



TOUCH: THE ALLURE OF TANGIBLE DESIGN

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “seduction” as “the qualities or features of something that make it seem attractive.” What does seduction signify in the context of industrial design? What makes industrial-designed products, services, and user experiences so alluring that customers want to come back repeatedly?

Facets of Seduction

Stephen Anderson explored seduction in interaction design in his book *Seductive Interaction Design: Creating Playful, Fun, and Effective User Experiences*. In service and experience design, the 5E experience model—entice, enter, engage, exit, and extend—begins with entice (or excitement) to explain why customers are incentivized by different types of services.

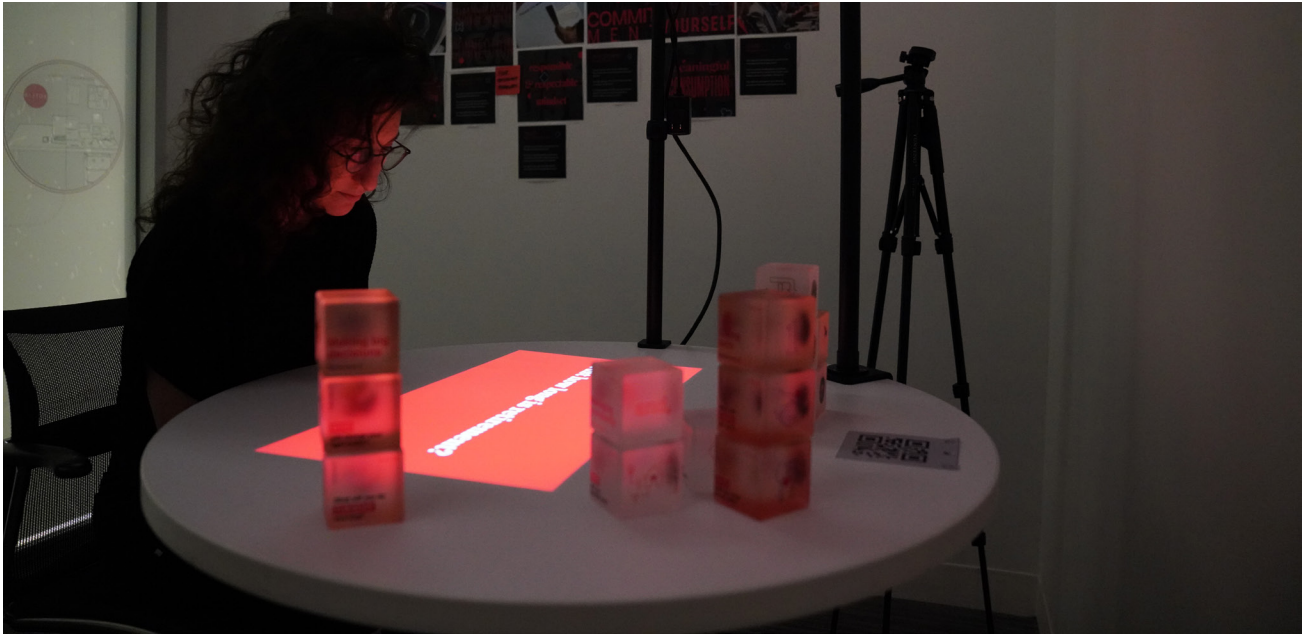
When I think of service design, I’m inspired by the field of industrial design. How can we use product design to its full capacity? How can we leverage meaningful tangible artifacts to connect touchpoints within the user journey to create more incentives for both service recipients and providers?

I interpret the phrase “seduction in design” as an expression of the designer’s empathy toward service

providers and service recipients (the users). By satisfying individual needs, empathetic design solutions create external incentives and internal motivations that capture attention and drive action. This approach epitomizes the allure of human-centered and life-centered design.

Empathetic design ideas create positive and lasting impressions through engaging service encounters with tangible, cultural, and societal artifacts. The concept of embedded empathy can refer to Jane Fulton Suri’s *Thoughtless Acts?: Observations On Intuitive Design*, which discusses how people’s behaviors are influenced by the built environment to form new habits or user experiences. Suri uses the term “thoughtless acts” to describe how our actions and behaviors are determined by the affordance (the potential actions that an artifact or space enables or offers to an individual, connecting to the physical capabilities of the individual and the characteristics of the artifact or space), life rituals, and interactions these artifacts facilitate.

The concept of seduction in design also brings to mind the term “stickiness.” We can understand that through the lens of affordance, a concept defined by Don Norman, the author of *The Design of Everyday Things*. Affordance represents the possibilities in the world for how agents—



A study conducted at the MIT AgeLab sought to understand how to seduce people into wanting longevity services by using tangible artifacts in the form of Longevity Planning Blocks. (Photo: Sheng-Hung Lee)

whether they are people, animals, or machines—can interact with something as intended or not by the service providers (e.g., makers), whether in a visible or hidden way.

This article explores a case study that exemplifies how designed affordances and their resulting thoughtless acts demonstrate the power of seductive design. It examines how we can create a set of tangible artifacts (e.g., Longevity Planning Blocks, or LPBs) and interactive service encounters (e.g., tech- or touch-based services) to increase people's desire for longevity services to improve their awareness, knowledge, and longevity. The case study is based on redesigned longevity services that were the focus of a doctoral research project I developed at the MIT AgeLab with Dr. Joseph Coughlin.

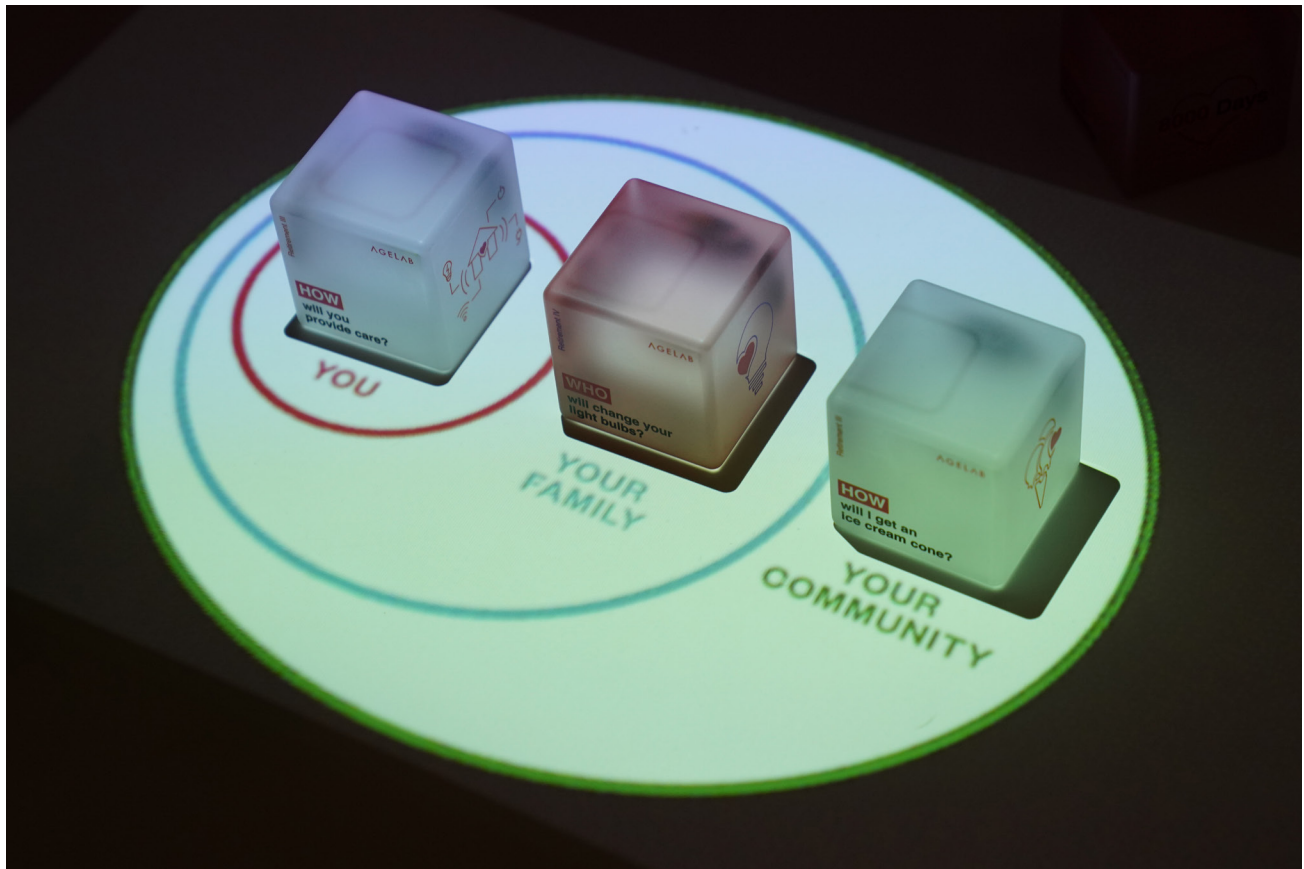
Leveraging Attraction

People are living longer and aspire to have a better quality of life. Longevity coaching services emerged out of the need to help people cope with these disruptive demographic transformations. With their roots in traditional financial planning, they include topics such as education, community, family, home, risk, mobility, and health. Longevity coaching empowers and encourages individuals and families to

better prepare for the complicated systemic socioeconomic challenges that define the era of longevity economics. Longevity economics refers to research on how changes in human longevity affect economic factors, including labor markets, productivity, healthcare costs, pension systems, and economic growth. It encompasses a range of challenges that arise from increased life expectancy and an aging population.

LPBs were designed to help people recognize the need to transition from the traditional three-stage model of life (birth, education, and retirement) to a more adaptable and fluid multistage lifestyle approach. This aligns with Susan Wilner Golden's assertion that life is characterized by different stages rather than simply age as a number. She summarized her 18 life stages into a proposed five-quarter (5Q) life framework: starting, growing, renaissance, legacy, and extra. The framework emphasizes the new concept of *furtherhood* in the new stages of longevity from the third quarter, renaissance, to the fifth quarter, extra.

Based on the idea that age is not merely a numerical number, the MIT AgeLab has conducted a continuous experiment for the past two years. The experiment is designed to examine the implementation of longevity



The Longevity Planning Blocks invite people to reflect on the situations they may find themselves in as they age to help them plan for the future. (Photo: Sheng-Hung Lee)

planning at the individual and societal levels. It comprised a series of qualitative studies, including semistructured expert and user interviews, surveys, controlled experiments, and co-creation workshops. The goal was to assess the participants' level of engagement through the seductive design of two critical factors: tangible artifacts (the LPBs) and an engaging service encounter.

A service encounter is the direct interaction between a customer (user) and a service provider. This interaction can occur across various scenarios in different communication formats from in-person to digitally mediated. Additionally, service encounters are key moments in service delivery because they offer the customer a tangible experience of the service quality and significantly influence customer satisfaction and perception of the service brand.

The ability of an object to elicit people's emotions and stimulate their thoughts is highlighted in Sherry Turkle's concept of evocative objects. Turkle defines evocative

objects as an intellectual element capable of anchoring memories, nurturing connections, and inspiring innovative ideas. Bringing tangibility to the assessment process can facilitate more constructive and meaningful dialogue among designers, clients, and other essential stakeholders. For example, touch is an intricate sense that enables us to explore the complex world by interacting with different materials, textures, and temperatures and can provide a means of communication.

In this context, LPBs were intentionally built as provocative artifacts to enable participants to express their emotions, articulate their ideas, and engage in discussions about sensitive, personal, and private longevity-planning topics.

The blocks were designed to be alluring. They are sized to fit perfectly in one's palm. The material, a frosted acrylic, combined with rounded corners almost demands to be touched. As soon as participants sit down in front of the

blocks, they intuitively reach out to start stacking them. It's a familiar and "thoughtless act," adapted and elevated from the children's playroom.

The proposed longevity service aims to enhance users' understanding of longevity literacy through interacting with LPBs across different service encounters. We used six design attributes to gauge the quality of the longevity service: learnability (ease of comprehension), efficiency (effectiveness in learning), intimacy (provision of personal space), trustworthiness (establishing trust), confidence (leaving a positive impression), and satisfaction (perceived quality). Participants rated the service quality on these six design attributes. Their insights gave us fresh and creative perspectives to understand the connection between how attractive the design is, the design intent, and the effectiveness of using a tangible artifact in longevity services.

The seductivity of the LPBs is integral to building trust between service providers, longevity coaches, or financial advisors and their clients. Particularly in longevity-planning scenarios, where individuals discuss sensitive topics related to their financial future and challenges, the service encounter introduces additional layers of sophistication that must consider various scripts, environmental factors, team dynamics, and touchpoints within the system.

Seduction in design plays a crucial role in creating not just a seamless and successful user experience between two parties but also one that is comfortable, safe, and enjoyable. The preliminary findings from the experiments in longevity services transcend simple evaluations of efficiency and effectiveness in service encounters involving tangible elements (LPBs). They further highlight the importance of empathy both toward and with individuals. This insight serves as a powerful reminder of the evolving roles and responsibilities of designers. It underscores the need to consider not only the design of physical products and services but also to embrace wider perspectives that include political, communal, cultural, and social dimensions. This holistic approach is essential for generating a meaningful and positive impact.

Impacts for the Future

Seductive artifacts associated with service encounters

can culturally, socially, and globally shape meanings within the context of building an equitable, sustainable, and inclusive longevity ecosystem. However, we must consider the political dimensions of seduction in design. Do we aim to captivate users to be addicted to the novel services and experiences we have crafted? Do we wish to achieve altruistic commercial success by considering the environmental and social impact? Can we seduce citizens to use more public transportation and share resources to reduce carbon emissions?

In this article, we explored the notion of seduction in design through the creation of tangible artifacts (LPBs) coupled with interactive service encounters. The aim of this study was to learn how to stimulate people's attraction to longevity services to improve their awareness, knowledge, and strategies for living a long and healthy life. In the era of longevity economics, with the significant influence of service and experience industries, seduction in design has become a context-sensitive term that can be interpreted and applied in various ways. Incorporating seduction into the design process will create deeper, more meaningful, more respectful, and more effective engagement for people and with people.

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