



## It Is About the Time! Incorporate Entrepreneurship Education in Fashion Merchandising Curriculum

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Entrepreneurship is a major contributor to economic development of most nations (Kuratko, 2005). In the United States, entrepreneurship has been respected as a way to accelerate innovation and create competition (Holmgren & From, 2005). Universities play an important role in creating entrepreneurial climate and providing new inventions and knowledge (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). Entrepreneurship education seeks ways to provide students with entrepreneurial skills to encourage professional success in a variety of settings (Potter & Storey, 2007). In recent years, entrepreneurship programs and courses in fashion education have steadily increased in the United States. However, there is a gap between the growing demand for fashion entrepreneurship education and the understanding of how best to approach the teaching and learning of entrepreneurship.

**Entrepreneurship and the fashion industry.** In today's global fashion industry, the innovation aspect of entrepreneurship has gained critical importance to stimulate a new type of competition and create the new paradigm of competitive advantage among fashion companies (Ünay & Zehir, 2012). Fashion consumers have become very educated with the influence of social media. Meanwhile, with the advance of technology, both electronic and logistical, many consumers turn to online shopping for the convenience, price, and choice value. Since the beginning of 2017, traditional retailers, including both department stores (e.g. Macy's and JCPenny) and specialty stores (e.g. Guess) have closed hundreds of stores, and are expected to close nearly 3,000 stores in 2017 (Timmermann, 2017). Fashion consumers' new shopping patterns and emerging technologies are changing and redefining the fashion industry and market. The industry needs to find new directions and business strategies, and respond with business models structured around today's consumer demand. This provides an opportunity for fashion entrepreneurs to capture the demand of evolving fashion markets and achieve business success (Birnbaum, 2015). It is a time of reinvention, which also indicates new opportunities for entrepreneurial thinking. Therefore, entrepreneurship education is increasingly relevant in fashion merchandising programs following these developments.

**Role of entrepreneurship education in fashion programs.** To meet the needs of the industry's development and students' employment, fashion programs need to reexamine existing curricula. Although entrepreneurship provides employment opportunities for fashion students, most fashion merchandising programs prepare students for the corporate domain and promote a "take-a-job"

mentality. A 2012 report from the British Fashion Council also highlighted the concerns about fashion graduates, including “lack of business skills in fashion graduates,” “limited awareness of the diverse opportunities amongst young people and career advisors,” and “growing international competition” (Jenny Shi, et.al., 2012, p 295). Recognizing the important role of entrepreneurship education in fashion education, some fashion programs have added entrepreneurship courses. However, the fashion industry is such a diverse industry with a complex supply chain. The major challenge for fashion programs is how to incorporate entrepreneurship education into their curricula. Entrepreneurship itself has become a well-established academic discipline with ever-growing subject areas within business schools. The key question is which component of entrepreneurship education should fashion merchandising or design programs curricula focus on.

We argue that an effective fashion entrepreneurship education needs three components. First, fashion programs should offer a general fashion entrepreneurship course that focuses on the startup processes and strategies. Zhao, Davis, and Copeland (2018) found that such a course was essential for helping fashion students with refining their business ideas. Because of the unique demands and operations within the fashion industry, this course should address challenges and strategies of fashion startups. In addition, besides a typical business plan, this course content should focus on practical knowledge of how to start a small business such as getting business licenses, determining type of business entity, purchasing insurances, and securing bank loans. Secondly, fashion programs should incorporate entrepreneurship components into existing courses in the curricula. Most courses in the fashion programs focus on providing students basic knowledge of the fashion industry/business and necessary skills for a successful career in the fashion industry (Zhao, Davis, & Copeland, 2018). The key is to foster the entrepreneurial thinking and intentions while equipping students with basic knowledge and skills. This will help students to generate business ideas and recognize entrepreneurial opportunities. In addition, with the emergence of social media and influencers, some fashion courses should focus on helping students to strengthen their interaction and communication with start-up team members, business partners and consumers. Thirdly, fashion students should be required to take general business courses such as Marketing, Accounting, and Business Communication. Those courses can help students to learn more about general business operations and strategies. This approach also helps fashion programs to avoid wasting precious resources by reinventing similar business courses within the curricula.

**Conclusions.** Although entrepreneurship has become a well-established academic discipline in Business Schools, entrepreneurship education alone may not be enough to foster fashion entrepreneurs. To be successful in the fashion industry, entrepreneurs have to first develop solid business concepts based on in-depth understanding of the fashion market, target consumers, and industry. Therefore, fashion entrepreneurship should integrate various business activities necessary for successful start-ups, including product development, manufacturing, sourcing, marketing, and sales. In this light, fashion entrepreneurship education should be the curriculum centerpieces that connects and complements subject areas in the discipline. The course content

would require more conversation and should reflect current industry trends and consumers' preferences. Curricula developers should focus on a comprehensive framework for a fashion entrepreneurship concentration based on an in-depth understanding of fashion startup processes and challenges. Incorporating entrepreneurship education into fashion merchandising-related programs will offer students necessary entrepreneurial concepts and skills to fulfill their dreams. In addition, with the changing industry and markets, companies are seeking employees who have entrepreneurial mindsets and skills. Entrepreneurship education will make fashion students more desirable in the job market. Entrepreneurship is a critical component for fashion merchandising programs and should be developed and supported.

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