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Style Studies: Adopting Personas in Fashion Design Pedagogy through Use of Social Media  
Web Applications with Real Consumers

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The purpose of this research is to explore an innovative approach to adopting personas in fashion design pedagogy through use of social media web applications with real consumers. Personas provide designers with a vivid representation of the target consumers by bringing them to life through use of narratives, pictures and names that integrate their needs and serve as a central driver of design processes (Miaskiewicz and Kozar, 2011). Based on observations, students in previous fashion design courses seem to have limited experience designing for someone other than themselves or their peers who have similar aesthetic preferences. By bringing real consumers into the design process to serve as personas, the goal of this project was for students to develop a greater understanding of their target market and consider the consumer lifestyle as the focal point of their design processes. The website, [stylestudies.weebly.com](http://stylestudies.weebly.com), was created by the researchers for this project to enhance communication between students and their specified target consumers. Aljraiwi (2017) found that students were more interested in learning and performed better when using web applications and that this was effective support for both teachers and students in managing educational activities inside and outside the classroom.

Upon receiving IRB approval, the Style Studies project was introduced to college juniors in a fashion design studio course. The project lasted a total of 5 weeks and 17 students participated. Four target customers in different markets (designer, better, contemporary, and moderate) were invited to collaborate with the students to design a resort collection. Each specified target customer completed a survey of questions indicating general information, price points for garments, and ideal vacation. Additionally, they provided 15-20 photos of their lifestyles. This information was used to develop a convincing persona that students designed for. All personas were posted on the website in blog format so students could have access to research their customers on their computers or mobile devices. Following are quick descriptions of each customer. With an approximate budget of \$10,000 per season for clothes, customer 1 was in her early thirties and dreamed of a resort vacation in Monte Carlo. Customer 2 had a budget of \$3000 and was in her late twenties with a desire to go to New Zealand. Customer 3 was a new mom with a budget of \$450 per season and reminisced of a favorite vacation to San Francisco. The youngest was Customer 4 in her early twenties with a budget of \$700 per season and dreamed of a resort vacation in Fiji. The students were each assigned one of the four customers by blindly selecting a number at random. This was also done in the hopes of helping students select someone with different clothing preferences and lifestyles than their usual design focus.

The students started by analyzing the assigned persona on the Style Studies website. They reviewed average price points, researched customer's favorite stores and collected additional trend research. The students came up with concepts that reflected the interest of their customers

and started sketching roughly sixty looks in their sketchbooks. Eight looks were selected for their final collection and a sample muslin was created of the look they thought the customer was most likely to purchase. Finally, students submitted final looks and photos of muslin samples to be uploaded to the website. Once uploaded, the customers were asked to comment directly on the website regarding each look, the overall collection, and the sample muslin. Customers responded to wearability of the garments, style, fabric choices, color, and age appropriateness. For example, customer 3 said, "It's a really cool outfit, but this is something I would have worn in college, not now in my late 20s." Customer 1 said, "You really captured the essence of what I was looking for which is a wearable blend of modern and vintage that celebrates the female figure."

After the customers' commented on the website, an anonymous survey was sent to all students participating in the project. Responses from fourteen of the seventeen students were received and analyzed for learning outcomes and effectiveness of the strategy. Overall students responded positively to the project and appreciated using the website in a classroom setting. Many commented this was a new experience to have actual customers inspire their design ideas and felt this pushed them out of their comfort zones. For example, one student said "It was a good experience as I had to try to get out of my shell and adapt my designs to the customer's style." Another commented, "Getting a feel of who they really are, what they do, what they like, etc. really helps create a knowledge of who the actual customer would be for future projects." The customer's feedback also helped students reflect on past design exercises. For example, one student said, "Getting physical feedback helped me to realize sometimes I design things I like for myself and that's a habit I never realized with previous projects." A few negative responses addressed personal creativity and felt that this project was limiting. For example, "I like designing for the particular customer in this project but I enjoy more by choosing my own customer to design for that is more my style." In a real world context, one may not always get to design for their ideal customer. This helps prepare students for possible future design challenges that may lie ahead.

The Style Studies project emphasized the importance of target customer research and helped students focus on creating well-targeted collections. The target customers also enjoyed the process and in most cases offered to participate in future iterations. Both students and target customers found the website easy to use and allowed students to communicate with customers in a way they have not before. Future plans for the project include finding personas even further outside student comfort zones and expanding the use of social media web applications. Follow up observations of the same students will also occur in their upcoming projects to see their reflections on customer research. The presentation of this project would include images of the process and visual examples from the website [stylestudies.weebly.com](http://stylestudies.weebly.com).

Aljraiwi, S. S. (2017). The effect of classroom web applications on teaching, learning and academic performance among college of education female students. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(2), 132-145.

Miaskiewicz, T., & Kozar, K. (2011). Personas and user-centered design: How can personas benefit product design processes? *Design Studies*, 32(5), 417-430.