



**Understanding Aesthetic Preference:  
Approaches Toward Improved Product Development**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Every garment has a visual presence and every garment provides physical qualities in relationship with the body. In the design process, both functional and aesthetic attributes contribute to the overall success of the complete apparel system for the consumer. New developments in technology and materials have generated interesting applications toward this goal through functional design research. Research on aesthetic preference – consumer visual response and desire- is also taking advantage of these opportunities. This paper highlights the possibilities and the roadblocks present in exploring aesthetic issues, in combination with other factors in the design process. Several examples are provided of design research on aesthetic preference and new possibilities are suggested that take advantage of emerging technology directions.*

*Keywords: aesthetic preference, visual style, appearance, design process*

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**Introduction**

At the core of any design concept for a garment, series of garments, or appearance style is a relationship between aesthetics and function. The designer’s intent may be focused on one or the other at any given time, however both qualities are present in the finished product. At even the most basic level, every garment has a visual presence and every garment provides physical qualities, regardless of intent.

The functional elements in a design concept for a garment are determined by careful analysis of the situation in which the garment will be worn, along with the physical requirements of the body, whether it is to stay warm, move more easily, enhance systems, etc. Technical designers often form teams with researchers to focus

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on creating the best solutions. The attention to aesthetics in the design process, however, is often left to the designer’s artistic sense alone. Visual training in the application of design elements and principles along with a personal artistic vision are relied on when aesthetic design decisions are made. To assist the designer, the merchandiser provides information based on data describing what has sold well in the recent past. Many also rely on trend services for direction.

Often functional and aesthetic dimensions are given separate focus, yet consumers are increasingly demanding attention to both. Gone are the days when high-tech skiwear is only available in blue, red or grey. And even the most stunning gown must fit perfectly and move fluidly as with the wearer’s breath. Today’s design