

Visual Newness Value of Craft Products for Indonesian Public

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Abstract

Market mechanism demands “newness” as a predicate to be embedded on any product to be offered on the market. The contextuality of the “newness” calls for a study of how consumers respond to a product that offers such newness. In any craft products, the value of newness is often in conflict with the unique characteristics shaped by tradition, making newness harder to achieve. This study comprises a phenomenological analysis towards consumer appreciation of the value of newness in craft products. The study is conducted through surveying public appreciation towards randomly chosen craft product. The analysis that follows is based on the conclusion collected from questionnaires, a formalistic analysis of the craft products, and the resulting phenomenon based on the profiles of the respondents.

Keywords: newness, craft, formalistic.

Introduction

“Newness” is a logical consequence of the competitive market demands. This consequence also impacts those whose business model emphasizes creativity, craft included. In general, most craft products are rooted from tradition and its production process is passed on from one generation to the next. This tendency consequently affects the creation offered by craft entrepreneurs; their products are essentially repetitions of the previous creation. Efforts are made to depart from tradition through alterations of the products, such as by changing the materials, functions, shapes and colors and by making minor revisions to product configuration. In reality, however, these efforts are not responded accordingly by the general public, since what the public perspective of what is new or not new might be different from that of the craftsmen.

Attempting to create a product with newness value requires certain criteria of the degree of newness. This study is part of a dissertation on the attempt to seek newness in craft. This article explains the search for the visual elements that influence the degree of newness of a craft product. The object of this study is limited only to the visual characteristic aspect of the products. In this case, the materials that constitute the products are not analyzed.

Research Methodology

This study is qualitative study that employs a phenomenological approach. In order to assess the valuation criteria, a survey is conducted towards 66 randomly chosen respondents.

Questionnaires are disseminated through the internet from December 9 to 19, 2014. The respondents are 68% males and 32% females with the professional backgrounds 9% in craft business, 52% in design and 25% in non-craft business. Fifteen per cent of the respondents are high school graduates, while the 85% comprises university graduates. According to age groups, 26% of the respondents are under 30 years old, 40% between 30 and 39, and 34% above 40.

Each respondent is asked to grade three craft products in each sheet of the questionnaire, from scale 1 to 5, in which 1 represents a low newness value, while 5 denotes a high novelty value. The questionnaire consists of twelve sheets, with three craft products on each sheet, so that each respondent can make comparison among products during grading.

The samples consist of 36 craft products made from rattan and/or bamboo. This limitation in materials is done to reduce the factor of material as an element that builds up the newness value, and to further observe factors other than materials that affect the construction of the newness value. The reduction of the material as a determining factor is conducted since this factor is part of another sub-chapter of the main study that aims to seek the degree of newness produced through material exploration.

In the questionnaire, the grading criteria towards the newness elements are not included, in order to obtain breadth of analysis.

The conclusion gathered from the questionnaires results in product categories according to the newness values given by the respondents. According to the conclusion, the visual characters of each category are analyzed in order to obtain the visual characteristic tendency of each category.

Theoretical Analysis

“Newness” represents a change from the previously constructed state from within itself. “New” signifies the

existence of the “old”, or not new, and is related to something that changes to avoid the “constant”, related furthermore to the connection between newness and “resemblance” or typicality. Newness is a predicate embedded on something, and it appears visually. If the predicate signifies a product, the value of newness will appear visually on the product itself. Newness is qualitative and contextual at the same time; there is a limit that separates when the products is considered new and when it is no longer considered new.

As the D’Angour states that, according to Aristoteles, newness is a concept seemingly complex and layered, involving various different elements that contribute towards the definition and experience of innovation: multiplicity, reflexivity, and interactivity. “New” will have a different meaning in a different context for a different person of a different discipline. The temporal dimension of newness shows that the philosophical analysis of “new” is connected to the notion and meaning of “time.” “New” in English comes from a word meaning “firm” (see the Sanskrit cognate *nāvas*), and is rooted from the Greek word, νέος. *Novus* in Latin, *nouveau* (French), and *neu* (German) mean “new”, different from the words meaning “young.” The Greek word has no morphological equal as it is the only one that connotes “new” as “young” in the words νέος, νεανός, νεανίας (ne-wo is commonly found in Mycenaean Greek). (D’Angour, 1998)

In his doctoral dissertation, D’Angour states that, like significant influences in innovations in the intellectual field, the newness in the sensory experience is not often formally articulated – new sound, smell, sight and taste – all contribute to the new climate.

As for the artisans, they are called the “banauistic techne” specialists, masters of a too mechanical or materialistic technique, making the question of innovation in craft harder to answer than the innovation in politics, religion, or music. The initial definition of innovation may start from the search of context in which “new” and other related terms are found in English and Greek. The logic of the “new” will involve many aporiai (difficulties), similar to what is experienced now, but with distinctly different context and association (D’Angour, 1998).

In the dissertation, he explains that “new” is a predicate of a stir of “confusion”, different from the subject, both abstract and concrete: ideas, events, experience, roles, institutions, people, places, physical objects, artifacts and material structures. This represents “new” in normal discourse as an objective and descriptive term, both are relative and context-sensitive, such as the temporal relation between the “now” and the “new.” The connotation of new covers “contemporariness”, “difference”. “addition”, “unusual”, “alien”, “never happening before”, “never existing” and “as yet unknown” and every inclusive and exclusive combination of those meanings. An object may be new in one side, but may not on another. Newness is often a function of “knowledge” and “ignorance”, difference in perspective, and the condition of the mind of the perceiving subject. In many cases, “new” signifies the distance from the previous identity and at the same time refers to some manifestation of “pre-existence” or predecessor. The attribution of newness may require the compulsion of new values, which means that newness is identified in a wider context: public convention on which recognition and opinions depend on.

Newness as achievement is tied to the effort of inventing and becoming creative, which is the ability to think through established distinctive ways. Creativity and innovation are two different yet connected concepts and phenomena. Creativity plays a significant role in new and unexpected situations. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1988) and Sternberg (1999), today creativity is considered a varied and multi-disciplinary structure in the society, connected to both the personal history and social environment (Seitamaa, 2011). Creativity is a combination a person’s cognitive process, personal capacity and surrounding influences.

New is an adjective that shows that something is different from the previously existing. The term of newness is related to the terminology of creativity and innovation. Creativity is the human potential, within the human mind, while innovation is the implementation of the manifested creative thought. In other words, creativity lies within the mind when one is in the process of making innovation, and newness is the degree of the innovation itself.

According to Lindfors, innovation can be a new solution or re-development oriented towards the future, product, process, method or service that are designed and brought into practice to meet the purposes of life betterment by solving problems. In the Innovation Strategy of Finland (2008), in many cases, the practical need of modifying is the starting point and the target to find new ways to do something and to develop action in practice. The self-designed creative solution is not innovation; innovation is the combination of knowledge, skills and creativity (Lindfors, 2011).

The definition of innovation or the new is always developing until now. Benoît Godin states that the development of this definition is constructed through observation and discourse, which stands on six elements: 1) the concept in construction in which several terms are used and overlapped with each other, 2) by definition, 3) the discourse composed from the identified concept, 4) the analysis of values that emphasize innovation, directing towards development of dichotomy, such tradition vs. Innovation, 5) the development of conceptual theory and model for explanation, and 6) the study on the context in which the categories appear (Godin, 2008). The discourse on innovation is generally classified into three categories: innovation as a factor of change

in society, innovation as development and innovation for personal importance, such as personal recognition or professional identity (Godin, 2008).

Every form of innovation is new, and according to its degrees, innovation can be classified into: (1) incremental innovation, which is innovation that covers a small alteration, a minor improvement over the existing solution, (2) radical innovation, which is innovation that covers a larger course of alteration, a major improvement over the existing solution, and (3) revolution innovation, which is innovation that causes a great changes. In reality, these types of innovation are related to each other, incremental steps cause radical innovations that, if combined, may cause revolution. Inventors take small steps without knowing what actually has the chance of getting produced.

Berlyne (1971) classifies two types of newness by using the newness terminology: absolute newness, a thing never existing previously, and relative newness, something that is made of combination of previously existing elements (Hung & Chen, 2012).

What is further questioned is the effort to seek newness. In reality, craft artists are having trouble in creating newness. According to Wallas (1926), the commonly employed model to observe one's creativity in producing newness consists of three steps, namely preparation, incubation, and illumination, all of which culminate in the verification process (Schweizer, *The Psychology of Novelty-Seeking, Creativity and Innovation: Neurocognitive Aspects Within a Work-Psychological Perspective*, 2006). Howeverm this model is unable to explain why someones stops producing newness.

Tanja Sophie Schweizer, in her dissertation titled *An Individual Psychology of Novelty-Seeking, Creativity and Innovation*, offers a model called Novelty Generation Model (NGM), in which creativity is divided into two components, initialized by novelty-seeking behavior and followed by innovative performance. At this stage, cognitive processes, such as mental image, concept forming, categorization, memory selection, analogical reasoning, problem solving, attention, concentration and achievement of a higher level of consciousness, play a key role. When a creative individual changes a new discovery into an observable product, it is part of the "novelty production" process, as the second component of creativity. The act of "producing" novelty is the first step and is a compulsory condition for novelty in order to enter the next process of innovation.

The NGM emphasizes more on the individual characteristics (traits) and personality factors that affect the process of generating novelty, particularly at the beginning process that does not start from an issue or a task, but from observation of a problem. This kind of behavior is supported by individual characteristics and cognitive needs. Another interesting aspect is the social valuation element that ends the process of generating newness. In addition, in the proposed model, creativity is not treated as a component in the process of newness generation, besides giving attention to the neuro-cognitive qualities that support it.

Schweizer states that NGM does emphasize on the aspect of the subject in creation, while the object is seen as one same constant for everyone. In craft, the condition is different, since in order to generate newness, the object is highly significant. There are at least several variables of the elements in the object that are considered in creation, such as functions, materials, production, and visual and perceptual aspects.

At the same degree of potential, a craft object may give a different opportunity at newness. Working with certain materials require certain basic skill levels to be fulfilled, while other materials demand other conditions, such technical demand in production. Each demand results in a different consequence which later affects the factors possessed by the subject.

Questionnaire Results



Figure 1. Craft product samples graded by respondents

The questionnaire given to the respondents aims to obtain grades on the newness value of a number of craft products. The result of grading later becomes the basis for the formalistic analysis of the relation between craft products and the general public, in order to obtain the formalistic characteristics of the craft products. The grading is conducted on the scale from 1 to 5. The result of grading each product is multiplied by the scores given by the respondents, whose result is multiplied by the number of respondents.

$$\sum \frac{(ax1) + (bx2) + (cx3) + (dx4) + (ex5)}{n}$$

Legends:

- a Score 1
- b Score 2
- c Score 3
- d Score 4
- e Score 5
- n Number of respondents

From the results of the questionnaires, the lowest value obtained is 1.9 and the highest is 4.0, with the mean of 3.0 and median of 3.0.

The obtained data can be elaborated as the following:

1. There are some products that are never considered “not new”, which all of these products are considered “newness.”



Figure 2. Products considered “novelty”

2. There is one products that achieve the lowest point [2.03] and can be classified as “not new” craft products.



Figure 3. Products considered “newness”

3. Below is the craft product that achieves the highest score of 4.32



Figure 4. Products considered “newness”

4. There are four products (pictures below) whose newness level is considered very high [>4]. The scores are (from left to right): 4.03, 4.03, 4.06, and 4.23.



Figure 5. Products considered having very high level of newness

5. There is no product having newness value lower than 2, which implies that the products are not considered having a very low newness value. However, according to scoring results, there are three craft products that make up the 10% of the lowest valued products, as shown below, with their respective scores, from left to right: 2.03, 2.20, and 2.23.



Figure 6. Product with lower novelty value

The formalistic phenomenon seen from the scoring results leads to the conclusion of the relation between newness value and complexity, which is explained in the following chart:

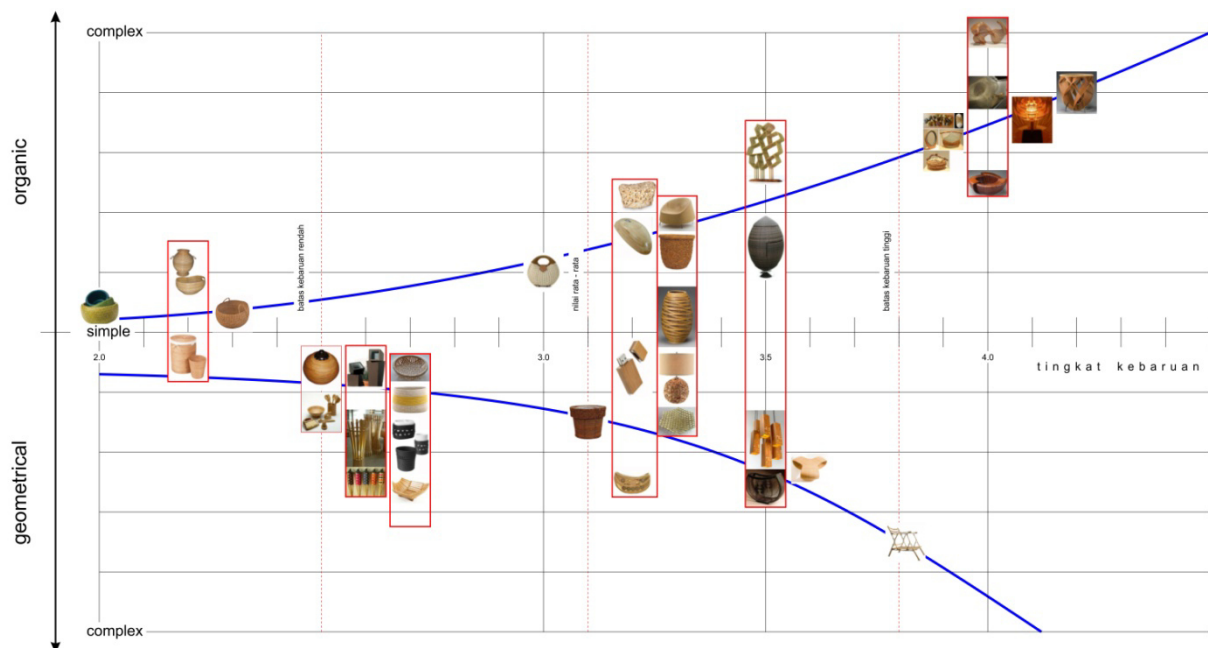


Figure 7. Distribution of novelty value in craft product samples

Analysis

From the 46 craft product samples, there are five craft products commonly considered as new (figure 2). From the five products, one is not considered as having a very high level of newness. The five products, including the one not considered as having a very high level of newness, have one same characteristic: they have less clear functions.

Of particular interest is a craftwork by Shono Shounsai (1904-1974), made in 1969, which is considered as the craft product with the highest newness value (figure 4). One interesting factor that separates the products with high newness values from those with low newness values is the clarity of the function. In the products with high newness values, the function of the products are less clear than that of the products with low newness values. Besides the clarity of function, the visual attractiveness also determines the newness value. Products with high newness values are more visually attractive than those with low newness values. From the two points of comparison, clarity of functions and visual attractiveness are two determining factors in assessing the newness value.

The latter characteristic is discovered in products with high newness values. The attractiveness of the products is achieved through several attempts, such as the harmony of the “value of order” in their visual elements. Most of the products with low newness values have low value of organization, easily deduced pattern of order, and no attempt at displaying visual “interruption.” Another visible characteristic of the craft products with high newness values is the avoidance of the “codes” commonly intended for certain product categories. For example, the code for serving tray is usually rectangular or circular, and the characteristic of the circle shaped by the module will lead to the circular shape, but the bamboo serving tray created by the students of the University of Washington and Maryland Institute College of Art is, instead, hexagonal.

The similar case happens also to mouse and USB flash drive products, whose codes commonly denotes their materials as plastic and metal. The usage of bamboo as mouse and flash drive materials contributes to their newness value.













Figure 8. Craft products made from laminated bamboo

In figure 8, even though all of the products are made of the same material, laminated bamboo, the household equipment do not obtain a higher newness value. This is due to bamboo being a code of the material used for household equipment.

In figure 7, it is implied that the shapes of the craft products do not determine the value of newness. In both the organic and geometrical areas, the newness values are almost equal. In the high newness value group, the organic shapes seem to dominate. However, both the geometric and organic shapes have same chances at offering a high value of newness.

Based on the respondents’ backgrounds, there are several differences occurring, although they are not too significant, as can be seen in the table below.

Table 1 Comparison of scores based on respondent background

		number of picture										
		1	6	7	17	22	32		12	30	23	33
		lowest novelty values						highest novelty values				
												
field of occupation	craft	3.00	3.33	2.83	2.83	2.83	3.67		4.17	5.00	4.50	5.00
	non-craft	2.52	2.44	3.08	2.48	2.08	2.64		4.20	4.08	4.48	4.28
	Design	2.09	2.15	2.35	2.29	2.09	2.59		4.50	4.41	4.26	4.65
age	<30	2.59	2.59	3.12	2.59	2.76	3.06		4.82	5.00	4.88	5.35
	30-40	2.00	2.19	2.62	2.08	1.88	2.62		4.04	3.88	4.04	4.00
	>40	1.17	1.10	1.10	1.23	0.92	1.17		2.00	2.00	2.00	2.08
gender	male	2.32	2.34	2.73	2.27	2.02	2.86		4.27	4.32	4.16	4.50
	female	2.38	2.43	2.57	2.71	2.43	2.38		4.52	4.38	4.81	4.62
total respondents		2.17	2.20	2.49	2.24	2.00	2.51		4.04	4.03	4.06	4.21
field of occupation	craft	B	B	C	C	C	B		A	A	A	A
	non-craft	C	C	B	C	C	C		A	A	A	A
	Design	C	C	C	C	C	C		A	A	A	A
age	<30	C	C	B	C	C	B		A	A	A	A
	30-40	C	C	C	C	D	C		A	B	A	A
	>40	D	D	D	D	E	D		C	C	C	C
gender	male	C	C	C	C	C	C		A	A	A	A
	female	C	C	C	C	C	C		A	A	A	A
total respondents		C	C	C	C	C	C		A	A	A	A

On the table, it is visible that product no. 22 and 33 are the products that are commonly considered by most respondents as having the lowest newness value. For respondents with craft background, the products with the lowest newness value are no. 7, 17, and 22, while those with higher newness values are no. 30 and 33. With very small score difference, female respondents choose products number 1 and 32 as the products with the lowest newness value. Product no. 23, on the other hand, is considered as having the highest value of newness for non-craft, female respondents.

Product selection does not exhibit significant differences, but the range of the scores shows large differentiation, as seen on the table below.

		lowest	Highest	range
Field of occupation	Craft	2.83	5.00	2.17
	Non-craft	2.00	4.08	2.08
	Design	1.91	4.29	2.38
Age	<30	2.18	4.35	2.18
	30-40	1.88	4.04	2.15
	>40	0.90	2.02	1.13
Gender	Male	1.91	4.14	2.23
	Female	2.24	4.57	2.33
Total respondents		2.03	4.23	2.20

Female respondents over 30 years old working in craft tend to give higher scores for even the lowest newness values. Female respondents working in the design field tend to give higher scores for high newness values; the highest score range is found in this group.

An interesting phenomenon is discovered in the female respondents over 40 years old. Besides the lower mean value [1,31], the lower point for this group is 0.9 and the highest is 2.02. This implies that for this age group, there is no product considered as having a high newness value. There is event a product considered as having no newness value, which is number 22.

Conclusion

Certain visual characteristics in craft products are considered as having high newness value for the Indonesia public; these characteristics are high level of order and less clarity of function. Level of order is related to the achievement of product attractiveness. Knowledge of the codes of craft products is essential, as well as the knowledge of the categories to which craft products belong. Codes can either be materials or formalistic elements of the products. Lower level of order lowers also the attractiveness of a product, thus lowering its newness value.

Seen from the background of the respondents, there are significant differences in terms of the given scores across different respondent groups. An example of this is the group of respondents over 40 years old. Even though their product selection are quite similar to the other groups, they give significantly lowers scores. For this group, there are products that have no newness value, and the products with newness value are not ranked highly.

The contextuality of newness can be seen from the varied backgrounds of the respondents. The craft background significantly affects the amount of scores given. Based on age groups, the group that gives significantly different scoring is the group of respondents over 40 years old.

In conclusion, further research on craft codes in Indonesia is needed in order to effectively produce newness values.

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Biography

Andry is lecturer at the Faculty of Arts and Design of ITENAS (National Institut of Technology), Bandung, Indonesia. He was born in Bandung, West Java, 24 April 1968. He is PhD candidate for the Design Program in the Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), Bandung, Indonesia. Her promotor is Dr. Agus Sachari, MSn. And second promotor is Dr. Pribadi Widodo, MSn. His research focuses on the Indonesia Craft development.

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