Copying and Product Development: Definitions and Practices by Fashion Industry Personnel

Peggy P. Quesenberry, Ph.D.
Doris H. Kincade, Ph.D.
Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: Design Process, Product Development, Copying

The results of copying are clearly visible as consumers adopt the apparel style of others through a cyclic consumption process. An examination of the fashion adoption process identifies fashion leaders, first to wear the new style, and their followers, wearing apparel with some repeat, or copying, in the same season or in subsequent years (Kincade & Gibson, 2010; Labat & Solowiski, 1999). Product development textbooks (e.g., Garner & Keiser, 2012) often describe in detail ways for designers and developers to seek inspiration for a product idea from a variety of people, places and things. Although the terms of copying, counterfeiting, and knockoffs are often used interchangeably, a brief exploration of the literature highlights the legal issues in counterfeiting (Gentry, Putrevu, & Shultz, II, 2006). The entire issue of copying, knocking-off and counterfeiting has driven some designers to protect their work with copyrights, trademarks, or patents and is costing the fashion industry a vast amount of money (e.g., "The counterfeit report," 2019). In addition to amplified concern about legal issues, new technologies have increased the ease and accuracy of copying (e.g., improved cameras in cell phones, inexpensive but color accurate desktop scanners and color copiers). Copying may be as simple as drag and click. As the issue of copying has legal and financial ramifications along with increased ease of use, understanding the copying process and examining the use of copying throughout the fashion product development process becomes important for industry practitioners as well as apparel researchers and for faculty developing curriculum for the product development area. More needs to be known about the copying practices in the fashion industry.

Design and product development literature delineates the process of garment creation with the initiation of the idea shown through concept boards and sketches, to the formation of flats and patterns, through to the selection of designs for production and sales. Recent academic literature on fashion design and product development focuses on specific applications such as consumer input, technology use, sustainability and luxury goods (e.g., Fung, & Choi, 2018; Vezzetti, Alemanni, & Morelli, 2017). Whereas, the exact tasks and activities in the fashion product development process were most closely examine in the literature of the 1990s through a series of academic conceptual and research articles exemplified by the work of Gaskill (1992).

Although product development has been extensively studied in the academic literature and appears as full chapters in fashion textbooks, the issue of copying within product development has received limited focus in the academic literature. Knock-offs are mentioned in the Wickett, Gaskil and Damhorst (1999) article, but otherwise limited to no mention of copying is found in the majority of the classic product development literature or in the more recent application-focused literature. The traditional apparel product development model (Gaskill, 1992) further delineated with stage gates and output (Kincade and Gibson, 2010) was used as the theoretical framework to set terminology and process stages for this research.

To seek information about copying in the product development process, an exploratory study was used to clarify industry definitions relative to copying in product development and to verify copying as an industry practice for augmentation of the literature on product development. As an exploratory study, qualitative methods were used to achieve the purpose of the research. The instrument for the study was an online survey with open-ended questions based on terms used in previous research (Gaskill, 1992; Labat & Solowiski, 1999) and product development process stage gates (Kincade & Gibson, 2010). Fixed response questions were used only for gathering personnel and company information. Responses were data rich and extensive and were often followed with email responses or Facebook comments from participants with further explanations for the survey data. As the participants were working in the fashion industry in New York City, the online format allowed for reaching these busy individuals and provided a way to capture data when face-to-face interviews were not feasible. The online fluency of these participants enhanced rather than diminished the volume of information acquired by the researchers and was in keeping with new methods of data collection using available technology, especially for hard-to-reach or otherwise unavailable participants (Neville, Adams, & Cook, 2016). In a cross-sectional approach to selecting participants for data collection, apparel industry personnel, as fit the criteria of work in product development, were invited to participate. Ten participants, representing eight job titles and 10 companies within the product development segment, responded to the online survey. In examining the data, the researchers concluded that conceptual areas were well saturated, and coverage of jobs and tasks in the fashion industry were well represented; both key measures to participant numbers for qualitative studies with hard-to-reach participants (Latham, 2013). Using recommendations by Strauss and Corin (1990) for qualitative data analysis and a coding system developed from the product development literature, content analysis was done to deconceptualize and reconceptualize data.

In the findings, a degree of similarity was observed in participants' definitions of copying; most recognized copying as using existing products to create new products. However, variations representing the extremes in copying practices were noted as participants used phrases

such as copying "without changing anything" to "copying the idea and concept." Key reasons for copying products were reported as following trends (70%) and speed to market (60%). Participants' definition of knocking-off were primarily stated as a copy with variation in price point. Several of the participants concluded that "there is nothing new" and everyone copies. Copying was used at several stages within product development. Copying was used in the idea and inspiration stage (47%) and copying was reported at the pattern making stage (73%). Participants were unanimous in noting that the process of counterfeiting was an unauthorized or illegal copy of a product and often included copying labels or logos. Several participants indicated that they needed to know more about the legal issues of copying and when copying became counterfeiting. These findings confirm through industry practice that fashion is created through copying and is in at least two stages of the product development process. With technology making copying easier and more accurate, further research is suggested to examine issues of the legality of copying in product development and to examine the implications of these findings for educational direction. As the number of respondents are a few less than the minimum recommendation of 15 (Latham, 2013), future research is needed with a larger respondent pool and perhaps additional product areas or job descriptions to verify results.

References

Fung, Y-N., & Choi, T-M. (2018). Product development process of an international luxury fashion brand: Implications to Hong Kong fashion trading and manufacturing companies. In P.-S. Chow, C.-H. Chiu, C. Y. Yip, A., K. Y. Tang, A. (eds). *Contemporary Case Studies on Fashion Production, Marketing and Operations*. Springer Series in Fashion Business. Springer, Singapore. DOI: 10.1007/978-981-10-7007-5_2

Garner, M. B., & Keiser, S. J. (2012). *Beyond design: The synergy of apparel product development.* New Nork, NY: Fairchild Books.

Gaskill, L. (1992). Towards a model of retail product development: A case study analysis. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 10*(4), 17-24.

Gentry, J., Putrevu, S., & Shultz, C., II. (2006). The effects of counterfeiting on consumer search. *Journal of Consumer Behavior, 5*(3) 245-256.

Kincade, D. H., & Gibson, F. (2010). *Merchandising of fashion products.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall.

LaBat, K., & Sokolowski, S. (1999). A three-stage design process applied to an industry-university textile product design project. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 17*(1), 11-20.

Latham, J. R. (2013). A framework for leading the transformation to performance excellence part I: CEO perspectives on forces, facilitators, and strategic leadership systems. *Quality Management Journal, 20*(2), 22.

Neville, S., Adams, J., & Cook, J. (2016). Using internet-based approaches to collect qualitative data from vulnerable groups: reflections from the field. *Contemporary Nurse, 52*(6), 657-668. DOI: 10.1080/10376178.2015.1095056

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research.* Newberry Park, CA: Sage Publications Incorporated.

The counterfeit report: The big business of fakes. (2018, October 11). *The Fashion Law*. http://www.thefashionlaw.com/home/the-counterfeit-report-the-impact-on-the-fashion-industry

Wickett, J. L., Gaskil, L. R., & Damhorst, M. L. (1999). Apparel retail product development: Model testing and expansion. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal, 17*(1), 21-35.

Vezzetti, E., Alemanni, M., & Morelli, B. (2017). New product development (NPD) of 'family business' dealing in the luxury industry: evaluating maturity stage for implementing a PLM solution. *International Journal of Fashion Design, Technology and Education, 10*(2), 219-229. DOI: 10.1080/17543266.2016.1250286