



From Food Trucks to Fashion Trucks:
An Exploration of the Fashion Truck Phenomenon Through The Eyes of the Entrepreneur

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Recently, the restaurant industry experienced a transformation with the advent of food trucks. The food truck model quickly became a phenomenon, and revolutionized the industry by becoming the fastest growing sector of the restaurant industry in 2011 (Weber, 2012). Taking a cue from the food truck craze, many entrepreneurs are applying the food truck model to the apparel retail market by showcasing and selling their merchandise through fashion trucks or mobile retailers (Feloni, 2014). This positioning allows the entrepreneurs to differentiate themselves from traditional brick and mortar stores, given current retail market saturation and slow spending growth in the apparel retail market (Kim, Jolly, & Kim, 2007). Similar to the food truck phenomenon, fashion trucks have quickly gained notoriety, and the trend has spread from a couple dozen within the country in 2011 to about 400 today (Baukhnecht, 2014). While the notion of mobile retailers has recently gained popularity, no academic study to date has assessed this trend, nor have the motivations of the fashion truck entrepreneurs been examined. Thus, the purpose of this study is to gain deeper understanding of the fashion truck/mobile retailer phenomenon from a retail entrepreneur perspective.

An exploratory study was conducted to address the lack of research concerning the fashion truck phenomenon. Using a qualitative research approach, primary data was collected by researchers via in-depth, structured interviews with six fashion truck entrepreneurs. Interviews lasted between forty to sixty minutes, were audio-taped with participants' consent, and transcribed verbatim. The following questions are a sampling of what participants were asked during the interviews: (a) *Could you share your journey/story of how you started your fashion truck business?* (b) *How would you describe your vision for your fashion truck?* (c) *How would you describe the image of your store and its merchandise?* (d) *What is your favorite part of owning a fashion truck?* Spiggle's (1994) suggestions for qualitative data analysis and interpretation were used to examine all data. The process began with the authors examining each individual transcript. Thereafter, researchers discussed and identified commonalities and differences that emerged from the data. Finally, the categories were compared and contrasted, and themes used to explain each category were clearly identified (Spiggle, 1994). Four broad themes were

identified from the interviews: (1) *Mobile is Social*, (2) *Personal Touch*, (3) *A Taste of the Unique*, and (4) *Passion Project*.

The first theme, *Mobile is Social*, points to the notion that fashion truck entrepreneurs are motivated by the desire to meet and connect with a wide variety of consumers. Thus, the mobile nature of these businesses provides for more accessibility to various communities. To this end, social media is an essential tool for fashion truck entrepreneurs, as it is used to assist them in marketing their offerings to stay constantly connected to their customer base. *Personal Touch*, the second theme, entails the idea that fashion truck entrepreneurs provide more intimate interactions with consumers compared to traditional retailers, including: private showings, personal styling sessions, and fashion truck hosted parties. The participants expressed further sentiments that this particular element of personal touch differentiated them from brick and mortar venues. The third theme, *A Taste of the Unique*, reflects the importance that fashion truck entrepreneurs place on being able to acquire unique, vintage, and artisan merchandise that consumers might not normally have access to. Along these lines, fashion truck entrepreneurs noted the fashion truck model itself allows them to merchandise their items in a novel way, which further sets them apart from traditional retailers. *Passion Project*, the final theme, makes reference to the enthusiasm the fashion truck entrepreneurs expressed about their mobile businesses. That is, they viewed their fashion trucks as extensions of themselves, and described it as their “creative outlet.” This is especially true since the majority of the fashion truck entrepreneurs interviewed worked full-time jobs, in addition to being entrepreneurs.

This study makes a meaningful contribution to the literature in that the fashion truck phenomenon has not been extensively assessed. Just as the food truck trend quickly gained popularity, there is evidence that the fashion truck trend has also begun to impact the traditional retail industry. Thus, gaining knowledge about the phenomenon from the entrepreneurs who operate in this unique space is needed. Indeed, this study helps to uncover motivations of the fashion truck entrepreneurs, and sheds light on unique offerings these fashion trucks bring to the marketplace.

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