization of social revolutionaries made up of avant-garde artists, intellectuals, and political theorists, prominent in Europe from its formation in 1957 to its dissolution in **1972**. This led me into reading about **Situationism** which is a psychological term found by **Isidore Isou** (Romanian born French poet) which says: Under the controversy of person–situation debate, **Situationism** is the theory that changes in human behavior are factors of the situation rather than the traits a person possesses. Behavior is believed to be influenced by external, situational factors rather than internal traits or motivations. I could relate my idea with **Situationism** as it is very much similar.

2.3 CONCEPTS:

During the time I was still making sense out of my idea being related to **Situationism**, luckily I came across an artist who works on something similar with the technique of photo manipulation. **Michael Reeder** is an American graphic artist who uses portraits and different elements on it to produce a manipulated imagery content. That helped me learn the technicality of photo manipulation and also **Surrealism** as **Surrealism** released the creative potential of the unconscious mind. Moving on I came across another American artist **Michael Murphy** who works with wood as layers. His concept of layering is where I got the inspiration to work with layers.

3.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

The research questions for this project kept evolving as the process moved forward. Sometimes the questions focused on a singular concern but rest of the times they focused on many complex concerns. While writing these questions, I had to review my entire research over and over again to understand Emotional Contagion and its affiliation with my visuals. Initially since the start of conducting my detailed research, I had thought to keep questioning my concerns regarding the project and look for my own attachment with this topic which later on, I did.

In depth exploration of the act of Emotional Contagion in my personal life and the contemporary Pakistani society

How did I suffer from the act of Emotional Contagion in my daily routine?

Do we find it hard to maintain our expressions during the act of it?

Are there any specific emotions which don't let us control our expressions?

When one has to "fit in", what goes on inside the mind and how does it translate onto the face.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS EXPLAINED:

In depth exploration of the act of Emotional Contagion in my personal life and the contemporary Pakistani society

Like mentioned in my abstract, I learned the fact that the phenomenon of EC is not only there in the western society, it exists worldwide. With this on board, I started to question how this phenomenon has affected me and how it shapes our personality. With this very question, I wanted to explore what people think about it, how they deal with it and do they consider it negative or positive. The straight reasoning for this question was to look for people who have been in a similar situation and question them.

How did I suffer from the act of Emotional Contagion in my daily routine?

Do we find it hard to maintain our expressions during the act of it?

We grow up every day and hence the memory of the previous day starts to fade away with time. In my case, I believe out of some, the memory attached with the act of EC is still present in the back of my head. It has faded but still stays there. I knew I had the ability to trace back in my own past and remember some of the situations when I was in the act of EC and that is why I asked this question so I could look back and gather data to analyze how that suffering has shaped me as a person.

With that tracing back, I recalled a lot of forgotten memories which made me realize how awkward it was for me to fake an expression which changed constantly. This question gave me the ability to go out there and ask people if they find it hard to control their expressions during the act of this phenomenon.

Are there any specific emotions which don't let us control our expressions?

One question and its answer always leads us into asking more questions and that is exactly what happened here. After learning the fact that yes people do find it hard to maintain single expression during the act of EC just like me, I had this curiosity that what if, there are specific emotions which don't let us control our expression. And my curiosity was answered when I researched about this and learned that yes there are a few specific emotions, which can stop us from controlling our expressions but only if these emotions are induced onto us by another being, some of them: jealousy, envy and grudge. These emotions cannot be felt by us on ourselves like happiness or sadness. These emotions require the presence of another being to be felt. With this question, I wanted to know, what if, I'm not jealous of anything but another being talks to me about how he's jealous of someone, how would I react? In terms of expression and feeling?

When one has to "fit in", what goes on inside the mind and how does it translate onto the face.

The final question which decided the focus of my project. With this question I had my research concluded and the process of visualizing began. I started to take in volunteers and experimented basic scenarios where the group was asked to force a specific person to feel a certain emotion and his/her reactions were recorded for visual references. With the help of this question I was able to conduct experiments, surveys, and interview to collect plenty of data for creating visuals.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY + DATA SOURCES:

After the desktop research, I created a questionnaire in order to get feedback from my class mates and people around the campus. With the help of in class presentations and feedback on questionnaires, the participants started to believe in the fact that they are somehow a victim of EC as well.

Shockingly, most of the people felt connected when I presented them with a brief research of my project. People started sharing their first hand experiences with this phenomenon. The questionnaire was completely dedicated to clear my understanding of what people think of EC but it turned out that people felt connected to it more than I expected they would. The questionnaire started with a very basic question where I asked the participants if they believe in

something described as 'enforced feeling' which followed up with a question which intended to ask who's probably responsible for enforced feelings. Moving on I asked if they do believe in enforced feelings, how and why they feel it which ended with a small activity where I asked the participants to roughly sketch a visual which pops up in their mind the moment they think about enforced feelings.

Before this, I was already looking and observing people in my circle who were at times in the act of EC but they did not know what it was and hence that became an inspiration for me to create visuals. My secondary research also known as desktop research contained insane amounts of findings which included films, articles and YouTube videos, but I'd say most of the information I came across initially was through articles.

This whole process was emotionally and physically exhausting as it got quite in depth and I felt overwhelmed with so much data to look at so I had to work through it very carefully and try to focus on the things directly related to my work. From this data collected I filtered the common themes and collected the most similar reviews of people upon how they feel and dodge the situation. Overall the data collection was in a mixed form but this idea is mainly backed up with desktop research and falls under secondary research. It includes gathering information from essays, articles, academic reviews, books, movies, videos and even shows with in depth analysis and understanding of each.

4.1 MEDIUM OF PRESENTATION + PRE - PRODUCTION:

Before lockdown, I had different plans of executing my work which contained a lot of material exploration and technicalities. As I wanted to visualize the constant shift of expression and the feeling of enforcement, the medium of presentation was illustration and interactive art. I aimed to print out my illustrations on acrylic sheets and cut out the negative spaces, then compose them into a 5x5 ft acrylic box where each illustration was attached to a stepper motor through iron rods. This box had knobs on the outer side where viewers could interact and create an expression of their own. My entire narrative said that people somehow control our expressions during the act of EC and I believe that was being achieved with my execution plan where viewers interacted with the art piece.

Post lockdown, I had to shift my medium of presentation to only illustration as our display was shifted to virtual from physical. I created more than 50 illustrations and placed them on a grid. When a viewer looks at it, it seems like so many thumb impressions but when you look closer, there's a range of different expressions which are hard to understand.

In the beginning, I was sketching around 10-15 illustrations per day which ended up with about a 100 sketches. I used to place them all in front of me in my studio and looked at them as a whole. This was important as I was needed to bring them in some shape or form.

Later, I selected a range out of these illustrations and started to work on them one by one.

My choice of medium was illustrative from the start as my idea was mainly about expression explorations and they were supposed to be hand-drawn onto a piece of paper first. First I felt the need of focusing more on anatomy but then I started to focus on how not to focus on the anatomy as my work specifically talks about enforced emotions and I believe, enforcement is always awful which means I don't need to focus on the anatomy of a human face hence this was the most effective part of the process in terms of production.

Later on as we were advised to switch to digital mediums, I improvised by creating a range of faces and later creating one frame out of these all which can be looked at as a whole and separately. It gave me an edge as well, for now I had the liberty to play with the scale of the frame even further.

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GLOSSARY:

Naively

Phenomenon

Synchronize

Wicked

Extensiveness

Commodity

Estrangement

Alienation