People, Culture, and Society

What you need to know:

- Understand how technology push and market pull affect consumer choice and employment
- Understand changes in job roles due to the emergence of new ways of working
- Be aware of changes in fashion and trends and how they affect designers and manufacturers
- Understand how new products can have both a positive and negative impact on society

People and Culture

Understanding the market place and the people who will buy and use new products and technologies is important for all designers and manufacturers. When launching a product designers and manufacturers need to consider many different factors. This is because people across the world can have very different needs and tastes. Products selling well in one country can become a complete failure in another.

Culture is the combination of ideas, beliefs, customs and social behaviours of a society or group of people. This can be shown through rituals, fashion and art. Designers need to be aware of the society around them and the cultures within it.

Some parts of the world are still dominated by a single culture, designing in these cultures can be seen as easier as there is less diversity and the majority of the population have similar lifestyles. A negative for manufacturers is that they may require a more limited range of products. In the UK and especially in large cities there is a wide range and mix of cultures—selling a product in this market could be challenging as many more factors need to be considered.

The product design market can quite often be influenced by the 'latest thing'. Consumers want to be part of a group, to fit in, or to buy into a lifestyle. Designers and manufacturers buy into peoples insecurities and design and make products that people feel they 'must-have'. Fashion is a great example—the latest designs are only meant to last a season before they are outdated or people have moved on to the next new thing.

Designs influenced by a fashion trend are common… Marketing a product to the correct audience is the key. The font used in an advert could be chosen to give the impression of an expensive product, or a rival company could use a font to imitate a brand leader.

Products can fail for many reasons, one of the easiest mistakes to make is the use of a brand name that means something else in a different language, or using a brand name that when turned into a web address creates a new word with different meaning. This is why market testing is vital!

The £5 note was replaced recently. The new polymer Bank of England £5 note contains tallow— this is an animal fat-based substance. Hindu, Sikh and some other faith based communities often choose to follow a vegetarian diet as part of their culture and beliefs, as well as not easting meat some will also choose to avoid using animal products in their every day lives as well. This is also the case for some vegetarians and vegans. Why could the new £5 note cause issues?

Key Questions:

- List 3 products that would sell well in one country but not in another. Give reasons for your answers.
- Explain what the positive and negative factors of a global market place are for the manufacturer.
- Explain what the positive and negative factors of a global market place are for the consumer.
- How can a company keep up to date with the latest trends in their sector?
- What is market testing?
- Why is market testing important?
- Why would being first to market a new product give a company a competitive advantage?
- How could market push affect the development of smartphones in the future?
- Explain the advantages and disadvantages of crowd funding.
- Why might a company choose robots over humans?
- Evaluate how research and development contribute to new technologies or products being developed.

Society

Most societies are trying to become more inclusive and cater for the needs of the disabled and elderly. New technologies have enabled designers and manufacturers to create products such as tools and household gadgets, building access, and transportation methods that will drastically improve the lives of disabled and elderly people. A designer should consider inclusive design when developing any product– the more people a product will appeal to the more popular it will be. Designers need to be aware of who could be excluded from a product and consider any modifications which could make it more accessible.

Modern technologies play an important role, for example, the use of carbon fibre has allowed disabled people to take part in activities previously not open to them e.g. sports—equipment for Paralympians is at the cutting edge.

Key words: (Find out what these mean!)

Manufacturer
Consumer
Culture
Marketing
Technology Pull/Market Push
Inclusive Design

PUSH

Designers, engineers and technologists often use new technological discoveries in the development of new products. Often there is no consumer awareness or demand for the product. This is called *technology push*. Current thinking is driven forward and new, exciting developments are created. Research and Development (R&D) departments in large companies ensure new and exciting products can be created. New products need to be developed so that a company is able to be first to the market and therefore keep their market share… rather than consumers going to the competitor because they got there first!

Without R&D many products would never have made it to market.

PULL

Market pull is when consumer demand is the driving force behind the development of a new product. If a designer can analyse the consumer market to understand the needs and desires, a 'gap in the market' can be filled. Market pull puts pressure of companies to update and improve their product. They can then keep their share of the market through brand loyalty AND with new products also attract new customers.

Smartphones are a great example of market pull leading to development of a product e.g. combination of features, improved battery, miniaturisation of electronic components.

Digital Development

New technologies are being developed faster than ever before. The growth in digital and social media has begun to impact the sustainability of traditional job roles. Automation is leading to a decreased need for manual labour and therefore a change in job roles and working conditions is inevitable. The human workforce needs to and will up-skill—the jobs people train for will be of a higher value. The workforce will need to be flexible and workers of the not so distant future will be performing tasks that do not exist today. The way we work will be driven by technological change and advances.

The population is ageing. As advances in medical care, and other factors now lead to people living longer than ever before, the design of new products using new technologies to meet these needs is increasingly important. Not everyone who lives longer will be as strong or as healthy as the younger generations. Products that address specific difficulties or offer a better quality of life will find a growing market.