

Incorporation of an Online Fashion News Publication into a Fashion Merchandising Course:

Perceived Benefits and Educational Impact

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Given the extensively global and rapidly changing nature of the fashion industry it is imperative that students are aware of current events in the field. Following current events can create media literacy, the ability to “find, identify and use news content” (Wright, Schemberger, & Price, 2016, p.232). This skill is especially important to develop during young adulthood, as habits developed during these years can become lifelong practices (Diddi & LaRose, 2006). Furthermore, following current events can help students understand how events in the fashion industry are connected to broader global events, which is essential to preparing them to be global citizens (LeHew & Meyer, 2005). Incorporating current events into the curriculum along with traditional sources can enhance students’ ability to connect course concepts to real world examples, analyze and evaluate news information, and critique social phenomenon by applying fashion theories (Park, Seo, & Lee 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this teaching strategy was to explore the perceived student benefits and educational impact of incorporating a real time online fashion news publication as required reading in a fashion merchandising class. More specifically, the objectives of the assignment were to develop students’ media literacy by having students locate news about the fashion industry, enhance students’ knowledge of the fashion industry and prepare them for careers in fashion.

The fashion news teaching strategy was implemented into a lecture-based fashion merchandising class at a large university in the southeastern United States. The class selected for the required readings was an upper level fashion merchandising class comprised of students with the class standing of juniors and seniors. The required readings were published by a prominent online fashion news publication and were accessed by the students through free student educational accounts. Students were assigned by the instructor to read the top stories published by the publication on the day before each class meeting. For example, students would read Monday’s top news for their Tuesday class. In order to assess if the students were completing the readings a discussion took place regarding the latest news in each class meeting. Fifteen minutes out of each 75 minute class session was allotted to discuss the readings. The discussion time was student led with a different student volunteering to take the leader role in each class and the instructor only acted as a moderator when needed.

During the last week of the semester students were asked to participate in an optional questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to solicit insights about their experience with the readings which included questions regarding benefits and impact on learning. The anonymous questionnaire was administered by a student volunteer and was comprised of ten yes or no questions with open-ended follow-up responses, as well as two open-ended questions. Seventy-two out of the 81 students enrolled in the class chose to participate in the questionnaire. Content analysis and descriptive statistic were used to analyze the data.

The majority (90%) of the students had not previously read online fashion news publications in a fashion merchandising course. All of the students except one responded that they would like to have fashion news publications incorporated into more of their fashion merchandising and apparel design classes. In response to an open-ended question regarding benefits of the readings and class discussion, the students indicated it provided benefits that traditional fashion related textbook readings did not. The emergent themes of the benefits included: up to date information, real world examples, and more relevant content than their traditional course materials. Only four students indicated disadvantages with the readings and discussion and each indicated a different reason. To learn more about the readings' impact on students' fashion industry knowledge, students were asked if they felt the readings improved their fashion vocabulary and awareness of fashion brands and designers. Seventy-seven percent of the students reported a perceived increase in their vocabulary and 65% reported an increased awareness of fashion brands and designers. In order to gain an understanding of the student perceived long term effects of incorporating the readings and discussions into the class curriculum student were asked if they felt more prepared for their future careers in the fashion industry after reading the fashion news publication over the semester. Ninety-two percent expressed that the readings and discussions had positively impacted their career readiness. Emergent themes from their responses included interview preparedness and increased industry knowledge. Students were additionally asked to disclose what they felt was the most valuable information gained from the readings and class discussions. Their answers revealed a variety of topics, although three prominent themes emerged: customer and business insight, the connection of fashion to political and world events, and importance of corporate social responsibility.

Based on the positive impact fashion merchandising students communicated that the reading had on their learning, the instructor plans to permanently integrate the use of online fashion news publications into the required reading for this course. The instructor aims to explore opportunities to incorporate fashion news into additional fashion merchandising classes, as well as apparel design courses. After some reflection on the implementation of this teaching strategy the instructor has decided to supply future classes with basic guidelines to ensure the class discussions stay on topic. Additionally, the instructor will assign all students a day to act as discussion leader instead of taking volunteers to provide all students with experience leading the class discussion.

### References

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