

THE FUTURE OF DESIGN RESEARCH

1) In your opinion, which developments and trends will influence the future of design most in the next couple of years? Why?

There is so much complexity in today's society and the excess of meaningless choice is still an unsolved issue in most developed western economies. Therefore intelligent reduction will play a key role in the future of innovation and design. Creating successful products, services and experiences in the future will mean changing the way we think about people and the way we do research. Concepts simply must become people-centric, demonstrating empathy for the cultures they serve and respect for the context in which they exist. Below I have listed a handful of the most salient trends that will shape the future of design.

Emotional Consumption

Living in a developed economy with our basic needs covered we now engage ourselves in personal development, or so-called 'self actualisation'. The Future Foundation found that "personal fulfilment" was the top priority for 50% of British adults, compared with 25% in 1983. Tomorrow's individuals want "Emotional Consumption" across the board – and that means as consumers of jobs, experiences and cultures as well as goods and services. This trend is driven by communal as well as individual values and universal issues overriding income-level, gender, age or geography. It is important to recognise that the more choice increase in our complex society, the more people are driven by emotional values

Sustainability

Sustainability is our new religion – it is no longer an option but a must. Crucially also geopolitical questions and social responsibility issues will drive developments in relation to a sustainable future. Citizen power means we demand that our leaders and captains of industry demonstrate a proactive stance, together with accountability in relation to pollution, conservation of biodiversity and natural resources. The Emotional consumer demands products that appeal to personal ethics as well as to practical needs, and they also want transparency. Transparency implies openness, communication, and accountability. People want local and natural produce of traceable origin in order to sustain more meaning and also feel a sense of connection with their locale.

Co-creation

Social networks and user-created content connect people across age, gender and conventional borders. People want co-creation and personal interaction - they want a stake and are already saying "Don't tell us, consult us!" The authorship of innovation is shifting from the few to the many. People are increasingly putting their faith in information delivered through 'social software' and virtual networks. Companies can now develop products in cooperation with their consumers by tapping into the collective creativity. This allows end-users to influence goods, services and experiences in a truly empowering and positive exchange.

Convenience

Convenience is king. In Hybrid SUVs, with a skinny latte in the drinks holder, we use our BlackBerry to catch up on e-mails. We shop or pay our bills with our Palm Pilot while stuck in traffic or sitting on the bus. We want stress-free products, services and experiences - delivering more 'me time' in a time-starved society. We are so busy chasing moments of freedom that our convenience culture has developed a whole raft of projects and services that provide instant gratification and indulgence. Ironically, we also crave authenticity – memory-filled and life enhancing moments – and this will increasingly inform our choices.

Health and Wellbeing

Health concerns have changed the face of Western culture. Some lifestyle diseases such as obesity, depression and stress have reached epidemic levels. Some react with fear and weariness, others ignore

the issue altogether. However, increasing amounts of people respond by applying a more holistic approach to health and wellbeing, as they realise that a balanced lifestyle is the only route to a happier and healthier existence. A healthy body and mind is a new form of capital. People want to feel good and perform well in their everyday lives. Living optimistically is a sound investment in our health and helps us maximise life and its opportunities.

2) What kind of role will the research of design play in near future?

Research is clearly crucial in developing spot-on products, services and experiences – especially as it often highlights deeper social, cultural and ecological issues. It's worth noting that effective research is invariably a cornerstone of innovation activity, not something that is undertaken as an isolated or one-off event. Good groundbreaking data gathering and expert interviews give a unique insight into macro trends and society drivers, as well as providing clues to tomorrow's lifestyle choices. They also open up new possibilities and solutions to longstanding design problems.

We already see that traditional demographics are no longer relevant if we want to tap into and learn more about the true needs of the future consumer. A holistic approach is essential. That means implementing thinking and practices from a variety of disciplines across the design research field. This opens up for more long-term thinking and fertile scenario creation. Drawing on both left-brain or quantitative thinking and right-brain or qualitative thinking forms a 'whole brain' synthesis that acts as a framework for future innovation.

As an example of this holistic approach, when we look at today's society we cannot ignore how much health and wellness is impacting on us at all levels. Because of extensive research we now understand that healthcare involves lifestyle choices, such as our nutrition, exercise, emotional mindset, lifestyle patterns and even where and how we choose to live.

Another good example is the issue of Global Warming. The new buzzword in industry is Clean-Tech. You'll hear it discussed everywhere from China to Scandinavia, which is leading this field. Recently at the Copenmind Global Conference in Copenhagen industry experts, universities and companies got together to talk about the future of Sustainability – next year the theme will be Energy. Recognising a problem is said to be half way to solving it. So we are half way there. But that is not good enough. Because the environment is not only a global challenge: it is also an urgent one. Again, research is crucial if we are to find the answers. All of this has progressed so far, and will progress in the future, due to research. This is why industry and academia need to work together with the new creative class and incorporate intuition and feeling – a holistic approach – into future solutions.

3) What tasks can be performed by classical research institutions like universities and museums? Which duties will they have?

'Business as usual' has already taken on a whole new meaning and the linear business model is being scrutinised in today's competitive landscape. The capability of user-centric research to solve global challenges, deliver high quality and intelligent choice, and define future markets, continues to expand. Among corporations and business schools, people are beginning to understand the potential of design, in research (and across the whole organisational structure) to develop strategies and differentiate products and services from one another.

An obvious challenge is to foster partnerships between traditional and non-traditional research establishments to foster this 'whole brain' thinking. Museums and art institutions could provide the missing link to foster intuition and creativity so often excluded by conventional research. In the future left and right brainers must work together. We need to see knowledge transfer and knowledge sharing – incorporating scientific, social and emotional dimensions. We also need to incorporate the spiritual drivers such as ethics and personal value sets.

4) Could you imagine novel, ground-breaking institutions dealing with design research? What agendas should they have?

Yes is the short answer. We will see a far more diverse and co-operative approach to researching solutions. As to agendas, future priorities will be Sustainability and Ethics. Clearly Empathic Leadership is

the way ahead. Design research must showcase forward-thinking approaches. It is about developing the ability to relate to and connect with people for the purpose of inspiring and empowering their lives. The most successful brands and companies of the future will be those that "think from the outside in" and develop their thinking to connect with people. To lead the way in any area you must first connect – only then can you develop the vision to make a contribution that is meaningful and empowering.

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°The term "design" stands for various sub-disciplines in particular for product/industrial design, graphic design, communication design, media design and interior design.