

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO FASHION SERVICES AND SUSTAINABILITY

Bernardes J¹, Marques A¹, Ferreira F¹, Nogueira M²

¹University of Minho, 2C2T, Textile Department, Portugal

²IPAM, IPAM Lab, Portugal

joaopedro_bernardes11@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the creation and acceptance of an innovative service called OKG, that is inspired by the ‘slow fashion movement’, and that focuses on the question: "are people willing to use second-hand clothing and/or leased when traveling?". OKG is a rental service for the day-to-day, business, and also cultural clothing. The creation and development of this service happened through the use of a design thinking methodology: 9 steps framework by Kees Dorst. Regarding its validation, it was achieved with a focus group with people of interest. Finally, the paper culminates with the positive response to the problem.

Key Words: SUSTAINABILITY; FASHION; SLOW FASHION; CLOTHING RENTAL;

1. INTRODUCTION

Fashion is the way in which our clothes reflect and communicate our individual vision within society, linking us to time and space, and [1] clothing is the material thing that gives fashion a contextual vision in society [2]. The fashion industry is evolving in a fast pace manner and presently witnessing situations of contradictions in consumer behaviour: on one hand, consumers are becoming more conscious of the impact of their purchasing behaviour, and willing to support a more sustainable fashion industry but on the other hand are complying with unsustainable business models where production is achieved to the lowest price in the shortest time possible. People say they want to become more sustainable but at the same time cannot resist buying ‘cheap’ fashion. In fact, consumers’ attitude and behaviour are in tune with fast production [3]. Figures from the UK show that people are buying more today than twelve years ago. According to [4] in 2005 consumer spending on clothing and footwear (in million GBP) was 44.4 M, and in 2015 was 66.1 M.

Experts blame fast fashion as the reason for the dramatic expansion of our wardrobes [5]. Fast production and fast consumption inevitably lead to the systematic decrease of resources and increase of waste, thus stressing the earth’s capacity to regenerate at a natural pace. This is why the ‘slow fashion approach’ appears as a new model that intervenes as a revolutionary process in the contemporary world. It is focused on its link with human needs, awareness and responsibility. By using the concept of slow in the fashion industry it is possible to re-invigorate a healthy rhythm of production, meaning that the environment and people could healthily co-exist and the earth would have time to regenerate during production cycles [1]. While fast is the opposite of slow in language; in the context of slow culture; fast and slow are not in opposition. They are different worldviews, with different economic logic and business models, values, and processes [6]. If we continue to need ‘fast’ or at least inexpensive fashion, we have to ask how it can be made in an interly environmentally acceptable way, throughout the whole life cycle [7]. The slow movement questions growth fashion’s emphasis on image, look, and ‘the new’ over making and maintaining actual material garments [8], re-finding earlier experiences of fashion linked to active making rather than watching [9]. *In Cradle-to-Cradle*, [10] argue that creative sustainable design essentially means eliminating

waste completely through the application of human ingenuity. Once a product has reached the end of its useful life in one form, it serves as the raw technical material, or biological nourishment, for another. That way, closed-loop industrial cycles will see recycling being replaced by downcycling. Fashion and sustainable wise there are very real practical strategies that will enable designers to specify new environmentally friendly life cycles and inspire new business opportunities that will involve where the design of systems of use can be realised by new businesses and entrepreneurs [7].

2. STATE OF THE ART

This research focuses on one main theme that is essential to the development of OKG: design thinking, that supports the creation of the service.

2.1 Design Thinking

Design thinking is described as an interesting new paradigm regarding problem-solving solutions in many different occupations, mainly in the fields of technology (IT) [11] and also business [12]. There isn't a consensual definition of design thinking because the definitions for this concept are very confusing [13]. These authors present disparity between the concepts of 'thinking of' (design), 'thinking about' (design), and 'thinking through' (design) and suggest that the most accurate definition brings together these three different perspectives. The eagerness to adopt and apply these design practices in other fields created a sudden demand for clear and definitive knowledge about the design thinking (including a clear definition). For Cooper, Junginger and Lockwood [13], design thinking (think through design) involves the ability to quickly visualize problems and concepts, the development of scenarios based on people, and the construction of business strategies based on designers' research methods. Lockwood defines design thinking as being essentially a process of human-centered innovation that emphasizes the note, collaboration, rapid learning, visualization ideas, a quick prototype of concepts and analysis of business competitors. [13]

Brown [12] states that design thinking is about observing an unclear phenomenon and try to look at it away from conventional scenarios in order to preview future scenarios. In this way, by using an appropriate business strategy, it is possible to turn customers' needs into value and create a market opportunity.

Kees Dorst [14] describes a new approach, which focuses on problem-solving innovation in organizations that is called the creation of frames. Dorst applies design thinking, but goes one step ahead of the tricks and techniques that regularly characterize it. Creating frames focuses on the ability to create new approaches to the analysis of the situation of the problem itself, and not only on creating solutions to problems. The strategies suggested by Kees Dorst [14] are drawn through the consistent practices in several sophisticated and unique layers from top designers, and also through ideas that emerged from 50 years of research in Design. Dorst describes nine steps in the process of creating frames and illustrates its application to real-world problems. It maps innovative solutions and provides tools and methods to implement the creation of frames, in other words, it is a way of thinking in design that helps professionals to develop their own approaches to problem solving and creating innovation along with the Design. This way it is possible to see companies as a series of frames: frames for resiliency, Kees Dorst [14]. The 9 steps are: 1 - Archaeology of the problem (why is it the problem? how did it become a problem? Why haven't been solved? who has this problem?); 2 - Paradox (what makes this problem difficult to solve?); 3 - Stakeholders (who are the

stakeholders?); 4 - Problem Arena (what else is part of the problem?); 5 - Themes; 6 - Frames; 7 - Future; 8 - Transformations (what needs to change to be implemented?); 9 - Connections (how does it connect to the rest of the world?).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

The main research goal of this paper is to analyse the feasibility of OKG and realize the acceptance of this type of service, in order to respond to the problem: "Are people willing to use second-hand clothing and/or leased when traveling?". The methodology adopted in this study (Table 1) is based on a qualitative approach, resorting to the focus group technique.

Table 1. Specific objectives and respective methodology

Specific Objectives	Methodology
Creation of OKG	9 steps framework
Validation of OKG	Focus Group

4. OKG: TRAVELING NEVER FELT SO LIGHT

OKG (zero quilos) is an exciting new clothing service that respects slow fashion and points towards the promotion of different cultures and sustainable lifestyles. The way it works is simple: different types of clothes and accessories can be rented, via online or via store, and then delivered at the desired location (e.g. hotel, resort, company) or picked up at the store. Besides everyday clothes, OKG also provides cultural clothes depending on the country to travel, and also suits for business trips. After some research on the subject, the use of second-hand or rented clothes has not yet been given much thought in the way OKG intends to act, so this is a problem that ends up becoming a business opportunity. At the time being, the only type of clothing that is possible to rent are carnival costumes and garments for specific events, usually parties and galas. Also, the differentiation of OKG would be in offering all kinds of clothes, with the possibility to also rent depending on the type of country (for example: snow clothes for the Nordic countries or beach wear for the hot/exotic countries). There is also the possibility to rent cultural clothing in order to experience a greater integration into the culture and not be just another tourist (for example: Sari in India). Still, the service offers the possibility of renting clothes for business trips. Promoting a new sharing economy and respecting the slow fashion movement, the OKG clients can drop off clothes in exchange for new clothes, and this way there is good circulation fomenting the reuse of clothes and experimentation. This way, looking for a collaborative economy can enter as a solution to the crisis we face today, since this is based on economic, social, technological and environmental pillars. And that is exactly what OKG promotes: an economy in which people are the focus, and the exchange of goods and services between themselves, in this case, clothing and accessories, contributes to a healthy growth, not only mind-set wise but also of economies.

It should be noted that, in accordance with the results of the focus group, people feel awkward in acquiring second-hand products. To overcome this constraint there are various complicated stages, among which raising awareness to solutions such as OKG. It is also necessary to ensure total cleanliness and quality of clothes, to try to minimize the stigma about the use of clothes already used by other people. The biggest obstacle to the use of this type of service is the doubt in the consumers' minds if the clothes are clean enough and ready to use without having to question its cleanliness. These problems came up during the focus group, and were

a very important insight for the development of the service.

4.1. Design Thinking: 9 steps framework by Kees Dorst

The section below presents the application of the 9 steps framework to OKG:

1. Archaeology of the problem. The research question became a problem from the time when the economic crisis in Portugal started. From that moment, there was a decrease in purchasing power, forcing people to direct their income for other less superfluous goods. It is a problem that was never solved because there is not yet a rental service similar to OKG philosophy. A philosophy that encourages a collaborative economy, by promoting sustainability values. Also, the main holder of this problem is anyone who travels.

2. Paradox. According to the focus group results, this is a problem that is difficult to solve because people don't like the idea of using second hand clothes. They have doubts concerning its quality and cleanliness. This resistance to leased and/or used clothing is what makes this a complicated problem to solve.

3. Stakeholders. The interested parties on OKG are the community in general (partnership with travel bloggers; and business partners as advertising agencies), designers (national, international and local talent), institutions (airports, municipalities and national tourism departments) and lastly, all customers who are able to share the vision of OKG, and thus join the service. Essentially, it is expected that the adhesion to this service is made mainly by people that are part of generation Y, that support and share a more collaborative vision.

4. Problem arena. Aside from the main research question, are all the different and cultural misunderstandings that can come up during a trip to a city/country that has a different culture. OKG intends to be a link between the tourist and the culture of the country that he will meet, and not only to facilitate the traveling moment by providing all the clothes for day to day. Not all is about clothes, but education in a way. Another concern that is inherent in the problem is the luggage. The fact that tourists have to pack, causes an inconvenience to the extent that they need to select the clothes they want to take, and later, the psychological cost of a potential loss of bag is quite high. With this service, the tourist's clothes are "safe and sound" at home, and they don't need to worry at all with luggage. It is only necessary to bring their essentials (hygiene).

5. Themes. Here themes start to emerge, and they are the bases for new frames. In this case there are four major themes for the service to exist: clothes and accessories; Physical stores, Website and mobile application (app).

6. Frames. The main frame of OKG is its motto: "Traveling never felt so light". This is because tourists don't need to take anything with them. On the other side, they bring home a rich experience and a cultural baggage, that it is only emotional and not physical. This is how OKG wants to position themselves, because looking at the problem from this perspective, shows that OKG serves to enrich and not only to facilitate the traveling moment.

7. Future. Nowadays society is more susceptible to a collaborative and sharing way of living, either in the sense of physical goods, experiences or information. OKG is just one of the mechanisms of this collaborative economy, where people can share tastes, styles, goods, but, above all, cultural experiences.

8. Transformations. This is the complicated step because in order for OKG to succeed, the mentality of people when it comes to renting clothes that has already been used by third parties needs to change. For this to be possible a major campaign of demystification of the service needs to be in correctly done. With good communication of OKG, people can understand the advantages clearly. As will be shown by the focus group results, the question of hygiene and cleaning of the clothes is in fact a barrier and a huge resistance.

9. Connections. If OKG reaches the needs of the population in general, it has the potential

of becoming a social collaboration tool. That way this model can be quickly replicated in other cities around the world, always respecting the way of dressing and the fashions of each culture and country.

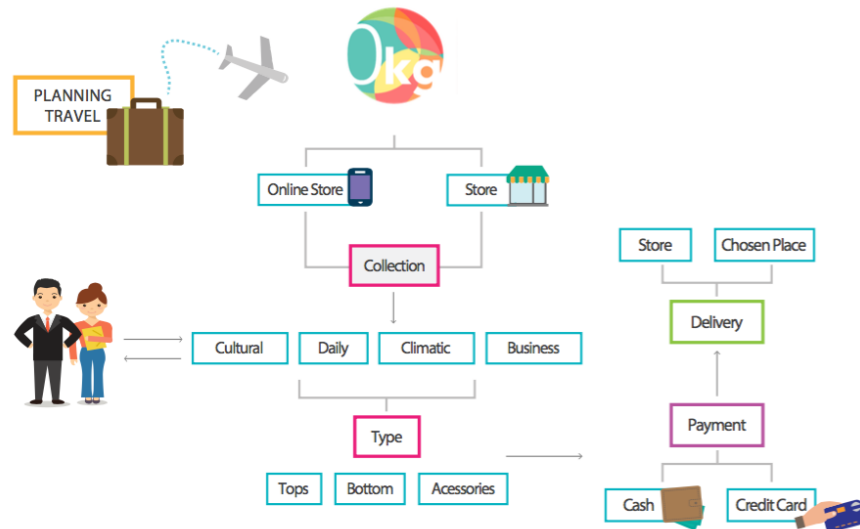


Figure 1. How OKG works

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Focus Group was conducted with 7 people, aged between 18 and 31 years, from different professional areas, because this was the age group with the highest response rate in the questionnaire. The first important question was “what do you think when you hear rented or in second-hand?”, and “worn-out”, “insecurity”, “doubt”, lack of hygiene” were the main responses. But after some discussion the group came to the conclusion that something rented or in second-hand is used, but is not damaged. That has its value.

Then the question "Have used or considered using something borrowed/used?" was asked, and in general, all elements of the group indicated that they would use or consider using something used/borrowed, some giving practical examples of services of this type, like uber, or chic by choice, a cocktail dress rental service.

When the participants were asked “Would you rent or purchase second-handed clothes or accessories?”, the majority of the participants responded positively, and as a justification they stated the economic aspect because it allows saving by avoiding ongoing investments in new clothes and still be able to find different clothes, which encourages experimentation. Those who answered "no" to the previous question justified that they would not to use clothes that were already worn by others and because they have doubt about the cleanliness and hygiene of the items. In order to understand if the supposed “lack” of hygiene and cleanliness would be one of the main obstacles to the use of second-hand clothing and accessories, the participants who replied "no" were asked “if it was guaranteed the quality and cleanliness of the clothes, would you change your answer?”, they all did change it to a positive answer. OKG was explained and introduced to them and all participants showed great acceptance of service. There were different answers to the question “Do you think this is innovative? Why?”, like: “Its it excellent, however I think it will work better with the younger generations because they have a more open mind in this aspects of sharing economy”, “(...) I can choose a completely different style from what mine is and wear it in a different country. Something that normally I wouldn’t wear because I don’t keep it, so I can experiment”, and also “Love it

because this way I can be submersed in culture and not just be another tourist”. This way, as long as the quality is guaranteed and well communicated to the tourists, few barriers may arise and more and more people may consider joining OKG. Also it was perceived that OKG is an innovative service that will be very well received, as long as the partnerships are made intelligently and the quality and hygiene of the clothes, well communicated. In general, all participants showed interest in the service stating that each one of them would be a customer.

6. CONCLUSIONS

OKG is born to be a new way of promotion of a more sustainable society, encouraging different consumption habits, and approaching fashion in a way that promotes a shift from fast to slow fashion, changing the way we consume clothes. The research problem was positively answered, showing that people are willing to use second-hand clothing and/or leased when traveling but only if the cleanliness and hygiene of the clothes are guaranteed. The main limitation of this study is that the results from the analysed sample are 100% Portuguese, therefore it is not possible to extrapolate these results to other countries where OKG would like to be present. Different market studies are needed to a better assessment of the business.

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