Norman’s Concept of Affordances

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Don Norman’s concept of affordances are viewed as interactions between people, animals, and/or machines and their surroundings. The interactions are used to determine the capabilities of how a specific product can be used. Affordances can be perceivable, while at other times are invisible. Norman views affordances as dependent on culture, prior knowledge and expectations of the individual. He focuses on the perceptual and mental capabilities of the properties that may not always exist. His lack in separating affordances from the perceptual information that specifies the affordances has been strongly criticized.

Affordances are relationships and not an actual property, which make it hard to understand. Understanding affordances is crucial to designers because they have to understand the relationship and its impact on the environment before they can design the product. It is becoming more difficult to design effective affordances because the manner in which objects are used is constantly changing.

Despite the various concepts of affordances, they allow us to distinguish between the usefulness and the usability of an object. Designs are developed for usefulness through the creation of affordances to highlight the relationship and interaction of the design with the end goal of the user. The usability is improved by designing the product based on the specific of the affordances.

References

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