

Iris+Olivia: Tech Accessory Accessories for the 'Wired' Woman

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DRAFT

1. Abstract

Iris+Olivia is a fully-developed prototype for a brand of technologically-minded jewelry—a collection of “tech accessory accessories” geared towards today’s increasingly technologically connected woman. The brand depicts the jewelry lines of two extreme characters: Iris and Olivia, whose names are derived from the fundamental input/output (I/O) relationship that drives all technology. Each piece is designed to seamlessly incorporate a crucial but often overlooked piece of technology into its structure and functionality, making use of items such as flash drives, phone chargers, data transfer cables and headphones in ways that don’t just conceal the technology but actually depend on its form for structural integrity. High standards of craftsmanship were upheld in the creation of each piece in order to fully demonstrate the validity and desirability of such a jewelry line in the everyday life of today’s tech-savvy woman, resulting in a full collection of pieces that are as functional as they are aesthetically beautiful.

2. Concept

Iris+Olivia is a fully-developed prototype for a brand of technologically-minded jewelry—a collection of “tech accessory accessories” geared towards today’s increasingly technologically connected woman. As we welcome more electronics into our daily lives, we continue to weave an increasingly intricate web of social and technical interactions, requiring the seamless coordination of people, servers, technologies, and elements as fundamental as charged batteries for us to function at a top level. Dependence on mobile technology in particular has been increasing rapidly over the past eight years. In 2003, less than five percent of households in the U.S. forwent traditional landline telephone service in favor of wireless-only communications—that number has since catapulted, hitting 13.6 percent in 2007 and doubling again to 26.6 percent by the middle of 2010 [1]. We have also seen a massive shift in the way data is transmitted and stored—floppy disks and CD-ROMs have been replaced with pocket-sized portable hard drives, penny-sized USB flash drives, the micro-SD memory cards in our cell phones, and “the cloud”. With such a massive shift to pervasive and mobile computing taking place, it is no longer sufficient to have all your supplies waiting for you at your desk, they need to be on your person. Flash drives now come on keychains and lanyards, hard drives are sold with carrying cases to facilitate travel. But all of these tech accessories have converged under the same style paradigm—a minimalist aesthetic dominated by sleek lines, curved edges and neoprene cases. There are certainly good-looking tech accessories, but they are exactly that—tech accessories. Even successful attempts to integrate technology, such as IBM’s Wearable Technology for Everyday Life series in 2001, remain overly sleek, resisting more ornate existing styles [2]. In short, no one to date has successfully taken these tech accessories and integrated them seamlessly with the personal fashion accessories that we already wear on a daily basis; these two spheres—the digital and the personal—remain conspicuously separate in their aesthetic and functionality. Iris+Olivia is an attempt to bridge that gap in order to change how we interact with technology, by allowing the small accessories that facilitate its use—flash drives, data transfer and charger cables, headphones and other similar technological lifelines—to become part of our self-expression and personal identity, not just part of our digital identity.

3. Motivation

This collection was inspired by a long-held and deeply-rooted curiosity about the interplay between technology and the ways in which a person defines and perceives their own identity. There are certainly people who identify with the minimal, often-futuristic styling of tech accessories, but as the number of people dependent on these devices increases, the percentage of people in this group continues to decline. There are countless people who find themselves utterly dependent on tech accessories but who prefer a much different aesthetic, who are consequently forced to compromise their desire for self-expression in order to benefit fully from these gadgets. Being part of this group of people, I have always looked for interesting ways to incorporate my digital “lifelines”

into my personal style through customization and embellishment. With Iris+Olivia, I propose a set of solutions for this dilemma, that incorporate tech accessories into fashion jewelry in ways that not only retain their full functionality, but which take advantage of their existing affordances as integral components of both the form and function of the final piece.

4. Technological Functionality

Each piece in the Iris+Olivia Collection utilizes one or more pieces of existing technology in its design and construction, resulting in a piece of jewelry that operates as both fashion accessory and electronic accessory. Several bracelets use the male and female connection mechanism of a USB flash drive as its functional clasp, which allows the wearer to have their data storage on them at all times while also expressing their personal style [Figure 1]. A further iteration of this concept uses the same small USB flash drives as connections between links of a customizable-length charm bracelet, allowing many options for wearability as well as the capacity to exchange links with friends. This modularity is particularly interesting conceptually in the way that it elicits a new, updated interaction to occur between friends—it melds together the existing tradition of making mix tapes or CDs for friends and trading fashion items to create a unique hybrid experience [Figure 2].

Moving away from the flash storage pieces, the collection also features two sets of headphones (one with microphone functionality and one without) that are decorated with beading and chains respectively. Through embellishment and unique clasp placement, each piece is transformed into both a necklace and a fully functional headset [Figure 3]. Another piece that is more dramatic in style but subtler in function includes a bib necklace, decorated on the front with ornately arranged silk rosettes and backed with microfiber cloth to allow on-the-go cleaning of laptop screens, smart phone screens, and glasses [Figure 4].

And finally, two more intricately-constructed necklaces feature fully-integrated data transfer and charging cables into their structure—one that allows the wearer to sync or charge their iPhone via wall outlet as needed [Figure 5], and the other that offers charging and data transfer compatibilities with any device that uses one of its three included adapter tips. (The necklace currently features an iPhone adapter, mini-USB, and micro-USB adapter in addition to the USB extension cable from which they hang around the wearer's neck; these adapter tips are interchangeable, however, and could be further customized to meet the wearer's digital needs [Figure 6].)

5. Execution

Each piece was constructed using simple tools and existing parts, to varying levels of customization. Only one piece was assembled from a fully pre-existing bracelet and flash drive; the others incorporated pieces of chain and fashion trimming that were hand-stitched, woven, beaded or affixed to create custom designs. The construction of each piece was followed through to a high level of polish, giving the collection the feel of a body of truly finished products. In addition, mock-ups of propose web pages were created for the home page and detail pages for each piece, describing the unique description, form, incorporated technology and instructions for use of each one.

By focusing intensely on the the craftsmanship and identity of the Iris+Olivia brand of tech accessory accessories, I have put forth a comprehensive attempt to address the needs of the growing number of women that would benefit from having their tech accessories on their person without having to carry additional items. In doing so, I have shown that the net result is not only plausible but desirable in both form and function. The aesthetic achieved by combining pieces of technology with distinct fashion styles adds a subtle layer of depth to each piece, providing both visual interest and high functionality.

6. References

1. Blumberg SJ, Luke JV. Wireless substitution: Early release of estimates from the National Health Interview Survey, January–June 2010. National Center for Health Statistics. December 2010. Available from: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nhis.htm>.
2. Miner, Cameron S, Denise M. Chan and Christopher Campbell. Digital jewelry: wearable technology for everyday life. Proceeding, CHI '01 extended abstracts on Human factors in computing systems. ACM, 2001.

7. Appendix of Images

Figure 1.

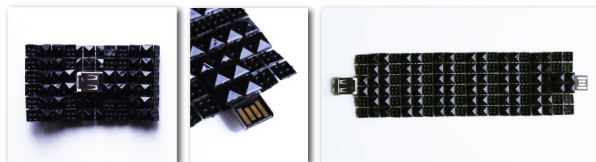
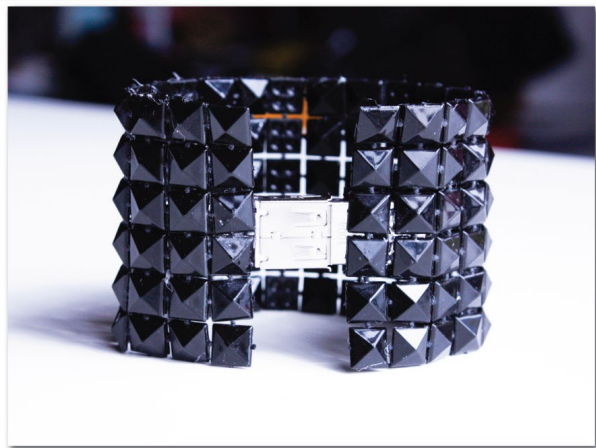
RED GROSGRAIN RIBBON
USB Flash Drive Bracelet



RAINBOW RIBBON CABLE
USB Flash Drive Bracelet



BLACK STUDED
USB Flash Drive Bracelet



BLACK LEATHER STUDED
USB Flash Drive Bracelet



Figure 2.

BRASS CHAIN
Thumb Drive Charm Bracelet



Figure 3.

METAL CHAIN HANDS-FREE
Headphones+Mic Necklace



BEADED
Headphone Necklace



Figure 4.

Microfiber Bib Necklace



Figure 5.

SILK + BEADED iPhone-Charging Necklace



Figure 6.

ALL-IN-ONE BRASS CHAIN
USB Adapter Necklace

