

INVOLVING ENDURING VALUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE TRENDS

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ABSTRACT

Cool Hunters constantly develop transitory trends that companies acquire and use for the creation and transformation of their products that, thanks to these ephemeral movements, every season are launched with shallow changes that certainly increase the consumption and also a homogenization on people's minds, facts which directly affect the worldwide cultural diversity. Despite the negative consequences of this massive phenomenon there are positive factors related to consumers' perception because in some ways they also renew different environments with colours, geometries, textures, etc.; and shape each product with aesthetics elements that strongly seduce diverse kind of consumers. Designers should rescue this positive factor and use it for the development of future trends in constructive ways and not only for the corporations benefit. During the Trends Research course at Universidad del Norte the students are developing this proposal through one project, where they analyze their own context and find those unique elements, which reflect the values of their city and are disappearing because there is a strong foreigner influence caused by trends. Consumers' perception must be stimulated by the cultural characteristics of each trend proposed by the students, and in an emotional way provoke reencounters among consumers and their identity in contemporary and changeable contexts.

Keywords: Culture, trends, diversity and design

1 THE FACTS

The development and creation of new trends has been related to temporal styles without intention of settling on the memories of consumers positive ideas for the improvement and development of their social attitudes, cultural values and the concern about the environment; thanks to consumption and globalization, season after season different industries are bringing to worldwide consumers, products which pretend to impose global life styles, in places where the historical background and conditions are unique and don't match with new and transitory ideas about music, food, architecture, daily objects, etc. As a matter of fact, this situation is one of the responsible of the traditions vanishing; and that is the case of many indigenous communities which are still alive in Colombia, that sadly are losing many of their traditions because the enormous influence of these changeable Trends, for example they wear watches that in some cases they don't even know how to read, they wear shirts and the gorgeous paintings that used to cover their bodies are becoming practices of elderly and a tourist attraction.

All these events are happening together and distinctive ethnical groups are getting convinced with the strong influence of mass media, which shows brands, behaviors, food, music and a whole life style completely perfect and desirable, that when is frequently seen in television becomes more important than the own traditions learned during centuries, even if that means the latent disappearance of their cultural uniqueness. As an example of this process, many children in Colombia easily identify international fantasy characters, which become their icons, but they don't recognize the characters that were part of their own mythological past because their families and teachers are also influenced by the international bed stories told by mass media. Danilo J Anton in his book Diversity, globalization and the ways of nature (Uniformity against culture) affirms: **“Recently, the homogenizing influences of the communication media and transnational economic complexes, are attacking the diversity of many societies. These influences operate through relatively uniform transnational cultures, taking different forms in each epoch but widening their effects with the expansion of globalization”.**

The conditions described above represent a hazard for the conservation of the cultural diversity because new generations don't identify their own roots, due to the continuous launch of New Trends and life models, that with the help of globalization, get transmitted, making the concept of own culture more confusing because it gets covered under many layers of foreign life styles which arrive without stopping; and the distinctiveness of each folklore gets replaced by international standards of diverse expressions, like clothing, architecture, music, behaviors, etc.

On the other hand, trends have become tools that help companies to renew constantly the appearance of their products that through perception, seduce consumers every season thanks to a group of aesthetic features (new colors, textures, patterns, flavors, sounds, etc.), which persuade consumers and make them to believe that those products are brand new thanks to the temporary looks proposed by trends, even when they are just changing the external coat of conventional objects. That situation increases the production and sales of companies by giving people the impression of an unstoppable innovation, that brings new products which satisfy momentary needs, but most of the time they just change the superficial aspects of those products and people feel these shallow changes like the launch of a new product that inevitably is going to renew their environment with different colors, patterns and all those aesthetic characteristics mentioned before. Most of the time, this desire and ephemeral renovation is manipulated by consumption because after a short while those products regardless all the "renovation" which could have brought, are not trendy any longer and stored, because the satisfaction finishes with the launch of the next trend and the unavoidable storage of many products.

Certainly the impact of these frequent changes, has been managed just for the benefit of consumption, but these kind of strategies have completely forgotten one of the most important principles of the design which searches the quality of life improvement, and that includes the satisfaction not only of physical and emotional needs, but also the care of the place where life carries on, which is our unhealthy environment. Every season there are thousands of products which are produced, sold and replaced, even if they still are in good conditions, and all the energy and resources use for keeping on this cycle, conform other of the weakness and harmful facets of the Trends and its constant renovation purpose.

2 SOMETHING POSITIVE OF TREND DEVELOPMENT

Nevertheless there is an interesting fact that can't be ignored in the development and creation of trends because when they seduce consumers, all its aesthetic features become emotional tools that make products go further than functionality, because every time that the users interact with them (food, clothes, furniture, music, etc.) there is an explosion of stimulus, where different senses can be stirred. In the article Aesthetics redefined, Gianfranco Zaccai gives us a statement where we can see the importance of this fact: **"Aesthetics in regard to any object, therefore is not an absolute and separate value. Rather, it is totally related to our ability to see a congruence among our intellectual expectations of an object's functional characteristics, our emotional need to feel that ethical and social values are met, and finally our physical need for sensory stimulation"**. Some interesting cases can be seen in the special collections of Habitat store; for example "Atlantic Ocean" in 2007 used textures, patterns and colors inspired in the deep blue, soft sand, the explosion of the tide on the rocks and other characteristics which were applied in the design of several objects, and it's quite remarkable that the intentions are not only to provide a different case to the usual products but also to make people feel close to the ocean and all the mood interconnected to this place.

In this proposal the idea is to use those positive results of perception described above in order to create a complement for the methodology of Cool Hunting, where despite the continuous changes of trends there would be something perdurable transmitted through human senses, which could be constructive messages, and not just a transitory bunch of feelings and waste that maintain the consumption without any significant benefit to the society, that in the case of folklore expressions, do not respect the multiculturalism worldwide. If cultural and constructive values are involved in the concept of Trends, consumers would interact with functional and emotional products and at the same time would perceive,

remember and recognize some unique elements of their own culture or others located far away, and it would change that current and disturbing idea where fashion and life styles forget the values of the cultural diversity with its uniforms that sadly try to standardize the diversity of the cultural wealth.

At this point, the factors mentioned above: trends, perception, culture and globalization can be linked and become constructive key points of the Cool Hunting activity and help to the development of trends. In this case the perception would be the tool that (through emotional factors) encourages consumers to buy and interact pleasantly with a product which would help them to recognize and retake cultural elements that were vanished in the past or reflect folklores from remote places; and the globalization would become the transmitter of diverse cultural uniqueness instead of superficial and changeable styles.

3 SOME IMPORTANT REASONS

UNESCO has declared in many of its statements that there is an urgent need for recovering our patrimony and the entire group of elements which are part of this complex concept, as Ms Khalida Toumi, Minister of Culture of Algeria, concluded in the first session of the Intangible Heritage Committee in Algiers (The Intangible Heritage Messenger, no.5): **“intangible heritage is to the identity of peoples what the DNA map is to the human genome”**. Thanks to this kind of affirmations this proposal has been encouraged during one year of lectures where different students have developed trends, inspired in expressions which conform the identity of their own city (Barranquilla, Colombia); the students get an experience where they approach to their own culture in a contemporary context, and throughout the process of design, they discover aspects of the city and its people, which were unknown for them because they are vanished in the past and only old people know about them, or because they are too absorbed by the routine of their own city which makes them do not realize those distinctive aspects. The idea is not only to learn about Cool Hunting and the development of new trends, but also to make the students aware of the richness present in all the practices that make part of their own city which are disappearing because the foreign models are coming into several countries with a vigorous strength.

4 METHODOLOGY

During the lectures and workshop of the course of **Research and Development of Trends** at Universidad del Norte (6th semester) the students develop this proposal through one project, where in the first stage they collect information of their own context (Barranquilla) and after, they analyze and look for those unique elements which are disappearing because the homogenization that the globalization and the trends impose on people's minds. After the research, the students start the design process where they have to propose a trend that uses the positive and unique factors that identify the context analyzed, the idea is to translate the concepts of cultural identity to fashion with the help of design.

The experience has become an interesting design exercise where the students have discovered that the richness of their culture is more than the history which is revealed by books, because there are several practices which can be found just when there is a close contact with the city and the students forget their condition of citizen, and become observers who analyze their surrounds and determine the difference which make their city and their people unique.

5 INVOLVING STUDENTS OF DESIGN

Some of the works made in this course, have proposed trends where the colors are not just characteristics that would renovate the appearance of the products designed for the city, but also would make people to remember some expressions present just in their city like in figure 1, where the colors of the trend recover some features of the traditional public transport in Barranquilla; which is a group of buses decorated with bright and colorful stripes around the carcasses that are named Soledad, Galapa, Recreo, Litoral, etc, to remember the users the main neighborhoods of the journey. The goal of this proposal was to give other status to this uniqueness that would make people to realize that the creativity shown in these simple elements is something that make part of their contemporary identity and could be used in other products of the city.

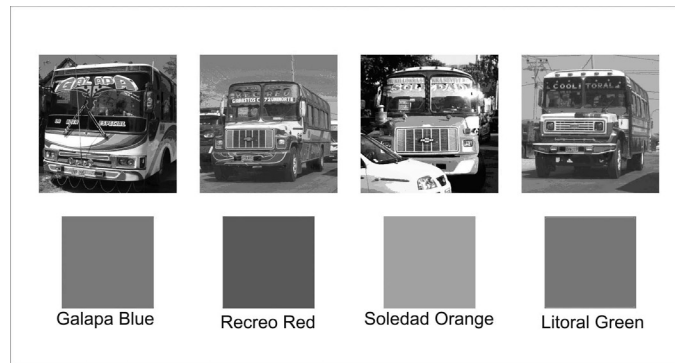


Figure 1 The colors of the trend proposed, were taken from the decoration of the buses and in addition are named as the neighborhoods mentioned above

Another good example where the trend proposed has contemporary identity values, was developed from the advertising posters that cover the walls of the city creating several layers of paper, color, typography, images, and in general, a big amount of graphic information, which in the trend has become the surface of products like coffee tables, crockery, garments, etc., that can be literally read by the users creating a connection that makes the function of the product more enjoyable and a reminder of the visual richness present in the city which until now has been categorized as a weakness that makes the city unattractive.

These cases show how the students found in the streets, elements that make part of their identity, which is a challenge because they have to realize that its meaning is more than the traditional concepts learned during generations; here they find new material that shows the complexity that identity acquires throughout the time and its potential for evolving and progressing with all its background and the influences obtained across its existence.

Nevertheless, the trends developed from the traditional elements, which are considered the most significant identity of Barranquilla and are part of its traditional Carnival (Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Humanity Heritage), are remarkable. Several works of this course have taken this path and the results have projected trends with bright colors, animal skin patterns and other aesthetic characteristics that reflect the ancestral influence of Indigenous, Africans and Spanish who shared these territories and created a unique cultural mixture. This example can be seen in the figure 2, where some crockery is inspired by one of the characters of this Carnival.



Figure 2 Crockery inspired in the Carnival

6 THE FUTURE OF THIS COURSE

Despite of the results, there are some elements which still need to be applied in the design process, for example sounds, smells and flavors collected in streets, markets and houses, are also part of these searches but in the development of each trend, the students put them apart and the reasons of this isolation are quite obvious; they are used to develop forms with colors, textures, patterns and all the factors which

conform the visual language; then those unusual personages, get excluded of their designs.

For the next semester, the course will be focused to familiarize the students with those aspects and their role in product design, without forgetting that the main goal is to encourage reencounters with the cultural identity and the values of their city, which are more than the visual images easily obtained in every expedition into this context. This is the case perceived with the trees called sandalwood, which during some nights when the weather is quite hot, expel a soft perfume quite memorable for the citizens. How could designers include this kind of elements in their products? Could it be possible to design products which expel aromas when users interact with them? Could those aromas become reminders of characteristic that make special a particular place? How could designers use other stimulus (different to the visual ones) in the design of a product?

With this process the students could expand the qualities of their products in the vast area of sensory stimulation, and those senses that design has forgotten, but the trends research and Cool Hunting have met again, would be more exploited and at the same time would make the interaction more interesting, because they would stimulate not only the sight but also the hearing, taste, smell and touch, and all of them would cooperate in the persuasion of consumers and in the reencounter with cultural values.

7 FINAL THOUGHTS: INVOLVING ENDURING VALUES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE TRENDS FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF THE CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The richness of different folklores is a complex group of endless characteristics that can inspire a big amount of trends for every kind of consumer and for the unstoppable launch of seasons, that thanks to consumers' perception, could stimulate human senses and make them to realize the distinctiveness of their own and other cultures with exceptional characteristics; and on the other hand, because this topic inevitably involves consumption and globalization, it's important to clarify that in this work, they could become diffusers of those positive and meaningful trends designed not only for an economic benefit but also for the culture development.

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