

FASHION, FUNCTION, STRATEGY AND ECOLOGY

Possibilities and Limits of the Application of Function Orientation for Ecological Clothing

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Presentation of the Problem

The research assumes that the realisation of ecological mass textiles is increased by considering the multiple functions of clothing in the ecological optimisation of products. The conceptual basis is provided by function orientation, originally developed for corporate policy. The concept has been discussed since the mid 90's in environmental management. The further developments and practical applications focus on the question, how the functions of conventional products could be realised with new products and services (or combinations of both) using less material and energy input.

The more complex, varied and intransparent functions of products, the more difficulties arise in finding alternative products or services that satisfy exactly the same (potential) functions. For clothing these problems are even more significant due to the importance of fashion and trends. Moreover, the advantages and functions of apparel are determined by the specific contexts of application within different social backgrounds. For clothing, as well as for other products, the functions are not objective and therefore equally relevant for all users, but they are defined subjectively and perceived differently.

Nevertheless, the idea of function orientation is relevant for (eco-)textiles, yet in a different perspective. Even though not intended, ecologically oriented changes in products and production have implications on the functions and features of clothes. The analysis of the bundle of functions and their perception by producers, commerce and consumer groups is an important prerequisite for a successful marketing of product changes and innovations (even if the product is not completely substituted by another one or a service).

Objectives and methods

The question is which functions and functional changes are perceived and assessed by the customer and how this can be actively influenced by firms. Different instruments and methods such as cognitive mapping or quality function deployment are tested concerning their applicability.

On the conceptual level the ideas of function orientation will be extended beyond strategic management. Considering developments towards “event economy” and due to the influence of fashion in clothing, the results of the research are interesting for other fields. In the near future, even now timeless and fashion-independent or resistant products, e.g. refrigerators, will be subject to fashion influences. To ignore this trend in ecological optimisation would jeopardize the market success of ecological products.