

Project Title: MoodFlower

Full Name: Yunxuan Zhu (Victoria)

Tutor's name: Jennifer McHugh

University URL address: <https://2025.macd.work/yz6v20/>

Project Report

Introduction:

In recent years, emotional problems and mental health have become important issues of common concern to people. Young women lose the ability to express their true emotions due to aesthetic standards, labeling and social pressure. Persistent emotional suppression affects physical and mental health, disrupts the healthy environment for public in society (Patel and Patel, 2019). The final project named "MoodFlower", critically discussed the impact of Instagram on the emotional expression of young women. This project creates a free and safe space for emotional expression through an interactive App, and guides users to participate in offline exhibitions with posters and dynamic videos, provoking public's attention, reflection on emotions.

This report will reflect on research and process based on the DIEP structure. This report also explains "Paradigm Shift" and explore the social phenomena and user psychological needs and conduct evaluations and plans.

Paradigm Shift – How to shift A/B Manifesto:

From "Affirmative" to "Critical", the project has shifted from overemphasizing positive emotions to reflecting on the emotional suppression mechanisms of social platforms. The project focuses on people's suppressed true feelings on Instagram, presenting the diversity and complexity of emotions through art

therapy and personified visual images, and criticizing the phenomenon of excessive beautification of emotions in current digital culture. The project encourages users to face up to and release negative emotions and reflect on how Instagram shapes the standards of emotional expression.

From "change the world to suit us" to "change us to suit the world", the project hopes that people will gradually break free from the control of Instagram and no longer cater to others' expectations, such as uploading "perfect life content" or "shaping a perfect social image" (Cohen et al., 2019). The project helps people accept their inner emotions and reflect on whether they are unconsciously changing themselves. The project provides young women with a space that supports emotional expression and self-reflection through self-awareness and empathetic interaction experiences. The project encourages people to establish correct emotional expression and achieve true emotional acceptance.

From "research for design" to "research through design", the project no longer regards "research" as the preparatory work before "design". "Research" is not merely for solving problems but has become a way to raise questions and trigger thinking. "Design" is used as a medium for seeking emotions, evoking resonance by exploring users' feelings, and it is a tool for psychological growth and self-awareness. When using App, women are no longer passive recipients but gradually understand and accept their emotions through interaction. It has made "design" a way to understand emotions. According to Dunne and Raby (2013, p.34), "Design is not always about problem-solving, sometimes it is about problem-finding." Functions such as "mood recording, mood selection" meet users' emotional needs, and help them gradually build their cognition.

From "user" to "person", the project no longer regards users as passive

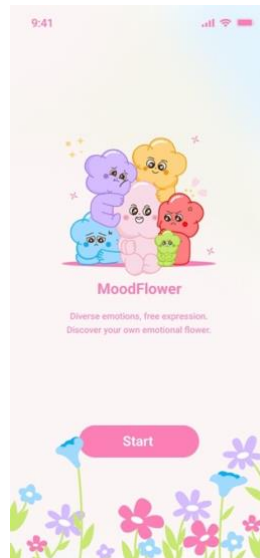
recipients, but rather as individuals with their own rights and emotional expressions, possessing the ability to participate, express and reflect within the platform. The project focuses on the real feelings and psychological states of "person" on Instagram. The project meets the functional requirements, emphasizes emotional care and human-oriented design concepts. So, the project provides women with a safe, free, and resonant space through art therapy and interactive experiences, guiding them to express and understand their emotions.

Describe:

The theme of this project is "The Impact of Instagram on Women's Emotional Expression", focusing on emotional expression and women's mental health. The project aims to provide young women with a safe, free, and unjudged space. Due to the aesthetic culture and recommendation mechanism of Instagram, young women suppress their inner emotions, which has a negative impact on their mental health. Through interaction app and offline exhibition, this project helps users express their emotions bravely and become aware of the negative impacts of emotional suppression. During my design process, I found that the combination of emotional visualization and interaction experience can evoke users' emotional resonance and self-reflection. According to Norman's "Emotional design" theory, the project stimulates users' emotional identification and participation motivation (Norman, 2004). Based on Malchiodi's art therapy, the project has incorporated functions such as anonymous communication, interactive companionship into App design, providing users for emotional release and self-awareness (Malchiodi, 2003). Figure 1 shows different emotional characters. My inspiration for character design comes from symbolic meaning of flowers. The project combines Robert Plutchik's "Wheel of emotions". It constructs six characters by personifying flowers, presenting diverse emotional states (Plutchik, 1980). I

hope to make women aware of the impact of emotional suppression through character's expressions and body language.

Fig1: Different emotional character images



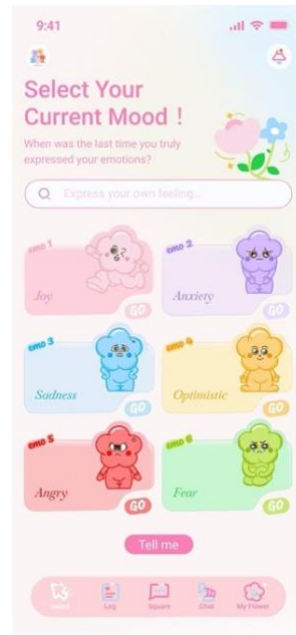
Source: MoodFlower's app

Interpret:

Instagram has a negative impact on the emotions of young women. People are accustomed to hiding their emotions, but they are not aware that suppressing emotions for a long time can affect self-perception. Women are afraid of being misunderstood, and do not know how to take the initiative to express themselves or seek help. Due to this cognitive gap, people fall into emotional predicaments, which affect their mental health and social development issues. I have designed an emotional expression app includes functions such as emotional selection and recording, emotional communication, and companionship. Figure 2 shows "Mood Select" functional interface. It offers users an opportunity to observe and reflect on their emotions, further promoting self-reflection. Users don't need to worry about others' evaluations. They can share content anonymously. Flower illustration and interactive experiences relieve users' psychological pressure, guiding them to understand, accept and express themselves. When I am doing color

matching, I pay special attention to the relationship between colors and emotions. I have learned how color psychology can help users identify and reflect on emotions and enhance emotional resonance (Hussain, 2021).

Fig2: Emotion selection page



Source: MoodFlower's app

Besides, I realized the Importance of art therapy. Emotional games and community interaction mechanisms help users relieve stress and cultivate their self-identity (Huss, Nagamine and Zaccai, 2025). Through emotional healing, users can face up emotions and establish healthier space. A private and secure space for expression is for those women who have suppressed their emotions due to fear. The project provides women with emotional needs and build trust and self-acceptance. People learn about offline exhibition information on personal homepages. This enhances users' sense of participation and provides opportunities for emotional reflection, awakening more people's attention to emotional expression and mental health. The App also offers emotional support, guiding people to be aware of the impact of suppressing their emotions (Dam, 2025). However, this project exposed some challenges. For example, women lack the motivation to use the App. Because

emotional expression is often phased, when women feel down, they tend to use this app to seek emotional support and reduce the frequency of use when their emotions are stable. This will reduce user stickiness and affect emotional companionship. Therefore, the app can enhance the sense of participation with users and stimulate their motivation to use it through making incentives.

Evaluate:

By critically exploring emotional expression on Instagram, I achieved my design goals and gained a deeper understanding of how to raise questions and convey emotional needs through design. I have learned emotional design focuses on user experience and an important tool for exploring users' emotional needs. It helped me deeply consider the connection between emotional expression and Instagram. Through PACT method, I have learned young women aged 18 to 30 are more likely to suffer from the emotional distress brought by Instagram, which helps me accurately identify the pain points of users. I express emotions through the personified flowers, which is conducive to stimulating the users' emotional resonance. This design process made me realize design can solve problems and help people critically explore (Benyon, 2013). Based on my previous research on relationship between color and emotional expression, I chose flower as the app's visual image. Different colors can evoke different emotional responses. This insight helped me build an emotional connection with users, demonstrating the complexity and diversity of emotions, and thereby deepening my understanding of the project's theme.

However, the project still faces the issue of reflection. Figure 3 shows the application provides a space for anonymous expression. But its functions still need to be improved when dealing with users from different cultural backgrounds and those with insufficient emotional cognition. I suggest adding

more inclusive matching methods and encouraging the participation of more diverse female groups. Although posters and videos are used as promotional media, the project still has room for development. I hope to collaborate with multiple platforms to expand its influence and build a more sustainable and emotionally supportive platform.

Fig3: Emotional communication page



Source: MoodFlower's app

Plan:

In the future design, I plan to explore the potential of this project and integrate digital platform with offline emotional support services. I attempt to enhance emotional motivation and collaborate with mental health institutions to stimulate critical thinking about women's emotional expression. These insights have played a significant role in my future design direction, especially in helping me engage in area of interaction design and visual aesthetics. I mastered methods such as paradigm shift, PACT analysis, persona, and iterative design. I have also transformed theory into practical design strategies. I conducted research on "emotional design", "art therapy". These theories have brought criticality and depth to my projects. I will combine

interaction design with multi-sensory to explore more possibilities. I want to continue exploring interdisciplinary fields, which can attract the audience's attention and prompt people to reflect (Shams and Seitz, 2008). Through critical type design works, I hope to contribute to enhancing public awareness and mental health. I also reflect on my shortcomings. I still need to further improve my animation design. I will browse design teaching videos about VR design and hope to continue exploring critically content's design theme.

Reference:

Benyon, D. (2013) *Designing Interactive Systems: A Comprehensive Guide to HCI, UX and Interaction Design*. 3rd edn. Harlow: Pearson.

Cohen, R., Fardouly, J., Newton-John, T. and Slater, A. (2019) '#BoPo on Instagram: an experimental investigation of the effects of viewing body positive content on young women's mood and body image'. *New Media & Society*, 21(7), pp. 1546–1564. doi:10.1177/1461444819826530.

Dam, R.F. (2025) 'The 5 Stages in the Design Thinking Process' [online]. *Interaction Design Foundation*. Available at: <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/article/5-stages-in-the-design-thinking-process> [Accessed 15 August 2025].

Dunne, A. and Raby, F. (2013). *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Hussain, A.R. (2021) 'Color Psychology in Art: How Color Impacts Mood'. *Art and Design Review*, 9(4), pp.301–308. doi:10.4236/adr.2021.94025.

Huss, E., Nagamine, M. and Zaccai, M. (2025) 'Observing versus creating flowers: a review of relevance for art therapy'. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 19, Article 1504057. doi:10.3389/fnhum.2025.1504057.

Malchiodi, C. A. (2003) *Handbook of Art Therapy*. New York: Guilford Press.

Norman, D.A. (2004) *Emotional Design: Why We Love (or Hate) Everyday Things*. New York: Basic Books.

Patel, J. and Patel, P. (2019) 'Consequences of Repression of Emotion: Physical Health, Mental Health, and General Well Being'. *International Journal of Psychotherapy Practice and Research*, 1(3), pp.16–21. doi: 10.14302/issn.2574-612X.ijpr-18-2564.

Plutchik, R. (1980) *Emotion: A Psychoevolutionary Synthesis*. New York: Harper & Row.

Shams, L. and Seitz, A.R. (2008) 'Benefits of multisensory learning'. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 12(11), pp.411–417. doi:10.1016/j.tics.2008.07.006.

List of Illustrations:

Figure 1: Screenshot of Different emotional character in MoodFlower's app.

Author's own design work.

Figure 2: Screenshot of emotion selection page in MoodFlower's app.

Author's own design work.

Figure 3: Screenshot of emotional communication page in MoodFlower's app.

Author's own design work.