A Fashion Buyer's Role in the 21st Century: A Data-Mining-Based Content Analysis Approach

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Fashion buyers play an integral role in the development and commercial success of a fashion brand or company (Berman & Evans, 2012). The buying and merchandising team within a fashion retailer are a critical value-creating resource as they are responsible for key elements of the marketing mix (Varley, 2014). The fashion buyers' role is discussed by few authors (Goworek, 2007). The role differs significantly between companies based on market position, label/branded product, company size, product category and business model (Varley, 2014). However, with the growing need of 21st century skills and sustainability, incorporating this knowledge and implementing it in all aspects of fashion buying is a neglected area of academic research (Goworek, 2010; Clark, 2014) and therefore a gap within the literature exits. Arbuthnot et al., (1993) concurs and states that retail buyer behavior is a little researched area and the existing literature focuses mainly on areas of industrial buying and consumer buying behavior. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to analyze the current fashion buying roles that are presently required in the industry and compare them with the 21st century skill sets that are required for achieving sustainability within the fashion buying workplace.

The theory used to achieve the research goal is P21's Framework. P21's Framework for 21st Century Learning has defined and illustrated the skills and knowledge students and future professionals need to succeed in work, life and citizenship (P21, 2018). It has been used by thousands of educators and industry professionals in the U.S. and abroad to put 21st century skills at the center of learning. According to P21 (2018), there are twelve 21st century skills that are grouped into three main categories: (a) Learning skills [critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication]; (b) Literacy skills [information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy]; (c) Life skills [flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity, social skills]. Learning skills teach students and future professionals about the mental processes required to adapt and improve upon a modern work environment. Literacy skills focus on how students and future professionals can discern facts, publishing outlets, and the technology behind them. Life skills take a look at intangible elements of a student's and future professional's everyday life focusing on both personal and professional qualities. These skillsets are necessary among fashion buyers to be able to attain company goals more efficiently, and sustainably.

Data-mining-based content analysis was conducted in this research. Data mining is an innovative process of discovering concepts, themes and patterns in large data sets (Han et al., 2001). Researchers have used content analysis successfully to explore job responsibilities and requirements of particular personnel (Muhammad & Ha-Brookshire, 2011). In this study, job advertisements posted on Indeed.com were crawled and analyzed for the descriptions of job duties and required or preferred knowledge and skills. Indeed.com was selected because it is one of the largest job listing site on the internet and provides relevant and important information on

the desired qualifications and requirements for various personnel in the fashion industry. A total of 677 fashion-buying jobs were collected by data mining algorithm in Python, using the search keyword "fashion buyer" on February 25, 2018. Out of those, 228 were removed from the data set due to repeated posting, lack of detailed description and buying positions that were not related to fashion industry. Therefore, 449 job advertisements were used for the final data analysis. A text data analytical tool named Leximancer was used to develop the concept map among the collected text data (Figure. 1) and analyze the word frequency related to 21st century skills.
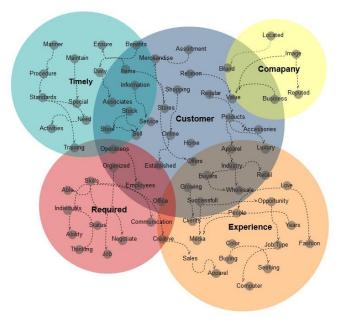

Figure. 1: Concept map of fashion buyer role

The results of this study are noteworthy. First, terms like "critical thinking", "creativity", "collaboration", "teamwork" and "communication" were present 1610 times across all the job postings which shows the current demand and need for Learning skills in the fashion-buying roles. Second, terms like "information", "social media", "computer literacy", "MS office", "software's" and "technology" were present 962 times across all the job postings which shows the current demand and need for Literacy skills in the fashion-buying roles. Finally, terms like "flexibility", "adaptable", "leadership", "initiative", "productivity", "customer skills" and "relations" were present 866 times across all the job postings which shows the demand and need for Life skills in the fashion-buying roles.

The results illustrate the current demand and need of 21st Century skills in the fashion-buying role. Although the framework given by P21 was in general, it seems to have significant implications for fashion industry, too. Notably, the most prominent skillset that was present in the fashion buyer job posting is the Learning skills which means that current industry needs more creativity, innovative thinking, and critical thinking ability among professionals so that they could address societal, environmental, and technological challenges more efficiently. To the best of our knowledge, this study is one of the very few that adopted the computational data mining and concept map development approach in fashion buying research. The results help fashion professionals, educators, students, and job seekers to get a better picture of which skillsets to develop so that they could be industry-ready and face the 21st century challenges. Future research is recommended to investigate the need of 21st century skillsets in fashion-buying role globally and why fashion industries are diving more into these skillsets and how it transforms the fashion industry to achieve sustainability goals.

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