Process Book
The Dynamics of Fashion Trend Forecasting

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1. The process

1.1 The idea
The idea and interest for the subject of the thesis came from questions I had about the trend forecasting process, as I had in mind that it was the ultimate example of a self-fulfilling prophecy. How do trend forecasters ‘predict’ the future of fashion? What is their way of working? What sources do they use? Do fashion companies apply the forecaster’s advice without questioning? How come all haute couture designers seem to do the same thing each season while they are not supposed to follow trends yet be the inspiration for new trends? While reading literature on the topic of fashion trend forecasting, I continuously found myself frustrated about the way the words ‘forecasting’ and ‘predicting’ were used and about the self-fulfilling characteristics of the trend forecasters. This frustration has become the key element of the research and of the article.

1.2 Research Report - The process and difficulties
The process of writing the research report and the approach I applied can be divided into 6 steps.
First, I have collected as much relevant literature (dissertations, academic researches, theses) and newspaper articles I could find in databases and on the Internet. Secondly, I analysed the collected literature. While analysing, I kept the following questions in mind: What information can I use? How do I describe the findings in my own words? At the same time, I gave headings to the texts I wrote after reading a specific source, so that the texts could later be inserted in the report in the right chapters more easily. Thirdly, I combined all these findings - written in my own words - in the report. At that time, the only structure in the report was the structure formed by the chapters. The text was not at all a fluid story yet. After that, I started ‘editing’ the text of the research report to create a story that would make sense to the reader. The fifth step was inserting the findings from the interviews into the research report to support (or oppose) the literature findings. In the final stage I re-edited the text by trying to leave out what was of lesser importance so that only the relevant information remained. I found this quite a difficult task, which is why I have ended up with quite an extended research report.

As the consumer is very important when discussing fashion trends, I wanted to include the attitude of the consumer with regard to fashion trends in the beginning. Initially, I wanted to do a survey, yet finding out what I wanted to know was too complicated to include in the research. The findings for the consumer subquestion are therefore based on literature. This subquestion (3) was quite a bottleneck, as it was obvious from the beginning that it would be very hard and time consuming to say something about how consumers respond to trends, as countless factors are involved. Initially, the subquestion’s title was ‘What is the consumer’s attitude towards ‘trends’ and how does the consumer behave when it comes to trends?’ This question, however, forced me to say something about the behaviour of consumers as respondents of a trend, whereas my research report actually revolved around the agents that played a role in the creation and dissemination of trends. Therefore, I decided to change this subquestion’s title into ‘What role does the consumer play in the creation and dissemination of fashion trends?’ Regarding this revised title, I decided to focus specifically on the fashion innovators and not on other consumer groups, as it was necessary time wise to narrow down the research of this subquestion. The fashion innovators, according to the literature I found, play a crucial role in the creation and dissemination of trends and therefore were the most interesting to say something about. Apart from
that, involving fashion innovators means involving social media, the group of fashion innovators mainly consist of fashion bloggers, celebrities and models, which form the core of social media.

Along the way of writing the research report and especially after a hand in of an interim version of the report, I noticed that I had to give more attention again to what exactly I wanted to ‘research’ in the report and what I would want to say or argue in the eventual article. While writing the research report, I collected a large amount of information that was very interesting yet it sometimes forced me to look back at what exactly I was trying to research, as I found that sometimes specific information was not relevant for my topic of research.

1.3 Product – The process and difficulties

While writing the research report I developed an idea about the topic and aim of the article and the way to structure it. What intrigued me from the beginning, as mentioned before, was how the forecasting industry seems to be self-fulfilling. This prophetic character causes a standardization and dullness of the fashion industry. I decided to introduce specific dynamics of my research report succinctly in the beginning of the article and then continue by describing the complexities and oddities (self-fulfilling, ‘forecasting’ is a wrong term) of the fashion industry.

It took me 3 drafts to write the almost-final article. After writing the first draft, I felt stuck. I was not satisfied with what I had written yet I found it very difficult to see what I had to change in order to solve the problem. My coach recommended me to make a mind map of what I actually wanted to ‘say’ in my article. What message did I want to convey? What did I want to argue, why and how? This recommendation was very helpful. After making the mind map, I completely restructured the draft of the article and was able to make my arguments clearer and to make the article more ‘fun’ to read. The second draft was therefore much better already. The introduction was, however, the hardest to write and was too fragmented still in draft 2. The third and final draft is structured the same as draft 2, yet the texts have been altered (primarily the introduction) according to the feedback from my coach.
2. Literature review

2.1 Literature review

The following short literature review provides an overview of the sources that have been most important for the Research Report.

Gallate and Keen’s (2011) text has been a very informative source about the different sorts of views that exist on intuition. The literature helped me to explain clearly that intuition is a complex concept and that there are different opinions on its nature.

Some literature concerned quite specific areas within the field of forecasting, such as the research by de Wet (2008), which focuses on the role of fashion forecasting in South Africa, making most of its content too specific to use for the current research. The first part of the dissertation, however, discusses in general what fashion forecasting is, what trends are and how the fashion forecasting process works. The author gives a step-by-step (general) overview of the fashion forecasting process, from the discovery of an emerging trend by trend chasers until the phase of application by the design team. It has thus proven to be a useful source of information. King’s (2011) research is focused on a specific field of forecasting namely colour forecasting. Important forecasting agencies such as Peclers and Promostyl are examined in the research, which made the information very valuable. Also, the forecaster’s position, the general process of colour forecasting and fashion companies’ approach to colour forecasting are critically discussed.

The value and role of trends and trend forecasting is profoundly discussed in the PhD research of Petermann (n.d.). Petermann acknowledges the notion that the practice of trend forecasting holds power in itself, which is crucial to the research and article of this project. The methods of future’s studies mentioned in Petermann’s paper – forecasting, polling and envisioning – have been a very useful tool to describe the difference between fashion analytics, basic market research forecasting and visionary forecasting.

Giertz-Mårtenson’s (2006) research has been used to describe the process of traditional trend forecasting. This source was also useful for explaining fashion companies’ approaches when it comes to discovering trends. In addition, Giertz-Mårtenson’s view on the role of forecasters and consumers in the establishment of a fashion trend has been used.

In the documentary Close Up: Trends – Een verborgen wereld (2016) various experts give their view on the fashion trend industry. This source has therefore been valuable for various subtopics of the research, such as explaining what trend forecasting is and for explaining the trust that clients – brands, fashion companies – have in these experts and for explaining the way the clients use the forecasting advice given to them by the experts. Also, in the documentary the standardization of the fashion industry is discussed and one of the experts proves that forecasters play a role in ‘determining’ a trend as he talks about a ‘decision’ that is made on the fashion colours for the next season.

Brunini (2011) has been very helpful for finding out more about the way product designers - including fashion designers – approach fashion trend forecasting. This source contained useful information about how designers use trend reports and what they think of them.

2.2 Sources


3. Interviews

3.1 Definition overview
The following information was given in the e-mail from the author to the interviewee before conducting the interviews.

Fashion Analytics
The use of data analytics and machine learning in the Fashion industry with the aim to predict and analyse consumer behaviour in order to maximize sales and optimize business processes

Visionary based trend forecasting
The abstract approach to fashion trend forecasting in which trend forecasters do not rely on figures and factual market research but rather on combining analyses of observations of subtle changes/developments and intuition when analysing trends. This type of forecasting agencies offer visions to the client, mostly through seminars

Market research based trend forecasting
The market research focused approach to fashion trend forecasting in which consumer attitude and economic/sociological/cultural trends (online and offline) are analysed and translated into possible scenarios for the future. This type of forecasting agencies offer practical scenarios to the client, ready to be implemented

Neuroscientific modelling
The process of creating models, based on neuroscientific theories, that can explain human behaviour/choices or, for example in this case, the colours of a new fashion season a couple of years in advance

3.2 Interview trend forecaster - Jan Agelink (telephone)

Q Which of the types of forecasting (Fashion Analytics or traditional trend forecasting (visionary based trend forecasting + market research trend forecasting)) would you consider yourself to be part of and why?
Q How does the main process of trend forecasting work? Which steps do you, as a trend forecaster, take in order for a new ‘trend forecast’ to be born?
Q What role does intuition play?
A I would classify myself as a visionary based trend forecaster. Yet, it is not all about intuition. I read books and opinion magazines. I do visual research and I visit fairs for inspiration. I analyse the information that I collect. It is important to keep in mind the client you work for.
I have a design background – I studied at the Design Academy and did a ‘People & Identity’ course. I translate the information I find into visuals; I give visual presentations to my clients. I know that my
clients find it pleasant to be presented with a visual story. I create a view of the future that can be used as an inspiration for my clients.

I rarely use texts during my presentations, I only make titles and some keywords when presenting. I of course do tell a story, however, when presenting; a story is crucial.

Q What do you think of the term ‘forecasting’? When hearing about the way you work, ‘forecasting’ seems a strange word.
A I create trend stories, if I think about it this way, I do not really prefer the word ‘forecasting’, yet it is a recognition tool for the outside world. I would rather say that I am an ‘editor’, I give ‘directions’ rather than forecasts. One must not, however, underestimate the fact that you need talent to combine visuals and create something ‘new’ and ‘beautiful’. I find the aesthetic aspects important. I think clients find it important as well to be offered something that looks nice, that is very valuable.

Q Have there been any recent developments or changes with regard to the process of trend forecasting? If so, in what sense and to what extent?
A There is nowadays more interest in general for the study of trend forecasting. We can see that in education; there is a course in Tilburg named ‘trend forecasting’. Many want to become a trend forecaster. Yet what is of major importance, I think, is being personal and having the right talent. It is also important to be able to present what you want to convey in the right way. I myself use media in different ways these days when I present for my clients. I am up to date when it comes to new and interesting ways of presenting.

Q Do you make use of data analytics and/or neuroscientific modelling to forecast trends? If so, to what extent? If not, are you considering applying it in the future and why (not)?
A I would say that inspiration is very important; I use it myself and I give it to my clients; yet that is not science at all. I do find data analytics very interesting. I am aware of what is happening in that field, it is a trend itself. Yet I do not use it, I am not a scientist. I think it is possible to apply statistics to everything including the process of trend forecasting, yet I think my work would lose its soul if I would try to quantify it.

Trends are everywhere; it is impossible to find something ‘new’. I think that is what Lidewij Edelkoort is referring to when she talks about ‘trends that are out of fashion’

Q Lidewij Edelkoort argues with her anti-trend discussion that we should go back to clothing itself (SOURCE), back to the core of it. She uses this to indicate how wasteful the industry has become. What is your opinion about sustainability?
A I am very much involved in sustainability, yet I notice that the industry and consumers are not so much interested in it yet. It’s about money! Young designers are, though; there are many good initiatives from young players in the field yet these do not have enough influence, of course.

Q Do you continuously advise your clients about the newest trends you spot or do you provide them with information on a weekly/monthly/… basis? In which manner do you advise your clients (through what channels)?
A I consult my clients 1 to 2 times a season. I visit them and give customized trend presentations. Apart from that, I organize ‘Trend Safari’ once a season, which is a general trend seminar.

I am working on a better e-mail system to send my clients updates, because, to be honest, I do not do that enough right now.

Q Does your company benchmark its predictions to what other agencies have predicted in order to find out the accuracy of your own predictions?
Yes, I do look at what my ‘competitors’ are doing. I think it is important to know what they are up to and I myself of course also look for some sort of ‘confirmation’ of what I am doing myself. I think it is quite essential to have experience in the field, since it helps you build a sphere of authority around you. Yet I do appreciate young people’s fresh views, since they can be a good source of inspiration, they can be eye-openers.

Q  Do you agree that there is a certain form of uniformity concerning trend forecasting? Do you feel that, in the end, all players in the fashion business ‘follow each other’?
A  I think saying that we all ‘follow’ each other is quite a limited view. Yes, we do all have the same ‘base’ of information of the world around us on which we build our own views. Each ‘forecaster’ makes his or her own choices and communicates in his or her own way. I really think we should not ‘copy’ each other, that is thus not what I am doing either.

3.3 Interview fashion company (Haute Couture) – Designer of ILJA (face to face)

Q  Does ILJA make use of an external companies to make trend forecasts or are the new collections/themes/concepts based on own research only?
A  Own research

Q  How do you do research? Do you visit specific websites?
A  It differs very much, actually. Usually you start developing an idea for the new season while you are working on the current collection, so that new idea slowly ‘rolls in’. Like: oh, now we are heading in this direction and based on what in previous collections happens I sometimes think: oh, there is already quite a cool continuation already because it is interesting, or you use a certain element that is typically ‘ILJA’ to emphasize that and then you elaborate on that, and there is then a certain theme that matches with it. Like last season, we really wanted to show a more feminine side of ILJA since both news agency and reactions of other people showed that our collections were quite ‘heavy’. So yeah, how do you make a very feminine collection then to show the very soft side of the brand and simultaneously show ILJA’s signature; you constantly have to challenge yourself. So mostly, during the development of a collection and based on the reactions after the fashion show of the previous collection you get an idea about what we have not done yet, how can we position ourselves even better, and what kind of feeling do you have already with which you want to do something or, what we had as well, is that while designing a collection we realized we discovered something really cool which we could not develop enough in that specific collection, so we take it with us for the next collection. For ILJA, this mostly has to do with form or a combination of form and material that is really interesting. So… It’s not easy at all. It’s a combination of a lot of different things.

Q  Yes, it is never one specific thing you base your collection upon. It is never one specific path you follow.
A  No, never. We would never do “70’s”, for example. That is way too commercial, of course. We absolutely don’t do that. Also, we really try to establish ILJA as a brand that is recognizable for the press and public. So you are constantly analysing: what is ILJA, what elements do we want to use in the collection without those elements being too obvious, it is a lot of analysing both with what you want to say and with what the reactions are of press agencies and others.

Q  Yes, so those reactions come from the press agencies…
A  Yes, amongst others. Also the Federacion (Sindicale de la Mode) gives us feedback, as well as bloggers, the public and newspapers. It’s about analysing: what is the red thread of the feedback?
What do we want to listen to? Some things just make no sense so you don’t use that feedback. I usually start analysing what has been experienced by the public after we’ve done the show.

Q And then, of course, you are already developing the next collection at the same time, so you use that information directly for the new collection.

A Exactly, and then you can check whether the initial ‘feeling’ you had was right and in tune with the feedback. Mostly, that is the case.

Q Yes, ok. So we could maybe say that developing a new collection is about 80% free creativity and the rest is not ‘listening to a forecasting advice’, yet listening to the reactions to the previous collection and analysing what worked and what did not...

A Yes, and the total picture, so that you think by yourself: ok, we want to be this kind of brand, this is how we want to portray ourselves, does that make sense? Do we have to alter things? Is it becoming too obvious since four other brands are also going that direction? If so, then you have to change direction a little like: we may have to bring in some femininity as the ‘sculptural’ thing is sort of passé. So it’s constant ‘tuning’ of each collection.

Q So it is also sort of ‘rebelling against’ others that are doing the same?

A Well, it’s not really ‘rebelling against’, since we all have to do our own thing, yet since we are a young brand, we need people to feel ‘oh, that is really an ILJA thing’. And that is something you reach through repetition, through ‘brainwashing’ the public; repeating forms and silhouettes so that they start recognizing it as ILJA’s signature. But you have to be careful, since it should not become too obvious as it will result in a collection that is out of balance. So it is constant thinking and tuning and adapting the collection. The collection really is finished only a night before the show. It happens a lot that we cut off a skirt the last moment, or we eliminate a coat last minute since it is too ‘heavy’ in the total picture or we make last moment changes in the way outfits are constituted. The collection is done only when it’s done. But that’s what makes it fun. If it wouldn’t be like that, I’d be done with a collection in two months.

Q OK, so I could conclude that ‘trends’ are not really important for ILJA?

A Well, they are not really important, yet at the same time you do pick up the signals of trends, since with couture you are working on a collection half a year in advance, as opposed to one year in ready-to-wear or commercial. So if you are working on something for a season and something has been put on style.com as ‘the thing’, then you should start worrying and slightly adapt the collection. You cannot NOT look at what is ‘on trend’ at the moment, because then you take the risk of making a fool out of yourself. So it really is there, trends, but it is more about moving your own story a little towards what will be trending in the market at the moment that you will bring out your collection.

- interruption -

Q So, you still go to the PV, I suppose? Do you visit the trend stands there?

A No. I always skip them. Sometimes I pass it by accident and then I of course take a look. Yet we work with certain suppliers and since we are a small company with low amounts of meters that we order, we are ‘stuck’ to the suppliers we have and the things they offer. I have to maintain the good relationship that we have. So, I could take a look at the trend stands, yet at the end of the day I have to look at what my suppliers offer.

Q I understand. Also, I suppose that you could say that eventually what your suppliers offer you is ‘in tune’ with what the trend forecasters show at the PV.

A Yes. Mostly, what they show at the trend stands is very commercial. Also, I feel like the last couple of years they tell the same story over and over again. So, I don’t really look at it anymore. It’s
always lurex this, animal print there. Sometimes it's interesting to look at it just for the techniques they are using. Sometimes they mix certain techniques randomly, which is cool. But it is not essential.

Q  Ok, right, so you don't go there to look at what the trends are going to be.
A  No, it's more like: I pass them for 2 seconds but then I have to get back to the suppliers since time is tight.

Q  Which websites do you use when searching for inspiration? You mentioned style.com before.
A  Yes, for fashion shows. Models.com is handy as well, since they show the most recent editorials. Editorials.com as well. And Pinterest, random. That is an easy one.

Q  Now I don't think this is of importance, yet how important is ‘big data’ for you? This may be mostly related to commercial fashion companies, yet I am talking about customer information you have and then you make decisions based on that for the next collection. We talked about it before, actually...
A  Yes, it's more the feedback we take into account. And also what bloggers pick up and what is used in editorials and also what people 'post' on social media and sometimes there is are specific outfits that are picked out to be used and posted most of the times. Then you know: oh that is something iconic, we have to do something like that again next collection. Like supple dresses, for example. That is something that comes back. Or a bodycon dress with something sculptural on top is picked out a lot as well. This way you can analyse very well what people apparently remember of the collection; that is valuable information you can use if you want to build an image. Also for couture.

Q  In your fashion education, did you learn about fashion trends and trend watching?
A  Yes, for AMFI it was very important. AMFI was very much based on trends. Which is good, I guess. We really had to analyse: is it new? Why would you do this? We were pushed to think about that. We could not just do something randomly. That happened more in Paris, actually. Paris was more about researching: what is your inner feeling, what is your strength you can use for design? AMFI as well, but it is more commercial. How to bring it to the market? And why would you, there are thousands of other things heading the same direction, why is your idea better? I think that is a good thing to think about.

It is a good game to play. Looking at trends is about filtering what you can use and what you cannot. When we still did commercial, we did look at trends and the other designer picked up other things than I did because he had a very different taste. When you combine that, you head toward quite a funny and interesting direction. But there are sooo many trends. What I like most is looking at new fashion shows and discover new vibes that are going on. I recently discovered something interesting that came back in 4 or 5 shows, which apparently is trending all of the sudden. I think it is funny to see that that is what people want to see, apparently. Designers put it on the catwalk because they think it will sell. I think it is really interesting to see what is new and how that reflects on society, economy and art.

Q  So you look at art as well, for example? For inspiration?
A  Well, no not really, actually. It’s more an interest. I am more the ‘feeling’ kind of person. Right now, I have a feeling for a new design direction for next collection. So I start looking: are designers using this already? But no, I look at what the rest is doing and how brands are developing. Some are stuck, some not. It is interesting to see and analyse how they came to a collection, what they did, and what it has to do with a feeling you have. What fits ILJA? What is a cool element, silhouette? Can I emphasize a certain element we use already in ILJA collections that is suddenly popular? Or is there something that some designers do already but haven’t taken to the next or another level? Could we do
that? It is very random, actually. But I don’t look at it like: these are the trends, so I have to use elements of all the trends directly in the new collection. No. But there are always things that are new and what is new, I use and translate into something for the brand, or the idea at least.

Q You were talking about ‘taste’ before. Do you have the idea that you sometimes have to forget about your own taste for the sake of the collection?
A Not really, actually. I am very lucky, as Ilja and I have the same taste mostly in design. We are on the same level. I really have to feel what Ilja’s taste is, of course, but that is therefore not really difficult.

Q Yes. But also, based on the feedback on the collection. I can imagine that there is some kind of feedback of which you think: well, that’s not really something I would like to apply in the new collection.
A Yes, regarding that, Ilja and I always agree but: some feedback we receive tries to direct us very much into a certain design direction, which we do not want. We do want to stay true to ourselves and to what ILJA stands for. So then we start thinking: how can we process this feedback in our own manner? In a way that we think it is cool again. That’s a challenge. So we do really listen to the feedback, of course, yet we don’t always literally and directly alter our collection accordingly if it is not in line with the image we want ILJA to have. We are suborn enough. Some things you have to listen to as you do want to convince people and you thus sometimes have to come out of your comfort zone. That is what we did for our last collection, by the way. We really stepped out of our comfort zone. In the beginning, we really had to get used to the ‘feel’ of the collection, which includes ruffles and pastel, yet it worked very well. It was the best collection till now. We did not receive negative feedback so far…

I usually search for negative feedback so I can use constructive criticism to improve the next collection, yet we didn’t get any so far for last collection.

What we always need in the collection is a reference to couture. We continuously try to ‘re-invent’ couture, yet when doing so it is important to continue referencing to couture in terms of finishes, for example, or embellishments. If you don’t, you will get the critique that the collection is close to ready-to-wear; which is what you want to stay away from as a haute couture brand.

Also, Paris (and the Federacion) is quite conservative when it comes to haute couture. What we try to do is being innovative, stepping out of our comfort zone with our collections; yet at the same time we have to make sure that we don’t rebel too much against the conservative nature of the Federacion. So, we do not follow trends yet we are limited in directions to a certain extent as there are rules we have to follow in Paris. It is quite a strategic story, actually.

When in Paris, I visit stores of Gucci, Prada – all the big brands, but also the smaller ones – to see what everyone is doing. What I notice then is that, most of the time, brands head the same direction design-wise.

3.4 Interview fashion company (mass market) – Head of Styling of Expresso Fashion (e-mail)

Q Does your company make use of an external company to create trend forecasts or are the seasonal concepts solely based on own research? To what extent do the designers/concept developers etc. make use of trend reports made by trend forecasting agencies?
A We create our own themes but we do so after a lot of research on fairs, catwalk shows,
shopping, Internet and also based on information of different trend agencies. With all the information we collect we build a specific story for each delivery within a season.

Q  How important are fashion trends for your company?
A  We are selective in assessing what trends work well for our target group. We of course follow trends yet we do not apply them all.

Q  What type of trend forecasting does your company apply?
A  It is a combination of trend forecasting, so all the aspects you mention in the definition overview are applied. The beginning of the season is visionary and abstract. When the design of the collection becomes more concrete, we implement more market research.

Q  Could you describe the process of creating and developing the trends/themes of a new season?
A  1-Research 2-Theme/ambience per delivery 3-Materials/colours 4-Silhouettes 5-Design

Q  According to you, how important is big data to your company? Does your company make use of the data and customer information that is available (or do you, for example, feel like they are missing out on important information that could be used in the following season because you do not have the resources?)?
A  Our company schedules weekly meetings in which all data is analysed. This is of importance for the support of the development of new collections.

Q  Could you give an indication, expressed in percentages if you like, how much of creating trends/moods for the new season is ‘free creativity’ and how much is ‘following the forecasting advice’?
A  We freely compose our collections ourselves. We do of course look at trend forecasting but we always follow tendencies translated and applied to our own brand DNA and our target group.

3.5 Interview trend forecaster – Geraldine Wharry (Skype)

Q  My thesis is about the consumers, forecasting agencies and fashion companies. I am trying to find out about the influence they have on each other and on the establishment of a fashion trend. And it is about trend forecasting in itself. Is it really forecasting or is it maybe also ‘determining’ what we will wear as a consumer? Fashion companies, with marketing and branding, have an influence as well as forecasters that have their own interpretation of what will become a trend. So, that is what I am trying to analyse and I am very interested in your view on the topic.

   Basically, my first question is about your process of trend forecasting. How does it work? Which steps do you take? And what are your main sources of inspiration?

A  Eh, I call it hunting and gathering and I basically have 3 steps which are (1) hunting, which is having a broad vision of a certain unending viewpoint, at least that is what it is for me, and it can range from an article I read on the NY times to a new designer I just discovered who is talking about a concept, technology, developments. Because I focus on macro trends I try to look at what’s going on above and beyond fashion and I try to predict what will happen in a year / 2 years time roughly. The trends I look at generally have ‘longer legs’, they last a while, whereas if you’re just doing trend analysis, which is different from trend forecasting, like say for example recently I did a catwalk analysis, then it’s must shorter term. But, back to hunting, so I research, go into the field, I have a broad viewpoint.
The next step I call identifying. From that point I identify a pattern of behaviour. Usually I’ll see sort of key concepts emerge, maybe there’ll be 4 or 5 key ideas. I have these post it notes of things I’m developing and from that point it’s a bit like having a funnel. It’s like you have it wide and you narrow it and then when I find the narrowed elements I go broader into those. You’ve probably seen those charts out there that describe its process and I quite like that truc as it corresponds with how I’ve always done it. And so I might do that but I don’t do it a ton of times, in the end I do it like three times. So It's about having a broad viewpoint and knowing when to stop and look at your research and narrow it down.

Then, the last step, which I call gathering, is really the part where your audience needs to have take aways. It’s not just about telling ‘this is what’s going to happen’. With for example the style industries that need to generate products, if you tell them well, this trend is about, ... Like I’m working on this piece right know which is about a trend that I’ve forecasted a while ago ..., modesty, it’s about simplifying and down sizing and It's about living within your means and there is a nostalgic element in this trend as it looks at the great depression and the 40s, the time when people had less money, post war, and during the great depression, so the 20s and 30s. So that does something to a trend with denim, so you might see a lot of repairing, a lot of destroying but then repairing, this trend is very good for utilitarian clothing. And then it has these sort of like pockets or things that remind you of farmer clothing. So gathering I call is the part of direction. And what some forecasting companies do is they go very literal; they provide the sketches, the colour palette, etc. ...

Q Is that what WGSN did as well, when you worked there?
A Yes, that what I actually did for WGSN, I sketched the collection so I did it from the concept to actually providing downloadable sketches. Because of my background as a designer I sketch a lot. With me, with my forecasts, I don’t really go into sketches now. The thing I am launching now is that I am actually designing clothes. Because with the process of trend forecasting, the ones that don’t sketch that much show pictures of garments that are already made and I think that promotes sameness.

Q Yes, a standardization of the industry.
A That’s a huge problem right now. There’s an article that came out on the Outdrapers that the consumer is bored. The consumer is unhappy; everything looks the same and it does not look well made either. And we’ve gone from high street brand that people were just buying buying buying, like Primark, to now people not wanting that, there is a need for innovation. So of course it’s great to showcase what other designers are doing, but I made that choice a while back, that I don’t want to be literal with my direction and that now I’m doing these garments, because it’s easier for me to produce a vision myself that is original.

Q So you provide your clients with an inspirational vision rather than something they should strictly follow.
A Yes

Q What role does intuition play?
A Intuition is important it’s just your ability to keep it in check. To be self critical and sometimes people think they’re forecasting a trend but they’re just forecasting what they like. I think my experience as a designer working for brands and having to adapt to the brand’s need as a fulltime employee – I wasn’t designing my own collection – and I did that for over 10 years, so I have this ability, I have this sort of handwriting that people can recognize what I’m drawn to. But on the other hand I’ve done very different kinds of trends. The looks, stories, themes are very different. My main
thing is that I always push for innovation. I tend to go the avant garde route. I’m not really the best person to give you the ‘bohemian-romantic’ trend, probably. So, but instinct is important because ultimately it’s what you pick up, the signs you pick up, but it has to be backed up with real information. A broad research, where you can back it up. And then your instinct needs to be backed up with several seasons of having had the right instinct so you can say to people ‘well, I predicted this, that’.

Q      Ok, so you need to have credibility for your client base.
So, intuition is important for you. Now, big data, and data analytics are really up and coming. Do you implement that as well, in your way of working?
A      I don’t, because I don’t have access to that software and data analytics is really much more for retailers or merchandisers, more like the business side. If I had that data it would be obviously very informative but at the same time you gotta be really careful. My idea is like focus groups. Innovation doesn’t come from following what the consumer wants you to do. I think that’s the whole problem. We followed so much we thought the consumer wanted that we all look the same now. We’re the ones who should tell the consumer what he wants. Steve Jobbs, apple, never used focus groups. Focus groups are important but they have their place and I think in the case of forecasting a design trend, data can be looked at but it shouldn’t be educating a future. It can only maybe tell you the cycle where the trend is at. Is it emerging? A trend then blows up, and then it’s on its… So if the data said that the trend is everywhere, and you’re telling your retailers that “in a year and a half time this is going to be big!”, but it’s already selling everywhere… You’re taking the change that at the time their production cycle is finished, they invested all this money into making it, the consumers already get tired of it. Data is really good in telling what did really well or is doing really well. But it’s to be looked at in a very educated way. And it’s done through algorithms so it’s not something I have access to.

Q      Yes, it’s something different than the fashion industry is used to.
A      Yes. But it is interesting with data in terms of what’s trending. If you’re doing trend research and you go on Twitter and you see the hash tags there… There is interesting parts of data that can influence maybe your forecasts. Like: ahh, people are really interested in this or that.

Q      So, how important is social media for you? Do you follow bloggers? Do you think they are fashion innovators?
A      I don’t think they’re fashion innovators. I just think they’re a tool to propagate the content that’s being created. I don’t think they’re innovators themselves. They’d be innovators if they’d actually be making the product. But they can be messengers of innovation. There’s some amazing blogs out there that have become a platform for really interesting innovative projects to be highlighted. But I wouldn’t say they’re innovators themselves. But I use blogs for research because they’re a one stop shop. I have my trusted blogs.

Q      Is there someone you could say is a main influencer of a fashion trend? How would you describe how a trend is born?
A      Art. And I think popular culture has an influence on trends. You see designers go back to references from their childhood or iconic brands and streetstyle, like a brand that uses logo’s and subverts them. But yeah, pop culture could have a big influence. I think art and architecture… You know, I always go to exhibitions because that’s where designers go to get inspired. For example, I know that Proenza Shouler every resort collection is inspired by a place they travel to. So sometimes it can be travel, books, … It’s not generally something you find online, it has to be an element of field research or cult research. That’s where generally designers look. The higher end, at least. Obviously, if you are high street or contemporary, you’re going to be inspired by what the higher end is doing. But
I know that in the Marc Jacobs documentary he was looking at flowers, and petals, and had this team scan the petals. And art is a big influence for Raf Simons.

Q Yes. It’s funny. Because even though the high fashion designers don’t follow forecasting advice, that’s what they say at least, they have their own sources of inspiration and information, most of the times what you see on the catwalk is similar. They head the same direction.

A Yes, that is quite fascinating. Definitely. I don’t know how to explain that.

Q That’s what’s been in my head while writing this research. Because it’s such a strange thing.

A One way to explain it also is, at the very front end of the fashion cycle is manufacturing. That’s why innovation is so important. What’s going on in fashion, materials, because when designers start their collection and they have an idea in mind, and they meet with suppliers and see what their latest developments are, their new fabrics, that goes hand in hand. So manufacturing is quite important also.

It’s a driver for innovation. Designers get very inspired by the fabrics. And so obviously what I’m telling you is valid for macro trends. Someone you might meet that does high street goes a lot into blogs and catwalks, might have a very different viewpoint and might say: oh, we look a lot at celebrities and music videos, Beyoncé, all that stuff, which is cool to, but not as important for me.

Q Yes, it’s a different way of working.

A Someone like Trendrules, this trend agency, they look a lot at youth culture, so that’s a lot different too.

Q Do you have any information available, or do you know to what extent your trend predictions are accurate or boost your client’s sales?

A I’m kind of the new kid on the block, I’ve only had my consultancy for only 3 years so I haven’t yet seen it completely but I think now I have enough forecasts under my belt to say: ‘look, I predicted this’. So that’s what I’ve been doing these last 6 months. I’ve been doing reports in which I compare what I forecasted to what is on the catwalk. Sometimes when I do these presentations, I slip it in, like ‘hey, I did this, that’. I need to do a lot more of that, it’s just that it’s quite time consuming. But that’s one of the things I’m working on right now, it’s doing more and more reports and things whenever I can and say ‘hey, I predicted this’. Not that I’m being cocky about it, but just pointing it out.

Q Building your trend’s resume.

A Yes.

Q You now have your own trend consultancy, but what was it like working for a big company like WGSN? I can imagine that it’s way different as it is such a big company.

A Yes, some things are similar. I think the difference is that they had a wide range of reports and products whereas I really focus on what I’m specialized in. It was a great experience, I learned a lot. It was great having a job for which I could do a lot of research and also sketch. I loved doing the trends days when you meet with everyone and share ideas. That happened a few times a year. So, it was good, it was great.

Q Was the trend forecasting process similar to what you’re doing now?

A It was similar but it was more focused on what commercial reports. They wanted the hit rates. They were the third on the web so they were looking a lot at hit rates and things like that. I had to make sure that it wasn’t too conceptual. Whereas now, I’m like, I’m gonna be conceptual. That’s what I’m going to specialize in.
Q  Do you also feel like there is a demand from the industry, from your clients, for you to produce more like a vision rather than something more specified?

A  Yes, I use the word vision, I don’t know if you’ve seen it on my website, but I’m not calling my reports trend reports. I call them visions. A lot of companies don’t have time to do research. Not that they want the package of the final outcome already produced for them, they are more than happy to create the final outcome themselves, but they need inspirational research; content. They don’t have hours available to browse the internet and go to exhibitions. So one request that’s been popping up more and more is just people asking me ‘could you do a newsletter for us?’ These type of requests. Because they don’t have time to research. So that’s what I’m working on. The trend forecasting industry is a tricky industry, as the return on investment on trend reports is not that great. What really does well is more the advisory and the bespoke research, product. The trend intelligence they publish is more a way of getting your name out there and be constantly showing that you can forecast. But the fall out of that is people contacting you for consulting work.

And if you can sell a report that’s great, but that’s not always necessarily for sure, it really depends. A lot of people want a bespoke service.

Q  Do you feel like there’s been developments in the world of trend forecasting, the last couple of years?

A  Some agencies really focus on innovation but I noticed more agencies are focusing on special events, creative events, where the innovators come and talk. They try to focus more on workshops and consultancy and advisory.

Q  In stead of just a trend book/report?

A  Yes.

Q  If you go to the Premiere Vision, there’s still the trend forecasting agencies with their trend books, right?

A  Yes, those do really well too. In the European market that formula is still very popular. Some agencies are amazing and do a great job, like Peclers, but in terms of diversification, in a last couple of years I’ve noticed the growth in events and trend talks, etc.