PREPARING STUDENTS AS SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE GLOBAL CITIZENS:

INSIGHTS FROM THE FASHION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the global, environmental, and cultural impacts on the fashion industry and explores teaching strategies and methods that will to prepare our students to be socially responsible global citizens.

INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry is global business in nature. The comprehensive fashion business encompasses all of the activities of the textile-apparel complex as well as the functions of distribution, marketing, and retail operations to the end users/consumers (Dickerson, 2003). Traditionally, apparel manufacturing is labor intensive with companies historically competing on price. In today's highly competitive market however, the race is intense amongst companies to deliver low price products and meet consumer demands on quality and choice and at the same time maximize returns to shareholders. Each stage of the fashion pipeline reflects the relationship among environment, product, and people (Dickerson, 2003).

The fashion industry is perhaps one of the largest, most influential businesses in the world's cultural societies (Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, & Michelman, 2005). With the ability to

shape attitudes and social status, fashion has become a major social issue as it dictates the status, image and perceptions individuals have about themselves, others, and culture. Consumers' concern for the environment now influences what many individuals buy. The fashion industry has tremendous power to control what people see, feel, and think about themselves, the environments, and about the welfare of society; this power is even larger because of globalization and advances in communication and information technologies. Therefore, cultural and global influences as well as social responsibility exist at every stage of the global fashion industry, and it becomes increasingly important for fashion organizations to attempt to be proactively responsive to cultural, social, and environmental issues in order to ameliorate social concerns. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of cultural diversity, globalization and social responsibility on the global fashion industry. Furthermore, this paper offers several teaching strategies and methods that can be used to increase student understanding of the impact of cultural diversity, globalization, and social responsibility on the fashion industry and for preparing our students to be socially responsible global citizens.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF CULTURAL AWARENESS, GLOBALIZATION, AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY ON THE FASHION INDUSTRY

Culture can be viewed as the "collective programming of the mind" (Hofstede, 1984, p.389). Culture is a system that is learned and reflected in behavioral patterns characteristic of the members of a society; it is everything that people have, think, and do as members of their society (Ferraro, 2006). Spradley (1972) neatly summarized culture as "what people know, feel, think, make, and do." (p. 6) What people know and think are the mentifacts of a culture, which include ideas, ideals, values, knowledge, and ways of knowing. What people do are the

sociofacts of a culture, which are social behaviors or how people organize themselves in relation to one another. The things that people make are sometimes called the artifacts of culture. Artifacts include manufactured and handmade objects and materials (Spradley, 1972). Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, and Michelman (2005) maintain that a holistic approach should be used to understand dress from a cultural perspective and all aspects of a culture shape the meaning of dress and the choices people make when choosing forms of dress.

It is widely recognized that the theories and practices of business management are culture bound (Hope & Mühlemann, 2001). Culture is an important construct in the fashion business because culture has a profound influence on all aspects of behavior and impacts every aspect of fashion industry. For example culture impacts values, lifestyles and consumer intentions to purchase apparel/fashion products (Shen, Dickson, Lennon, Montalto, & Zhang, 2003), and culture influences a firm's quality management and performance (Naor, Goldstein, Linderman, & Schroeder, 2008), negotiations (Adair & Brett, 2005), advertising responses (Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999), choice of entry mode (Brouthers, 2002), establishment of marketing concepts (Nakata & Sivakumar, 2001), information search behavior (Doran, 2002), and perceptions about ethical behavior (Chung, Eichenseher, & Taniguchi, 2008).

Globalization trends in the fashion industry have served to raise public concerns over issues of raw material sourcing and tracking through the fashion supply channel. Most of the production activities of fashion products are done in developing countries, and there are considerable environmental concerns about how the production activities in these developing countries impact the future development of the regions and the whole world (Dickerson, 2003). In this context, the development and impact of outsourcing trends is a substantial concern, and

the industry needs to find a balance between outsourcing benefits and regional economic and environmental considerations (Dickerson, 2003).

Fashion industry professionals are very familiar with the increasing societal expectations regarding the use of textile components and materials throughout the world. In light of the societal views of responsible textile and apparel production and sourcing, and also a business climate that is experiencing increasing consolidation and globalization, it is not surprising that sustainability, which includes environmental, social, and economic sustainability, has become an increasingly relevant issue within the industry (Su, 2006). Social responsibility in the fashion industry has drawn increasing attention in the fashion industry due to the global fragmentation of production of apparel products, the highly competitive apparel marketplace (Dickson, Loker, & Eckman, 2009). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development defines corporate social responsibility as "the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community and social at large to improve their quality of life" (WBCSD, 2000, p.10).

In this study, we present a model (Figure 1, adapted from (Su, 2006)) that can address the relationship between globalization, cultural diversity, social responsibility and fashion industry. It promotes an understanding of the interdependence of major systems, such as the relationship between production and consumption of fashion products in the global environment, the need for long-term thinking/visioning, an understanding of the value of diversity in cultural, social, and economic and natural systems, and an understanding of the different approaches to sustainable solutions (legal, economic, managerial, scientific and technological, design, and educational).

Figure 1 A model of fashion industry

In today's global arena, cultural awareness and social responsibility is particularly important for fashion students who will be future fashion industry professionals (Dickson, Loker, & Eckman, 2009). Distributors, marketers, and buyers for fashion products are often located in industrialized countries, , but many of their suppliers are located in Asia and Latin America, and their best opportunities for growth and expansion are in developing areas such as Asia and Latin America (Dickerson, 2003). Thus, the cultural differences between a fashion product manufacturer and its distributors/retailers or between fashion suppliers and buyers not only play an important part in whether the relationship ever comes about, but also impact the long-term success of the relationships. Cultural differences may cause complexity and challenges in the global fashion business, for example, inefficient sourcing and supplier management, confusion in quality control and management, misunderstanding in communication and relationship management, and ineffectiveness collaboration. It is vital to note that every country, even every

region in a country, has different social structures, languages, nonverbal communication cues, religions, values, and attitudes. For firms, before working with overseas vendors, it is imperative to study these elements to gain a better understanding and appreciation of the people in that country. Those successful in doing business in another country not only research and gain an understanding of that culture; they also have empathy for the culture, even though they may not agree with or understand it fully.

TEACHING STRATEGIES AND METHODS

The interconnected issues of globalization, cultural diversity, and social responsibility require inclusive partnerships from different areas and from different organizations to create a global learning environment. Higher education has a special responsibility to provide new learning environment, generate the new knowledge needed, and train the leaders and educators of tomorrow, as well as communicate this knowledge to decision-makers and the public-at-large (Haigh, 2005). Globalization, culture awareness, and social responsibility reflected in this paper are three important themes of U.S. higher education (Hendershot & Sperandio, 2009). Recognizing the importance of the effects of culture and social responsibility on the global fashion industry, we presents a framework (Figure 2) that integrates globalization, cultural diversity, and social responsibility in every aspect of fashion merchandising. We have integrated several teaching strategies into our Fashion Merchandising curriculum which better prepare students for a global environment. Fashion Merchandising is an interdisciplinary area which combines the study of every aspect related to textile and clothing products including science, technology, arts, and business management. We believe our teaching efforts enhance students'

global business capabilities, raise awareness for worldwide cultures and social responsibility, and broaden the opportunity for success in their future careers.
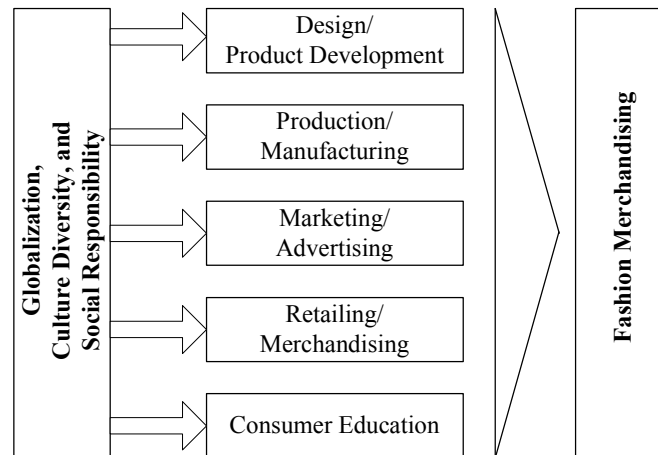

Figure 2 A framework of fashion merchandising integrating globalization, cultural diversity and social responsibility

To do this we first integrated the concepts of global and cultural awareness and social responsibility in most of our Fashion Merchandising classes. We have designed class contents and projects to help our students understand globalization, cultural diversity, and social responsibility issues in fashion industry. Below are two examples of our fashion merchandising courses.

Example-1: FSMR 281 Cultural Studies of Dress and Appearance was developed and is being taught as a Special Topics class in order to expose our Fashion Merchandising students to the importance and power that an individual's culture holds over what they wear, how they perceive beauty and physical attractiveness, and how they relate to another's cultural practices. Through this course student will be able to: 1) demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the interrelationships within and across cultures and global communities in relation to dress and

appearance; 2) recognize and apply accepted cultural theories and concepts as they relate to dress and appearance; 3) apply academic models for the classification of dress and appearance; 4) analyze and evaluate contemporary cultures' dress and appearance in relation to their traditional and ethnic origins; 5) reflect upon their own and others' cultural beliefs and practices in regards to the meanings of dress, adornment, beauty, and appropriateness in clothing, appearance, and fashion; 6) recognize and appreciate the characteristics of their own culture's dress and appearance practices as well as others; 7) utilize writing as a tool for documentation, reflection, and discovery.

To meet these course outcomes, student activities and projects include summary and reflection papers based upon textbook readings, a cultural self-evaluation paper, regular in-class activities, and a group term research project in which students research, report, and present a traditional culture's mentifacts, sociofacts, and artifacts in general as well as in regards to dress and appearance practices (Horn & Gurel, 1981). It is our hope that by self-reflection and exposure to the practices and beliefs of other cultures, our students will become more sensitive professionals in the global community of fashion. For example, for some in-class activities students are shown clips featuring a variety of traditional and contemporary world cultures and are then asked to list aspects of the culture shown that go against their own beliefs and practices. It is therefore very important that students become aware of their own ethnocentric responses (Eicher, Evenson, & Lutz, 2007) and determine why they think and feel that way in order to put their own and others' cultural practices into perspective. In this way, their own self-awareness may translate to a future understanding of the differences that can impact relationships in the workplace and beyond. Along the same lines, after students read assigned chapters, they are posed with questions designed to not only apply chapter concepts but also to reflect upon how

those concepts relate to their life experiences. This again is designed to situate their personal experiences in a much larger and complex world that goes beyond their immediate families, social groups, and educational environments.

Example #2: In one of our merchandising classes, "Global Issues in Textiles and Apparel" which is the study of the global textile and apparel industry with emphasis on the U.S textile complex and the U.S. market within an international context, we want our students to 1) recognize how broadly dispersed the textile and apparel industry are around the world and identify forces which affect domestic production, consumption, and distribution of textiles and apparel; 2) identify and analyze the policies, agreements, regulations, and organizations which impact the international trade of textiles and apparel; 3) analyze the impact of foreign trade on the U.S. textile and apparel industry, foreign relations, the economy, the retail institutions, and the consumer and 4) evaluate the current status of technology, research and development, and marketing, and promotion of the textile and apparel industry. Students are given a term project in which students need to select an American manufacturer that is currently exporting American-made apparel. They are encouraged to research trade and business publications, check business indexes (i.e. *Hoovers*) and use the Internet to gather information on their chosen transnational corporation. Once their "Case Study Company" has been chosen, they select just one of their most active foreign markets. This will be their "Target-market country" that they will research and profile in their report. We then ask students to find the firm's website and review the site for key data related to their international trade activities. They also need to look on their site for a copy of their most recent Annual Report–or request that one be sent to them. The students are also encouraged to contact their case study company and ask for articles, samples of foreign-

language packaging, collateral material (sell-sheets, catalogs, etc.) and advertisements (in the language of the targeted country).

Second, to broaden the horizon of IUP Fashion Merchandising student, we designed and offered cultural study tour for our faculty and students. We have organized three educational and cultural tours to Seoul, Korea and Beijing and Shanghai, China (two educational and cultural tours of Seoul, Korea, and a faculty study tour in China). The first study tour program was a Faculty-Led Study Tour Program to Korea for faculty only during Summer 2008. One Fashion Merchandising faculty member arranged the entire trip and made sure the faculty members in the tour could experience the Korean culture and see the fashion industry in Korea. During ten days they visited printing, dying, and apparel manufacturers; research institutes, an online shopping mall company, a velvet fabric manufacturer, sample rooms, apparel companies, and a sourcing market in Korea. They watched a Korean traditional performance and explored Korean culture. The same faculty member also arranged another trip for the Spring 2010 semester. The trip was open to faculty, students, and families. There were six students and three faculty members (two from the Human Development and Environmental Studies and the Assistant Dean from the College of Health and Human Services). This tour focused more on experiencing Korean culture including visits to many programs/workshops/presentations at the Korean Cultural District; a private tour of the Korean National Assembly Building (which are prohibited to the public); a visit to the Gyeongbokgung Palace; the National Palace Museum; the Korean Folk Museum; meals at traditional Korean restaurants and a river cruise. The tour members visited a Korean folk village, made Kimchi (a Korean traditional dish), wore Hanbok (Korean traditional dress), ate Korean traditional food, did embroidery, made knots, and stamped using Korean blocks. They also visited three different museums so students and faculty members could gain an

understanding of Korean culture. We also visited different markets and retail stores so faculty members and students could see the retail side of Korea.

In our faculty educational and cultural tour to China in the summer of 2010, we visited a Chinese university – Donghua University, Shanghai, China and had very productive discussions with their faculty members. Donghua University is a top comprehensive university which was originally specialized in textile, apparel, and fashion higher education. We toured the campus, visited the library, as well as the College of Textile and Clothing and the School of Business and Management. Our visit to Donghua University laid the foundation for our future international collaboration between the two universities. Tour members were excited to see and talk to ordinary Chinese people and understand real life in China. Besides our educational tour of Beijing and Shanghai, we also visited historic sightseeing places like The Great Wall, The Temple of Heaven, The Forbidden City and some of the most well preserved sites of old Beijing, and places that present the new look of Beijing like the Beijing's Olympic Park.

For the IUP Fashion Merchandising program, these efforts demonstrate an extension of international outreach into a region where our students and program have little experience and knowledge. The study tours allow important contributions to our teaching and research programs, providing both the depth and diversity of program content.

A golden opportunity to create a new generation of socially responsible global citizens is before us. The interdisciplinary perspective of apparel and textiles higher education could play a key role in enhancing students' global business capabilities, raise awareness for worldwide cultures and social responsibility. We believe our teaching efforts will generate the new knowledge needed, train the leaders and teachers of tomorrow, broaden the opportunity for

success in their future careers, as well as communicate t knowledge to decision-makers and the public-at-large.

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