Post Pandemic Accessible Pedagogy: The Case for Collaborative Online Class Resources for Trend Research and Forecasting

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Keywords: Open Access, Online Collaboration, Textbook, Learning Resource, Trend Research

Introduction: The Covid-19 pandemic has affected over 1.5 billion learners at all levels of the global education systems according to UNESCO data (UNESCO, 2020). The abrupt changes in modes of learning forced by pandemic conditions spur a global paradigm shift in education that we expect to continue post pandemic. Hybrid classes blending online and in-person interactions and contents became the "new normal" in higher education settings. Especially in design education which heavily relies on hands-on experiences and live demonstrations, huge amounts of digital resources such as how-to video tutorials and lecture-captures were created. Alternative visual digital platforms such as Miro, Mural, Jamboard and many others were adopted for design critiques in addition to Zoom break-out rooms that could be used for team projects. Tools like Discord and Slack became new modes of written communication. Many of these digital resources and tools continue to stay in use as students expect to have access to course content anywhere, anytime and educators enrich their course content with up-to-date digital contents such as webinars, Zoom guest lectures and global digital collaborations. In this new context, the use of the traditional physical textbook in higher education is also challenged by digital open textbooks (Ma, 2021). According to the Affordable College Textbook Act (S.2176) the high cost of college textbooks that increased more than double in the past two decades has become a major barrier for equity in higher education (Ritzhold, 2018). Parallel to this, academic libraries are offering online resources for educational materials in their involvement in Open Educational Resources (OERs) and Affordable Course Content (ACC). (Jensen & Nackerud,2018).

In this case study, we present a collaborative interdisciplinary trend research and forecasting course experience supported by an open access, online textbook collaboratively written by the instructors and offered by two Research One higher education institutions (https://open.lib.umn.edu/communicatingfashion/) . The courses were offered Fall, 2021 using this online textbook. The textbook published by an academic library includes fashion design content as a part of a larger design framework covering many fields of design. The open access textbook was assigned to students in chapters written by the two instructors through links to the academic library that is in publication process of the book and as individual pdfs uploaded on Canvas. Each instructor used the book content in their own order. The book provided integrated trend challenge activities that were completed individually and clickable links to up-to-date examples from the Internet (text, image, video). The textbook presented activities and content

associated with other digital platforms such WGSN, Berg Fashion Library, videos of trend forecasting experts (i.e. Li Edelkoort, Faith Popcorn), open-access crowdsourced trend data (i.e. https://www.trendwatching.com/make-shift), and recorded webinars and lectures.

Analysis of Course and Students Outcomes: The two classes adopted the online textbook differed in terms of class sizes, levels, student backgrounds, but they were similarly focused on project-based trend research and product innovation. The differences were not considered critical to the objective of focusing on the process of trend research, analysis, and forecasting. The process focused larger framework of the textbook encompassing many areas of design including fashion allowed both classes access and optimally use this online resource. For example, both dealt with hands-on trend research and a forecasting project with documentation of research on trend drivers and overarching mega trends, product innovation (function, style, material). However, different digital platforms were used for documentation—for the first institution it was Miro and for the second, it consisted of creating a blog. Nuances are listed for the cases as follows:

Institution 1: Course content was focused on trend research and analysis process for product innovation with a general focus in design. Both individual and team projects included innovation, process analysis and forecasting with documentation of research based upon trend drivers and mega trends. Assignments and projects developed in the class not only displayed examples from the fashion industry but also trends in interiors, architecture, gaming design, packaging design and graphics and product design. The flexibility of the book and wide range of digital examples helped the students develop an understanding of how changing user trends affect different fields of design and direct designers to product innovation ideas.

Institution 2: Course content was more focused on fashion communication in the trend research process. Five discrete projects were completed by the students, some individually and some through team collaboration. For example, a team project involved collecting user data through means deemed appropriate for their selected target market, i.e., survey, focus group, interview. An individual project involved design of a product from an unmet need discovered from data from their target market. At the end of each project, teams practiced communication by reporting their findings to the class. All five projects led up to the final team project: a short and long-term forecast for their selected target market.

At the end of course, a feedback survey was administered to the students with a question, "How helpful are the readings to your understanding of trend forecasting?" The Likert scale was marked neutral and above by 84% of the students. Comments included: Content is amazing! Add more illustrations; Add videos; Add more activities or other venues i.e. crossword puzzles. Similarly, in Institution 2, value of the course content and assignments were marked good and above by 96% of the students.

Conclusions: This presented case specifically demonstrates the flexibility offered by the open access, digital textbook in catering to different student backgrounds and two courses with somewhat different objectives in learning about trends. With this format, the instructors selected those resources that best fit the course concepts from a variety of up-to-date sources. Especially in classes that need continuous content updates such as a Trends class, an open-access digital textbook overcomes the equity challenges and financial burden created by new editions of a traditional hard copy textbooks. The open access digital model allows quick updates of examples and new materials continually added as the content becomes less current. In addition, clickable links and trend challenges that encourage students to explore freely available digital resources and available academic library data bases broaden their perspectives and help them triangulate their trend research using many resources. Because the textbook was digital, other online resources with constantly updated information were encouraged within the student experience.

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