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2017-06-22

A Macabre Tale: eliciting negative emotions through exhibit design

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Original Publication Citation

Frost, M., (2017, June). A Macabre Tale: eliciting negative emotions through exhibit design, Poster Presentation, ACRL, Rare Book and Manuscript Conference, Iowa City, Iowa.

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Frost, Megan and McKeen, Quincey, "A Macabre Tale: eliciting negative emotions through exhibit design" (2017). *All Faculty Publications*. 2036.

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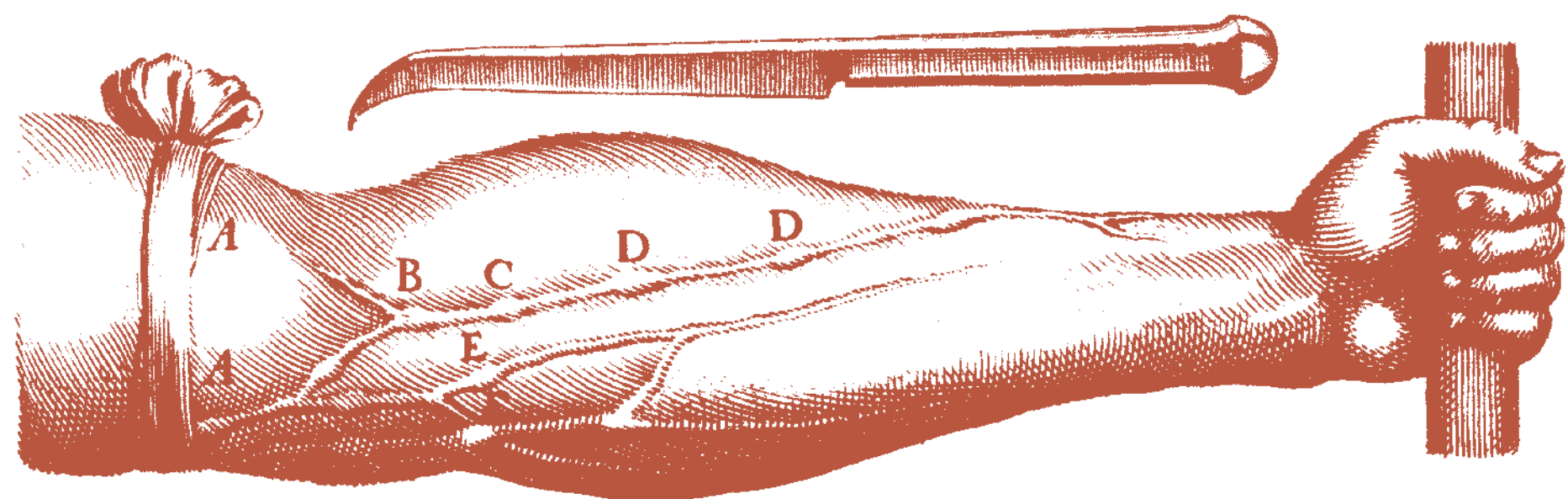


A MACABRE TALE: ELICITING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS THROUGH EXHIBIT DESIGN

HOW DOES A VIEWER'S EMOTIONAL RESPONSE TO AN EXHIBIT IMPACT THE LIKELIHOOD THAT THEY WILL RETURN?

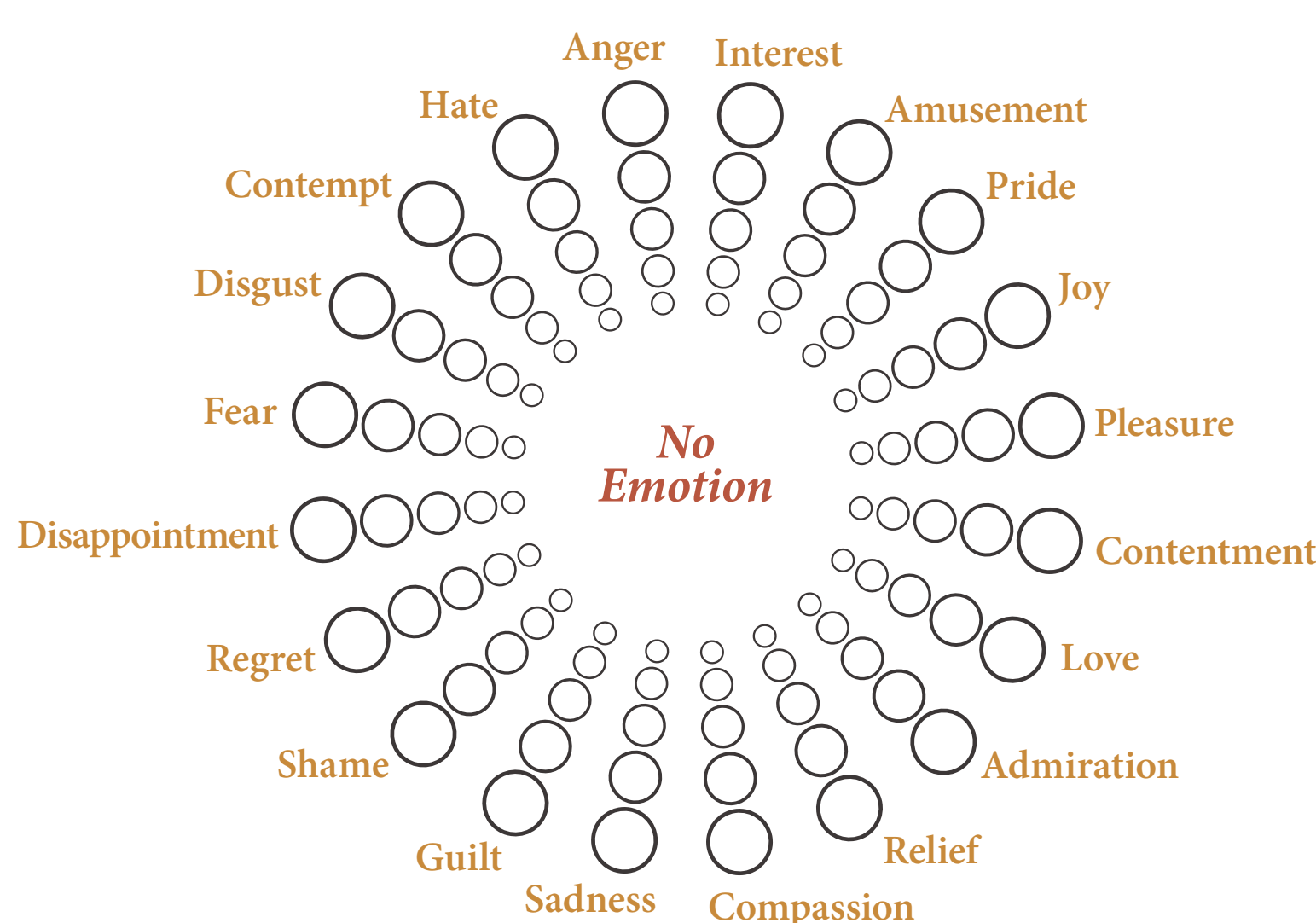
INTRODUCTION

In our exhibit displaying medical books from the 16th & 17th centuries, the design of the text and displays were intended to create a somewhat dark and macabre atmosphere. We were interested in how eliciting emotions, particularly negative emotions, impacted patrons' reception of the exhibit.



METHODS

An exit survey asked visitors to identify and rate the intensity of the emotions they felt while viewing the exhibit. (See emotion wheel below) These emotions were coded as either positive or negative. The survey also posed questions designed to assess the visitor's likelihood of returning to view the exhibit again.



Number of Responses to Each Emotion

POSITIVE EMOTIONS	NEGATIVE EMOTIONS
Interest	Disgust
100	45
Amusement	Sadness
55	42
Admiration	Fear
44	21
Compassion	Disappointment
41	12
Relief	Shame
28	8
Pleasure	Contempt
26	7
Contentment	Anger
19	6
Joy	Guilt
16	6
Love	Regret
11	6
Pride	Hate
11	5

DISCUSSION

As expected, there was a direct correlation between the intensity of a visitor's positive emotions and their likelihood of returning to the exhibit. But more interestingly, our statistical analysis indicated a significant correlation between negative emotions and visitor behavior:

Visitors who recorded feeling negative emotions while viewing the exhibit, were significantly more likely to visit multiple times than those who did not.

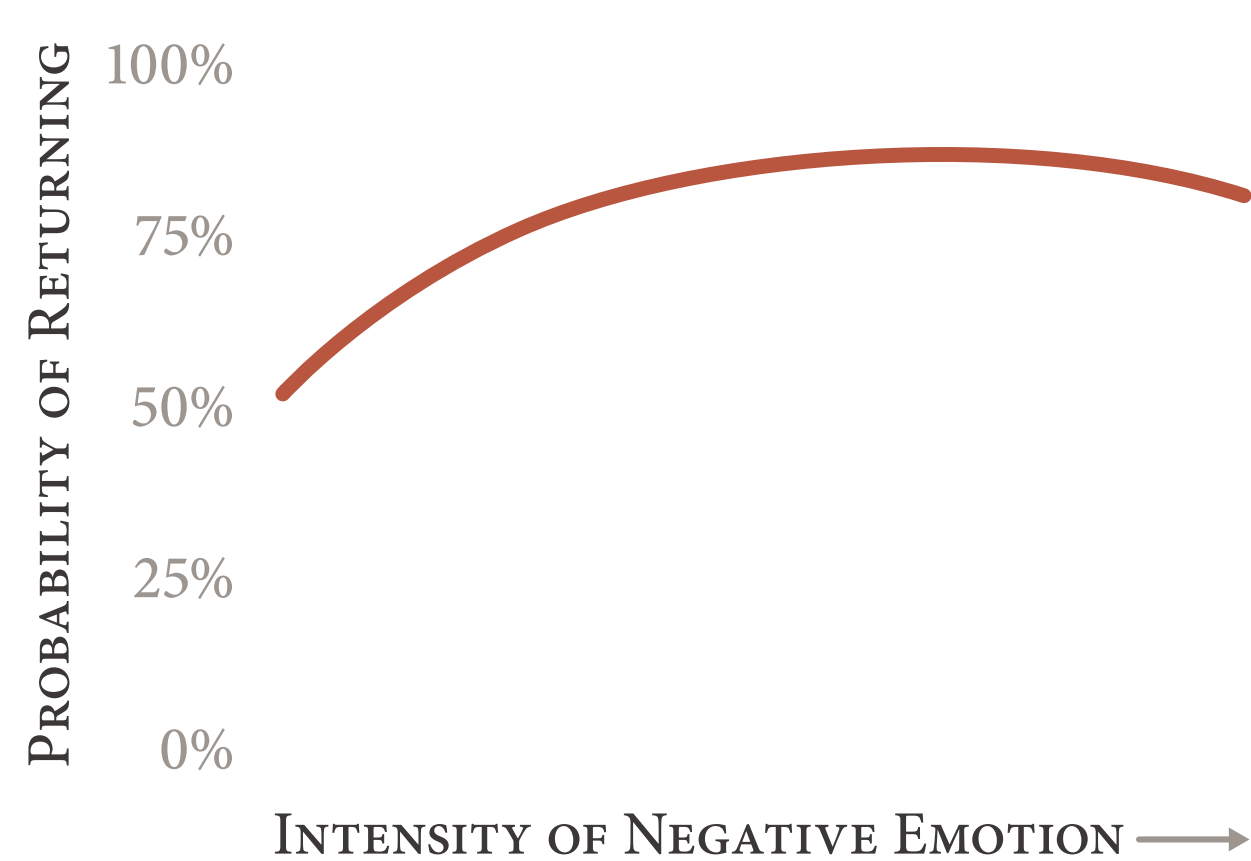
In general, as the intensity of negative emotions increased, visitor response increased. At a certain point, however, this correlation reversed. Those that recorded the highest levels of negative emotion became increasingly less likely to return.

One exception was those visitors who recorded experiencing high levels of both negative and positive emotion. These individuals were the most likely of any group to return.

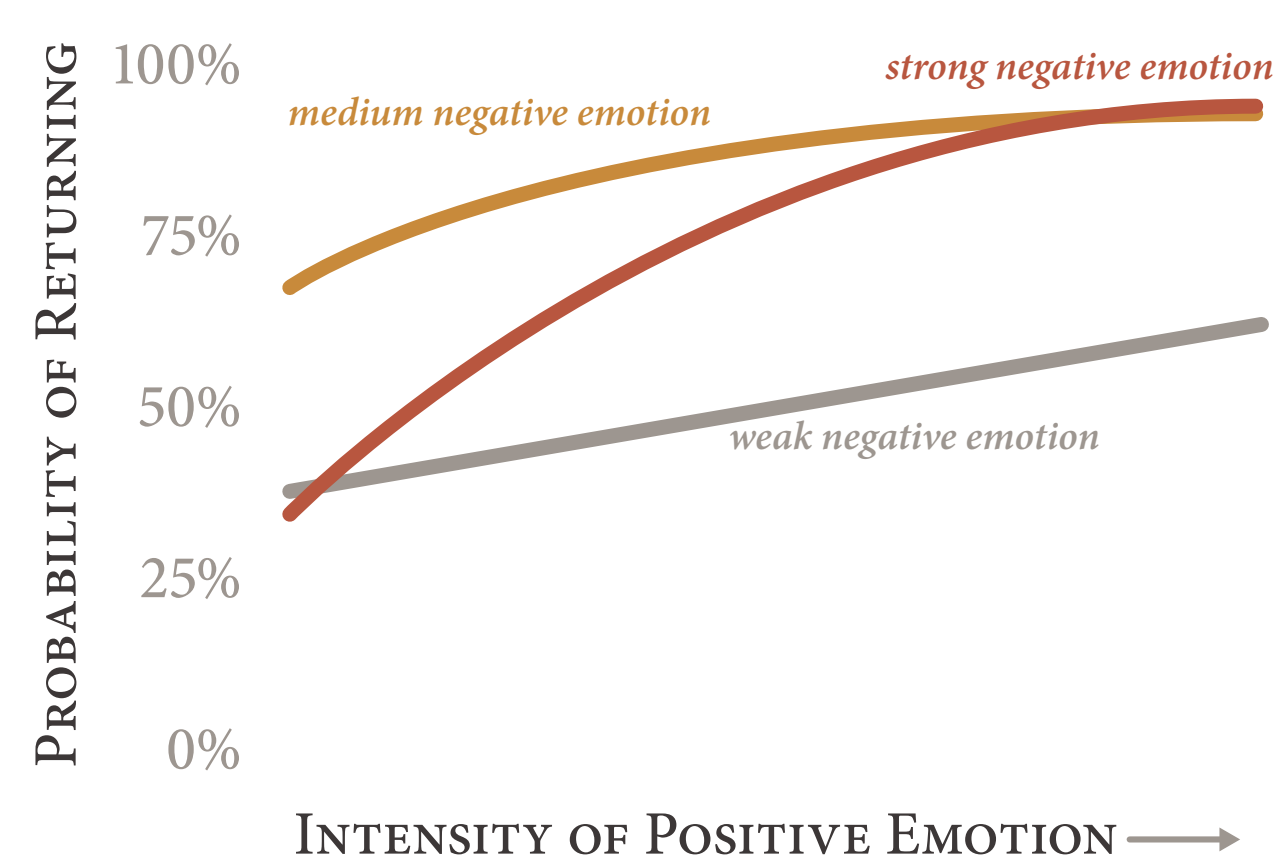
As in other forms of entertainment that tell a story, such as movies and video games, we believe that many individuals enjoy feeling some degree of negative emotion. As long as those emotions are accompanied by positive emotions and/or do not exceed an individual's comfort level, they can increase viewer interest in an exhibit.

RESULTS

Visitors who felt negative emotions were more likely to visit the exhibit multiple times



Visitors who felt strong negative emotions were more likely to return if they also felt strong positive emotions



CONCLUSION

This research may be of benefit to exhibit curators and designers. Creating exhibits that deliberately elicit, not only positive, but also negative emotions can enhance visitor interest and increase viewership.