

Better Fashion Futures. From Product Consumption to Service Experiencing

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Abstract

This paper offers a view on how Service Design may help fashion brands take a greater role in the circular economy by shifting organizational mindset from a product focus, to one where the product becomes part of a highly experiential service. This is done by using the lens of Service Design as a means of designing for highly experiential, more meaningful and desirable services. The paper describes the newly developed Service Design method Trendslation, which aims to design innovative service concepts based upon cultural trends and brand values. Further, it provides an example of the Trendslation method, and its use, in an explorative research by design project with a Global sports and lifestyle brand. The findings indicate that Service Design can be a useful approach for fashion brands as a means to develop more sustainable fashion practices. However, Service Design needs to be further developed in a more experiential direction to be able to fully realize the potential presented here. A focus upon the *experiential customer journey*, and *experiential elements* are suggested as additions to existing Service Design tools as a means to do this. Finally, this paper suggests that Service Design and Fashion could develop valuable symbioses, to explore the move from product to service as the fashion industry continues towards becoming more sustainable in practice.

Keywords: Service Design, Trendslation, sustainable fashion, experience, experiential service journey, experiential elements

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Introduction

The fashion industry is in the midst of a transformative era. Moving towards more sustainable and socially conscious practices, commercial fashion brands and companies are looking for new approaches for developing sustainable solutions for better fashion consumption (Ræbild and Bang, 2018). A growing awareness is arising around the environmental impact and social injustice the commercial fashion industry inflicts on people and planet (Fletcher, 2008; Aakko, 2013), yet consumers still seek the pleasure and emotional satisfaction, as well as the novel experience, status and identity creation they can attain through the purchase of fashion products (Fletcher, 2008). This transformation towards sustainable and socially conscious practices moves the focus from the point of sale, towards a circular economy, that requires a greater degree of customer participation, motivation and action over time. The fashion industry therefore needs to move its focus from one specific point in time, to a lifecycle approach, which necessarily requires creating relationships over time with customers. However, this transformation needs to happen without loss of the customer experience that fashion has, through its highly aesthetic, desirable and seductive nature.

In parallel, a societal shift of mindset is growing - from buying and owning products, to using services (Millburn & Nicodemus, 2014). Established fashion brands and companies are slowly realizing the value of looking into models for extending product lifetime in line with the circular economy (Niinimäki, 2017), and following in the footsteps of independent brands, startups and NGO's through offering services built around their products, such as repair, recycling and redesign (Armstrong et.al, 2015). To motivate consumers to adopt these new practices, there is a strong need for these services to be highly experiential in nature and to be perceived as meaningful and desirable. They also need to be strongly aligned to brand DNA and attuned to cultural trends (Dennington, 2018).

The combination of a sustainable transformation of the industry and the societal move from owning products to using services, alongside the consequences mentioned earlier, I argue creates a trajectory in fashion that moves it from products to services. If fashion is viewed in a service perspective, there is a need to design and develop the relationship between fashion brand and customer over time - beyond the purchase point, and consider the whole fashion experience. Service Design is a field of design that designs offerings to provide experience over time, and across different touch-points (Clatworthy, 2013). Service Design therefore seems like a relevant field to work together with Fashion to develop the services that will be necessary during this transformative era. By bridging the fashion industry with Service Design, potential synergies may be revealed, in the move towards more sustainable and socially conscious fashion practices. If fashion is to move past its focus upon the point of sale, and look at a circular economy, there is a need to find means of understanding the customer perspective in this.

Shifting to a service mindset requires customer effort and motivation also outside of the purchase moment. Service design offers a means to understand and encourage this through its focus upon the customers' experiential journey, where the point of purchase is one part of a total journey, seen from the customer view. The service designer seeks to design for specific experiences along a journey, in which the customer is an active co-creator and co-producer.

Through this paper I suggest the newly developed Service Design method *Trendslation* as an option for fashion companies to look beyond the point of purchase, and towards the design of services across a whole journey. This approach could open up for innovative service solutions that provide emotional value through use of a service, in contrast to the purchase of a product. This in turn could influence a more sustainable approach to fashion consumption. Service Design as a design field and discipline, looks beyond the product and point-of-purchase, and into the design for holistic experiences over time, across different touch-points (Clatworthy, 2013). The *Trendslation* method could assist in the transformation from fashion product to service experiences, by focusing on meaning-driven service innovation (Dennington, 2018) through the uptake of cultural influences, and the translation of these into highly experiential and more meaningful service experiences. Through this paper I suggest that this could specifically be valuable for the fashion domain, with its major cultural position and focus, and trend-based nature. This paper offers one view forward in the quest for more sustainable fashion practices.

A Service Design approach for better fashion practices?

Service Design, as a field and approach, has grown out of an interdisciplinary background, including product and interaction design (Clatworthy, 2013). Service design is described as “designed offerings to provide experiences that happen over time and across different touch-points” (Clatworthy, 2013, pp.19). With its focus on designing for the intangible and complex nature of services, service design has described and developed tools, methods and approaches for deconstructing such complexity into parts – including timeline, touch-points, service moments and actors (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2012). The notion of a timeline is translated into the service design tool of a Customer Journey, which is a mapping of touch-points through time. The customer journey “provides a vivid, but structured visualization of a service user's experience” (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2012), whilst touch-points are described as “the points of interaction between customer and organization” (Clatworthy, 2013, pp.88). Touch-points can range from physical to digital, intangible to tangible, and have been defined as a service design material, argued as “one of the most important materials used in Service Design to understand, explore and develop innovative service solutions” (Clatworthy, 2011). In today's fashion context the main touch-points that customers meet are often directly related to the point

of purchase, such as the physical or digital store, the products and labels, carrier bags, or to the pre-purchase phase through magazines, advertisements, social media posts etc. Designing and structuring touch-points throughout the post-purchase phase could potentially open up for innovative service solutions across the whole journey. Another relevant viewpoint is how services exist within a network of actors, where in this context – the customer is viewed as a major actor that together co-produce the service, and through this, become co-creators of value.

The objectives of using Service Design approaches are to support innovation in service organizations (Clatworthy, 2009), and to design, develop and deliver services that are useful, usable, efficient, effective and desirable (British design council). Up until now, a major part of service design practice and research has focused on the “useful, usable, efficient and effective” part – through service design for more traditional service providers such as within telecom, banking, insurance, healthcare (Freire and Sangiorgi, 2010; Halvorsrud et al., 2016). However, the newly identified direction in Service Design of Service Design as a cultural intermediary (Matthews, 2017; Dennington, 2018), casts the domain as a culturally sensitive field where *meaning-construction* is explored as an innovation material with the aim to address and enhance the desirability and experience focus, and to design new services and service offerings that trigger an immediate and intuitive emotional response, through being highly experiential. This seems to resonate strongly with some core characteristics of fashion, with its focus on style and the “It”-factor (Beard, 2012), and the need to deliver desirable and meaningful service experiences. In turn, the design of “desirable services” could lead to competitive advantage in a growing service dominant market, specifically within such culturally conditioned business sectors as fashion.

Desirable and meaningful service experiences

To address and further explore the area of meaning-construction through service design, the Trendslation method has been developed with the aim to utilize cultural influence as an innovation material (Dennington, 2017), based on the notion of a semantic transformation process (Karjalainen, 2004). The method is built within the framework of design as a cultural intermediary in which designed artifacts can convey intrinsic meaning through its physical design attributes (Cooper and Press, 2003), brands as bearers of meaning through their cultural relevance (Holt, 2004), and the cyclic interplay between design and culture (du Gay, 1998; Julier, 2007). The Trendslation method explores how style, aesthetics and trends can be factors for conveying intrinsic meaning of designed services. By looking to cultural trends and identifying the underlying meaning of these cultural movements in alignment with brand DNA, the semantic translation can transform this, through design, into new service offerings and details. In the same way design competence is used to design desirable products that entice

customers to purchase certain products, how can service design competence be used to entice customers to use certain services?

Moving beyond the point of product purchase through journey

Due to Fashion's strong cultural position, the new services that will be offered in a transformational process from product to service will have to be highly experiential, and perceived as desirable. In the book "This is Service Design thinking" *desirability* in Service Design is presented as consisting of usability, pleasurability and utility, and further how desirability "requires a strong internal alignment, a strong brand and a good knowledge of managing design" (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2011). Brands with high cultural and lifestyle capital, and a strong brand perception both internally and externally may be most successful in developing new services that can entice customers to more sustainable practices. In regards to new services related to repair and reuse Cosette Armstrong (2013) argues how these might be "most suitable for companies with strong brand images", which enhances this view, also from a sustainable fashion perspective. Many brands within the commercial fashion industry are already highly linked to service and experience, especially at the point of purchase, such as the in-store or online experience, staff training and through branded and experiential touch-points. However, introducing Service Design tools, such as an experience-based customer journey, could help in service innovation throughout the whole experience, extending into the post purchase phase. How can Service Design help cultural brands nudge customers into more sustainable fashion practices, through designing for memorable, desirable and meaningful service experiences?

Service Design for sustainable fashion solutions

From a sustainable fashion point of view, the design of new services is suggested as a way forward for more sustainable fashion practices and buying. Kirsi Niinimäki (2013) writes how for example "services that aim to extend how long garments are used offer value in the sustainable context" (pp. 22). She adds, "one challenge in the current system is how to design products added with services that encourage consumers to adopt more environmentally responsible behavior". This is perhaps where Service Design could assist in designing services that trigger emotional response, that engage and entice customers to use these services, through the *experience* they provide. Armstrong (2013) suggests how the *social experience* surrounding the object could be a means to move from consumption, while Niinimäki (2013) writes how the *emotional experience* of consumption and purchasing needs to be offered through new sustainable systems, including services. With a Service Design approach, the focus upon designing for such experiences could help consumer become more socially responsible, through the experiential value they offer.

Methods

To further explore the Trendslation method and the service designer's translation process, a design intervention was carried out using a Research by Design approach (Sevaldson, 2010). Between January and May 2018, I engaged in a collaborative service design project with the Research & Development department of a Global sport and lifestyle brand with major cultural influence. Throughout the project phase I spent some periods of time physically embedded in the design department, and participated actively as a service design professional by enacting several design interventions. These design interventions were executed on an independent level; however, the team supported me with insights, relevant material and continuous feedback. Through an explorative and open-ended approach several service concepts were designed throughout the project, and acted as investigative "objects" (Seago and Dunne, 1999) that were used to analyze the steps of semantic transformation. The actual act of designing became part of the reflexive process (Schön, 1992). The brands customer insight unit identified the trends used.

Mixed methods were further used to extract and synthesize findings (Tashakkori and Creswell, 2007), including the use of research diaries (Nadin and Cassell, 2006), participatory observation and semi-structured conversations (Taylor et al., 2015) and field notes and sketches (Segelström, 2009). The findings are also built upon insights that surfaced through the work of 11 MA students in a 7 – week Service Design course in the Trendslation method, at the Oslo School of Architecture and Design, which I co-tutored and co-supervised.

The Trendslation method

The Trendslation method has been developed to assist services designers in the semantic translation process of identifying, translating and transforming cultural trends into new service offerings and details. The Trendslation method can be used in the early innovation phase to design for highly experiential and more meaningful service experiences (Dennington, 2018). Through the Trendslation process the underlying meaning behind cultural trends are utilized as a material for innovation through three acts of semantic translation, illustrated in Figure 1. (Dennington, 2018).

1 SCAN & UNDERSTAND
SEMANTIC TRANSFORMATION
SYNTHESIZE - TRANSLATE

2 CONCEPTUALISE
SEMANTIC TRANSFORMATION
SYNTHESIZE - TRANSLATE

3 IMPLEMENT
SEMANTIC TRANSFORMATION
SYNTHESIZE - TRANSLATE

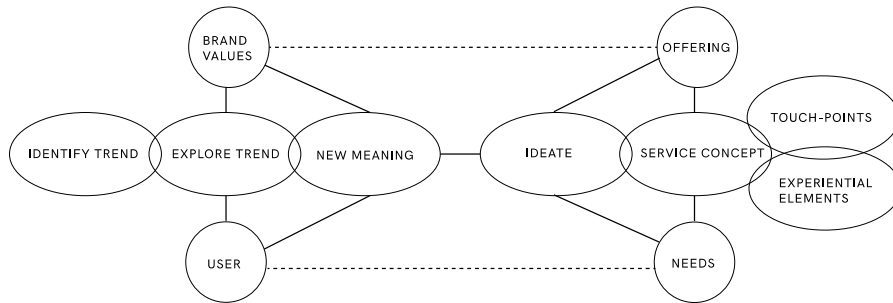


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the Trendslation method showing the three steps of semantic translation. By Claire Dennington, 2018.

Together with the partnering brand, I carried out a design intervention to test and further develop the Trendslation method. Through utilizing the underlying meaning of identified cultural trends in line with the brand DNA, this was further translated into new service concepts. One of the outcomes of this work was the service concept Remix (Figure 2). For this paper I will focus on the second and third step of translation, highlighted through Remix as a case example.

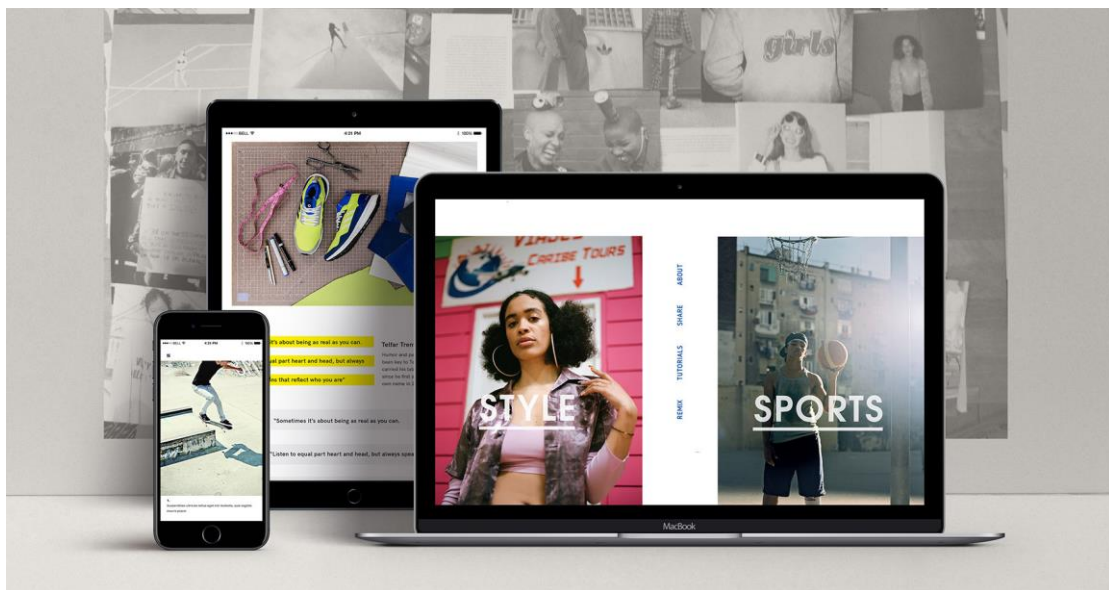


Figure 2. Service Design concept Remix, early sketch of cross-platform experience. By Claire Dennington, 2018.

The service design concept Remix – a case example

Remix is a service that offers a creative space for the identified user of “creative consumer” to explore, hack and create content related to style and identity, urban sports and street culture. Remix offers on- and offline platforms for building communities of creative individuals that re-make and re-sell pre-owned branded products that inspire more sustainable consumption patterns, and build awareness around societal or political issues. In addition, users can upload and share editorial and educational content, such as style guides or tutorials. Remix offers new way for users to engage with the brand through a more meaningful brand experience, by creating emotional and social value through this community. The concept is based on the translation of trends regarding DIY- and maker culture, gender and identity fluidity, deconstruction of brands and the slash/slash generation, to mention some. The trends, and the underlying meaning behind, were explored and visually interpreted (Figure 3), and further synthesized into a value proposition based on experience. This served as a baseline throughout the next translation stages, to keep the concept in line with both the brand DNA and the identified meaning.

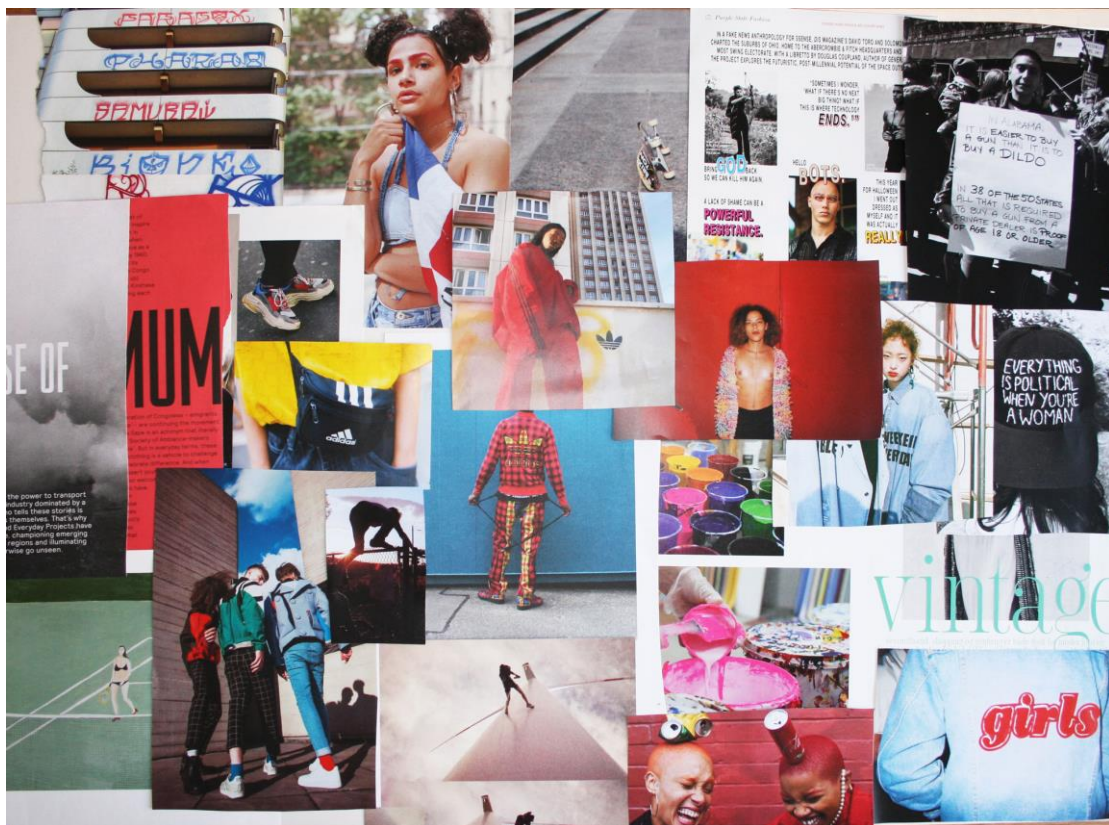


Figure 3. Experiential mood board used to explore trends and meaning. By Claire Dennington, 2018.

The service journey and key service moments

Remix was further developed and designed through developing a visual and experience-based journey (Figure 4). Some key service moments, touch-points and actors are described here: Through an internal contest with re-making and up-cycling of pre-used products in focus, the creative individuals are carefully curated amongst the brands employees, as many of these are conceived as ambassadors and influencers of lifestyle culture, connected to the creative scenes, such as within music, art, design and street style. The results are showcased in an exhibition, to create social media buzz and gain media attention. External actor collaborations are a part of the concept, such as with influential artists or musicians that could donate key brand products to create awareness around re-use. This could contribute to raising funds through an auction of these products in support of other partnering actors, such as non-profit organization working with causes in line with the brands core values.

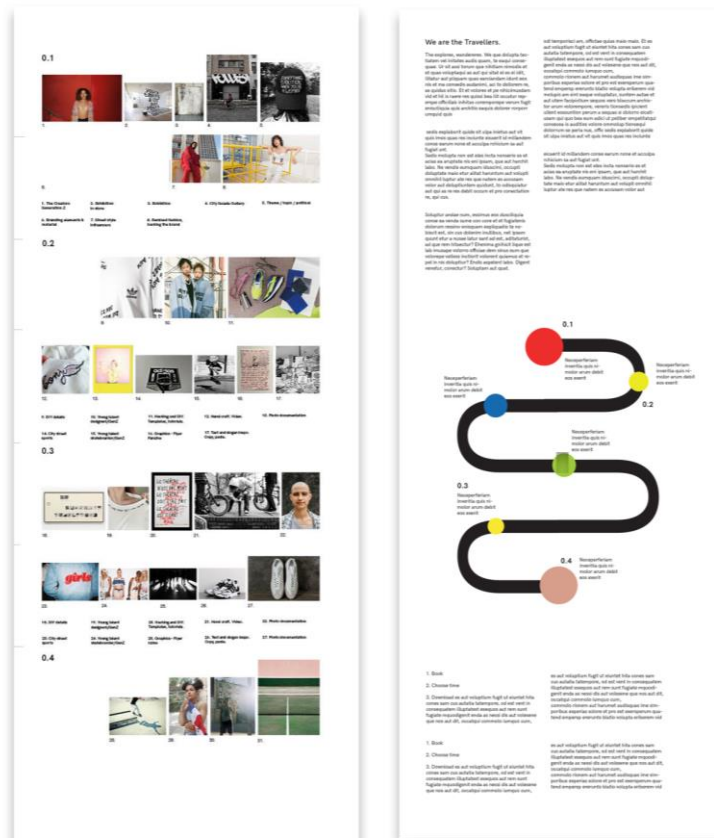


Figure 4. Example of an Experiential Service Journey to convey the curated service experience. By Claire Dennington 2018.

At the point of purchase, the shop staff encourages customers to bring back their products if they no longer use them, and the carrier bag functions as pre-paid postal packaging for returning used items. Products that are in good condition are re-sold through the Remix platform. In this way the brand can curate and sell their own pre-owned products, and to some extent reclaim brand ownership that may get lost on independent and more general re-selling sites. To launch Remix to customers, in-store experiences with popup workshops offer customization and “remixing” of your product by artists, designers and illustrators is offered. Addressing issues of gender and identity, Remix offers rental of lifestyle related sporting goods, such as skateboards and BMX bikes, together with courses hosted by key names within the scene, and a focus on recruiting participants across gender. Through this, customers are given an opportunity to “remix” their identity through trying different urban sports.

From touch-points to experiential elements

To engage customers throughout the service journey every touch-point and detail needs to have a high level of style, including service specific details such as ones related to tone-of-voice, sensory details, gestures and rituals. In developing the experience, it was not sufficient to add a generic entity, such as “magazine” or “music”, but rather define what kind of magazine, through details as theme, copy and images, or what kind of music - down to the detail of which artist and which song. In exploring socio-political trends in relation to sport and lifestyle, one example of an experiential element was a fanzine (Figure 5) with a “guide to organize a demonstration”, another was a curated playlist of early 90’s political hip hop to download together with renting a skateboard. This showed how going into the details and altering these had direct impact on the experience. In this example, the core offering persisted, however the experience changed in direction of the translated trend.

Through the work with developing the service concept, two findings became prominent. One is the need to develop the customer journey into an experiential journey to fully convey and communicate the intended experience through time; the other is how experiential details can reinforce, influence and alter the experience.



Figure 5. *Experiential elements: The fanzine includes tone-of-voice, images, font. Graphic design by Daniel B. Nerheim, 2018*

Moving from Customer Journey to Experiential Service Journey

Customer journeys are central parts of Service Design, and “provides a high-level overview of the factors influencing user experience” (Stickdorn and Schneider, 2012), yet when designing for a highly experiential service experience, the traditional Customer Journey became insufficient in communicating the experiential touch-points and other elements, and their stylistic characteristics. In fashion, the experience is more determined on style, aesthetics and desirability. The *experiential service journey* was developed to convey and communicate a curated experience throughout the journey, by adding signifiers of cultural codes (Santamaria et al., 2018) to visualize touch-points and other experience based elements. Through shifting these elements along the journey, the experience changed accordingly. The stylistic service journey contributes to a more immediate, intuitive and emotional response to the intended service experience, through aligning touch-points and elements to both trend and brand DNA, resulting in a more holistic, stylistic and experiential service concept. The stylistic service journey can also act as a co-creative and strategic innovation tool for businesses.

Experiential elements

To reinforce the stylistic journey and through this, the experience, service specific *experiential elements* were identified as an addition to touch-points, as well as adding stylistic features to existing or new touch-points. Experiential elements can be used to reinforce the intended experience/meaning, and help in the development of a specific *service style*. Experimental

elements could include sensory, symbolic, gestural, physical, digital, material, aesthetic and spatial details, such as tone-of-voice, interior, graphic elements, taste, sound, lighting, fonts, colours, illustration, photo, branding, form or geographic location, to mention some. By understanding and detailing these elements, the experience can be shifted, altered, or even *curated*.

From co-creator to co-curator

An additional reflection that surfaced through the design work was how the curator role became apparent throughout the Remix concept, both in the design of the concept – but also through the concept itself. The Service Designer acts as a curator, in carefully curating the service style through the stylistic journey and experiential elements. In the concept, the brand acts as a curator of competence, and the user acts as a curator of content. In the view of curators as "knowledge brokers of a specific nature, taking culture created by others, and interpreting and publicizing it for the public good" (Villi et al. 2012), I find it interesting to reflect upon these different curatorial roles, and how they may affect the outcomes of a new service that relies on customer involvement and engagement. As co-creation and co-production is an essential part of Service Design, what happens when the customer also becomes a *co-curator*, a broker of cultural knowledge that will have a direct impact on the service experience?

Although the testing of Trendslation has been limited, it has shown to be a promising tool for Service Design, and a good fit for the design of highly experiential services. It has also unearthed many interesting aspects, some which are discussed in the following section.

Service Design and better fashion practices

As the fashion industry calls for more sustainable solutions, it will necessarily move from products towards services. Service design is here presented as an option for looking beyond the product, and point of purchase – and into the whole journey of the customer - brand relationship, to identify potential areas for service innovation. As the field of Service Design is developing in a more culturally determined direction, the aim of delivering highly experiential and desirable services seems a relevant fit for fashion businesses, and an opportunity worth investigating further. Tools and methods from Service Design, such as the customer journey can be beneficial in moving focus from product to service, although they need to be adapted to fit the specific rich experiential context of fashion. Designing services through developing customer journeys, and mapping of touch-points is argued to be valuable in improving the customer experience (Clatworthy, 2013), specifically towards the pre-and post-purchase experience (Zomerdjik and Voss, 2010). Yet, these tools need to be evolved to better fit the

highly stylistic and experiential characteristics of more desirable and meaningful service concepts. The *Experiential Service Journey*, and *Experiential Elements* are suggested to address this issue; however there is still a need to further explore the potential dynamics between Service Design and product focused companies.

Another issue that arose in the early stages of the transformation process through the design intervention was the need to develop a new value proposition based on experience. This could assist in the move from product focus to service mindset, through the further translation of this new value proposition into the service concepts, and details, as a step in the Trendslation process. This resonates with Armstrong's suggestion of "creating compelling value propositions that entice consumers into a new, more sustainable lifestyle" (Armstrong, 2013 pp. 108) to influence better fashion production and consumption. In becoming more experience centric, focusing on a new value proposition based on experience could help re-frame the brand's new or existing offering, and assist in the development of highly experiential services. This should be further defined and exemplified.

Through continuous meetings with, and presentations for representatives from the partnering brand throughout the project presented in this paper, it also became apparent how brands that hold a strong position in the culture industries, like within lifestyle and fashion, could introduce new conceptual services with a strong experiential focus with different intentions. One could be as external initiatives, helping build customer relationships, brand value and better practices, as described in this paper. On the other hand, the design of new concept services could act as internal conversation pieces, or change agents, to help shift mindset within the company. Concept services can convey innovative concepts in an emotional, visual, stylistic way that both represent the brand and the identified trend. In the same way, for example, concept cars are designed in the automotive industry for attention creation (Backman and Börjesson, 2006), to strengthen brand image and act as a catalyst for change within organizations (Clatworthy, 2009), concept services could also be designed as brand strengthening, and trend-driven experiential initiatives to envision new service concepts, to enact change within an organization. This could be further explored by looking into more speculative and futures-oriented approaches perhaps by including anti-trends into the Trendslation method.

One final reflection is linked to Kate Fletcher's argument of how "fashion and clothing are different concepts and entities", and further how she defines "clothing as material production, and fashion as symbolic production." (p.119). Fashion, with its highly cultural, experiential and mediated practices (Skjulstad and Morrison, 2016), could investigate this symbolic production through Service Design. With its focus on experience, meaning-making and cultural influence, Service Design could be a relevant approach for the fashion industry in designing for more

sustainable service offerings, ones that exist past the point of purchase. Through the design of the concept service Remix, it became evident how the users were not only meant to create creative product-based content, such as up-cycled and remixed products, but also immaterial entities, such as new knowledge, new skills, new style and new identities. Service Design could be used to further investigate how to design for symbolic production, such as style mediation, identity creation and knowledge transferal. This could be further researched together with business partners, or through a more speculative approach. Through this, the interconnectedness between fashion businesses, Service Design, value creation and cultural influence could be looked into, specifically in the direction of non-product based identity creation. In what way could Service Design assist in enhancing the intangible, cultural and symbolic practices of fashion, rather than the material production - and through this create new value?

Co-creation and co-production with the customer is a core part of Service Design, however when designing for experiential services such as within fashion, there may be a third role, that of *co-curator*. This role places the customer in a *knowledge broking* position, which will affect core aspects of the service experience, and could actively be designed for. The term might be a key part of designing for sustainable fashion services and will be followed up in further research.

One way forward - from product consumption to service experiencing

The intention behind this paper has been to outline one possible direction for fashion businesses to think beyond the traditional product focus, and into new opportunities for service innovation, as a step towards more sustainable fashion practices. Through operationalizing the Trendslation method presented in this paper, cultural material can be utilized in designing for more meaningful and highly experiential services in line with brand DNA and cultural influence, with a focus on experience throughout the customer journey. This is argued through using an exemplary case from my design work with a Global sports and lifestyle brand. The *experiential customer journey* and *experiential elements* are identified as important parts of designing for desirable service solutions. In addition, the customer's new suggested role as *co-curator*, may serve as a valuable view in further research into the area of designing for sustainable fashion services. This paper also argues that the nature of service of providing experiences seemingly fits the fashion industry well.

As several prominent voices within sustainable fashion advocate for, the transformation of the fashion industry from a focus upon point of sale to a circular economy, is prominent (Fletcher, 2008; Niinimäki, 2013; Armstrong, 2013; Ræbild and Bang, 2018). In this transformational

process adding services to products are suggested through e.g. recycling, reusing, reselling. This suggests the need to introduce a journey mindset, thinking past the point of purchase and into the post-purchase phase. Customers need to be engaged and motivated to use such services, and there is a need for building stronger relationships between brand and consumer in this phase. This means that companies will necessarily have to move from selling products, to providing services.

This paper suggests how Service Design could assist in this move, through designing for experiences that offer alternative value. Utilizing the Trendslation method is a suggested way forward in designing for highly experiential and meaningful services, in line with trends and cultural influence – that can result in new service concepts that can move customers in a more sustainable direction. Fashion brands with a strong identity and cultural influence can help guide customers to more enlightened fashion consumption practices by offering services that create emotional value through offering experiences beyond the point of sale and throughout the customer journey and product lifecycle. With a focus on designing for highly experiential and more meaningful service experiences, bridging Fashion with Service Design could offer valuable synergies for moving away from product consumption and into *service experiencing*.

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