

e-forecasting : Spotting Fashion trends in the Age of Technology

MA Dissertation

MA Design Management for the Fashion Industries

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Abstract

Fashion Forecasting is described as “the prediction of the how, why and motivation that drive customers to behave, shop and buy fashion” (Rickman and Cosenza, 2007, p.607). Chasing a trend is searching for a ‘transitory increase or decrease’ (Makridaris, 1990).

The techniques that involve Fashion Forecasting were developed in order to predict consuming changes and add competitive advantage to businesses minimising risks and pursuing innovation.

Although there has been a great progress on Fashion Forecasting through the past 10 years with the development of online websites for predicting fashion trends, there are currently some ‘gaps’ left in the market for these research media. There is also no current academic research specifically in fashion forecasting as an online service managing knowledge, also a reason for investigating the subject.

The main gap identified is the interactivity, which has an extensive scope to explore in order to meet the forecasting main objectives indicated above. Businesses need a higher interactive environment for online fashion forecasting in order to keep pace with new technologies.

This gap raises the risk of predictability for the forecasting system, raising the margin error for predicting trends. This project investigates as well as proposes a format with increased interactivity for online fashion forecasting websites in order to meet current market necessities for this online service.

Statement of Originality

“This MA dissertation is submitted in Overall fulfilment of the assessment required for MA Design Management for the Fashion Industries. No part of the work has been submitted for any other academic qualification.”

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1.0. Introduction Chapter

1.1 Rationale

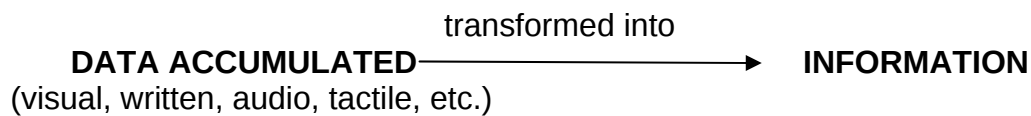
As a business like any other, Fashion Forecasting is meant to meet customer's needs. These needs and tastes change rapidly and it is important that forecasters are ahead of their time looking for trends, monitoring them and fuelling the market with information.

Forecasting is often used as a tool to minimise risk at business (Rickman, T. and Cosenza, R., 2007, p.605) as well as pursue for innovation. It is undoubtedly that it gives competitive advantage for fashion businesses.

There has been a crescent increase of interest for Forecasting systems. This increase is due to the higher complexity of factors which influence consuming, altogether with an increase of the speed of fashion itself. Brannon (2006, p.31) affirms/utters that also the 'global nature of apparel production and marketing' had a significant influence on the increase of importance of Fashion Forecasting for the business of Fashion. Globalization moved by technological advances and shifts on society dynamics drove Forecasting into a more important position within fashion.

Some factors are crucial in order to analyse the increase/growth of importance of Fashion Forecasting for Fashion businesses. First, the forecasting methods builds analysis systems in order to give a support to decision making on fragmented social environments. These analysis systems can build explicit justification for particular actions (Wadel and Sonal, 1994, p.41), a requirement of

many organizations. This is done by organizing data and facts transforming it into valuable information.



Secondly, Fashion Forecasting provides an in-depth analysis on a particular subject. Many aspects are analysed and modelled in order to identify or ‘spot’ a trend. E. Brannon states Fashion Forecasting “consists of tools and techniques applied systematically” (2006, p.7). More than that, it is a result of a cross-sectional research, evolving both objective and subjective tools, also quantitative and qualitative methods.

Society is moving towards a direction of pluralism which shows no way to reduce the complexity of forecasting process. With the increase of the amount of information, the analysis process is becoming more and more complex. One important factor to consider is that it differs from managerial forecasting systems as the past experiences do not tell so much about the upcoming trend. In order to forecast fashion the forward thinkers or innovators are as important as patterns.

The main objective of Fashion Forecasting leads to the third aspect: project future directions acts as a key for planning (Brannon, 2006, p.6). It is a device applied to identify new relationships, pursuing the perpetual novelty. Blumer (1969, in Barnard, 2007, p. 220) states fashion acts as a ‘result of a recurrent process of innovation and emulation’.

Although forecasting is a crucial tool for planning it is also important to state the differences between them. Forecasting is used in order to predict or describe

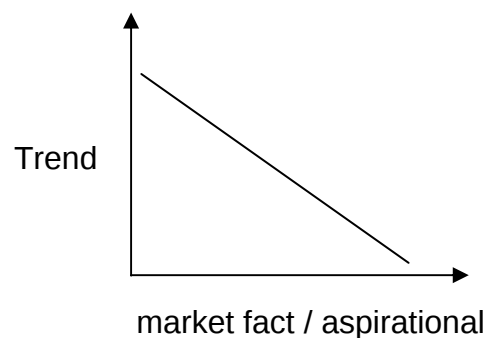
trends. Planning is a different step, which uses forecast for better decision making. Wadel and Sohal (1994, p.41) describes forecasts as inputs to the planning process.

Forecasting which is widely used in several businesses as well for fashion. A consistent trend forecast projects a pattern, a direction, many times the source of the trend and also its length (long or short-term). An example is the 'cocooning', spotted by Faith Popcorn, a long-term trend (describe trend) that can reflect into fashion by increasing the demand for a casual or 'loungewear', with natural fabrics and light relaxing colours. After identifying a worthwhile trend, adapting it into a business model is part of each company's planning duties.

As a business, Fashion Forecasting manages knowledge as a corporate asset (Brannon, 2006, p.9), through a fashion consumer and market scan. Managing information is on the centre of Fashion Forecasting activities.

Information, if steady, has no value. It is a 'raw' material and its exchange and sharing is what adds value to it. A trend is a type of information yet to be accomplished. When accepted by a certain group of consumers starts to lose value as a trend and gains value as a 'market fact' (Figure 1).

Figure 1: **Trend x market fact**



In order to keep pace with the speed of changing trends for consuming, **technology became a key point for trends research**. Currently, there has been a constant shortening of the product development cycle (Brannon, 2006, p.128) and the current competition between businesses is also much more time-based than half decade ago. Adapting Forecasting methods using Internet as a mean to research and also to deliver trends information is a recent phenomenon from the mid-1990s, when the site WGSN (Worth Global Style Network) was launched. The previous media that delivered trends information for fashion seemed obsolete if faced with sites/portals that provided on-time trend scouting. As many other businesses changed their paths, also Fashion Forecasting was influenced by the new technologies characteristics.

Fashion Forecasting websites like WGSN, Trendstop and StyleSight are now a widespread source for trends research among fashion professionals. Not only in means of presentation (eg. less tactile) and more globalized and faster paced. The main innovativenesses provided by these sites are relied on:

- time-saving for research while browsing information
- faster speed on the delivery of the information
- higher storage of data
- user-friendly interface
- daily updates and also
- worldwide based – globalized information

The internet as a media has changed the way Fashion Forecasting has been settled. Although these changes are very important for the Fashion Forecasting process there is still one gap in current sites: market and forecasters interaction. As forecasting research is a dynamic process, it is crucial to have discussions in current Fashion Forecasting sites. However, in spite of this, there is no interactive tool in these sites.

Digital communication brings with a shift in the factors that contribute to competitiveness (DuMont, 1997). In all means, technology adds agility and faster response to market needs. The same analysis can be applied to the forecasting process; adding faster means to searching, analysing and applying upcoming fashion and consumer trends.

But trend in fashion, as its own concept says is the acceleration of consumer indications toward a preference for something (Perna, 1987, p.53). As an indicator, it is supposed to be searched and then monitored. It is ever-changing in the same speed as society modifies. Each trend is affected constantly by several variables and can easily turn into something else or either disappears without becoming real.

In Postmodern times, a trend search is conceived through this process and it is an **opened-discourse** with a starting point but no certain about its realisation. Its predictions become more definite when approaching the trend happening. According to Rickman and Cosenza (2007, p.607) 'the important thing to remember about forecasting is not accuracy but outcome'.

The opened discourse is often seen in internet itself due to its high level of interactiveness. The technologies known as Web 2.0 'provide a platform that

enables and accelerates social explorations, which reach into corners of our culture that mass media have largely ignored' (Jennings, 2007, p.5). According to Jennings (2007), the blog culture is an open form of participation where anyone can contribute, it is a conversation, not a lecture or a broadcast and there is no final word. It is important to state that in this format there are no editors, it is rewarded by recognition and characterized by fellow contributors that share interests.

Baker and Green (2005) define a weblog as 'personalisation used in the internet in a context of chronicling, storing and/or receiving information to a community/group particularly interested in this information'.

Newspapers with fashion sections as The New York Times have a weblog (Cathy Horyn is the in charged journalist for The NY Times) and the response is very high from specialized style readers. So, this is an example of media that explores interactive tools in order to discuss fashion in a professional way and investigate trends. It becomes a forum, where individuals express their opinions on fashion issues.

Increasing interaction within stakeholders in a specialized Fashion Forecasting site could meet the new forecasting dynamics and also open discussions on trends and consumer attitudes. This aspect can assist to detect trends more precisely and reduce risk for businesses.

1.2 Aim

The aim of this project is to investigate the current methodology and devices of online Fashion Forecasting Research and propose a more interactive format.

1.3 Objectives

- Discuss the impact of new technologies on both Society and Fashion Forecasting
- Analyse current service offered by the main contemporary online Fashion Forecast sites
- Compare any possible advantages and efficacy of a higher interactive with less interactive format for online Fashion Forecasting
- Propose a customer-oriented Model for online Fashion Forecasting using higher interactive format
- Investigate if this format would accomplish to raise the predictability of trends

1.4 Methodology

A constructivist epistemological method will be employed in order to study of knowledge as justified belief (Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002, p.34).

Both practical and theoretical implications for this research are based on the Constructivist philosophy in which human being is in permanent change and social phenomena are continuously being accomplished by social actors (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p.20). The Constructivist position has an Ontological basis that implies that social phenomena are in constant state of revision and cannot be regarded as

definitive (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p.21). The ontological basis for constructivism is that the being is never complete, whilst is in constant state of '*devir*'.

This methodology coheres with the Postmodern assumption that online Fashion Forecasting is analysed in this research as an opened discourse and knowledge as well as the trends are build within time basis and constantly change with human interaction.

A triangulated research method will be conducted in order to crosscheck findings obtained from different primary and secondary sources (Bryman and Bell, 2003,p.51). As an exploratory research (Hackley, 2003, p.34) an inductive approach will outline generalizable assumptions out of observations (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p.12).

1.4.1 Primary research instruments:

a) Interviews

o Content-Makers:

- WGSN Central and East Europe Account Manager – Marlena Woolford
- Stylesight Materials Editor – Fernanda Pigatto
- Knowledge Manager – Alan Brompton

o Users of online Fashion Forecasting sites:

- Karla Rey – Focus Textil
- Celestino Garcia – Mango

- Karina Souza – Lojas Marisa

1.4.2 Secondary research Instruments:

Literature review

2.0 The Network Society

2.1 Chapter Introduction

Fashion Forecasting is a Business-to-Business driven to the fashion market with the aim of predicting Fashion trends. Social trends are the main material to be researched in order to predict these movements. The following chapter will discuss the current configuration of society, focus of trends study and further investigate new forms of researching trends for online Fashion Forecasting businesses. Understanding the shifts in society arrangement to Networks as well as in communication exchange will implicate substantial adjustments in the online Fashion Forecasting system as a business.

“Panta rey kay oude meney”

Heraclitus

2.2 Individual versus Community

The term Network society was coined by Jan van Dijk and Manuel Castells, the main theorists on this matter, analysing social changes in many levels in what was prior meant by Information Society. According to Castells, networks constitute ‘the new social morphology of our societies’ and the dissemination of this logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in the processes of ‘production, experience, power and culture’ (1996, p.469).

Theorists on the Network Society as Castells, van Dijk and Harraway claim a reshaping of society and social interaction, stimulated by technological advances and an ever-increasing globalization, impacted by new media and a mode of development based on information and communication.

Information could be compared as the raw material, while communication would be the instrument that drives this change. The need to intensify communication flow and manipulate greater amount of information carried technological advances as a mean to achieve these changes.

Although technology plays a key role in the Network Society, Castells asserts technological development is part of a larger process, and its development and rise of importance is one result of major social changes brought by the search of new parameters of social interaction. Networks are defined by Castells as 'the new social morphology of our societies' (1996a, p.46) where people replace physical contact by a virtual one.

The virtual interaction leads to the Virtual Communities and they are substantially different from the Organic Communities, although the two co-exist as complimentary in people's lives and social relations. The organic communities are bounded by time and space, based mainly on face-to-face communication. Whereas the Virtual are built by people with similar interests and non-limited by "organic" boundaries, as technological advances imposes a consequence of the 'detachment of society from geography' (van Dijk, 1999, p.157).

Van Dijk refers to Burgers in his studies on the network society stating 'the natural environment as a relevant context is replaced by or interwoven with social environments constructed by people' (van Dijk, 1999, p.157), meaning that the

relevance of organic communities is lower now and shared with the virtual ones. Virtual environment offers more options for 'socializing and creating social networks' (van Dijk, 1999, p. 157), being mainly held by similarity of interests.

Online fashion forecasting sites can be then, classified as virtual communities, embracing their characteristics in matters of communication (virtual, via internet devices) as well as being held by professionals who carry related interests. These sites allow forecasters as well as fashion professionals acquire worldwide information on society and consuming.

Virtual networks also made the social environment more objective, allowing the user to position preferences, tastes and choices, upgrading the importance of the *Individual* face *Society* as a whole. So, society becomes a blur interconnected non-linear net, where one can choose different roles in different communities (or even in the same community). The organization of its system is volatile and the relations between members are unstable as well as the connection of a member to a community. If a member of a virtual community decides to quit it in a moment it is done, whilst in an organic type/kind of association the bonding is more stable.

Although technological changes generated/led to other levels of societal changes, it cannot be considered the/a 'cause' of these transformations but yet the main instrument (and media) that made these changes possible. Diverging from what Levitt states in "the Globalization of The Markets" (1983) that technology is the most important factor that leads to globalization, it was in fact, the need for a global interaction what pushed technology forward. When Adorno states in "The crisis of the self in the Age of Information" that 'technology accomplishes nothing by itself' (1994, p.6), he assumes technology as a device, influential only when employed in a

certain social context. The social context meant by Adorno referred to the ascendant acceptance of Postmodernity and its anti-Aristotelian two-valued logic.

Adorno ideas on Aristoteles work also reflect the most well-known critics over the idea of truth as if there is one absolute, non-interpretative which, in Aristotelian thought, would be God. Adorno uses this understanding to undo the idea of totality in any means, as for him; there is no truth that can absolute. Nevertheless, on the human field, Aristoteles do not admit that there is an unconditional certainty, but an interpretative one. According to him, truth is the resulting relation between subject and object. The two-valued logic stated by Adorno is yet, also interpretative, reflecting his own point-of-view on Aristoteles thoughts in order to ground his concepts for postmodernism and also untotally/fragmentation.

When applied to fashion trends, which are the main subject researched by forecasters, should now be seen not as absolute truths, nevertheless as many options yet to be accepted by the market. As the meaning is constructed, spotting a trend is indeed very important, but monitoring the outcomes of a trend gains space in the forecasting process. The constant rise of complexity for studying the development of a tendency pushes the market into a direction to search the individual (subjective) in order to acquire a better picture of the collective.

Yet, the industry is not totally prepared for these shifts as it frequently tries to figure the market as naturalistic and objective. Even facing a *Postmodern Era*, the postmodern discourse is frequently not applied in means to manage businesses led to a post-mod market. Negoita also affirms the postmodern narrative seeks to expose the mechanisms by which this construction is hidden and naturalized (2002, p.1043). So, undressing this construction is part of the trends research process as it

searches in a blurred and fragmented world some possible “truths”/means or directions for the market.

A multi-optional world suggests breaks in the sequential order of phenomena setting, where these options, which could be even called “windows” act as simultaneous choices on/over the same subject. In Fashion as well as in aesthetics, the oppositional and concrete idea of a truth, a choice or a specific trend as a hit over others (or a dominant culture) is again, much more a market need, in order to set up methodologies and frames, than a societal truth. The *Zeitgeist* or the *Spirit of the times* surely exists, but it is no longer as dominant as it was if compared with decades ago.

Coined as *Zeitgeist*, the *Spirit of the times* is said to be the “issue of the changing trend” (Cholachatpinyo, *et. al*, 2002, p.14) or emergence of social needs. According to Blumer (1969, in Barnard, 2007, p. 238), discovering a *Zeitgeist* is dealing with collective selection, as various trends may appear but in order to set a *Zeitgeist* in the fashion process, a collective selection will ‘assemble’ positions of fashionability. It is related to modernity and the ephemeral and is considered to be in constant movement towards novelty as a result of a frequent interaction between consumer and industry.

A characteristic of the current *Zeitgeist* in society is the revising of the dichotomised relation between individualization and socialization. This is seen as a consequence of the Network Society as an individualization of the social sphere and a socialization of the individual sphere. The first refers to fragmentation and the higher opportunity for choice offered by internet. “Customization” became an important tool in order to work out options for searches, purchases and even virtual

relationships as mass less is passive towards social scene. The Net allows innumerable combinations resulted by the binary system, and permits each individual to make his/her individual personal choice. The second is very well characterized by what van Dijk calls 'pseudo-personal relations between sender and receiver', communities where networks are a "meeting-point" of people with similar interests.

The first (individualization of the social sphere) is also an adaptation of the mass-created facts into individual preferences and the second (socialization of the individual sphere) is turning public individual choices/preferences as a mean to interact with the public sphere.

Blogs are a genuine example of a networked individualism. The blogger acts as the sender of a specific message/information, or a sort of "story-teller", that will be accomplished through the process of interaction of readers. The difference of a blog from a face-to-face conversation is that the receiver can act differently depending on motivation of the subject on him or even own-motivation on making his opinion public as well. Studies show that low percentage of blog readers participate with comments. Most of frequent readers still don't participate actively on the blogs. Still they will be able to diffuse/disseminate the content in other means, for instance in his organic communities in face-to-face communication.

Time is another parameter being revised at the network/information 'age' as the clock time is frequently substituted by a socially constructed time. As things are happening instantaneously and simultaneously and linearity is broken, time is compressed into the relations that we prioritize, in the way one personally edits his own path. Time as well as social space (previously cited) becomes more

individualized and the previous 'mythical' idea of time that ruled until the end of the twentieth century has been substituted by fragmented moments and interventions.

Donna Harraway (1991, p.151) refers to 'cyborgs' or cybernetic organism as a 'creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction' referencing to a key point that sets boundaries between man (organism) and machine, the physical dimensions and the non-physical (virtual). Harraway's cyborg is as 'value-free' as Castells's referenced networks: genderless (post-gendered), binary, logical, objective, flexible and volatile. She states in her studies that the cyborg is an 'amalgamation of animal and machine' (in Taylor and Winqvist, 2001, p.169) and it threatens fundamental boundaries that have long structured ways of understanding the world. A body of life which is half machine and works under a binary code can easily be turned on or off, switched from one parameter to another within one click, as the cyborg or the networker decides to 'represent' something else.

The idea of cyborg – integration between man and machine - rise the capacity of interaction among people approximating the virtual world to the real world, as one can simulate some desirable reality. So, man in the virtual environment act as a creature of fiction, and experiences acquired through representing in the virtual world become as important as the real living experiences.

Representation also rises in importance as various options allow one to occasionally *act as* rather than *be*. Representation challenges our previously learnt boundaries, as the last embodies an essential part in our individuality, and also shapes our positioning face society. The dimension of representation is often seen within the web, were physical boundaries are frequently overlapped by the virtual ones.

The current rise of integration between man-machine allows online business to develop a collaborative nature which is already a characteristic that belongs to the media. Representation also must be interpreted so the online forecaster and also the customers (designers, marketers) as fashion agents should see interaction as a potential source for not only spotting but also monitoring fashion change. 'Change' meaning constant revision, permanent *devir*.

In the context of the Network Society, social relations are to be constructed within interaction, and as a consequence, knowledge is as well to be. Social phenomena, as a consequence of social interaction are in constant state of *devir*.

"*Panta rey kay oude meney*" the phrase coined by the Greek philosopher Heraclitus means that everything changes, nothing remains steady. From this idea, he compares our relation with reality with that of a river; as nobody touches the same water of a river more than once. According to Heraclitus's theory, society is even so shaped by energy condensed in many different ways, but as it embodies a non-stable energy which is like the water that cannot be touched twice, it is also never steady. Social phenomena are developed in both real and virtual environments dynamically, in a constant state of change, construction, or *devir*.

So, representation means to show one's choices according to his/her personality and individuality which is under continuous change. 'Representing' in virtual environment is like Heraclitus's idea of reality, never stable neither related to "being" (now) but to "devir" (yet to be). The continuous change in society is the main subject of trend studies, which observes and codes this constant movement of renewing to market purposes.

The ‘place’ where people gather to represent virtually and also interact socially in the internet are called *Hubs*.

2.3 The Hub and Communities

Understanding the idea of “Hub” is key for comprehending the communication shifts, how does it flow in this current moment of networking society and new movements for online interaction, therefore paths online businesses as well.

The word ‘*hub*’ states for “central part of a wheel, from which spokes radiate. Central point of activity: *the hub of the universe*” (Oxford Dictionary). A hub is often described as a meeting point, a ‘place’ where people gather. Online, a hub means the same, a virtual place where people interact in order to exchange experiences, thoughts or communicate. The Hub for knowledge matters could be a reprocess point, where knowledge is often/ cyclically constructed through communication. The hub is therefore, a virtual ‘spot’ where community individuals often return in order to feed them with the exchange.

The idea of Community is shaped by people who are joined together by a common interest. The online communities are referred by Rheingold (1993, p. 5) as “social aggregations that emerge from the internet when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace’. This could be said as a dated concept, which could have been valuable for the beginning of the *Network Era*, but currently the virtual communities coexist with the off-line or organic communities with different characteristics and they still cannot exist without the organic ones, although can exist

independently from them. This is due to the higher instability of the virtual communities and also to the fact that face-to-face interaction still evolves more senses and therefore holds a greater complexity and stronger bonding among participants.

An organic community, as van Dijk states, has better chances of building and maintaining its own culture and identity than virtual community (van Dijk, 1997, p.24). Members of organic communities share more characteristics than in virtual ones. Observations of virtual communities also reveal that members of electronic groups take with them, as a kind of baggage, all rules, identities and mental states they have learned and shaped in organic groups. On the other hand, virtual communities hold together individuals who would have difficulties on interacting if it was not through internet mediated communication.

van Dijk separates the virtual from the organic world while Castells states that these relations can equal society. Castells stresses the perception of network society affirming that it 'disembodies social relationships, introducing the culture of real virtuality' (III: 349). Although challenging, Castells's views over the subject are quite radical and with a lack of a 'holistic' view. Two elements can be complimentary without being considered the same. On the other hand, Van Dijk assumes the existence of the two 'medium' and believes 'social and media networks are contextually embedded, and they will remain that way' (van Dijk, *The One-dimensional Network Society of Manuel Castells*, online article in <http://www.thechronicle.demon.co.uk/archive/castells.htm>).

Nodes are by theory, a point of intersection, where the same curve intersects itself, a spot of linkage. A node is flexible/mobile, doesn't have an address like a

website, can be anywhere in the virtual place, even though it is a point of convergence. The nodes' flexibility also gives to the internet a flexible structure of communication: unstable, fast, interconnected (many-to-many mediated) and so, fragmented.

The tension within the online communication is so “stressed” by the various nodes or points of intersection that communication can blur as well as the signifier always changing within this movement. According to Barthes, the networks are many and interact and its text is a ‘galaxy of signifiers not a structure of signifieds (in Landow, 1997, p.3). This refers to a type of correlation that could be developed in two ways, not only one. The type of communication established within nodding connection is multilateral and reversible.

Is in this nodding connection that knowledge is constructed because the nodes are the elements which build interaction into the internet environment. It is the point of attrition in the net, therefore the point where information is forwarded embedded in context.

The idea of a link will be further developed with the hyperlink, even though this tool is a key to understanding how communication via web differs from other forms of communication. A www link is a ‘connection between some point on one webpage and a point of other web page’ (Pemberton and Shurville, 2000, p.4). Links allows a non-sequential writing or reading; as the text branches and allows choices to the reader. The links' dynamics on the internet allows the reader interact with the text, as he or she has choices of different pathways through the reading process. It enables a constant openness to texts.

2.4 Communication within the context of the Internet

“Every reading of a text enables new meanings. Every reading places a text into a new context.” Jacques Derrida

The communication as a consequence of social interaction has been suffering significant changes in society with the higher accessibility of internet devices. The relations on communication model in hypermedia Computer mediated Environment (CME) like the Web (Hoffman and Novak, 1997, p. 151) are no longer only one-to-one or one-to-many based, but much more like many-to-many based, particularly when regarding business.

The two main ways of communicating in CME classified by Evans (*et al.*, 2001, p.151) are: ‘asynchronous’, consists in e-mail message exchanges and ‘synchronous’, text-based and chat facilities. So, not all communication within the internet can be said as blurring the sphere of time (van Dijk, 1999, p.20), as chats condition both of the parts to be with an online device simultaneously.

Some important consequences of the CME communication are the changes in the behaviour and relations between sender and receiver. As they will be further shown, these facts, when applied to an online business (specially fashion forecasting, that researches behaviour and society) happen to be pushing a constant review in the roles of who’s the trend-setter, who’s the fashion-victim or the researcher. The last can interact directly and simultaneously with different fashion agents. This is mostly due to these shifts on communication with a higher level of interactiveness.

The interconnection offered by the web environment provides possibilities of overlapping the roles of each fashion agent so, looking to the postmodern theory over communication, these agents can rather '*represent*' then '*be*' something. Fundamentally, new technologies permit people to make direct connections with others by the elimination of the middleman, a process known as disintermediation (Evans *et al.*, 2001, p.151). This relevant information will be further developed when discussing forecasting and business-to-business methods.

Without a middleman and with the possibility of having straight-forward communication among different agents (fashion, media and consumers) in the fashion world, the messages start to blur, without the conventional filter hierarchies in the industrial fashion chain.

The predictability of trends within this new reality becomes more complex. For a fashion forecaster is crucial to interact with all agents performing him the role of a "node" in order to spot relevant information surrounded by a very fragmented environment.

This excessive amount of information flow the world has been facing also turns each input and also the interaction moment more ephemeral. An example is the Blog, where each entry is dated and the website is organised with the last post appearing first and so on. If there are two comments after yours in a blog in the same day, your information can already be outdated or invalidated.

With exchange of information increasing so drastically with web communication, the messages also changes in a faster-pace. Derrida stresses the idea over the *contingency of meaning* in CMC (Computer Mediated Communication). According to him, 'dissemination 'is' (about) the play of meanings; an unequivocal

meaning cannot be assigned to it' (Derrida, J., online resource, http://www.cobussen.com/proefschrift/200_deconstruction/270_dissemination/dissemination.htm). From Derrida discussions over meaning a semantic approach (connotation – what does something mean for a specific person at a specific situation), it is possible to relate his concept of dissemination to the fashion discourse and the studies over fashion change.

According to him, the surplus of the meaning can never be stabilized and 'no appeal to context or convention can possibly arrest the disseminating free play of language' (in Taylor and Winkist, 2001, p.103). In CMC the meaning is even more volatile than in organic means of communication, and staying apart of this process can be a factual thread for a fashion business.

The surplus of meaning can also be material for pushing fashion change, as fashion relies on new combinations, meanings or representations to move forward. The forecaster must observe this surplus as a material to explore the idea of newness within the context of the contingency of meaning.

It is important to state the Network Society has never been a technological matter. It has always been a matter of sociological transformation. Technology is an inseparable element from social, economic, cultural and political trends.

Networks work under sort of encapsulated dynamics – according to van Dijk it can be discriminative with non-users, which would configure the 'disqualified', diffusing concepts like in a colonial system as 'not everyone participates equally in exercising the power of change and innovations' (Adorno, 1994, p.6). The last still compares institutional online systems to the colonial regime, 'governing' the changes through communication nets and even 'the lives of those subjects' (p.6).

Through the last decade society faced a socio-technical ‘paradigm shift’ where both micro and macro levels depend on access and ability to manipulate information. Then, a new form of knowledge production is set; laid in ‘the technology of knowledge generation, information processing, and symbol communication’ (Castells in Bell, 2007, p.60).

Michel Foucault’s (1926-84) studies proved before how power can be produced by knowledge, and how this power can designate an order based on what is ‘normal’ or ‘deviant’, using people as subjects of this analogy (in Bell, 2007, p.103). In the trending-hunting process the power of being commercially succeeded over the competitors lays very much on the idea of a time-based knowledge. Based on the code of what would be ‘normal’ or ‘deviant’, commercial or non-acceptable in a certain season or period of time, to hold knowledge and operate it can provide power to an organization to influence others.

Managing knowledge is so, the basis of any Forecasting system – and by this mean Fashion Forecasting businesses are supposed to deliver to fashion Industry adapted information over the selections (yet) to be made by consumers.

As a business which sells specific knowledge expertise, the online FF systems suit Castells’s (1996, p.17) concept that the action of knowledge upon knowledge itself is its main source of productivity. Representing a macro level of society it constantly builds knowledge by human interaction through computer mediated sources. As their product is information and knowledge generation, this is a business designed to meet the new mode/configuration of society.

It is important to state that these shifts in society and the rise of importance of information exchange are factors that influenced opening a market for online

forecasting businesses. The search for specific information over current topics related to the business and market opened opportunities for new ventures meeting these needs.

Still Castells states in the book *The rise of Network Society* (1996, p.67) 'the emergence of new technological paradigm organized around new, more powerful and more flexible information technologies makes it possible for information itself to become the product of the production process'. So, online Fashion Forecasting as an information-producing device is part of a 'new industry' that could no longer exist in other previous period of time, but the current. The product sold is not only the business expertise, but also time-saving and the opportunity of sharing information with competition. Even the competitors are part of a community in this case. The 'fear' of not accessing important information that is known by your competitor is also a motivator towards accessing this category of site/service.

2.5 Fashion Forecasting: Trends and Fashion Cycles

2.5.1 Trends Research

In order to discuss the trending process it is relevant to have a broader comprehension of the term. Chasing a trend is searching for a 'transitory increase or decrease' (Makridaris, 1990). A trend is a type of information yet to be accomplished; Barbara Vinken has a relevant point-of-view over trends relating it to performance as according to her, Fashion is defined as 'the art of the perfect moment, an immediate future' and its realization is, 'at the same time its destruction' (Vinken, 2005, p.42).

So, the act of performing fashion would be confirming an increase and finalizing it as a trend itself.

The trending process always deals with looking forward, through insights that predict the future for fashion as performance and also as consumption. The role of forecasters in this context is to look ahead of their time searching for the increases or decreases in fashion market balancing the incoming information with a probable collective selection.

The evolution of the trending process can be compared to the dynamics of a discourse, as it also is a 'meaningful passage of language that reflects the social, epistemological and rhetorical practices of a group' (Taylor & Winkler, 2002, p.101). The individuals within a group use aesthetical elements of fashion in order to express themselves. Individuals are immersed within a wider context – represented by society (that configures a macro level), and express themselves through visual codification inherent in fashion objects. In a micro level, individuals pursue the personal needs even within the symbolic atmosphere they are immersed. The expression of an individual style through fashion is made under a social context and codes, always a result of the interaction of the *Zeitgeist* and the individual expression.

In addition, Baudrillard referred to fashion as a "compulsion to innovate signs... apparently arbitrary and perpetual production of meaning – a kind of meaning drive" (Baudrillard, 1981, cited in Barnard, 1996). The relation between fashion and meaning is vast and has many relevant points for discussion, so in order to frame the study, the guidelines for the discourse analysis speech will be the

trending process and also the shifts the technology web in postmodernism has been accomplishing into trends research.

Its cycles constantly evolve *innovation, dissemination* and *selection*.

For the fashion business researching trends plays a central role as it establishes parameters for collection planning and brand directions. In other words, it could be said as a 'didactic' form of organizing information to be accomplished and applied for fashion industry.

The current study of Trends is relied in a cross-sectional research process, which includes mostly qualitative methods. The main focus of the Forecasting studies is the *Fashion Change*, which are the inputs for changes and how it will be assembled in social context.

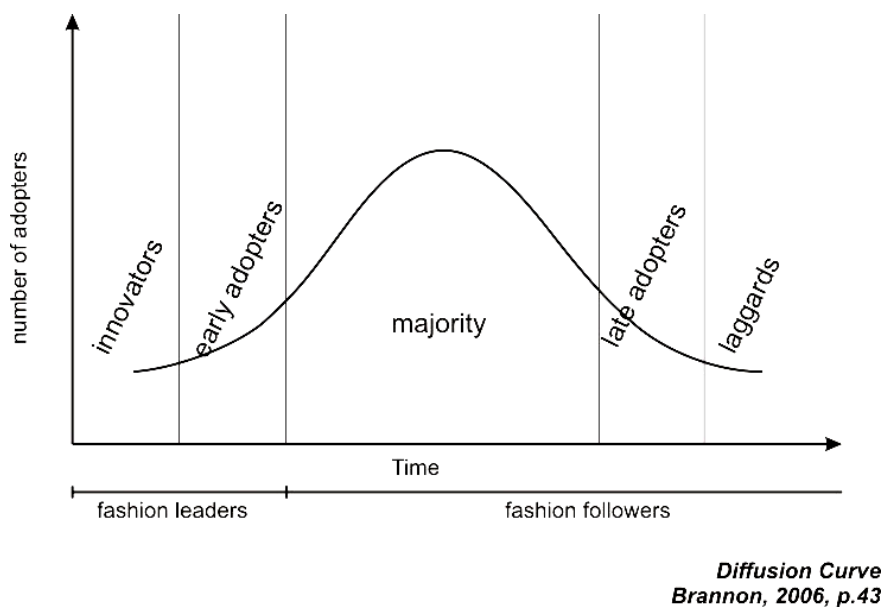
Due to the ephemeral nature of fashion, its dynamics is always pushed by the frequent search of novelty. Blumer declares 'the feature of 'modernity' in fashion is especially significant' (in Barnard, 2007, p.239). Being modern for fashion means embrace innovation at a certain period of time, so modernity is always denominated by a time. The cycle of a fashion trend can be either a long term or short-term, but in either ways it reflects a 'time' within a context and also has a duration. Some trends can appear and not even be adopted while others can succeed into a long-term basis.

The context of a fashion trend is also important in order to adapt future products into customers' needs. Some trends can be very strong for a specific region or group of consumers, like luxury market, but not adopted by others. The current trends, as a part of the present postmodern times are highly fragmented as

well as other fields of society, so contextualizing is crucial in order to focus a trend into a consumer necessity or aspiration.

In the development of a fashion cycle there are different levels of innovation adoption, which also rates dissemination. One of the main theorists on the subject, Everett Rogers (2003, p.83), segmented innovation adopters into five categories:

Figure2: **Diffusion Curve** (Brannon, 2006, p.43)



- (1) *Innovators* - launch new ideas, fashion cycles begin with innovators, they take more risk into adopting a trend in the very beginning.
- (2) *Early Adopters* – are the first true diffusers of a trend, opinion-formers, not as rash as innovators
- (3) *Early Majority* – Tend to adopt an innovation a little quicker than the majority of the population

(4) *Late Majority* – Adopt innovation through the collective selection, as the innovation has been already settled, the acceptance of a trend is usually due to peer and marketplace pressure

(5) *Non-adoptors* – some group do not follow trends at all, consequently it is not a focus of the study, but significant to consider as a share of the market.

It is also important to state that the same consumer may react in various ways according to different product categories. An innovator for clothes can also be a non-adopter for accessories. So, the trending process will only show a 'window of possibilities' (Brannon, 2006, p.12) of what can become later a market reality.

Seeking modernity is part of the role of fashion innovators as this becomes a push factor towards fashion change. Blumer (in Barnard, 2007, p.237) states it is the potential fashionableness of a design what gives status to the innovators to pursue adopting a new style.

After Innovators, the process follows with the diffusion of the new styles and collective selection is what shapes a successful trend. Roger's idealization of the diffusion process in the early 1960's (figure 2) illustrates a curve of acceptance of innovation in fashion. Although it is always referred to an individual purchasing choice, the collective 'taste' has a central role for adoption of innovation it is set through social interaction.

The relation between Individual Expression versus Group Interaction shapes innovation adoption as fashion as it is seen 'within the context of the group behaviour'. It is characterised by a tension-created ambivalence between an

'individual's wish to preserve a semblance of individuality and the contradictory need to signal membership with a larger group' (König, 1973, in Lynch and Strauss, 2007, p.59). So, for fashion change, the acceptance of a fashion trend both links one to a social group and also defines us as individuals.

The Zeitgeist is then, a result of the interplay between individual's desire to fit and to stand out, between imitation and differentiation. Even so, it is relevant to state that when a trend becomes a fashion fact/market reality it is no longer more a trend becoming a performance, and almost belongs to the past. So that is the main reason why Fashion Forecasting studies are becoming more constructive for market needs.

Nevertheless, the means of social interaction have been changing as described in the Network Society chapter. A point of convergence of the main theorists on postmodern social studies related to technology is the need for 'connection'. A network can be established just if there is a connection between two points interacting. It is also presumable that there is no virtual network that assemble the totality of humanity, what makes them 'wary of holism' (Harraway, 1991, p.151), non-totalist, fragmented and so, relativist. Once more, similarities and differences is what assemble human relations within a network. This point of view leads us to thinking trends studies from a 'non-conclusionist' perspective.

2.5.2 Trends Research and new Technologies - in CMC (Computer Mediated Environment)

The current studies on trends also follow the same perspective as cause and effect within the interaction and what produces knowledge or, in other words, constructs knowledge through information and data manipulation. This manipulation (in business, 'management') is often set through communicating in collective interface.

Both online business-to-consumer (B2C) interaction as well as in business-to-business (B2B) communications model is a many-to-many mediated. Consumers can interact with the medium and in B2B basis, many should be able to interact as well, as this is one of the media's character. In the last, which is the main focus of this research, firms can provide content to the medium and target market can provide commercially-oriented content to the medium.

In this mediated model, the primary relationships are not between sender and receiver, but rather with the CME (computermediated environment) with which they interact. In this new model, information or content is not merely transmitted from a sender to a receiver, but instead, mediated environments are created by participants and then experienced (Evans et al, 2001, p. 151).

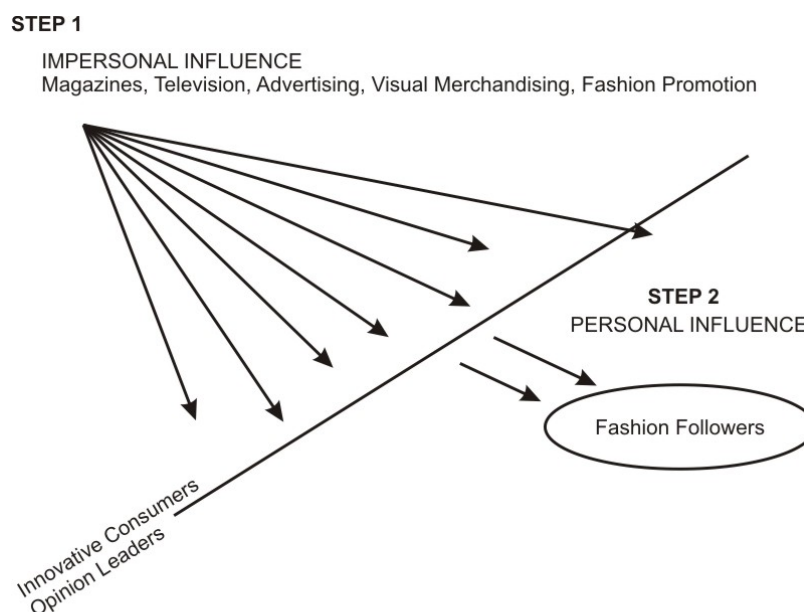
In the context of Network Society, the multimodal system needs *Hubs* where not only the content will be assembled but also perform as a virtual place where the participants can interact.

New technologies permit people to make direct connections with others by the elimination of the middleman, a process known as disintermediation. van Dijk also

stated before the process known as aggregation, where the like-minded come together irrespective of time and space issues to form groups and a variety of networks.

A Fashion Forecasting Website works as a point of convergence of a Network with a specific interest on Forecasting. The transmission of new ideas throughout this media has been changing the diffusion of innovation. Brannon still uses Rogers's (1962) Innovation Diffusion Model, see figure below:

Figure 3: **Innovation Diffusion Model** (Brannon, 2006, p.55)



Brannon, 2006, p.55
Figure 3

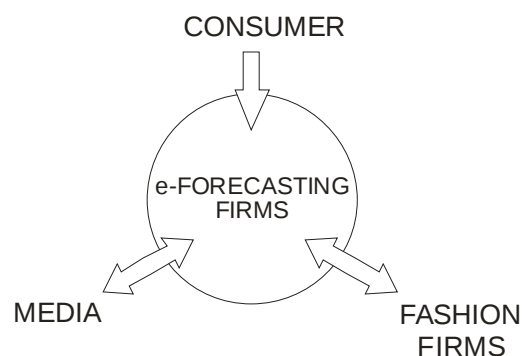
According to this model, diffusion occurs in market in a two-step flow; first the impersonal influence takes place coming mostly from mass media and marketer-

based information to innovators and opinion-leaders. The second step depends upon face-to-face influence, when innovation moves from fashion innovators to followers.

Now, with World Wide Web, the diffusion can reach any person and the roles are ambiguous towards innovation. The impersonal influence can become a personal influence as technology breaks barriers for communication and exposure, leading to a higher accessibility of information on trends, in a process called 'disintermediation' (Evans *et al.*, 2001, p.151). Information now is much more democratized, and disintermediation leads to a dynamic, two-way based communication among all fashion agents.

The complexity of non-linear system of predictions in fashion now facing a higher accessibility the internet provides makes independent agents (consumers, fashion firms, media) 'interact to each other in many ways' (Brannon, 2006, p.135). This scenario, information exchange between functional groups can increase the quality of the forecast. The online Forecasting sites are able to act as a Hub bringing fashion agents into interacting, discussing and monitoring future trends.

Figure 4: e-forecasting Firms as “hub” – point of convergence and interaction of information exchange



The many-to-many interaction happens simultaneously as shown in the figure above, with inputs from the consumer and two-way exchange among other agents. The difference between this model and the previous consists in the convergence point. When the e-Forecasting firms act as a **Hub** where fashion agents interact in order to investigate trends, they are able to manage knowledge with more efficacy as they become “mediators” of the process.

3.0 Online Forecasting as a service

3.1 The Forecasting Business

Forecasting information and analysis are often used as a support for decision making. The literature review indicates that the two main goals of forecasting as a business are: provide risk reducing and also innovation pursuing. (Brannon, Morrell, Rickman and Cosenza). Although there are both online and off-line forecasting services which are ruled by different communications methods, they act as an 'input for planning' (Brannon, 2006, p.6).

Even though the data is difficult to assert, (as the main online fashion forecasting websites are not PLC, raising the objections to a precise analysis on the figures) there is evidence demonstrating the current Fashion forecasting sites have been increasing their share in the market if compared to the offline competitors. The first represent acquiring information in a faster-paced basis due to the nature of the media, with regular updates (daily) and also a worldwide basis, with globalized information. The fashion industry changes are in an ever-increasing pace in order to meet social needs of pursuing the feature of modernity (Blumer, 1969 in Barnard, 2007, p.239).

The consumer's ever-changing needs have pushed fashion industry into a focus towards time-based strategies of competition. It is currently vital to have the right trend at the right time adapted into a specific market, as trends are 'meant to have a sense of timing' (Brannon, 2006, p.30). The delivery methods of Fashion

Forecasting websites such as WGSN and Stylesight need to meet this ephemeral character of fashion.

3.2 Online vs. Offline Service

Online Fashion Forecasting is then, a **service** (or an *e-service*) offered to other businesses in order to 'chase' consumers ever-renewing tastes. According to Lovelock and Wirtz (2004, p.8), e-services are a group of information services that has built strategy entirely around Internet access and delivery.

Services consist of 'performances rather than objects' (Lovelock, 2004, p.127) carrying characteristics as abstractness and generality, which makes it more difficult to evaluate quality of service or customer's satisfaction. Intangible elements – including labour and expertise of service personnel – dominate the creation of value in service performances (2004, p.10).

Customers' perceptions of value will lead to levels of satisfaction when comparing what is needed to what is delivered. A gap between the two could be easily placed in a context where knowledge is the core of the offered service. The abstractness of knowledge creates barriers for measuring effectiveness of the service and transforming this asset into a tangible element. Dealing with this abstract facet and a very limited level of tangibility of the service is indeed, part of the business.

The nature of digital products such as a website for Fashion Forecasting has both a distribution process and the actual 'commodity' as facets within the digital

environment (Rowley, 2008, p.521). This fact can be a threat for evaluating the right service to deliver as customers have difficulty in fixing notions of “value” in relation to digital content.

Indeed, comprehending the nature of ‘electronic information products’ (Rowley, 2008, p.522) is crucial for further analysing the performance of current Fashion Forecasting Websites. Characterised as a digital product, these sites offer information and knowledge on fashion and consumers. Managing the knowledge is the core of their competitive factor. As an intangible asset, knowledge cannot be easily measured but still it is proved as being a differential and ‘generating competitive advantage’ (Hallawi *et al.*, 2006, p. 386). In recent years, many organizations have come to realise that information has an impact on almost every activity and must therefore be seen as an important asset.

3.3 Managing knowledge networks as an asset

Bocij *et al* (2006, p.28) states ‘knowledge can be thought of as the combined result of a person’s experiences and the information they possess’. O’Dell and Grayson (1998, p. 100) define knowledge to be information in action. As an alternative, Davenport and Prusak (1998, p.42) defined knowledge as a ‘fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information and expert insight that offers a framework for evaluating and integrating new experience and information’. In fact, knowledge is proved to be a relied upon communication process. Currently, where network society builds new relations within the social order, the rise of interaction through CME (Computermediated Environment) influences knowledge and its

dynamics. As a device in constant action, which is always renewed, knowledge is in constant stage of revision. Rethinking the process of managing knowledge for Fashion Forecasting sites could be a differential yet to be acquired for these businesses.

Knowledge Management has an important role within any organization, but particularly for the e-business since success is critically dependent on staff knowledge and information exchange and how to shape these processes lead to the best deliver customer value.

Barney (2001) developed four criteria for assessing what types of resources would present sustainable competitive advantage in a service. These were value creation for the customers, rarity compared to the competition, inimitability, and substitutability. When analyzing the current forecasting websites though these four aspects are very similar in the main online forecasting services. After the great advance WGSN have made and the innovativeness it offered to fashion businesses, other websites as Trendstop or Stylesight leveled their services into a very similar basis to WGSN. The main competitors became in the last two years very similar in their service offer, which increase the competitiveness and decrease the rarity rate, turning all these businesses more easily substitutable.

Although knowledge exists in many means, for Fashion Forecasting as a business should be understood as a managed and 'profitable' device to be delivered by a specific service.

Providing knowledge through digital content as a service (e-service) has several particularities that are not found in services outside the internet context. The

nature of digital content is different in certain ways as it will be analysed in the following section. It is indeed important to state these differences in order to evaluate the current methods for online Fashion Forecasting and propose a service compatible with customers' needs.

3.4 E-services and the digital content

In services marketing literature Bateson (1992, p. 49) indicates the inseparability of production and consumption (they happen simultaneously) which makes the buyer an integral part of the consumption process. In the case of the online Fashion Forecasting site, it does not happen simultaneously, but almost (as the updates happen just before the content is available for accessing), and the frequent renewals are in the core of their service offering.

The frequent updates shorten the delay between consumption and production, so it causes production to be highly interactive. Inseparability also means, according to Bateson (1992, p. 49) the producer and the seller are the same entity, making it easier for the producer to acquire information on the customer, from a primary source.

Another aspect of this type of service is that it lays on a long-term relationship between the consumer and the provider, characterised by a functional interdependence between these two parts (Coviello, 2001, p.383). Customer satisfaction in this case is crucial for service maintenance and consumer loyalty. In a business-to-business as Fashion Forecasting this relationship tends to last many 'seasons' or years. Cooperating on a regular basis raises the quality of service

provided as the consumer who can take part in the process of producing and managing knowledge.

Castells and Harraway were both cited in the Network Society chapter discussing the 'value-free' nature of CME (computermediated environment) (section 2.1). This opinion is shared by Rowley, who states that 'digital content has no intrinsic value' (2008, p.524). This statement is important as it drives us to realise that its value depends upon its context and its use by particular users on specific occasions, so it cannot be determined in advance (p.524). This fact links *inseparability* with *context*. The relevance and reliability of delivered information from forecasting sites must be shaped/focused on the context. If the information delivered by these sites is not relevant enough or reliable, the service will no longer be needed after some time has passed.

The discussion over trends research moves further as the amount of information delivered today is so massive by any of these sites that a part of it will definitely be accurate. The difficulty lies on knowing exactly which trend will be a market fact and which will not. However, an effort towards editing and cooperating with users could probably raise the precision of the prediction. Making the most of the interactive features of the digital content that enables cooperation and information exchange (provider-consumer) is a window for better service results.

The last element which characterises the nature of digital content influencing directly the quality of service offering is 'homogeneity' (Bateson, 1992, p.51). This is a point of conflict, as services are meant to be as customised as possible as concerns the potential for 'high variability' (p.51). It is often described as a one-to-

one basis, in other words, adapting the service into the customer's needs. However, digital content is 'at the extreme end of the homogeneity spectrum' (Rowley, 2008, p. 525) since each copy is identical to each other copy, and to the original. The communication is also many-to-many based, so a personal information delivery is not practiced by any of the forecasting sites. The divergence in this case creates also a homogenous trend study for the market and therefore a homogeneous service for companies with different market positioning and necessities.

3.5 Strategy in Services Marketing

In order to deliver a good service, strategies for services market were framed by Zeithaml and Bitner (1996, p.119) as including five main dimensions: *reliability*, *empathy*, *responsiveness*, *assurance*, and *tangibles*.

According to Malhotra *et al* (1994, p.7), service *reliability* means performing the service consistently and accurately. He also states in e-services both hi-touch (performance of the service personnel) and high-tech (technological superiority and dependability of the process by which the service is produced) approaches are the two core elements for a reliable service. For online Fashion Forecasting not only reliability but also the consistency of the delivery of information and knowledge depends on both *high-tech* and *high-touch* factors.

When managing knowledge as content on a Fashion Forecasting website, reliability is crucial towards customer's loyalty. The market expects just-in-time trend updates in order to supply fashion industry with novelty. Instead of being a plus in the service provided, the business performance depends on recurrent updates, this

characteristic turned into a standard component of the core service. Not anymore a differential as it used to be less a decade ago, when this kind of business was emerging into the fashion market.

Performing rapidly and delivering accurately are then, two basic elements for a competitive performance. As current Fashion Forecasting Websites services are purchased through subscription in order to get access to information and knowledge, the nature of the access leads the business to be performing as a virtual community. As it has been stated in the previous chapter, virtual communities are mainly built by common interests of their members, in this case, fashion content which is the central subject and consists the main interest for joining the 'community' or, in other words, for subscribing to the website.

The highly qualified audience of these sites formed by professionals is a benefit for the business itself. Knowing the customer generates *empathy* for service, as business-to-business, the post-selling for Fashion Forecasting services is very important, and the feed-back given by customers can change the course of a service. The largest online fashion forecasting businesses as WGSN include post-selling and relationship with customers as top activity in order to retain the customer.

Responsiveness is strongly related to *empathy*, it emphasizes 'attentiveness and promptness in dealing with customer requests, questions, complaints and problems' (Zeithaml and Bitner 1996, p.121). Responsiveness also captures the ability to customize the service to customer needs, which can represent a fragility in Fashion Forecasting websites, as the standardised format doesn't favour the prompt response. WGSN takes months to adapt the service into an upcoming need, from the development phase until the launching. In many cases, the changes in a website

also mean interfering in the way the content is presented, which could change the interface. In this case, clients could have access to tutorials in order to use properly the new benefit.

Assurance represents ‘the customer’s trust and confidence in the service’ (Bateson, 1992, p. 499). For online Fashion Forecasting, this dimension refers mainly on delivering on-time information covering trends worldwide. The trust of customer’s on these websites is based on the objective of the service itself, as this is one of the primary materials used for their everyday work.

The *tangibles* are what a customer can see, hear and touch (Bateson, 1992, p.499). Usually, the physical environment provides tangible evidence of a firm’s service quality or either the appearance of the contact personnel. Applying to the analysed websites, the real tangible fact is the personnel as all the rest is done online.

The understanding of service dimensions show that quality is not perceived by the customer as a ‘unidimensional concept’ but yet multiple factors (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996, p.118). Nevertheless, even if the provider is aware of what involves quality in his service, some gaps may occur within this process. In order to avoid these gaps, strategies must be set focusing the client’s satisfaction and loyalty.

The next section emphasises the importance of being responsive to gaps that have been occurring in the services offered by current Fashion Forecasting websites. This analysis will be applied in the proposed model for Online Fashion Forecasting further on.

3.6 Theoretical Framework of Gap Analysis

Lovelock emphasizes that relationships in a business-to-business service are 'dependent largely on the quality of the interactions between individuals of each of the partnering firms' (2004, p. 367). The relationship in an *e-service* should not be thought of as one-to-one, but in a many-to-many basis, due to the nature of the media. In this case, acting like a *Hub* bringing customers to participate into the production process through raising the interactivity could not only improve the predictability system of the site, but also strengthen the bond between the parts, increasing loyalty.

Customer loyalty relies mostly on satisfaction. At present, satisfaction is meant to be the relation between customer's expectations and his perception of the delivered service. Unlike the goods market, where the customer evaluates predominantly the finished product, in services the customers take part during the process of the service as well as its outcome. Customers expectations are, according to Zeithaml and Bitner (1996, p.37) 'the standards of reference point for performance against which service experiences are compared', meaning they are often formulated in terms of what a customer believes should or will happen.

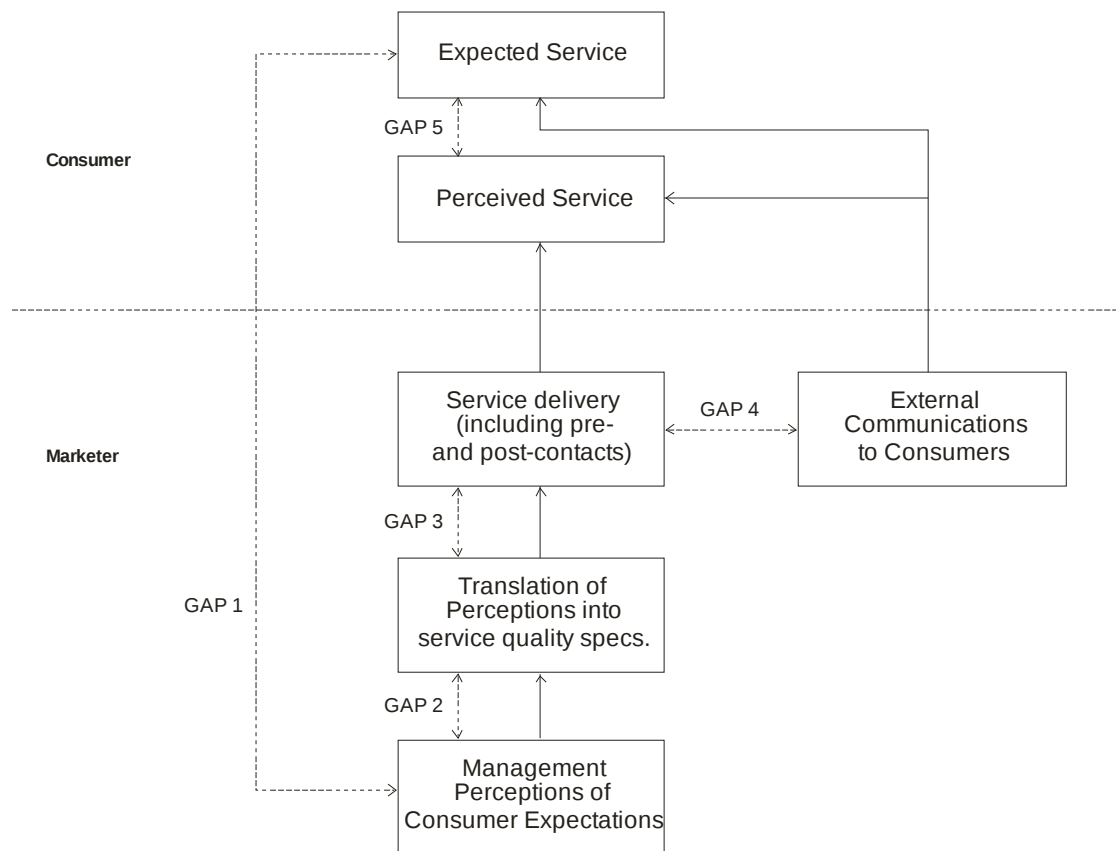
The perceived quality, based on 'customer perceptions of benefits received versus cost in terms of time, financial and effort' (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996, p.38) will influence directly on satisfaction as the offered service must at least meet consumer's expectations. Understanding customers' service expectations is a prerequisite for delivering superior service because they are implicit performance

standards that customers use in assessing service quality (Parasuraman, 1998, p.317).

Nevertheless, during the process of providing a service, some gaps may occur between what the customers want and what they perceive they obtain, as shown in the following chart. This chart emphasises 'gaps' between expectations and satisfaction and its analysis will be used for further recommending actions to improve online Fashion Forecasting service and improving the current service offer.

Figure 5: **Conceptual Model of Service Quality by Parasuraman and Zeithaml** (1985) (in Managing Services Marketing, Bateson, 1992, p.498)

A Conceptual Model of Service Quality



Source: Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V., and Berry, L. (1985) in Bateson, 1992, p.498

The conceptual model of service quality by Parasuraman and Zeithaml (1985) (in Managing Services Marketing, Bateson, 1992, p.498) shows different types of gaps between expectations and satisfaction. Briefly explaining:

GAP 1: *What managers perceive as the expected service is different from what is indeed expected.*

Services experiences are often formulated on what a customer believes should or will happen (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996, p.38). For example, if a fashion designer access a fashion forecasting website they expect to experience a future

view on consumers' trends, shaped by reliable information, accurately edited, high quality images from various subjects that will give enough material to support design and managerial decision making.

In order to fulfil the first gap it is crucial to make the most effort to understand what the customer wants. In this stage, listening to the customer and creating a direct interaction facilitates the understanding of their needs. Post-selling and relationship marketing is needed to perform better, and understand the renewing expectations.

GAP 2: *Management perceptions of customer expectations are not well translated into adequate methods, so resulting actions don't meet customer needs.*

The Gap refers to designing the right service as well as 'translating their understanding of customers' expectations into service quality specifications' (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996, p.41). Sometimes a firm does not believe customers' wills are the best specifications for the service, or even is held back by inadequate methods. If applied to the online Fashion Forecasting context, not only the website managerial team take part of the process but also the ones involved with developing the right tools for researching trends, as the media is shaped by fast moving technical processes.

GAP 3: *The problem lies on properly delivering the service. Even with a good method, poor service delivery may cause dissatisfaction.*

The delivery can be connected to external as well as internal customers, as the internal figure departments that interact directly with customers (eg. selling and post-selling) acting as a link between external customer and the firm. In Fashion

Forecasting websites there is no middleman on the service delivery, as it is done through the internet, produced by (internal) content makers and evaluated by editors before it is delivered. Although there are the internal customers, who sell and work on the service maintenance, the main channel for service delivery is the website itself. Even though, a Gap can be set in this context, which will be indicated further on this chapter.

Synchronising demand and supplying capacity is also a delivery gap, as services are quite difficult to assess due to perishability (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996, p.45), it is difficult to picture the exact capacity of a services company. In online Fashion Forecasting context, the media is a facilitator as it provides many originals derived exactly from the first model. The material seen by every user can be considered an original (or an exact copy of the original), as it has been previously stated in the section 3.4. The delivery capacity is quite unlimited, what will limit the delivery is the character of the service, since the product business intelligence, is supposed to have a certain level of exclusivity.

GAP 4: *Also called “promises gap” by Bateson (1992, p.502) concerns to what the firm promises to deliver and what it actually does deliver to the customer.*

The lack of matching performance to what is promised is indeed a cause of a gap. According to Zeithaml and Bitner (1996, p.46) external communications can ‘affect not only customers’ expectations but also customers’ perceptions of the delivered service’. Promises made by a service company through external communication raises expectations which can be reliable or not.

Nevertheless, customers' perceptions also can be enhanced with training internal customers (any employee with direct contact with external customer) of how communicating externally and also educating external customer on how to have a better use of the service.

3.7 Closing the Gaps

In order to fulfil these gaps, the provider must develop a customer-driven strategy for planning, communicating and also constantly re-evaluate the quality of the service provided. In Fashion Forecasting firms there does exist a post-service relationship with customers, but in a short future a gap can be set up consisting GAPS 2 and 3.

As interaction increases in CME all e-services must be very well blended into the media environment. Customers want to interact in a frequent-basis and this interaction not only can help to predict trends but also can facilitate building a more personal customer relationship.

The current sites for fashion forecasting oscillate between old and current methods, which does not completely fulfil expectations, and may cause future dissatisfaction.

Old methods consist in applying off-line communication techniques in an online environment, as a one-way sender $\longrightarrow$ receiver while in CME, as it was stated in chapter 2, the communication is based in a two-way sender $\longleftrightarrow$ receiver due to interaction. The current sites just provide information, act like a sender, load

information within the sites but don't have any channel for receiving back the impact of the information sent.

3.7.1 Gap 2 – Service Design

Designing the right service can also mean updating, revising and redesigning constantly the service offered to meet upcoming customers' needs. Web environment is very dynamic and pushes more regular renewals.

On one hand is seen a higher standardization of the service as all customers access the same information from the subscribed forecasting sites. On the other hand, these services design should contemplate a higher effort on adapting the sites into an updated working tool for forecasting. This means that the environment of the sites have many opportunities which have not been making good use of. Brannon states 'continuous information sharing between functional groups in fashion increase the quality of the forecast' (2006, p. 12), meaning a good forecast is assumed to be assembled through process of information sharing.

In order to design the proper service meeting users' needs, sites should increase interactiveness with the intention of intensifying communication among fashion agents and not only using the media properly but also improving the feature of the forecast.

The Gap 2 has been observed in all current Fashion Forecasting websites that work under subscription format, as their service is designed on a one-way based

communication and they should redesign the service adapting to a two-way interactionist communication basis.

Interaction is a key device for managing knowledge and not being interactive is a threat as they are providing an outdated service format. With the evolution of internet as a media, it is to become infeasible not having an interactive format for trends research.

3.7.2 Gap 3 - Delivery

Other aspect of taking the most of the media in which the sites are build in is using the *Hub* where fashion agents are researching trends as a 'place' for acquiring knowledge. Not only the knowledge that there is a trend forthcoming in the market but also to understand the trend itself. This is also a current gap (classified as GAP 3 – delivering properly the service) in the fashion forecasting sites as the information sometimes is in the site but in a completely different directory or difficult to acquire. Further on, tools will be suggested in order to solve these gaps and provide a better service to online fashion forecasting users.

The second aspect of Gap 3 is in fact a consequence of the Gap 2, as the current format does restrain information and knowledge delivery, risking the predictability accuracy. Delivery in this context is understood by a knowledge management point of view, which is to 'put more emphasis on the value-added for users and not simply on the delivery and accessibility of information' (Al-Hawamdeh, 2003, p.63). Rethinking what the user will do with the information given, its

relevance, and opening a channel to information exchange to improve the quality of the forecast.

All these factors may not appear at the moment as it would need a further evaluation of the current customer satisfaction rate, but as Stephen Brown *et. al* state in “Revitalising Service Innovations”, in a management process is crucial to evaluate the current service provided in order to refocus and provide a ‘refreshed’ service, meeting the ever-renewed consumer necessities. According to him, in this case, the service provider may be ‘anticipating continued success’, by anticipating future needs (1990, p.67) as ‘it may not be in the best interests of the service provider to continue providing the service in its present form’.

Anticipation is the key in such a high standard audience and client-base. The following section will propose a Model for online Fashion Forecasting sites to deliver a better service in the current and short-future market setting.

4.0 Research Methodology

4.1 Introduction and Problem definition

Little research has been undertaken on Online Fashion Forecasting practices and its relevance in fashion market. Current analysis has been made by press but still there is a lack of in-depth academic research on the subject. Nevertheless, it has been identified a gap of updating the current forecasting methods to market necessities. Therefore, as a service focused on business-to-business, the study evaluate market practices and investigates market needs in order to propose an adjustment of the service/business to customers' emergent requirements.

4.2 Research Philosophy and Strategy

According to Smith *et al.* (2002, p.27), philosophical issues in research methodology contain important assumptions in order to 'clarify research design and recognize which designs will work and which will not.' These assumptions will provide a basis for research methods and strategy in order to obtain better results for the research.

An epistemological method is applied as it concerns the question of 'what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge' (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p.16). Knowledge regarded as a subject to be investigated is relied on this study in an Ontological basis that knowledge is build within a social context, as a relativist position towards the investigation of reality. The relativist position recognizes that concepts are human constructions (Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002, p.33).

As the constructionist philosophy is applied to the research, truth becomes a consensus between different viewpoints (2002, p.33) and it is in constant state of revision. Following this postpositivist claim of knowledge, it is assumed in this study that there is no “absolute truth”, opposing to positivism that would rely on the traditional notion of the absolute of knowledge (Creswell, 2003, p.7). Still data, evidence and rational considerations shape knowledge through a postpositivist perspective (2003, p.7).

It is relevant to perceive truth, and meaning, as constructed. Truth can be compared with meaning, as it is a result of the fusion between external and internal factors; where external would be the societal and the internal the individual. This leads to “subjective truths”, belonged to each individual and assembled through social interaction. The countless ‘certainties’ have been constructed piece by piece, fragment by fragment. Negoita (2002, p.1043) would classify the process of assembling these fragments as non-naturalistic, as they are gathered together and are consequence of an individual perspective over social relation.

In the context of knowledge sharing, as an online fashion forecasting site which objectives to research fashion trends, a triangulation of data is required in order to find the consensus previously described. The data triangulation will be method applied for primary research, referring to data collected ‘over different time frames or from different sources’ (Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 2002, p.146). In the primary research it is found necessary to interview users (the customers) and also the forecasters (content makers) as well as information manager in order to find new releases or gaps in current processes.

The constructionist philosophy is then adopted in a qualitative basis using open-ended questions so the participants can express their views. The research strategy applied is qualitative, in order to investigate 'emerging approaches' (Creswell, 2003, p.19) from users and content-makers perspective, investigating possible gaps left within the current online fashion forecasting service. Also evaluate if the current customers are opened to the launch of a higher interactive format and finally investigate if this format would accomplish to raise the predictability of trends.

The qualitative strategy in this case facilitates to identify in a culture-sharing group (fashion agents; media, customers/designers and forecasters), which has been recognized as a community who interact within the forecasting sites, the development of patterns and behaviour towards innovative tools of information and knowledge sharing. Along with the interviews, individuals' stories and specialised opinions are collected in order to identify how they experience researching fashion trends online adapting into their businesses models. The findings from primary research support the assessment of the feasibility of the hypothesis and also accomplish new visions for the current study, as 'an array of interpretative techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world' (van Manen, 1983, p.9).

In order to reach the aim of this study, qualitative data was gathered as it is more suitable to achieve objectives answer research questions, previously.

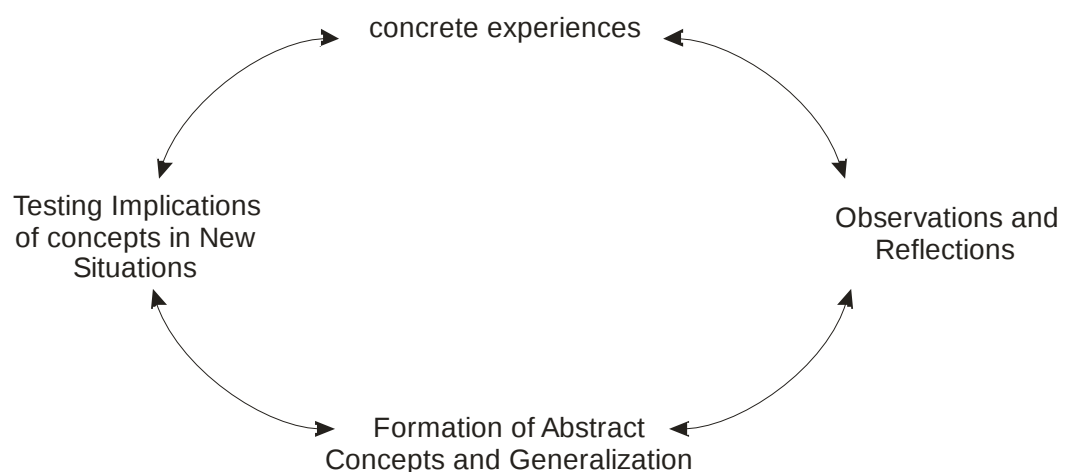
Additionally, qualitative research was improved with the use of a theoretical perspective to guide the study on Network Society and business Management as the two main frames for further investigation of the research question, providing a 'theory

of emancipation’ (Creswell, 2003, p.131) in order to achieve the findings. The design of these two frames will be further developed in this chapter.

4.3 The Inductive Approach

The inductive approach is followed in this study as it comes originally from empiricism to theory. According to Hackley (2003, p.37) ‘empirical knowledge derives from experience and empirical research projects utilize first-hand experience of primary data’. The research questions would not have been able to be composed by a non-user of online fashion forecasting. Prior knowledge on the sites and use as a tool for acquiring better results in fashion industry were key elements for designing the analysis of this research.

Figure 6: **Kolb’s experiential learning cycle** (Gill and Johnson, 2002, p.30)



(in Gill and Johnson, 2002, p.30)

According to the figure 6 in Kolb's experiential learning cycle, the inductive method follows the clockwise direction, starting the top of the figure, with concrete experiences, reflecting upon these past experiences (the previous use of online fashion forecasting websites) and through the formulation of abstract concepts, theories and generalizations that explain past (primary and secondary research), and predict future, experience (presentation of a model which would be more effective for the business).

Nevertheless, not only the topic is relatively new for academic research but the service is new on market, as the first fashion forecasting site just came to market within the last decade (1998). Few studies reveal a focus on forecasting as a managerial tool for fashion and none was found referring to online fashion forecasting and its methods for managing knowledge in order to improve business results.

Although the first motivation for the research comes from empiricism, the study was shaped by combining both empirical and conceptual approaches (Hackley, 2003, p.37), as both literature review supported interviews to be conducted as an exploratory study. As interactive methods of forecasting are still not applied into specialised websites for fashion forecasting, the outcomes of the interviews also gave the research new inputs on the matter.

4.4 Research Design

According to Bryman and Bell, the choice of research design reflects 'the priority being given to a range of dimensions of the research process' (2007, p.40).

They express causal connection between variables (eg. using updated knowledge sharing methods to get more accurate results for trends research), give means for generalization, understand the behaviour and the meaning of that behaviour by contextualization of Online fashion forecasting facing fashion market and fashion industry.

The 'interpretive' ethnography attempts to "render bold or striking creative interpretations of limited data sources" (Hackley, 2003, p.137). As an exploratory study, the research was firstly developed through reflections on previous concrete experiences in order to form the research questions, framed by theoretical sources. A gap on the updating of online fashion forecasting methods was identified in the market, which could mean that online fashion forecasting companies were not accompanying the development of the Society in which it is immersed and also is the central matter of its business: investigating societal directions for business purposes.

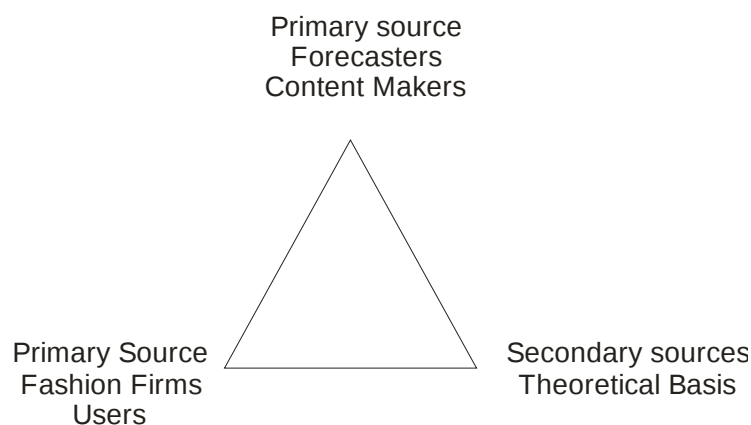
The cross-sectional design 'entails the collection of data on one or more than one case and at a single point in time' (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p.55). The data are collected from multiple types of people in cross-sectional research, in this study the primary data is collected interviewing users and content makers in order to evaluate the perspectives over the research questions and how applicable is in business-to-business context. By investigating both perspectives it is possible, for example, to check the openness towards a higher interactive format of forecasting in order to further propose possible solutions.

In this case, both users and forecasters are variables, and their relationship is examined from both primary (in-depth interviews) and secondary sources (literature

review) within the market context in order to identify if the main business purposes are being achieved: reducing risks and pursuing innovation.

Bryman and Bell state a form of applying cross sectional research into qualitative research is employing unstructured interviewing (2007, p.59). The figure below shows how triangulated method cross-checks the findings from primary and secondary sources as triangulation is seen as 'collection of different data upon the same phenomena, so as to validate any findings' (Gill and Johnson, 2002, p.229).

Figure 7: **Data Triangulation** (based on Gill and Johnson, 2002, p. 229)



4.4.1 Secondary Research and Framework

In this research, the main secondary sources were used to create 'awareness of the current stage of knowledge on the subject' (Gill and Johnson, 2002, p.24), the limitations of these current studies and 'how the proposed research aims to add to what is known' (p.24), facilitating to define the scope of the research, giving a better understanding of the topic.

In order to frame the theoretical basis already settled on related subjects, books, journals, articles and online sources are analysed on Network Society theorists as Manuel Castells and Jan van Dijk. The study on Fashion Forecast is mainly framed by Evelyn Brannon and Barbara Vinken, with perspectives on trending studies and their applications on fashion industry in the first and the last on the concept of *Zeitgeist*, agreeing with Blumer's 1969 previous theories on the spirit of the times, emphasizing the relevance of the "issue of the changing trend" (Cholachatpinyo, *et. al*, 2002, p.14) raising the importance of Forecasting techniques for managing fashion.

In the second part of the literature review is given a focus on the business itself, contextualizing the current Trend studies as an e-service (Lovelock and Wirtz, Stephen Brown) with core on managing knowledge (Jennifer Rowley, Leila A. Halawi *et al.* and Andrew Greasley *et al.*).

Even so, it was found a gap on original literature linking online Fashion Forecasting as a service and knowledge management. Useful data was found in journals and academic articles on subjects individually, textbooks and online resources as current newspapers articles as well as online news (Investor's Business Daily, Retail Week, The Guardian, Women's Wear Daily) were used as updated information in order to contextualize the issue. Finally, the main sources were gathered through browsing e-library from University of the Arts, London College of Communications Library, British Library and London College of Fashion.

4.4.2 Primary Research

A mixed-method of part semi-structured and part in-depth open interviewing is used so as to give to the interviewer some 'latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies' (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 213). This technique is coherent with the belief that knowledge is constructed within social interaction. The outcomes of the interviews accomplish significantly to the research findings as this kind of data collection technique allows to further cross-check the outcomes.

As the nature of this research is exploratory, questions may not follow exactly in the way outlined in the first schedule and the interview process is flexible. The first sampling is: expert interview, content makers from both WGSN and Stylesight (the current two major online fashion forecasting firms) as the 'interviewees are less interested as a person than their capacities of being an expert for a certain field of activity' (Flick, 2006, p. 206). They are integrated into the study not as a single case but as representing a group. The expected result to be achieved with these interviews is exploring the business perspective on the service offered and also investigating the openness of these businesses' towards innovation on the service offered. The problem in conducting this interview method could rely on blocking information by the expert (Flick, 2006, p. 207), which means a limitation of the sincerity of the answers for ethical reasons. The interviewee might not be allowed to give some important information on the business due to confidentiality.

The second sampling is: user interview, users of the service, designers who make use of the service of online Fashion Forecasting, with the aim of finding the client perspective. Different questions are asked applying the same interview

method, in order to find out expectations of the customers towards this type of service, how they apply the knowledge acquired to their businesses and if they find any gap in the current service. Part of the interview is unstructured to get possible inputs for innovative changes for the service.

The third sampling is: knowledge manager interview (expert interview), in order to ground better the discussion over knowledge as an asset managed by the online fashion forecasting businesses. This interview will have some topics to be discussed, but still is open-ended.

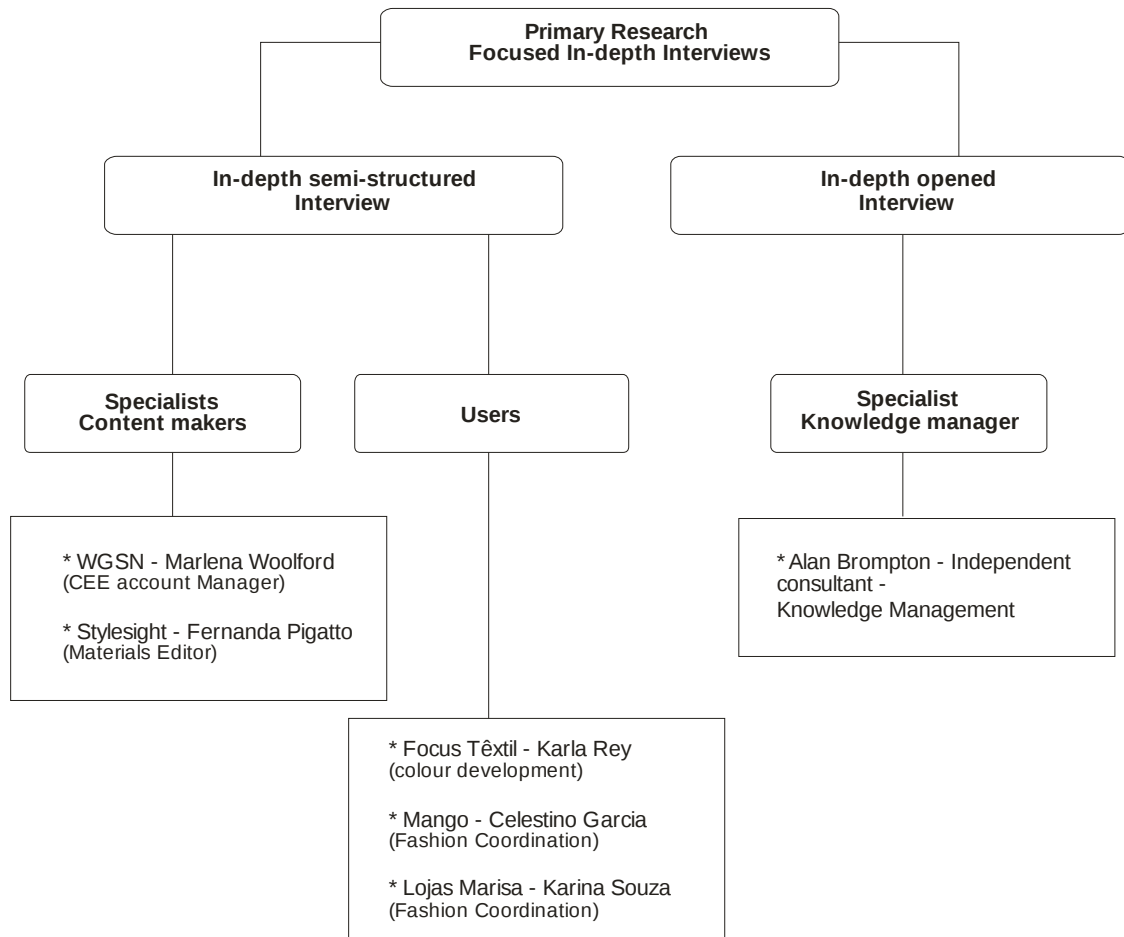
4.4.2.1 Sampling

The sampling was chosen in order to further cross-check findings from primary and secondary sources. All the interviews took place between the 3rd and the 14th of November, 2008, lasting approximately 40 minutes each. The expert interviews were all conducted in English whereas the users' were partly answered in Portuguese, recorded, transcribed and then translated into English. Three different interviews were designed in order to face the three sampling perspectives.

The open-ended interviews with a guide listing questions to be explored were conducted with 3 major samples:

- (1) experts, content-makers from the online Fashion Forecasting firms,
- (2) users of the online Fashion Forecasting services
- (3) and expert in Knowledge Management

Figure 8: Interviews Table:



As stated before in the methodology chapter (section 4.4.2), the open-ended interviews tend to be unstructured and flexible to obtain a ‘freedom and spontaneity of the answers’ (Oppenheim, 2005, p. 115). The data gathering is different for each interviewee and the analysis and coding in this case may be affected by individual differences on interests and situational changes (Patton, 2002, p.343). Even though, this approach offers opportunities for flexibility and spontaneity when discussing the subject, facilitating the ongoing exploratory character of the research.

For the first sampling, the interviewees were Marlena Woolford, Central and Eastern Europe account manager for WGSN (Worth Global Style Network), and Fernanda Pigatto, Stylesight's Materials Editor.

WGSN is the current major fashion forecasting website, it has been chosen for sampling as it was the first innovator in online forecasting methods, as they developed the first website for fashion forecasting with a global network of correspondents using an innovative delivery method, which was the internet. As they are still global market leaders, it was fundamental to gather their information and perceptions on the market, as well as on fashion forecasting and new technologies. The face-to-face interview was conducted at WGSN's head office in London.

The second expert interviewed, also classified as *specialist content-maker*, was Fernanda Pigatto, Stylesight's Materials Editor. Stylesight is currently the main WGSN competitor as it has been commercially very aggressive facing a rapid worldwide expansion and it has been updating its website devices more frequently than WGSN. The sampling leading factors were observed through preliminary observation while still in the empirical part of the research. Many e-mails were exchanged prior to this interview, and the questions were first submitted to the marketing department due to the company's concerns on ethics and confidentiality. Due to Pigatto's agenda, the interview was first answered by e-mail and it was further complemented by phone.

The second sampling was 'users', in other words, the external customers of the service. All the interviewees from this sample use several forecasting tools as a decision support to their work, so they are able to compare both online and off-line

forecasting tools and also the sites named above. These interviews were conducted in order to identify levels of satisfaction as well as their use of the sites (evaluating if the sites' aims meets consumers' needs) and how do they see internet in the forecasting context assessing the relevance of the new media upon their work. They were also asked about a service they would like to have from these sites and is not available at the moment. This part of the interview is supposed to investigate the spontaneous output of desired new devices or services.

Three users were interviewed, as following: Karla Rey, product/colour development from Focus Textil, Celestino Garcia, from Fashion Coordination Team at Mango, and Karina Souza, Fashion Coordinator at Marisa Lojas Varejistas. This sampling was gathered in order to get a heterogeneous group of users, from different parts of the fashion chain.

Focus Textil is the Brazilian largest textile and fabrics importer. The colour forecasting is one of the most anticipated on the fashion industrial chain. Karla works in an everyday basis with Forecasting different services to adapt predictions into Focus Textil's planning and the Brazilian market.

Celestino Garcia works for the second largest textile exporter from Spain, Mango. The company operates worldwide and has high interest on forecasting as well as make intense use of it for planning matters. Mango was chosen for sampling as all the product conception and main development is centred in the head office at Barcelona, so internal designers and the development team, as well as marketing and the Visual Merchandising team must be aware of trends and adapt into the customers' profile. Again Fashion Forecasting is daily used and applied in the interviewee's actions.

Karina Souza works for a large retailer fashion chain in Brazil, Marisa Lojas Varejistas. The chain operates in Brazil with 192 stores including womenswear, menswear, childrenswear, accessories and 'homewear'. As fashion coordinator, Karina Souza is responsible for the fashion guidelines and also supervising the product development for Contemporary womenswear. As a large retailer that operates in one country and develops products for different lifestyles under one brand, forecasting is a primary device used for their business and collection planning.

The contact with all interviewees from *Users sample* was made through e-mails at first and the interviews were conducted by phone.

The last sample was an expert interview with a specialist in KM (Knowledge Management), Alan Brompton, an independent consultant and author of books on KM as "Procurement Guide" and "Data Management and Access". As managing knowledge is in the core of the Forecasting activities (as stated in chapter 3, section 3.4), the subject has to be further investigated through primary source as this would give a current perspective of the topic. As internet is a fast-changing media it was important to gather an up to date specialist point-of-view.

5.0 Primary Research Findings

5.1 Chapter introduction

In order to analyse the current methods used by the main online Fashion Forecasting sites and evaluate their proficiency to meet customers' needs, primary research was focused on the interviewing methods in this research. The interview is 'probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research' (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p. 472). Furthermore, the focus of the applied method is on 'participants' perceptions and experiences' (Creswell, 2003, p.195), attempting to 'understand not one, but multiple realities' (p.195) by an array of 'interpretative techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency' of social phenomena (van Maanen, 1983, p.9).

5.2 Analysis Methods

According to Patton (2002, p.453), the inductive data analysis 'involves discovering patterns, themes, and categories in one's data'. The findings of primary data give the understanding from the perspective of its practitioners, and data are collected to build theory rather than to test it (Bryman and Bell, 2003, p.581).

The analysis of qualitative data in this research develops codes and categories to be discussed (Patton, 2002, p.465), although limitations for coding make it challenging to find *homogeneity*, as *heterogeneity* (p.465) is generally most common in answers of semi-structured and open-ended interviews.

5.3. Analysis of the Primary data

5.3.1 Comparative Findings of Interviews

Three interviews were designed in order to compare different perspectives on the subject. Interviews transcripts are in the appendix 1 to 6. The following tables were made in order to compare key findings.

5.3.1.1 Tables of Key findings from Interviews

Table 1: Sample 1 – EXPERT - Users

QUESTION	Focus Textil Karla Rey	Mango Celestino Garcia	Marisa Karina Souza	COMMENTS / FINDINGS
(1) How do you research trends in fashion and what are the main tools you use for researching?	Use online and offline sources	- Use online and offline - Forecasting books, trips, exhibitions cinema communication - brainstorm in the design team	Uses both online and offline forecasting services	To have a broader view, all research trends from different sources, both online and offline
(2) Use any kind of paid forecasting service? Why?	- WGSN, Usefashion, Preview Books, consultants - Stylesight is more modern - WGSN has better content	- WGSN - Preview books - The interface is easy to use and access information	- WGSN - Preview books - WGSN is the most complete	One of the main reasons for staying with WGSN is because they are used and it is easy to use (used to the interface)
(3) How apply Fashion Forecasting into the business	- Tool for planning - Needs adaptation	- Confirmation tool for collection development - Adapt to their business	- Use as planning tool - Adapt trends into business	They all use for planning and all state they need to adapt the information into their business
(4) Where browse trends information on the Internet	- Blogs, - online magazines - google, - dictionary.com	Besides WGSN, Blogs	- WGSN - Style.com - Vogue.com - National and international brands sites	Internal barriers in the company for trying out blogs Researching is time consuming, so most of them choose the easier and most didactic means with easy language

(5) Use blogs to research trends? Are they reliable sources?	▪ She is very used to the blogs language ▪ Trusts the information ▪ Thinks they are very reliable ▪ Personal view ▪ Less censorship ▪ More democratic	▪ Yes, Blogs offer something the paid sites don't offer: the personalised point-of-view	▪ No, she is not sure if they are reliable ▪ They don't use an easy language	Opinions divided. K. Souza does not use and is not familiar, she avoids using and does not trust. C. Garcia and K. Rey are frequent users, familiar with the language and more confident to use for researching. They search in very well-known blogs. Reliability comes from who is writing.
(6) Communication within trends research	▪ Not in the beginning of collection ▪ uses for pre-test and development phase ▪ Thinks information exchange is very important	▪ Don't exchange information with other sectors of fashion industry	▪ Exchanges information in the planning stage, ▪ face-to-face basis	They maintain confidentiality at a certain point of the collection but in general agree that communication and information sharing are important.
(7) Impact of Internet on Fashion Forecasting	▪ increased speed, easy use, high information sharing, democratization ▪ No touching doesn't substitute offline forecasting	▪ Higher information flow ▪ Faster trends ▪ Many interesting things but nothing really unique	▪ Fast-paced Information exchange ▪ Get more information	Increase of speed, high information sharing and standardization. Disadvantage of online is not touching
(8) Direction for online trends research	▪ Collaboration ▪ Partnerships ▪ new ways for sending information	▪ Still the constant search for innovation ▪ Always-increasing of information	▪ Online Library ▪ Information source	Collaboration through information sharing, Online library
(9) Any service they would like to have and doesn't exist?	▪ Improve Image quality ▪ Agility on collection reviews and some reports	▪ Blogs, to have a particular view and ▪ Encyclopedia to learn while researching	▪ Better image quality	Technical devices and also Blog and Encyclopedia, they want different types of information

Table 2: Sample 2 – EXPERT - Content Makers

QUESTION	WGSN Marlena Woolford (CEE Account Manager)	Stylesight Fernanda Pigatto (Materials Editor)	COMMENTS / FINDINGS
(1) Fashion Forecasting as a Business	▪ Creative Intelligence ▪ Support companies with trends Forecasting	▪ Provide information on Market now	Both are aware their businesses are about information
(2) Main Activities of the site	▪ Inspiration ▪ Expert analysis of product design and design-led industry ▪ Support decision making	▪ Inspiration ▪ Offer unparalleled point of view on the industry ▪ Online pictures library ▪ Market intelligence	Objectives are related to inspiration. Open-ended inputs, not conclusive ones. Advisors, experts supporting decision making
(3) Role of Fashion Forecasting in Fashion Industry	▪ Atmosphere around us ▪ companies need to be aware of consumer behaviour	▪ Reference ▪ Fashion Forecasting is conceptual	Zeitgeist adapted into a framework/ business
(4) Relationship with Customers	▪ B2B relationship ▪ Post-selling service	▪ B2B relationship ▪ Post-selling service	To measure satisfaction B2B relationship marketing is applied by both and seen as important. Post selling enables evaluate customers' satisfaction
(5) Impact of Internet on Fashion Forecasting	▪ Faster-paced (Info in real time) ▪ Easy access ▪ accuracy	▪ Positive ▪ More practical	The 'time' matter is very important in fashion industry, reflected in this statement.
(6) Objectives of their work	▪ Post-selling ▪ B2B Relationship to improve service	▪ Reports about Textile and Print ▪ Current and future expert point of view	They are from different areas, but have similar perspective on the business in other statements
(7) Advantages and Disadvantages of online format facing offline	▪ Disadvantage: Can't touch ▪ Advantages: Speed, Portable, Interactive tools	▪ More versatile format ▪ Faster and more efficient	The speed is again an advantage, but businesses know the importance of offline methods. Interaction also stated as important advantage
(8) Blogs have importance on investigating trends?	▪ Democratic, independent, no accuracy, source of inspiration that needs double-check, not very reliable provide good discussions approximates people	▪ Yes but needs "filter"	Both agree about adaptation of blogs information and non-accuracy. The first also talks about other aspects, similar to users statements.
(9) How they evaluate customer's satisfaction	▪ Relationship marketing through account managers who get feedbacks from customers	▪ Online feedback from customers ▪ Close relationship with customers	Proximity with customers as an important tool to meet their needs
(10) Does the current format meet customers' needs?	▪ Yes, but there's always things to improve	▪ Yes	There is an ethical matter in this question-they might have given this answer because would sound unethical to say 'no'

(11) 3.0 Stylesight new Version, planning any changes?	▪ Don't know Stylesight ▪ Launching a Blog in December ▪ Planning many changes for next year	▪ Key-word searches ▪ Drag-and-drop technology ▪ Image Preview ▪ Users can Save, Share and Edit research in folders	WGSN professional is not aware of their competitor. As a marketing person she should know. Lack of awareness of competitors and their positioning might be a future threat for their business.
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Table 3: Sample 3 – EXPERT – Knowledge Manager

QUESTION	Alan Brompton	COMMENTS / FINDINGS
(1) KM (Knowledge Management) definition	▪ managing tacit knowledge ▪ Managing explicit knowledge using technology ▪ managing those documents to allow people to gain value from accessing that knowledge	Implicit and explicit knowledge are both part of the KM spectrum. Gain value from these business resources is the main objective of KM. Technology makes it feasible (to share and accessible)
(2) How KM accomplishes on business results?	▪ Knowledge produces value in organizations	Knowledge is directly connected to value in organizations
(3) What do you mean by value in this case?	▪ Value: getting more from what you have spent, Profitability ▪ Speed Delivery, greater customer satisfaction, improved self	Many devices can build value in business, from technical to human resources.
(4) How increasing interaction among fashion agents could accomplish to fashion research?	▪ Knowledge improves speed in market ▪ Understand the drivers early to make appropriate changes in business ▪ Keep the pace with trends ▪ Customer Insight ▪ Customer Understanding	Helps in managerial process increasing speed, giving tools to understand the drivers so it is possible to make changes in business improving results.
(5) How measuring knowledge achievements as it is intangible	▪ Surveys ▪ Questionnaires with staff or partners ▪ The method is specific to what you're doing	He stated it is very difficult to measure, there are some methods but are specific to each case
(6) Are blogs, hyperlinks and data mining tools that help to build knowledge in CME (computer mediated environment)?	▪ Technology has always been helping KM (Blogs, discussion forums, wikis) ▪ nobody has it clear which technologies actually delivers a benefit ▪ People still experimenting with them, they are believers ▪ Questions may arise: Is the content reliable? ▪ Can give a 'personal' character to the provider ▪ Internet tools are available and people are going to use them whether the organization takes part or not	Experiential character of internet devices as wikis, blogs, discussion forums. Difficult to measure result. The author, the writer, the one who makes the content is the most important, what gives reliability to the content. Better take part on a 'movement' that is inevitable; including internet tools in organizations environment

(7) KM and the interaction in the online Fashion Forecasting context	▪ knowledge sharing can be a threat for business – confidentiality - when dealing with innovation	Ethical matters on knowledge sharing
(8) Isn't knowledge sharing inevitable?	▪ The company can "partially" share, share just with some other members or companies	Valuable statement, it can point a solution as you chose who you are going to share the knowledge with.
(9) What is Data Mining?	▪ Looking at the data and trying to extract trends or information from the data	trying to find trends and relationships among Data
(10) Current use of Data Mining in companies	▪ It is particularly used when you have loads of information, ▪ It is very important that you understand the cause and the effect relation within the data	Data Mining just have value through someone evaluating and interpreting that information (as internet devices are value-free)
(11) Ethics involving Blogs and Corporations	▪ It is very important to control information and knowledge as they are business resources ▪ The organization must act as a moderator and facilitator as knowledge in business environment needs control	Great dangers for corporations as well as benefits In order to get the benefits, facilitate and control, acting like a moderator, 'managing' the knowledge that goes under the business label, as this will further be a parameter for reliability

5.3.2 Findings

5.3.2.1 Fashion Forecasting as a managerial tool

Both users and content makers have the similar perspective on Fashion Forecasting objectives within the Fashion market. Users state they adapt the information into their business and use it as a planning tool. They also emphasize the need for adaptation of the information into the business context.

C. Garcia also said it is a "confirmation for collection development", so they are able to make changes in the collection when there is still time for it. A. Brompton compared Primark and Marks & Spencer in the interview, stating the first has better results also because of the agility on responding to new trends. He states interaction

among fashion agents and use of knowledge management on fashion (or any other business) can help to “understand the drivers early to make appropriate changes in business”. He also states “knowledge improves speed in market”, while C. Garcia states the knowledge flow among agents in fashion industry has been increasing as “the trends now are time-led”.

5.3.2.2 Knowledge and Information Flow

The interviews are evidence that Internet has an important impact on Fashion Forecasting as higher information and knowledge flow, cited by all respondents. The increased speed and democratization of information and knowledge are seen as advantages of this format facing an offline format (stated by users, content makers and knowledge manager). These are major changes that could only be achieved with technological advances and the increase of internet in business. They also emphasize the portability, as you can access the site from anywhere with the internet, just by accessing it with a password. “Now you don’t have to carry the heavy preview books anymore”, says Marlena Woolford, from WGSN.

Nevertheless, standardization of this information was a disadvantage pointed out by users, as the current fashion forecasting sites don’t offer customization for their customers. So, C. Garcia says “there are many interesting things on the site, but nothing really unique” meaning the interesting information is very fragmented and the uniqueness is hard to find in this context. Also Karla Rey and Karina Souza emphasized the need for adaptation, which is time-consuming as the information comes standardized for all industry. The businesses perspective shows that these

“sites are inspirational” (Woolford and Pigatto), offering open-ended inputs, not conclusive ones. They see themselves as advisors.

The users mix Online and Offline Fashion Forecasting techniques as the first is more conceptual and doesn't substitute the 'touching', as fabrics and other materials can't still be in fact touched through the computer. M. Woolford, from WGSN also stated non-touching as a disadvantage of online facing offline forecasting. So, the core of online Forecasting is indeed on knowledge, it is conceptual, relied on information.

All the users use WGSN and just one used Stylesight, and the users justify this higher adoption to WGSN as they are used to the site's language and interface, as it is “easy to use and access information” (C.Garcia). Karla Rey who also used Stylesight said it is more modern with easier tools, although now Focus Textil opted for just subscribing to WGSN as the content is better and almost all their clients use it so they must follow the same language.

5.3.2.3 Where looking for information in the web

When asked where they browse trends information in the web, online magazines as style.com and vogue.com and blogs were the common cited sites. Karina Souza from Marisa stated there were internal barriers in the company for trying out blogs as they are blocked by the IT department. In this case, when someone needs to access a blog they need to ask the IT department to do it. As it is time consuming and also bureaucratic she always tries to look for information in other sources as websites and browsers like google.com.

K. Souza states that researching in blogs can be again very time consuming as you never know which one has good information at the moment you are searching. So, for her it is more practical just to browse on the websites and WGSN for online information. At last, when asked specifically if she used blogs to research fashion and consuming trends she said no, because she was not sure if they are a reliable source.

5.3.2.4 Blogs Reliability as a Fashion Forecasting device

When asked about blogs the responses were very heterogeneous among the respondents. Some said they are reliable sources and some stated they are not. Celestino Garcia from Mango suggests blogs “offer something the paid sites don’t offer: the personalised point-of-view”. Karla Rey also relies on blogs again always looking for a personal view from the blogger. These professionals are very familiar to the blogs language and more confident to use it as a researching tool.

Even so, they emphasize the ones they prefer are related to the ‘author’ they prefer. When they browse in blogs they look for a particular view. Karla Rey has a preference for the national blogs than the international. As their reality has more similarities (the national blogger and Karla’s) the information seems more easily absorbed, already adapted into the Brazilian market.

Many independent bloggers are professionals in their area of interest. In this case, bloggers are ‘opinion leaders for large communities of internet users because they are seen as informed and unbiased’ (Cox. J et al, 2008, p.9).

Karla Rey also discussed censorship. As “the journalists take care about their own name, they assure they will publish reliable information, as they don’t have editors or even are connected to an institution”. This statement shows she is not only used to the language but also she searches for specialists’ opinions in their blogs (cited ‘Jc Report’ and ‘WWD’ as examples). In her opinion, less censorship and more freedom when talking about fashion and trends are very relevant points for investigating trends. She searches for these points while researching in blogs. So while browsing the blogs, she searches for a specific point-of-view, personal, authorial, enabled by freedom of speech that blogs allow, and according to her a website like WGSN, Stylesight and vogue.com doesn’t.

Although some users have forward points-of-view on blogs, Karina Souza states blogs don’t have an easy language for translating into feasible and commercial sources. The lack of familiarity with the device makes her less confident about it and extracting information from it, so it becomes unreliable.

Alan Brampton concludes that in order to get real benefits from a blog there should be a moderator, a facilitator. “If there’s no facilitator, how can you rely on the content at all? The information may be incorrect. It can also be difficult to find the information, to find knowledge in that content” (Alan Brompton). According to him, “people will go to a particular blog, of someone who is well known and because they’re well known they can be trusted”. The moderator idea conflicts with the democratic facet of blogs which Karla Rey and Celestino Garcia put positive emphasis on. Reliability of a blog is indeed a characteristic directly depended upon the author.

5.3.2.5 Delivering Value with Knowledge Management and Information Sharing

This aspect was explicitly explored in the knowledge manager interview. He stresses the idea that knowledge produces value in organizations although measuring the benefits can be very difficult. The specialist on knowledge management, state “people are still experimenting with these devices” and that “they are believers” and also that “nobody has been able to demonstrate that the cost of using it really delivers value”.

Nevertheless, he stated that “internet tools are available and people are going to use them whether the organization takes part or not”, meaning that knowledge sharing through blogs, wikis and interactive tools are already being used. Including internet tools in organization environment is just being part of an inevitable ‘movement’, according to Brompton.

When asked about the directions for online trends research, users stated ‘collaboration’ and ‘partnerships’ with other sectors are crucial for more accurate predictions. Also new ways of sending information, online library and the constant increase of information were the future seen by the users for online Fashion Forecasting.

On the other hand, Brompton says knowledge sharing can be a threat for business due to confidentiality, when dealing with innovation. In fact, when asked if they share information all users stated they do not share at all or share just for pre-test or chose who they are sharing with (in a face-to-face basis).

5.3.2.6 Customer Satisfaction

Finally, when asked about customer satisfaction, both sites said they think they meet customers' needs. There was perhaps an ethical matter in this question as they might have given this answer as it sound unethical if they have said 'no'. They both use relationship marketing to measure customers' satisfaction as well as inputs for improving the service offered.

Customers on the other hand, stated they would like to improve image quality (K. Rey and K. Souza) and agility on collection reviews and some reports (K. Rey), a blog inside the sites and also an encyclopedia, to learn while researching (C. Garcia).

6.0 Conclusion Chapter

6.1 Chapter Introduction

The following sections take the reader back through the dissertation to recap the argument that was put forward that the contemporary society is characterised by the network effects. This concept can also be applied to fashion trend forecasting. By doing this, chapter 3 identified a number of gaps that are not currently being utilised by the industry. Through empirical research and analysis it was found that there are specific reasons for these gaps and it is proposed a customer-oriented Model for online Fashion Forecasting using higher interactive format.

6.2 Summary of Argument

Online Fashion Forecasting is currently used as a tool to support managerial decisions predicting consuming changes. Its increasingly importance in the Fashion Market is an indicator that fashion industry has become time-led, always searching novelty as a sales driver.

The main authors on Fashion Forecasting suggest the fashion innovators are driven by either representing or differentiating oneself from the Spirit of the Times – the *Zeitgeist* (Blumer, Vinken, Brannon). The search for identifying novelty in fashion and reduce risk in business are the main push factors for recurring to forecasting devices as business support.

Technology became a key point for trends research, accomplishing speed, increasing levels of information exchange and also boosting data storage helping fashion companies to keep the pace with the speed of changing trend. Alan Brompton declares in his interview that “understanding the drivers early or earlier could deliver a greater business, greater market share and so on”.

The new configuration of society called “Network Society” is claimed to be organized in virtual communities (Castells, 1996 and van Dijk, 1997) and sharing space with the organic ones (bonded by geographical and physical features).

Internet as a media has particularities that must be taken in consideration while setting a business in this environment, this research discussed the impact of new technologies on Fashion Forecasting, as well as analysed the current methodology and devices of Online Fashion Forecasting research. Primary research was conducted in order to compare the current service offer with customer satisfaction, as well as investigate which devices customers would like to have available to improve service use.

Getting the most of what internet as a media offers may improve the quality of the forecast and increase customer satisfaction, reducing a possible Gap in service while designing and delivering it. The conceptual model of service quality by Parasuraman and Zeithaml (1985) was applied in order to evaluate the current service offer by online Fashion Forecasting companies. The goal was analysing the business in the internet and market context and evaluating if there would be any Gap in business offer. Two Gaps were identified as Gap 2 – related to the service design and Gap 3 – delivering properly the service.

Obtaining the most of what a media like the internet offers may improve the quality of the forecast and increase customer satisfaction, minimizing the Gaps cited above. Designing the right service in CME (computer mediated environment) means using **interactivity** to increase the quality of the forecast. Online Fashion Forecasting is a service designed for a virtual community of style and design industry professionals. The Primary research revealed with interviews that all respondents see a broader access to knowledge and higher information exchange as positive for improving trends research.

While operating the business, forecasters are aware they are to manage knowledge and deliver business expertise to the subscribers or as M. Woolford stated at the interview providing “creative intelligence”. Managing expert information and knowledge is in the core of the business extent. Through this research it was identified that the current fashion forecasting websites have been managing knowledge while studying trends partially as if they were in an offline environment, not taking the most of what these businesses could offer to their customers.

Using offline parameters of communication to offer an online service means merely transmitting knowledge from a sender to a receiver, not applying adapted communication techniques for CME which would consist in ‘mediated environments created by participants and then experienced’ (Evans et al, 2001, p. 151). Instead of one-to-one or one-to-many based communication, in internet communities many-to-many based communication is the practice, with high interaction among the participants as well as a high turn-over of information and knowledge. Particularly when regarding business-to-business, the experience of knowledge sharing and exchanging could accomplish in the process of trends research.

Alan Brompton state when questioned in his interview that knowledge is such an important asset in a corporation that sharing it could be a threat when dealing with innovation. On the other hand, he states that “if the organization doesn’t facilitate their use (he was talking about blogs) people will go outside in the internet and they are going to use it anyway”. As it is indeed inevitable that an internet frequent user will be sharing knowledge in some virtual environment, this research proposes the Forecasting sites should take part of it, developing interactionist/ interactive tools inside the websites participating on the process.

6.3 Discussion and Conclusion

After analysing the primary data in chapter 5, it now seems that it supports the literature discussed in the previous chapters 2 and 3. The literature revealed in chapter 3 that constantly updating a business and its service offer is necessary and Fashion Forecasting websites as any other must also keep pace with the market and with its media improvements. The current users expressed themselves satisfied with the overall service they were offered by the Forecasting websites they were subscribing to. Even if the customers haven’t expressed initial discontentment with current service, anticipating future customers’ needs may provide ‘anticipating continued success’ (Brown, 1990, p.67).

The increased information flow caused by greater use of internet devices have shown an impact not only on society’s configuration (reshaping into networks) but also fashion industry and its time-led pace towards consumer pursue for novelty. All interviewees confirmed the use of forecasting tools are to “understand the drivers

early to make appropriate changes in business” (A. Brompton) as it offers “fast-paced Information” (K. Souza).

Joining a Network as a Fashion Forecasting website means being part of a community with similar interests as stated in chapter 2, and supported by Karla Rey when refers to WGSN as almost an obligatory tool for her business as their clients and manufacturers also subscribe, also take part of the community.

The frequent use of online fashion forecasting must though be adapted into each business, and standardization of the service cited in chapter 3 consist a ‘gap’ these websites cannot fulfil as digital content is ‘at the extreme end of the homogeneity spectrum’ (Rowley, 2008, p. 525). In the interview, all subscribers suggested if not a customised service, section(s) with more ‘personalised’ content, with unique point-of-view, less institutional, showing specific points-of-view.

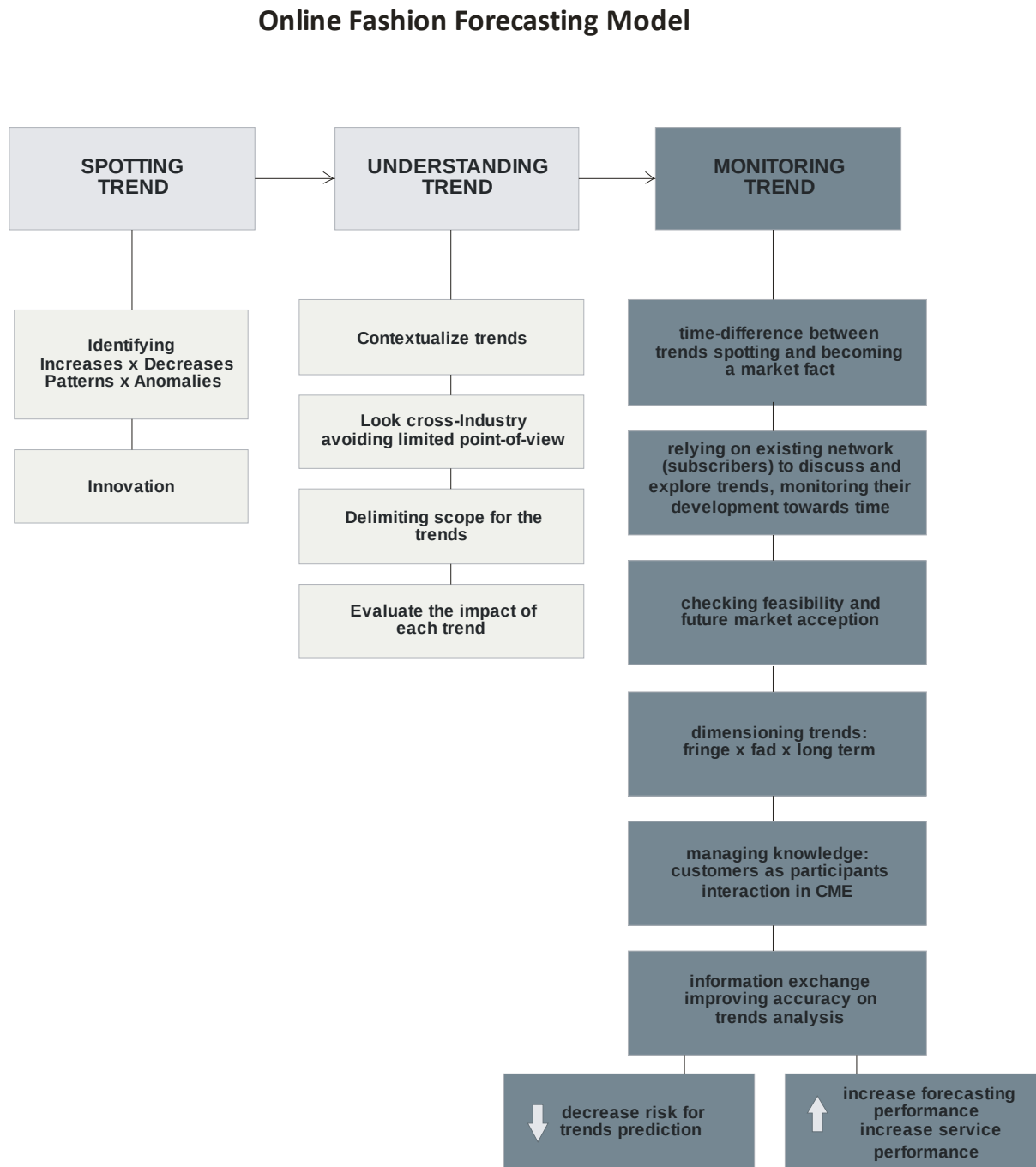
As managing knowledge in digital content, these sites can use the media in order to investigate trends in a more interactional way, making a better use of what the media (internet) offers. The multidirectional communication is possible through interactive devices and applying interaction into the websites can improve the quality of the forecast. In the forecasting sites it is currently given a higher emphasis to the early stages of trends research, but applying a monitored interaction can also develop quality the forecast.

After in-depth analysing the current service offer and cross-checking findings from both primary and secondary research, a new Model for Online Fashion Forecasting is proposed.

6.3.1 Proposal Model for Online Fashion Forecasting

“Panta rey kay oude meney”, as nobody touches the same water of a river more than once, knowledge as an outcome of social phenomena cannot be seen as steady, but yet constantly constructed through social interaction. The following framework purposes the construction of knowledge on consumer and fashion as a constantly revised feature through interaction among fashion agents.

The Online Fashion Forecasting Model features the three main stages of trends research: ***Spotting a new trend, Understanding this trend and Monitoring the trend***. The Model is grounded in these three elements, as the following figure shows:

Figure 9: **Online Fashion Forecasting Model**

The Model is based on the constructivist theories of learning that suggest learning is an active process and it is in constant state of revision. The three steps of studying trends help the forecaster asserting a methodology to investigate them as a result of researching social phenomena.

In the first part, **Spotting** a new trend means identifying increases or decreases in the market, patterns or anomalies, in order to recognize innovations and upcoming consumer necessities. It is important to state that currently fashion companies are in a stage coined by Brannon as the 'fourth wave' of the evolution of the demand-activated system of studying consumer behaviour and trends (2006, p.267). According to Brannon, the evolution of trends studies have developed into a 'pull approach', placing more emphasis on creating, producing and delivering the right products for consumers by anticipating their needs and developing new products to satisfy them (2006, p267).

In the first stage, the role of the forecaster is centred in observations and research in specific fields of industry (like dyes, yarns, retail) and also in the other end, which consists the consumer (social, technological, economical, political and environmental) changes – this gives the first scope for spotting a trend.

The second stage of the Model, **Understanding a Trend**, consist on placing trends into context in order to have a guidance for future analysis on the feasibility of these increases or decreases. In this stage, looking cross-industry is crucial to avoid a 'limiting point of view' (online resource site Trendwatching accessed on Oct.31st, 2008, <http://trendwatching.com>) and also to 'support the understanding of innovation and consumer expectations' as many times innovations can take place in cross markets due to the *Zeitgeist* (spirit of the times). It gives the industry a scope of the trend, and a first perspective of its reach and strength facing marketplace.

Although the first and second stages are key phases of the forecasting process, the Online Fashion Forecasting Model focuses on the third stage, which is **Monitoring a Trend**.

There is a time difference between a trend being identified and it actually becoming a market fact, a product or service. In this last stage, monitoring fashion trends aims accompanying the development of novelties. Some of the trends will disappear and others will become stronger and the monitoring stage is crucial to classify these differences and therefore deliver a high standard forecasting service.

The current problem on Fashion Forecasting websites is mostly centred in the monitoring as the current online devices to monitor the development of trends are in a one-sided based communication (sender to receiver). The lack of interaction on Fashion Forecasting websites has been identified as the main factor that leads to an over constrained and unprivileged position to the monitoring phase on online fashion research. Identified as Gaps 2 (service design) and 3 (service delivery) in chapter 3, monitoring phase can be improved using tools to approximate provider and customer, changing the websites into mediated environments.

In this mediated environments, fashion agents are producers as well as consumers, taking part of trends investigating and monitoring process. The high skilled character of the community participants can be a helpful device as their inputs, comments and information have roots in different market perspectives.

The monitoring is an important stage in any means of management, whether it is an event, a business or 'knowledge', the subject changes but the managing stages remain predominantly the same. As there is a time gap between the moment the trend appears and the time it becomes a fact, the monitoring should be constant. Not giving the correct importance to this stage may cause a higher risk for the predictability system, which means less accuracy in a very complex and fragmented environment.

Acting as a 'mediator' relying on existing network to discuss and explore trends can also help the website forecasters to gather market insights and to monitor trends towards time improving accuracy on trends analysis.

For the Monitoring Stage, three internet devices are suggested to fulfil the Gaps stated above, innovating the service through accomplishing the adequate mean of communication for web environment: Blogs, Hyperlinks, Data Mining.

6.3.1.1 Blogs

Grounded on information exchange, the weblog can open discussion 'forums' one a certain subject or even point directions for new trends, as it is an interactive tool that not only permit but also stimulates communication among different parts. Blogging about trends inside a specialised website just for stakeholders could bring interesting discussions with high level of relevant information about trends.

According to the Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory, a weblog or a blog is "a frequently updated website consisting of dated entries arranged in reverse chronological order so the most recent post appears first".

A blog therefore can be a very useful tool for broadcasting thoughts to a large number of people quickly. It is a many-to-many communication channel, with a starting point at the bloggers post, but no predictable end, as comments can come as any user would like to get involved in the discussion.

As it was spontaneously cited by two of the four users as devices the Forecasting websites should have, blogs can add to current content as it is an opened-ended discussion, with various agents stating their opinions about trends.

A blog inside such high skilled community works similarly as a corporate blog, as there must be a mediator to not only open the debates but also facilitate the process

Stating personal points-of-view is one of the main characteristics of weblogs and it was cited as a missing service from one of the interviewed users, Celestino Garcia, from Mango. Karla Rey, from Focus Textil also sees 'collaboration', 'partnerships' and 'new ways for sending information' the future for better online trends research.

A blog can add value to a forecast as readers expect (and would in fact have) an 'expert analysis, unique opinion and insider perspectives' (Cox, J. *et al*, 2008, p.10). Opening discussion forums gives the participants (fashion forecasting sites subscribers) the opportunity to have a voice and sense of autonomy on discussing trends.

Even though, credibility seems to be one of the major issues on having blogs inside forecasting sites. Having a blog should not put in risk the site's credibility. With the purpose of avoiding the decrease of credibility, Alan Brompton states businesses "must exercise and element of control over any resources that they provide". These blogs must have a moderator so discussions can add proper value to trends research. As Brompton states in the interview, "there's a conflict between the desire to have something open and free and the potential value or damage for

opening and free can be". These blogs would add discussion but also would represent the business they are connected to.

This can probably be one of the main aspects why the online forecasting websites haven't yet launched any blog *inside* their site domain. The first most important factor to launch this type of blog is then having a 'consistent and authentic first-person voice' (Cox, J. *et al*, 2008, p.10).

Blogs also have a starting point but no perspective of final conclusion, as it can be constantly updated with new comments. Respecting the audience's expertise on the subjects (as the target is also made by professionals) can lead to a better use of the opened-discourse on researching trends. The multi-sided opinions on a certain subject can indeed improve quality of the forecast and therefore add value to the business, by discussing the trends' variables, their context, discussing innovations. Blogs as a suggested interactional device to improve the quality of forecast through discussions on trends facilitates the monitoring phase as valuable knowledge is produced not only with the outcome but also in the process associated with it.

6.3.1.2 Hyperlinks

A reference or navigation element as a hyperlink can connect a word, expression or many types of elements to another part of the document or to another document in the net. In Fashion Forecasting websites this tool can be used in order to enrich the research linking key-words to their concepts (eg. Bauhaus – the hyperlink opens a concept for Bauhaus). This tool can minimise time-consuming in

research, as the main concept can be reached in just one click. Then, is up to the researcher to look for additional information or not. The links are indeed 'the key to understanding how communication via web differs from other form of communication' (Pemberton and Shurville, 2000, p.4).

Landow (1997, p.5) states hypertext is both an author's tool and a reader's medium, it allows authors or groups of authors to link information together, create notes that point readers to either bibliographic data or the body of the referenced text.

The need for a researching tool inside the forecasting sites was cited by two users interviewed as K. Souza stated an online library should be part of future online trends research and C. Garcia suggested an encyclopedia inside the current sites to learn while researching. The hypertext offers additional information on a subject and can link a 'word' its concept or to a related idea.

Decentring information is a link's feature as each reader takes part of the text itself or 'constructs' the text while reading and connecting other information. The reader can choose to access a link or not. If accessed, links are directional, guiding the reading 'enhancing the flow of information via computers' (Pemberton and Shurville, 2000, p.6).

As internet is more likely an exploratory media, highly interactive, the hyperlinks as part of this sort of communication, allow choice and involvement, permitting multiple paths to information, thereby 'supporting multiple points-of-view, and encouraging access to new information' (Pemberton and Shurville, 2000, p.12).

Not only information is constructed while it is accessed through links but also the link enable a point-of-view or additional information on a subject enriching the research process and saving time as users wouldn't have to leave the site environment to search for further information, making the research moment more practical and agile for users.

6.3.1.3 Data Mining

Data Mining is suggested as massive amount of data is produced daily by these sites as content is uploaded and there should be an use of these data if transformed into 'useful information and knowledge' (Han and Kamber, 2001, p.1).

The process of data mining involves first extracting and loading data onto the data warehouse system, then storing and managing the data in a multidimensional database system. This system allows different parameters to be compared and finally presents the data in a useful format, such as a graph or table.

The data mining (DM) device is an "intelligent text-mining system that extracts text fragments relevant to user queries, automatically creates and processes a series of new queries, and assembles a new text" (Lee and Siau, 2001). According to Rickman and Consenza (2007) is the process of extracting interesting and non-trivial information knowledge from unstructured data. Data mining uses artificial intelligence (AI) in order to find patterns or anomalies in a specific scope using "filters". Statistics reveals that unstructured information makes up '80% to 90% of the average corporation's information content' (Anthes, 2004).

The huge amount of data produced by the forecasting sites, including texts and images can be categorised in behalf of continuous trends studies. Patterns can be identified in the monitoring phase and trends evaluated as data mining can be classified into two categories: descriptive and predictive. Descriptive mining tasks 'characterize the general properties of the data in the database' (Han and Kamber, 2001, p.21). Predictive mining tasks 'perform inference on the current data in order to make predictions' (p.21).

By applying a 'filter' and relating different concepts, DM also allows users to focus search for interesting patterns. The result interface is very simple, in form of easy-reading graphs, in order to find these patterns or/and anomalies. Patterns could, for example, give the direction for a current trend and anomalies could 'spot' new trends or could be non-useful information.

Data mining enables high interaction between man-machine, as was stated by Harraway (section 2.1) it is value-free, value is given by human evaluation on these graphics, but undoubtedly the technique enables easy visualization and relation upon data which is at first disorganized and fragmented.

6.4 Limitations of the Research

This dissertation had limited sampling due to time constraint although interviewed professionals represent a various sample for the study, a larger users sampling could give a more diverse input on the desired service.

Ethical matters also limited gathering data from the content-makers, as they represent a business and can speak over a limited scope and were not able to discuss some important matters.

The technical feasibility of the three suggested tools were analysed in a theoretical basis and also through predicting by what has been done currently in other fields with the same devices, but in order to apply them some further research and pre-testing should be done.

6.5 Recommendation for Future Research

As was just stated, future testing and evaluation should be a further step in order to evaluate feasibility and value of applying these tools into online fashion forecasting businesses.

As this study is exploratory, further research will be needed to research the interactive devices in-depth. Blogs and hyperlinks are two currently very used tools in fashion, even if they are still not used by online fashion forecasting sites. Data mining is the device with higher level of difficulty while adapting into this business and will need a higher effort towards evaluation and testing.

6.6 Managerial implications

It is also important to state that these three devices are part of an exploratory study. As it has been previously discussed, trends studies as an analysis based on social phenomena, requires constant revision and other means of interaction can appeal to be feasible and productive as well. In order to deliver a high quality service it is crucial to focus on interaction between provider-consumer and constantly updating service seeking customers' satisfaction and loyalty.

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Appendix 1 - Interview user transcript: Karla Rey

INTERVIEW TYPE 1 – SAMPLE: USER

NAME : Karla Rey

COMPANY : Focus Textil

POSITION : Product development – colour development

1. How do you research trends in Fashion? What are the main tools you use for this purpose?

Preview Books as Peclers, Here and There, Italian Lab...the one I like most is the American Here and There.

Use online
and offline
sources

Also Moda In, Premiere Vision, Pret a Porter Paris, Tissu Premiere

Intertextile, Texworld. In the trade shows I research material specific on colours, but in a daily basis I research everything: shapes, fabrics, behaviour, etc.

International consultants

Magazines like View Magazine

WGSN, international and national fashion shows. I research both international and local sources to adapt the trends to Brazilian market.

Blogs and International New IHT International Herald Tribune, NY Times, the Daily Telegraph as they have great season summaries

2. Do you use any kind of (paid) Fashion Forecasting services? Which? Why choosing this particular site?

WGSN, Usefashion (Brazilian forecasting Site)

Compares
WGSN to
Stylesight

Stylesight is very modern, better for travel Guides – they have more partnerships with well-known guides so it is very complete, it even gives you weather forecast for your trips, they talk about popular stores. For people

Stylesight is
more
modern

who travel a lot like us these are important tools. It also has a type of messenger inside the site between the users. You can also share the folders with other users. Very modern

WGSN has
better
content

But WGSN has better content, they talk about high-end brands.

WGSN is a brand now. It is dictating fashion trends. We give great relevance to what they say because the market is used to it and we can't be apart from it. This is bad from one side, because they end up monopolizing the 'trends market'.

3. What do you use fashion forecasting sites for? (How do you apply Fashion Forecasting into your business?)

Tool for
planning

It is a tool to help collection planning. We always adapt to our market that needs warmer colours in general. It is a tool to help in planning a direction when you plan for such a long term.

Needs
adaptation

4. When you are researching trends in the internet, where do you usually browse for information and why?

Blogs, online
magazines,
google,
dictionary.co
m

Blogs, Magazine Sites, eg. Vogue.com (with better pictures than WGSN), google

Fashionet.com, google.com, dictionary.com,

5. Do you use fashion blogs to research trends? Do you think they are important and reliable source for investigating trends?

She is very
used to the
blogs
language

Trusts the
information

I use and also think they are very reliable. The national blogs are more reliable than the international. In my opinion the blogs journalists have more independence to talk than the ones who are connected to a specific vehicle. The blogs are all about the personal view. The journalist takes care about their own name, so they assure they will publish reliable information, as they don't have editors or even are connected to an institution. There's less censorship so there's more freedom, I like that. The "feeling" of people who

have been working with fashion for a long time should be listened and respected. These are, in part, the editors of what will be “in” for next seasons. Jc Report, WWD, I don’t remember them now by heart but I have many in my favourites.

BLOGS:
personal
view, less
censorship,
more
democratic,
reliable

6. Would you state ways you communicate with other sectors of fashion industry or professionals in order to investigate trends? (and how do you see communication within trends research?)

Information
exchange: not
in the
beginning of
collection
uses for pre-
test and
development
phase

As we are very anticipated, in the research phase we usually don’t exchange info in the very initial stage of the collection development. As we are market leaders we preserve the first stage of research as confidential. For the next step of the development we pre-test with our clients, manufacturers and retailers. We exchange general infos on trends.

I would say that there’s no part of the fashion industry chain that works by itself. It’s important to exchange; each and every part is a part of the whole engine. In my case it’s always important to know what’s going on with the retailers at the shop floor, to know which products have good performance and so which fabrics have performed well. These infos exchanges are informal, confidential and sometimes concealed but always very important...

Thinks
information
exchange is
very
important

7. In your opinion which are the main consequences of technological advances and the increase of internet participation for Fashion Forecasting? (how do you see the impact of internet on Fashion Forecasting?)

Internet Impact:
increased speed,
easy use, high
information
sharing,
democratization

The good part is the increased speed and the easy use, and also the high information sharing. It is positive but not complete. As we work with textiles, we need to visit fashion centres, to go to fairs, and to touch fabrics etc.

There's another point which is the democratization of communication. Fashion critic is now much more opened and can be done by anyone and good analysis is done in a more democratic basis.

No touching
doesn't
substitute
offline
forecasting

I must say that the online forecasting doesn't substitute the offline one. The face-to-face trends explanation will always have its place. It has a different approach, a different meaning for who's listening about the forecast. Especially when we can "touch" the forecasts as a new fabric.

8. In your opinion, what will be the direction for online Trends Fashion Research?

For Future
trends
research:
collaboration,
partnerships,
new ways for
sending
information

I think they will always look for new ways to send information through new means.

Partnership and collaboration is the secret, as much the site knows how to offer a diverse information and open new options for the user, more they will get it right.

9. Is there any service you would like to have from a Fashion Forecasting Site they still don't offer?

Future
improvements:
Image quality,
agility

Separate all images inside the site and print them or save the folder all in high resolution in my computer. You can just save picture per picture. Agility, the pictures still take time to upload. Also the information should come earlier to the site, from, for example, the fashion shows reviews.

Thank you very much for your time,

Lorena Borja

Appendix 2 - Interview user transcript: Celestino Garcia

INTERVIEW TYPE 1 – SAMPLE: USER

NAME : Celestino Garcia

COMPANY : Mango

POSITION : Fashion Coordinator Team

1. What is your position at the company?

CG: I'm part of the design and fashion coordination team. We give the themes for the design team and we follow the collection to make sure that the theme concept has been kept thorough the design development and we coordinate the product development to make sure the right product get to the shops.

Apart from that, the coordination team also act like a source to give fashion directions for managerial team

1. How do you research trends in Fashion? What are the main tools you use for this purpose?

CG: We are constant looking for information, being aware of what is happening. So we travel quite a lot.

Use online and offline forecasting books, trips, exhibitions cinema communication ad brainstorm in the design team

We are very aware of what is happening. We travel to luxury markets, to exhibitions, we are very aware of everything that comes out in the cinema, music, and we kind of have brainstorms every week with the design team of things that might be interesting for anyone. In Mango communication very important so we believe that we'd rather have something new and it could come from anyone from the staff. Obviously fabric, trends fabric, books, we look at the main fashion prediction books like Trends Union, we like very much. So you also go for the Offline Forecasting?

He is talking about the editing and the interface

Yes, yes, yes, and also the web, that we constantly look and are very important, especially WGSN. We have been working with WGSN for a long time ad we are very used to their 'language'. It is the main web we use for searching information. There are several reasons for that, the first is because we used it for a long time and we like the way the information, we like the way

they categorise, how they cache the information and we're very familiar with their web.

Is WGSN the only site that you subscribe to?

CG: We have used other ones but we've just been using WGSN for a long time.

Have you ever heard of Stylesight?

CG: We have heard of it but we haven't actually used it.

Because they're going for different markets and trying to get clients in different markets

Delivery-
the
interface is
easy to use
and access
infos

One of the
main
reasons for
staying with
WGSN is
because
they're used
and it's easy
to use

CG: We have heard of it but perhaps we might need some more information because it might be of our interest. We do have WGSN because there we have all the information and we are very used to it. All the sites we've tried, we've had trials with different other sites but it didn't worked out for us because he have so many people that need to access for the design team. You have a very personal way you like a site like that, but WGSN has an approach to a number of the staff you know, and also the designers. And also we like the language, it's very easy to access we're already familiar with it, and we've thought about changing, but again another trial...

It's like changing the system, isn't it?

CG: Yeah, because you don't have much time to look at the others, and you're looking for information, and you have to learn another kind of language in order to gather the information, sometimes it takes a long time, I think this is the main reason that we've stayed with WGSN for so many years.

2. When you are researching trends in the internet, where do you usually browse for information and why?

Besides WGSN, blogs.

3. What are your favourite blogs for researching fashion?

The Sartorialist, that's my favourite, I would say that's the one I use the most, and a French one, but to be true the one I tend to look the most is the Sartorialist.

Why?

Blogs are personal points-of-view, important to complement fashion research

It's quite personal, I like the point of view, the taste and they catch the eye of the person, I like to see his point-of-view or the way they catch point of view of other people, if it is the latest thing that came out, something to do with your style and what you like. Because if you really want to know wider perspective on fashion information you just go to WGSN you don't go to blogs, obviously, blogs are very particular points-of-view. It's just a matter of mixing a little bit, otherwise you're just getting information from one source and one point-of-view.

WGSN is not personalized at all, all the market gets the same information. Don't you think it can be a little 'tricky' at one point?

Blogs offer something the paid sites don't offer, the personalised point-of-view

That is what I think. It's very interesting what you're saying because I think on the future...that's why blogs are so interesting, it's showing your own personal point-of-view and how you put things together. And people get the same information, and then you are 'bombarded' by all kinds of information and get even people get anxious about getting this information at the same time. You need to play an individual style, also gather your own information. That's why blogs are very important, because they have a particular point of view. Especially in styling and celebrities, stylists use celebrities to portray an individual style, so they want a person to be known by a certain personality and they're trusted in a way that they actually show a personality. Because people are bored and each one is anxious about having more information than any other person. And the market is so quick and their reaction to new information now is more 'timeless', I like an individual style even though you're gathering information from all over you still make your own particular style and when you wear your clothes you talk about yourself.

That's why for the last few years we've been using celebrities and certain designers for highstreet brand. It helps to personalise. But again it's up to the customer to customize things, how to make it different.

4. Do you use any kind of (paid) Fashion Forecasting services? Which? Why choosing this particular site?

Uses city-by-city
Pictures of fashion shows
Colour reviews
how they categorise

RELIABILITY

WGSN. What I like most about WGSN is the city by city, for travelling is very useful, it is one of the most important tools of the site, it gives you a guide. I also go to images, snaps of the shows, their reviews about the colours, how they categorise them and think tank as well.

5. What do you use fashion forecasting sites for? (How do you apply Fashion Forecasting into your business?)

Confirmation tool for collection development

It is mainly used to confirm things that you're doing. We work with a normal timing – close enough to move (change) something in terms of colour what so ever. So that work is to confirm if what you've have done and what's happening in the world, an exhibition, a graphic artist that just came out, their view of what is happening in terms of graphics, colour. Art exhibitions are very important; they create general interest on a subject, not isolated fashion.

Adapt to their business

When you're experienced you get all this information from different sources you pick up what's going to suit you, with your brands and with your products.

Obviously when you're in the high street is not like if you were a small studio that would be much more personal and narrower point of view, we need to be very aware of what is happening, and WGSN has information on everything.

6. Do you use fashion blogs to research trends? Do you think they are important and reliable source for investigating trends?

Answered in question 3

7. Would you state ways you communicate with other sectors of fashion industry or professionals in order to investigate trends? (and how do you see communication within trends research?)

Don't exchange information with other sectors of fashion industry

We do collaborate with other areas, we work with celebrities or celebrities designers, and we build up our collection together, again is a way to give an 'extra' to the customer, to the 'wearer', we currently work with Penelope and Monica Cruz and we've collaborated with Nike recently. We don't exchange information on fashion with supplier industry, but we buy information from the prediction books. We pretty much give the information and brief our suppliers with what we want. We are very well structured, and each particular department of the company deals with each type of supplier.

8. In your opinion which are the main consequences of technological advances and the increase of internet participation for Fashion Forecasting? (how do you see the impact of internet on Fashion Forecasting?)

Higher information flow
Faster trends
Many interesting things but nothing really unique

You know, there's so much information out there that, trends are now fast driven. Everything is so attractive, you must see the trend coming at the right time, you must be very aware of everything. But at the same time people are getting so bored of this kind of fast paced system they want to have something different, not the same things as everybody else.

So, what you're saying is that are 2 different movements: one fast-paced, time-led, the other people who don't want that anymore...it's a kind of 'neurosis' isn't it?

Importance of identification and differentiation

Yeah, there are these huge trends, that you can't be apart from, you must join (as a fashion company) on the other hand there are all these small trends, they come in between a blurred, massive amount of information, that's why I think it creates this kind of 'neurosis' over fashion.

In a way you want to have everything and creating a reaction on what people want to be and people who want to be different, otherwise we would all be the same.

Do you know how many users there are in Mango for WGSN?

Around 30-40 people

9. In your opinion, what will be the direction for online Trends Fashion Research?

Still the
constant
search for
innovation

Always-
increasing of
information

The market requires we get information all the time, we have to adapt to new creating tools, and as we were saying before it could be a blog within the web, thinking of offering something new and different all the time. Market requires that you have wide information and that you also make your own statement with something new.

10. Is there any service you would like to have from a Fashion Forecasting Site they still don't offer?

He suggests
2 tools:
blogs, to have
a particular
view and
encyclopedia
to learn
while
researching

Maybe what I've stated before: having a particular point of view. Maybe a blog would give a more particular, more personal, to have someone who picks up things that they think are interesting. Maybe it would be good to have these points of views. They could also have a more interactive communication within a blog. One encyclopedia for fashion as well, so we could type a period and they would give you a concept.

Thank you very much for your time,

Lorena Borja

Appendix 3 - Interview user transcript: Karina Souza

INTERVIEW TYPE 1 – SAMPLE: USER

NAME : Karina Souza

COMPANY : Marisa Lojas Varejistas (Brazil)

POSITION : Fashion Coordinator

1. How do you research trends in Fashion? What are the main tools you use for this purpose?

Uses both
online and
offline
forecasting
services

WGSN, national and international sites, fashion brand sites, stylelenses, Usefashion, Catwalk images, trips (to confirm) national and international. Some manufacturers and suppliers also bring information on trends. Also seminars

2. Do you use any kind of (paid) Fashion Forecasting services? Which? Why choosing this particular site?

WGSN. It is the most complete. It brings long term trends not only the finished product itself as Stylesight, for example. It also has an easy interface and easy language for the user

3. What do you use fashion forecasting sites for? (How do you apply Fashion Forecasting into your business?)

Adapt
trends into
business

Use as
planning
tool

We translate and adapt to our market internal and external consumers, the final consumers and the market. After I pass this information to the buyers we plan the collection. Also for colour forecast and to be aware of long term trends

4. When you are researching trends in the internet, where do you usually browse for information and why?

Internal barriers in the company for trying out blogs

National and international brands websites, WGSN, style.com, vogue.com. The youth fashion coordinator use Blogs, but as they are blocked by security we don't often use it, as it is time consuming asking for the IT team to unblock each blog we want to access

5. Do you use fashion blogs to research trends? Do you think they are important and reliable source for investigating trends?

Because she does not experience and is not familiar she avoids using and does not trust

Not really. I'm not sure if they are reliable. I'm not used to it, its amateur, they don't use an easy language and I get insecure to research fashion in blogs.

6. Would you state ways you communicate with other sectors of fashion industry or professionals in order to investigate trends? (and how do you see communication within trends research?)

Exchanges information in the planning stage, face-to-face basis

We meet with other agents from fashion industry 3 times a year and we give the directions for them. The trips confirm our planning but we haven't received much information from the market. We meet some fabric suppliers occasionally to listen to discuss trends. We always talk informally with our suppliers about trends in general.

7. In your opinion which are the main consequences of technological advances and the increase of internet participation for Fashion Forecasting? (how do you see the impact of internet on Fashion Forecasting?)

Fast-paced
Information
exchange
Get more
information

Fast paced, more information exchange with suppliers and other sectors of fashion

8. In your opinion, what will be the direction for online Trends Fashion Research?

ONLINE
LIBRARY

Information
source

We work directly with the material from the catwalks and not only the directions given from WGSN. It is not customised into our lifestyles planning, so many times I personally go directly to the shows and adapt. I think it is going to be like an online library, where you there is loads of information available and you get the one which is more suitable for your business.

9. Is there any service you would like to have from a Fashion Forecasting Site they still don't offer?

Better image
quality

WGSN doesn't have the best quality for images and it's also slow to upload images. The magazines are still very used in the company because the images and the details are much better to see.

Thank you very much for your time,

Lorena Borja

Appendix 4 - Interview content maker transcript: Marlana Woolford

INTERVIEW TYPE 2 – SAMPLE: EXPERT INTERVIEW

NAME : Marlana Woolford

COMPANY : WGSN

POSITION : Regional Manager – Central and Eastern Europe

1. Would you describe WGSN as a business? What are the main objectives of the business?

ADAPTATION
TO EACH
BUSINESS

INSPIRATION,
FLOW OF
COMMUNICA
TION

We call WGSN creative intelligence, and we provide expert analysis of product design and to the design-led industry. So, for a short extent information that is used by all companies that, all main companies that are connected with style. Mainly fashion, so we work with Zara, we work with Mango, Esprit, Prada, Louis Vuitton, Hugo Boss, Primark, all of the Arcadia Group. So, we work with companies that are different price levels and different styles as well. I've named the biggest ones but of course that are smaller manufacturers, suppliers also to sell information. The aim of the business is to support companies with trend forecasting, with inspiration, with flow of communication between the design department and the marketing department, visual merchandising, management. WGSN gives more security to the decision making because we provide professional information upon which decisions can be made. This can be a design decision; this can be a strategic decision, a visual merchandising decision, and any strategic information that is important for style industry, mainly fashion.

SUPPORT
DECISION
MAKING

Which part of the site is the most popular or the most accessed?

It depends on the department that is seeing it but definitely I would say trade shows, catwalks, trends information, graphics, retail analysis.

2. What are the main activities of the site?

Inspirations, we have product service tools so it means that companies can download various sketches for trends infographics and they could work on that and it's in .eps format, so they can work on that and they can work on the image and we also give the copyright for all of our clients, so they can use the information the way they want.

Of course we recommend making changes but they can use the designs prepared by us. The other information is only inspirational of course. So they can prepare also advertising strategy, marketing strategy, Visual Merchandising, we have some market advices for decision-makers, we have information about what industry is doing.

3. What in your opinion is the role of Fashion Forecasting in Fashion Industry?

ZEITGEIST
ADAPTED
TO A
FRAMEWORK

This question is more for our trends team I would say, but I will try to answer from what I've heard from our clients. There's certain atmosphere around us, certain behaviour of consumer. So companies need to be aware of what's on the consumer's mind, so whatever they design will be both interesting but inside a framework. These are the things that people want to buy, want to wear, want to be seen in.

So it's predicting consumers' needs? Helping the client to predict it?

If I would summarize what our specialists say, it's on different levels, there are the main trends and they move very slowly, like for organic food, spas, for more relaxed life, because these trends move very slowly and gradually. And trends that I would call fads, that come very strong and big trends that provokes our interest on consumers when they go to shops every season or when there's something new in the shops. So the main trend is bigger and moves slowly and fads are more quickly to just provoke someone's interest.

4. Would you briefly describe WGSN relationship with customers?

POST-
SELLING

B2B
Relationship

We love our customers! The thing that we try to do always, we try to provide the professional information that can be useful for them and will help their businesses to grow but we don't only provide the information, we also provide the assistance, so every company gets an account manager.

As an account manager, how do you work? Do you get a periodic response from customers? (answer for question 6)

The account managers have a direct contact with the company. It can be very small things like when they forget their password and training them how to use the site, for each different interest from a designer, manager, etc. It's an assistance of how to use

the website and direct contact with different clients and customers, so we don't do consulting but any other help for a better use of the website.

Is there any contact between the trends team and the customer or is it all through the account manager?

I prefer to not answer this question.

5. In your opinion which are the main consequences of technological advances and increase of internet participation for Fashion Forecasting? (how do you see the impact of internet on Fashion Forecasting?)

Consequences:

Faster-paced
(Info in real
time)

Easy access
accuracy

WGSN was set up in 1998 by two brothers and this was the time where, this was the very beginning of the internet, and in fact, the brothers were big visionaries. Even though everyone else was doing forecasting in print materials and trend books, they've decided that internet was a good platform to provide this kind of information. And in the beginning it wasn't very easy because they had to set up the satellite on the top of the buildings where our clients were based on, had to sent floppy discs with the reports they've published, so the vision was there, the brothers saw that this was the platform for the future. And as we can see nowadays, every company has easy access to the internet, they can use this information and they can allow this information to be in more real time, more up to date. Because when we look years ago when we look 10 years ago when there was just trends books, by the time you go through all the publishing process this information is already old. Online we have 10-12 reports every day. So, it just provides quick updates, much easier access to the information on trends and more accurate information on trends and more accurate information for people who can travel around the world using the internet so even if someone is a designer and is in a small island, they can have access to the work without moving from there.

6. What would you state as objectives of your work?

It was answered before.

7. What are the main advantages of an online format for Fashion Forecasting facing the offline format? Any disadvantage?

Disadvantage:
Can't touch

Advantages:
Speed
Portable
interactive
tools

The only disadvantage that I could see is that you can't touch the fabrics and the colours that you look through the screen. At the moment this is a limitation of the internet. Advantages: speed of information of course and the interactivity tools are very easy to download designs and it's available everywhere so people don't have to carry on lots of books when they travel and in fashion businesses people travel to trade show, conferences, for shopping trips, and they can access the information everywhere.

8. Do you think blogs have any importance on investigating trends?

BLOGS:

Democratic,
independent,
no accuracy,
source of
inspiration that
needs double-
check, not very
reliable
provide good
discussions
approximates
people

For sure, blogs are a very democratic way of spreading the information. There's the question of accuracy but on the other hand they have the freedom where anyone can say whatever they want. So people who are using trends inspiration only they have to double-check the accuracy and also the quality may vary. Very difficult to compare, but very democratic, you know, can be good idea, can provide good discussions again with people around the world, which in the past it would have taken much more time and much slower and many times internet approximates people.

9. Do you evaluate customers' satisfaction on the offered service? If yes, how?

Was answered before

10. Do you think the current format meets totally customers' needs? Why?

I think we provide a good service, there's no other company with a similar service as ours, but there's always things to improve, that's why we always encourage our customers to give us feed-back.

11. Do you know Stylesight has launched a 3.0 version of their site? Is WGSN planning any changes?

Don't know
their
competitors!

Launching a
Blog in
December

I don't know Stylesight and yes we are planning many changes, I can't tell you about all of them but one of the main is the launch of our blog inside the site in December.

12. Do you have any data showing the growth of online FF services (especially if compared with off-line services)

She didn't answer the question as this is confidential data and the company isn't PLC

Thank you very much for your time,

Lorena Borja

Appendix 5 - Interview content maker transcript: Fernanda Pigatto

INTERVIEW TYPE 2 – SAMPLE: EXPERT INTERVIEW

NAME : Fernanda Pigatto

COMPANY : Stylesight

POSITION : Materials Editor

1. Would you describe Stylesight as a business? What are the main objectives of the business?

Provide information report what is happening in the market and world almost real time (timing is very important)

Stylesight is a leading provider of trend forecasting and product development tools for creative professionals in the fashion and style industries. The objective is to provide actionable information and reporting on what is happening in the market and the world in almost real time, and offering creative professionals innovative tools and technology for their product development journeys.

2. What are the main activities of the site?

UNPARALLELED point of view on the industry

The company offers clients around the world a Fashion Office with an unparalleled 'point of view' on the industry, an expansive Stylesight Search library with more than three million inspiring images, comprehensive market intelligence and advanced technology tools that enable faster and more efficient product development. Stylesight covers all the Women's, Men's & Children's, Fall / Spring Designer Collections in New York, London, Paris, Milan, Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo as well as Haute Couture Collections, Street, Vintage, Retail, Celebrity Fashions, Denim, Color, Trade Shows, Mood Galleries and Interiors.

3. What in your opinion is the role of Fashion Forecasting in Fashion Industry?

As reference, Fashion Forecasting is conceptual

In my viewpoint is a reference, not a guide. Fashion forecasting is very conceptual and ludic. All signs come from the consumers and from the everyday life and facts that will impact on fashion, food, lifestyle, interiors, travelling, etc.

4. Describe Stylesight relationship with customers?

Our clients can talk to us anytime, we have a system that keeps us informed about our clients' needs and what information is important to help them do their jobs. We work with our clients very closely to provide support whenever possible.

5. In your opinion which are the main consequences of technological advances and increase of internet participation for Fashion Forecasting? (how do you see the impact of internet on Fashion Forecasting?)

More
Practical

Positive
consequences

It depends on who is using the information and how it is being using. I feel like is totally positive and practical. As I said before, if fashion forecasting is used as a concept to be interpreted in each one way, is fine. Because I really believe that we need directions, but not a guide, otherwise everybody would produce the same. For sure there are Companies just following what is already working on the market, but those ones are not Trendsetters, are just followers, and the market and consumers needs that too. For example Zara is a follower and the consumers can get a trend garment with a reasonable price.

6. What would you state as objectives of your work?

Reports about
Textile and
Print

Current and
future expert
point of view

Working as an editor I do reports about Textile and Print trade shows, Art and Graphic events, Art Exhibitions, Profile of Textile and Graphic Designers, research to catch latest trends to work on special reports as a Monthly P&G Report for all genders...is all about reporting as best as possible to our clients what is happening now and in the future with an expert point-of-view.

7. What are the main advantages of an online format for Fashion Forecasting facing the offline format? Any disadvantage?

More
versatile
format

The main advantage is that the online forecasting format can play much more with flats, colors, prints, compose a look in a minute, just playing. I'm talking about Stylesight forecast, which provides to our clients this possibility. In general is just easier, in a click! Stylesight is able to deliver information to our clients faster b/c we don't have print production and distribution lead times. Also, our clients can view our information anywhere in the world, as long as

Faster and
more
efficient
format

they have internet access. Our technology allows them to easily search for images and content, save their research and share it with business partners globally. Our technology makes the product development process faster and more efficient. Disadvantages, yes, there are many as there are many on trendbooks forecast, the fact is, could come out many similar collections, but good designers and visionaries ones, make a good mix of everything.

8. Do you think blogs have any importance on investigating trends?

Yes but
needs "filter"

Blogs are interesting, we have a blog as well at Stylesight that points on street snaps from all over the world. It is called Stylesightings. In general is important but you need to filter them as a user in base of your objectives.

9. Do you evaluate customers' satisfaction on the offered service? If yes, how?

Online
feedback
from
customers

Close
relationship
with
customers

As mentioned before, we keep in close contact with our clients throughout the relationship. We have a full time client services team that maintains continuous communications with our clients to obtain feedback. Our clients can also submit feedback online as they are using our technology. For example, in Stylesight Search, our library of over 3 million inspiring images, we have a key-word search function that enables clients to easily search images. If they ever come across a word that has no search results, they can submit the word at that very moment, and that request gets routed to our content and technology team. We read all suggestions and are committed to continuously improving our services and products for our clients.

10. Do you think the current format meets totally customers' needs? Why?

In my viewpoint yes, because became easier to us editors too, at the end we are also clients. I always check on what my colleagues are doing as an internal research.

11. Would you explain the 3.0 version of the Stylesight?

Key-word
searches

Drag-and-drop
technology

Image Preview

Users can Save,
Share and Edit
research in
folders

“Nothing like this search exists anywhere in the world!!” Frank Bober, our CEO words when presented to the team. Stylesight Search 3.0 offers clients state-of-the-art enhancements such as refined and key-word searches, drag-and-drop technology, image preview functionality, and enables users to save, edit and share research using workspace and folder functions.

Thank you very much for your time,

Lorena Borja

Appendix 6 - Interview knowledge manager transcript: Alan Brompton

INTERVIEW TYPE 3 – SAMPLE: SPECIALIST – KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

NAME : Alan Brompton

POSITION : Independent Knowledge Management Consultant

1. Can you define knowledge management?

Well, that's a difficult question...KM is about managing tacit knowledge in people's heads and the explicit knowledge for the knowledge that contains procurement tools accessible using technology. It doesn't have to be all documents to allow it. It is managing those documents to allow people to gain value from accessing that knowledge. Which degree either we create can or generate from a verge.

2. How does knowledge management can accomplish on business results?

Knowledge
produces
value in
organizations

Knowledge that is created in the organization which other people from the organization could use to produce some value.

3. What do you mean by value in this case?

VALUE: getting
more from
what you have
spent,
PROFITABILITY

SPEED
DELIVERY
GREATER
CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION
IMPROVED
SELF

For instance, if you look at a piece of work that I did for the Tax office in Italy: they were going through a massive change program and the question was could we use KM to help that change program. So if you can imagine the work involved in that, the office involved 40.000 people, about 4.000 offices. If we could share the experience that people had in that change program, and I see value in getting more that what have you spent, so if you have spent one dollar you get a dollar fifty in value, I mean it could be related to cost, it could be something to do with speed of delivery, greater customer satisfaction, it could be to do with improved self, or it could be to do with any of these issues together because they all include profitability. It could be increasing market share, any of those.

4. Do you think that for fashion trends research and consumer trends research, applying KM could accomplish to this type of business, if you raise the interaction among fashion agents?

KNOWLEDGE
IMPROVES
SPEED IN
MARKET

UNDERSTAND
THE DRIVERS
EARLY TO MAKE
APPROPRIATE
CHANGES IN
BUSINESS, helps
Managing
process

KEEP THE PACE
WITH TRENDS

Customer
Insight

Customer
understanding

I don't know exactly how fashion industry works, but we've applied in many different industries and retail, if you improve you improve your speed to market. The same you can apply in many industries, in retail, if you through your knowledge you improve your speed in market. If you see the retail organization called Primark who is focused in low cost bids. They are doing extremely well, and you see other organization as Marks & Spencer perhaps focused on quality are showing a loss on business because they are keeping money down. It is more an economic factor that a fashion one but if you understand the drivers early or earlier that could deliver a greater business, greater market share and so on. Also I think that the trend and everything are very rapid, trying to keep pace with that is also a challenge. But value is to some extend is related to business intelligence and KM. I've noticed that a lot of the jobs that are advertised now as KM would have previously advertised as business intelligence. We have been talking to 2 organizations at the moment and one is looking at what is called as customer insight and the other is talking about customer understanding, and both are relating those to KM.

5. Due to the intangible aspect of knowledge, how is it possible to measure these achievements?

The answer for that is quite difficult. We have to look at the indicators, if you say we have to do this so it will increase our self and you do it and it does increase, that does not necessarily implied that what you did led to the increase so it could've been that one of your competitors went out of business. So you've got to be very careful even when you've got real numbers. But some of the things you can use are qualitative measurement. Obviously you can do surveys, you can send a questionnaire to your staff or partners outlets or ever else, ask them some questions today and in some months you can send it again to see how things have changed, improved or not, so surveys are one approach. There might be other qualitative measures, I mean, but it is going to be specific to what you're doing.

6. How KM is connected with internet/technology? Do you think blogs, hyperlinks and data mining are tools that help to build knowledge in CME (computermediated environment)? If yes, why?

Experiential character of internet devices as wikis, blogs, discussion forums

Difficult to measure result

There's always been technology helping KM, because it's not easy to capture information and turn it into knowledge. You need the persons, you need the organization, you need the incentives to do things, but very often it doesn't deliver the result. There has been an emergence of the Web 2.0, some people are calling it KM 2.0 and KM content. They are primarily blogs, perhaps discussion forums and wikis. But people from KM field that I know, nobody has it clear which technologies actually delivers a benefit. Lots of people are experimenting with them but nobody has been able to demonstrate that the cost of using it really delivers value. People are just believers.

THE PERSONAL CHARACTER OF A BLOG

EVERYONE STATED THAT WHO WRITES IS THE MOST IMPORTANT

IT CAN BE A WAY OF PERSONALIZING THE SERVICE (NOT CUSTOMIZING, BUT PERSONALIZING)

If you look at something like the Wikis, Wikipedias, for example, if you look at an organization context, the questions that will arise are: do they get used? The experience that I've seen it is that some people use it and some people don't use it at all, so can you rely on the content? If there's no facilitator, how can you rely on the content at all? The info may be incorrect. It can also be difficult to find the information, to find knowledge in that content. It depends on what you're looking for. If you're looking for the details of some performer you'll probably find it in the Wikipedia, you're not sure if the information is correct, but if you're looking for something that might be more generic it's very difficult to find an engine that will help you. Trying to mine information out of blogs and wikis is not simple. People will go to a particular blog, someone who is well known in a blog and because they're well known they can be trusted. I don't know if you ever used the trip advisor?

No, I've never used.

INTERNET
TOOLS ARE
AVAILABLE AND
PEOPLE ARE
GOING TO USE
THEM
WHETHER THE
ORGANIZATION
TAKES PART OF
IT OR NOT.

BETTER TO
TAKE PART...

It is a very large site where anyone can publish their reviews of a hotel. I always look to see what people say. If you're lucky, you'll look at a hotel and there'll be 40-50 reviews on the hotel you're looking for, saying it's great or it's bad, but very often what you find is that opinions are divided. ½ of people will like and ½ of people will say they didn't like it.

So. That's the problem with anything that is not monitored, anything that has no facilitation...but people are trying to use it. In an organizational context, if the organization doesn't facilitate their use people will go outside in the internet and they're going to use it anyway.

7. KM and the interaction in the online Fashion Forecasting context

ETHICAL
MATTERS

KNOWLEDGE
GENERATING
AND
SHARING CAN
THREAT
BUSINESS TOO

If someone would have a site, they could have a blog or a discussion forum, they could host a wiki. The key question they need to answer is that they're in a competitive environment, how widely available it is knowledge generating and sharing and is it advantageous to them? Does it give them competitive advantage? For instance, in fashion terms, if you wanted to create something that you believe is a new fashion it is useful that you've identified it is a trend, a new fashion, but the implication is that everybody knows. Now you have everybody competing. Or is it better to find ways to not reveal what you're doing. I think there's a risk commercially and I think the philosophy on KM is you're better off to know what you know and what other people know. That's a principle in KM. But if your competitors know what you know, have you disadvantaged yourself?

8. Don't you think this is quite changing? People are going to share the knowledge anyway, either if it is inside the site or outside the site. In my opinion sharing in this case is inevitable.

The company
can "partially"
share, share
just with some
other
members or
companies

I know what you mean. You believe that sharing has more advantages than disadvantages. There is an argument that says that since speed is in the essence, by the time somebody else's recognized what you're doing is already too late for them anyway. There are 2 things you can do: you can charge for this sharing or you can define who you're going to share the

knowledge with. For instance, a manufacturer might share knowledge with and outlet but not openly with the whole market.

9. Do you know data mining? Would you explain Data Mining?

It is a common tool. It's about looking at the data and trying to extract trends or information from the data. By looking at it and experimenting, it's about trying to find trends and relationships and so on.

The current common use it to find out what and how people shop in the internet.

10. What is the current use of Data Mining in companies?

Data mining is particularly used when you have loads of information, but I say it again, it's very important that you understand the cause and the effect.

11. Is there any ethic matter on using blogs as part of a business or corporation? If yes, please explain.

ETHICAL
MATTERS

I think there's a conflict between the desire to have something open and free and the potential value or damage for opening and free can be. But if you as a company say you can open you own blog or wiki do what you like, encouraging people to do that. And for a company like Google, this might not bring any value to Google. And it not only brings any value to Google as it may have people spending work time doing something that is not useful for the company. There's a risk that the company is spending effort, time and money resources to no benefit for the company.

There also sources saying that employers are looking at people's profiles at Facebook, and there's people applying for jobs and rejecting them because of what they say.

CONTROL
INFORMATION
AND
KNOWLEDGE
AS THEY ARE
BUSINESS
RESOURCES

I think there are some great dangers. I think there need to be some elements of monitoring for any business site. I think a business is there primarily to make money and obviously to give employment and satisfying the customers in doing that. I think they must exercise and element of control over any resources that they provide. And I think it's wrong to allow a free form from a

business perspective. I think it's dangerous, but you must understand that there are millions of people who are not very academic and who are not very bright and we must consider who these people are. They can't write, they can't spell, they don't understand what they're saying, sometimes what they're saying, sometimes the way they behave in private is just not appropriate in a business environment, so you've got to consider all of those things.

My view is that there has to be a certain kind of control, I wouldn't say that e-mails should be scrutinized but there must be some kind of facilitation or moderation.

Thank you very much for your time,

Lorena Borja