



Preferences of Co-Designed Cultural Textile Products from Guatemala and Peru

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After agriculture and tourism, artisan work provides a needed source of income for many people in less developed countries (Basu, 1995). Craft production for commercial sale is becoming an integral component of communities' economic activities especially in rural areas. For many artisan enterprises, participation in regional and export markets is essential to their survival (Littrell & Dickson, 1999). However, questions remain regarding the viability of artisan enterprises for economic development and sustainability (Chatterjee, 2007). The success of handcrafted products is dependent on artisans producing quality products in keeping with the tastes and preferences of consumers. Increased commercialization of products for export markets require artisans to include artistic craft and ethnic values with a touch of innovation (Dash, 2011). Training and communicating current fashion trends to cultural textile artisans is vital to understanding foreign tastes and lifestyles.

This research involves working with fair-trade weaving groups in Guatemala and Peru. Artisan textiles were co-designed with contemporary color palettes and layouts for backstrap weaving with U.S. designers. Co-design has been integrated into the textile design process in this study through pictures and technical diagrams. The textiles were then incorporated into modern silhouettes of apparel and home décor. Co-design is a process of collaborative design thinking involving joint inquiry and imagination in which diverse people explore and define a problem and collaboratively develop and evaluate solutions (Steen, 2013). In co-design, participants are able to express and share their experiences and negotiate their roles and interest to jointly bring about positive change. Co-design presents an opportunity to work with textile artisans to create textiles and products with the intent to expand product offerings and sales in the global marketplace.

Fifty-two artisan textile products were exhibited in a gallery exhibition and surveys were collected regarding visitor's preferences of the products. Survey participants were asked to select the product they would most like to own and describe "what you find most interesting and attractive about the product". The exhibition in a university gallery space allowed for display of a variety of functional home décor, apparel, and accessory products. Products in the exhibition were designed and developed with fair-trade weavings from Guatemala and Peru as well as hand embroidered textiles from Guatemala. The co-designed textiles and authentic cultural textiles were then designed into contemporary products by the researcher and two undergraduate design students.

Survey responses of participants (n=261) for the product selected as 'most like to own' were 69.6% apparel, 12.2% furniture, 6.4% home décor pillows, 5.7% fashion accessories, 3.1% home

framed art, and 1.5% tabletop home décor. Forty-one products from the fifty-two total products in the exhibition were selected for most like to own. Of the products selected, 46% were co-designed textiles designed into contemporary products, 31% were authentic textiles designed in contemporary products, and 23% were authentic cultural products.

The qualitative responses for “describe what you find most interesting and attractive about the product” were collected. Two other sources of qualitative data were gathered: 1) the researcher transcript of describing products in the exhibition, and 2) public blog posts by one of the undergraduate students while working with the fair trade weaving group in Guatemala. Qualitative data was open coded using constant comparison. Themes emerged for both the exhibition visitors ‘user experience’ of viewing the artisan textile products and the ‘designer visual representation’ of the researcher and design student. Analysis of the data found four themes for the viewers of the exhibition: Modern mix with traditional, “I Love” the detail; Pop of color; and Versatility. Themes which emerged for designers associated with the exhibition were: Textiles tell a story, Women work hard, Design collaboration, and Sustainability.

Co-designed textiles and products were preferred in this study. The sustainability-oriented innovation of reducing the size of hand woven textiles and incorporating the textiles into contemporary products was preferred by exhibition visitors. Participants in the study preferred modern silhouettes and clean lines in the products with a mix of traditional textiles and patterns. Color was an important element in participants’ descriptions of the products preferences and may indicate that the co-design process with the cultural artisans is beneficial in producing products relating to contemporary consumers’ tastes and lifestyles.

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