



The Impact of a Short-Term Fashion Study Abroad Trip on Undergraduates' Cultural Intelligence and Career Perceptions as Future Global Fashion Change Agents

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According to Boorady, Hall, Ledbury, and Emerson (2016), short-term study abroad experiences provide students with a positive outlook on the fashion industry. This positive outlook towards a global industry may be due to students' increased comfortability to interact with diverse cultures, whereby enhancing their cultural intelligence. Cultural Intelligence (CQ) is the capability of an individual to be at ease and perform well within diverse cultural settings (Livermore, 2011). In particular, CQ enables individuals to adapt in diverse cultural circumstances through metacognition (i.e., thinking which promotes coping strategies), cognition (i.e., using knowledge of cultures), motivation (i.e., persistence), and behavior (Wood & St. Peters, 2014).

These CQ capabilities are shown to improve individuals' communication, networking, and leadership in diverse workplaces including globally (Livermore, 2011). Since CQ is the adaptability of an individual in a cultural context, it is important to investigate students' perceptions of their own abilities to be adaptable and display CQ as future global fashion change agents. In addition, CQ may also enhance students' career perceptions. In order to determine how a short-term fashion study abroad trip has impacted undergraduates, the following research questions are posed.

- RQ1: Does a fashion study abroad trip impact undergraduates' view of the fashion industry?
- RQ2: Does a fashion study abroad trip impact undergraduates' future career goals?
- RQ3: Does a fashion study abroad trip impact undergraduates' cultural intelligence?
- RQ4: How do undergraduates plan to use their cultural awareness in their future career?

A group of 15 undergraduate female students from a Southeastern United States University participated in a short-term, one-week study abroad trip. A week before the trip, students were sent an emailed link to an extra credit pre-trip survey asking them to write on how they thought the trip might impact their perceptions of the fashion industry, their career, and their cultural awareness. One week after the trip, students were sent another emailed link to an extra credit post-trip survey that asked students to reflect on if/how they felt the trip did impact them in the same areas addressed in the pre-test (e.g., cultural awareness, career, etc.).

According to the thematically coded qualitative data, undergraduates responded that the fashion study abroad trip would and did allow them to view the fashion industry with broader insight into careers. In particular, students commented on how they were exposed to costume

design, history of clothing, styling, tailoring, marketing, and trends for future career options. In responding to the impact of this trip on their future career goals, the students commented before and after the trip that they would discover their career path and potentially work overseas. These invaluable insights may not have occurred had these students not taken this trip. Furthermore, students also reported feeling inspired after the trip, which was an unpredicted result based on their previous pre-trip survey answers.

When responding about the trip's impact on their cultural awareness, students commonly reported in both the pre-trip and post-trip surveys that they would focus on cultural differences such as customs, foods, and manners. However, students mentioned only after returning from the trip that they had also observed cultural similarities. This distinction of creating cultural comparisons inclusive of cultural similarities, rather than only cultural differences, seems to be insightful knowledge about how students may use coping strategies of familiarity to off-set unfamiliarity in a culturally diverse setting. Therefore, focusing on similarities amongst diverse cultures allows one to find balance and coexist with another culture, while increasing CQ capabilities.

Finally, students responded that their cultural awareness from this trip will be used in their future careers by having better having interaction skills with others. In particular, they mentioned respecting others and their values. This communicates a desire to relate better with others from diverse cultures. Overall, these results convey that short-term fashion study abroad trips are helpful in building undergraduate's CQ by helping them to focus on cultural similarities while experiencing cultural differences. Additionally, students may have the opportunity to be exposed to more career options overseas, since the fashion industry is global. As such, students have the ability to have a better understanding of their field.

It is recommended for future studies that limitations be addressed such as limited sample size, non-longitudinal results to compare with other trips, location of the trip compared to other areas in the world, duration of the trip compared to long-term trips, and students' prior study abroad experiences. Implications for these results are the benefit they may bring to other global industries such as industrial design, interiors, or global studies. In conclusion, based upon the results of this study, it is recommended that undergraduates wishing to embark on a career in the fashion industry should try studying abroad to help them in pursuit of their future career.

References

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