

## Using Fashion Revolution's Who Made My Clothes Campaign to Introduce Cotton Supply Chain Transparency to Upper-Level Apparel Undergraduates

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The global cotton supply chain is one of the most complex supply chains. Stakeholders and consumers are demanding methods of measuring and reducing textile products' environmental impact and textile firms' social responsibility (Lindskog & Roth, 2011). Graduates entering the workplace need to know and understand the complexity of the global supply chain and how a fiber, like cotton, interacts within the complex supply chain to meet consumers' demanding needs. Today's professionals will be tasked with ensuring consumers' needs are met while mitigating the global apparel complex's environmental impact and demonstrating their social responsibility efforts. Therefore, the purpose of this project was to provide a practice-based experiential learning project for undergraduate students with an opportunity to explore and understand cotton sourcing and cotton supply chain transparency.

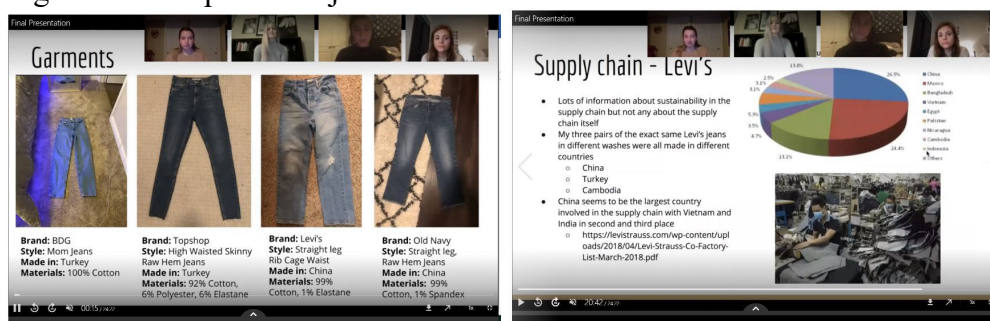
The goal of this was to provide tools and resources so students could gather data from key-cotton supply chain stakeholders to enhance their knowledge about the cotton supply chain and to understand the cotton industry and sustainability practices in different countries. Further, this project helped students select and apply the global supply chain framework to appreciate the complex interrelationships among supply chain partners and make recommendations for appropriate future sourcing plans for the case company to achieve its sustainability goals.

The experiential learning theory is used as a theoretical framework for this project (Kolb, Boyatzis, and Mainemelis, 2001). Experiential learning suggests learning by focusing on providing students with experiences while learning new knowledge. The integration of knowledge, activity, and reflection is the basis for the experiential learning process (Kolb). Through a practice-based research project, students learned by implementing the *Who Made My Clothes* (WMMC) project adapted from Fashion Revolution's WMMC campaign.

Students identified and researched a cotton garment, consisting of at least 80% cotton fiber, from their closet to research. They determined the brand's overall supply chain sustainability and transparency practices and analyzed how they impacted garment quality. Student's researched their garment in three stages 1) know your garment where students investigated the style, garment pieces, and label details of their selected garment to connect their garment to the garment workers along the supply chain, 2) know your brand where students used brand sources to identify how they discuss and narrate their sustainability and transparency practices, and 3) behind the curtains where students researched external sources to reconcile whether the sustainability and transparency practices stated by the brand are honest.

Data was presented in the form of reports submitted upon the completion of each stage. The project culminated with a final presentation that summarized all stages of the project demonstrated each brand's cotton supply chain and discussed the student's overall findings regarding sustainability and supply chain transparency. Finally, students were tasked with posting their research findings to the course Instagram page (@mizzou\_tam\_3200) to highlight their work and learn how to communicate research in a social media environment. Figure 1 shows a selection of slides from the final presentation of one group. The first image showcases their garment selection. Image 2 shows an example of a student's summary of a brand's transparency ratings.

Figure 1. Example of Project Outcomes



The project outcomes demonstrated that by combining supply chain transparency and sustainability knowledge into a project-focused experience, students were able to (a) explaining apparel supply chain and supply chain transparency, (b) identify and differentiate best practices related to quality standards and practices in the apparel industry, (c) summarize how a variety of apparel brands implement supply chain transparency and quality, (d) apply knowledge learned about supply chain transparency and apparel quality to decipher brand marketing toward a better understanding of actual practices, (e) propose changes apparel brands can make to become more transparent along either supply chain, and (f) anticipate the supply chain transparency of brands by using primary research sources.

Students were interviewed at the end of the semester to analyze experiences and understand how they applied the project learning outcomes. The interview data results suggested that overall, students gained a deeper understanding of the cotton supply chain, sustainability, and supply chain transparency. Natalie, a student, participating in the project, stated this about her experience with the project "I think it has defiantly brought more attention to the cotton aspect because it is mostly used in a lot of clothing I wear. We chose denim pants, and we all had 100% cotton, but the way they are made or the brands they are from the impact their quality. So, it was interesting to see that they could be from the same material but have completely different ways of being manufactured."

Research suggests that including experiential learning projects into coursework may enhance the student learning experience. Experiential learning allows students to move beyond the textbook and lecture and apply what they learn to a real-world problem. Future improvements to this project include expanding access to industry-specific data and industry experts to support the student's research into the cotton and garment supply chain practices.

#### References

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