



Yarn Design Characteristics Which Influence Crafters

Casey R. Stannard, Louisiana State University and Kathy K. Mullet, Oregon State University

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Crafting has undergone a major resurgence since the new millennium. Numerous businesses emerged to satisfy the demand for craft supplies (Jakob, 2013). Of these businesses, there are many small retailers and producers of exclusive, handmade yarns. These artisan brand yarns (ABY) may be: handspun, hand-dyed, and/or also may be farmstead yarns (sold directly to the consumer by the farmer who raised the fiber animals). ABYs are different from national brand yarns (NBY) which are produced by large, national companies and are standardized in terms of fiber, dyeing techniques, and production. The increasing availability of yarn options begs the question, what aspects of raw materials are important to crafters and why? The purpose of this research was to determine the characteristics of yarn (visceral, behavioral, and/or emotional) that influence crafters to choose either ABY or NBY for their craft projects.

The characteristics of both types of yarn were related to the three levels of design as described by Donald Norman (2004). He discussed design on three levels a) the visceral level of design was the most simplistic level and related to features like color, shape, and texture of a product, b) the behavioral level was composed of the functional aspects of a product like weight and usability, c) the reflective level explored emotional reactions to a product, for instance if the product had a greater meaning in the life of the user or helped users to forge bonds with other individuals. Norman theorized that a successful product fostered an emotional connection with users. Additionally, he claimed that products with all three levels of design would be more desirable to consumers.

Methods and Procedures

An online survey was created to investigate the purpose for this research. The survey contained both close-ended and open-ended questions. A sample of crafters (either knitters, crocheters, or weavers) were solicited through various web-based craft forums. The crafters were US residents, English speakers, and at least 18 years old.

In the survey, respondents were asked to recall a favorite completed project and relay what yarn design characteristics were important to their decision to utilize the yarn to make their project. The respondents were asked to rank the importance of yarn characteristics using a five point Likert-type scale. Six characteristics of yarn, which corresponded to the three levels of design described by Norman (2004) were used. The characteristics of color and visible texture corresponded to the visceral level of design, yarn weight and feel were related to the behavioral level of design, finally supporting an important business and the ethical treatment of fiber animals represented the reflective level of design.

The respondents were then clustered into two yarn user groups to allow for comparison. Respondents who used yarns that were handspun, hand-dyed, and/or farmstead were placed into the ABY group. All other users were grouped into the NBY group. MANOVAs were calculated

based on the importance of yarn characteristics in the decision to consume the two different types of yarn.

Additionally, respondents were asked to write-in the top three reasons they chose to purchase their yarn. These written responses were analyzed using the three-stage constant comparison method of coding. The results of the qualitative data were integrated with the quantitative findings to provide a richer understanding of the phenomenon at hand.

Results and Discussion

A total of 657 usable responses were collected. ABY users accounted for 24% of the sample. One visceral design characteristic, color, was important to both yarn user groups. However, a significant difference ($p=0.05$ level) was found for the remaining visceral yarn characteristic, visible texture. ABY yarn users found visible texture to be more important than NBY users. The importance of visible texture among the ABY users may relate to the handspun/homemade aesthetic often associated with artisan products.

In terms of behavioral characteristics, there were also significant differences ($p=0.05$ level). ABY users found the weight, and feel of yarn to be more important to their consumption decision than NBY users. The perceived importance of yarn feel may be attributed to the emphasis of high-end fibers among handspun yarns, which were part of the ABY group.

ABY users also felt reflective design characteristics were more important than the NBY users. The ABY users were concerned with supporting small retailers, fiber farmers, and yarn artisans. The ethical treatment of fiber animals was another concern for ABY users. However, many NBY users commented that ethical treatment of animals was important but they had used synthetic yarns and therefore this characteristic did not factor into their yarn decision.

Additional considerations for choosing yarn emerged from the qualitative data. Characteristics such as lower price, consistency, availability, and a need for high yardage tended to encourage crafters to choose NBY. Whereas, quality, desire to buy local, and uniqueness were traits that tended to influence crafters to purchase ABY. No matter which type of yarn was chosen, the crafters often thought about the functional needs of the finished project/end user prior to selecting their materials.

Conclusion

The three levels of design (Norman, 2004) aided in understanding what yarn design characteristics influenced crafters to purchase either ABY or NBY. Crafters who chose ABYs found many characteristics to be more important to their yarn decision than NBY users. Specifically, characteristics associated with the reflective level or emotional concerns were more important to ABY users. The importance of this study and future research should determine how emotional design features could be incorporated into successfully marketing ABY to crafters.

References

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