

FUTURE STUDIES: A METHODOLOGY FOR FASHION RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The fashion research involves a type of perception and construction of the perspective in order to understand the social context in which it operates, but also with detachment capacity and reflection on this context on the values that distinguish itself about the desires that are managed and generated by those who live in it. So combining traditional forecasting methods with new methods to react more quickly to the consumers' wishes is currently a challenge for most brands and creators. Today, situational factors and technological advances have forced the configuration of new methodologies, called Future Studies, which enabled medium and long term planning, with the active information in dynamic conditions of the decision-making processes. It can be seen that future studies are complex, intricate and include a wide range and depth of classes and plans of observation and analysis. Therefore, the work was bibliographic nature, presenting the various classifications and approaches found in the literature, with the intention to unify the understanding of the meanings of the various expressions alluding to future studies, avoiding theoretical confusion, conceptual errors or indiscriminate application of synonymous concepts found in the literature.

Keywords: Future Studies; Fashion Research; Fashion Trends; Prospective; Forecast.

INTRODUCTION

At present, the ranking is occurring downstream upstream in the supply chain of fashion, i.e. the final consumer to the production of raw material, since the competition is based on the differentiation and centered on the inclusion of elements such as style, design and fashion in the products¹. “The production of textiles and clothing is now driven by end customers, who look for standard product and production in up-stream sectors”².

This new configuration of the production chain relates to the progressive fork between the tangible and the intangible, the material and the immaterial, the productive functions and the recovery³. The author points out that, despite the modernization of the textile and clothing industry through the active materials (investments in machinery, equipment and raw materials) remains important, it is increasingly unsatisfactory. This deficiency is accentuated when peer competitiveness of the productive chain fashion as a whole and not just in some companies and/or links, since the active materials make up only one of the dimensions for sus-tainable competitiveness chain gains.

Immaterial assets (intangible) are increasingly effective in competitiveness of the textile and clothing industry. This conjunction, broadly speaking, include previous assets and post-production, such as design, product development, engineering, marketing, sales channels, brands, logistics, maintenance and service providers, management capacity and coordination of the chain. Gimeno⁴ argues that fashion is an effective tool for increasing the competitiveness of enterprises, as it enables product differentiation and consequently the business itself. As a competitive tool, the use is dependent on the “strategic plan of the company, the mar-ket you want to take and their technical and artistic ability for its application”.

Based on the above, it can be stated that the prospective study and its use in fashion design products are a matter of academic relevance, since it can produce inputs to analyze the development of the fashion system and its main actors (industry, designers and consumers) and its insertion in today's global environment. In the academic environment, the examination of this system and trends of surveys can also contribute to the devel-opment of theoretical frameworks of other important fields for the industrial development in developing coun-tries. Characterized by transience, fashion presents itself as a competitive industry, boosted by globalization, stimulating the rapid development of new products and instigating competition. The research also becomes important for there are few systematic studies on the topic addressed in the field.

PROSPECTIVE AND FASHION TRENDS

The anticipated result of the prospective study is not simply confirm that a direction to follow is the correct one, but from the collection of the signs at present conceive narrative with sense. Therefore, filtering, interpretation, construction of narratives and the production of meaning are the differential elements for the professional who works with anticipation of strategic information. Thus, we seek to research and analyze prospecting techniques that assist in monitoring and application trends to guide organizations in building a process of re-search and innovation.

Trend, the *tendentia* in Latin, means striving for, leaning or be attracted to. In the field of fashion, trends are basic guidelines that reflect the desires of the consumer market, that is, the application of the demonstrations, sensations and feelings that settle in the human community from its evolution in industrial and consumer products. According to Erner⁵, “usually, any phenomenon of polarization in which the same object — in the broadest sense of the word — simultaneously seduces a large number of people is determined under the name of trend”. Understanding the author is closely linked to the adoption, ownership and desire for certain object, confirming that the trends may represent the futility, but the frivolous does not suppress the enigma, since the trends do not obey, by chance, linearly.

For years, scholars have sought to find explanations for the dynamic changes in fashion. “They are causes of psychological, sociological, psychoanalytical, metaphysics, ethnic, ideological and religious orders”⁶. Caldas⁷ ensures that the cult of transformations “simultaneously delights and amazes everyone who gets carried away by the sweetness of the changes of promises — and, sometimes, by the threat of the prophecies of the era of uncertainty”, for every action comprises a representation of the future. Many people believe in the existence of a “commission of fashions” establishing trends to the public, funded by influential fashion industry⁸. One of the stunt variants is the existence of soothsayers — the trend offices. “The fact that their methods do not become clear to the general public contributes to the fascination of this myth”⁹. Erner¹⁰ contradicts the fantasy translating the power of decision to the public:

Belief in trend conspiracy reveals the inability to imagine a power whose influence would be everywhere, and whose headquarters would be nowhere. In the fashion industry, as in a democracy, everyone gets to vote. However, as in the census suffrage, not everyone has the same number of votes. It is for this reason that the tailors exert an obvious influence. However, ultimately, it is people’s opinion that prevails.

Fashion trends, or the so-called short-term trends (fewer than two years), are ephemeral fashion events; they are considered reducers of uncertainties for the supply chain of fashion and projective requirements for professional designer practice. They are signs that predict manifestations of a time, intervening in consumption, behaviour, directing will and aspirations. Given in cycles, for they come up, become popular and decline; trends identify colors, themes, shapes, fabrics, accessories, principles and elements of fashion design in a particular season, signaling possible stylistic directions that evolve to, draw near.

The fashion trend research involves a type of perception and construction of look, to understand the social context in which it operates, but also with detachment capacity and reflection on this context, about the values that distinguish it on the desires that are managed and generated by those who live in it. This means that the search of fashion trends is a kind of mutual action indicated by the method, by the training and by the construction of the researcher's perspective. Many variants of the same story intersect and intertwine, becoming part of the same plot, covering an ethnography of the area and having as guiding the integration of the vectors in a big gear. So combining traditional forecasting methods with new methods to react more quickly to the wishes of consumers is now a challenge for most brands and creators.

In short, you can ensure that the fashion trends made last prioritized technique, the shape and the material as strategic information and approached the abstract meanings as additional elements, today, and the situation was reversed. Questions peeking contemporary life, grouped under the term behaviour, provide the basic supreme research. Anyway, fashion trends instigate the researcher / designer to go to other fields of knowledge. Future studies involve a variety of thematic areas and cover several areas promoting a transdisciplinary space "reassemble the fragments, weaken the boundaries of disciplines, exchange concepts and notions, and especially search the links of intersection between the physis, the life and man", implying the understand-ing that fashion and design need of new knowledge¹¹.

FUTURE STUDIES

The scope of prospective studies is the construction of thought, adding value to the present information in order to subsidize the construction of strategies and identification as well as orientation of new future opportunities for the various actors involved.

It is important, in this context, to have a growing awareness that scientific and technological developments are the result of complex interactions between different factors, the existence and action of various social actors of evolving technological courses and competition, views of opportunities and environmental and economical constraints, and many other issues, belonging to and including the field of imponderable¹².

It is noted that future studies are complex, intricate and include a wide range and depth of classes and observation plans and analysis. Therefore, the conceptualization of appropriate tools and methodologies for the development of this process is valuable, avoiding theoretical confusion, conceptual errors or indiscriminate application of synonymous concepts found in the literature.

The original generic approach has been replaced by more specific views, related to own methods of research and building the future, gaining greater relevance, consistency and replicability. The adoption of one or another nomenclature (and their methods) must be a historical and cultural identity with the application context¹³.

Fundación Cotec Research¹⁴ reports that each country has used its own working practice and their future goals, and experts of every nation have achieved supposedly different results from the methodologies used. Therefore, it is necessary to have a unified line of definition of terms, preventing methodological errors resulting from this fact and enabling comparative studies and other analyzes to be able to be extended. “In Brazil, the terms exploration, future studies and foresight have been used. In English, the terms more frequently used are forecast(ing), foresight(ing) and future studies. In France, veille technologique, futuribles and la prospective have been used”¹⁵. In order to understand the meanings of many expressions related to future studies, some classifications and conceptual approaches are presented, namely: Future Studies; Anticipation and Forecasting; Prospecting; Prospective; Foresight; Forecast and Scenarios.

The Future Studies

In the academic field, the idea that the real world is too complex is commonplace so you can discover your casual hidden determinism and “taking it for granted that the future can not be controlled, but society can influence so, the man sought then to develop and test different methodologies to explore, create and prove systematically at least two visions of the future: a possible one and a desirable one”¹⁶. Thus, after the impact of the Second World War, in 1960, researchers bothered to study the future in global and academic research field¹⁷. The future studies as all activities that enhance the understanding of the future consequences of current developments and choices are regarded, forming a natural foundation for national/international action, interdisciplinary/ transdisciplinary and tend to turn into new forums for policy-making decisions¹⁸. They make up an intellectual field of activity and policy, covering all social, economic, political and cultural sectors, and aim at unravelling and mastering the intricate causal chains through systematic considerations, experiments, anticipations and creative thinking.

Anticipation and Forecasting

Anyone’s decisions are based on the expected future performance of certain event or circumstance. Godet¹⁹ points out that “it is for the lack of yesterday’s anticipation that the present is full of unsolved is-sues, yesterday insignificant, but today they need urgent resolution, even if it is to sacrifice the long-term de-velopment to the adoption of illusory solutions and of immediate effect”. So in this article, the gathering of the terms anticipate and forecast to a future trend are considered, which may be weighed through historical series.

Prospecting



Figure 1. FutureTense — Prospecting by BrainReserve

The methods of prospecting group the study on the transformation process and on the likely routes to be traveled²⁰. They address qualitative information, deliberated by a group of experts and researchers, identifying events and actions that may request changes in direction, leading to a far better resolved future condition. “These studies are conducted to obtain more information about upcoming events so that today’s decisions are more solidly based on tacit and explicit available knowledge”²¹.

You can refer to BrainReserve company (figure 1), founded in 1974 by Faith Popcorn. It was known currently as a futuristic marketing company that can, from data collecting, analyze, synthesize, identify patterns of behaviour and propose new products for different industrial sectors.

Prospective

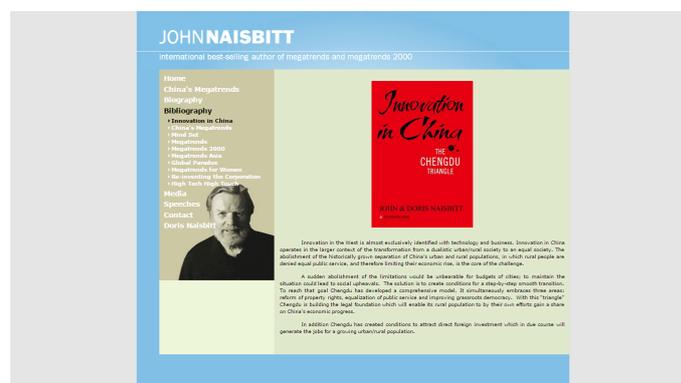


Figure 2. Innovation in China — Prospective John Naisbitt

“The foresight does not consist in expecting the change to react — flexibility by itself does not lead anywhere — but to manage change in the double sense in pre-activity (to prepare for an expected change) and pro-activity (cause a desired change): desire is the productive force of the future”²². Prospective is one of the most important tools developed and available to managers, thus becoming a solid foundation for organizational sustainability. It allows capturing and perception of the behaviour of variables of the organizational environment in an orderly manner, which are relevant for strategic institutional settings²³.

Since the beginning of the 70's, John Naisbitt (figure 2) has been working for major American corporations in order to identify behaviours and trends in society. His work process, prospective study example, is based on content analysis, that is, the set of methodological tools that apply to extremely diverse discourses, having as the common factor of this the frequency calculation that provides encrypted data to the extraction of translatable structures in models.

Foresight

It is defined as a foresight process by which it reaches a full understanding of the forces that shape the long-term future and that should be considered in policy formulation, planning and decision-making, therefore closely linked to planning²⁴. You can use the term foresight, or simply, prospecting, arising from evolutionary approach to economic theory²⁵. The term starts from the premise that the future is not and can not be established analytically, that is, it makes no sense to have a scientific theory to clarify the future of scientific development.

The approach provides an interactive construction of the future in a sequence of interpretations of this future, which are being slowly improved or even supplanted by others, more appropriate. It contains qualitative and quantitative means to monitor development trends of indicators and their unfolding and it is the best approach to determine research and development priorities and align the C&T efforts to economic and social needs of countries²⁶.

Forecast

Although both foresighting as forecasting involving the attempt to stimulate future conditions based on this, the latter also includes the connotation of predictability; as the methods are improved, forecasting should become increasingly accurate in estimating future states. In contrast, a recurring theme in foresighting is that many aspects of the future are not predictable and, therefore, the “prediction” becomes a less relevant concept²⁷.

Forecasting, according to studies by Salles Filho *et al.*²⁸, has a prediction connotation, that is, the pattern formation of knowledge is used to define the causal relationships of scientific and technological developments and it draws probabilistic scenarios of the future. Recently, studies of this nature have been applied in research on technological development.

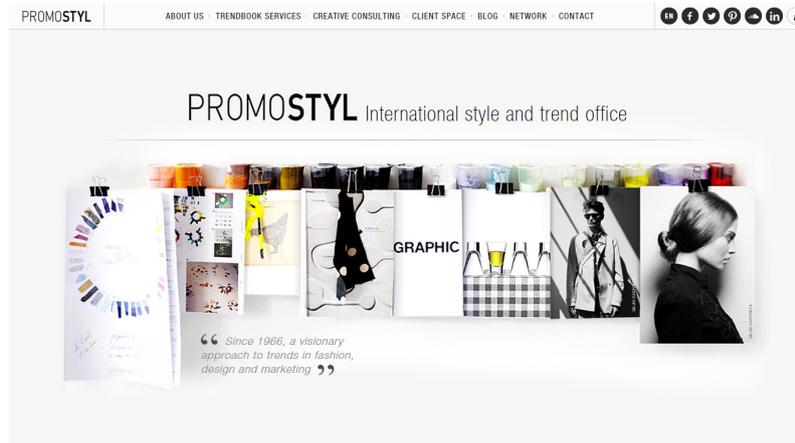


Figure 3. Promostyl

In 1966, Françoise Vincent founded in Paris, the company Promostyl (figure 3), whose mission is “detecting and interpreting trends, socio-cultural movements that define new creative directions, new lifestyles and customer expectations”. The forecasting work process is the constant monitoring, observing the changes in society, markets and consumption methods.

Scenarios

Scenarios can be seen as an administrative tool, as they are a strategic thinking approach that recognizes the unpredictability of the future, marking the possible ways of improvement of the present. The method of constructing scenarios searches to architect future designs as well as paths that lead to these representations, trying to highlight the dominant trends and rupture probabilities in the environment in which organizations and institutions are centered.



Figure 4. Observatório de Sinais / Brazil

As an example, we can mention the Brazilian office trends Observatório de Sinais²⁹, whose goal is “to help companies and brands to tell significant stories through its actions, products, services and communication” (figure 4).

FINAL REMARKS

Expression Studies of the Future covers all approaches and scientific methodologies related to the orderly attempt to anticipate or architect the future. Two striking features are present: (a) estimate, which is quantitative focus and is characterized by establishing a future to the past image based on static relationships; (b) prospecting, with qualitative focus, more dynamic and directed to one or more future. Considering that the structure of future studies is a recent activity and the establishment of an appropriate conceptual framework to scientific environment is challenging, especially in a world scenario of constant change, it is noted that the observation, analysis and interpretation of the future is what guides the large sectors of the wishes and desires of consumers. But to analyze it is essential to create a certain distance, aiming at noting such practices so as they truly present themselves. The continued product differentiation keeps on being the key element for the survival of smaller businesses. Therefore, the constant monitoring and cross-market trends — successively associated with studies of the future that are sustainable — are transformed into strategic information inputs and tool for the development of products, services and the management of innovation processes branding.

Finally, we can confirm that the current competitive dynamics requires knowledge, skills and ability to manage financial, technological, productive and operational resources, both by managers and all the

actual industry. Therefore, it is necessary the use of projective methods, aiming organization, validity and alleged impartiality of the information collected in the present, and to structure and evaluate actions and future marketing options.

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