

RESEARCH

IN PRACTICE

Student Name: Maria Arias de Diego

Student Number: 2004880

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Tutor Name: Julia Lockheart

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In this paper, I explored the meaning of the words; Innovation, Skills and IKI, and their value in design. I have chosen these three keywords in particular because, as a Product design student, I feel they represent some of the aspects I have learnt have certain value while designing. And I wanted to see if they could be linked together or influence one another. By the end of this paper, with all the knowledge I gained, I formulated a question for my independent research document for my final year.

INNOVATION:

As designers being innovative and designing something different, new, or unknown is something that will bring a substantial amount of attention to your product. We are drawn to what is peculiar and unique. Hence, there is a strong link between new innovative products and market performance. They “help capture and retain market share and increase profitability in those market” (Tidd, 2011, p. 9). Innovation could even be considered the main driving force in the economy. Sales growth does not simply come from offering low prices but also from other non-price factors, like design and quality. But what makes a product innovative? What really is a ‘design innovation’? In order to understand what makes a product innovative, I researched the definition of innovation and how this term is used on the design industry.

Firstly, the word ‘innovation’ comes from the Latin noun ‘innovationem’, derived from the verb ‘innovare’ which means ‘to make new’ and has its origins from ‘in+novus’, ‘in’ meaning “into” and ‘novus’ meaning ‘new’. Therefore, ‘to innovate’ is ‘to begin or introduce (something new) for the first time’ and ‘innovation’ means ‘the act or process of introducing something new’ (The American Heritage Dictionary, 200, quoted in Mutlu and Er, 2003).

Tidd (2011, p.8) notes how being able to frequently develop new products with even better versions is becoming increasingly important nowadays, not only because every product has a due date and their life cycles are really short, but also because the environment is endlessly changing. And although new products are often seen as the cutting edge of innovation in the marketplace, process

innovation plays just an important strategic role. It is not just about designing something no one else can, is about designing it in ways which are better than anyone else's. According to Tidd (2011, p.3-4) an 'Innovation' is not just coming up with new ideas, methods, or products, it is the ability to see connections, to spot different ways you can offer the same product but with better service- meaning it is faster, cheaper, or higher quality- which is a powerful source of advantage in the design industry.

Thus, Schumpeter (1934, quoted in Mutlu and Er, 2003, p.5) classifies innovations in two groups: product and process innovations. Product innovations would involve the design of entirely new products or the design of new products with certain improvements.; and a process innovation would involve replacing one production good by another, which serves the same or approximately the same purpose, but it is cheaper, more efficient or improves productivity, or just introducing new materials or supplies in the process.

Leonard and Swap (1999), who studied the connection between 'innovation' and 'creativity', claimed innovation to be the end result of creative activity, since they see 'creativity' as 'a process of developing and expressing novel, new and unusual ideas' but equally affirm that creativity is something special and occasional, possessed by the favoured few and not a capability everyone can deploy. But just because you might not have such creative abilities does not mean you will not be able to design innovative ideas. Innovation is about learning from our mistakes and flaunts so we can find different ways to solve them and adapt or change them in order to improve the outcome.

Even though the concept 'design innovation' is increasingly used in the design discourse, it does not have a universally agreed upon definition, and literature still fails highlighting the role of 'design' in innovation. Most people, including me, associate 'innovation' with 'invention' as it is generally perceived as 'a new device created by study and experimentation', but when Mutlu and Er (2003) studied the terms 'design' and 'innovation', they realized they both mentioned 'design innovation' as "new designs enhancing product quality but involving no technical change". Implying it is the

incremental improvement of the quality of a product or service. An example of this would be the image below. It involves the incremental innovation of an already existing product- Coca-cola. Representing the development from a glass bottle to a much more adequate outcome.



Figure1: What is Design Innovation?, Alexander Obenauer (2017)

Having said this, the concept of

‘Design innovation’ constitutes a ‘category of innovation’ like technological innovation, product innovation (radical or incremental), process innovation and other sub-categories. In the light of this considerations, we conclude that ‘designs innovations’ comprise (a) the incremental novelties in the design of an existing product or service, or (b) radically new products or services obtained by design effort with no or minimal technical novelty’.

(Mutlu and Er, 2003, p.17)

SKILLS:

Arias, M. (2021) I consider design to be one of the most powerful tools with which we shape everything. Everything around us has been designed. As Victor Papanek said in ‘design for the real world’ “all we do all the time, is design, for basic to all human activity” (p.4) From his point of view, everyone possesses, to some degree, the ability to design.

According to the Oxford dictionary, skill is the ability to do something well or a particular ability or type of ability (Oxford University Press, N.d). It is a trained practice that can be learned and mastered through experience, education, and repetition, meaning we develop them with time as we grow. But if you want to improve and learn new skills, you must be willing to experiment through error.

Being great designers require many skills and the amount of skills is what determines the outcome of what we are creating. So, it is something we truly value as designers. ability

I always thought that being able to sketch and draw was enough to make me a designer, yet I was entirely wrong. A great designer knows the principles, observes the world, visualises ideas, experiments through error, communicates well, accept criticism, and solves problems. And once I started my Product design course, I had no knowledge at all. Now I can analyse and solve problems in ways I could have never imagined, but I had to learn many new skills if I wanted to be a good designer. And I made a lot of mistakes in the process. If I failed, I tried again. If I did not like my design, I tried again.

At the same time, being a good designer is more than simply knowing the Software.

“Designers have been around for a millennia, creating excellent and effective work long before software come along. The design principles we work with have not changed. You are a designer whether you use pencil or paper or Adobe Creative Cloud. The tools do not matter. If you cannot design using pencil and paint, you will not be able to, using Illustrator and Photoshop.”

(Lundgren, 2015)



Figure2: 10 skills that make a great designer, José Torre (2018)

Throughout the design process designers require a set of skills that will help them gain the knowledge they need to create new and original designs. My job as a product designer is to be constantly learning, adapting, and developing a better understanding of my work. What I learnt throughout this years as a Product design student is learning how to understand and use the theory behind the design process- the Design theory. According to Stevenson (2020) design theory gives us the knowledge and ability to combine form and function. Form being the design principles- such as alignment, repetition, contrast, balance and hierarchy, and function being the design purpose, which, is the basis of any successful design. Plus, it enables us to explain how theoretical decisions lead us to design our final outcome, rather than hollow explanations. Because as designer we need to know how to communicate effectively and how everything we do and design influence, directs, invites, attracts an audience. Design theory is the asking and answering of the question “why?” once you understand the importance of design theory you are able to create more efficient, appealing, and valuable work for yourself and your clients. “As designers we should not be making decisions based on personal preference. We are not artists”. (Stevenson, 2020) It is all about putting the user first and creating a design for a specific intended audience.

Skills enable us to acquire new information and contrast it with the information we already know, leading to the creation of original and 'innovative' ideas.

IKI (EMOTION):

My first intention was to explore the word 'emotion' and its value when designing, but I came across a word I have never seen or heard before- 'IKI'. A Japanese word, very hard to define with any precision. So, I tried associating both and explored their importance and influence in the design process.

IKI is a Japanese 'aesthetic sense', which means it focuses on what is pleasing to sight. It is said to have emerged among the townspeople of Fukazawa (Koto Ward) and Edo (modern-day Tokyo), during the late Edo period. (Japanese Wiki Corpus, N.d). Kincaid (2020) notes that, during this period, IKI was generally identified as something that was elegant and sophisticated, yet it also accents the idea of minimalism, focusing on appreciation and possession of what truly matters. But, as stated in 'Art nomura' (n.d.) nowadays in Japan, it is more commonly used with the word "sappari", which means 'neat, frank, and plain' when used as an adjective. It is more friendly and has a broader meaning than before.

It shares characteristics with other Japanese concepts Wabi (a state of calm, quiet, subtlety which avoids being gaudy or showy) and Sabi (austere elegance which reflects simplicity and loneliness) because they all have certain orientation towards simple beauty. As the architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe said "less is more". He revealed a constant decorative urge or genetic aversion to simplicity, one of the main principles of design. Thus, I choose this keyword. I wanted to focus on the idea of how our products should easily communicate what they are or their function without having to clarify it. Like when artists only show what is necessary to tell the story and nothing more.



Figure 3: *IKI design* (N.d)

The image above is from a Furniture company named 'IKI' that shapes their designs with that Japanese authentic sense, prioritizing the beauty nature of wood. We constantly live around furniture, so they truly value capturing the spirit of the client and the essence of the space.

In 'Emotionally Durable Design' Chapman (2008) reports how people are gradually becoming more sensitive to those products that are designed past the traditional aspects of usability; hence topics of emotion and affective response are extremely important in design. It helps us create an emotional and aesthetic resonance between people and products, which I find to be crucial in design. Belk (1987) once demonstrated that individuals identify more or less with things, i.e., we feel more connected to certain items and less so to other. And that this degree of attachment can change over time. We would expect that strong attachment would be associated with a sense of liking while a weaker one would be associated with a sense of dislike or neutral feelings.

In design, it is important that the work supports a goal purpose or aims for a targeted audience that will most likely love it. Then the design can be selected based on what will appeal to that audience and make the goal a success. But, Pelzel (2022) notes that the only way to target a specific audience is to design products with particular characteristics, so they feel more connected to your product.

And if you design something to cater to an average, it will not cater to anyone. Therefore, accepting the fact that not everyone is going to like your work, is key to designing more aesthetically pleasing work and engaging more productively with clients.

I feel IKI is excellent way to describe my design philosophy, as it focuses on the beauty of simplicity and how with the minimum necessary you can create an emotional and aesthetic link between people and our designs.

CONCLUSION:

In summary, these three keywords I have analysed represent what I truly value as a designer. We, as designers, have the ability and opportunity to think outside the box when designing something entirely new. Having skills is what enables us to create innovative ideas, yet we should not be making decisions based on personal preferences. There are no constraints in design, so why do we end up limiting our designs for an intended audience? With this research, I have come to the conclusion that even if we try to be somewhat senseless and design an innovative product, we tend to limit ourselves to ensure that it satisfies our chosen audience. Therefore, what is my purpose as a designer? I am a second year Product Design student, so I am still in the learning process, I aspire to find my style and myself as a designer. But then, what is the point of having your own personal style if you're going to have to change it in order to design for an intended audience. I'm eager to understand the 'whys' of design.

So the question for my independent research document is **"why so we design the way we design?"** yet may act as a starting point.

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Figures:

Fig. 1: *What is Design Innovation? Alexander Obenauer (2017)* Accessed from: <https://medium.com/newindustrialist/what-is-design-innovation-89fb307462ae>

Fig. 2: Figure2: 10 skills that make a great designer, José Torre (2018). Accessed from: <https://uxdesign.cc/10-skills-that-make-a-great-designer-5e1e1f43fa0c>

Fig.3: IKI design (N.d) Accessed from: <https://www.facebook.com/ikidesign1/>