COLOUR FORECASTING

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AND ITS MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS
Title: Colour Forecasting and its managerial implications

Publication year: 2012

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Abstract
In this thesis we examine the colour forecasting process, its methodology and how it is communicated and used in fashion companies. The study is foremost based on qualitative research and on semi-structured interviews with people within the forecasting industry. We have divided the data collection process that constitutes the basis of the actual forecast into steps, which consist of gathering both objective facts and more soft, subjective experiences. After having collected the data, colour forecasters start their analysis by breaking them down into thematical categories that depict specific patterns (themes). We have identified colour expertise, intuition, creativity and inspiration as the factors that help the forecaster interpret those patterns. The final forecasted colour stories are being presented in different media and contexts. Besides design style, market, customer base and lead-time, it is foremost the different management philosophies of either building creative, solid collections or fast fashion that define how to use the colour forecasting material. To help the reader understand the process we have constructed a model (aDaMas).

Keywords: Trend forecasting, Colour forecasting, Colour planning, Intuition, Zeitgeist, Aesthetic economy, Cultural capital, Colour stories, Fast fashion.
Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Lotta Ahlvar, Cay Bond and Louise Klarsten for their contribution to our study, Elias Le Grand for the invaluable guidance and our families for their precious support.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Born in the late 19th century, colour forecasting constitutes an essential part of the fashion system, providing it with a direction that the challenges of today render more than necessary. The aim of this thesis is to clearly depict its process, along with its managerial implications, in order to strengthen forecasting as a practice both in the academic and business world.

1.1 BACKGROUND

Tangerine tango, Ultramarine green, Olympian blue, Titanium, Honey gold and Pink flambé are some of the colours that will prevail in fashion during the forthcoming Fall/Winter 12’ season, according to Pantone’s fashion colour report (Pantone.com, 2012.03.15). Pantone is a world-renowned colour authority and along with a few other companies and organizations, they form a group of specialists important to the fashion universe because of their colour forecasting practices.

Colour has always had a prominent place in the history of mankind, bearing a variety of associations in each culture, affecting human emotions or activities, and even being used as a means of healing (chromotherapy). However, in the fashion industry, colour plays an even more important role, having been rated as the most important aesthetic criteria in consumer preference (Eckman, Damhorst, & Kadolph, 1990: 13-22). Consequently, one of the most neuralgic decisions a design, buying or marketing team has to make in the fashion industry is that of the appropriate colour selection for their products.

Colour forecasting is the process of identifying precisely those colour hues, tones and shades that will be “in fashion” 18 to 24 months ahead of time and constitutes a vital element of the entire fashion system. It is a fundamental part of a collective process known as fashion forecasting or trend prediction, where individuals or teams attempt to accurately forecast the colours, fabrics and styles of fashionable garments and accessories that consumers will purchase in the near future (Diane, & Cassidy, 2005: xi).

Colour forecasting’s history goes way back to the late 1800s when French textile mills first issued colour cards. These foldout books, made from paper and ribbon samples, showed which colours were popular among Paris dressmakers and milliners in the current season, and quickly became valuable tools for manufacturers, helping them match their dye lots to a particular shade card. It was during the 1850s that Paris achieved a monopoly in fashion with Charles Frederick Worth revolutionizing the craft of French dressmaking, elevating it to haute couture. Paris designers now “dictated” the silhouettes and the French textile mills determined on a global level which colours were “in” or “out”.
However, with the break-out of World War I, Parisian colour cards became unobtainable and in desperation, the American textile mills and retailers established the Textile Color Card Association (later renamed as Color Association of the United States) to design an all-American palette that would be conceived and produced at home (Blaszczyk, 2008: 31). America's first professional colour forecaster was Margaret Hayden Rorke, who headed the association for nearly four decades. The organization's 1,500 members welcomed her monthly newsletters, colour bulletins and published forecasts, which she conducted with the contribution of her appointed style spies in Paris (one would call today trend chasers or trend spotters) that kept her abreast of the latest trends. Rorke didn't use their correspondence to copy the Paris colour verbatim, but she matched the reports to her own recent forecasts, using them to enhance the association's position as a colour authority (Blaszczyk, 2008: 34). During the 1920s the American influence grew bigger with New York turning into a fashion metropolis and the Hollywood spreading the lifestyle of its icons worldwide. By the end of that decade two more companies were founded (Tobe Associates and The Fashion Group) that would provide fashion direction to garment manufacturers and issue trend reports (Diane, & Cassidy, 2005: 13).

During 1930s haute couture became more outrageous (in order to differentiate itself from the continuously developing ready-to-wear) and gradually began to lose its dominance as a driving force of fashion. As a result, the need to forecast consumer demand for the ready-to-wear industry became more evident (Diane, & Cassidy, 2005: 14-15). In 1931 the British Colour Council was founded and in 1937 Carlin International, one of the leading forecasting agencies still nowadays. The fashion disaster of the midi-skirt in the late 1960s and early 1970s highlighted the need for more accurate fashion direction/prediction (Diane, & Cassidy, 2005: 20). A few more forecasting agencies were born during that period like Promostyl, Informa Inc., International Colour Association, Design Intelligence and British Textile Colour Group. However, it was not until the 1980s that the forecasting sector was established. Agencies Nelly Rodi and Trend Union were founded along with numerous trade fairs that strengthened the fashion industry. With the rapid development of the Internet during the 1990s a new generation of forecasters was born, like Trendstop and WGSN that would transmit their predictions and services over an online environment.

The process of colour forecasting starts by collecting, evaluating, analysing and interpreting data to anticipate a range of colours desirable by the consumer, using a strong element of intuition, inspiration and creativity (Diane, & Cassidy, 2005: xi). Afterwards, the results of the forecasters are being presented to fashion professionals through fabric fairs, trade events and conferences, while special publications - “colour Bibles” - are issued and sold to fashion executives around the world: from avant-garde fashion designers to fast-fashion retailers. From that moment on, those colour predictions find their practical implementation either through the colour planning of a designer’s collection or through the merchandising of a retail assortment.
Nowadays, the need for an even more accurate colour forecasting process that will result in a highly reliable outcome has become more imperative than ever. Fashion companies are not only surrounded by a globally unstable economy, but they also experience an ultra-hostile environment within their sector that threatens their profit margins and market shares. The competition in the fashion industry has become ruthless, due to low entry barriers, cheap outsourcing and large profit gains (Vij, 2009: 1). Designers, brands and retailers spend vast amounts of money on gigantic marketing campaigns that will persuade consumers into buying their products. Under these circumstances, the fashion industry needs a reduction in the level of risk and colour forecasters can provide them with the appropriate colour direction that they might need. Predicting the “right” hue, shade and tone that the “zeitgeist” demands can really “make or break” a particular style or look: launching it to a market success or turning it into an epic failure.

What is more, the constant technological advances in fabric dying, bleaching, finishing and printing have provided fashion companies with an even wider variety of colours to choose from. In 2011, Pantone announced the addition of 175 new colours to its PANTONE FASHION + HOME Color System, bringing its total to 2,100 shades (Pantone, 2012.03.15). Colour forecasters can give an essential direction to fashion executives, guiding them with safety through this plethora of colours that exists nowadays.

Last but not least, the consumers according to the Cotton Incorporated Lifestyle Monitor™ Survey seem to be responsive to colour right now, as colour is emotional and happy (Cotton Inc., 2012.03.20). They want more colour and colour choices in their everyday life, being more colour daring than before. However, the same study indicates that since the recession, consumers appear to be more discerning in how and where they spend their money. On average, American consumers spend approximately $54 per month on clothing, which is down significantly from $77 in 2008, $63 in 2009, and even $60 in 2010 – a decline of about 30% in three-year time (Cotton Inc., 2012.03.20). In addition, when it comes to choosing colours for a new article of clothing, most people are quite conservative in their tastes. An Ohio State University study showed that each consumer may have a different idea of what colour they want to emphasize, but once they make that choice, their palette tends to be restricted (Potter, 2011: 24). Within this framework, colour forecasters have to compile a colour palette each season, wide enough to include all colour families, as well as innovative and refreshing, ensuring that the hues feel new and inspiring.

Having mentioned the above, the subject of our thesis will evolve around the neuralgic process of colour forecasting in the fashion industry, as well as its practical implications from a managerial perspective.
1.2 MOTIVATION

Although colour forecasting plays such a crucial role in the entire fashion system and lies in the very beginning of fashion creation itself, not much academic research has been realized on this subject. Additionally, the already published relevant literature lacks a sophisticated approach when it comes to its methodology, a fact that reinforces the existent confusion over the colour forecasting process.

We believe it is of crucial importance to develop those academic frameworks that will help fashion industry understand its own practices and prepare the industry executives for the challenges that lie ahead. Colour forecasting has remained a “mystical” process for a long time (to the degree that many fashion professionals regard it as a conspiracy or even a self-fulfilled prophecy) and it is essential to bring to light its practice along with its managerial implications. By doing so, colour forecasters will have a solid academic basis to strengthen their work, fashion managers will receive valuable information on better planning of their collections and generally the members of the fashion industry will gain insight into a process that largely defines what is “in fashion” or not.

1.3 AIM & RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Reading existing literature and talking to informants in the fashion business, the main problem we have identified is that there is no clear depiction of the (fashion or) colour forecasting process, its methodology, nor of its practical managerial implications. We believe that it is of great importance to examine and investigate how the information is arranged and communicated and how it affects real commercial fashion business.

More specifically, our thesis will try to give answers to the following questions:

- **How is colour information collected?**
  We will try to identify all the different types of data that are used as the input of the process.

- **How do forecasters evaluate, analyse and interpret the data collected?**
  After defining the input of the process, the forecasters must translate it into precise colour stories. The themes that emerge here will form the basis of the forecast, thus, it is of vital importance to examine how these stories are formed.

- **How are the final colour stories being presented?**
  Each forecasting agency uses each own material to present its forecast and it can take the form of a book, an album, a mood video etc. It is essential to examine those elements that will elevate the forecast presentation to an efficient and valuable tool.

- **How do fashion companies use the colour forecasting output?**
  Last but not least, our thesis examines how the colour forecasting tools are being used by the fashion companies in the colour selection phase of their product development.
1.4. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

We believe that our thesis can be proven a very useful tool to:

- **Fashion academics**
  The thesis tries to examine in depth the colour forecasting process as a method, providing the academic community with further knowledge and conclusions on the subject. It can also help fashion teachers and fashion students understand more holistically the function of the fashion system. In addition, our study makes theoretical contributions to earlier research regarding the fashion industry, since it investigates the role of the forecaster as an element (intermediary) of the fashion system.

- **Forecasting agencies**
  Our thesis can be regarded as an outside perspective to the practices of forecasting companies and thus, a more objective, unbiased approach. What is more, the managerial implications of the colour forecasting output can be used as feedback for improvement in many areas of the agency’s functions.

- **Fashion brands and apparel manufacturers**
  The colour planning is a very important stage in the development process of a collection and our thesis provides the buying, designing and marketing teams of the company with further insight on the utilization of the colour predictions.

- **Retailers**
  The thesis can provide the buying, merchandising and visual coordination teams with further knowledge on the best implementation of the colour forecasts in their assortment and visual communication strategies.

- **Fibre, yarn and fabric producers**
  The fibre and yarn manufacturers are provided with useful colour forecasting information that can help them compile more efficiently their own prediction packages in the form of shade cards.

1.5 DELIMITATIONS

The purpose of this study is to investigate colour forecasting and not to examine the entire fashion forecasting process. Fashion forecasting consists of various sub-processes that have to do with materials, cuts and silhouettes, even design concepts, apart from colour; processes that we do not intend to cover in this thesis. What is more, the study has been focused on Sweden, limiting its scope to how Swedish colour forecasting works and how its output is being used by Swedish fashion brands.

1.6 THESIS STRUCTURE

Having presented the background of our thesis, Section 2 provides the reader with the earlier literature concerning the topic and basic academic concepts that helped us build an appropriate theoretical framework. In Section 3 the methodology of our research is explained, and after this, in Section 4 we present the data we collected.
during our study along with a detailed analysis of them. In Section 5 one can find a new model that we propose, depicting the colour forecasting process (the aDaMas model), as well as a further discussion of the data gathered. Finally, in the last section we present our conclusions, by giving answers to our initial research questions and making suggestions for further research on the topic.

SECTION 2: CONTEXTUALIZATION

Despite the fact that colour forecasting is so closely intertwined with the fashion business and collection building, we found that only a few people have addressed the subject so far and in many cases from a non-academic perspective. In this section, an account of the main contributors to the field is presented, along with their approaches and ideas. We also present our theoretical framework, that examines fashion from a sociological perspective, underlining the role of the forecaster as “cultural intermediary”, whose “selections” define what constitutes fashion.

2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

We have searched for relevant literature amongst academic papers, publications in journals and published books. As we have argued above, there is not sufficient material written about this topic and it remains a lot more to be articulated. However, the main contributors in this field today consist of Evelyn Brannon, Rita Perna, Katheryn McKelvey, Tom Cassidy and Diane Tracey, who are all frequently quoted and referred back to. In Fashion Forecasting (2010) author Evelyn L. Brannon, foremost addresses fashion professionals interested in improving their forecasting abilities. Brannon combines theories of fashion change with the process of organizing and analysing the information for presenting and implementing the forecast. Brannon touches upon several interesting issues about the forecasting process, but is not providing any comprehensive research. Further, in the somewhat dated Fashion forecasting: a mystery or a method? (1987), fashion journalist Rita Perna investigates the fashion process through three levels: the fabric and textile suppliers, the apparel manufacturers, and the retailers of fashion products. She then tries to address some important questions, e.g. “Who decides what’s in and what’s out?” “How does the worldwide marketplace come to the same conclusions?” However, as book reviewer Jerome Greenberg points out, she fails to answer them in more than a subjective brief manner and without any theoretical discussion (Greenberg, 1999). Likewise, Kathryn McKelvey, has authored a well-illustrated book called Fashion forecasting (2008). The author interviews key people within this industry and provides here insights into the contemporary fashion forecasting world and the varied creative roles within it: from intelligence gatherers to project consultants. The book covers how a trend is sourced, anticipated and developed, and also explores the interaction with marketing and brand development. Unfortunately, we found the book to be brief and vague.

Tracy Diane, PhD, Manchester Metropolitan University and Tom Cassidy Professor
and Head of School of Design University of Leeds, have written the most extensive work done on colour forecasting. In *The Colour Forecasting* (2005), Diane & Cassidy stress the complexity of the colour forecasting process and how it is a highly intuitive and little understood process. “Colour has very personal and emotional qualities, making forecasting new colour trends a complex process involving a combination of intuition, directional awareness and market research.” (Diane & Cassidy, 2005:8) They also discuss how colour forecasting began and how it has developed to its present state, as well as explain colour terminology and some tools used by colour forecasters. The authors expressed hope to fill the gap in information on this subject and introduce a deeper understanding of the process through a conceptual model and furthermore attempted to develop a potential improvement to forecasting. They suggest that an understanding of consumer preference data could benefit the current system for colour forecasting (Diane & Cassidy, 2005:15). “The current system was not satisfying the consumer to the degree that the forecasters claim, and that consumers and the industry would derive immediate benefit from forecasting using consumer colour preference data” (Diane & Cassidy, 2005:177). However, in our thesis we question this statement.

The only literature to be found published in Sweden is Ingrid Giertz-Mårtenson's *Att se in i framtiden. En studie av trendanalys inom modebranschen* (2006) (Looking into the Future: A Study of Fashion Forecasting), Department of Ethnology, Stockholm University. In this MA thesis Giertz-Mårtenson writes about a subject that she has great work experience from as former CEO of the Swedish Fashion Council. However, Giertz-Mårtenson is not delimitating her research to Sweden or colour forecasting. Some of the most interesting points in the text are her reasoning about Trend Pitching. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, she interprets trend pitching as the ability to spot trends and new “currents” in society. She further argues that the ability to interpret them can be seen as important symbolic capital for the forecaster. The thesis also shows that forecasters do not create new fashion trends but rather help push ideas that already exist on the catwalk, on celebrities, on the street and in society. An important aspect is that the information is arranged or “curated” into messages that help save time and position what is happening into real, commercial fashion movements. Especially successful in this aspect are documents with textiles and colour cards. A third interesting point is the question of how the traditional forecasting practice will do in the future since the online information community is growing stronger.

2.1.1 Conclusion

An overall problem that we found is the lack of in-depth research, since one tends to have a more general approach and aims to address non-academics. The relevant literature lacks good primary investigations, as for example interviews with professionals at different positions throughout the process. Instead, we have found a lot of subjective and brief descriptions that tend to be not so comprehensive, presenting forecasting methods as being complex, highly intuitive and frequently
underestimated. The literature review confirms the idea of fashion forecasting methods as being complex and not studied enough. What is more, most of these books handling the fashion forecasting process, unfortunately, exclude theoretical work and ideas presented by scholars from various disciplines that have studied fashion systematically for many years and have addressed issues relevant to the subject. Thus, there remains a need for a more sophisticated academic approach to the investigation of the fashion forecasting process and its methodology.

2.2 THEORY: EXPLAINING FASHION IN THE SOCIOLOGICAL TRADITION

What are the driving forces of fashion and trends? This has been a key question for many scholars examining the fashion phenomenon. Within the sociological tradition one points to the distinction between the social classes, through style, cut and colour as a driving force and gives theoretical explanation for how taste is negotiated through social relations. A few prominent scholars in the sociology field have influenced us and constructed the basis of our understanding of the fashion system. Especially interesting are Herbert Blumer's and Pierre Bourdieu's theorization of fashion and cultural concerns, such as cultural knowledge, capital and acquired taste, produced within social and institutional relations. We find these theories useful in order to analyse the cultural production of fashion and the intermediates working within that system. However, we have also chosen to look closer at the interpretations of their works done by the acknowledged fashion scholars Joanne Entwistle and Yuniya Kawamura. We believe them to be more up to date and thus more relevant to our contemporary fashion system.

In *Fashion: From Class Differentiation to Collective Selection* (1969), Blumer outlined the institutional relations and processes of “collective selection” that determine what constitutes “fashion”. Blumer argues that fashion is socially produced by the institutional, social and cultural relations between a number of key players in the industry. Thus, fashions come into being as the result of selective choices made. Blumer also notes that there is a remarkable similarity between these key players as to what elements they select and this he puts down to the fact that these cultural innovators and mediators are immersed in the same culture and seek out inspiration for new trends and tastes from the same sources. They are therefore well placed to pick up and translate what he calls “incipient taste”, the emerging aesthetic dispositions of the particular time (Entwistle, 2002:333).

In *A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (1984), *The field of Cultural Production* (1993) and *The Rules of Art* (1996), Bourdieu explains his theories about cultural production and symbolic capitals. A key concept, especially important to note, is Bourdieu’s notion of the existence of multiple forms of capital (e.g., economic, cultural, and symbolic) and that he provides a theoretical explanation for how taste is negotiated through social relations. Bourdieu notes how the power of particular individuals in “fields”, such as art and fashion, depends upon their mythical
status within the system. The aesthetic sensibilities and cultural capital, as well as the social, cultural and institutional connections and relationships which sustain them, are critical to the commercial transaction of commodities, generated internally within the field of cultural production itself. Thus, economic calculations in aesthetic economies are always, by definition, cultural ones (Entwistle, 2002:334-338). Bourdieu is the first to refer to the “new cultural intermediaries” and the term has been expanded to include an ever-widening band of cultural producers or “taste-makers”. In Bourdieu’s later analysis of the Field of cultural production (1993), he suggests the possibility of including those cultural workers involved in “the production of the value of the work” (Entwistle, 2006:708); which would suggest colour forecasters as new cultural intermediaries in the field of fashion.

In Fashion-ology, Kawamura continues to formulate a sociological approach to fashion, in the tradition of Blumer and Bourdieu. Kawamura introduces the idea of fashion as something immaterial, rather than a tangible material commodity. A fashion system consisting of different institutions and organizations produces fashion through a structured cultural process. Thus, fashion is a cultural phenomenon distinct from clothing, although garments can be used as a medium conveying fashion (Kawamura, 2004: 3-11). Kawamura mentions several different sociological constructed systems, operating in different cities such as Paris, London and Tokyo. In relation to this, the function of fashion leaders and gatekeepers is discussed. The gatekeepers have a cultural capital that gives legitimacy to what may become fashion. However, the traditional rigid sociological system and consequently, also the fashion systems are becoming increasingly loose in terms of diffusion and power relations (Kawamura, 2005:4-11).

In The Aesthetic Economy from 2002, Entwistle explains her view on the fashion system and how it functions. Like in Kawamura's text, the traditions of Blumer and Bourdieu are strong. First of all, Entwistle puts fashion in the context of aesthetic economy:

"(An aesthetic economy...) is one in which aesthetics is a key component in the production of particular goods and services within a particular industry, organization or firm, and one in which aesthetics are central to the economic calculations of that setting." (Entwistle, 2002: 321)

This means that the aesthetics are at the very centre of the business, and thus is not added afterwards (Entwistle, 2002:321). Further, aesthetic economies have their own particularity. They are often perceived as more “subjective”, and thus far less “stable” as other economies, which are supposedly based upon “rational” decisions and actions (Entwistle, 2002:322). Entwistle declares that the aesthetic values do not come out of nowhere; but are generated internally to the field of production itself, by the routine actions and practices of individuals and institutions. A culturally valued fashion is produced through processes of cultural valorisation (Entwistle, 2002: 322). Entwistle explains how people with important positions within the fashion business are habitually described to have a certain indefinable quality, and their view of aesthetics
are often less connected to popular taste than to the esoteric and rarefied world of high fashion, and this makes them less accessible to the outsider’s eye and the mainstream public. These are qualities that demand “cultural capital” in the form of cultural competency, knowledge and an acquired aesthetic sensibility, to be intelligible (Entwistle, 2002: 327). There is an internal logic to this aesthetic economy, which depends upon the acquisition of detailed cultural knowledge and a particular aesthetic sense by those within the field. They exist in a network of institutional and social relations within the world of fashion and, as such, acquire the same cultural capital, habitus and taste as each other (Entwistle, 2002: 332). In this argumentation, reasoning from Blumer and Bourdieu, shines through in both terms and hypothesis.

In The Cultural Economy of Fashion Buying (2006), Entwistle goes further into the examination of qualification and mediation of fashionable clothing by fashion buyers at Selfridges, London. Her findings are well applicable in an examination of other mediators, such as trend forecasters. Entwistle examines the “active and reflexive role of economic agents in the qualification of products” in their “habitual and routine” working practices - in other words functioning as “cultural intermediaries”. Again, Bourdieu is a main influence. Entwistle points out that Bourdieu’s thoughts are applicable to cultural agents, symbolically creating products with high cultural value and helping shape and forge tastes in the process, becoming also, by necessity, economic agents, since their actions are orientated to a marketplace. Hence, this is relevant to the praxis of trend forecasting and the use of symbolic capital to obtain status in order to create dependability and validity within the field.

2.2.1 Conclusion

How can we apply these theories? We find the sociological approach to fashion as a system consisting of different institutions and organizations, which produces fashion through a structured cultural process, relevant for our thesis subject. We are interested in examining these processes more closely. We also recognise the description of a networked based, subjective profession from the literature reviewed above. The notion and logic of “aesthetic economies” described by Entwistle, as “subjective”, and thus far less “stable” than other economies, offers an interesting perspective to the colour forecasting methodology and process (Entwistle, 2002:322). As stressed by Entwistle, we find it important to regard the unique features of the fashion field in order to make the study as reliable as possible. Further, Entwistle describes people with important positions within the fashion business as having certain indefinable qualities, and their view of aesthetics demand “cultural capital” in the form of cultural competency, knowledge and an acquired aesthetic sensibility, to be intelligible (Entwistle, 2002: 327). Thus, fashions come into being as the result of selective choices made by cultural mediators, who in extension seek out inspiration from the same sources, which are picked up, and then get translated into trends or fashions (Entwistle, 2002: 333). Hence, this is relevant to the selective praxis of trend forecasting and the use of symbolic capital to obtain status in order to create validity within the field. Bourdieu's aspect of “culture intermediaries” as those who are in-
between creative artisans and consumers is also relevant to the role of the forecaster (Bourdieu, 1984). Indeed, colour forecasters occupy a position in the middle between production and consumption and their objective is to transfer information from culture and society to the production chain; to be able to legitimise cultural symbols and practices, forecasters rely on a high cultural capital (Pedroni, 2012).

2.3 COLOUR THEORIES

Apart from the theoretical concepts that have to do with the fashion system and forecasting as a vital component of it, it is also essential to discuss a few notions that have to do with colour and especially the shifts in colour preference by the consumers, namely colour cycles.

Colour cycles refer to two phenomena: the periodic shifts in colour preferences and the patterns of repetition in the popularity of colours (Brannon, 2010: 165). According to Brannon, both depend on the mechanism of boredom, since people get tired of what they have and start looking for something new. However, one can add to this also a mechanism of distinction, which is set in motion when some individuals stop wearing a colour if too many people start wearing it. A mechanism similar to Georg Simmel’s “trickle-down” theory, where people in the superordinate groups are constantly looking to set themselves apart from people below them on the social ladder, abandoning fashions and adopting even newer styles to ensure the social distinction (Simmel, 1904: 130-155).

As previously mentioned, new colours continuously enter the marketplace. However, there is a lag time between the introduction of a new colour or new colour direction and its acceptance, while people gain familiarity with the idea. In that sense, colours and colour palettes move gradually from trendy to mainstream, to uninteresting, before finally getting replaced by the next new thing. This mechanism means that colours have somewhat predictable life cycles (Danger, 1968; Jack, & Schiffer, 1948; Nichols, 1996) and that colours that were once popular can be repositioned in a future season. The vogue for a group of colours evolves over a period of 10 to 12 years reaching its peak in mid-cycle (Brannon, 2010: 165).

Since colour forecasting evolves mainly around matching colour with specific consumer segments, the colour forecaster has to take into account the consumer type and membership in cultural group, when applying a colour theory. Applying a colour cycle theory in the whole forecasting process takes experience and insight, especially when there are more than one colour cycle theories to consider.

2.3.1 The Long-Wave Colour Cycle

According to this theory, the cycle begins with bright, saturated, primary colours; this is followed by an exploration of mixed, less intense colours; then, it pauses in neutral, until the rich, strong colours are rediscovered (Porter, 1994). Researchers have confirmed a periodic swing from high chroma colours to “multicoloredness”, to
subdued colours, to earth tones, to achromatic colours (black, white and grey) and back to high chroma colours. What is more, a purple phase occurs between achromatic and chromatic phases and signals a new colour cycle (Brannon, 2010: 166). Colour cycles can be sparked by new technology as in the case of mauve in the mid 1800s and turquoise in the 1950s. Economic conditions can also disturb colour cycles and signify the beginning of new ones. For example, during the “depressed” decade of 1930s subdued colours prevailed, since this colour family could be worn very frequently, hiding the dirt, not needing frequent washing and thus lasting longer. Last but not least, colour cycles can be associated with social change and nostalgic revivals of looks from previous decades (Brannon, 2010: 167-168).

2.3.2 Pendulum swing

Everett Brown, who introduced the Color Key Program for apparel and paint selection, identified a cycle of approximately 7 years during which the pendulum swings between warm-toned and cool-toned colours (Brown, 1994: 136-145).

2.3.3 Seasonal continuity

Irrespective of trends, some seasonal continuity remains stable. This means that fall/winter palettes tend to be darker and less intense than the spring/summer ones. What is more, one can easily observe some recurring themes in certain seasons, for example leaf colours and animal prints during fall/winter and a variation of some nautical theme – red, white and blue – along with a blooming flower scheme during spring/summer (Nelson, 2007; Wrack, 1994).

SECTION 3: METHODOLOGY

The nature of our research questions defined qualitative interviewing as the most appropriate method to use, since it would provide us with a richness of data on the entire colour forecasting process. Hence, we conducted semi-structured interviews with 3 key-people in the Swedish forecasting industry, using induction to analyze the gathered data.

3.1 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWING

For our research topic, we found qualitative research to be the most appropriate, since we want to gather an in-depth understanding of the colour forecasting process, investigating the why and how of the process and not just what, where, when (Glenn, 2010: 104). In order to collect our data, we used semi-structured interviews with key-people from the Swedish fashion forecasting industry. According to Bridget Byrne, qualitative interviewing when done well is able to achieve a level of depth and complexity that is not available to other, particularly survey-based, approaches (2003: 182). What is more, as Silverman notes, for interviewers in the interactionist tradition, interview subjects construct not just narratives, but social worlds and for researchers
in this tradition “the primary issue is to generate data which give an authentic insight into people’s experiences” (Silverman, 1993: 91).

In semi-structured interviews (sometimes called “moderately scheduled”), the interview format is not highly structured, as is the case of an interview that consists of all closed-ended questions, nor is it unstructured, such that the interviewee is simply given a license to talk freely about whatever comes up. Semi-structured interviews offer topics and questions to the interviewee, but are carefully designed to elicit the interviewee’s ideas and opinions on the topic of interest, as opposed to leading the interviewee toward preconceived choices. They rely on the interviewer following up with probes to get in-depth information on topics of interest. The questions that focus on the topics of interest are broad, open-ended questions that allow the interviewee latitude in constructing an answer. Usually, qualitative researchers want to understand the interviewee’s language and meanings, and open-ended questions encourage this (Waikato Management School, 2012.03.16). We believe that the semi-structured interviews provided us with a richness of information, which is essential, since there is a lack of academic literature on our chosen topic. What is more, our research questions are in many ways “qualitative” in nature, since we want to understand how forecasters work and not just measure what they do.

We approached qualitative interviewing from a constructionist point of view, which supports that interviewers and interviewees are always engaged in constructing meaning and the topic gets formulated as meaning is mutually constructed. We found Holstein & Gubrium’s concept of “active interview” a very helpful perspective, according to which “the subject behind the respondent not only holds facts and details of experience, but, in the very process of offering them up for response, constructively adds to, takes away from, and transforms the facts and details (Silverman, 1997: 121). In that sense, this approach enabled us to transform the subject behind the respondent from a repository of opinions and reasons or a wellspring of emotions into a productive source of knowledge.

3.2 THE INTERVIEWING PROCESS

Since our interviews were semi-structured, they evolved around a few thematic categories, which facilitated the whole flow of the interview. These themes derived from our research questions and were the following:

1. Sourcing of primary data
2. Colour story development: Data processing, analysis and interpretation
3. Forecast presentation
4. The use of the output by fashion companies

All interviews were conducted in English in order to depict more authentically the international terminology in forecasting and the fashion industry in general. However, we took into consideration the fact that the respondents would find it more difficult to
express themselves in this second language rather than their native one (namely Swedish).

The interviews were recorded with high-end technological equipment and later transcribed by the researchers. However, apart from the transcripts of the interviews, we also included field notes that were taken during the interview process. Those field notes were ethnographic observations during the interview, documenting the interview situation, as well as the mood of the interviewee and his attitude. This practice was employed to increase the reliability and validity of the transcripts and, thus, the research itself. What is more, the authors participated in a forecasting presentation, in order to gain experience on the subject and the field notes of that event were also used to increase the validity of the data. Last but not least, colour forecasting reports for upcoming seasons were studied and the deriving field notes were once more used to support the reliability of the research.

In order to construct a spherical perspective of the entire colour forecasting process we selected specific professionals from the forecasting field that would constitute our sample. Hence, for our study we talked to 2 trend forecasters and a forecasting agencies’ representative, all based in Sweden.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lotta Ahlvar, CEO of the Swedish Fashion Council</th>
<th>Cay Bond, trend forecasting legend</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swedish Fashion Council produces trend information with focus on fashion, lifestyle and interior design for the Nordic market and offer tools for inspiration and planning. The Fashion Council is also a collaborative forum for the industry and act through different projects for the development of Swedish fashion in both Sweden and abroad (Moderadet.se, 2012.04.01).</td>
<td>Cay Bond is a Swedish journalist, trend analyst and author who focuses on fashion. She has founded the fashion magazine Clic, published from 1981 to 1991. Cay Bond, has worked as an agent for Promostyl trend information. In the 1980s she launched the first design trend information in Scandinavia, which involved studying the sociocultural valuation and attitude changes that occur and to translate those into color, shape, design and communication (Caybond.se, 2012.04.01).</td>
</tr>
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After defining the key-people, we came in contact with them and let them choose the time and date of our interview. The interviews took place both in office environment as well as in cafés. Their duration varied from 40 minutes to 2 hours and during the interviews both authors were present.

Regarding the analysis of the interviews, we first listened through each recording 2 times and then we started transcribing them. After the transcription, we started
searching for the themes that we had defined previously, grouping the responses of the informants accordingly.

3.3 INDUCTIVE ANALYSIS

As far as the analytic strategy of the data gathered is concerned, our study is using analytic induction in the sense that our study is explorative and its primary focus is not about testing specific primary hypotheses. The general idea is that with an examination of a single case from a predefined ‘population’ (our pre-defined sample) we attempt to formulate a general statement about that population, a concept or a hypothesis. Then, the study continues with the examination of another case to see whether it fits the statement. If it does, a further case is selected. If it does not fit, there are two options: either the statement is changed to fit both cases, or the definition of the population is changed in such a way that the case is no longer a member of the newly defined population. Then another case is selected and the process continues. In this way, one should be able to arrive at a statement that fits all cases of a population-as-defined (Ten Have, 2004: 135). Despite the fact that our study is explorative, we have to underline once more the fact that it is guided by important theoretical concepts, been already described in Section 2. Last but not least, we are aware that we examine indirectly how information is used in the forecasting industry, as it is only from the perspective of the forecasters.

SECTION 4: RESULTS

When we set out to write this thesis we had an ambitious plan to interview several people with different experiences from the fashion business and colour forecasting. However, an unforeseen reluctance and scepticism to academic investigations made our prospects constricted. We did manage to talk to some very important people, highly knowledgeable about colour forecasting. Adding to this, one needs to keep in mind that the Swedish fashion scene is very small and the key operators are very few (and influential). Thus we believe our data to be sufficient.

The purpose of this section is to report the findings of our research. We present the data we obtained during the interviews, arranged in a thematically order.

As we previously stated, there have been some attempts at outlining the forecasting process, and the difficulty in doing so may also depend on the fact that there are several different methods, approaches and applications of colour forecasting, depending on various variables, further discussed in the text. As one respondent states:

"All forecasters have different methods, so there is no formula, no checklist. The only thing to recommend is to really know your fashion and art history, and then you learn how things work and how cycles come." (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)
4.1 COLLECTION OF DATA

There are different tools used to gather information for a forecast. The usual practices described and summarized by Brannon, are following the latest fashion news to spot emerging fashion and lifestyle trends and to monitor consumer characteristics. Brannon also mentions looking for cultural changes in society that involve shifts in lifestyle and reflect changes in generational cohorts or cycles in the economy, which will affect mass scale purchasing decisions (Brannon, 2010: 4-9). We found that the forecasters we talked to, worked in a similar manner, collecting both hard data and soft experiences.

4.1.1 Keeping up with the industry

Keeping up with the latest fashion news and participating in events within the business are vital for spotting emerging tendencies and future trends. Our interview subjects talked about travelling the world, visiting the major metropolis for fashion weeks, meeting and exchanging thoughts with colleagues, having prescriptions to newsletters and following fashion media.

Lotta Ahlvar explained to us that The Swedish Fashion Council makes sure to visit different branch fairs. Not the ones that buyers usually attend, such as Première Vision, but the ones that lay one step ahead in the textile business, for example Pitti Filati.

"We visit the fibre- and yarn fairs. Here we look at the first fibres, which can then be twisted into yarn, or to be spun into cloth. And there you can see innovations and news. And through that we can see emerging trends that will come when these materials are ready for use." (Ahlvar, 2012.05.03)

Ahlvar continues explaining how they can detect colour trends in such early stages:

"You get ideas for material (...) Since we have been doing this ever since 1979, there is a process in the way we work, and I would say that colours and materials - they are linked together. And off course the participants at the fair showcase their products and samples with colours." (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

Ahlvar describes that even some runway shows have a large impact on colour trend forecasting, despite the fact that they are generally too late in time, and too developed to be considered.

"Sometimes designers launch something, like Victor & Rolf had a black collection, and a blue collection, and that is quite influential on ideas. Even if H&M will do their whole assortment and they will always use colours because it is in their culture; if V&R have a collection in just blue, you know that H&M will probably have some blue sweaters or something. But it's more rare, I would say." (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

Cay Bond tells us that she finds it very rewarding going to product presentations:

"You know, the PR companies today, they are more than advertising companies. They do very small gatherings and they present new collections of many various things in cosmetics, in fashion, in design, interiors, textiles, and food. So, I try to attend as many as I can." (Bond, 2012.04.23)
4.1.2 Defining the Zeitgeist

The fashion study scholar Barbara Vinken expresses the relation between fashion and modernity:

"Fashion has become what art had wanted to be: the Zeitgeist expressing itself in visible form." (Vinken, 2004, p.40)

Vinken's phrase summarizes what many scholars before her have tried to say about fashion's ability to reflect the signs of a time and culture, and thus it is important to be aware of the Zeitgeist in order to be able to predict future patterns. Vinken stresses that one needs to consider the politics and philosophies that constitute the driving force directing the sense of style. (Vinken, 2004: 10-15) Consequently, in this next step in the forecasting process it is vital to discover and interpret the “Zeitgeist” or the “Spirit of the Times”. This means that one tries to pin down the general cultural, social or political climate and the mood associated with the present time. To do so one can study significant occurrences such as world fairs and academy awards, major cultural events, movements of influential artisans etc. (Brannon, 2010: 17-19). From observations and experiences the forecasters can learn to see the dominating ideas and attitudes that will become important in the shaping of our socio-cultural climate - and further the consumption of fashion. Hence, one tries to define the present, and the patterns that can act as directional signposts to the future (Brannon, 2010: 17-19).

Cay Bond, who used to work as an agent for Promostyl, explained to us how important the study of socio-political climate and culture was for their forecasts:

"(...) We studied the social cultural aspects and follow events, politics, economy, well now biology - because it’s about the environment - and also consumer or people's behaviour in society. It’s very important tool to follow what they are sort of understanding, how they understand their own time and how they act (...) and interact" (Bond, 2012.04.23)

In order to notice these “sign of the times” one needs to have a sensibility and intuition. To a large extent, the ability to observe and the capability to process information is key. As a forecaster, the collection of data never stops, it is an on going process.

"I never stop. You cannot stop! When you are doing my job it’s like I don’t know when I am working and when I am not working, because I am trained to see different things and to be aware of different things and when I travel a lot of course I want to go to places. I am always curious because there are always things to discover, what I eat, what I do, how people live, how they act. I mean, I observe. I observe almost 24 hours. I do!" (Bond, 2012.04.23)

For other forecasters, the active involvement in culture is not procedure. However, the observation of one's surroundings still is. Some, such as the Swedish Fashion Council, look more into street culture and the crowds around other creative areas. (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

In Diane & Cassidy's study, we find a similar conclusion, where colour is described as representations of interest, which are collected on an on-going basis throughout the
year in any form or substance (Diane, & Cassidy, 2005, p. 30). Further, one stipulates that awareness is a highly personal but important aspect, continual throughout the forecasting process. Intuition can be developed through observation, which absorbs information continually from our surroundings (Diane & Cassidy, p. 34).

4.1.3 New Technology

As Brannon points out, technology imprints not only the Zeitgeist but also the production methods. (Brannon, 2010, p. 20) Thus, the awareness of new technological developments is central in the forecasting process. For example:

"We also look at information about smart textiles and fabrics - we find that very interesting - even if it does not resolve in a clothing fashion." (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

This aspect has grown stronger the last couple of years, with the advancement of smart textiles, interactive gadgets and the general increase of technology usage.

4.1.4 Hard data and previous sales

Both hard and soft tools are used in the first stage of the forecasting process; the hard tools include statistical analysis and conceptual models derived from previous trend information, sales data, and a range of analytic programmes available as computer software (Diane & Cassidy, 2005: 106). These facts are important due to the fact that direction of colour change is gradual and thus the forecaster must always be aware of previous data. Some retailers and forecasters give special consideration to previous seasons’ best sellers and see this as recognising consumer preferences (Diane & Cassidy, 2005: 119).

4.1.5 Colour Archive

Due to the cycles and continuation of colour preferences and trends, an important activity is to look back in time. British forecasting agency d.cipher is known for focus on colour and its application in the fashion industry. They describe how important their grand colour archive is for them and to their ability to predict. They see it as a unique tool for selecting colour, containing roughly 1500 colours and are growing every season. It is a compilation of their forecast fashion colours dyed over the past 11 years (Deipher, 2012.05.08).

4.1.6 Addressing the customers

"Give them what they didn't know they wanted." (Allegedly said by Diana Vreeland, former editor-in-chief at Vogue US.)

In the forecasting process’ first steps, there is a disagreement among forecasters on how to handle customer surveys and inquiries about taste preferences. The commercial fashion business is based on a negotiation of what the brands present and what the consumers want. Thus, there are those who want to involve the consumer more in the forecasting prognosis, as suggested by Diane & Cassidy for an improvement of the forecasting accuracy. Hence, one suggests quantitative scientific approaches including data collection from consumer surveys and panels, market
testing, and analysing sales trends. The idea being, that this information ought to indicate consumer acceptability (Diane, & Cassidy, 2005: 35-37).

We discussed this notion with our interview subjects, and they did not agree with the suggestions above:

"You can ask (the customers) which one is the most important; price, style, colour or quality? Asking them what they want next season however is completely pointless because they don't know what they'll want. When all the influences from music and culture come together they will have changed." (Klarsten, 2012.04.04)

The difference in opinion may lay in one's view of management and what type of collection one is creating. It may also reflect a perceived need for scientific basis, which can be recorded and analysed, in the forecasting (Diane & Cassidy, 2005: 35). Klarsten explains to us how she finds market departments always wanting everything quantified:

"Institutes asking about colour preferences are useless in developing a collection, that is if you have some cultural knowledge...and know local adoptions and balance stock in regions. But not when it comes to trends with a time span of 6 months - 1 year, then the info is lost. Three months is relevant - but then you are back on express collections, and not building solid colour stories. (Klarsten, 2012.04.04)

Nor does Ahlvar believe in consulting the consumers directly:

"I know lots of people do that. Of course we have a look at people (...). We look at real people at fashion shows, what and how they wear a style. But we are not crowd sourcing." (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

However, this last statement relates more to the procedure of keeping á jour with the business; observations of “Change Agents”, who are more knowledgeable about fashion and have a more developed aesthetic taste and a different social sensitivity for stylish looks, than the general consumer (Brannon, 2010: 47).

**4.2 COLOUR STORY DEVELOPMENT**

Having defined the input of the process, the next step is the translation of the data into precise and consistent colour stories. During this step the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the data takes place, resulting in the final colour forecast.

**4.2.1 Analysis**

The colour story development phase starts with the analysis process, once data collection is complete and sufficient information has been gathered. The analysis has to do with the separation of the various elements and the identification of any specific classifications or patterns, in order for data to be arranged in a meaningful manner (Diane, & Cassidy, 2005:114). According to Lotta Ahlvar:

“‘You have to look around, gather and systemize somehow - and that's what it is all about.” (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

Cay Bond explains the analysis process in more detail:
“(…) today when I start my analysis or when I try to set a presentation together, I have clippings and I have different texts, I have different brochures about exhibitions or whatever or notes… and then I put them in stacks and then at one point when I think it’s ready time-wise… then I put a sentence, a headline on this stack and then continue.” (Bond, 2012.04.23)

The forecasters separate the gathered data into categories, which are rather thematical (stories) than strictly one-dimensional. Cay Bond gives us some examples:

“Now, I have my headlines for my present presentation (…) in that (…) one is China and then one is about music, one is about relations, communication, it’s about buildings… just some examples…”

### 4.2.2 Interpretation

“In the forecasters’ pairing of tints and stories there was an assurance of something real, and not merely apophenia - finding connections and “patternicity” in unrelated things” (Vanderbilt, 2012)

The meaning deriving from the analysis phase is recognised as the interpretation process and this explains why the patterns or groups are as they are. Although the initial information gathered is the one that will determine the basis, theme or mood of the colour story, *thought, reasoning and decision-making* become the driving forces behind the ideas towards accomplishing the colour story (Diane, & Cassidy, 2005: 115).

At this point, the factors that support the thought, reasoning and decision-making processes are *knowledge, intuition* and *creativity* (Diane, & Cassidy, 2005: 118).

- **Colour Expertise**

“(…) it is a very special sort of thing to work with colours. It is, you know. So, it has really to do with a lot of knowledge.” (Bond, 2012.04.23)

It is very important for a forecaster to possess basic colour principles and concepts. Colour cycles and waves (explained in Section 2) are widely used by the professionals to back up and support their decisions and reasoning in the interpretation phase.

“(…) one does tend to use historical platforms and follow methods of colour change cycles. This means one can predict fairly accurate what kind of colours that will be in vogue following a seven year-long cycle.” (Klarsten, 2012.04.04)

Forecasters also look at their previous predictions in order to give a sense of continuity and make the transition between the seasons as natural as possible, this way working with a long perspective (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24).

“(…) we look at our own cards for the last season and now since we are working with spring ’14, we are looking at what we are predicting for ’13, but we also can go even further back at previous autumn.” (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)
This sense of continuity is also confirmed by Cay Bond who supports that colours “(…) develop from season to season. It’s not it changes totally like that.” (Bond, 2012.04.23)

What is more, Bond thinks that colours can both develop themselves as well as be reinvented (2012.04.23).

“By coincidence sometimes colours by aging or by how it’s being handled sometimes of course they can change themselves, so to say, or they can give a new aspect by themselves… so.” (Bond, 2012.04.23)

Last but not least, colours when creatively mixed or matched bring out a whole new feeling that looks either fresh or old.

“For me there is a whole range of colours that, a whole palette, and somehow it can be fashion how you mix colours, how you dress two colours. For instance, five years ago it was impossible to have light pink with black, because it was regarded as too hard. And in a few years we will find it to hard again. So it can be how you combine colours as well. (…) And you can combine colours so it feels old or new.” (Lotta Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

- Intuition, inspiration and creativity

The intuitive aspect in the interpretation stage was something underlined by most of our interviewees.

“Trend agency's predictions are not inexplicable, but they are indeed intuitive.” (Klarsten, 2012.04.04)

“(…) it's about having a guts feeling for what will work.” (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

When working with such a diversity of data and trying to connect the different pieces into a consistent theme that depicts the trend, creativity and inspiration are two more aspects that one has to consider. As Cay Bond states the whole process “(…) it’s something very artistic I would say”. (Bond, 2012.04.23) (discussed in detail in Section 5)

4.2.3 Evaluation

Having finished with the interpretation, it all comes down to which of those patterns revealed (or surfaced) will be included in the final colour story, and this evaluation process has a lot to do with synchronizing. Klarsten specifically says that:

“(…) the market has to be ready and mature, in order for a new trend to work.” (Klarsten, 2012.04.04)

Colour forecasters at this point try to determine whether a specific pattern is ready to be adopted by the market.

“(…) it's not difficult to be first with the latest, but it's very difficult to know when companies can make a lot of money on this trend. Because if you think about trends as waves, with long trends and sudden storms. It is more about calculating what and when a trend will be possible for the Swedish market.” (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)
When Ahlvar discusses market adoption readiness, she underlines the role of the consumer that is central here. There has to exist a certain mass of consumers that will be ready (or feel ready) to adopt the new colour trend and that mass is far beyond innovators and early adopters. What is more, Ahlvar highlights the importance of timing; it is all about presenting those hues and shades that will hit the market at that specific time point, predicting those “colour waves” that are ready to come ashore. And to be able to make that decision (to correctly time the launch of a new colour pattern), the forecaster has to have knowledge (symbolic capital) in the field of fashion.

“(…) we always present the colours we believe are coming – but sometimes we believe too early. And sometimes we believe (…) that something will stay too long. But our main problem is being too early; especially with these mustard colours we see now (…) Brown is another good example. I remember us talking a lot of brown in 2004 on shoes and leather accessories, and at that time it was only black in the stores. And we waited, but nothing seemed to happen. We wanted the shift to brown to happen earlier, but it took really a long time for the brown to hit the commercial customers (…) we work with people from the business and we have our meetings, we invite people. For example this brown trend, that some wanted to bring out early but together we calculated... and it took some time to become adopted.” (Lotta Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

Ahlvar underlines the importance of the evaluation phase, since the world nowadays is surrounded by a plethora of trends and patterns.

“Today there are so many trends going on so that the biggest work is to exclude and decide what you want to work with.” (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

This step of the colour forecasting process functions as a very good example on Blumer’s “selection” perspective and how the choices of the industry’s key players will determine what constitutes fashion.  

4.2.4 Finalization of the colour story

The final phase of the colour story development is to put together the themes that have passed successfully the evaluation process, by presenting the complete colour story.

The final colour story can be either presented on its own in a colour book or can be broken down to its original themes and complement the narrative of each corresponding trend (more details on this are presented in the following “Presentation” step). According to Ahlvar, the final colour forecast consists of 40-50 nuances.

“We have around 40 colours in our colour book, sometimes 50. But we try to keep them low, because we really want to give more concrete guidelines. Within those 40 colours there are 10 that are really important for the designers to work with.” (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

According to Diane & Cassidy, in a final colour forecast one can find staple colours (“bread and butter” colours with long life, e.g. black, navy), fashion colours (that last for a season or two e.g. lime, fuchsia) and taster colours (or rogue colours). The latter ones are 1-2 misplaced colours whose purpose is to whet the information user’s appetite for that nuance before being heavily promoted in future trends (2005: 126).
When we asked Ahlvar about this, she stated clearly that the Swedish Fashion Council does not include these rogue shades in their forecasts and that they only present colours, which they believe that are coming (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24).

4.3 PRESENTATION

“It’s a special way to present it, to make it understandable. That’s very important! To get a thread from A to Z. It has to be explainable.” (Bond, 2012.04.23)

Having finalized the colour stories, forecasters are now ready to present the fashion professionals (buyers, designers, yarn & fabric manufacturers) with their findings and reports. Each forecasting agency uses its own material to present the colour forecast and it can take the form of a book, an album or even a mood video. Apart from the material to-be-published, presentations in front of an audience take place explaining the forecast more in detail. Last but not least, very often and mostly upon client request special seminars are held in order to provide specific guidance and colour direction to the company that needs it. An analysis of these presentation tools follows.

4.3.1 Published material

The forecasting books (“Bibles” to some) is the most widely spread format for reporting the colour predictions. They can be general, presenting the upcoming nuances (e.g. The Swedish Fashion Council’s Colour Chart) or they can be more specific addressing to a particular target group (e.g. Women’s fashion, Men’s, Accessories).

“We do the overall inspiration book, our ladies, men's and kids, what we call fashion, and then sport, accessories and interior guides.” (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

Over the years new books have been developed, since the market demanded it, focusing the forecast to a specific product category.

“So, I insisted, I said that we wouldn’t have a trend book in jeans and you know the French how they can be very arrogant when we had our meetings. They said: “No, no, no, is not fine enough!” I said: “Well, we are heading towards this market, we have to…” Because so many in Sweden… we have only jeans’ companies producing jeans in Borås, everywhere. So, they finally agreed and that book for ten years it was the most sold book everywhere because that was new to France, Italy, Spain, probably Greece, everywhere. My God! It was a hit!” (Bond, 2012.04.23)

Each book starts with a general overview of the season it refers to and then is divided into the stories that we discussed earlier.

“It could be five to ten (themes), it varies. There has been a tendency to be many main stories because there is happening a lot. We try to avoid to have too many.” (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

In each story, the corresponding nuances are presented either imprinted on the surface of the paper or with appropriate coloured materials.

“We are an agency and help the companies to choose the right materials. You need yarn, woven, knits and plastic coloured with pigments to tell. (…) A+A First Concept, Scout Carlin, d cipher... and Pantone colour planner know how to translate and present colour on materials and surfaces.” (Klarsten, 2012.04.04)
What forecasters underline is the fact that the book should provide the company with inspiration and work as a guideline and not as a strict recipe to-follow per se.

“I hope companies don't buy their whole lot from trend books! Because the book should be like an inspiration and it is a forecast (…) Let the books be inspirational and start the season, what's new, what's happening. Like a guideline. And sometimes you see something you really like - then use that as your inspirational source and do your own thing of it.” (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

As part of our research, we analysed 3 publications by the Swedish Fashion Council for Fall/Winter 12-13 season. The Inspiration Guide consists of 9 themes, extending to an average of 7 pages each. Each theme has a title that captures the trend’s feeling (e.g. “Black Magic”) followed by a brief text that summarizes the concept. After that, a page is dedicated to the colours of that story, which are named after the Pantone Matching System. The rest of the pages are filled with inspirational photos, various materials that express the mood of the theme, props (e.g. voodoo dolls in 'Black Magic'), fabric samples, herbs and even scented material.

The Swedish Fashion Council's Colour Chart starts with a brief summary of each theme presented in the Inspiration Guide. Then a 2-page colour map follows, depicting on printed-paper the forecasted colours expressed once again in PMS values.

Last, we examined the Women’s Fashion book. After presenting a brief overview of the season’s trends, the book is divided into 5 themes. Once again, each story starts with an inspirational title and a corresponding text, followed by thematically colour swatches and textile samples. What is original in this publication is the fact that each story is enriched with catwalk photos and mainly with illustrations of designs (e.g. dresses, tops, jackets).

### 4.3.2 Presentations

Having completed the content of their publishing material, forecasters are now ready to present their reports to a wider audience and start diffusing their findings into the fashion system. One of these presentations, we attended ourselves in order to gain original and authentic experience of the whole atmosphere: The Swedish Fashion Council’s presentation for Spring/Summer 2013 took place in Borås (Sweden) on January 24th, 2012 in the city’s Town Hall and lasted for two hours. The presentation started with a brief overview of the political, cultural and economical trends that shape our society nowadays, making also references to other influences that varied from astrology to chaos theory. After this introduction, a brief description of each theme presented in the S/S 13’ Inspiration Guide took place, enriched with abundant audio-visual material that ranged from photos to movie clips (e.g. Madonna’s “W.E” movie for the nostalgic “Flaming Hearts” story) and inspirational songs (e.g. David Bowie’s “Little China Girl” for the “Dragon Empire” theme).

### 4.3.3 Seminars/Consultations

Colour forecasts can be also presented in smaller audiences and take the form of a workshop or seminar. These specific consultations are conducted upon request from fashion companies that usually seek for a colour direction or even a starting point for their collections.

“(…) if you started a fashion company or something like that you could start with Promostyl and then do the 2-3 first seasons in order to get to it and understand the whole process and how to look for that, for material, for colours…” (Bond, 2012.04.23)

“We do sometimes trend forecast for some companies on consultant basis. Color House does not have their own colour forecasting in print, but customized trend analysis is given to some companies on consultant basis. “ (Klarsten, 2012.04.04)

“We do that sometimes when a customer asks us for special seminars or help to give them a starting point.” (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)
Cay Bond discusses in detail the synthesis of her seminars and the agenda that they entail.

“I now do smaller groups and I do my presentation and then we discuss the same time as we have lunch, we discuss, they present themselves to each other and I try to make groups that are compatible, interesting to each other from different areas of fashion and design and architecture or food, culture, art, I mean, a lot of things and it’s very rewarding I would say. It’s very rewarding. Because I notice they have so many ideas so they can continue to work… I find this more interesting than having a bigger audience (...) it’s about giving inspiration, guidelines, important guidelines.” (Bond, 2012.04.23)

4.3.4 The Web
A very recent development in the forecasting industry has been the online agencies like WGSN and Trendstop transmitting their reports in much faster pace than their conventional competitors. What is more, the subscription fees for their services are very competitive (especially if someone considers the richness of their archived material) and they both employ latest technology software tools that facilitate the whole product development process (e.g. virtual mood board creation, depiction of trends in different cities, full catwalk coverage). The fact that a fashion company can receive all this information online without having to travel to attain it (meaning extra costs) has turned these agencies into major players of the industry. As far as colour is concerned, WGSN, in particular, provides its 38,000 clients with various tools such us colour palettes, colour levels, colour usage, analysis and local trend confirmations (wgsn.com, 2012.04.26). However, one sees drawbacks in this type of presenting the colour reports, having to do with the technological inadequacy to depict the nuances precisely.

“These services provide inspirational photos from catwalks and constantly updated information. Unfortunately however, some people think one can do all work on computers. Colours are not ideal to look upon a screen, since they are mixed with light and in reality they are mixed with black.” (Klarsten, 2012.04.04)

4.4 THE MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS
We wanted to investigate the kind of influence the forecasters had and what the implications of their provided material were.

4.4.1 Designers and buyers; different mentalities
So, who decides which colours are to be used? Colour House usually deals directly with designers. They see some reoccurring problems. One is that designers may not have the budget to buy many different colour books, although it is perhaps needed in order to make a solid collection. Instead, the budget lies in the hand of the marketing department. Klarsten explains to us that she has had several meetings and discussions with boards and management in order to change this perceived skewedness (Klarsten, 2012.04.04). Some of Klarsten's clients had the marketing department setting the colours schemes instead of the designers. Klarsten clarifies that this is not a good way to build a solid collection or product. Instead, she believes the marketing departments’ forte to be raising knowledge of what colours will work in which regions or analyse the retailing to see what the company could sell more of that season. This statements
lead to a crucial success factor in colour planning; the colour story has to be mastered and understood by the whole team working with the collection and further that it will be correctly translated throughout the design, production and sales processes, according to Klarsten.

"Our fight here is to make people understand that one needs to follow colour through, not to just spend time choosing the colours and then have a team that do not secure that these are the actual colours that get into the store." (Klarsten, 2012.04.04)

Klarsten explains; In order to follow a colour through one needs to have a swatch following each distinct step, a master to control at every production step, with many different undersupplies. Often, mistakes are done in the quality control.

"Some companies even have special department to take care of selling their mistakes. This is the wrong way of thinking. It is all in the hands of controllers and people on the economy side." (Klarsten, 2012.04.04)

Ahlvar has noticed this difference in mentality as well:

"Also as designer, sitting with buyers claiming something would not work, you could point to the trend books and see how they have believed in this. It's different how they work with our books." (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

### 4.4.2 Colour Planning

As previously stated, it is understandably important for fashion companies to keep up with current trends and to be able to predict the future regarding colour, shape, material, in order to go in the right direction and make the right calls. Being able to ensure the right colour choice is increasingly critical of how an upcoming collection will be received by the market. Colour is an important aesthetical sale factor and thus it is important to get it just right (Klarsten, 2012.04.04).

Klarsten appreciates that a medium size company will be likely to buy two to three colour books per season. What trend material is bought depends on a ray of factors such as budget, brand strategies and taste preferences. Sometimes companies are trying a new sort of collection, for example a sport collection, and thus one needs extra colour material suitable for that style of fashion. (Klarsten, 2012.04.04)

- **Signature Colours**

  "What is Chanel? Beige and black, right?" (Bond, 2012.04.23)

We asked about how influential the forecasts were on the companies’ actual colour planning in relation to the other values the designers and management has to keep in mind when creating a collection. We gather that it depends on your design style, market and customers. Most brands keep some constant basic colours, *signature colours*. The companies tend not to change these basics according to colour forecasts, although sometimes they make slight adjustments in hue to keep being modern, similar to the practice of up-dating one's logo (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24). Also, the design...
aesthetics, choice of material and also the size of the company, come into play when deciding the brand's colours. Ahlvar compares two Swedish fashion brands:

"A company like Dagmar, who works with a lot of knit-work where they dye a lot, compared to, for instance, Rodebjer, which is buying a lot of fabrics that's been dyed by other suppliers, so she has to take their colours" (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24)

So, Dagmar that does clothes in yarn can more easily bring on their own colours, even if they are a small company. One can see this in their signature 'retro-colours’ with dirty pastels that correspond well with their overall design. Otherwise it can become a problem for small designers to get the colours they desire, and one has to accept the supplier’s colour assortment (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24).

Accordingly, Bond emphasizes the importance of signature colours for a brand.

"If you have a profile in your collection, if your name is Fillipa K or Rodebjer, you want as a client, you want to recognize… you could say, “This is a Fillipa K colour, this is a Rodebjer colour”(...)” (Bond, 2012.04.23)

And

"Prada that’s a very good example! (...) you get right nuances, but she worked hard on that. But then, there are others doing also well in a more commercial way, like Ralph Lauren. They always kept their colours the same."(Bond, 2012.04.23)

Thus, colour is essential to strong brand building. Bond justifies that if one can develop a really good palette, and good colour stories, one does not have to be bothered by trends. Although, it is also a question of quality. Bigger fashion chains, in the lower to mid price range, are forced to think differently about colours. When one has lower quality of materials it implicates a limitation of colours. Bond mentions the commonly used material Viscose and how problematic it is to get interesting and beautiful colours to work on that material.

"I have never seen a viscose happily coloured. Never ever! So, that would be a challenge!" (Bond, 2012.04.23)

It is likewise important to find a balance between trends and basic sales. Successful companies follow up and track the previous collections in order to decide colour stories for coming seasons. A "right" colour theme can work for a long time for a company, up to 5 years. Thus, these colours will be repeated in different pieces through several seasonal collections, in different shapes and materials, from a plastic accent to wool coat. It is normal to bring in about four to six trend colours, but one will probably make more money on two main colour stories (Klarsten, 2012.04.04).

• Market Adaption

Another aspect that became clear to us was the aspect of the market's traditions and cultures. Different markets make different choices and adapt to trends differently. One cannot make successful colour plans disregarding this. An example that Bond gives is the different perspective China has, even though one could think they are becoming more and more western world oriented. (Bond, 2012.04.23)
"The culture is so important, so important, much more important than in our culture. And I think that many businesses there, which sees the dollar signs or yen signs; they miss (...) the fact that (...) this product will probably sell differently and it needs to be adapted a little to be able to sell on that market. (Bond, 2012.04.23)

Bond stresses how one can learn from this and adapt, both for the low price segment and luxury markets:

"Chanel when they opened their first shop in Beijing, I mean, they made, Karl Lagerfeld made a special collection which was a little bit Tibetan, a winter collection that was beautiful! But they had fantastic pieces which was adapted to the Chinese way of looking at colours you know; the red, you could never skip the red. And together with sort of very, how to say, strong materials." (Bond, 2012.04.23)

The need for adaptation in colour stories is also evident in Sweden and the Nordic countries.

"Different markets have different taste preferences that will affect the fashion. Fast fashion trends are however global and do not differ much from various regions. In the northern hemisphere one tends to prefer bright colours, and soft pastels. One does not like brown shades. In opposite, the Japanese market tends to like dark blues. This means one will have to adapt to the market in colour stories." (Klarsten, 2012.04.04)

Some of the typical stylistic preferences the Swedish Fashion Council mentions are the folkloric influences and it anticipates a revival of traditional Swedish handcrafted designs in fashion, as a part of the sustainability wave gave way for natural linens, hand-woven fabrics and earthy tones. There is a fondness for discreet colours and a pared-down, refined appearance. And off course white on white and woodsy tones (Simmons, 2011).

- **The Colour of the season**

  In fashion magazines one can usually read about what colours are the 'musts' for this season. When talking to our forecasting experts about seasonal colour trends, we learned that there are several trendy 'it'-colours being promoted parallel, depending on the market and the brand. Also, it is a promotional tool. Cay Bond told us she constantly get asked about what colours are 'in', by journalists and clients of hers. She said that she usually replies that there are so many; it depends on what you do.

  "(…) and for us there is no such thing as “this autumn - this colour is THE colour”. That doesn’t mean anything! That’s the market’s way to do forecasting. The market! And of course, we are suffering from this." (Bond, 2012.04.23)
SECTION 5: DISCUSSION

Having presented our data, in this section we continue by stating our interpretations and opinions. Initially, we propose a new model that clearly depicts the colour forecasting process and all of its phases (the aDaMas model). After this, we discuss various topics that one should pay extra attention to, and they either have to do with forecasting as a whole, or constitute important elements in specific phases of the process. In order to give further understanding and depth we try to apply relevant theories and concepts.

5.1 THE aDaMas MODEL

Having gathered essential information on the colour forecasting process, we attempt to propose a new model that depicts this process differently from what already exists in the relevant literature and in a more sophisticated way.

What inspired this model were the diamond (adamas, “αδάμας”, in ancient Greek) and the prism effects that occur when light runs through the stone. Depending on the angles (facets) and the cut, the colour effect will come out differently - much like a forecast will depend on the data and methodology of a forecaster in relation to his or her mission.

The "light" is all around us, and so is the inspiration that the forecasters draw from. In the model it stands for the soft and the hard input constituting the data collection.
Level 1: Crown. The light hits the crown and the analysis of the gathered material starts; the data get categorized in themes (the diamond’s facets) and the colour stories start to develop.

Level 2: Girdle. This is where the interpretation process takes place using the forecaster’s colour knowledge, intuition, inspiration and creativity.

Level 3: Pavilion. Its decreasing shape indicates the evaluation phase of the derived themes and their possible elimination.

Level 4: Culet. The composition of the final colour story. Through the cullet the predicted colours come out and are ready to be used by the fashion companies.

5.2 FORECASTING AND TREND SPOTTING

During our interviews and readings we have repeatedly encountered the problem of defining fashion and/or colour forecasting in relation to trend spotting. This problem has grown since the take-off of blogs and social media. In her study, Giertz-Mårtenson writes about the newcomers in the field and how they have understood that the weakness of the traditional agencies is the time cycle. She argues that predicting new trends more than a year in advance seems impossible, or at least more complicated, today when fast fashion is everywhere and information from the runways can be found on the web the very same day as collections are shown (Giertz Mårtenson, 2006). However, here one has to be careful not to confuse forecasting with trend spotting as we see it interpreted in various fashion media and blogs. Ahlvar, explained to us that those kind of scoops are very 'here and now' and do not look forward as much, nor are they as analytic such as trend forecasting (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24). Trend forecasting and the adaptation of its material is a balance act of knowing in advance what will excite costumers, to be one step ahead, but still not be too early with trends or colours out on the market.

5.3 SELECTIONS AND GATEKEEPING

From the interviews we conclude that the trend forecasters seem to exist in a network like the one originally described by Blumer, constituted of institutional and social relations within the fashion world and, as such, acquire the same cultural capital, habitus and taste as each other (Entwistle, 2002: 332). The statements we gathered witness to the institutional relations and the processes of ‘collective selection’ that determines what constitutes ‘fashion’. Also relevant here is Blumer’s observations on the remarkable similarities between these key players as to what elements they select and this he puts down to the fact that these cultural innovators and mediators are immersed in the same culture and seek out inspiration for new trends and tastes from the same sources - and from each other (Entwistle, 2002: 333). Visiting similar events and getting exposed to the same influences will affect the outcome and the basis for the forecasting, something that our interviewees confirmed to be true.
Further, the aesthetic sensibilities and cultural capital, as well as the social, cultural and institutional connections and relationships, which sustain them, are critical in this aspect. (Entwistle, 2002: 334-338) The so-called “Gatekeepers”; key branch people such as the forecasters, select what eventually reaches the audience, and thus are connected to notions of power. As previously explained, Bourdieu notes how the power of particular individuals in fields, such as fashion, depends upon their mythical status within the field. Hence, there have been discussions of conspiracy in relation to trend forecasters, and further a questioning of the validity of their predictions (are they not just self-fulfilled prophecies?). The difficulties we experienced during the investigating process for the thesis reinforces the image of forecasters as a secretive and closed group. Our interviewees explain to us that this is because they need to keep details about their methods secretive in order to protect their business model. However, as we have tried to convey in this thesis, the trend agency's predictions are not inexplicable, although they are indeed intuitive. This intuition is seldom questioned or exposed to more critical reasoning, so the methodology remains hidden in mystery and a sort of monopoly is created for forecasters (Diane & Cassidy, 2005:29). This is a contributing aspect to the secretiveness that we strongly agree with (Klarsten, 2012.04.04). We have noticed a tendency to be more open and to inform the public to what forecasting is (and what it is not). Ahlvar told us that she finds it interesting to share their material and the general idea behind their methods, to a certain limit, because the general public is so interested in fashion today (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24). The Swedish Fashion Council has recently launched a magazine for this very reason. It contains different reports that have already been used in their network and thus are not a “secret” anymore.

Further, in the study of the process of collecting data, we can see how Entwistle's description of aesthetic economies is applicable. Aesthetic economies, such as fashion, have their own particularity and are perceived as more ‘subjective’ than other economies, which are supposedly based upon more ‘rational’ decisions and actions (Entwistle, 2002: 321-322). We recognize the same patterns as Entwistle describes; people with important positions within the fashion business have a certain indefinable quality, and their view of aesthetics are often more complex and inaccessible. These are qualities that demand ‘cultural capital’ in the form of cultural competency, knowledge and an acquired aesthetic sensibility, much similar as the ones described in the interviews (Entwistle, 2002: 327). There is an internal logic to this aesthetic economy, which depends upon the acquisition of detailed cultural knowledge and a particular aesthetic sense by those within the field. Although the trend forecasters are rather vague in their description of what constitutes these qualities and a sense of “je ne sais quoi”, they are acquired by experience and training in the field. Thus it makes sense within the system. We also recognize these qualities in Giertz–Mårtensons’ investigation and description of the forecasting agencies.

“When I talk to producers and users of forecasting material, some key-qualities were mentioned as necessary for a successful forecaster: intuition, curiosity and experience.” (Giertz – Mårtenson, 2006, p. 4)
Giertz–Mårtenson continues to argue that this “gift” of spotting new currents in society (trend pitch) and the ability to interpret them can be seen as important symbolic capital for the forecaster and thus it is an ability vital to gaining recognition and prestige in the field (Giertz–Mårtenson, 2006: 4-10)

5.4 INTUITION, CREATIVITY AND INSPIRATION

Although the colour forecasting process has a method and is, indeed, a systemic approach based on facts, we have to underline that intuition, inspiration and creativity are three elements that are present throughout the entire process, playing a very important role. The critics of forecasting have long used this fact to question its reliability and objectivity.

Intuition has always been essential in fields like philosophy and psychology, with science and scientific methodologies almost always neglecting it. However, there have been scientists that acknowledged its value, especially regarding discovery. Modern-day physicist and author Fritjof Capra refers to intuition as being the insight and creativity that is required in scientific research in order to break new ground. Einstein was also reputed to have acknowledged the value of intuition in his PhD thesis and early papers (Diane, & Cassidy, 2005: 111). On the other hand, behavioural research acknowledges that intuition contributes greatly in the decision-making process, which constitutes an important step in forecasting.

What is more, intuition was interpreted in our study as a “gut-feeling”, which forecasters employ when making their aesthetic judgments (Ahlvar, 2012.04.24); an ability that these actors develop through their long experience of working with the process. This can be easily linked with Bourdieu’s notion of “symbolic capital”, since this intuitive ability the forecasters employ, seems to be produced by their position in the industry.

As far as inspiration (the “eureka” factor) and creativity is concerned, one faces the challenging question, where do these remarkable and appropriate ideas come from? According to Diane & Cassidy there are two identifiable origins. The first being the many sources available to the forecaster that provide a visual and tangible aspect, provoking thoughts, feelings and intuitive hunches. The second and possibly the most controversial source is when these seemingly appropriately and timely notions come to mind out of the blue – deriving from the universal mind, the Akashic records, or even the spirit world (2005: 112-114). To conclude, one must take into consideration that the notions mentioned above have not yet been scientifically quantified and it is difficult for a forecaster or a researcher to provide tangible proof of them in the forecasting process.
5.5 COLOUR REPRESENTATION

Although the colour story development phase has resulted in the nuances that constitute the forecast, their accurate representation on tangible materials is equally important. Tracey & Diane in their research found discrepancies in colours within a single prediction package and more specifically variations in tonal value of those colours on different pages of the package examined (Diane, & Cassidy, 2005: 40). Hence, the accuracy of reproducing colours is vitally important and it is influenced by many factors depending on the medium used to communicate the forecast. In published colour reports these factors could include the quality of the paper used to print on, the use of any painting effects or dying techniques and more. According to Klarsten, colours on paper are not relevant anymore. Colours should be depicted on materials that have the ability to fully express their depth, richness and feeling.

“(…) In general trend forecasting agencies could improve: colours on paper are not relevant. Printing in 4-colours is devastating. You need yarn, woven, knits and plastic coloured with pigments to tell (…) There is more need fore companies to have a good idea about material translation of colour nowadays.” (Klarsten, 2012-04-04)

In the case of online communication, one must consider that the forecasted colours look totally different on the computer screen, since they are mixed with white light (see Klarsten’s comment in Section 4). However, the use of standardized colour cards (or shade cards) by both the forecasters and the fashion brands (e.g. Pantone’s Colour System) can secure the accurate representation of the nuances and minimize the possibility of a colour being misreproduced.

5.6 DIFFERENT MENTALITIES IN MANAGEMENT

Today one can see two distinct approaches in management towards building a collection and using forecasting material. One is to have long lead-time in production and use the forecasting material to help build solid collections. Here, forecasts are not for the fast track fashion decisions but for the longer-term decisions. This responds to quality issues and the demand for sustainability as well. On the other hand one can see how one takes trends and incorporates them into the collections being produced with short lead times, express collections or constantly updated mini-collections. Here one can see a constant development of their collection with added elements. An approach with constant flow with news is less risky economical (Klarsten, 2012.04.04). This change has been driven by the major retail chains that have the muscles to produce this, such as Zara. Unfortunately one can see how this leads to less creativity design-wise. Klarsten explains that because of the pressed economic situation one is forced to get products out quick and unfortunately there is no room to build solid collections. So, what happens is that people get inspired from catwalks pictures and copy them instead (Klarsten, 2012.04.04). This may have to do with the fear from the top management people who don't understand or believe in their own design teams. They pressure them to do 300-400 garments - and to master that, one has to take shortcuts. Hence, one can see how structural changes have taken place in the fashion system and in the media. Where colour used to begin with the fiber producers and the colour
spinners, and trickled through a whole chain of trade shows and production processes, this arrangement was upset by the fast-fashion chains - which went directly to the beginning of the chain and shrank the lead times that had long made forecasters useful (Vanderbilt, 2012).

5.7 WHAT DO CUSTOMERS WANT?

As previously stated, we do not agree with Diane & Cassidy's idea of asking the consumer what they want in the future, in order to improve the forecasting accuracy and further the precision of the companies’ colour planning. Instead we can see a need for a socio-cultural based forecasting to help the fashion companies build solid collections. According to Carbanaro & Votava, the Postmodern has reduced its perspectives to the “here and now”. Today, people in our Western societies are trying to remember what was good in the past and sensing what they are missing now - a longing for authenticity. As one can clearly see in the new fashion media, postmodern communication is obsessed with the latest trend but doesn't have a clue about grammar or syntax. So what Carbanaro & Votava claims is that in order for an innovation to have the power of authenticity, it must be able to say something to the people. This is not possible to obtain simply by means of an analysis of customers’ wishes, but requires an active examination of the contents of people’s culture. If we want to anticipate The New, we cannot allow ourselves to be blinded by market trends and fashion appearances. We must try to understand and interpret the Zeitgeist, the spirit of our time (Carbonaro & Votava, 2008). We can see how this applies to forecasting as its interpretation of culture and Zeitgeist is able to predict consumer preferences and give a clue of what will speak to them.
SECTION 6: CONCLUSIONS

In this section, we try to sum up the answers that our study provided to our initial research questions, as well as propose future research topics around colour forecasting.

6.1 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- **How is colour information collected?**
  We have divided the data collection process that constitutes the basis of the actual forecast into steps; keeping up with the industry and actively participating in anything new occurring in the fashion system; trying to define and interpret the Zeitgeist; looking at new technological developments, statistical hard data, previous sales and colour archives. We have discussed and questioned the importance of addressing the costumers at this stage. The data collection consists of both objective facts and more soft, subjective experiences. The degree of attention one gives to each step depends on the forecaster methodology preferences and their clients.

- **How do forecasters evaluate, analyse and interpret the data collected?**
  After having collected the data, colour forecasters start their analysis by breaking them down into thematical categories that depict specific patterns (themes). Colour expertise, intuition, creativity and inspiration are the factors that help the forecaster interpret those patterns. After that, each theme is evaluated in terms of synchronicity and market readiness and the themes that pass the evaluation phase constitute the final colour story for the given season.

- **How are the final colour stories being presented?**
  The forecasted nuances can be both presented as a united story or be broken down to their original themes (patterns) from which they emerged. Regarding the medium, the final colour stories are being presented either with published materials or with real-time presentations that can be both small- (seminars or workshops) and big-scaled (in front of a big audience). When the reports are published, the forecasted colours can be reproduced on paper or other materials, like yarns and pigments. Finally, colour stories can also be communicated online with the colour range limitations that the use of screen imposes.

- **How do fashion companies use the colour forecasting output?**
  We have discussed how important the forecast outputs were on the companies’ actual colour planning in relation to the other values the designers and management has to keep in mind when creating a collection. We gather that it depends on one’s design style, market, customers and lead-time. Different management philosophies and approaches of creative, good design or fast fashion is what decides how the colour forecasting material is used.
6.2 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Despite the fact that our study gave answers to our initial research questions, there is still a lot to be said and researched when it comes to colour and its forecasting practices. We present here some suggestions for future research that we would like to investigate at a later date for possible publication.

- A more detailed analysis of the presentation step of the colour forecasting process
  Each forecasting agency uses different materials and presentation formats and a content analysis of these would be proven useful.

- The colour planning of a collection
  Apart from colour forecasts and sales history data, there are more factors to be defined that influence the colour decisions. Furthermore, it would also be useful to answer how the colour planning process could become more efficient, proposing a relevant model.

- Colour forecasting outside Sweden
  Investigating the processes of other colour forecasters in other countries would be extremely useful in order to make comparisons, spot differences or similarities in their methods and draw conclusions that generally apply. It would also be interesting to examine the colour forecasting process from a non-Western perspective, researching the practices of professionals in countries like India or China.
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**Pictures**

Picture on front cover: Pantone.com, retrieved on 2012.05.17 at http://pantone.com

Interview schema

We began each of our interviews with presenting our chosen subject and ourselves. We stated the aim of the thesis and that it aspired to investigate how colour information is gathered, communicated and how it affects fashion businesses.

We further presented our method and the applied use of semi-structured interviews. Thus we encouraged the interview subjects to talk freely, with us asking the bare minimum of questions to keep the talk going. We had a few thematic categories, which facilitated the whole flow of the interview. These themes derived from our research questions and were the following:

1. Sourcing of primary data
2. Colour story development: Data processing, analysis and interpretation
3. Forecast presentation
4. The use of the colour forecast output by fashion companies

These thematic categories lead to questions such as:
- How do you relate to trend cycles?
- Should or could one ask the customers about future preferences?
- What are the common misconceptions about colour forecasting praxis and the forecasting profession?
- What could be approved within this area? What do you like to see?