

Q-Methodology and Aesthetic Preferences for IOs: The Role of Alexithymia

POLLICINO, Carla, GAO, Jie, CONTI, Daniela, COMMODARI, Elena and SORANZO, Alessandro <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4445-1968>>

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Introduction

Does alexithymia affect aesthetic preferences? This study aims at answering to this question by measuring the aesthetic preference of Interactive Objects using the Q method and by measuring participants' alexithymia trait (Toronto Alexithymia Scale, TAS-20).

Description

Interactive Objects (IOs) (Figure 1) are three-dimensional physical artefacts equipped with motion sensors that display autonomous behavior when handled (e.g. vibrating, lighting, sounding or quiescent). Soranzo et al. (2018) found that people prefer objects exhibiting "behavior" to quiescent objects.



Figure 1: Interactive objects

Furthermore, by using Q-mode factor analysis to investigate individual differences, Gao & Soranzo (2018) found that people can be classified in two types of responders:

- 1) Base their aesthetic judgments on the IOs' behavior only;
- 2) Consider IOs' texture and shape in addition to behavior.

Q methodology (Stephenson, 1930s) is an ideal tool to investigate aesthetic preferences (Palmer, Schloss, & Sammartino, 2013) as it has a number of advantages over conventional research methods (Gao & Soranzo, 2018).

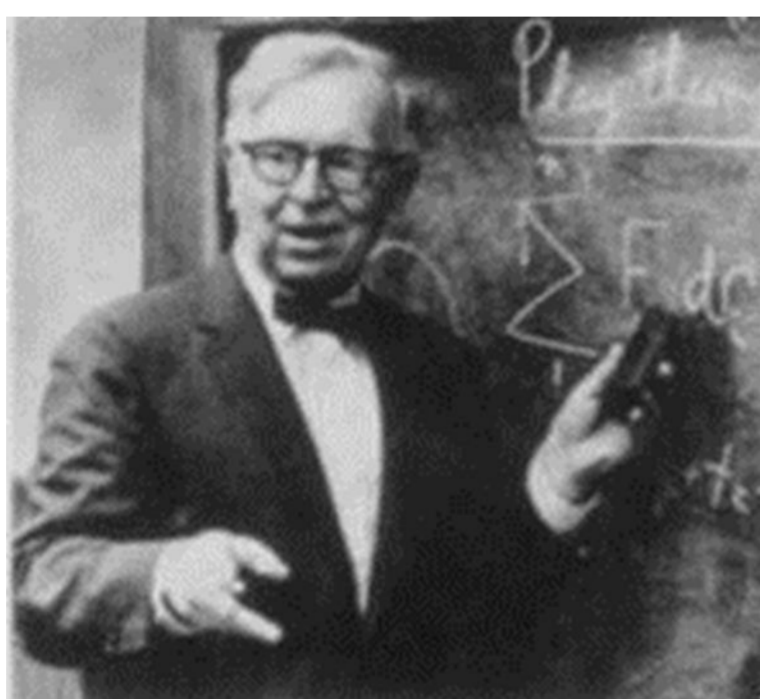


Figure 2: William Stephenson

Alexithymia is a personality trait characterized by difficulty in identifying and describing emotion, difficulty in distinguishing between emotions and bodily sensations, and an externally oriented cognitive style (Taylor, Bagby, & Parker, 1997; Taylor, 2002). Suzuki et al. (2004), report that there may be no substantial difference between alexithymic people and non-alexithymic people in evaluating impressions such as agreeableness and beauty but alexithymics may evaluate aesthetics in an amplified way. By measuring the alexithymia personality trait, it will be possible verifying whether there are differences in aesthetic perception between alexithymic e non alexithymic people.

Aim of the project:

This study aims to investigate if Alexithymia affects the overall aesthetic experience.

The study also aim to contribute to the psychological inquiry into decision-making by extending the application of Q methodology.

Experiment

We present 32 Interactive objects (IOs) different for form (contour, size, surface texture) and behavior (emit a light, a sound, a vibration or nothing). The participant will consider all these characteristics and therefore put each object in a grid which represents a continuum ranging from "the least preferred" (-5) to "the most preferred" (+5) (Figure 3).



Figure 3: The setting

Then, using a post sorting interview, it will be possible to clarify which type of characteristics are more important in aesthetics. After the sorting procedure is completed, the participant will fill in a personality questionnaire (Toronto Alexithymia Scale, TAS-20) to measure the alexithymic trait and this will be correlated with the aesthetic preference.

Expectations:

It is expected that higher levels of alexithymia correlate with preference for objects that exhibit vibrating behaviour and that the material will be more considered in the choice of alexithymic people.

<https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-us/our-people/staff-profiles/alessandro-soranzo>

Email: cp6315@hallam.shu.ac.uk

Telephone: +44 (0)114 6532

Address: Centre for Behavioural Science and Applied Psychology | Heart of the Campus | Collegiate Crescent | Sheffield Hallam University S10 2BQ

Twitter: @CeBSAP



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