INTRO

WHY THIS BOOK?

Imagine you are at a dinner party where people ask you about your profession. You wipe your mouth, take a deep breath and tell them: "I'm a trend researcher". Then you lean back and wait for the standard response to come: "Beg your pardon, you're what?" "Well, I research trends." "Ooooh so, you're a trend-watcher! Can you tell me about the latest fashion trends and what colours to wear this summer?" Sigh!

As this conversation illustrates, the profession of a trend researcher is still highly charged with stereotypes. Many think it is mainly about hip and trendy fashion styles or about hypes and fads. I fully understand this preconception, because it was mine too. But when I started to orientate myself some more on trend research the scales fell from eyes. I was amazed about the broader scope of this profession and how it includes so much more than just hypes, styles and the latest gadgets. It studies change and provides an analysis of emerging shifts in people's needs and wants. These trend insights are essential during any innovation process as a foundation to create future proof concepts that improve people's quality of life. I would like to take trend research to a next level where organisations perceive trend analysis as an ongoing dialogue rather than just a yearly purchase of a trend report as a nice little add on. I believe it is up to trend researchers to empower organisations to produce innovative policies, strategies, concepts, products and services that in turn empower people.

To detect, understand and create change, it is crucial to develop a solid research design and execute your trend research in a structured manner. But how? When I started out with trend research I could not find many books explaining the process of trend research. There are many inspiring books and reports presenting next year's trends but they explain little about the research process behind them. There are also lots of interesting books on long-term futures studies, which have a more academic approach, but these are not so easy to use in an applied setting. Then there are insightful books written by trend agencies, showcasing their unique vision on the trend process but these are somewhat unilateral. So where is that book I was craving for as a beginner in trend research? The book that explains the process of trend research by showing multiple perspectives and brings this in an accessible and down to earth way for everyone to understand? I decided to write one myself. So here it is, in front of you.

I learned by doing, I learned by watching others, I learned by experimenting, failing and adjusting. I have worked at several agencies applying trend research for various organisations and brands, from non-profit to profit, with a local and international scope, within a variety of sectors from finance to fashion and from telecom to food. The lessons I learned during this journey I am now sharing with my students at Fontys Academy for Creative Industries (ACI) in the Netherlands. My colleagues and

REWIND

LOOKING BACK AT LOOKING FORWARD

In this chapter you will hit rewind and become familiar with the objectives of trend research and the history of researching the future. You will be brought up to date on the way past, present and future are interconnected and the status quo of the trend profession. This will help you to navigate the trend research domain and understand its roots.

QUESTION ·····································

Are you a past, present or future oriented person?
The way you look at the future is defined by your own time orientation. What type of orientation do you have? Read the questions below to get an indication which type of person you might be.*

Do you often look at your personal photographs? Are you keeping a diary? And do you love to tell people your life story? Do vintage, retro and dust turn you on? Then you must be the nostalgic type and oriented towards the past.

Can you get into the flow easily while working on a project? Do you often do something in the spur of the moment? Are you feeling totally zen and in the now most of the time? It seems like you are a modern day Buddha and mainly present-oriented.

Are you thinking about what might happen a lot? Do you keep an agenda everywhere you go? Do you love horizons, horoscopes and the next and new? You might just have a future-forward personality.

Do you feel you do not belong in any of the above categories?
Take caution: when you are neither in the past, present or future, you might be stuck in a time warp!

*Of course this is not a certified psychological test, but you probably feel attracted to one of these categories more than the others and this can influence how you perceive the future yourself.

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PREDICTION OR EXPLORATION?

A prevailing image of trend researchers is that they claim to predict the future. Statements like "In 2030 we will all have self-sustaining lifestyles, transport ourselves via self-driving cars and 3D print our food." are very common in presentations by trend gurus. On the other hand if you type in 'predictions gone wrong' in an online search engine you can find a lot of examples of experts predicting future events which never came true. Is prediction of the future possible at all? That depends mainly on how you look at the future in a philosophical kind of way. There are many different ways of looking at the future depending on your cultural background and roots. The following three approaches of the future (Asselt, 2010) are widely used:

» The future is determined. This approach sees the future as fixed and determined by fate and destiny.
» The future is open but not empty. This approach sees our future as open but not totally empty because it is partly shaped by our actions in the past and present.
» The future is open. This approach believes that the future is open and can be completely influenced by human beings.

As a researcher of trends it is important to be aware of your own beliefs and perceptions regarding the future because it will influence the way you analyse signs of change.

QUESTION ·····································

What are your thoughts on the future?
What are your ideas about the future? How uncertain or how determined do you feel it is? Ask yourself the following questions:

» To which degree do you think the future is determined?
  Do you believe in fate and destiny?

» To which degree do you think the future is open?
  Do you believe anything can happen?

» To which degree do you think the future can be shaped?
  Do you believe you have the power to influence your future?

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» **Forces**: this level of a trend is about the forces that are driving the emergence of the trend manifestations and their underlying needs and values. Often referred to as the mega, long term or societal trend level. These forces go beyond the individual's power and slowly, almost unnoticeable, come into people's lives. Think of forces like urbanisation, globalisation and digitalisation.

The levels are interconnected and there is not a linear way of how these are influencing each other. A manifestation, like a 3D printer, is a technological product innovation. But it also shows a need for self-producing and creation and it is driven by forces like digitalisation and globalisation. While doing trend research you are zooming in and out from one level to the other and trying to get an overview of the relations between the levels.

"Trends come in all shapes and sizes. I'm not interested in gadgets per se, but in the mentality behind the gadgets. These shifting mentalities are placed within the context of forces like economic and political drivers."

Carl Rohde - Culture Sociologist and founder of Science of the Time

The trend levels provide a framework for looking at trends and can be used to analyse and structure the build-up of a trend. Most of the time it is easier for people to understand the full scope of a trend when you show them it is made up of manifestations which relate to emerging values and needs and are driven by societal forces. Chapter four zooms in on analysing a trend and how to integrate these trend levels into your analysis.

"I see trends as changes in consumer mind-sets. These are often shifts that take a few years to drip down into the mainstream. So while the change in mind-set is a slow shift, keeping up with the manifestations is where we have to go fast."

Pernille Kok-Jensen - Connectivity Director at MARE

FORCES   Digitalisation

↕

VALUES & NEEDS   Creative independency

↕

MANIFESTATIONS   3D printing, open source, creative commons, ...

An example of the trend levels.

FORCES

When investigating a changing environment you can use the STEEP factors to make an inventory of external forces and developments on a local and worldwide scale. STEEP is an acronym that stands for Social, Technological, Economic, Environmental and Political factors. Other acronyms in use are PEST, PESTLE, PESTEL, STEP, DESTEP, PESTO and STEEPLED, adding factors like an L for Legal, E for Ethical, O for Other and D for Demographical. Whichever you use, they are all applied as a memory aid and tool to organise and structure external developments happening in society.

Originally this tool, used since the 1960's, is aimed at helping businesses understand the external environment in which they are operating and the opportunities and threats that lie within it (Francis, 1967). By understanding their environment organisations can take advantage of opportunities and minimise threats. In trend research the STEEP factors are used as a more generic orientation tool to explore and organise what is happening in societies on a local and global scale. You can use it as a checklist to make an inventory of forces of change. The STEEP factors lie mostly beyond the control of individuals in society, it feels like these global developments are happening to us and we are subjected to it. They represent deep structural forces that interact within societies and can create a range of possible futures. Let's take a closer look at each of the STEEP factors.

SOCIAL
Social developments and factors build a society. They influence people's choices and include the beliefs, values and attitudes of a society. These factors include demographics like population growth rate, age distribution, immigration and emigration, living standards and dominant lifestyles. Social factors also include cultural values like health consciousness, religious influence, education and career attitudes, gender diversity and various ethical issues. Consumer behaviour, buying patterns, media views and advertising are social factors too.

Example: driving social forces of change behind the trend of gender bending are, amongst others, the shifts in cultural notions of femininity and masculinity and the way these are portrayed via the media and in advertising.

TECHNOLOGICAL
Technological developments are mainly about studying the rate of technological change and which fields are developing most rapidly by monitoring research and development activities, research funding, licensing and patents, intellectual property issues manufacturing advances, automation and innovation in sectors like transport, energy, health, communication and computing.

Example: technological forces behind the trend of interconnectivity are digitalisation and specifically the rise of internet and mobile technology.

ECONOMICAL
An economic situation is largely related to the buying position of businesses and consumers. Think about factors like interest rates, inflation levels, taxes, debts and savings levels, international trade,

= TOPICS

= INTRO

One of the goals of trend research is to detect change. To find signs of change you will have to scan your environment continuously. As a trend researcher your life is never on pause and your radar is on: always, anytime and anywhere.

"You need to surround yourself with all kinds of stimuli and make being up to date part of your day-to-day life. I don't think you can be a part-time trend researcher because you need to update and refresh your brain all the time."

Kelly McKnight - Head of Culture and Trends at Join the Dots

In this chapter you will practice the art of looking sideways (Fletcher, 2001) and be introduced to a three step approach of scanning. The first step is to spot signs of change using desk research and field research activities. Then you will practice making a first selection of your trend spots based on a list of criteria. And finally, you will find a fitting way to describe and archive these selected spots in a trend database.

Filing criteria
To create your own way of documenting and to decide on how to archive your trend spots the following can be considered:

» Amount of users
Are you the only one using the archiving system or are others too? If you are the only one using it, you can personalise it in a way you like it. But when others, such as colleagues or clients, should be able to use it too then you should think of a system that is easy for anyone to use. You could create a system together with the other users and make an inventory of which filing criteria matter most to them.

» Visual or text driven
Do you want a visual focussed archiving system, a text driven one or a combination of both? Some people can remember and search things easier with visual clues, others with text. Decide which works for you.

» Analogue or digital
Do you prefer an analogue or digital way of filing information? Each has its strengths and weaknesses. When you like to hold on to something physically, create an overview on a wall or leave through pages, then analogue is the way to go. If you like to be able to use a search tool and take your archive anywhere you want, then digital is the way to go. A combination of both analogue and digital systems is possible too.

» System of tagging
Randomly saving information in a system is not recommended because information will pile causing a feeling of information overload instead of being in control of your spots. Creating a category structure upfront will help you to find stored spots quicker within an archiving system, whether it is labelling your paper folders to tagging smart in digital tools. Think of categories for tagging, such as industry sectors, mentality groups, regions or anything else that is relevant to you.

Filing examples
Trend researchers each have their own personal preferences in setting up a trend database. Take a look at some of these filing systems to help you in finding your personal way of archiving your selected spots.

» Notebooks
You can carry a notebook and file things that stand out to you by writing them down, drawing them or cutting and pasting them in. You can use a dummy and turn it into your personalised trend scrapbook. This type of filing is suitable when you use it as a personal archive but it is harder to share with a group of people.

"I like to use A6 paper notebooks which fit into my pants' back pockets."

Rodrigo dos Reis - Consumer Trends Specialist at Zeitgeist

» Dossiers
You can file your trend spots in an analogue way by creating trend dossiers, where you file cut outs of articles, visuals and your own personal paper notes. This type of archiving can be used within a team too, but is not accessible from other locations easily.

"I always mark words, sentences and quotes in newspapers, cut them out and archive them. I have rows of dossiers in my study divided into specific sectors and mentality groups."

Carl Rohde - Culture Sociologist and founder of Science of the Time

» Evidence wall
It can be handy to collect all trend spots on a wall to create a visual overview. To observe all information within a confined space helps you to select and cluster. You can create a wall at home or at the office, where it also serves as a reminder for others to stick their spots on the wall. The disadvantages being that is has no search function and you cannot take it with you easily.

"It was really great to be able to put down everything I spotted on a surface. Using a wall creates an overview and I like that you can really hold your spots and move things around."

Fleur Stiels - Concept Developer at Dutch Rose Media and former Fontys ILS student

» Digital folders
You can create digital folders on your personal computer or in the cloud to make them even more accessible, also to others. This way of filing requires you to think of ways of naming your files and folders in a logical way.

"When I read interesting things I copy-paste these texts into a word file on my laptop, because next to having a digital version, I like to be able to print it out and have something tangible in my hands."

Niels van der Burg - Global Category Insights Manager at Asics

"I take a lot of photos and videos. I place them in project based folders on my laptop."

Rodrigo dos Reis - Consumer Trends Specialist at Zeitgeist

» Company databases
Some organisations have created their own databases that allow employees to access it anytime to stay updated on anything added and add their own spots too.

» External platforms
If you do not have the budget to buy a personalised database system you can use an online external platform which can be subscription based or free of charge. You can assign people to access this platform or keep your folders private. Most of these systems are accessible from any device.

"We have a subscription to Evernote and create folders with a chronological numbered system where we archive all signals. We tag them in categories like feminism or sports."

Hannah Lincoln - Culture Research Manager at China Youthology

To find out what works best for you, experiment with the different kinds of filing systems and combinations. Remember that the aim of filing is to retrieve information as quickly as you can, do not get caught in a web of complex archives.

PIECING THE PUZZLE

Analysis is about comparing your spots and noticing differences and similarities that point towards certain patterns. The aim of a trend analysis is to have a better understanding of what is going on in society right now and how this might impact the future. During analysis you establish links and find relationships between manifestations that at first sight might feel unrelated.

> *"To me analysing trends is about deleting and adding data, combining information and looking for an overlap."*
>
> Niels van der Burg - Global Category Insights Manager at Asics

Analysis is about finding meaning that goes beyond the surface of your trend spots, so go beyond features and finishes to find the deeper meaning. For trend researchers a new technology or style per se is not the most interesting, but the meaning behind it is. Key in analysis is that you ask 'why' all the time. Why do people want to use, buy or show a certain innovation? What does it add to their quality of life? Which values does it link to and which needs does it meet?

> *"It is like the work of an archaeologist. You find a small piece, like one bone, and then you have to imagine what the whole dinosaur would have looked like. The same goes for trend analysis."*
>
> Zuzanna Skalska - Founding Partner of 360Inspiration

Analysing your trend findings is a subjective activity as is all analysis of information gathered via a qualitative approach. When analysing trends you have to get comfortable with ambiguity. To lower subjectivity and to challenge your own thoughts it is key to discuss your analysis with others. Make it a team activity, have conversations and debates to question your own interpretations. This cross-reference of findings can be done in all kinds of ways, from just an informal chat with friends and family to structured ways of exchanging views with fellow team members, experts or your clients.

> *"Analysing really is a collaborative effort. At our agency we get together once in a while to share and analyse findings. I also analyse together with my students in coolhunting and their lecturers. And last but not least, I also analyse my findings with my commercial clients via brainstorming sessions."*
>
> Carl Rohde - Culture Sociologist and founder of Science of the Time

ANALYSE STEPS

Most people who analyse trends for the first time feel a bit uneasy about where to start. It helps to set up your analysis in a structured manner to stay in control of the process. This also makes it easier to explain to others what you have been doing and communicate about your analysis in a transparent way. To help you get started, the analysing process is divided into three steps: Cluster, Validate and Label. On the following pages you will dive into every step and understand how to use these steps to create your first trend overview.
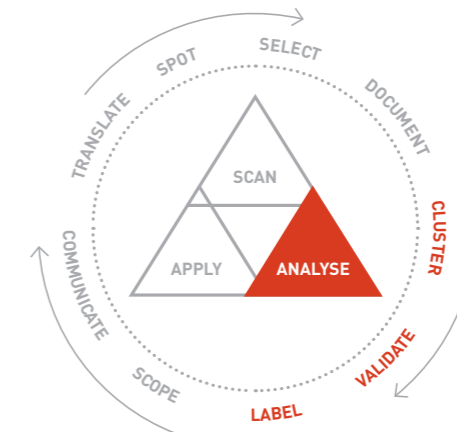
STEP 1: CLUSTER

Analysing starts with using the output of the scan phase and clustering your trend spots. When you look at these spots, which of these seem to address the same underlying values and needs? Can you find common themes running through them? In this section you will be updated on how to cluster your trend spots.

STEP 2: VALIDATE

Dig deeper into your trend clusters and develop a coherent, thorough and inspiring trend storyline per cluster. You zoom in on every cluster and try to underpin why this specific change is happening right now, how it has emerged and how it might evolve. This segment will show you which questions to ask yourself to drill down your trend clusters.

STEP 3: LABEL

During this final step of the analysis phase you will capture each detailed, validated trend in a single name with accompanying key visuals that represent the trend in an inspiring and meaningful way. In this part you will read about various ways of labelling and visualising trends.

STEP 2: COMMUNICATE

Based on the scope you can now decide on how to communicate your trends in a way that fits your client's challenge. This means adapting your general trend overview to the project at hand and create a relevant storyline and tailor-made deliverables. The role of the trend researcher involves being a curator during this step of the process. You will decide on how to build a narrative so your client understands the risks and opportunities the trends provide for their challenge.

"In these times of overload it is not the problem for my clients to find information but to select the most relevant information."

Ksenia Penkina Lery - CEO of Trendsquire

In the end the goal is to help your client find an answer to their question and your trend communication should always serve this purpose. By presenting trend insights in a made-to-measure way the core of the trend stories should help others to decide which direction to take or to avoid. Impactful communication makes your trends more meaningful to and actionable for others. During your trend briefing you have picked up on things, such as the client's internal culture, their trend sensitivity and other factors shaping your clients daily work processes. Now it is your turn to see in which ways you can surprise, challenge or reassure your client.

"If you want your trends to resonate with me it has to have a structured storyline and tell me about the impact a trend has and what it means for our brand."

Nadines Guhlich - Audience Research Lead at Soundcloud

COMMUNICATION APPROACH

Think about the way to approach your trend communication. For instance when a client's culture is very open and non-hierarchical you can be more daring and provocative in your tone of voice and type of deliverables. When it is the other way around, it is best to provide clients with a more reassuring perspective and show lots of proof that a trend is already happening. When a client has a high trend sensitivity you will have to find a way to surprise them, for example by carefully selecting examples of a trend that go beyond the sources they would normally use. When, on the other hand, a client has a low trend sensitivity you would have to explain more about your research process and show concrete and practical examples within their industry. This often means that your trend communication is a balancing act between being inspiring and bringing a fresh perspective versus making things relevant and actionable for a specific challenge. How to find the right balance? You can use the checklist on trend communication to help you think about your communication approach.
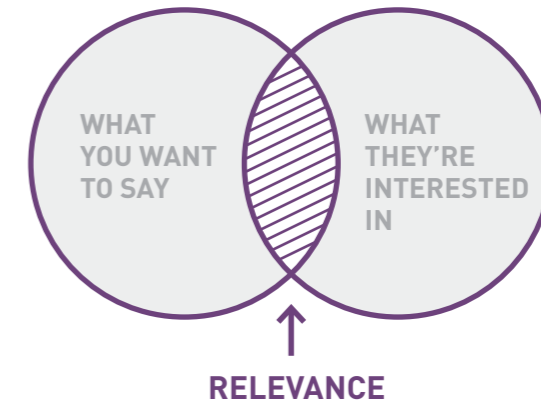
The sweetspot of trend communication.

TREND COMMUNICATION CHECKLIST

- » Scope
- » Audience
- » Level of interaction
- » Tone of voice
- » Form

» **Scope**
Do not forget the scope of a project. What is the main question and how can your style of communication help in answering it for your client? Try to keep this in the back of your mind.

» **Audience**
Who will you be communicating with? Who are you going to speak to, either live or via text, video or other means of communication? What are their interests and what do they need to take from your research?

» **Level of interaction**
Looking at the type of client and the audience, would you like to have a low level of interaction and use a send-receiver approach or does a more active and engaging approach fit your client better?

» **Tone of voice**
Is your client more on the emotional side or the rational side of the spectrum? Think of the implications for your storytelling style. Would you use a formal versus informal approach, visuals versus graphs and symbolic expressions versus concrete wordings?

TRENDS & SOUNDCLOUD

Nadines Guhlich - Audience Research Lead at Soundcloud

"Trend insights always need to be translated into something, in my case to different markets, to Soundcloud users or to new product features. I must go beyond just delivering trend slides and translate these into what it would mean for our industry and base business questions on it like: do we need to change something in our product? You can translate trends into new product features, but there is no recipe for when a trend is ready to be translated into a product. The right momentum is something that involves all kinds of other factors besides just your brand. For the music streaming business it was very convenient when 3G mobile data plans made it affordable for teenagers to stream on the go all the time, but this was something we at Soundcloud did not control ourselves at that time.

My goal is to have my colleagues own the trend insights themselves. When they live and breathe the trends they can work with them and make the right decisions. I am always asking myself: who is my target audience within the company and what kind of decisions do they have to make? When teams within Soundcloud are making their product road maps or overall strategy plans, I have to be a part of the process and check if they understand the trends they are working with. That's why I like to have meetings and workshops with small groups so people feel more comfortable to ask questions. It's a balance between being accessible and having open conversations and on the other hand people valuing my expertise and future visions.

Bigger companies have the budget to experiment in innovation projects, think of the Google spin offs. Although they might not act on it immediately, it makes them better prepared for the future. When you're a smaller company, like Soundcloud, it's much more difficult to respond to these changes because it's more of a risk for us to innovate in an early stage."

THE FINISH LINE?

You have now arrived at the end of the three phased cycle of trend research and went from scanning and analysing to applying trends. Innovation is a fuzzy, dynamic, chaotic and iterative process. The earlier mentioned translation tools can help you in defining building blocks for your innovation process, but always try to stay flexible and adapt to the circumstances. It also means that there is not a hundred percent guarantee that using trends will lead you to a ground-breaking idea. This sometimes makes it hard to explain the added value of trends to others because trend insights are only one factor in the innovation process. In retrospect it is hard to pinpoint what the starting point of an innovation was, there is often not just one leading insight, there are always other factors playing out too.

"There is no good or bad concept, but rather a good or bad concepting process. A concept can fail for a lot of reasons, being consistent and iterative in the choices you make during a concepting process can help in avoiding failure."

Jakob Sutmuller - Senior Lecturer Concepting & Business Innovation at Fontys ILS

X SUMMARY

» The apply phase is about putting your trends to use to create value.

» In this phase trends are prepared to be integrated during an innovation process.

» Applying trends can be done in a structured three step way: scope, communicate, translate.

SCOPE
» Setting a scope helps you in understanding a client's challenge and perspective.

» To define a scope setting up an in-depth briefing is a must.

COMMUNICATE
» Based on the scope you communicate your trend insights in a tailor-made way.

» You choose a communication approach and the type of trend deliverables that fit your client's challenge.

TRANSLATE
» To translate trends into innovative ideas a valuefit and concept statement serve as a foundation.

» A translation workshop is a suitable way to move from insights to innovative ideas.

» By diverging and converging in the creative process you can select ideas to develop further.

#6

FOR WARD

THE FUTURE UNFOLDS

What does the future of researching the future hold? This chapter looks forward and showcases visions of trend professionals on the development of their own profession. It concludes with these experts helping you move forward too by sharing their essential advice on how to research trends.