

A Study of Stereotyping Approaches in Textiles, Clothing and Fashion Design

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Abstract

This study investigated types, approaches, and elements of stereotyping of textile, clothing, and fashion design. This study was based on researching professional and academic resources to find out the tools and methods used to segment and visually design stereotypes. Moreover, the driving forces of stereotyping were analysed and discussed. Textile, clothing, and fashion design stereotyping were found to be implemented through various design elements, including colour, materials and motifs/patterns. The colour was the most significant design element used for stereotyping throughout history, and gender-specific colour is expected to be approaching its end. Several factors affect the formation of visual design stereotypes, including social, cultural and marketing reasons. Trends of design are a decent method to demonstrate a definite cultural or societal vision and consequently stimulate others. Alternative terms like “gender-neutral” and “non-binary” have been added to designers’ vocabulary. However, there are still many improvements to be carried out in this area and many gender-specific ideas.

Keywords: Stereotyping; Culture; Trend; Gender-specific; Color; Neutral.

1. Introduction

Textiles, clothing, and fashion designers develop their designs based on collected inputs from diverse resources that influence their projects’ paths. However, one entity has a more critical impact on the designers’ tasks than others: consumer or purchaser attributes, demands or needs. Therefore, designers should extensively study consumer attitudes and behaviour to meet their needs, aspirations, and motivations. This analysis would include gender, age, qualification, background, and other specifications that might affect their preferences. Moreover, design tasks would consist of developing or changing the state of a product based on these inputs. A designer is requested to explore all these aspects that might affect product features, including consumer attitude and behaviour (Arango, 2019).

Design trends are an essential aspect or path of the design world, constantly changing and part of the inspiration processes. These are initial indicators of unusual themes suggested to be used in the future, compared to currently used design products. These trends could be based on past and outdated or new design themes. Consumers would either look for current design trends, traditional design, or something completely new or out of both trend and conventional. Therefore, understanding trends and why they are created is one of the significant sources of design inspiration (Market, 2021; Medium, 2021). Nowadays, designers use various sources to obtain background information on design trends. The most common sources for trends are well-known websites with collected images, articles or other data. These websites could be data-based, such as Adobes Creative Trends, Shutterstock or annual reports, i.e., Pantone Color of the Year, relevant domain sources, or awarded products. Other sources include magazines, books, talks, conferences, meetings or conversations. Therefore, it is essential to structure trends and their sources as their duration transforms appeal and usage. Trends are based on current and past topics to anticipate present or future ones.

1.1. Trends Development and Size

Trend types are “Megatrends”, “Macro”, and “Micro” trends. These types of trends are followed by smaller structures, i.e. “fads”. A megatrend is almost always associated with social developments and specific generations or is affected by political or economic interrelations. Therefore, they are long-living and of large-scale cultural, societal or economic shifts. Typical examples of megatrends are globalisation and sustainability.

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However, Macro trends include current issues of interest in about five years. Naturally, they appear in one area and might span to others. Nevertheless, macro trends are long-established living trends. Examples of macro trends are “flat design”, “natural materials”, or “voice interfaces”. Microtrends would relate to contemporary styles and attract an audience in about one year. This could be applied in limited examples in design and minor detail. More than one micro trend would produce a macro trend, creating a megatrend. Micro and macro trends differ based on the topic's time, diffusion, relevance, or size. Some examples of micro trends are “huge shadows”, “speckled materials”, or “parallax scrolling”. Fad is developed due to limited trends in terms of time and geographical and social impacts, which would be found in clothing, foods, or language.

1.2. What and Who Decides What Is Trendy in Design?

Several sides; for instance, Designers, Celebrities, Journalists, Stylists, and Executives play significant roles in creating trends experienced by people. However, they are made by someone somewhere and then adopted by others. There are practical reasons for getting a trend on various runways worldwide at once. This is highly affected by the industries' decisions on colours and textures (Doughnut, 2021). This means that a developer and creator already set the product's design that is expected to be used and spread among people and will give orders of this product's specifications. Another reason for a designer to implement perceived and informed original ideas of designers is the ability to implement this in a wide range. Although trends appear suddenly, they would not be highly successful if they are overdone quickly and spread quickly. Regardless of the role or identity of the developer of any trend, segmentation and stereotyping of the consumers should be considered by designers.

1.3. Visual Design Stereotyping

A stereotype is a definite range of known specifications linked and connected to a specific type of thing/s or person/s. Stereotyping is the action or process of assigning and signifying a thing or person with significant features of that type. Stereotypes are not only established on the consumer identity but also according to others' recognition and expectations of that consumer (Hartmann, 2011). This is one of the aspects designers would consider in the design process, and it would be considered in developing a design trend. Textiles, clothing, and fashion design could be implemented using design elements, including colour, texture, material, motifs, and patterns. Therefore, stereotyping could be affected by culture, background, ethnic group, gender, age, or marketing trends.

The literature review was found to need more detailed explanations and analysis about textiles, clothing and fashion design stereotyping addressing their appearance, development, and assessment. The purpose of this study is to investigate stereotyping aspects in the areas of textiles, clothing, and fashion design to find their sources and indicators. This study's objectives include examining stereotyping aspects, namely design elements that would be adopted to represent a thing or person. Moreover, factors and circumstances in which a definite model would play a significant role in forming a stereotype are investigated. This will be done by studying textiles, clothing, and fashion design product trends, the sides setting these casts, and how and why. A particular focus will be placed on how colour trends are used as a marketing tool and in business. This research hypothesis is that designers use design elements to implement serotyping. Other hypotheses are about considering the driving forces of stereotyping, including gender, age, ethical and ethnic factors. This research's value lies in guiding designers, educators, and students to create designs aiming at stereotyping or avoiding stereotyping.

2. Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative research method identifying and determining stereotyping approaches adopted by designers. This is conducted by reviewing published academic research papers to consider researchers' findings towards consumer stereotyping according to various hypotheses. Moreover, specialised websites and magazines are checked to report and analyse professional specialised textiles, clothing, and fashion design sources. Observation methodology to find out current trends is applied through online shops.

3. Analysis and Discussion

3.1. Aspects and Tools of Stereotyping in Design

Visual stereotypes are models of shape or form that deliver an expected pattern of specific categories of things, persons, experiences, or functions that support recognising them. For consumers, manufacturers, designers, or marketers, stereotyping is a means of clearly signifying a model of an item. Designers could conduct this using various tools and approaches, including colour, materials or motifs/patterns (Ask, 2016). This section discusses evidence and examples of using these methods.

3.1.1. Colour and Stereotyping

Colour is one of the most important textile, clothing, and fashion design elements that could confer an exceptional cast on a product or refer to it as a definite cultural group or gender. If more attention is paid to colour in this context, it should be highlighted that Gender-specific colours are not randomly designed and are not only applied for aesthetic appeal. Generally, two main techniques are used in selling design products. These are positioning and image creation. Positioning accounts for targeting an identified market for a product. Image creation is relevant to the visual features of a product. This is where the significance of colour as a design element has arisen. Colour is used as a marketing and persuading tool to design products. The correlation between colour and brand is affected by the suitability of the colour for a particular brand. Consumers are affected in perceiving brand personality via recognised colour (Cunningham & Macrae, 2011).

The movement towards gender-specific clothes needed to be straighter and speedier. In the late 1800s, infants used to dress in white. This colour was chosen because of its ease of cleaning and bleaching. In that era, children would start to wear gender-specific colours after 6 or 7 years old. The idea of associating colours with gender did not exist before the mid-19th century (News, 2021). Pink, blue and other pastels were approved for babies in the mid-19th century; later, these two colours were promoted as gender descriptors ahead of World War I—and then, it took time for trendy culture to adopt them. Light shades of baby clothes were created and introduced to the market. 1918, the generally accepted rule of pink for boys and blue for girls was coined. Pink is a more decided and stronger colour, while blue is more delicate and prettier. Another reason could be that blue is more appropriate for girls as it is more sensitive and stylish. Another view states that blue and pink were for blond and dark-haired babies.

In 1927, gender-specific colours were published, and parents were asked to dress boys in pink. Consequently, several companies such as Best & Co., Halle's and Marshall followed the advice. Unexpectedly, this theme was swapped after World War II, and pink started to be sold out for women's products and blue for men. So, the baby boomers (1946 to 1964) were raised in gender-specific clothing—boys dressed like their fathers, girls like their mothers. Girls had to wear dresses to school, though unadorned styles and tomboy play clothes were acceptable. Over time, the space between these colours was enlarged, and the pink/blue gap started to cover other children's items, such as playthings, decorations, beds, and prams. Later, in the 60s and 70s, the Women's liberation movement called for gender equality in terms of gender colours, and the unisex look became the rage. Gender-neutral clothing remained popular until about 1985.

In the mid-80s, pink and blue were back, and the manufacturers played a pivot role as they found other items different from clothes of these colours that parents would purchase once they knew the baby's gender. Knowing the gender of the expected baby was one of the reasons. However, people did not prefer pink and blue, and some designers did not support losing gender-specific colours as moving towards neutral clothing is considered nurture, not nature (Hartmann, 2011). A research study was conducted investigating colour preference based on gender. Both women and men chose the blue colour. However, women were highly rated tested shades more than men. This could be because of women participants' jobs relevant to reddish objects. This statement would support the point that gender-specific colours would be a myth and might be developed intentionally by beneficiaries (Ellis & Ficek, 2001). Colour as a design element was found controversial in terms of being gender specific or not based on culture and time. Cultural colours are evident, signifying cultures, such as red for the Chinese.

3.1.2. Materials and Stereotyping

In this research, it is hypothesised that materials would be dependent on consumer specifications, including gender, age, or culture. To explore and examine this hypothesis, one of the most important and popular search engines, GOOGLE, is used to search for fabrics for women and men in two main seasons, i.e., winter and summer. Moreover, international online shops were used to examine this hypothesis. By exploring the online shops, several materials were found associated with women and men (Table 1 shows the fabric found on Google in this context). For textiles used by women and men in the summer and winter seasons, it is evident from Table 1 that common types of fabrics, namely denim, gabardine, and weed, were used by both genders in both seasons. On the other hand, some fabrics stereotyped women and men significantly in these two seasons. Therefore, it is apparent that fabrics used for several purposes, such as clothing or fashion design, could be employed to signify or model consumers.

Table 1 Gender-specific Fabric in Summer and Winter Seasons

Women winter	Women summer	Man Winter	Man Summer
Bamboo textile	Bamboo textile		
Brocade	Charmeuse	Chino cloth	
Corduroy	Chiffon	Corduroy	
	Corduroy		
Crêpe	Crêpe		Crêpe
Denim	Denim	Denim	Denim
	Dobby		
Flannel		Flannel	Flannel
Gabardine	Gabardine	Gabardine	Gabardine
Polar fleece	Gauze		
Sateen	Georgette		Gingham
	Lawn cloth		Madras
	Poplin		Poplin
Taffeta	Taffeta	Polar fleece	
Tweed	Tweed	Tweed	Tweed
Velour	Voile	Tartan	
Velvet			

Motifs and patterns used in designing women's and men's clothing textiles were investigated by employing and exploring one of the online shops used by purchasers worldwide: Amazon online shop <https://www.amazon.com/>. The investigation used women's and men's shirt products, and the apparel pattern was searched. The following classification was found for apparel patterns: Animal Print, Argyle, Camouflage, Cartoon, Checkered, Chevron, Floral, Fruits, Geometric, Hearts, Herringbone, Houndstooth, Letter Print, Moire, Paisley, Plaid, Solid, Stars, Striped. However, Polka Dots designs are found only in women's shirts. These patterns were then filtered to include only black colour designs and sorted by "Best Seller" to consider first the best products based on the purchasers' views. Five categories of patterns are examined to determine the similarities or differences between women's and men's products, as differences indicate stereotyping. In Animal Print patterns, women's prints are more.

Abstract design elements are highly adopted in men's patterns to the extent that they are presented as points and splashes of colours. While comparing "Camouflage" textiles, it was found that some designs are similar, and others are dissimilar. Women's patterns show more tiny elements, and men's patterns are coloured with dark green and yellow ochre. A significant difference is found in the size of the floral patterns; women's designs are brighter and smaller than men's. In the geometric pattern, men's designs are of multiple colours and larger sizes than women's. For the Stripy designs, women's designs are highest in contrast with more exciting colour combinations. Men's designs are based on thin stripes. Therefore, signifying patterns would consider using a low-contrast design, the large size of motifs used with large spaces in between. On the other hand, the women's shirt pattern is brightly colourful with limited background spaces and tiny soft motifs (see Table 2).

Table 2 Pattern types for women's and men's shirts on Amazon.com

Pattern Type.	Gender	
	Women	Men
Animal Print		
Camouflage		
Floral		
Geometric		
Striped		

4. Driving Forces of Stereotyping

4.1. Cultural Aspects

Designs inspired or based on culture represent visual backgrounds and cultural norms, beliefs, roots, and traditions. In this context, backgrounds could be based on ethnicity, religion or heritage/indigenous. Various aspects would be considered for background stereotyping. Examples of these designs showing a significant range of motifs/shapes and colour themes are represented in Table 3. Therefore, it is evident that these examples of 2D designs representing religious and indigenous designs could be adopted to signify types of products or groups of users.

Table 3 Background-based designs

Background	Design
Religious	 Islamic Designs
	 Christian Designs
Indigenous	 Indian Design
	 Chinese Design

4.2. Marketing and Trends

Fashion trends could be one of the bases for developing a significant stereotype for one of things or persons. This is an approach that marketers adopt to enhance consumer purchase behaviour, signifying a period with definite design elements and principles. Segmentation of population or products to deal with the needs and demand of the targeted consumer and design is one of the marketing approaches and principles.

For clothing design, categorisation was found almost according to product specifications. However, the segmentation of consumers was found due to “gender” and “age”. This is evident from various online shops such as Amazon.com, asos.com and marksandspencer.com. Other categories were linked to consumer purposes of usage, such as beliefs presented by Modest Fashion revealing less skin for reasons relevant to the wearer's personal inclination, faith, and religion. The occasion and environment are evident sources of market segment, such as school wear. Consumer physical attributes in terms of length and size are considered by designers, i.e., Maternity, Petite, Plus size and Tall (amazon.com; asos.com, 2023; marksandspencer.com, 2023).

4.3. Gender Aspects

Gender stereotyping is a general sight or notion about women's and men's qualities. Another aspect of considering gender in the design specifications is “Gender-Inclusive Design”, which is an approach of design providing specifications fulfilling both genders' consumer visual and functional demands and needs. On the other hand, gender-neutral design is non-biased in terms of gender preferences or inclinations. A gender stereotype is a generalised view or preconception about attributes or characteristics or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by, women and men.

4.4. Social Factors

These are factors relating to social status, rank or occupation affecting clothing attributes, including colour, motif and style. For example, Executives wear suits of plain dark colours rather than casual clothes worn by many average employees for office jobs.

5. Conclusions

In this study, it is concluded that Design stereotyping could be an effective method to signify types of products or groups of consumers supporting a company's vision and subsequently inspiring others. There is an inverse relationship between the number of people involved in adopting the design model and its uniqueness, as the increased number of people affected would limit its peaks and enjoyment. Textile, clothing, and fashion design stereotyping, including colour, materials, and motifs/patterns, were found. Special significance is highlighted for colour and its link to gender stereotyping. New terms like “gender-neutral” and “non-binary” have been added to designers' dictionaries. However, there is still much advancement to be made in this area, and there are still a lot of apparently gender-specific impressions and colours. With better consideration, perception and knowledge of gender personalities, more would be carried out in terms of crashing traditional stereotypes of gender-specific links, and the time of the pink/blue split would be approaching its end. If single persons do design trend reports, they are typically more inspiring than those done by groups/organisations. Several factors affect the formation of visual design stereotypes, including social, cultural and marketing reasons.

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