



Using a Case Method to Teach Luxury Fashion Management

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Background: The world's luxury fashion industry surpassed €1 trillion in retail sales in 2015 with a healthy growth rate of 5 percent year-over-year (D'Arpizio, Levato, Zito, & Montgolfier, 2015). With this rapid development, the luxury industry brings excellent job opportunities for textile and apparel students who are interested in professions in the areas of fashion and luxury. Given the inimitable characteristics, creative leaps, tools, and processes necessary to work in the luxury industry, it is important to motivate students to bring their interests, curiosities, and abilities to class and to provide them the most relevant and practical ways to learn managerial and analytical skills. To achieve this goal, the luxury fashion management class is designed to address the unique properties, opportunities, and challenges of the international luxury industry and help students develop a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the global market for luxury goods and services.

The Case Method of Teaching: The case method of teaching was used in luxury fashion management class. This teaching method can provide students a variety of carefully chosen relevant cases in the luxury industry to give them an appreciation for grappling with real-life problems in different situations. Grasby et al. (2000) defined the term "case" as a written description of a situation actually faced by a manager that usually involves a decision to be made, a problem to be solved or an issue to be settled. The case method is used to encourage students to "learn by doing, rather than by listening" (Grasby et al., 2000). The students in the case-method environment interact with other students and the instructor and work toward a solution to the particular problem being addressed (Keeney, Hammond & Raiffa, 1999). It is a good way for a "would-be luxury professional" to construct an understanding of the luxury industry and develop the confidence and skills necessary for her/his future career.

Implementation: Case selection is the most critical step for case-method teaching. Six cases covering key topics were introduced to students in this class in a graduated order of complexity. They ranged from a luxury industry overview, talent management in the luxury industry, and expanding brand dominance in emerging markets, to luxury brand business models, growth of a new global luxury brand and luxury in the digital world. Several supplemental topics were also introduced, including business licensing, product development, counterfeiting, and sustainability in the luxury industry.

The case-method approach was introduced to students in the first class. One primer lecture was given to provide students basic concepts and terms associated with the luxury industry.

Deliberations on each case followed a similar pattern. First, students were asked to read the case and leave a meaningful and thoughtful comment on the canvas discussion board. The open forum allowed students to interact with each other. A simple lecture was given in class to provide necessary background and clarify key points in the case. Students participated in class discussions, expressed their views to others, and learned from other students and the instructor. Students were required to be discussion leaders in order to promote more thoughtful discussions. Assignments were given to further evaluate performance and outcomes. Additionally, a group project was developed to help students apply course content to the real world. Students were asked to develop global strategies for a certain product of a luxury brand (e.g., Hermès' Classic 90x90 Scarves, Christian Dior's Lady Dior Bag, Chanel's J12 watch, etc.) as a global marketing/retailing professional.

Evaluations: A series of open-ended questions were used to evaluate the learning outcomes. Course evaluations yielded an 84 percent response rate. Students were asked if the case-method teaching motivated their learning, enhanced their knowledge of the luxury industry, and helped them become better prepared for a future career. There was only one negative comment ("very hard to follow, but it eventually made sense for me"). Positive responses numbered 20 out of 21. Students said that they "enjoy reading cases much more than reading a text book," "case method is the best way for luxury marketing examples," and "out of all my fashion classes this is the only class that has done this and I truly have enjoyed it." One student wrote the cases "are packed with information that is necessary to understand when working in the apparel industry."

Future Plans: The case method is an effective way to help students understand real situations, enhance their learning, and sharpen their analytical skills. How to select and organize cases should be explored more in the future. Helping students prepare cases and get the most out of the case-method process is another area for further exploration. Due to the rapid changes in the luxury industry, it will be important to keep up with new trends when choosing cases to be studied.

References

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