An Inter-Disciplinary Approach to Styling Apparel for Social Media Content & Marketing Media

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In our daily social media experiences, visual content is curated and refined for the viewing public. As a pedagogical practice, academics are unsure of how to approach curriculum that prepares students for social media careers (Fratti, 2013). Styling, a career once thought only applicable to traditional print media and celebrity or affluent clientele; is now a widely accessible venture due to social media’s endless potential for image and video content. In order to stay relevant in the ever-shifting technological giant of social media- a new inter-disciplinary approach to pedagogy in the course ‘Styling for Apparel’ was taken with impressive resulting content.

Social media, are “new communication technology tools (that) allow individual users and organizations to engage with, reach, persuade and target key audiences” (Freberg, 2016, p.773). This has dramatically changed the way that consumers receive information and interact with fashion companies. This new interchange venue is where traditional media outlets are displaying their content. Vogue, for example, is the second leading magazine brand on social media as of Sept 2019 with 47.5 million page likes/followers combined, Elle being 8th (Statista, 2019). These media outlets have seen a great shift occurring in their “reader-base” and have thus made a significant change to the way stories are delivered.

Social media is being used by brand marketers to further brand awareness, increase website traffic and better their brand perception in the mind of the customer. Businesses are seeing the immediate sales power that social media engagement can hold with their customers. Fashion businesses have also integrated purchasing for customers directly through social media outlets through instant shopping carts. (Statista, 2019)

Given the state of social media’s influence over consumer purchasing, it was decided to integrate this concept in a collaborative styling project, to thoughtfully craft a social media brand story. Two professors, one teaching apparel design & merchandising and one in commercial photography collaborated to execute an inter-disciplinary course between ‘Styling for Apparel’ students and those in ‘Videography 1’ and ‘Advanced Videography’. All content produced (including still photography and short video clips) was intended for the boutiques to later use on their social networking sites. The boutiques were also presented with printed look books of the best still photography to showcase in their shop.

Students were divided into groups or 3-4 students per group, with accompanying photographers (typically 2 or 3). They were also assigned boutique partners, and were required to sign a “rules and
regulations” agreement prior to the project start. All collaborating students were briefed about the project requirements in a collective meeting outside of the normal class time.

The styling students had their own specific project requirements, separate from the photography students that related to the job of a real-world stylist. Students were required to construct a design plan for their photoshoot to communicate with their photographers. A pull letter was required; a copy of which would be shared with the boutique owner to document the merchandise borrowed for the shoot day. A total of at least 5 ensembles were required to be styled and photographed. A cheat sheet was also required, to document all garments and their details borrowed for editorial credits to go in the printed lookbook. Due to limited resources for execution, the styling students were responsible for marshalling all necessary components of the shoot, including sourcing of talent and prepping hair & makeup. During the shoot, the styling students were able to experience the job of a stylist by posing of the talent.

The purpose of this approach was to give each student a meaningful real-world experience with styling. This subject is particularly relevant to the changing world of fashion and its social media influencers. The plan is to continue this collaboration in Fall 2020. Though there were a few complaints about scheduling conflicts, the students commented on how rewarding this project was for them.

Future iterations of this course will incorporate an emphasis on digital curation: “which is the process of gathering, organizing, filtering and categorizing products to create a coherent collection of content” (Bendoni, 2017, p.213). The styling students perhaps intuitively developed their content with these principles of digital curation, yet a focus on this concept will help direct the creative direction of the merchandise chosen for the stylized shoots and further enhance the boutiques brand image.

A couple of resulting images are represented below from the group who styled merchandise from Anna Banana’s Consignment Boutique, a shop with a large variety of apparel due to its resale nature. The short video that the groups created were also particularly captivating, which can be shared during a presentation. The Anna Banana’s video is available for viewing here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bv9tKYfuT1_TTF-jqDMrjcBWshHJih1Ya/view?usp=sharing
References

