

# FIRST CONTACT EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO PRODUCTS

## First Contact with a Product

People have emotional relationships with products that can vary from person to person and change over time. A person's emotional relationship with a product at the moment of first-contact is when a product is seen for the first time and when a significant emotional response can be evoked in a potential consumer or user. For the purposes of this research, the term *first* is used to mean at a point which a potential consumer has no prior awareness of the product, and *contact* meaning visual contact rather than exclusively through physical touch.

## Eliciting Emotions through Design

Emotional responses can be evoked through aesthetics and design semiotics (the science of signs). Saussure demonstrated that meaning is signified as a result of aspects of signs known as signifiers (Cobley & Jansz 1999). Products can be signifiers and can have signifiers represented within them. When a person reflects on their experiences with a product, those meanings have time to establish themselves and the relationship with that product develops (Eves & Hewitt 2008).

## Processing Emotions

Norman (Norman 2004) describes a model of emotional processing that consists of visceral, behavioural and reflective processes linked to sensory inputs and motor control outputs (Fig.1). The visceral level deals with instinctive reactions that occur during a new encounter. The behavioural level, where conscious decisions are made, can influence the visceral level and can subsequently be influenced by the reflective level. Experiences are revisited at the reflective level after they have happened, and while reflection is not linked directly to the senses, it has a significant influence on how a similar experience might be dealt with in the future.

## The Aim of this Research

The aim of this research to develop a method or tool that will better enable designers to understand and design for people's emotional needs and to bridge the gap between the emotions experienced at first contact and those that develop over time, through reflection. It sets out by seeking to establish the emotional responses that people experience when they encounter a product for the first time. An initial qualitative pilot study was undertaken in April/May 2010 to gather this data and to identify themes for further research.

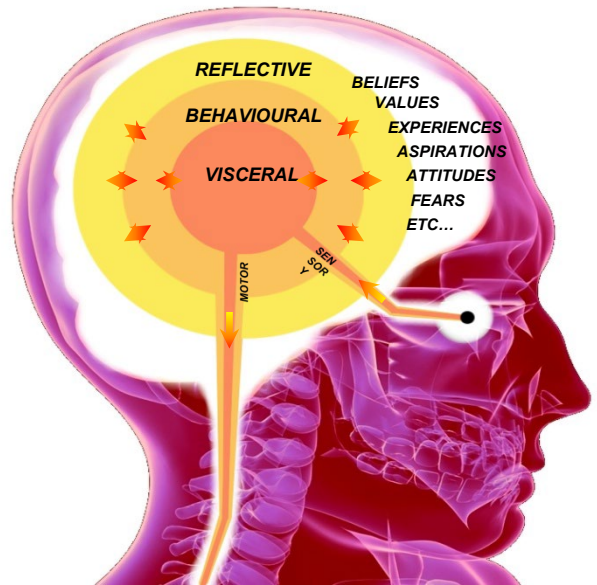
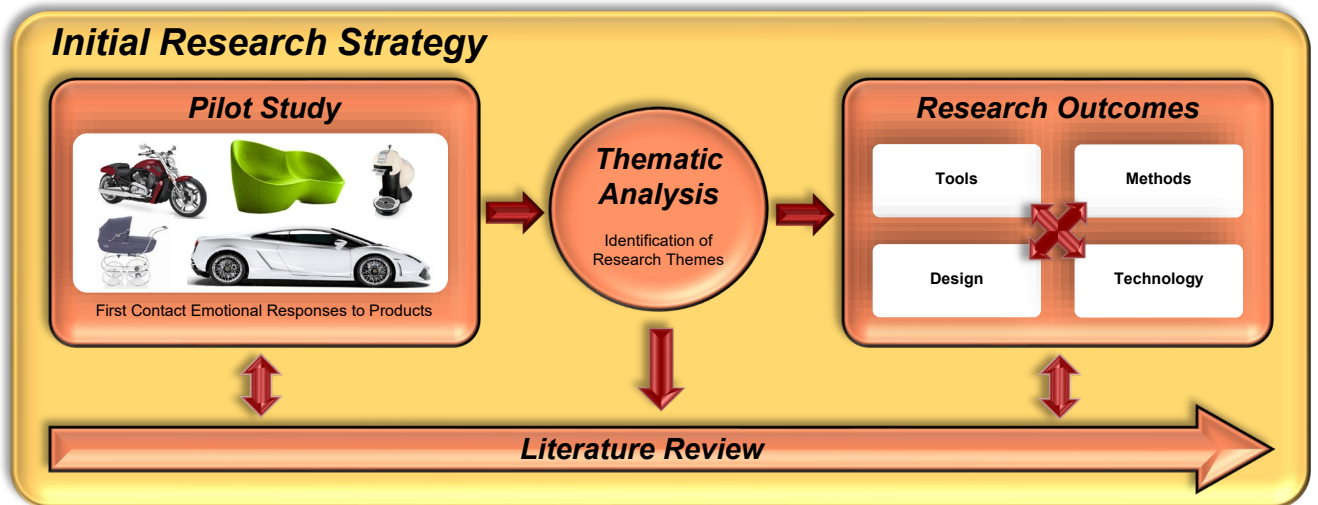


Figure 1. Three levels of emotional processing

An ongoing literature review has identified a growing academic and industrial interest in this field and the need for 'Rigorous and reliable methodologies that can be applied to common tasks in industrial product development...' (ENGAGE 2005). It is envisaged that the outcomes of the pilot study will inform the future direction of the research in conjunction with information gathered through the literature review.



## References

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