Perspectives of Design Professionals in the Fashion Industry with respect to the Creative Design Process

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Keywords: design, creative, process, skills, perspectives

Introduction.   While design professionals share as characteristics with other occupations in creative fields, they are clearly distinct from people such as artists or musicians (Owen, 1998). Fashion designers are "imaginative, unpredictable, and spontaneous" like those in any other occupations in creative field but, compared to them, fashion designers must also meet the needs of customers and design problems and develop interrelated solutions based on such needs (Sinha, 2002). To become a successful designer, one needs to understand customers and trends as well as social, cultural, economic, and political elements, so a fashion designer's success depends on both his or her personal skill level as well as understanding requirements of their employers and brands, and of the garments that they produce (Steacker, 1996). It is therefore crucial to understand the viewpoints of fashion industry professionals engaged in their design processes. The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of design professionals in the fashion industry in terms of their creative processes, and the study was specifically focused on seeking the importance of knowledge and skills, product development, reflections in actions of the design process, the designer's role in the system, and fashion as communication during a fashion designer's creative process.

Methods. Data were collected from a convenient sample of U.S. professionals in the fashion industry using an on-line survey. An invitational link was shared at professional organization websites and SNS, including LinkedIn and Facebook groups, and invitational email was also sent to professionals with industry connections with fashion programs in the United States. The survey questionnaire was developed to measure the fashion designers' creative design process and to assess the perspectives of designers with respect to that design process. Items were measured on 5-point Likert scales (1 not at all important, 5 extremely important).

Results. 180 responses were collected and analyzed using SPSS 24.0. All the participants either had worked or were currently working as designers, with and majority having worked or currently working in either Women's wear (38.5%) or Men's wear (24.7%). Almost half of the participants were male (46.7%), Caucasian/White (56.6%), who had completed a 4-year college degree program (49.5%). Most of the participants had spent time in designing for an average of more than 10 hours per week (75.2%), with such times varying from 11- 20 hours (25.8%), 21-30 hours (20.3%), 31-40 hours (15.9%), to 41-50 hours (11%). Respondents' fashion industry working experiences varied from 1-3 years (21.4%), 4-5 years (20.9%), 7-10 years (15.9%), to more than 15 years (8.8%).

   A series of descriptive analyses were performed to explore perspectives of designer professionals in the fashion industry in terms of their designing processes. Fashion industry professionals designated *materials* (M=3.96) and *customer needs* (M=3.94) as the most

important ***knowledge and skills*** for designers to know, with *sketching process* listed as the least important aspect of *knowledge and skills* (M=3.42). The results revealed that two most important aspects of the ***product development design process*** (design process during creating an artifact) were *material selection* (m=3.75) and *manufacturing process* (M=3.74), with *draping* (M=3.29) listed as the least important process. *Developing a solution* (M=3.97) and *redesigning, modifying and improving* (M=3.96) were identified as the most important ***iterative design processes*** (process occurring simultaneously during psychological aspects of designer's creation) design. *Brainstorming and sketching* (M=3.72) was identified as the least important *iterative design process* while designers are engaged in a creative design process.

Professionals responded that *observing changes* (M=3.94) was the most important ***reflex in action design process*** (cognitive and psychosocial aspects of design process during creative design development) followed by *reflection* (M=3.59), *intervening* (M=3.47), and *acting* (M=3.37). With respect to identifying among three roles, *researcher, entrepreneur,* and *manufacture,* the most important ***designers' role in the system,*** respondents recognized *researcher* (studying the consumer market, inspirations, concepts, trend analysis and past sales data) as the most important role(M=3.66), followed by *manufacturer* (M=3.64), and *entrepreneur* (M=3.54).

With respect to ***fashion as communication*** (during which designers utilize artifacts as a form of nonverbal communication to deliver their intention, belief, and design philosophy) *aesthetics* (how designers illustrate important visual elements when designing a garment) was the most important concept (M=3.72), followed by *function* (human-centered design. explaining important aspects of functionality with respect to design, where a critical factor to be considered is that garments should be wearable and comfortable) (M=3.69), and *designers' intention* (garments as an expression of values, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs) (M=3.45).

Conclusions.   This study was conducted to help understand perspectives of design professionals in the fashion industry in terms of their creative design processes. The results of this study supports previous findings that fashion designers must meet the needs of customers and it is critical to understand design problems and solutions in order to design a successful product (Sinha, 2002). The importance of designer perceptions with respect to how knowledge and skills, including product development and reflect in action design process, play a communication role in creative processes, as found in this study, will help entry level designers and future designers to understand the industry's expectations. Finally, findings from this study will help students understand desirable job traits for entry level designers and will benefit educators to developing design curricula to guide such students in becoming better prepared for the fashion industry. Because the fashion industry is a global industry, it will be interesting to explore in future studies the perspectives of other fashion industry professionals around the world in terms of their creative processes.

References

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