

EMERGING TRENDS IN TREND RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT:

The competitive advantage of design business today is based on the ability to embed user values in products and being able to innovate according to social and cultural trends. In recent years, high competitiveness, market complexity and technological advances allow the trend process to be rapidly developed. In this paper, the fashion trend process is the central theme. The emerging trends in trend research are uncovered through the investigation of the working process of all professions related to trend research and its application. Data were collected from research institutes, academic trend research labs, designers, and manufacturers in Italy and Thailand, which were chosen as the developed and developing countries respectively. The investigation reveals new and different approaches, processes, and methods in tracking, visualizing, communicating and applying

trends. Besides fashion, examples processes in other sectors, where understanding cultural values can help develop more meaningful products and experiences, are also discussed.

Keywords: socio-cultural trend, fashion trend, design process

I. INTRODUCTION

The understanding of social and cultural trends and incorporating them into products and services is becoming more and more important during the last few years. The condition of post capitalistic markets, with global competition, market saturation and fast product obsolescence has given new importance to customers or users and their needs as a source for construction of product (Crozier 1990; Reich 1991; Drucker 1993; Rifkin 1995; Thurow 1996). The competitive advantage in design business today is based on the ability to embed user values into competitive products and to innovate new ideas according to social and cultural custom (Brown 1991, Clark and Fujimoto 1991; Ulrich and Eppinger 1995; Pine 1997). Trends are a reflection of 'zeitgeist'-- the spirit of the age. Nowadays, trends have partially become a strategic tool for new product planning. Although spotting and predicting trends involve data analysis, it is far from being an exact science, for it requires the element of trying to gain a qualitative sense of the trends that are emerging (Jordan 2001).

In recent years, high competition, market complexity, and technological advancement have enabled the trend process to develop rapidly. These driving forces enable organizations involved in trend processing to explore new methodology. In developed countries where trend research has long been established, workers are skilled, and budgets are larger, new trend research and application approaches are easy to develop. On the other hand, in developing countries where the meaning of trend research is not well known, people lack skills, and budgets are low; alternative ways to gather information to survive in a competitive market are used.

2. FASHION AND TREND

The trend process in the fashion sector was selected for this research, for fashion is closely related with and requires the understanding of socio-cultural trends. Fashion is a field of cultural pluralism in which differences coexist. It seems to be able to capture and organize signs and images in languages and meanings, which fit into social and cultural communities. This specific field seems to show new praxis and methodologies in which businesses are able to continuously innovate products according to social and cultural changes.

2. 1. FASHION AND SOCIO-CULTURAL CONNOTATION

The relationship between fashion, social evolution and cultural context can be explained from various standpoints from sociology, semiotic, psychology, to anthropology. The contributions are diverse: from the "Trickle Down Theory" (Veblen 1899; Simmel 1904; Goffman 1959; King 1981) that gives an interpretation based on the idea of fashion as a class differentiation factor; through the contribution of semiotics that read fashion as a language whose signs and symbols are expressions of personal differentiation (Zeco 1979, Barthes 1983); to the theory of collective selection (Bluner, 1986) in which social and cultural communities contribute to collectively set the fashion of the moment according to their way of expression and interaction.

All these theories are expressions of deep changes that influenced fashion during the 19th century. Born as a craft sector in the late 1880 in France, fashion, in the modern sense, was in the beginning a way to establish status and class differentiation for small elites. Not until the end of 1960, that the social disorder and the contestation of bourgeois values have an important impact in the fashion sector: for the first time styles and taste from lower levels of society became dominant. In the late 70s, research for affordable and simple ways of dressing began the transformation of the sector from craft production to industrial production. This change was promoted by Italian companies, which at the time were already producing textile fabrics and knitwear and began collaborating with young designers, such as Armani and Versace. Since then, fashion began to lose its powerful "status" connotation to assume the role of "social" and "cultural" connotation (Bertola, 2001). Fashion is more and more related to cultural communities and to a plurality of life styles and behaviors. It is also often characterized by "fashions" which spread with a bottom up mechanism and start in the lower level of society (King 1981; Naisbit 1990; Morace 1996; Lopiano Misdo and De Luca, 1997)

2. 2. FASHION BUSINESS IN ITALY & TREND PROCESS

Italy was selected as the leader in fashion for this research in the trend process because Italian fashion is for everyone in society, and is not as exclusive as French fashion. Italian fashion, thus, is more rooted in cultural values and is more strongly associated with the trend process.

In Italy, clothes and accessories related to an idea of aesthetic quality, functionality and comfort, constructing a modern and new environment for informal social interaction. While France focused on the idea of luxury and distinction, Italian fashion has been characterized from the beginning as an expression of a contemporary style, generally affordable and close to different social groups (Anderson Black and Garland 1975; Steel 1988; Testa and Savoilo 2000). On the side of production, this leads Italian fashion to become an industrial sector able to

produce massive quantities of products, while French fashion remains based on craft production characterized by sophisticated and expensive processes to guarantee high quality and personalized products (Burns and Bryant 1997).

From beginning, Italian designers had the ability to understand needs and meaning, embedding them into products to share values and culture in a local context. They designed for a niche market; a local cultural community. Later, during the 90s, deep changes in society occurred. Conditions such as the globalized market, people migrations, the capillary diffusion of communication means, influenced the way in which social communities became localized and diffused (Toffler 1990). Italian design began to change, trying to become an expression of a cultural global plurality, which today characterizes fashion (Davis 1992).

Corresponding to these changes in the 90s, organizations transformed their implicit sensitivity to the market into a structured process of understanding cultural evolution and the potentialities of "bottom-up" phenomena. This new process is related to all the activities, which occur before product development. The result of their process is usually a document using visual language to express a vision of potential evolution in culture, life styles and behaviors. This special activity is the starting point of a standard trend tracking and visualizing service. The trend process was continually developed, then speeds up through the driving forces of high competition, complex market segments, and advancement in technology in order to quickly collect and understand target user information. This led to high efficiency in using the information to embed user values in products and innovate according to social and cultural trends.

2. 3. FASHION BUSINESS IN THAILAND & TREND PROCESS

Thailand was selected as a follower in fashion in this research because it has been a manufacturing country with one of the highest exports in clothing. Since the rise of cheaper Chinese labor, the Thai government has been promoting the trend process to make Thailand more competitive in the global market.

The fashion business and industry in Thailand are different from those of Italy and France in that designers and manufacturers lack cooperation. In the case of in-house designers, when a designer proposes a new product different from the mainstream, manufacturers do not recognize nor support the significance of design novelty. Designer-owned brands also face a similar problem when the manufacturer refuses to do small orders, or if the design consists of details that have never been done before. This results in very high prices for products with distinctive design, mainly in a niche market as most consumers cannot afford them. Many "risk-free" manufacturers are more interested in copying already successful products. As they are mass-produced, the prices become lower, and also more affordable as well as popular for most domestic consumers.

In the west, the socio-cultural movement is the driving influence on consumer perception, lifestyle, and in fashion. On the contrary, consumers in Thailand accept any new trend without relating to any socio-cultural issue. In reverse, the mainstream trends influence consequent socio-cultural reactions (Cholachatpinyo 2003). Nonetheless, the garment manufacturing and export industry of Thailand was one of the main revenues of the country in the beginning. Consumer preferences were not previously given importance as with other factors in manufacturing. Presently, the government's policy is promoting the creation of value-added products more than OEM. Trend information, thus becomes a necessity in product planning and development for export. In 1994, the Department of Export Promotion, Ministry of Commerce began distributing awareness of trends for targetted export markets in other countries. Thereafter, the DEP held trade fairs to exhibit Thai design and production capabilities, including how Thai products go along or fit into some specific international trends. Today, besides distributing trend awareness in the fashion industry, the Thai government also gives importance to a Thai identity or uniqueness for export products to compete globally. However, there are still obstacles in utilizing trend information in Thailand, as those in charge of design are often more like prototype makers or factory owners. The expectation for trend information is more a question of what style, color, or form to be made to minimize risks, not to understand the origins of trends in order to expand creativity.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The objective of this study is to explore emerging trends in trend process including: tracking and visualizing trends, communicating and distributing trends, as well as applying trends to design under today's driving forces: high market competition, effective branding, complicated market segmentation, and technological advancement.

Because developed and developing countries have different resources, constraints, and ways to gather and apply trend information in order to survive in the competitive market, another objective of this paper is to compare and find similarities, differences, problems and suitable options for trend process development in developed and developing countries.

Cases were collected from 33 key trend-related organizations in two countries, Italy and Thailand, including trend research institutes, academic trend research labs, design consultancies, fashion manufacturers, Department of Export Promotion and fashion trade fair publications. Data were collected directly from leading researchers, fashion design consultants, fashion designers, brand owners, government officers and fashion journalists working in the organizations. Through in-depth interviews, contextual observations, self-documentary studies, questionnaires, and qualitative analytic methods, the working processes and trend mechanisms were compared and analyzed according to research objectives. Whether similar trends will occur in other fields will be discussed,

as well as the development of the trend process in developing countries, where trend resources, trend tracking skills, and budgets are scarce.

4.RESULTS

From the research, the trend process can be divided into three parts, namely the following topics: tracking and visualizing trends, communicating and distributing trends, as well as applying trends to design. Each part contains emerging trends in the process as shown in Table 1.

TREND PROCESS	Italian Organizations						Thai Organizations									
	Social-Cultural Trend Institute	Trend Agency	Supplier Association	Professional Association	Publisher	Trend Leader	Very Early Trend Follower	Early Trend Follower	Manufacturer (OEM)	Government	Publisher	Trend Leader	Early Trend Follower	Medium Trend Follower	Late Trend Follower	Manufacturer (OEM)
I - TRACKING AND VISUALIZING																
1 Data Gathering and Archiving																
1.1 Secondary Research																
printed media	o					o	o					o	o			
archive of printed media	o															
digital media	o					o	o					o	o			
digital database/archive	o															
1.2 Primary Research																
from interview with professionals, researchers, experts		o														
from direct experience of travel and personal investigation						o						o				
from real people around the world in the real cultural context	o															
from global network in different towns and countries	o	o														
via cellphone camera or Internet, sent to main office for analysis	o															
from direct experience of travel, personal, and virtual investigation						o						o				
2 Working process and related organization																
trend agency		o						o			o					
socio-cultural trend institute	o									o						
internal individual capability in tracking and applying trends						o					o					
collaboration between research institute, trend agency and company																
workshop to develop concepts specific to the company	o	o						o								
consulting service (long term)	o	o						o								
consulting session (0.5-1 hour)										o			o			

traditional practice provide or practice
 emerging practice hire/ receive information fi

Table 1: The Comparison of Trend Processes in Italy and Thailand

	Italian Organizations							Thai Organizations								
	Social-Cultural Trend Institute	Trend Agency	Supplier Association	Professional Association	Publisher	Trend Leader	Very Early Trend Follower	Early Trend Follower	Manufacturer (OEM)	Government	Publisher	Trend Leader	Early Trend Follower	Medium Trend Follower	Late Trend Follower	Manufacturer (OEM)
TREND PROCESS																
I - TRACKING AND VISUALIZING (continued)																
2 Working process and related organization (continued)																
multi-disciplinary team to understand target from various perspectives	o	o														
building a global network to understand local context faster	o	o														
opening branch offices around the world	o	o	o													
using local correspondents around the world	o															
conduct user research from general trend info for each client	o						o									
building internal trend research capabilities																
trend research department in the organization																
increasing trend research capabilities of staff							o					o				
3 Deliverables - Types of Information Product																
general trend book		o								o			o	o		
general conclusion of social-cultural trends	o									o						
general presentation on envisioning possibilities										o			o			
research results for each industrial sector	o		o													
customized trend book for each company		o														
4 Client/Information buyer																
company	o	o														
government	o	o								o						
II - COMMUNICATING AND DISTRIBUTING																
1 Communicating through Event																
1.1 Events to exhibit completed products																
fashion shows for buyers			o			o	o	o				o	o	o		o
trade fairs for order			o	o		o	o	o				o	o	o		o
1.2 Concept-testing and feedback event																
fashion show to collect feedback from fashion critiques and buyers			o			o	o									
fair to collect feedback from buyers			o	o		o	o									
Showroom to collect feedback from buyers												o	o			
Invite potential buyers at trade fair to factory for collaboration														o	o	o
2 Network Building through Event and Media																
2.1 Broad Network through Big General Events & Media																
general trade fair with a range of materials and products										o		o	o	o	o	o
general magazine and publication										o		o	o	o	o	o
2.2 Specific Network through Focused Events/Media																
separated material and product fairs			o	o		o	o	o								
trade fairs for target segment			o	o		o	o	o								
specific magazine/catalog/publication for target market			o	o		o	o	o								
3 Event frequency																
3.1 Annual trade fair prior to collection launch																
3.2 Separate material fair and product fair with longer intervals										o	o	o	o	o	o	o
Supplier fair for material development			o		o	o	o	o	o							
Product fair with longer intervals for design development				o	o	o	o	o	o							
4 Influential event organizer who distribute trends																
Industry sector		o	o													
Government										o						
Publishers		o	o													
III - APPLICATION																
1 Intervals for applying trend info in design development																
1.1 Receiving and applying trend info seasonally according to Western fashion							o	o	o			o	o	o	o	
1.2 Continual accumulation of trends and applying to design development							o					o	o			
2 Mode of design presentation and production order																
2.1 Presentation of completed collection with limited production flexibilities							o	o	o			o	o	o	o	
2.2 Presentatng modifiable concepts for feedback							o					o	o			
3 Utilization of trend information																
3.1 Importing trend information from a single source							o	o	o			o	o			
3.2 Using trend info from different countries with local inspiration, regional art and culture												o				
4 Level of comprehension inTrend Mechanism																
4.1 Understanding of sociocultural changes affecting fashion trends							o					o				
4.2 Ability in using trend books and applying trend info to own company								o	o			o	o			
4.3 Using trends in magazines directly without understanding trend origins														o	o	
4.4 No understanding of trend origins but utilizes primal elements in design development																o

traditional practice provide or practice
 emerging practice hire/ receive information fi

Table 1: The Comparison of Trend Processes in Italy and Thailand (continued)

4. 1. TRACKING AND VISUALIZING TRENDS

Socio-cultural trend institutes and trend agencies are two main groups of organizations that track and visualize trends. Since the 90s, organizations studied the market to track changes and identify potentialities of "bottom-up" phenomena. The studies are carried out before product development or before starting a new collection. Socio-cultural trend institutes have based their process on observing the cultural and social evolution. The result is usually a vision of evolution in culture, lifestyle and behavior, not specific to products or businesses.

Trend agencies interpret the change in society and visualize how all the influences would effect people's preferences. The result of this process is usually a "trend book", containing a visual language to express a vision of fashion styles according to social and cultural trends. The trend book contains 4-5 directions that can be applied to a range of brands in the market, from basics to high fashion. The trend book is managed by trend agencies who are usually not commissioned by fashion companies. Trend agencies such as Cahier de Style and Quaderni Tendenza sell their trend books to different fashion companies, competing with other research firms.

In trend research, emerging trends are mainly driven by technological advancements, the complexity of market segmentation, and high competition, which increase the importance of branding. New practices in trends tracking and visualizing have the following characteristics.

4.1.1. Emerging trends in digital data gathering & archiving

Technological advancements enable both broad and specific trends to be rapidly collected, archived, analyzed, and compared more efficiently. Trend-related organizations and individuals no longer solely depend on printed media and archives. They now mainly use digital media and convert printed information into a digital database.

Primary research has also changed, for it no longer relies only on experts or researchers traveling to collect information. Today it can be collected from real people's mobile phones and the Internet, through an international network of correspondents living in different countries. The photographs and information of people, the streets, new places, shops, products, or anything viewed as "cool" and "contemporary" are sent to researchers who study the changes, identify and hypothesize consumer trends from each place. Trend agencies are also starting to open branch offices around the world in order to immerse in the local context to visualize possibilities more effectively.

While the development of socio-cultural trend institutes and trend agencies have been occurring in Italy, They are not yet apparent in Thailand. However, the Thai government has invested in hiring socio-cultural institutes and

trend agencies to carry out research for Thailand. The afore-mentioned technological advancements have also helped benefit the process.

Interestingly, leading designers and leading companies that are trend leaders have never had to hire or buy information from socio-cultural trend institutes and trend agencies. Trend leaders such as Prada and Gucci have high capabilities in tracking and visualizing trends in-house. Without relying on trend books, leading companies in Thailand have similarly been successful in doing research and envisioning possibilities through individual capability. Although these Thai leading companies may not be able to track changes and trends as clearly as institutes, technological advancements enable their staff to collect real world information more quickly and easily by traveling as well as through digital media and broadband technology.

4.1.2. Emerging trends in envisioning more specific possibilities

As market segments become more specific, the need for visualizing trend possibilities for specific target groups increases. Socio-cultural trend institutes began conducting user research such as contextual observation and focus groups along with studies of socio-cultural trends in order to yield more specific results. Additionally, socio-cultural trend institutes and trend agencies started offering customized information for each industrial sector. While these trends of practice have been occurring in Italy, They still are not apparent in Thailand.

4.1.3. Emerging trends in collaboration for brand specific visualization

High competition causes branding to become increasingly more important and demands more specific trend tracking and visualizing. This gives rise to the need for collaboration between socio-cultural trend institutes, trend agencies, and brand owners in developing specific possibilities. Working through collaboration in the form of a workshop and consulting service is much faster than the traditional practice of receiving information from trend books and finding a way to apply it. Trend information is analyzed and synthesized by a multi-disciplinary team in which design plays a leading role in envisioning possibilities from various perspectives. The result is something quite different from a research report, but similar to product design. It visualizes and interprets real context, organizing and structuring information to prefigure how culture can be expressed in terms of organization, interaction, and evolution.

The emerging trend of collaboration with socio-cultural trend institutes and trend agencies in Italy is quite costly. As the Thai government did not have the funds for that, it provided a number of trend books in a few libraries and hired a trend agency to travel to Thailand to hold a seminar for one day. Only companies with good business or potential were invited to attend a trend lecture and a consulting session. Unfortunately, trend

lectures often only show general possibilities of style without the background and origins of socio-cultural trends. Since the short consulting session could not help them develop any direction, most companies showed their concepts to the trend agency, asking them to point out the ones with most potential for target markets.

4. 2. COMMUNICATING AND DISTRIBUTING TRENDS

When the design solutions are developed from trend information, events and different media play an important role in communicating and distributing trends. New ways of communicating trends through events and media have the following characteristics:

4.2.1 Emerging trends in event organization for concept feedback

Fashion shows first appeared in France as a way to show customers the new models inside ateliers. Today, they are a communicative event and an important phase in the process of product development. Yet, in Haute Couture, and above all in France, fashion shows are still only a media event to attract attention, show new creations, and get cited in magazines.

The emerging trend of feedback fashion shows happen in Milan and more recently in New York. Their objective is to collect feedback from the fashion-influential community; the information distributors and the viewers. At this stage in the developmental process, the products are not yet completely developed, but represent a choice system, which can be modified before being produced. The event feedback collected from information distributors (such as journalists, writers, and public personalities) and the viewers (such as suppliers and distributors, buyers, managers, and directors from big international chains and small boutiques) helps determine the final definition of the product; in color, fabric, finishing, and while some clothes are eliminated, others may be introduced (Bertola, 2001).

An emerging trend in events and media similar to the fashion show is happening in both Italy and Thailand at trade fairs. It is a shift to feedback communication used to develop design. Some companies started to show concept products in order to collaborate with buyers, who bring expert opinions on marketability.

The fashion shows and fairs in Italy originate from the manufacturers, whereas in Thailand, they are sponsored by the government. In Thailand, they are quite broad, bringing in a mixed group of buyers, some of whom look for quality while others look for cheaper production. The leading companies then have to screen the visitors, and some do not even show the latest products as a caution against being copied. If a visitor is seen as a real potential buyer, they are taken to the office, shop, or factory to see various possibilities and production

capabilities. With limited funds and opportunity for a fashion show in the international arena, a leading Thai company instead invests in an undisclosed showroom, featuring the next season's collection. Buyers are brought in to give feedback for further development specific to their market.

4.2.2 Emerging trends in providing specific focus fair/media

In Italy, emerging trends in exhibition are making more specific divisions, separating the material and product fair, for example, MIPEL and Leather goods Exhibition from the shoe event MICAM. Moreover, the markets are further separated, such as MICAM for quality and GARDA for volume. Compared to GEDIUS, another exhibition in Europe, MICAM is more successful because GEDIUS never specialized in either quality or volume.

Developed companies benefit in specialized trade fairs, fashion shows, magazines and other media more than general ones, for they can focus on specific promotions for materials, products and specific markets. They are more effective as they attract buyers with special interests rather than the general public. This also enables strong networking in the industry sector.

Unlike Italy, where the design industry is integrated, Thai producers tend to go it alone and thus lose the benefit of sharing the market information. Most Thai companies also still tend to participate in the general fair organized by the government, which produces catalogs and websites with general rather than specific information for different targets. However, the leading companies recognize this problem and cleverly select clients to visit the shop, factory, or showroom mentioned in 4.2.1 dealing with constraints and limited funds.

4.2.3 Emerging trend in time span

There is an emerging trend in the time to organize events, allowing more time for developing a collection. Participating companies at GARDA have 1 full year to prepare a collection, as opposed to 6 months like in other places in the world. Companies present the summer collection in September at MICAM. In January, companies present the winter collection for a year ahead, giving time to be ready for completing the collection ordered. In contrast, this trend is not as apparent in Thailand due to little change in weather throughout the year. Producers are able to produce all year round and buyers do not see the time importance unless they are exporters.

4.2.4 Emerging trend in the role of publishers

In Italy, publishers today have a greater role in organizing events and media, promoting exhibitions, marketing catalogs, fair guides, advertisements in magazines, and organizing seminars in exhibition fairs such as GARDA.

With numerous contacts, they attend at least 100 exhibitions around the world, producing monthly fair calendars for each country. They also help to coordinate marketing campaigns for companies wishing to export, publishing specifically for each market segment magazine such as an Italian fashion for the Russian market.

Still in Thailand, publishers do not have a role beyond the traditional practice of publishing magazines to stimulate product interest.

4. 3. APPLYING TRENDS IN DESIGN

4.3.1 Trend leaders

Design organizations with a high sensitivity to new trends do not rely on secondary trend information; they always virtually and realistically travel and gain experience from foreign locales in order to absorb new trends and new inspiration. With this level of personal and organizational capability, new trends can be also identified early on. Some of the leading fashion brands keep track of trend information in order to understand fashion movement, not to fully apply that information to their design, in order to exclude themselves from the mainstream players.

However, the difference between Thai and Italian design organizations is that the Italians work closely with suppliers to develop specific materials to fit right into the new trend during their product development, while Thais rarely have such cooperation.

4.3.2 Early and medium trend follower

In Italy, the design organization uses trend resources as a major information supply. Traditionally, the success relies upon sensible and profound interpretation of the readers, common to most Italian design organizations. In Thailand, in contrast, where the affordability of this trend resource is comparatively low, there are only a few companies who have access to it. Therefore, only few individuals have a chance to develop such processes. However, since successful trend application depends on such skills mentioned, Thais seem to not fully benefit from this open-to-all-interpretation trend resource, provided mostly by the government, as they lack the skills to understand the meaning that the trends suggest and the evolution of the past to present and future trends.

The emerging trend in Italy is a workshop held between trend institutes and their clients in order to efficiently apply trend information to their products during the product development stage. Compared with Italy, the Thai government's organizations, such as the Department of Export Promotion and Thailand Creative and Design

Center, will provide trend seminars about the current trend information to public. Short individual sessions of consultation about how they can apply the trend information to their products and other issues about product development of each design company will sometimes be arranged. However, limitations of time and budget makes it much less effective than the cooperative workshop done in Italy.

4.3.3 Late trend followers

The late trend followers usually have superficial understanding about the mechanism of trend information, even less in how that information could efficiently be applied to their products. Without considering the cause and effect of socio-cultural factors that drive those trends, form and colors proposed in either fashion magazine or fashion shows for the coming season are always far more than the important elements that they pay attention to in order to directly adopt it to fit their own brand identity and products. Since they do not fully understand the evolution of trends, the next trend is always a myth that therefore needs prediction rather than investigation and analysis that can be done by themselves.

4.4.4 OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers)

Without the effort in trend proposals done by trend agencies or institutes, this group tends to seek trend information from existing products in the markets. Conducting market surveys of other brands with similar target customers is one way to gather the characteristics of new elements. Another way is to gain information from the wholesale sector that has direct contact with clients and marketing feedback to pinpoint which styles, colors, forms and details are promising for that season. In competition with China in the area of OEM, the Thai government provided a faster way for Thai manufacturers to meet with clients through road shows and other trade fairs.

Conclusively, the emerging trend in trend research shared between both countries seems to be the capability to strengthen trend research at either the individual or organizational level. If the design organizations do not conduct their own trend research, there seems to be more cooperative product development between either the trend information providers and design organization, or the material suppliers and design organization. Lastly, the trend information is applied in more customizing ways in order to serve specific brands, when market segmentations are getting more and more vital.

5. PARALLEL TRENDS IN OTHER FIELDS

Outside the fashion sector, there are some signals in other fields for the chance of trend visualization methodology to be applied to improve products according to social and cultural evolution. The following are examples of sectors with processes parallel to fashion.

5. 1. DEVELOPING TREND RESEARCH CAPABILITIES WITHIN A COMPANY

Having previously bought information from external research firms, many hi-tech businesses today, including Siemens, Philips, Nokia, and Motorola, are creating design research groups with similar methodology inside their organizations, separate from the business process. These groups function as consultancies for the company, but often work for other businesses to develop research projects for a broader trend visualization. Trend research is most effective when processes are not completely externalized, but core competences and knowledge within the companies are used in creating new ideas.

5.2. GLOBAL RESEARCH NETWORK

Technological advancement, particularly the Internet and more convenient and affordable air travel, allow organizations to open office branches around the world to understand local contexts, travel easily, and share information through a network. This is happening more and more in research institutes, trend agencies, design consultancies, and design offices.

5.3. ENVISIONING SPECIFIC POSSIBILITIES USING USER RESEARCH

The utilization of the understanding of socio-cultural trends through user research yields more specific results in envisioning possibilities. This also occurs in other design fields outside fashion, particularly in the IT sector. Socio-cultural trend tracking and visualizing helps to describe the user's cultural evolution and show new opportunities offered by technology which traditional research and product development departments are no longer able to figure out and explore. User observations, ethnographic research, participatory research, and interaction studies are good examples of user research techniques used to better understand users' needs in order to improve and create new product possibilities.

5.4. COLLABORATION FOR BRAND SPECIFIC SOLUTION

An emerging trend of collaborative workshops between a trend research institute or trend agency and a company for brand specific visualization in Italy is also happening in other design fields. They are a faster and more efficient way to see trend possibilities in these times of high competition and rapid market changes. The same research firms working for fashion businesses are now offering topics such as "home living cultures", "work and technology", and "mobility habits" to other sectors as well. They started working with leading IT companies and furniture companies to visualize future product possibilities specific to the brand, according to social and cultural evolution.

5.5. COLLECTING FEEDBACK EVENT

There are examples of applying feedback gathering events in other design areas. For example, at the furniture fairs in Cologne, Milan and Bangkok, many companies present not just new products but also new concepts to stimulate feedback for future products. Some high technology companies are following a similar strategy. Philips has established the "ExperienceLab" to explore projects such as "Future Care" and "Future Shop". New products and possibilities are shown as a model of reality, and are exhibited in many locations around the world.

5.6. SPECIFIC, SPECIALIZED AND FOCUS COMMUNICATION

Specialized trade events, magazines and other media are much more effective than general ones. For example, a specialized fair can focus on specific promotions of materials and products for specific markets. They are very effective as they attract buyers with special interests rather than the general public. Besides fashion, specialized events, product catalogs, and lifestyle magazines in the IT sector are also emerging for specific target groups.

5.7. TRACKING-BACK VISUAL PERCEPTION

Companies that have previously produced exact copies of successful products for mass market consumers and late fashion followers are now studying the design elements that create new trends. They are incorporating the elements in expanding the collection lines within their capacity of capital and production.

6. DEVELOPING TREND PROCESSES WHILE RESOURCES ARE LIMITED

Although Thailand, as a developing country, has many limitations in trend research, it has new practices that solve problems and develop the trend process. Businesses need government support, as well as awareness of suitable options in step-by-step development, which is summarized as follows.

6. 1. INDIVIDUAL CAPABILITIES

Trend leaders in developed and developing countries have very similar trend processes that utilize individual capabilities, not relying on costly external trend information. The government should support trend leaders with research capabilities because the results would be immediate. Financial support for travel can be given to leading companies to carry out research, show concepts, and get feedback from buyers in target markets. Another crucial support is to provide training in the trend research process for designers with potential. Both forms of support can raise the level of industry capabilities as a whole.

6. 2. CONSULTING – FROM THE ORIGIN OF TRENDS TO BRAND SPECIFIC SOLUTIONS

Today, various brands each have their own brand character and target group, requiring more specific trend possibilities. Using the same trend resource as before is no longer optimal, and is replaced by consultation with a trend expert or a trend institute to find specific solutions that match varying constraints and provide more opportunities. Companies in Thailand, however, lack the funding for consultation with a trend agency, the understanding of branding and brand identity, and the understanding of origins of trends. As a result, they are not able to benefit from trend lectures and consultation sponsored by the government. The steps needed to be taken by the government in order to effectively support Thai companies are the following: 1. Training in branding & brand identity, 2. Training in applying trend information to the design process, with an understanding in sociocultural changes, 3. Setting up a global trend resource center, with full-time consultants offering long-term service in applying trends for specific sectors and organizations. Consultants are currently rare in Thailand, so individuals need to be trained abroad, or outside experts could be brought in to train them to become qualified full-time staff.

6. 3. PARTICIPATING IN GLOBAL RESEARCH NETWORK

An emerging trend resulting from technological advancement is the ability to rapidly update on trends in fashion, product design, and lifestyle. For countries with limited trend resources like Thailand, participation in the global research network is another way to understand and keep track of trends. In the beginning, organizations in developing countries may face many limitations in the capabilities to understand and utilize the network. They could first join a network where they can send information to outside experts who can demonstrate the process and thereby help in the learning process. A regional center could then be later established.

6. 4. SEPARATING DESIGNERS AND OEM & BUILDING A STRONG NETWORK

Companies in developed countries have a solid identity, which structures the way trends are applied to their design. In Thailand, companies lack the self-awareness of identity. Manufacturers want to become brand owners without the necessary background in design, branding, and trend development. This problem affects the whole system, where copies and low-quality products are mass-produced. Designers with potential also lack collaboration with producers in continual design development, leading to designs that are not practical for production. The solution for Thailand may be to start with clearly separating the roles of producers and designers, and enabling them to work together effectively. Producers who would like to develop a brand must recognize the need for a qualified designer's service. The government can help to stress these measures and encourage businesses to effectively utilize trends and develop trend possibilities. Trend information will be used and interpreted in many ways, so building a strong network provides a reference, benefiting all in sharing analysis and comparison. Sharing trend studies and utilization is a vital process in countries with limited resources like Thailand.

7. CONCLUSION

The research showed that emerging trends in fashion trend process can be applied to other sections to increase efficiency, understanding, and speed in collecting and using target user information. This is useful for developing countries with many limitations such as Thailand. Government support is essential, but should be carried out with a full understanding of problems and limitations. Adopting the methods of developed countries cannot yield maximum results. Instead, appropriate methods should be developed to suit local context, starting with the knowledge of individuals to national institutions. Trend leaders who have successfully solved problems in the

fashion trend process in Thailand are a good example to be closely studied and used as a model for businesses in other sectors in developing countries.

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