Affie: An affective thesaurus for the professional and the curious

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Affect control theory's (ACT) methods, data and conceptual framework provide a basis through which to understand how affect relates fundamentally to people's processing of information (Smith-Lovin, 1993). Interact demonstrates how through modelling these affective processes we can simulate social interaction and people's related experience. As such in social psychology Interact is a powerful and unprecedented tool. In this presentation we suggest ACT may also assist in understanding the role of affect in creative problem solving and in the development of associated tools.

Innovation and creativity in design, business and marketing is increasingly recognized as being related to building on and playing with affective understanding. The capacity to think abstractly – to question, make connections and broaden understanding based on affect and meaning – has become a fundamental skill in many professions. Terms such as 'emotional intelligence' and narratives around successful businesses such as Apple are testament to the new importance of understanding and tapping into an affective logic. There are, however, few tools to assist people to explore the affective relationships between concepts. In this presentation we present a new tool, Affie, for exploring affective relationships that utilizes affect control theory's methods, data and the conceptual framework (Lulham, Thurgood and Shank, 2015).

Affie is a web based application that operates as an affective thesaurus (http://affie.io/). It allows a person to search for concepts, or words, that are affectively, or emotionally, similar to other concepts (i.e. "feel the same as"). The tool utilises existing ACT data sets for identities, modifiers, emotions, behaviours, settings as well as affective data on 400 human values and 200 consumer product concepts. Affective similarity and dissimilarity is determined by calculating the squared Euclidean distance between two concepts across the three dimensions of goodness, powerfulness, and activity. The tool enables a person to search for identities that feel similar to particular values or traits, for example 'trust', as displayed in the screen shot of the tool in Figure 2. Conversely it could enable a person to search for products (i.e. watches) that feel the same as particular moods, values or identities.

In addition to the use of the tool in creative innovation process, we believe this tool may have wider appeal to the general public. To the curious, whether its an author writing a script or a teenager wondering about the meaning of particular clothes, Affie provides an experience that may assist them in deepening their understanding. In a similar way to a typical thesaurus being useful to explore concepts with similar literal meanings, Affie may have general utility to the public in looking up and exploring concepts with similar conative or affective meaning. Speculatively in an open online environment, it may be a tool that becomes part of the searching lexicon that many people intermittently use in their everyday lives.

To date, we have explored the utility of the tool in design innovation workshop settings in our research centres, and will shortly be branching out into education for the undergraduate design subject, Designing Emotive Things. We are also intending to participate in an pre-accelerator/incubator program with an Australian Government Funding Body to pursue avenues for research and industry engagement.
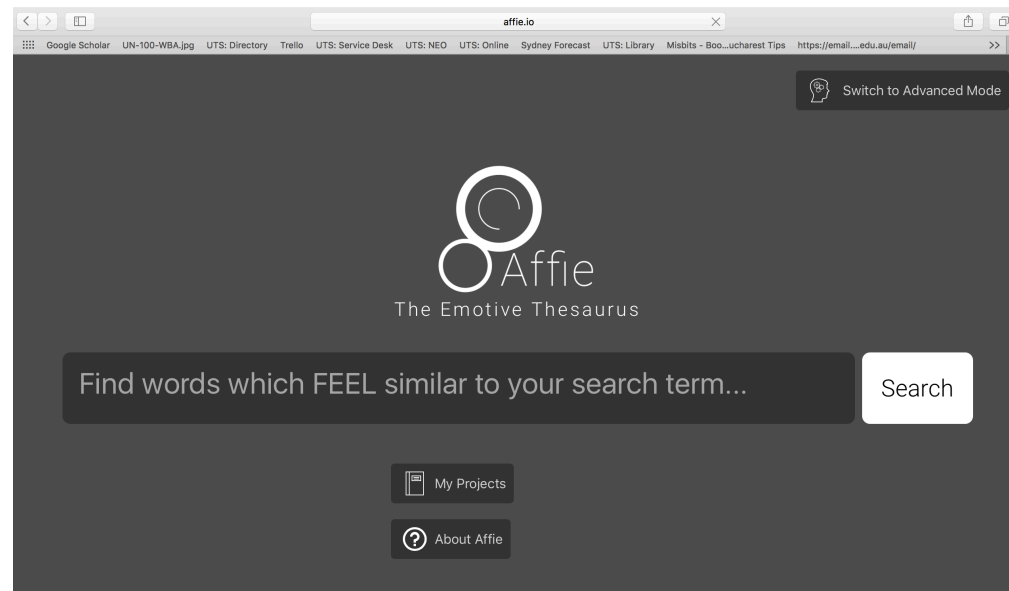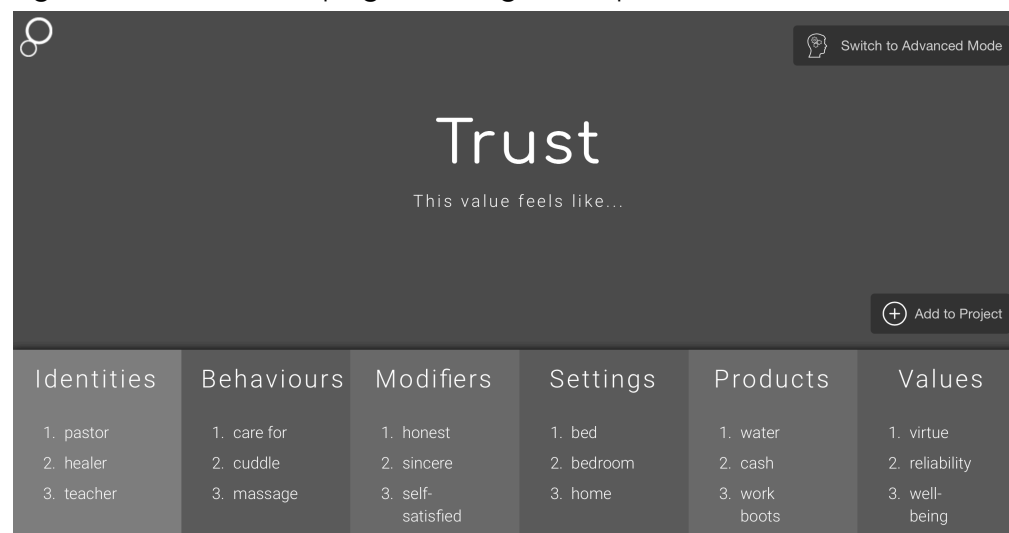
Figure 1: Affie search page

Figure 2: Search results page showing concepts that feel similar to 'trust'

Lulham, R., Thurgood, C. & Shank, D. 2015, 'An affective tool to assist in designing innovations', Interplay: Proceedings of the 6th International Congress of International Association of Societies of Design Research, IASDR, Brisbane, pp. 1361-1379.

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Smith-Lovin, L. (1992). "An Affect Control View of Cognition and Emotion.". In J Howard and P Callero (Eds.), Self and Society: A Social Cognition Approach (pp. 143-69). Cambridge University Press.