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2018

Fashion Forecasting: Critical Thinking and Analyses for Trends

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Title: *A Fashion Paradox: Reflective Thinking for Fashion Forecasting*

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Contextualization of exercise or assignment:
With the competitive nature of the fashion industry, professors strive to prepare their students for successful career paths. It is important that an undergraduate curriculum be designed so that students' work reflects high standards and incorporates critical thinking skills. Critical thinking analyses are often difficult for students who are stressed, short-on-time, and may be utilizing the Internet as their primary source of information. An unprecedented study that followed several thousand undergraduates through four years of college found that large numbers didn't learn the critical thinking, complex reasoning and written communication skills that are widely assumed to be at the core of a college education (Rimer, 2011).

The best teaching practice shared is the application of John Dewey's *Reflection as a Meaning Process* (1933) in a Fashion Forecasting course. Dewey's ideas' concerning reflective thinking provide method to move students beyond rote memorization, a summation of information, or a simple rewording of author's ideas. Fashion Forecasting is an ideal context to develop reflective thinking as it requires students to think beyond a tangible time and predict future fashion in a systematic way based on environmental, social, and political criteria (Adomaitis, 2013).
Roger's (2002) treatment of Dewey's (1933) critical thinking and reflection ideas provides four criteria that were integrated with Brannon's (2010) steps in predicting fashion trends to produce a learning experience that developed students' critical thinking.

Roger's (2002) criteria	Brannon's steps in fashion forecasting	Adomaitis' (2013) mini lessons
1. Reflection is a meaning-like process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships and connections to other experiences and ideas. 2. Reflection is systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking with its roots in scientific inquiry. 3. Reflection needs to happen in a community; in interaction with others. 4. Reflection requires an attitude that values the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others.	1. Identify basic facts about past trends 2. Determine the causes of change in the past 3. Determine differences between past forecasts and actual behavior 4. Apply forecasting tools and techniques 5. Determine the factors likely to affect trends in the future 6. Follow the forecast and look for deviations 7. Revise forecast when necessary	1. Identify causal relationships between fashion and society. 2. Research historical continuity among fashion trends using forecasting jargon 3. Fashion in the global stage 4. Critical thinking and reflecting upon the forecast

Implementation of Exercise*:*

Students are assigned a two-year (short-term) forecast to make in a specific category (e.g., dresses, suits). Students begin the forecast by searching for current fashion trends at different levels of the market, such as high fashion or mass fashion. Students at this stage learn that fashion forecasting is a causal relationship between the specific style and the social realms of a society. Recognizing this relationship moves the student through the first two forecasting steps (i.e., Adomaitis' (2013) mini lesson 1 or Roger's step 1 and Brannon's step 1 and 2) as it is entails the identification of trends and their relationship to economic, social, political, and cultural events. For example, students recalled the dominating colors red, white, and blue evident in fashion during the Obama–Romney election campaign of 2012.

The second step in Adomaitis' (2013) outline coincides with Rogers' second step in critical thinking and Brannon's third and fifth steps in conducting a forecast. There is historical information about past trends and actual events that shape both fashion fads and flops. By searching fashion history, researching timelines of fashion change, and studying designer interpretations of fashion trends, students are guided through a step-by-step research approach about fashion and how to forecast fashion trends for upcoming seasons by identifying repeating waves, pendulum swings, and cycles that re-occur in fashion.

The third step in Adomaitis' (2013) mini lesson places fashion in a global context. Fashion is group behavior, a form of social copying (Stone, 2010). Thus, fashion exists in a social context. Students begin to think beyond their personal experience of fashion and reflect on how fashion is interpreted by different people, cultures, and regions of the world. By using Stylesight, students research urban street fashions in cities such as Tokyo, New York, England, and Milan.

The fourth step in Adomaitis' (2013) mini lesson fosters critical thinking and reflection on the forecast. Keeping a journal about fashion predictions and having students consider them twice a week is one way to indicate their personal skills of reflection and research and whether it be they are on track with the actual assignment of predicting fashion trends.

Appropriate courses and course level for this assignment:
   a. Introductory course in Fashion Forecasting, Trend Analysis, Product Development, Fashion Merchandising
   b. Level: Sophomore or junior level

Appropriate Size of Class*:*
Class size 25-40 students

Estimated Time Required:
A full semester as each section of the paper took approximately 15 weeks. Lecturing on the forecast topics so they coincide with the forecast assignment provided a context for each step of the forecast/critical thinking. Breaking the actual assignment down as mini assignments provides a scaffolding for the students can be time consuming yet it was worthwhile as students "got it." Each semester, having critical thinking as a guideline along with the fashion forecasting text, students of varied academic abilities were able to complete a forecast trend book. Students actually thought about how trends move and become accepted by the masses.

Required Materials:
Brannon, E. (2010*). Fashion forecasting: Second edition*. Fairchild Books, Inc.

Learning Outcomes:
1. Analyze the direction of the fashion change. Which way is the pendulum swinging? (e.g., more conservative or risqué)
2. Recognize the breadth and depth of the fashion forecasting process.
3. Illustrate the "diffusion of innovation" as a framework for understanding and predicting fashion change.
4. Compare and contrast the methodologies used for short term (2 year) and long term (5 year) forecasting.
5. Recognize color forecasting as a coordinating factor in the apparel supply chain from fiber producer to retailer.
6. Examine the methods for conducting consumer research for new fashion products and marketing initiatives.
7. Prepare a color, fiber, and merchandise forecast for a future season.
8. Students will use appropriate controlled vocabulary to navigate subject/discipline-specific databases, identify gaps in information gathered, and employ alternative search tools— including bibliographies and citations to find additional materials.

Guidelines for Instructor preparing / facilitating exercise:
Cautionary Advice: Start on the project within the first few weeks of class. Apply to forecasting homework in small mini lessons. Plan to work with the librarian for your research area and the Writing Center so students and appropriate staff are all included with project outcomes.

Copy of the Exercise/Assignment: **FASHION FORECASTING PROJECT**

TREND REPORTS

Part 1
Assume you are employed by a major fashion forecasting company (e.g., *Tobe Report*, *Fashion Scoops, or WGSN/Stylesight.* You are responsibility is to develop a fashion trend report for two years from now: Your forecast will be ***Fall/Winter of that year or Spring/Summer of that year.*** The trend report can focus on women's wear, menswear, or children. Once you select the category, choose five trend areas (e.g., color) to analyze for the report. The category must be one type of fashion product – day dresses, sunglasses, trench coats, shoes (pumps), etc…

Developing a Forecast
Identify the basic facts about each trend by using information from past forecasts.   Your research should include:

1. Research fashion trends in the category you selected. You will need to review information from Stylesight, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and Trade Publications such as *DNR* and *WWD.* Look at trends in several categories (e.g., apparel, footwear, coats, accessories). Is a trend new or repeating trend?
2. Explain the trend's appeal to the specific target market, for example: Junior market. You will be completing a VALS SURVEY. You will need to complete geographics, demographics, psychographics and behavioralistics.
   In the case of a new trend, what appears to be the cause of the trend? Are causes of change (new trend)? Look at past and look at current style information. What are the

changes? What are the cultural factors they may have caused change? (economy, war, royalty, death, rise of a celebrity). For example, a celebrity might appear at a public event wearing a style or it was a hit on a designer runway show).
3. Determine the differences in fabric, styling, color, fit and silhouette. This is big…you need to discuss the change from the past to the present (research is needed here).
4. Determine the factors likely to affect trends in the future.   Why will this trend change in the future? How will the trend in 2 years from now? What are the differences?
5. Apply forecasting techniques. (we will review in class). Make sure you apply forecasting terminology where???? (e.g., *pendulum swing, cycles, waves, innovators, etc….*)

You will research each trend using the above steps. Reading trade and consumer publications can accomplish this. Popular culture and fashion websites will also be helpful.   In addition, observation will be done by visiting stores to see how the trend is being merchandised. It will be important to observe how consumers are interpreting the trend. May want to have a camera ready to snap photos of street fashion???

Format
Each trend will have its own report in a book format. It will include the following:

- Current Trend Research
- Trend Report (5 pages: 1 for each trend forecast) - Write a descriptive page outlining the importance of the trend and the direction it is taking.
- Sketch of trend for 2 years from now. You can use outside assistance for this.
- Proposed colors for the season. (Use paint swatches, but create color names.)
- Proposed fabrications for the season. (Use fabric swatches.)
- Forecast Trend Book will be bound like a book……

The trend report should be at least five pages and typed using Times New Roman 12 point font. *APA is to be used for citations and the work cited page.* The typed trend story should be exciting. Create a name for the trend, (for example, Bohemian Chic) and use the name as a basis for telling the story. The following web site www.fashiontrendsetter.com is an excellent source that demonstrates how a trend story is written.   The proposed sketch and trend story should be on the same page. You could also consider doing a fold out whereby the story, sketch, color, and swatches are shown as a grouping.

PART II – FINAL PRESENTATION
The project will be presented to the class. Visuals such as PowerPoint and trend boards must be included in your presentation.

Fashion forecasting is a visualization and intuitive process. You should begin by reading the trade publications such as WWD, DNR, and Accessories. This should be followed by reading consumer publications such as Vogue, In Styles, Lucky, People etc. It is important to check out what is doing in Europe. The London Times (www.thelondontimes.com) is an excellent source for this. You might also try www.parismatch.com, www.internationalheraldtribune.com, www.instyle.com, and www.style.com . Once, you have done this, it is now time to visit stores and to "people watch".

This is in addition to the written content: Have students submit into their respective portfolio or E-portfolio. Remind student to save all copies of their work on fashion forecasting.

Typical Results and Reflections on Exercise:
When outlining forecasting using these steps as guidance, students began to engage in actual forecasting rather than simply search for others' forecasts. Students used critical thinking skills to move through a forecast with an understanding that fashion connects with the recent past (i.e.; movies, music, celebrity), reflects current events, such as economic downturns, cultural impacts (i.e.; immigration reform), and political influences (i.e.; presidential race) that continually shape trends, as well as, the fact that trends are adapted and modified by all types of consumers. In addition, using this approach, students have an easier time forecasting global trends as well as (in addition to) trends for non-western cultures.

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