Fashion and Location: A contemporary ideology to explore social media as a tool for teaching and learning in design

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ABSTRACT

Fashion and Location is an international, multicultural and interdisciplinary collaborative approach to teaching fashion spanning four continents incorporating social media as a tool to connect the students for knowledge sharing and experiencing cultures. Location has always had an influence on clothing styles and is essentially an interesting area of learning for students in schools. The goal is to educate and connect students about various cultures', sub-cultures' and social classes' views of dressing, as well as considering the views of individuals within these categories who can formulate various responses vis-à-vis self presentation using social media as a platform. This research is a collaboration of six different institutions to make a learning platform for students through various projects.

The methodology of the project is collaborative teaching and learning. Our research implies a Goffmanian theoretical framework in which fashion is viewed as a dramaturgical type of action or performance through which meanings are expressed and interpreted within social and interactional settings situated in particular cities.

Keywords: Fashion education, social media, cultures, peer to peer learning, teaching and learning methodologies.

Introduction
The Conceptualization of Fashion and Location (F&L)

Faculty members from five campuses began an international collaborative project with a global learning focus which began at the Fashion Colloquia/IFFTI Nurturing Research Workshop at the London College of Fashion in 2013. The project is an exploratory study on seven university campuses of how students and people within the vicinity of the campus are dressing, encompassing their views and on why they choose to adapt a particular way of dressing (including use of accessories, makeup and hair style) and incorporating responses from their peers in other locations. The project acknowledges the position of street style as a "legitimate site of creativity" (Rocamora, & O'Neill, 2008), and in turn reflects upon the role of the amateur photographer (in this case fashion student) as documenter of fashion and campus style and the learning and teaching opportunities to come from this process. In identifying the sartorial character(s) of place, students are encouraged to come to conclusions about what do we understand about specific locations and vice versa.

In our first project fashion marketing students at Brooklyn College in New York City began working with both Patricia Brien's and Shivkumar Belli's fashion and textile design students at University of South Wales, Cardiff and at the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) in Hyderabad. While we are also collaborating with Amsterdam Institute of Fashion and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology the students who completed the project were students from Brooklyn, Hyderabad and Cardiff. In Fall 2015 we began working with more partners: Gretchen Harnick from IAU (International American University) in Aix-en-Provence, Karan Khurana from Ethiopian Institute of Fashion and Textile technology, Bahir Dar University in Ethiopia and Sharon Vanek from Colman College of Management located outside Tel Aviv. The latest addition to the project is Arch Academy of Design from India where we replicated the same project.

This year Veronica Manlow is teaching graduate level students at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Jessica Kolo, a graduate student from Milan who had been doing an independent study with Veronica Manlow is the project director and in this capacity has been coordinating research across campuses with student team leaders. The projects involve students analyzing self-presentation through fashion on campus and in the cities in which they live through the medium of visual ethnography. In this project they explore issues of personal, collective and identity while considering cross-cultural perspectives. Students responded to images shared from each campus and to the interviews that students conducted concerning fashion choices and self-presentation with students on their campus. In the previous project held in 2014 students concluded that each campus had a distinct style, demonstrating that they had arrived at agreed upon definitions within their own cultural context. They identified some universal elements in self-presentation across campuses, as well as differences. When evaluating what they perceived to be 'differences' they did not always agree upon how to define these differences.

Since the start of this project in 2013 we see a growing interest in this field of study and have institutions joining in every year to make a huge online learning platform on fashion and location directly influencing each other. There is a lot of researches taking place in design schools but our aim was to connect the students so that the exchange of real primary data becomes a common practice in the partnering schools instead of just finding secondary data on Google search.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE
SOCIAL MEDIA: THE CONNECTION WITH HIGHER EDUCATION

"There are a lot of pros and cons about social media; it's just how you choose to handle it and how you have to be prepared for the negatives as well."
(Aubrey Shea Peeples -American actress and singer)

Social media are defined as a variety of online applications that develop on the technological and ideological basics of Web 2.0. These Internet-based applica-

tions facilitate human communication, interaction, and collaboration by allowing exchange and creation of user-generated content (Dabbagh, & Kitsantas, 2012). We now live in an atmosphere which is made of Social Media such as Facebook, Instagram, twitter, Pinterest, blogging etc. The education system in the last decade has majorly transformed from books to the most advanced digital way of online teaching and learning methods. In addition, today's students, often referred to as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), have spent most of their time on computers, game consoles, digital music players, video cameras, cell phones, as well as the Web itself. We cannot only exchange views or feelings about certain issues but also research on topics which we knew on Google in a few seconds and which was a very tedious task in the past.

The ever increasing use of social media in our generation has bought many contemporary ideas into light. Numerous studies have demonstrated the benefits of online social interaction in the learning process. Positive aspects of online interaction with teachers and peers include (but are not restricted to) the following: access to peer and expert knowledge, ability to receive feedback from teachers and peers, unbiased evaluation and an opportunity to reflect on the exchanged messages (Ellis, 2001).

There are problems with the term 'social media', but it will not keep us here where we will show the overall picture (Ellison, 2007). Six potentials are worth highlighting. (Adapted from Social Media for Teaching and Learning by Jeff Seaman and Hester Tinti-Kane, 2013).

Firstly, researchers point at potentials for better *learning*. If social media are used in teaching the opportunities to express oneself, participate, collaborate, find information, reflect and learn together are expanded. The opportunities for help, teacher feedback, knowledge sharing, student productions, differentiation, shared notes, knowledge storage and process writing are also expanded (Crook, 2008; Moody, 2010; Liburd, 2011).

Secondly, researchers point at potentials for forming better *communities*. If the new media are used the researchers find better opportunities for getting to know each other, become familiar with each other, do things together, make friends, connect and maintain relationships, learn each other's friends to know and to form communities (Blanchard, & Markus 2004; Wright, 2010; Atkinson, 2010; Webb, 2012).

Thirdly, researchers point out that the *study environment* at a school can be improved if the social media are involved, the use of social media can expand opportunities for contact between the school and the students, contact between classes and between year groups, to alumni and future students and increase participation in activities at the school in addition to teaching. Also they find better contact with absent students and opportunities to create virtual homework help (McNely, 2009; Reid, 2011; Zeng, 2012).

Fourthly, researchers find better opportunities for *contact* with the surrounding community, people in other countries, politicians, friendship classes etc. and thus more realistic learning and perspective expanding education (Lovari, & Giglietto, 2012). By expressing their thoughts, discussing and challenging the

ideas of others, and working together towards a group solution to a given problem, students develop critical thinking skills as well as skills of self-reflection and co-construction of knowledge and meaning (Brindley, Walti, & Blaschke, 2009).

Fifthly, studies show that an active involvement of social media provides better *motivation and commitment*, as it expands the possibilities for creating lessons that students find interesting and challenging. With new media it is possible to achieve greater diversity in teaching and exceed traditional classroom training (Junco, 2010; Elavsky, 2012; Yaros, 2012).

Finally, sixthly, researchers point out that students get better *media and IT skills* when social media are used actively in class and that students get better prepared for the contemporary society that is permeated by digital media (Lowe, & Laffey, 2011; Shannon, 2011; Levinsen and Sørensen, 2011).

The use of Social Media in the F& L Project

The task of assessment in design schools holds quite a value in evaluation the performance of the student as quite of our subject content is practical in nature. Continuous assessment can provide a more reliable estimate of a student's capabilities and indirectly measure a student's capacity to manage time and handle stress (Brown, 2001). It is very interesting to see how students are evaluated from one country to another; there could be a lot to learn from international assessment systems. Peer assessment, in which students comment on and judge their colleagues' work, has a vital role to play in formative assessment and in this project we took this methodology more global by involvement of Social Media.

We will explore the visual and textual data which resulted from the first phase of this collaborative study and we will incorporate this year's results as well. Specifically we look at how students made sense of and evaluated images on their own campuses and compared them with those on other campuses giving examples of their work. We will also look at how students chose to approach the project and creative ways in which they carried out their work. For example Karan Khurana's students decided to look at the dress of religious communities and sub-cultures in students' home communities. One of Sharon Vanek's teams decided to use video to capture an interview, adding another dimension to the project that was appreciated by students. Gretchen Harnick's students are Americans studying abroad in France. They decided to compare American and French approaches to fashion and to look at how Americans changed their styles while living in France. Student in Veronica Manlow's class decided to look at librarians and professors on campus as well as students.

Curriculum internationalization often adopted by the universities caters to the objective of employment rather than training students in cultural expressions, and presenting meaning and interpretations with open-mindedness. Such exposure becomes all the more important in the area of fashion and design educa-

tion. Hence, curriculum internationalization in fashion and design has to focus more on building such an environment which offers ample opportunities for students and faculty members to understand, collaborate, work and communicate with one another. There are many ways to internationalize a course. Here, the authors have experimented to collaborate with other institutions at the faculty level and work together on devising collaborative student assignments and projects. This project resulted in offering students a virtual student project environment.

In order to make a platform we choose Facebook as a platform for interactions and assignment sharing and reviewing. Rambe (2012) studied Facebook posts in a university course and found that more students communicated administrative type posts and concluded that teachers should involve learners in critical engagement, instead of allowing students to receive teachers' content passively. Irwin *et al.* (2012) studied four university courses using Facebook and 78% of the students thought Facebook was an effective learning tool that enhanced discussion, interaction and access of posted assessments and lecture notes. McCarthy (2010) found that 95% of students in the survey agreed that Facebook assisted them in the development of peer relationships and appreciated the collaborative discussion in the online environment. Ophus and Abbitt (2009) performed a survey in a university course in which Facebook was used to facilitate sharing among students and 95.5% of students felt communication with others was improved.

We also initially choose a few subjects running in semesters commonly in different universities. We choose subjects such as fashion marketing and branding and fashion forecasting so that the tasks were a part if the tutorial section if the subjects in the semester.

In the Ethiopian education system social media as a tool is a very new aspect towards teaching and learning and so was for other developing economies. The task majorly accomplished through this research was that we could connect many universities. Then further on we divided the whole task into three assignments and also opened the group to students for uploading any other related assignments they wanted to share and get reviews on. The description of the primary assignments are as follows:

Assignment 1. Exploratory Analysis:
Students will create groups of 2-3 students each. As a class we will create a brief 5 question style survey.

Each group will take photographs on the campus and of each other around town. Photos can be of group members, faculty, and students. You will discuss the project with one another and compare photos. Members of the group will decide if there is a dominant style or if there many different styles and they will provide a brief description. Describe the style you've identified. Hand in a brief statement about your view of the style as a group.
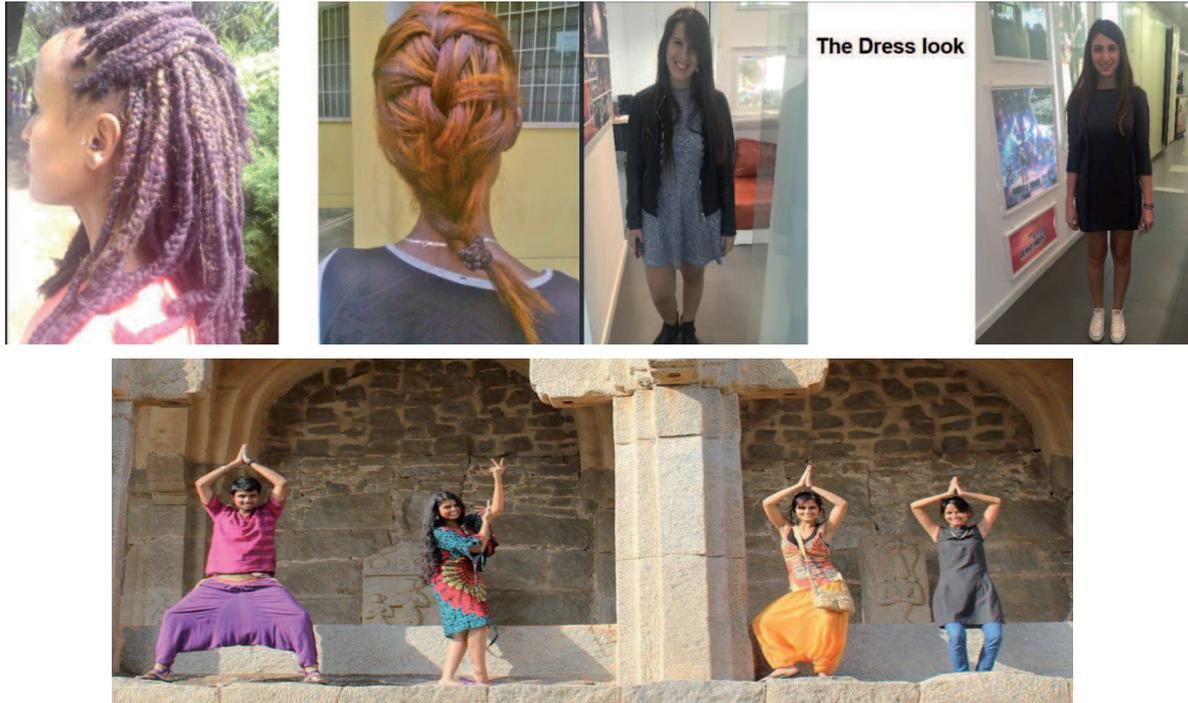
Image 1. Exploratory Analysis of dressing style across campuses (BDU, Ethiopia, NIFT, India and Colman, Israel; Source: Student Assignments.

Image2. Style Observation in campuses NIFT, India; Colman, Israel; BDU, Ethiopia. Source :Student assignments.

Assignment 2.

Observations of French/American/Ethiopian/Israel/ India Style. This assignment explores fashion choices and self-presentation. Select 2-3 students on campus for more in-depth discussion and interviews. How were choices made? How has their style evolved being in France/U.S.A./Ethiopia /Israel/ India? What have they adopted what have they maintained? How has this impacted the impression the student wants to make? Does he or she believe there is a certain look on campus? If so how would he or she describe it? 10 minutes in length total.

Assignment 3: How does the one campus evolving style compare with styles on other campuses?

IAU (International American University) groups will look at the work of students from Hyderabad, South Wales, Ethiopia, New York and Paris and will comment on styles found on other campuses. What is unique and different or for that matter similar when you compare the campuses? How do those students compare to one another and to IAU students in terms of self-presentation using fashion? Be creative in your analysis and put together a few slides from the work that you have done in the team that will be included in a master PowerPoint of the assignment. It will be possible to interact with the international students in a "virtual group" via email or social media (Skype/Google Hangouts/Facebook) and to incorporate this knowledge and data into the assignment.

Above stated are the examples of some of the work of students in different projects as defined. All these and other assignments are available as primary data to students which shall join the community further on. We later on extended the scope of assignments to various subjects of relevance and also opened doors to more universities across the world. This project was recently presented in Fashion Colloquia in June, 2015 at RMIT, Vietnam where we got more interest from universities in Australia and New Zealand.

> - Uniformity at the GC without dress code
> - Business casual
> - Late night classes
> - Muted colors
> - Uniformity in Ethiopia
> However, they have found other ways to stand out with makeup, patterns, colors, etc.
>
> **Ethiopian Fashion**

Figure 1. Comparison of fashion and styles from three universities.
Source: Authors

Results and findings

Social Media has mostly received a lot of negative recognition as it involved quite a lot of time of the younger generation. On the contrary this project served a totally reverse ideology. We were able to transform Facebook as a very interesting tool of learning and teaching. Following are the broad results of the project:
Begin to develop international skills and competencies and formulate opinions informed by global awareness.

Students in Ethiopia and other developing countries have faced problems in the past to understand and standardize skills sets in certain subjects. Through this project we are were able to put assignments of six design schools around the world on a social platform to analyze how have their peers dealt with a similar subject internationally and where the chances of improvement exist. Evaluation of assignments was also made more transparent as students were able to self analyze their work and improve majorly. In many cases we found that the quality of work increased substantially as they knew that their assignments would be open to reviews and were uploaded on a social platform. Thus an effort to come to a standard process of assessments was achieved during this research. Finally, connecting students of various universities to make education more interactive and peer – based learning; unbiased evaluations of project; global perspective and views to similar projects.
- *Demonstrate knowledge of own culture and values in assignments and Develop skills to interact with and evaluate expressions in other culture.*

Culture is one of the most important inspirations for design innovations worldwide. Fashion design students essentially need to learn to embrace the richness of the culture and further on how to contemporize ancient history into new age designs. Simultaneously also learn other world cultures and see how other peers have translated into design theories. Through this project we covered cultures from America to East Africa to Israel and Asia. As one of the main objectives of the project we were able to expose students to sources of primary data from six universities/countries making a very solid base for the future students. Now we have original researched database of design cultures from across the world to help students in the coming future. It automatically created an achieve of primary data from universities world-wide which acts as reference for the future students and reducing the role of secondary research from Google in student assignments. Here we also successfully create an e-library for the students using cloud space on Facebook.
- *Develop an attitude open to learning about other cultural expressions as well as an appreciation for new ideas and ways of thinking.*

Often it was observed that students came up with ideas in design generation from different cultures and could not comprehend it properly due to lack of substantial data. In this project we made an open platform for discussions and

reviews on anything which one student wanted to express or ask from another in any part of the world. We also achieved new methods of design thinking, culture appreciation and ways of thinking from many different perspectives.

- *Digitalizing assessments and reduce student expenditure.*

In certain universities it was also found that the cost related to assignments in fashion design programs was quite a burden on the student`s pocket. It might also limit creativity as printing high quality pictures was found to be very expensive in many cases. Other advantages of digitalization include easy movement of assignment from one part of the world to another. We took advantage of social media and made tasks lighter on the pocket and heavier on creativity.

To summarize, the benefits highlighted within the study can be explained as:
- Increasing student motivation and engagement with course material;
- Increasing student-to-student collaboration;
- Enhanced interaction between the student and the teacher;
- Accelerated data and information sharing;
- Removes barriers to self-expression and contribution;
- Provides students with 21st Century skills which could aide their employability and increase levels of satisfaction.

Further Scope of Research

Our aim in this project is to make teaching and learning a global process. A student should not feel that his or her creativity could not meet results because of limited data or opportunities to interact with peers worldwide. Social media has formed a virtual space around us and we live inside it. We have tried to see the positives sides of social media and saw growing interests of students in this domain. Surprisingly the youth in universities today is intensely hooked on to Facebook and other such media. We just took a diversion to use social media into academics and it made our assessments much more interesting and result oriented. We hereby wish to further extend this research to many more universities across the world and make this platform as useful as possible.

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