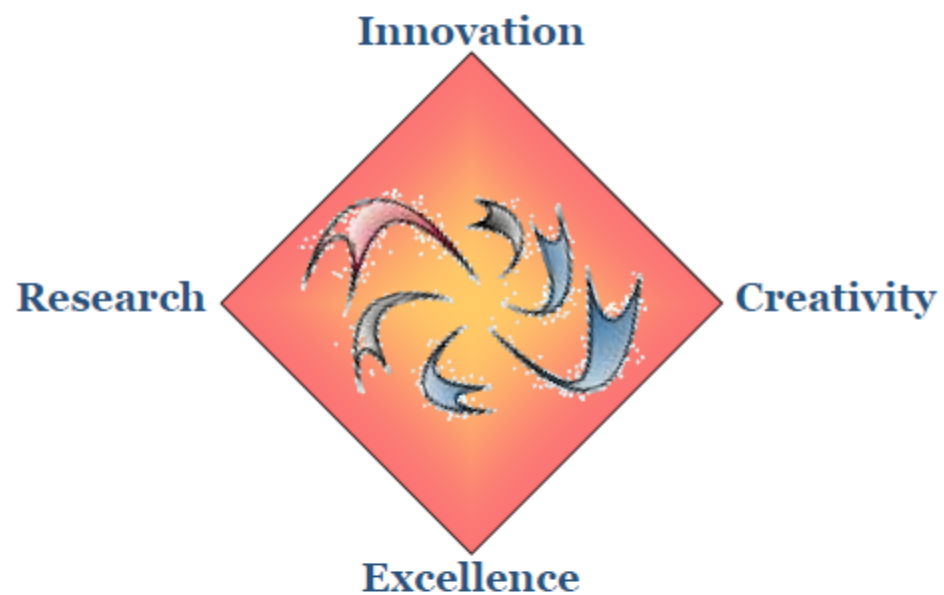


R M I C

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Also, I want to thank the Intellectbase International Consortium (IIC) Team for their hard work in producing this Issue. The ten papers offer great intellectual contributions and continue our focus on broadening intellectual resources, understanding, development and exchange of ideas among global education professionals.

The RMIC presents detailed theoretical explanations, innovative contributions, creative developments, and descriptions of managerial perspectives, based on creative thinking, illustrated with real case studies and applied research in a well-defined format with rich conceptual structures. Management innovation involves the development of individual researchers engaged in creative endeavors, across a wide range of fields including: the social sciences and humanities, public policy, administration, engineering, business, education, science, technology and the arts. Also, it is intended for scholars who are interested in, and wanting to explore and develop, complex compositions and linking incongruent elements to knowledge, and integrating them conceptually on a creative scale.

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Natalie Weathers
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ABSTRACT

*This is a study of the one-directional transfer of ideas from the fashion realm to realms where those ideas are translated into **product design** and **branding** strategies. The focus is on how the transfer of those ideas occurs, and the effects of that **idea transfer**. Those ideas are fashion elements, and the process of that transfer is fashion infusion. My rationale for doing this research stems from three interests: to explore fashion's application beyond the apparel realm; to use fashion infusion as a means to study cultural production; and to understand the transfer of fashion elements into consumer products, and the transformation of those consumer products into experiential products.*

Some of the key texts influencing the preliminary direction of my research include Brooke Hodge's Skin and Bones (2006), Mark Tungate's Fashion Brands (2004), and Ilkka Tuomi's Networks of Innovation (2002). The remainder of my literature review has focused on four areas: diffusion of innovations, organizational theory, fashion theory and cultural studies. I conducted a pilot study in 2007 of a range of companies across industries that appeared to exhibit idea transfer. The pilot study consisted of fifteen interviews with design and trend practitioners at these companies.

What has evolved from these perspectives combined with my work experience in the fashion industry is the fundamental question: What is the impetus to integrate fashion elements into consumer products, resulting in experiential products? The subsequent question that then forms the basis of my research is: How do fashion elements get integrated into experiential products and what are the results of the fashion infusion process?

This research will contribute to multiple theories including idea transfer, social networks, cultural theory and fashion theory. This investigation is important because minimal research has been done to date that examines the meaning of fashion elements' integration into products outside of clothing. Fashion theorists assert that fashion is a social and cultural phenomenon, mediates between the individual and the collective, and gives a sense of identity. This research will extend that explanation of fashion's significance to mainstream consumer products. This departure is important because it shows a broader application of fashion theory. In summary, this research will contribute to the field of knowledge because 1) it can teach us about how ideas diffuse through social networks; 2) minimal research has looked at the role of the manufacturer in diffusing innovations to other industries; 3) it will shed light on hybrid practices of the future.

INTRODUCTION

I am at the beginning stages of studying the one-directional transfer of ideas from the fashion realm to realms where those ideas are translated into product design and branding strategies. I am interested in how the transfer of those ideas occurs, and the effects of that idea transfer. I call those ideas *fashion elements*, and I call the process of that transfer, *fashion infusion*. My rationale for doing this research stems from three interests: to explore fashion's application beyond the apparel realm; to use fashion infusion as a means to study cultural production; and to understand the transfer of fashion elements into consumer products, and the transformation of those consumer products into what I call *experiential products*.

My interest in idea transfer from the fashion industry to other realms began with consultation work I completed in

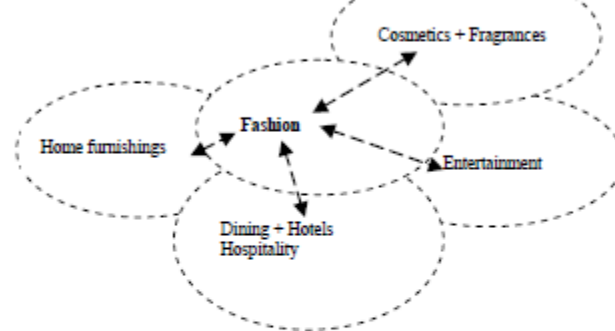
task was to explain to the industrial designers at this gum company the ways that fashion brands apply color forecasting, trend forecasting and fashion design principles, and then assist them in transferring and implementing those fashion brands' strategies to the chewing gum's package design. From this consultancy I learned that design and branding concepts used in the fashion industry are learning tools for other industries. This led to my interest to explore why and how consumer products companies integrate ideas from the fashion industry into their product design and branding strategies.

Fashion elements are a key asset in the successful branding of consumer products today. Successful branding incorporates style and design, and fashion is at the forefront of style (Gobé, 2001; Tungate, 2004). Why do consumer products incorporate fashion elements into their brands' styling and what process do they use to do this? What makes fashion elements a compelling source for product innovation and branding? My preliminary research on fashion infusion suggests that this is happening in cell phone design, automotive design, detergents' packaging and scent formulation, chocolates and the hospitality industry. This paper will highlight the ways that fashion elements are an asset to consumer products' branding and market innovation at a specialty chocolates company and at an automotive company. It will explore why fashion infusion occurs and how it manifests itself in these two areas. The paper will conclude with some thoughts on the broader implications of fashion infusion as an example of a network of meaning (Bourdieu, 1993; duGay, 1997; Tuomi, 2002; Currid, 2007).

In the summer of 2007 I conducted sixteen interviews with design and trend practitioners from a range of areas: chocolates, automotive, telecommunications, package design, dining/restaurants, fragrance forecasting, textile design and architecture. My first purpose for conducting those interviews was to understand from the practitioners' point of view whether or not fashion infusion is actually occurring. I learned that fashion infusion does indeed occur, and that its process is heterogeneous; it comes from a number of different data points. My second purpose was to get a sense of why these practitioners thought fashion infusion was occurring. In other words, I was interested in understanding fashion infusion as a network of meaning from the practitioners' interpretive process and point of view.

Some clarification of terminology I use is necessary. I recognize that there are complications in defining the term 'fashion'. Fashion is ubiquitous in contemporary Western society but simultaneously challenging to confine to one neat definition or to one context. There are vague definitions and multiple meanings attached to it. Cultural and fashion theorists refer to fashion as a social and cultural phenomenon and as a mode of cultural consumption and production (Barnard, 2007). Scholars think of fashion as a generalized phenomenon of human behavior. The fashion theorist George Sproles defined fashion as "temporary cyclical phenomena adopted by consumers for a particular time and situation" (Sproles, 1981: 116). Fashion is applied to cars, cell phones, food, even vodkas (Silverstein + Fiske, 2005). Fashion can be used as a verb, as in to give shape or form to something, or as a noun when referencing prevailing style of dress or custom. It is associated with fads and trends. For my research purposes I have oscillated between the terms 'fashion' and 'style', only to settle on fashion presently because style is even broader in scope and has another host of ambiguities complicating its meaning. One of my short-term objectives is to clarify my use of fashion versus style with further readings and discussions with my informants as I develop case studies.

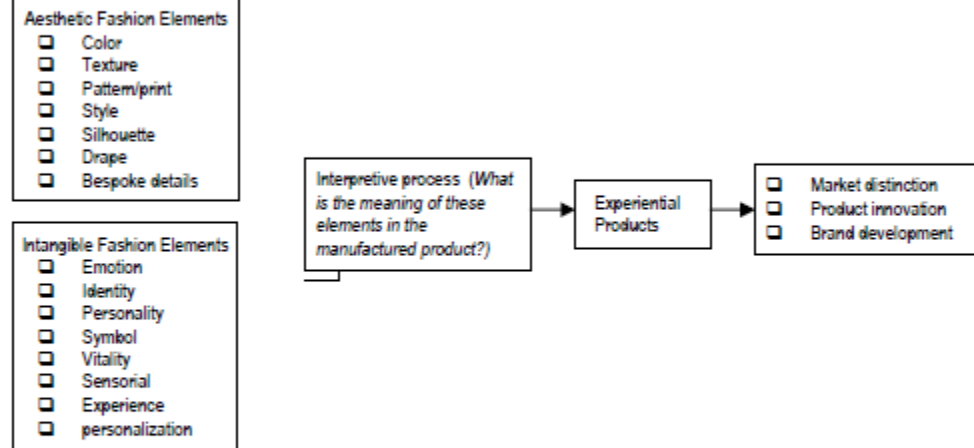
My working definition of fashion is that it is a social phenomenon that imbues objects with cultural meaning based on ideas from designed apparel. The fashion industry consists of a supply chain including designers of fashionable clothing, the mills and factories producing that clothing, the retailers selling that fashion clothing, and auxiliary operations. Those auxiliary operations, or realms, rotate around and intersect with the fashion industry. The realms include, for example, home furnishings, cosmetics and fragrances, and the entertainment industry. The fashion industry is one means for other products in those realms to achieve the attributes of a lifestyle brand. Because of the multiple extensions of the fashion industry into these other realms, fashion has become ubiquitous. The fashion industry is part of a web that can be envisioned as a Venn diagram, each circle representing a realm that intersects with the fashion industry and vice versa. While the influences in this web are multidirectional, that is, developments in the fashion industry are also influenced by these other realms, my



INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN FASHION + OTHER REALMS

The ideas that are embedded in the fashion industry are both physical and conceptual, and I call them *fashion elements*. I divide *fashion elements* into two categories, aesthetic fashion elements (the physical elements) and intangible fashion elements (the conceptual elements). *Aesthetic fashion elements* include color, texture, pattern, print, silhouette, drape, bespoke details and customization. The aesthetic fashion elements are parallel to Sproles and Burns' (1994) "code of fashion" which includes fabric, texture, color, pattern, volume, silhouette, and occasion for which the fashionable garment is worn. Those aesthetic fashion elements are encoded with *intangible fashion elements*, the second category: emotion, identity, personality, symbol, vitality, personalization, experiential aspects and sensorial aspects. I have named the phenomenon of incorporating fashion elements into ordinary consumer products, *fashion infusion*. Fashion infusion is a diffusion process whereby fashion elements are adopted by designers and marketers, across social systems, into consumer product design and branding strategies. Fashion infusion becomes a vehicle for innovation. This definition is influenced by Workman and Studak (2007) and Kaiser (1997) who examine the spreading of fashion innovations within and across social systems.

I purposely use the term *infusion* instead of *diffusion* for two reasons. First, the body of literature on fashion diffusion is specifically about the spreading of clothing styles in society and is focused on apparel. Second, while diffusion denotes spreading out and dissemination, infusion denotes introducing, imbuing and inspiring. Thus using the term infusion while incorporating some of the concepts from innovation diffusion adds meaning to fashion infusion. Additionally, diffusion, as detailed in the diffusion of innovations literature, has connoted deliberate, strategic patterns and pathways of innovations that can be quantified and tracked. The diffusion patterns in fashion infusion are less quantifiable and more emergent (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). The fashion infusion process is more consistent with the Mintzberg (1987) school of thought on strategy which says that strategy occurs in more haphazard, less pre-set ways. The fashion infusion process culminates in consumer products that serve beyond a functional level, and deliver an experience to consumers. I call those resulting products, *experiential products*. The color forecaster Bruno Remaury has commented, "Fashion is based on creating a need where, in reality, there is none. Fashion is a factory that manufactures desire" (Tungate, 2004: 8). That desire is one example of the intangible fashion elements that can be embedded in experiential products. I have developed the following conceptual framework to illustrate the idea transfer that occurs through fashion infusion.



FASHION INFUSION CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Some of the key texts influencing the preliminary direction of my research include Brooke Hodge's *Skin and Bones* (2006), Mark Tungate's *Fashion Brands* (2004), and Ilkka Tuomi's *Networks of Innovation* (2002). Hodge's work discusses the intersections and distinctions in the works of contemporary architects and fashion designers. She notes that designers in the two fields have not always collaborated although there have always been similarities in terms of functionality, the symbolic ability to express identity, and the creative process. She calls that collaboration a cross-fertilization process and explores why it is only in the past twenty years that there has been more collaboration between these fields. Hodge proposes that the main reason is that the social networks of the fashion and architectural worlds have begun to overlap. More fashion designers are commissioning architects to design their retail spaces: the retail collaboration between fashion designer Miuccia Prada and architect Rem Koolhaas is a good case in point. In addition, as architects use more software, they look to fashion designers for inspiration because fashion designers have a long history of dealing with complex forms and constructions through CAD (computer aided design) that architects now incorporate (Hodge, Mears, and Sidlauskas, 2006). *Skin and Bones* is useful as a case study that explores a future direction of what Hodge calls "hybrid practices of the future, when technology, material and conceptual borders between fashion and architecture could all but dissolve." I extend Hodge's concept of hybrid practices of the future to include the fashion infusion process, as an illustration of conceptual borders breaking down between the fashion industry and other realms. I will also be interested in exploring why these hybrid practices are occurring today in particular.

Mark Tungate's *Fashion Brands* (2004) examines the ubiquitous nature of the fashion industry in contemporary Western society, and the fashion industry's unique branding methods. Tungate's discussion of fashion brands focuses on fashion apparel, accessories and footwear. Through his interviews with various stakeholders in the fashion industry, Tungate considers the distinct qualities of fashion brands: fashion simultaneously mirrors society and idealizes a better, perhaps fantasy, world; in addition, fashion brands are expert at turning sub cultural trends into marketing opportunities. Tungate's points influenced my thinking to explore what could make fashion brands interesting models of brand innovation for other industries.

Ilkka Tuomi's *Networks of Innovation- Change and Meaning in the Age of the Internet* (2002) upholds a user-centric view of innovation. He believes that innovation is fundamentally about social change. His work is useful to my research for two reasons. First, he broadly defines users of innovations to include manufacturers as well as consumers. This is a relevant perspective as my case studies will be from the perspective of product designers and marketers at these companies- not from consumers' perspectives. Second, he uses fashion as a case study to illustrate how innovation becomes meaningful when used in social practice. The fashion case study is a good example of how innovations are adopted not only because they make something work better, but because they

cultural beliefs and values, it is not simply a message sent to a receiver (Barand, 2007). This social view of innovation, and Tuomi's specific examples drawn from the fashion industry, influenced me to explore the social networks present in the fashion infusion process as networks of meaning.

What has evolved from these perspectives combined with my work experience in the fashion industry is the fundamental question: What is the impetus to integrate fashion elements into consumer products, resulting in experiential products? The subsequent question that then forms the basis of my research is: How do fashion elements get integrated into experiential products and what are the results of the fashion infusion process?

In the case of specialty chocolates, one of my interviews was conducted with Maribel Lieberman the owner of the New York City based Mariebelle Chocolates. Fashion infusion was evident in package design as well as printing techniques on the chocolates themselves. Interestingly, Ms. Lieberman's background is as a fashion designer, which may make her more open to borrowing ideas from the fashion realm and integrating them into her work. Mariebelle's packaging is in the colors turquoise and deep brown, which when she started her company, were untraditional colors to apply to food. She used these colors, because they were colors she wore in her own clothing. She applies a screen printing technique to decorate the surface of the chocolate candies with a range of colorful patterns and images. Her chocolates become reminiscent of small fabric swatches. In addition, she launches "collections" essentially. One notable collection in the context of fashion infusion, was her pin-up doll series, where she licensed images from the artist Alberto Vargas' pin up doll posters from the 1940's. The use of the term "collection", common in the fashion industry, is one way that an idea from the fashion realm transfers to a chocolates company adding value to its marketing initiative. Ms. Lieberman believes that fashion elements are useful in her chocolates' product development because "Fashion has always been a part of our lives since the beginning. Why? It is about beauty... the sensorial experience. Beauty helps us to make an experience out of things." For Mariebelle Chocolates, the sensorial experience is key, and integrating ideas from the fashion realm is one way to deliver a sensorial experience.

In the case of the automotive industry, my interview with Chris Webb, a color and trend designer for General Motors (GM), pointed out some interesting intersections with the fashion industry. Mr. Webb pointed out that the automotive sector has "couture" lines of its specialty cars, that it looks to the fashion industry for upcoming trends on color and line, and that both fashion and cars are extensions of the consumer's personality. Mr. Webb gave three basic reasons for why fashion elements are useful in automotive product development: 1) fashion is personal and literally "touches" the body; 2) the fashion industry's faster product development cycle (three months versus three years) gives it an edge in visibility to the consumer; and 3) the average consumer is more exposed to fashion through the media and is more design savvy. All of these examples are reasons why the automotive industry is interested in idea transfer from the fashion industry for its own market competitiveness.

Mr. Webb gave an interesting example of collaboration between GM and Dana Buchman, a fashion division of the Liz Claiborne company. In the process of leading a trend meeting where Liz Claiborne designers were present, the two companies discovered that the Cadillac SRX and the Dana Buchman line targeted the same consumer. From that discovery, a collaboration was formed, where Dana Buchman designed a limited line of Cadillac SRX automobiles. Her fashion sensibility influenced the silk quilted seating, the pearl toned color palette, and the bejeweled details on interior panels. This is a clearer example of the transfer of ideas from the fashion industry to the automotive industry to more effectively target consumers.

One reason why fashion elements are a compelling source for product design innovation is because experimentation, fluidity and renewal characterize fashion. Clothing's communicative function and symbolic power (Crane, 1999; Du Gay, 1997; Barthes, 1990) also make fashion elements reasonable sources for innovation by consumer products firms. Both the aesthetic fashion elements and the intangible fashion elements become desirable marketing vehicles for consumer products in a competitive market (Silverstein + Fiske, 2005). My data also highlights an American consumer base that has broad exposure and access to fashion through the media, the Internet and other communication means. These consumers expect an upgraded product, be it a metallic pink

current fashion designer. Consumers expect products that deliver experience to them (Cobb, 2007; Author's interviews, 2007). They have been getting aspirational experiences from their fashionable clothing for years; they now expect those experiences when they dine in a restaurant, spend the night in a luxury boutique hotel, or bite into a chocolate candy bar.

There are key three findings from my pilot study. First, that the fashion discourse is broad. That is, fashion is a term applied widely today, beyond clothing, branching out to a range of consumer products (Weisman, 2004; Loyaute, 2006; Hodge, 2006; Martin, 2007; Ramstad, 2007; Author's interviews, 2007). Fashion's stylizing function has had useful branding application for a number of industries. For example, the Volkswagen Bug automobile is merchandised in a plethora of colors mimicking cosmetic nail polishes; boutique restaurants are styled with couture dresses in mind as an inspiration source. Second, that fashion infusion is a compelling method for styling, branding and innovation because fashion elements are the foundation for a network of meaning (Tuomi, 2002; Author's interviews, 2007). Fashion infusion is a means to give ordinary consumer products significance and value in cultural life and in commerce. Third, that fashion infusion points out a web-like cross-fertilization process of product innovation (Author's interviews, 2007). My data has surfaced some differences from the literature on diffusion of innovation, which highlight more concrete personal relations or networks (Granovetter, 1985; Grabher, 2002; Troshani + Doolin, 2007).

This research will contribute to multiple theories including idea transfer, social networks, cultural theory and fashion theory. More broadly, it will shed light on what Brooke Hodge called hybrid practices of the future: In an age where boundaries between disciplines and industries are blurring for the sake of creative innovation, it is useful to have a study that examines how those practices come about and the effects of those hybrid practices. This investigation is important because minimal research has been done to date that examines the meaning of fashion elements' integration into products outside of clothing. Fashion has been called "an expressive playground for creative social practice" (Barnard, 2007; xi). Fashion theorists assert that fashion is a social and cultural phenomenon, mediates between the individual and the collective, and gives a sense of identity. This research will extend that explanation of fashion's significance to mainstream consumer products. This departure is important because it shows a broader application of fashion theory. In summary, this research will contribute to the field of knowledge because: 1) fashion infusion is a process that can teach us about how ideas diffuse through social networks; 2) fashion theory has not looked as much at the role of the design developer or the manufacturer in diffusing innovations to other industries; and 3) fashion infusion will shed light on hybrid practices of the future.

This investigation is important because minimal research has been done to date that examines the meaning of fashion elements' integration into products outside of clothing. The materials and iconography of fashion are so ubiquitous that the engineering, art and commercial acumen involved are taken for granted: "Fashion is thought of as ephemeral and superficial" (Hodge, 2006). Its fleeting nature often belies its weightiness in the consciousness of popular culture (Lehman, 2000). Through fashion design, a one-dimensional piece of fabric is transformed into wearable art that is practical, functional and aesthetically pleasing. Add to that the emotional import embedded in clothing, and it becomes ironic that fashion can be looked upon as the more fickle of the design fields. Given the ephemeral nature of fashion those subtle and overt ways that fashion infusion occurs is very interesting to me. The democratization of fashion compels consumer products companies to utilize fashion infusion. Companies borrow from the multiple dimensions of fashion elements so that their products undergo continuous growth and innovation.

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