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## **Trends and design: A translation for use and implementation**

### **Tendencias y diseño: Una traducción para su uso e implementación**

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## Abstract

To date, trends are still a generally unknown tool on the part of companies and agents that propose consumer goods. Although in recent years its role has been changing, attracting attention, generating numerous jobs and specialized agencies in the study of foresight, continue to generate mistrust and are appreciated as a superficial element beyond a tool that can propose a clear competitive advantage within a market. This article presents a reflection that explains the process of adoption of the trends, trying to decipher its operation with the aim of improving its implementation, explaining this phenomenon from a social point of view.

**Keywords:** Trends; Design; Prospective; Consumption process; Market opportunity

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## Resumen

Hasta la fecha, las tendencias siguen siendo una herramienta generalmente desconocida por parte de las empresas y agentes que proponen bienes de consumo. Aunque en los últimos años su papel ha ido cambiando, llamando la atención, generando numerosos puestos de trabajo y agencias especializadas en el estudio de la prospectiva, siguen generando desconfianza y son apreciadas como un elemento superficial más allá de una herramienta que puede proponer una clara ventaja competitiva dentro de un mercado. Este artículo presenta una reflexión que explica el proceso de adopción de las tendencias, tratando de descifrar su funcionamiento con el objetivo de mejorar su implementación, explicando este fenómeno desde un punto de vista social.

**Palabras clave:** Tendencias; Diseño; Prospectiva; Proceso de consume; Oportunidades de Mercado

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**Summary:** 1. Introduction. 2. A matter of Social Constructs. 3. Sighting: The Detective's Key. 4. Trends and Design. 5. Establishment of a rhetoric. 6. Getting Agreements. 7. Discussion. References.

## 1. Introduction

Trends are placing the status of design inside society because they are humanizing it and incorporating more and more attentiveness to people. The implementation of the knowledge on trends and how detecting those in the design process allows innovation in a sector that is trying to approach actuality with its constant changes, including new consumption habits. Taking into account society, its transformations and desires so that they participate in the design process exists an increasingly need in order to get a position in the market and make quality designs which meet the most influential social issues.

It is evident that the magnitude of trends acquires in everything that possesses an aesthetic quality. However, information about the trends and how the detection methodologies of these works are quite diffuse. Partly because of the precarious recognition they receive from certain sectors that ignore or do not know trend's influence, and partly because of the high prices that are paid to get

such information, which hinders access to the treatment of content performed in the most important agencies and trend observatories. Until very recently the usual climate that exists around trends and working with them was characterized by wariness (Lipovetsky 2009), and even today remain who consider them a superfluous issue which should not be paid greater attention (Erner 2005). Nonetheless, the market and its complexity demand a new approach in an effort to locate and respond about trends importance. This has caused a change in attitude towards trends, from periods when ignorance of these was absolute to later periods when some sectors began to be more interested in trends (Lecuona 2010), but not without a certain level of misunderstanding at the beginning of these efforts. The goal of studying trends is the acquisition of knowledge that later can be used in a practical way, and to do so there are two methods basically. The first one is intuition, which seeks to develop this irrational and creative ability until turning it into a strategic or expert intuition that allows its implementation in a selective and targeted way (Raymond 2010). The second method is sociology, proposing trends as an epistemological matrix of the collective likings and presenting a trend as the result of the multiplication of aggregated individual choices (Erner 2010).

Currently most companies and design studios -working with product, fashion, decoration or interior-, are aware that trends can be a powerful tool to detect new enthusiasm and new needs of users. Therefore, they employ work strategies that focus on trends and their implementation in the design process to position and optimize resources and competitiveness of the company (Morace 2009), allowing all new intangible values, both during the process and the outcome and including interaction and experience as projects value also. The development of trends has

enabled companies to introduce new concepts that are being transmitted among people and placing them in the center of every design.

Although the economic benefits of designing according to the future demand are evident, the use of trends in a product development also requires the observation and the analysis of industry, becoming this one a constant source for innovation and inspiration to designs and designers. Furthermore, in a homologous way as with the discipline design happens, trends are a message which content is basically social.

## 2. A matter of Social Constructs

According to Rogers (2003), a trend is about change, it means a process and it also stands for innovation. It is a social phenomenon that occurs because there is an arbitrary group of people taking the same decision individually, being this mechanism the one that brings forward the great interest that exists in some sectors around trend and their direction: what people want, which their needs are, which cultural changes are happening, which fads are having more success and why all of this taking place are the main issues that underpin the entire narrative of trends.

Trends give information to us and reflect the transitions that are befalling within society, even moreover the succession of trend after trend in style and likings can conclude the changes and interest of people. They are one of the effects derived from modernity's process (Lipovetsky 2005), from the establishment of democracy in contemporary societies (De Tocqueville 2009), from the emergence of a more immediate and accelerated new temporality totally concerned about

the present (Lyotard 1984), and from the possibility of 24/7 information technology.

The second modern revolution has laid down the foundations for a more open and free social debate, consolidating the liberal society we know and in which trends emerge. They are a tool against the change and the unpredictability of what is to come, mitigating uncertainty raised from context, trends represent equality and identification (Martínez 2015), so some of the most important features of any trend are its ability to be seen, to attract the senses and to be imitated (Vejlgaard 2008).

The fact that several people who are unknown to each other but share a common desire places sociology at the basis of any trend. Their focus on the same liking or style causes that they perform the same selection, being this a sign of the autonomy they have acquired (Lipovetsky 2009). We are free to choose and so we do, making these choices as a representative sample of ourselves, our education and our culture. Shared interests, social relations, interaction between people and the continuing inspiration of the context that leads us to undertake any change, however small it is, cause the emergence of a new focus on something specific in which different people converge, because all of them have the need to belong and the need to differentiate (Appadurai 1996). Those areas that meet the greater mix of people and profiles will be the most favorable places for the emergence of a new trend (Vejlgaard 2008), since they allow observation and adoption of very diverse influences and fancies, reacting to a belonging network in which there is the possibility of interaction among its members. Owning a common interest is so powerful that it is able to unite people very different under its excuse, and when the profiles over a network are diversified the more likely it is that new trends

emerge and thrive successfully, according to the theory of the strength of weak ties (Granovetter 1973).

Who we are, which our identity is, which role we have in society, how we behave, how people around us are, how we spend our spare time, what we do professionally, where we live, etc., are determining factors for each individual election that ends up setting the status of “collective arbitrary” of trends, showing how socialized subjectivity is a yearning for individual difference on which we can build our own identity. So, the main function of trends inside society is social marking, what means to be a mechanism by which people are able to interact combining both processes of distinction and imitation.

Social, malleable and globalized aesthetics establishes its debate through trends, and it is defined depending on the preferences and the needs to belong to a social group with certain features, which can be transmitted to the rest of society in order to generate a communication or a dialogue with it by using those characteristics, fact which means that what lies at the bottom of a trend's sense is social interaction. As if it were a metalanguage able to be alone in a free competition system, trends reflect a process in which nothing rules but democratic opinion. Thereby, “playing trends” is to accept, consume and use codes or social constructs from which you can establish a dialogue that, although arising out individually, only in the social group can be completed its meaning. This is related to the proposal of Rogers (2003), a classification in which the different profiles can be differentiated according to their capacity of acceptance of the innovation (See Figure 1).

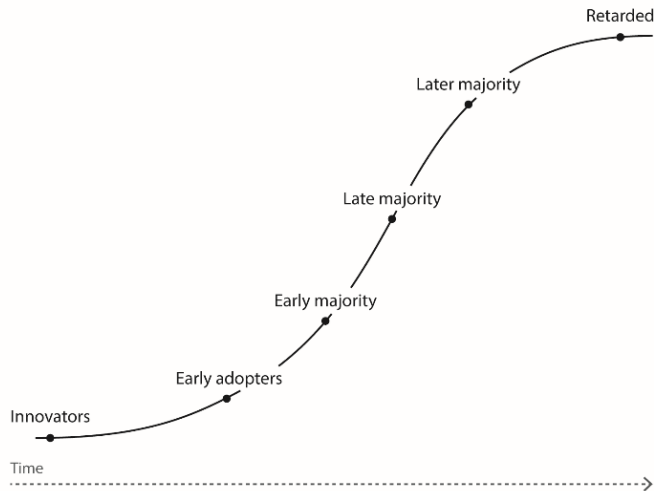


Figure 1. The Diffusion of Innovations model. Adapted from E.M. Rogers (2003).

Furthermore, it is important to mention at this point the relevance that social networks have had in the democratisation of information in recent decades, as well as their contribution to the acceleration of the process of dissemination of trends proposed by Rogers (2003). We currently live in a hyper-connected society in which digital channels play an important and not insignificant role. There are also specific portals where individuals share their preferences and tastes for certain areas of consumption, which serve, by way of influence, to modulate identity consumption through social influence and acceptance (Martínez and López, 2015). Precisely in view of the relevance of these new sources of information and influence, Harari (2019) warns of the impact that new technologies and major disruptions may have on the society of the future. Along the same lines, José Antonio Marina (2021) argues that "When something is transmitted through social networks with great intensity, it ends up becoming



true", which, once again, indicates the current acceleration of the processes of detection, acceptance and democratisation of trends.

### 3. Sighting: The Detective's Key

The observation of the context is the existence's axis of a trend (Veljgaard 2008). The birth and evolution of a trend always depend on the people involved in this process, so detecting emerging trends must begin by observing these people. The collection action of individuals is causing that a specific phenomenon can become a trend (Erner 2010), but for this to happen there must be involved an active and creative process (Veljgaard 2008) in which people take part during the development of new proposals for the market. Continuity in the supply of new products, while maintaining a constant attention of customers, ensures updating trends and increases innovation. Because observation is the axis of the process, both in its condition of action to identify trends and its condition of effect to recognize the facts, it is necessary that the new signals or signs refer to a trend able to attract the senses, ensuring that it will reach all people and may be imitated.

In consequence, trends become an operating social language that allows the ones interested in them construct and reconstruct themselves constantly, so that the designs along the axis of a trend are an original and innovative creation with which people can communicate a personal quality. When greater is the number of trend executors that adopt an innovation more likely it is that such novelty becomes a trend, because trend followers observe these individuals and their behavior to adopt new likes and styles. According to this pattern, an emerging

trend develops in society towards most of people configuring the famous Vejlgaard's Diamond shaped Trend Model (See Figure 2).

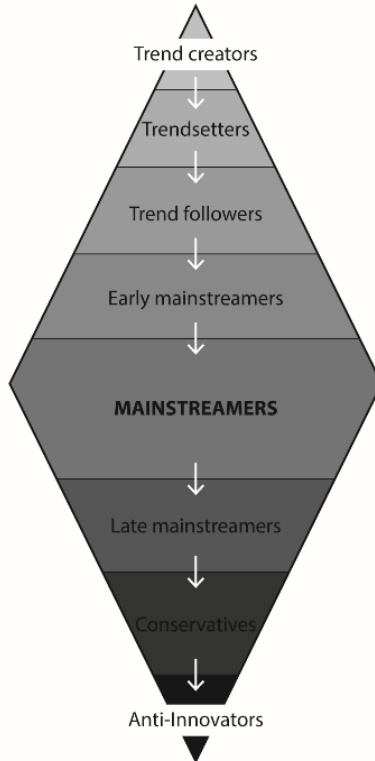


Figure 2. Diamond shaped trend model. Adapted from Henrik Veljgaard (2008).

These phases above must be followed by one of the key stages during the evolution of any trend which is its diffusion in society. The trends dissemination follows a horizontal model whose main symbol to be transmitted is a style rather than a status. For style symbol may exist it must be known, action of the media,

who are currently responsible for sanctioning a trend, thus ensuring its success, as they have a large influence based on the power of information and the desire of people, all of which determine the collective likes of most societies. If signs of a new trend are observed in two or more areas of any industry sector, it's probably a trend that is emerging, and when it is doing so, many media will pay attention and generate content about it.

To this heterogeneity of sectors that share an emerging trend responds the development of cross-cultural research, also called cultural braille (Raymond 2010), which is undertaken to find a meaning of trends. There are many tools, resources, methods and techniques to improve the skills needed to detect and predict trends, but being all these only a supplement to the main strategy: an alert and curious attitude for all around us. This attitude is what allows us to approach the process of a future trend developing after innovators create it. The first step in the naming of the phenomenon, for limit its birth's date and place later in order to know the causes of its adoption. These data are usually recurrent in many examples and depending on the category to which they belong, but there is a direct relationship between the influence of multi-social metropolitan areas and its GDP indicator, making those places more favorable for a novelty to become a trend.

#### 4. Trends and Design

From the point of view of sociology, trends reflect a process of change that can be read as the result of a product development, which is the subject of trends in design. The growing importance of trends .in industrial design has caused the design transcendence beyond the object, thus forming an innovation for business strategies and inside the discipline itself. This way of thinking about design in the

changing global context has included the questioning of all aspects that are directly or indirectly involved in the process or in final designs. Constant hybridization and interaction between agents, factors and disciplines have become an essential material to interpret and implement emerging trends in the design project work. This profession, like many others in the contemporary information paradigm, has found on trends an opportunity for thinking that allows it to ask the questions and to find the answers that are necessary for discipline's development and innovation. The obsession with image and appearance that grew during the 80s and that marked an unreasonable period in which the 'icon products' and 'star designers' triumphed, ended after the crisis that occurred at the end of that time, and then it became a decade in which the designer's reflection and the consumer's deliberation won, thus recovering the ecology values that design had lost until then, while a global identity based on the reaffirmation of diversity was pursued. This self-regulation modified consumer culture, from the mimic model of the 80s that simulated social systems and economic values of that time, to a maieutic model that generate rather than imitate (Morace 1993).

The use of international and global connection networks in which are involved many people and factors for new trends' detection involves an interdisciplinary field of research that currently is sketching new identities and relationships between design, society and people who form part of it Industry, specialized media, trend observatories, trend reports, contextualization maps, etc., are employing networking to function and so they are continuously used to follow new trends.

There is a noticeable difference between detection of an emerging trend and detection of a result derived from the existence of such trend in society or in

a sector of it<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of tracking trends to be implemented in the design process significantly improves dialogue and internal coordination to humanize the design by taking it into political, community and social developments. Through this implementation and subsequent communication of it, design field acquires a new dimension, in which the intangible values of the project, such as its social and cultural values, are the main responsible for any benefits that it can contribute. This design approach to society is directed towards the change in the discipline definition and in the products, which are no longer seen as unique objects to supports a more sustainable model in which design has started to dialogue proactively with trends by locating and using them to develop its creativity and social function.

## 5. Establishment of a rhetoric

According to Lecuona (2010), when at the beginning of the 90s decade specific nomenclatures started to be used in order to classify furniture design that was presented at fairs, it began the rhetoric of trends to exercise one of its main functions: to explain how the link between some certain attributes of furniture such as the color or the material they were made, it showed intangible aspects about the needs and the desires of the users. Subsequently this fact acquired a higher dimension, due in part to the massive media attention, which helped trends

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<sup>1</sup> The perspective with which information is sought is different if the goal is to detect new trends or detect elements that follow a particular trend.

not to reflect a desire of reality itself, but that they became a wish to aspire to.

The sociological transfer to the identification codes of people assumed that new trends should not focus on the individually furniture pieces in an isolated way but began to take into account the context in which they were framed. The cultural environment, domestic spheres, manufacturing processes and conditions thereof, the use of natural resources, user profiles, etc., became the factors that would draw new trends (Torrent and Marín 2015). So, what has been labeled 'lifestyle', the identification code to which we have referred, became the market's criterion and the argumentation for new offerings. Hence, the user stopped being a passive agent as to be regarded as mere consumer trends to acquire greater leadership and interaction with strategic design decisions. The user could identify himself with designs that collected and represented its behavior and critical thinking of society, and this possibility consolidated the current rhetoric of trends as an option for self-realization and intimate and committed relationship with the environment and the context of each person, drawing environments and atmospheres where people really want to live in.

The more complex and diversified new rhetoric is requiring to contextualize each of the signals and the indicative signs of any transformation, need or desire that possess its echo in emerging trends, such as new domestic spaces, new family structures and new forms of leisure (Lecuona 2010), in order to get an accurate diagnosis and a thorough reading of contemporary trends. All the same, the mere knowledge of this information does not guarantee that a trend is properly implemented or understood, because for this the requirement is that the vast amount of data, we have in contemporaneity is filtered and selected under a critical criterion for then think over them and its meaning.

## 6. Getting Agreements

Trends have not only become the process by which we can value the intangible aspects of design, but also have become an autonomous commercial phenomenon capable of providing knowledge about the future consumer's behavior, and therefore they have attracted attention and investment of many industries, especially those related to design. The relevance of trends in the design history and their incorporation into the design process constitute a strategic effort that has to be consistent, resilient and flexible, but must also be able to respond to planning and to future vision using perspectives that translate local and concentrated events to a global and intercultural stage. In our current constantly changing horizon the analysis and trend detection have become critical for designs that seek to highlight and participate in those changes. If you opt for a business strategy that incorporates trends, the aim to target a niche and create an image or attitude of design favorable to this would establish a relationship between them that will influence the information and communication of the project itself, which may be an opportunity for the transmission of concepts and values that are presented on design.

At present, the analysis of social transformations and forecasting trends have to be made being aware of the horizon in which trends arise and the concepts they answer and make visible during its evolution in society. The effort to synthesize in an epigraph all social phenomena in which we are embedded is due to the need to structure the links and the connections between different sectors to better understand who we are, how we behave and where we are going. In this regard, knowledge of trends must be started from the required list and appointment of concepts, both tangible and intangible, which participate in design

by giving a particular meaning. The study and analysis of these concepts has to be carried out through the network of connections and interactions that support such concept and incorporating the different perspectives that lead to the emergence of a trend. The current wide range of products in the market has forced even more to emphasize this in order to get a position for companies and studios while trying to solve the requirements of the mutable landscape in which they are inserted. It is also important to note that a design process that incorporates trends can acquire a new level of conceptualization of the design itself, articulating the discipline and its instruments to focus on the dialogue between design and society, aspect in which resides the innovation of this work opportunity.

The decades of the 80s and the 90s of the last centuries are critical to define the different narratives that trends acquired to consolidate its rhetoric. From reading 'Rustic' (1993) (Lecuona 2000) to 'From abroad with love' (2013-2015) (Observatorio de Tendencias del Hábitat 2013) as emerging trends, it has been necessary a tacit transformation of values taken into account for new trend' detection and anticipation. The increasing relevance of social phenomena within setting trends is a clear demonstration of how they have been contaminated from their context and have moved beyond discussions of physical and formal features to show deeper and more complex configuration concepts. The fact that the commitment to a more sustainable and conscious design began over the past decade is due to the emergence of new consumers more informed and participating who reclaimed these traits in those products in which they would invest money and would be part of their inhabited spaces and their identity (Torrent and Marin 2015). These new consumers who has developed their critical capacities and thoughts when analyzing and selecting what to buy, have been the center to which the market and marketing have looked, and now these consumers have become



autonomous, thanks to the vast information available and their desire to make the act of purchasing and acquiring new assets a leisure model with which to feel identified and self-realized, a model that makes the difference by seeking the strength and safety (Morace 1993). Design trends respond to his new audience that is able to read the effort of the discipline to achieve objects and products with which to identify, however the highest risk assumed by raising these designs is to give up the innovation ability that must also be offered, otherwise it is possible that new designs are not able to attract the attention and interest of new consumers beyond the niche to which a specific trend is directed. Nonetheless, making a commitment to the trends involves realizing that a trend is a guarantee of the efficiency for the industry, a proof of social equality and promise of personal identity (Erner 2010).

## 7. Discussion

The main problem of working with design trends is the numerous risks taken after a bigger corporate effort done to detect changes that could lead to new market opportunities and also report social and economic extra benefits. Not only because of this aspect a debate about the use of trends has been generated, but other options of using them in a less honest and more immediately way have emerged. The risks of taking a commercial strategy based on working with trends affect the professional designers work and other creative professionals who employ them. Originality, creativity, innovation, etc., are not qualities that this organization method supports, precisely because its success lies in taking examples and references which results have already been tested, after implementing new offerings resulting from a creative effort. Another risk assumed by this short circuit

method<sup>2</sup> is working on the speed increasing of the trends succession and so decreasing the duration of them, something that can be very negative for other sectors and for the public, and also unsupportive with some of the most contemporary social problems.

The importance of implementing trends in the design process focuses on changing the understanding of the process itself, promoting a vision that leads design and its function to focus on the problem and its analysis, activity in which it is located any innovation achieved. Trends offer a perspective of design and its evolution linked to a social and contextual reading, allowing design history to give us the opportunity to reread the styles that were gradually emerging as a references and inspiration sources for the current consolidation of preferred likes in society.

During the years that in successive design fairs in Milan and Paris were shaped and tested the different approaches to trends in furniture design and habitat, it went from a fledgling concern about social issues to more specific and certain conditions about life. In the beginning, any effort to assimilate emerging likes to more rational or theoretical aspects was a failure, while the environments descriptions based on how they were perceived by their color or their finishes, had a great success. This example is one of the most modifies until nowadays, where such sociological questions that incorporate different lifestyles not only have been seen again but have become the center around which turns detecting trends.

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<sup>2</sup> Method developed during the second half of the last century in the textile districts of big cities such as Paris' Sentier or Seventh Avenue in New York.

Market and people were responsible for contributing to a new trends reformulation that came from the media. Public demand to market once had already ensured the standards of comfort and quality, partly due to a high competitiveness, derived from the critical capacity that people had acquired to the representation of different attitudes to the life and design through which new decoration styles would become trends.

In this way, design has taken different position in the story whereby it has begun to interact with other social factors and with the user in a more active form. During establishing this dialogue, design has become a powerful tool by which justify lifestyles, certain attitudes, and political positions, as far as it employs trends and incorporates their signals as a communication link in society.

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