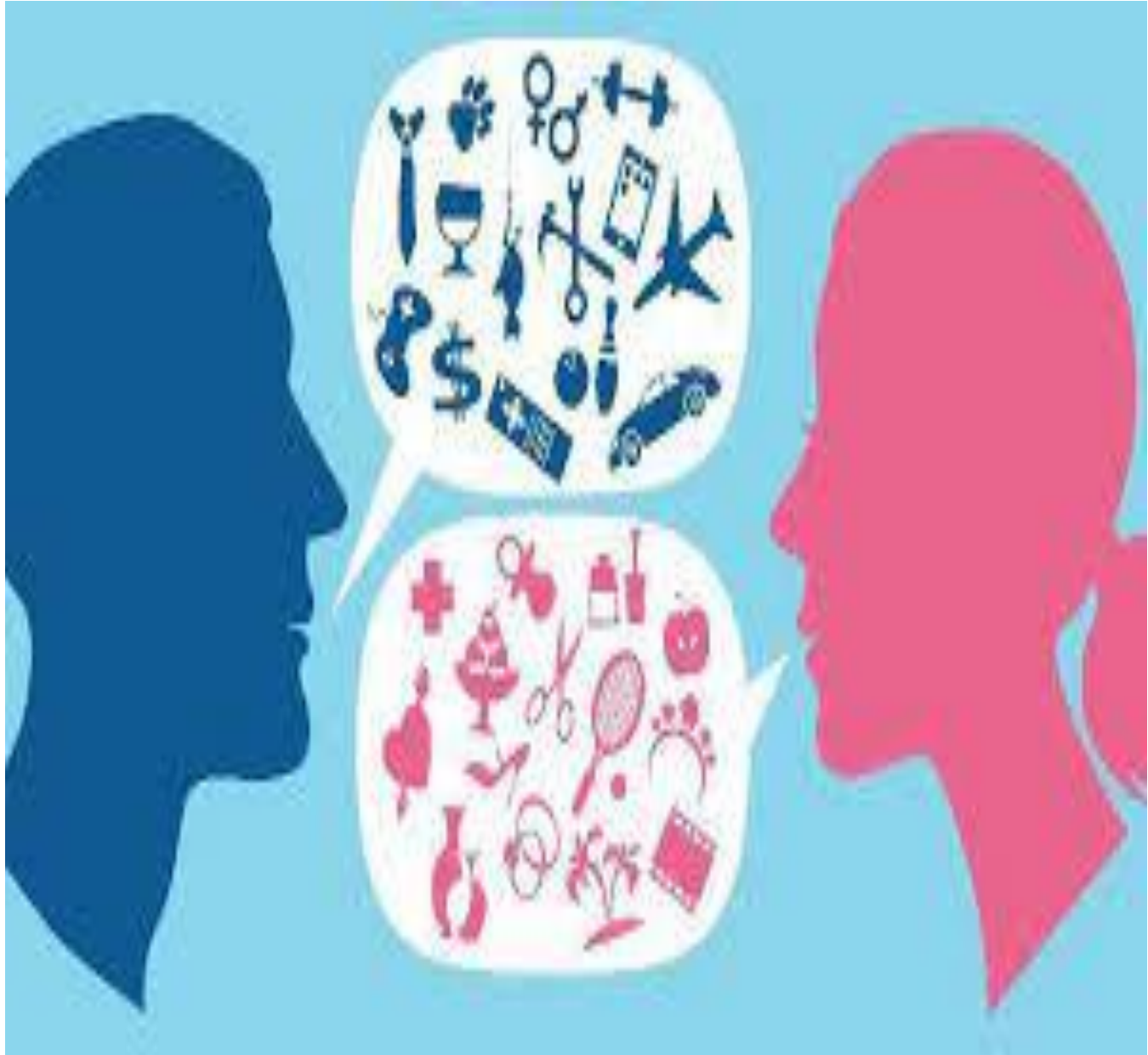


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Ethnographic Perspectives on Decision-Making Processes in Fashion Design Education

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This study explores decision-making processes in fashion design education through an ethnographic lens, emphasising the social, cultural, and experiential dimensions of creative practice. Drawing on qualitative secondary data, including ethnographic studies, scholarly literature, and documented case analyses, the research examines how students and educators construct and negotiate design decisions within studio-based learning environments. The study is theoretically grounded in symbolic interactionism, constructivism, and practice theory, enabling a multidimensional understanding of decision-making as a socially constructed and practice-based phenomenon. The findings reveal that decision-making in fashion design education is iterative, non-linear, and deeply influenced by studio culture, peer interactions, and institutional expectations. Additionally, tacit knowledge, emotional engagement, and identity formation play critical roles in shaping design choices. The study contributes to the literature by highlighting the importance of ethnographic approaches in capturing the complexity of creative decision-making and offers implications for pedagogy, curriculum design, and future research in fashion education.

Keywords: ethnography, fashion design education, decision-making, studio culture, tacit knowledge, constructivism, creative practice

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1. Introduction

Fashion design education represents a dynamic and interdisciplinary field situated at the intersection of creativity, culture, and industry. It is characterised by studio-based learning environments, experiential pedagogies, and an emphasis on aesthetic innovation and material exploration. Within this context, decision-making processes are central to the development of design outcomes, yet they remain underexplored in academic research. Unlike traditional decision-making models grounded in rational choice theory, decision-making in fashion design education is complex, iterative, and deeply embedded in social and cultural practices.

The creative process in fashion design involves a continuous negotiation between intuition, technical knowledge, and contextual constraints. Students are required to make numerous decisions regarding materials, forms, colours, and conceptual narratives, often under conditions of uncertainty and ambiguity. These decisions are rarely linear or predetermined; instead, they evolve through cycles of experimentation, reflection, and feedback (Cross, 2011). As such, understanding decision-making in this field requires a methodological approach that captures its complexity and situated nature.

Ethnography offers a valuable framework for exploring these processes, as it emphasises the study of human behaviour within its natural context. Rooted in anthropology and sociology, ethnography seeks to produce

“thick descriptions” of social practices, enabling researchers to uncover the meanings and interpretations that individuals attach to their actions (Geertz, 1973). In educational settings, ethnographic approaches have been used to examine classroom interactions, learning cultures, and institutional practices, providing rich insights into how knowledge is constructed and negotiated (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

In the context of fashion design education, an ethnographic perspective allows for an in-depth exploration of studio culture, where decision-making is shaped by interactions among students, instructors, and peers. The design studio functions as a collaborative and dialogic space in which ideas are generated, critiqued, and refined. Critique sessions, commonly referred to as “crits,” play a pivotal role in this process, serving as forums for feedback and evaluation. Through these interactions, students learn to justify their design choices, respond to criticism, and refine their creative thinking (Oak, 2000).

Moreover, decision-making in fashion design education is influenced by broader cultural and institutional contexts. Educational institutions establish norms and expectations that shape how students approach design problems, while industry standards and market trends impose additional constraints. The globalisation of fashion further complicates these dynamics, introducing diverse cultural influences and shifting expectations regarding creativity and innovation (Kawamura, 2005). As a result, decision-making in this field cannot be understood in isolation; it must be examined as part of a larger socio-cultural system.

Another important dimension of decision-making in fashion design education is the role of tacit knowledge. Unlike explicit knowledge, which can be easily articulated and documented, tacit knowledge is experiential and embodied, acquired through practice and interaction (Polanyi, 1966). In design education, students develop tacit knowledge through hands-on activities such as sketching, draping, and prototyping. These practices enable them to make intuitive decisions that may not be easily explained but are nonetheless critical to the creative process (Schön, 1983).

The increasing recognition of qualitative research methods across disciplines underscores the importance of approaches that can capture the richness and complexity of human experiences. In fashion studies, where subjective interpretation and cultural meaning are central, qualitative and ethnographic methods are particularly well-suited to exploring decision-making processes (Entwistle, 2015). However, conducting primary ethnographic research can be time-intensive and resource-demanding, especially in specialised educational settings.

To address this challenge, the present study adopts a qualitative research design based on secondary data analysis. By synthesising existing ethnographic studies, case analyses, and scholarly literature, the study aims to generate new insights into decision-making processes in fashion design education. Secondary data analysis is increasingly recognised as a valuable methodological approach, allowing researchers to reinterpret

existing data and contribute to theoretical development (Heaton, 2004).

This study is guided by the following research objectives:

- to examine how decision-making processes are constructed and enacted in fashion design education;
- to identify the social, cultural, and institutional factors that influence these processes; and
- to explore the role of ethnographic perspectives in understanding creative decision-making.

By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on design education and qualitative research. It highlights the importance of considering decision-making as a socially embedded and culturally mediated process, rather than a purely individual or cognitive activity. Furthermore, it underscores the value of ethnographic approaches in capturing the complexities of creative practice.

2. Literature Review

Fashion design is widely recognised as a socio-cultural practice that extends beyond the production of garments to encompass the creation of meaning, identity, and cultural expression. Scholars have emphasised that fashion is deeply embedded in social structures and cultural contexts, reflecting and shaping societal values (Entwistle, 2015; Kawamura, 2005). Designers operate within a network of cultural symbols, historical references, and aesthetic conventions, all of which influence their creative decisions.

The design process itself is inherently interpretive, requiring designers to translate abstract ideas into tangible forms. This process involves a continuous negotiation between personal creativity and external influences, such as trends, consumer preferences, and technological advancements. As such, decision-making in fashion design is not merely a technical activity but a cultural practice that involves meaning-making and symbolic communication.

2.1 Creative Decision-Making in Design Education

Decision-making in design education has been the subject of extensive research, particularly within the broader field of design studies. Cross (2011) describes design thinking as a unique form of intelligence characterised by solution-focused strategies and abductive reasoning. Unlike analytical problem-solving, design thinking involves exploring multiple possibilities and iteratively refining ideas.

In fashion design education, decision-making is often influenced by studio-based pedagogies that emphasise experimentation and critique. Students are encouraged to explore diverse approaches, take creative risks, and learn from failure. This iterative process aligns with Schön's (1983) concept of "reflection-in-action," where practitioners continuously evaluate and adjust their actions in response to emerging situations.

Critique sessions play a crucial role in shaping decision-making processes. During these sessions, students present their work and receive feedback from instructors and

peers. This feedback not only influences immediate design choices but also contributes to the development of critical thinking and self-reflection skills (Oak, 2000). The social nature of critique highlights the importance of interaction and dialogue in creative decision-making.

2.2 Studio Culture and Social Interaction

The design studio is a central component of fashion design education, serving as a space for collaboration, experimentation, and learning. Studio culture is characterised by informal interactions, shared practices, and a strong sense of community. These elements create an environment in which decision-making is influenced by social dynamics and collective knowledge.

Research has shown that learning in studio environments is highly collaborative, with students often engaging in peer-to-peer learning and knowledge exchange (Shreeve, Sims, & Trowler, 2010). This collaborative approach fosters a sense of shared responsibility and encourages students to consider multiple perspectives when making decisions.

Symbolic interactionism provides a useful framework for understanding these dynamics, as it emphasises the role of social interaction in shaping meaning and behaviour (Blumer, 1969). In the context of fashion design education, interactions between students and instructors contribute to the construction of shared understandings and norms, which in turn influence decision-making processes.

2.3 Tacit Knowledge and Embodied Practice

Tacit knowledge is a fundamental aspect of creative practice, particularly in design disciplines. Polanyi (1966) argues that “we know more than we can tell,” highlighting the importance of experiential and embodied knowledge. In fashion design education, tacit knowledge is developed through hands-on activities and repeated practice.

Schön (1983) further elaborates on this concept by emphasising the role of reflection in professional practice. Designers engage in a dialogue with their materials, making decisions based on sensory feedback and intuitive judgment. This process is difficult to formalise but is essential for developing expertise.

The role of tacit knowledge underscores the limitations of purely cognitive models of decision-making. Instead, it suggests that decision-making in fashion design is deeply rooted in practice and experience, requiring an understanding of both material and cultural contexts.

2.4 Ethnographic Approaches in Education and Design Research

Ethnography has gained prominence as a methodological approach in education and design research due to its ability to capture the complexity of social practices. By focusing on lived experiences and contextualised interactions, ethnography provides insights that are often overlooked by quantitative methods (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

In design research, ethnographic methods have been used to study creative processes, user experiences, and organisational practices. These studies highlight the importance of context and culture in shaping design outcomes. In fashion studies, ethnography is particularly valuable for exploring the subjective and experiential aspects of design practice (Pink, 2015).

2.5 Secondary Data Analysis in Qualitative Research

Secondary data analysis involves the use of existing data to address new research questions or reinterpret previous findings. This approach has gained increasing recognition in qualitative research, as it allows for the efficient use of resources and the development of new theoretical insights (Heaton, 2004).

In the context of ethnographic research, secondary data can include published studies, field notes, and archival materials. While this approach may lack the immediacy of primary data collection, it offers the advantage of accessing a wide range of perspectives and contexts. By synthesising multiple sources, researchers can identify patterns and themes that may not be evident in individual studies.

2.7 Research Gap

Despite the growing body of literature on design education and ethnographic research, there remains a limited focus on decision-making processes in fashion design education from an ethnographic perspective. Most studies emphasise creativity, pedagogy, or industry practices, without explicitly examining how decisions are made and negotiated within educational settings.

This study addresses this gap by integrating ethnographic theory with qualitative secondary data analysis to explore decision-making as a socially embedded and culturally mediated process. By doing so, it contributes to both fashion studies and educational research, offering new insights into the complexities of creative practice.

3. Theoretical Framework

Understanding decision-making processes in fashion design education requires a multidimensional theoretical lens that captures the complexity of social interaction, knowledge construction, and embodied practice. This study integrates symbolic interactionism, constructivism, and practice theory to conceptualise decision-making as a socially situated, culturally mediated, and practice-based phenomenon. Together, these perspectives provide a robust framework for analysing how students and educators negotiate design choices within studio-based learning environments.

3.1 Symbolic Interactionism and Meaning-Making

Symbolic interactionism, rooted in the work of Mead (1934) and further developed by Blumer (1969), emphasises the role of social interaction in the construction of meaning. According to this perspective, individuals act based on the meanings that objects, events, and interactions hold for them, and these meanings are continuously negotiated through social processes.

In fashion design education, symbolic interactionism provides a valuable lens for understanding how students interpret design

briefs, feedback, and aesthetic values. The design studio operates as a social arena where meanings are co-constructed through dialogue, critique, and collaboration. For instance, critique sessions (“crits”) serve as key sites of interaction where students present their work and receive evaluative feedback. Through these interactions, meanings are negotiated, challenged, and redefined (Oak, 2000).

Moreover, symbolic interactionism highlights the importance of identity formation in decision-making. Students in fashion design programs often develop professional identities as designers, which influence their creative choices and aesthetic preferences. These identities are shaped through ongoing interactions with peers, instructors, and institutional norms (Entwistle, 2015). Thus, decision-making is not merely a cognitive process but a socially embedded activity influenced by the desire to align with or resist particular identities and expectations.

3.2 Constructivism and Knowledge Construction

Constructivist theory posits that knowledge is actively constructed by individuals through their experiences and interactions with the world (Piaget, 1970; Vygotsky, 1978). In educational contexts, constructivism emphasises the role of active learning, collaboration, and reflection in the development of understanding.

In fashion design education, constructivism is particularly relevant due to the emphasis on experiential and studio-based learning. Students engage in hands-on activities such

as sketching, draping, and prototyping, through which they construct knowledge about materials, techniques, and design principles. Decision-making emerges as a process of learning, where students experiment with different approaches, reflect on outcomes, and refine their ideas.

Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) further underscores the importance of social interaction in learning. In the design studio, instructors and peers provide guidance and support that enable students to develop skills and make decisions beyond their current level of competence. This collaborative learning environment fosters the development of critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

Constructivism also highlights the role of reflection in decision-making. Schön's (1983) notion of "reflection-in-action" describes how practitioners think critically about their actions while engaging in practice. In fashion design, students continuously evaluate their work, respond to feedback, and make adjustments, demonstrating an ongoing process of reflective decision-making.

3.3 Practice Theory and Embodied Knowledge

Practice theory offers a complementary perspective by focusing on the routines, actions, and embodied knowledge that constitute social practices. Scholars such as Bourdieu (1977) and Schatzki (2001) emphasise that practices are shaped by both individual agency and social structures.

In the context of fashion design education, practice theory highlights the importance of tacit knowledge and embodied experience. Polanyi (1966) argues that much of what individuals know cannot be explicitly articulated but is instead embedded in practice. For fashion design students, this includes skills such as fabric manipulation, pattern cutting, and visual composition, which are developed through repeated practice and sensory engagement.

Decision-making, from this perspective, is embedded in everyday design practices. For example, choices about fabric, colour, or silhouette are often made through interaction with materials rather than abstract reasoning. This aligns with Schön's (1983) concept of a "conversation with materials," where designers respond to the affordances and constraints of the materials they work with.

Practice theory also draws attention to the role of institutional and cultural contexts in shaping practices. Fashion design education is influenced by institutional norms, curriculum structures, and industry expectations, all of which affect how decisions are made. Students learn not only technical skills but also the cultural codes and professional standards associated with the fashion industry (Kawamura, 2005).

3.4 Integrative Theoretical Perspective

The integration of symbolic interactionism, constructivism, and practice theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding decision-making in fashion design education. Symbolic interactionism emphasises the social construction of

meaning, constructivism focuses on experiential learning and knowledge construction, and practice theory highlights the role of embodied knowledge and routine practices.

Together, these perspectives conceptualise decision-making as:

- **Socially constructed** through interaction and dialogue
- **Experientially learned** through practice and reflection
- **Culturally embedded** within institutional and industry contexts

This integrative framework enables a nuanced analysis of decision-making processes, capturing their complexity and situated nature.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design informed by ethnographic principles. Qualitative research is particularly suited for exploring complex social phenomena, as it focuses on understanding meanings, experiences, and interactions rather than quantifiable variables (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Given the study's focus on decision-making processes in fashion design education, a qualitative approach allows for an in-depth examination of the cultural and social dimensions of creative practice.

Rather than conducting primary ethnographic fieldwork, this study employs a secondary data analysis approach. Secondary analysis involves the systematic examination and reinterpretation of existing data to address new research questions or generate new

insights (Heaton, 2004). This approach is especially valuable in contexts where primary data collection is constrained by time, access, or resources.

4.1 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The study draws on a diverse range of secondary qualitative data sources, including:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles on fashion design and education
- Ethnographic studies in design and creative industries
- Case studies documenting studio practices and pedagogy
- Academic books and theoretical texts related to design and ethnography

To ensure relevance and rigour, the selection of data sources was guided by the following criteria:

- **Topical relevance:** Focus on fashion design, design education, or creative practices
- **Methodological alignment:** Use of qualitative or ethnographic approaches
- **Analytical depth:** Inclusion of detailed descriptions of decision-making processes

This purposive sampling strategy ensures that the data are rich, contextually grounded, and aligned with the research objectives (Patton, 2015).

4.2 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection involved a systematic review of academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science.

Keywords used in the search process included “fashion design education,” “decision-making,” “ethnography,” “studio culture,” and “creative practice.”

Relevant studies were identified, screened, and organised using thematic categories. Key information, including research context, methodology, and findings, was extracted and documented. This process facilitated the identification of patterns and themes across different studies.

4.3 Data Analysis

The study employs thematic analysis, a widely used method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis followed a systematic process:

- **Familiarisation:** Reviewing and re-reading selected texts to gain an overall understanding
- **Coding:** Identifying key concepts and assigning codes to relevant data segments
- **Theme development:** Grouping codes into broader themes related to decision-making
- **Interpretation:** Analysing relationships between themes and linking them to theoretical frameworks

The constant comparative method was used to ensure consistency and depth in analysis, allowing for the refinement of themes and the identification of nuanced patterns (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

4.4 Trustworthiness and Rigour

Ensuring the credibility and rigour of qualitative research is essential. This study employs several strategies to enhance trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985):

- **Triangulation:** Using multiple data sources to validate findings
- **Reflexivity:** Acknowledging the researcher’s role in interpreting data
- **Thick description:** Providing detailed contextual information to support interpretations

Additionally, the use of established theoretical frameworks enhances the analytical rigour and coherence of the study.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

As this study is based on secondary data, it does not involve direct interaction with participants. However, ethical considerations remain important. All sources are properly cited, and intellectual property rights are respected. The study also adheres to academic integrity standards by accurately representing the original authors’ work (Mannan & Farhana, 2026).

4.6 Limitations of the Methodology

While secondary data analysis offers several advantages, it also has limitations. The researcher has limited control over the original data collection process, which may affect the depth and scope of analysis. Additionally, the absence of direct observation may limit the ability to capture real-time interactions and contextual nuances.

Despite these limitations, the use of diverse and high-quality data sources helps mitigate these challenges and provides a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

5. Findings and Analysis

The thematic analysis of secondary ethnographic and qualitative data reveals that decision-making processes in fashion design education are complex, socially embedded, and shaped by multiple interacting factors. These include iterative creative practices, studio culture, tacit knowledge, institutional constraints, and identity formation. The findings are presented through six interrelated themes that collectively illustrate the ethnographic depth of decision-making in fashion design education.

5.1 Decision-Making as an Iterative and Non-Linear Process

One of the most prominent findings is that decision-making in fashion design education is inherently iterative and non-linear. Unlike traditional problem-solving models that follow a linear sequence of steps, design decision-making involves cycles of experimentation, reflection, and revision. Students frequently revisit earlier stages of their work, modifying or abandoning ideas as new insights emerge.

This iterative process aligns with Schön's (1983) concept of "reflection-in-action," where practitioners engage in a continuous dialogue with their work. In fashion design studios, students often produce multiple sketches, prototypes, and samples before arriving at a final design. Each iteration

represents a decision point, influenced by feedback, material constraints, and evolving conceptual understanding.

Ethnographic studies highlight that this process is not merely technical but deeply experiential. Students describe moments of uncertainty, frustration, and discovery, which shape their decision-making trajectories. These experiences reflect the inherently uncertain and exploratory nature of creative practice (Cross, 2011). Decision-making, therefore, is not about selecting a single "correct" solution but about navigating a landscape of possibilities.

5.2 Studio Culture as a Social Context for Decision-Making

The design studio emerges as a central social environment where decision-making is enacted and negotiated. Studio culture is characterised by collaboration, informal interaction, and shared practices, creating a dynamic learning space where knowledge is co-constructed (Shreeve et al., 2010).

Ethnographic accounts reveal that students rarely make decisions in isolation. Instead, they engage in ongoing dialogue with peers and instructors, seeking feedback and validation. Critique sessions ("crits") are particularly significant, serving as structured opportunities for evaluation and discussion. During these sessions, students present their work and receive comments that influence subsequent decisions (Oak, 2000).

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, these interactions are crucial for meaning-making. Feedback is not simply accepted or rejected; it is interpreted and negotiated based on the student's understanding and

identity. For example, a student may choose to incorporate certain suggestions while resisting others, reflecting a balance between external influence and personal vision.

The studio also functions as a site of social learning, where students observe and learn from each other's practices. This peer learning environment fosters the exchange of ideas and encourages experimentation, contributing to the development of decision-making skills.

5.3 Tacit Knowledge and Embodied Decision-Making

A key finding is the central role of tacit knowledge in decision-making processes. Much of the knowledge required for fashion design is experiential and embodied, acquired through practice rather than formal instruction (Polanyi, 1966). Students develop an intuitive understanding of materials, techniques, and aesthetics, which guides their decisions.

For instance, decisions about fabric selection, draping, or colour combinations are often based on sensory perception and prior experience. These decisions may not be easily articulated but are nonetheless critical to the design process. Schön's (1983) notion of a "conversation with materials" captures this dynamic, where designers respond to the properties and constraints of the materials they work with.

Ethnographic data suggest that the development of tacit knowledge is closely linked to repeated practice and reflection. As students gain experience, they become more confident in their intuitive judgments, enabling them to make decisions more

effectively. This highlights the importance of experiential learning in fashion design education.

5.4 Institutional and Industry Influences on Decision-Making

Decision-making in fashion design education is also shaped by institutional and industry contexts. Educational institutions establish curricula, assessment criteria, and pedagogical approaches that influence how students approach design problems. For example, assessment rubrics may prioritise originality, technical skill, or conceptual clarity, guiding students' decision-making processes.

At the same time, industry expectations play a significant role. Students are often encouraged to consider market trends, consumer preferences, and commercial viability when developing their designs. This introduces a tension between creative expression and practical constraints, requiring students to balance artistic vision with industry demands (Kawamura, 2005).

Ethnographic studies reveal that students navigate these competing demands through strategic decision-making. Some prioritise innovation and experimentation, while others focus on producing commercially viable designs. These choices reflect broader debates within the fashion industry regarding the balance between creativity and profitability.

5.5 Emotional Dimensions of Decision-Making

Decision-making in fashion design education is not purely cognitive; it is also deeply

emotional. Students often experience a range of emotions, including excitement, anxiety, frustration, and satisfaction, which influence their decisions.

For example, fear of failure may lead students to adopt safer design choices, while confidence and enthusiasm may encourage risk-taking. Feedback from instructors and peers can also have a significant emotional impact, shaping students' perceptions of their work and influencing their subsequent decisions.

From an ethnographic perspective, these emotional dimensions are integral to understanding decision-making processes. They highlight the human aspect of design education, where personal experiences and feelings play a crucial role in shaping outcomes (Entwistle, 2015).

5.6 Identity Formation and Decision-Making

Finally, decision-making is closely linked to identity formation. As students progress through their education, they develop a sense of themselves as designers, which influences their creative choices. This identity is shaped through interactions with peers, instructors, and the broader fashion community.

Students often make decisions that align with their emerging identities, such as adopting particular aesthetic styles or design philosophies. These choices reflect their aspirations, values, and perceptions of what it means to be a designer.

Symbolic interactionism provides a useful framework for understanding this process, as it emphasises the role of social interaction in

shaping identity (Blumer, 1969). Decision-making, in this context, becomes a means of expressing and negotiating identity.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study provide a nuanced understanding of decision-making processes in fashion design education, highlighting their complexity, contextuality, and social embeddedness. By integrating ethnographic insights with theoretical perspectives, this discussion explores the implications of these findings for design education, theory, and practice.

6.1 Decision-Making as a Socially Constructed Process

One of the key contributions of this study is the conceptualisation of decision-making as a socially constructed process. Rather than being an individual cognitive activity, decision-making emerges through interactions within the studio environment. This aligns with symbolic interactionism, which emphasises the role of social interaction in shaping meaning and behaviour (Blumer, 1969).

The importance of critique sessions and peer interactions underscores the collaborative nature of decision-making. Students do not simply internalise feedback; they actively interpret and negotiate it, integrating it into their own understanding. This process reflects the co-construction of knowledge and highlights the importance of dialogue in creative practice.

6.2 Experiential Learning and Reflective Practice

The iterative nature of decision-making supports the relevance of constructivist theories of learning. Students construct knowledge through experience, engaging in cycles of experimentation and reflection. Schön's (1983) concept of reflection-in-action is particularly useful for understanding how students adapt their decisions in response to evolving circumstances.

This finding has important implications for pedagogy. It suggests that design education should prioritise experiential learning opportunities, allowing students to engage in hands-on practice and develop their decision-making skills. Structured reflection, such as reflective journals or portfolio reviews, can further enhance this process.

6.3 The Role of Tacit Knowledge in Creative Practice

The prominence of tacit knowledge highlights the limitations of traditional models of education that focus on explicit instruction. In fashion design, much of the knowledge required for decision-making is acquired through practice and cannot be easily codified.

Practice theory provides a valuable framework for understanding this phenomenon, emphasising the role of embodied knowledge and routine practices (Bourdieu, 1977; Schatzki, 2001). Decision-making is embedded in these practices, emerging through interaction with materials and tools.

This finding underscores the importance of studio-based learning environments, where students can engage in hands-on activities and develop their tacit knowledge. It also highlights the need for educators to recognise and support the development of intuitive and experiential skills.

6.4 Navigating Institutional and Industry Constraints

The influence of institutional and industry contexts on decision-making reflects the broader socio-cultural dimensions of fashion design education. Students must navigate competing demands, balancing creativity with practical considerations.

This tension can be understood through the lens of cultural production, where creative work is shaped by both artistic and commercial forces (Kawamura, 2005). Decision-making becomes a strategic process, involving the negotiation of these competing priorities.

Educators play a crucial role in supporting students in this process, helping them develop the skills and knowledge needed to navigate complex professional environments. This may involve integrating industry projects, internships, and real-world case studies into the curriculum.

6.5 Emotional and Identity Dimensions of Decision-Making

The emotional and identity-related aspects of decision-making highlight the importance of considering the affective dimensions of learning. Students' emotions influence their willingness to take risks, respond to

feedback, and persist in the face of challenges.

Identity formation is also central to decision-making, as students develop a sense of themselves as designers. This process is shaped by social interactions and cultural expectations, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of identity (Entwistle, 2015).

From a pedagogical perspective, this suggests the need for supportive learning environments that encourage experimentation and risk-taking. Educators should also be mindful of the emotional impact of feedback, ensuring that it is constructive and supportive.

6.6 Implications for Theory and Research

The integration of symbolic interactionism, constructivism, and practice theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding decision-making in fashion design education. This interdisciplinary approach highlights the value of combining multiple theoretical perspectives to capture the complexity of social phenomena.

The use of secondary ethnographic data also demonstrates the potential of this methodology for generating new insights. By synthesising existing research, this study contributes to the development of theory and highlights areas for future investigation.

6.7 Future Directions

Future research could build on these findings by conducting primary ethnographic studies in specific educational contexts. Comparative studies across different cultural and institutional settings would also provide

valuable insights into the diversity of decision-making processes.

7. Conclusion

This study set out to examine decision-making processes in fashion design education through an ethnographic perspective, with particular attention to the social, cultural, and experiential dimensions that shape creative practice. By employing a qualitative methodology based on secondary data analysis, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how decision-making is enacted within studio-based learning environments.

The findings demonstrate that decision-making in fashion design education is fundamentally iterative and non-linear, involving continuous cycles of experimentation, reflection, and revision. Rather than following a structured or purely rational model, students engage in dynamic processes that are shaped by uncertainty, exploration, and evolving insights. This reinforces the view that creative decision-making is inherently complex and cannot be reduced to standardised procedures.

A key contribution of the study is the identification of studio culture as a central context for decision-making. The design studio functions as a socially interactive space where knowledge is co-constructed through dialogue, critique, and collaboration. Peer interactions and instructor feedback play a critical role in shaping students' design choices, highlighting the importance of social learning processes. This aligns with symbolic

interactionist perspectives, which emphasise the role of interaction in meaning-making.

The study also underscores the significance of tacit knowledge and embodied practice in decision-making. Much of the knowledge required for fashion design is experiential and intuitive, developed through hands-on engagement with materials and techniques. This finding supports practice-based theories of learning and highlights the limitations of approaches that prioritise explicit knowledge alone.

Furthermore, decision-making is influenced by broader institutional and industry contexts, requiring students to balance creative expression with practical constraints such as market demands and professional standards. Emotional and identity-related factors further complicate this process, as students navigate their emerging identities as designers while responding to feedback and expectations.

In terms of implications, the study suggests that fashion design education should prioritise experiential learning, foster collaborative studio environments, and support reflective practice. Educators should also recognise the importance of emotional engagement and identity development in shaping decision-making processes.

Future research could build on these findings by conducting primary ethnographic studies in diverse educational contexts, as well as comparative analyses across cultural settings. Overall, this study highlights the value of ethnographic approaches in understanding the complexities of creative decision-making

and contributes to the advancement of theory and practice in fashion design education.

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