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RESEARCH METHODS IN FASHION DESIGN: IT'S COMPILATION AND IMPORTANCE IN DESIGN PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Research is the systematic and creative investigation that will yield so many ideas in terms of appropriate use of materials and sources to establish facts and reach new conclusions. The impact of intensity of research is directly proportional to the output of the project. It resolves various purposes during the commencement of the design process starting from investigating the project, explorations, prototyping till the final product development stage. This paper aims to understand the importance of research, types of research and research methods in design, visual research analysis, design brief and research compilation. The data presented in the paper is a result of continuous involvement in teaching pedagogy in fashion design and is derived from the fashion design projects guided at different levels. This research can be used as a guideline to conduct research for any fashion design project by students or professionals.

KEYWORDS: Research Methods, Research Compilation; Design Process & Fashion Design

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INTRODUCTION

Research is integral part of any design process that begins to investigate all the elements explored during design process from conceptualization to the product development. It involves initial hunt for ideas, market and client study, fabric and resources, production and execution, finding out vendors prior to design till the stage it gets final feedback from the experts and the users. It is like a lifeline of the projects which might take few weeks or months to provide required direction to the project. It triggers your mind towards creative thinking keeping in mind the restrictions at the same point of time (Mckelvey and Munslow (2007)). It is often observed that the amazing design products are a result of in-depth and intense research. Research helps immediately after the design brief is received. Initial trial and collection of the multiple design ideas helps further investigating it appropriately towards the design output. It resolves following purposes while during the commencement of the design process as stated by Asplund (2015).

- Any research will provide comparative thought on history, ongoing and probable aspect of any investigation. It is a learning about something new or from the past.
- It is the journey to explore, to read, to visit, to view and to record information.
- It also validates your thought processes and ideas collected from various resources.
- Support or find out about a particular subject.

- It is the way of showing world how you see the subject and how you think.
- It stimulates mind and opens new directions, leads to silhouettes, textures, colors, details, prints and embellishment
- Discover unknown information.
- New skills or technologies.
- Gathering information from various resources- explore variety of creative possibilities.
- Before channeling your focus, opportunity to inquire into interests and expand knowledge.
- Documentation, refer in the futures.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research can be done for an ongoing project, collecting information day by day or it can be done for newly acquired brief. The task is to observe world around you relating to the project you are handling. These observations and recording can be done using following methods:

- Secondary research methods
- Primary research methods
- Tertiary research methods

Secondary Research Methods

To start with any research it is extremely important to know the existing facts about all aspects which revolve around your project. Starting from the ideation to conceptualization, exploration to planning, sourcing to execution, detailing, marketing; one needs to understand the existing data which has already taken place. This helps in two ways – (a) it provides direction to explore considering the existing facts in mind and (b) it helps in avoiding duplication of work.

Secondary research involves collecting informative material which is already created by others. It can be findings of other people, found in books, internet, journals and magazines, allows seeing and reading about things that are no longer around or not easily accessible (Mckelvey and Munslow (2007)). It is important to know how to use this information since the data is too vast. It is important to analyze and distill the information which is appropriate for the project. Investigative skill of the researcher need to be really critical.

Secondary Resources

To have literary and academic information resources like books, journals and websites can be referred. Online resources like blogs, social media, you tube videos can also be used to have a personalized opinion about the topic. For cross-referencing museums, art galleries, trade shows and fashion Shows and exhibition can be visited to have a visual and in some cases tactile experience. Magazines, reviews and articles also help in providing added information.

Primary Research Methods

First-hand information created by the researcher and which didn't exist before is primary research. It can be information collected by you after talking to someone or a data captured or collected. Apart from that primary research can

be recorded through drawings, photographs, surveys or even sensory associations than just the object itself, touch and smell may all recall memories. While doing all this, one need to make sure that, the recording or explorations should be relevant to the project that you are doing so that it gives a particular direction for final selection.

While exploring, it is to be made sure that one has his own interpretation towards alteration of secondary resource. e.g., if any idea is interpreted by using drawing as a medium from a heritage site, rather than copying it directly, there should be assimilation of individual ideas. It is extremely important to do primary research because it is important to have a first-hand experience. Taking an example of monument again; the information can be easily collected from the secondary resources like internet or books. However, when a place is visited personally; it can be understood in complete perspective. Understanding on color, form, texture, detail, and environment has a personal opinion. Apart from this visual and physical appearance, there is an experiential learning about the influence the place has made on individual which can lead towards the creative directions. Touching, smelling and hearing are all very suggestive experience and may evoke some memories or experiences you have had, triggering your design thinking.

Primary Sources

Having analyzed your secondary data, you get a direction on how to proceed towards the projects. Based on this analysis, one make explorations, developments, charts, opinions which are primarily executed by you. Primary sources are the findings that you capture or record during the project. They can be enlisted as photography, drawing, surface ornamentation, trend study, silhouette exploration (2D and 3D) etc. Wide range of methods is listed below with examples wherever possible.

Photography

Photography is quick and generally the first method which is frequently used in recording any kind of information. Apart from data collection it also helps in documentation and compilation of your work.

Eg in the Figure 1, a student has captured the historic monument of Jamli Kamli located in Delhi. She tried to capture the raw and rough structures. She has chosen the place as it complimented her concept; she also chose to click black and white pictures as she wanted to keep the entire theme in monochromes. These pictures were further explored in terms to generate textures colors and silhouettes for the collection.

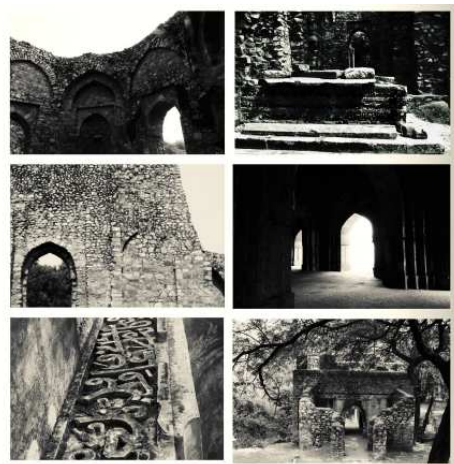


Figure 1: Photographs by Shivya Sachdeva for Fashion Studies 1

Surface Exploration

Surface exploration is another important tool for conducting primary research. Surface exploration can be print, embroidery, dyeing, handmade or machine generated. After concept get finalized student start exploring the different design like surface exploration. Figure 2 shows fabric exploration done by a student for her final project called *vasa*. She took a concept of sustainability where she explored the concept of *Rafugiri* “technique of mending the torn or old pieces”. She further took it up as concept to generate surfaces or may be fabric using this technique. She used old denim pieces and generated various surfaces which were further used to make summer jackets.



Figure 2: Fabric Explorations for Final Project Called *Vasa*

Trend Spotting

Many designers draw inspiration from the street culture. They document the trends observed in the streets. These trends are not only observed in terms of clothing or textiles but print advertising, digital media, the accessories, the behavioral trends can also be observed. Demographics, local style, client idea surface can be recorded in streets, malls, markets etc. (En. wikipedia.org, 2018).

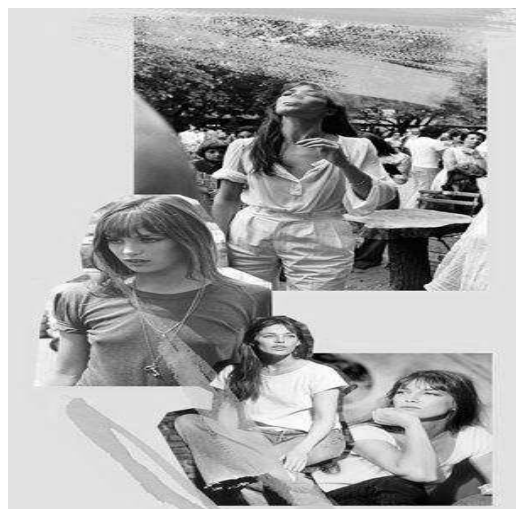


Figure 3: Trend Board Available at the kidslookertumblr.com



Figure 4: Trend Spotting in Kutch by Ashish Dhaka

Draw/Sketch /Illustrate

A designer does not really need to be an artist or an illustrator but should be able to communicate ideas through doodles or rough drawing. one should be able to withdraw information from the inspiration by using rough drawings/ doodling or collaging. In the following Figure 5; student has explored an inspiration which is based on Typography. By drawing as a medium she has tried to explore all possible directions for the project. In the image you can observe the inspiration has been explored to evolve 2D as well as 3D direction.



Figure 5: Exploration Using Doodling by Palak Singh for Design Project Level-1

Silhouette Exploration

Silhouette can be explored in either two or three dimensions. In figure 5, the silhouette is explored using 2 D drawing in as many as possible ways using inspiration of type phase in mind. Before proceeding to range plan it is very important to explore the same in 3 dimensional forms as well. The 3D silhouettes can be explored using fabric which is closer to the final fabric selected or muslin is most common fabric used.



Figure 6: 3D Exploration by Sonika Khar and Ashish Dhaka for Project En (Circled)

In the Figure 6 Circle as a shape is used in different ways to explore variation in silhouette. All of the above primary sources mentioned are explorative and interpretative in nature. The output is always qualitative, however, the other methods which are used to find out quantitative data are surveys, questionnaires and interviews. These methods are helpful primarily to conduct client and market study`

Tertiary Research Methods

After analyzing primary and secondary research and developing an own interpretation, feedback by a third person or an expert is tertiary. Taking an example of completion of design project in an institute, a jury is conducted to evaluate the work. Certain changes made according to the feedback is given is called tertiary research. In that case, jury members are also indirectly involved in the project. Similarly in industry, after prototyping, feedback is taken from the experts or users on the product. This feedback is applied again in the product before production and launching in the market.

COMPILATION OF RESEARCH

The output of research is huge and it is very important to compile research in proper format so that it can be used progressively during the project. Though it is informal but the best way to collate the research is in the form of scrap book or visual diary. All visual and textual research can be compiled in such a meticulous manner that it can be used appropriately. Scrap book or visual diary has personal touch and it is handy source which can be used to explain your journey to any one with the support of visual analysis (Seivewright & Sorger (2017)). It is also used to take continuous feedback and constant discussions with the mentors involved. The mediums used can be prints, Xeroxes, scrap sheets, write-ups, doodles etc. Research can be compiled using following methods (Seivewright & Sorger (2017)).

Drawing

Drawing is an elementary tool which is used by designers at almost all stages. It is the most ideal way to record any information. Any medium of colours or pencils can be used: Partial or complete drawing of the elements which you

have sourced will help you in ideating and provide design directions. Figure 5 shows the exploration using doodling

Collaging

It is another important approach to collate the information that has been gathered. Two pictures either similar or contrasting based on your thought process can provide third direction to your project. When one is working with images, one should not be scared of disturbing the visual balance of the composition. It should be aesthetically pleasant to your eyes.

Juxtaposition

If collage is about sticking and cutting pictures together, then juxtaposition is when you start placing relevant material together at one place. e.g., a choice is made about particular silhouette; a sketch is placed along with the probable fabric, surface choice, and technique and detailing. To some extent even the trims and design details can be put together. If not primary, the references can be derived from the secondary resources.

Deconstructions

Deconstruct or to disassemble is used to have a different outlook to view things. The existing clothes can be ripped apart to see how they are traditionally made and assemble the same components in a different manner than the original. It may provide insights to come up with new silhouette or form direction.

Cross-Referencing

When you start researching, the collected information may be varied and unrelated to each other. Cross referencing is to study related things which are complimentary to each other. These can be grouped with your earlier research to explore further. It is the mix of sources with similar qualities which highlights cross referencing.



Figure 7: Collaging Available at <http://trendland.com>



Figure 8: Juxtaposition Available at <http://www.artsthread.com>



Figure 9: Deconstruction Available at www.pinterest.com

Analysis of Research

As you begin to explore your research and compile ideas through drawings collage, juxtaposition etc; you begin to see design directions evolving out of the time you have captured all information related to texture shape etc. It is the time to draw early sketches. These sketches will reroute you through final design directions.

Key Focus

This stage allows you to work on series of pages which helps you to identify the elements which you wish to work on for your project

REFERENCING AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

While going through the information collection from the secondary resources it is very important and ethical responsibility of any designer to acknowledge the knowledge provider. Any information included in terms of picture, text, quote etc, essential should have in- text citation and referencing. Other than that, all the resources are referenced in the bibliography generally mentioned at the end pages of any document. There are various methods of referencing according to the guidelines of the institute.

FLOW OF RESEARCH IN DESIGN PROCESS

Table 1 reflects how the research applies at different stages of design process and also the research methods involved. The tools and methods vary according to the need of design project. Figure 10 is like a guideline to check the flow and intensity of research in design at each level along with the methods and tools to explore. In the end, it is very important to compile and direct the research towards the final output and references and citations should never be forgotten.

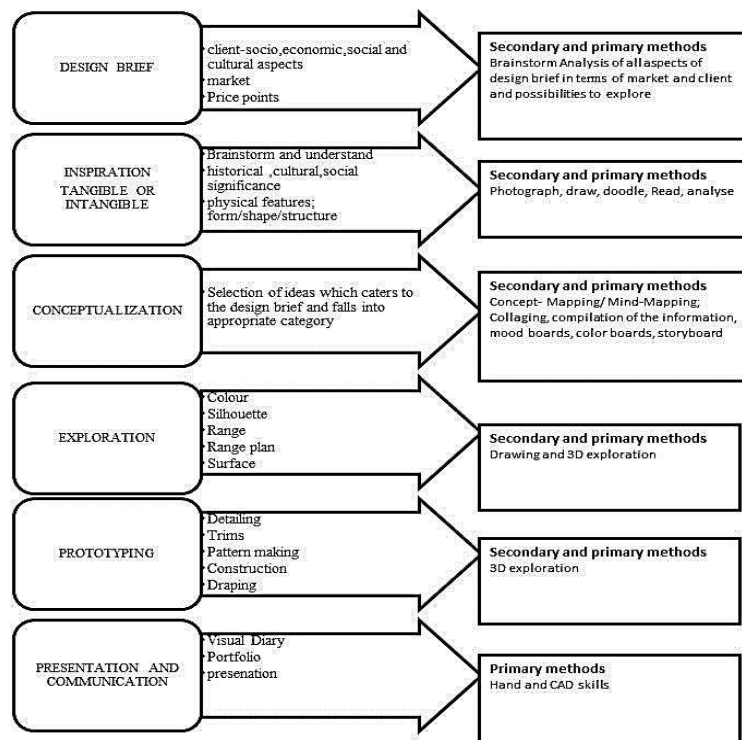


Figure 10: Flow if Research in Design Along with the Methods and Tools to Explore

This chart can become a quick reference for any design project. The research starts with brainstorming on client, market, and price range, social demographic and cultural background. The survey could be conducted using methods of questionnaires or online interviews targeting parents and school kids on needs and demands of the client. The methods can

be secondary followed by primary. It can be observed in the figure that research continues till the end of the project.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, research is integral part of design and continues along with the project at all stages. There are three types of research methods broadly divided into primary, secondary and tertiary. The tools and methods vary according to the need of design project. The figure 10 is like a guideline to check the flow and intensity of research in design at each level along with the methods and tools to explore. In the end it is very important to compile and direct the research towards the final output and references and citations should never be forgotten.

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