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Regional Fashion Weeks: Runway Showcases for Student Entrepreneurs

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Introduction

Fashion shows held during fashion weeks in major cities have a connotation of being only accessible to the very elite designers. Twice a year the runways prepare to host well renowned designers such as Chanel, Christian Dior, Elli Saab, and Valentino in shows New York, Paris and London. Phenomenally, smaller, regional fashion shows in the United States outside of New York and California have evolved in the last decade. “While much of the industry’s impact is concentrated in New York and Los Angeles, where most U.S. fashion designers live and work, cities in the South, Midwest, and West are seeing positive economic impacts from growth of the fashion industry in their communities” (*The economic*, 2015). Fern Mallis, the founder of New York fashion week states that regional fashion weeks are aspirational and they can be refreshing and honest (Grinberg, 2013). Regional fashion weeks are not on the same scale as those in New York or Paris fashion, but they are showcasing designers with various experiences. Collections from students as well as established designers are shown around the United States, which is providing the platform for aspiring designers to create their own brand. Some growing regional fashion weeks include Cleveland, Austin, Omaha, Charleston, and Phoenix to name a few. The authors' goal is to frame the advantages and disadvantages of student participation in regional fashion shows to assist academic support of student involvement in these events.

Background

An interview process often initiates participation in a regional fashion week, where the designer would apply and pitch their proposal for the collection to industry professionals and/or fashion show producers. Generally it is four months between the interviews and the fashion week, allotting time for collection creation. If the designer is chosen to be part of a specific fashion week, often mentoring opportunities are provided by industry professionals involved in that fashion week. Mentoring may include advice on: (a) cohesion of the collection, (b) marketing, (c) pricing, and (d) improving their collection or brand as a whole. Regional Fashion Weeks last several days to a full week. In many cases there are events throughout the week leading up to the runway show(s); such as pop-up shops or preview parties that helps bridge designers with potential buyers. Industry professionals, bloggers, and potential buyers attend regional fashion weeks to view the talent. These fashion weeks provide a platform for emerging or aspiring designers to showcase and jump-start their brand.

Student Participation in Regional Fashion Weeks

Designers in regional fashion weeks typically do not have a thriving company where they are mass-producing items and have hundreds of employees working for them. Students involved are

creating 8-15 piece collections while in secondary, post-secondary or graduate programs. Over 7 students at the authors' university have participated in regional fashion weeks over the past few years. From this participation, the authors have identified advantages and disadvantages for students at any level.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Student Participation in Regional Fashion Weeks

To participate in a regional fashion week the student has to have a lot of drive, dedication and "an entrepreneurial spirit" because of the major time commitment. With the opportunities to *network* with business and industry professionals as well as buyers is an advantage for the student who has an interest in owning their own design firm. While *mentoring* provided with participation affords the student constructive criticism and professional guidance. Development of a fully *cohesive collection* provides experience and a professional portfolio component. Student's *brand identity* is often further developed and *positive reinforcement* can occur from reaction and reviews of the audience and mentors.

Although participating in fashion shows may be an overwhelmingly positive experience, there are some disadvantages to students. Depending on the level of education the student may not possess skills to be accepted into the show, leaving the student *discouraged*. Students who are accepted to participate are making a *time commitment* outside of their schoolwork. While participation is commendable, it may result in *distraction* from current schoolwork. For students, participation may be *costly* depending on the type of garments created, quality of materials used, travel expenses to the show/events and possible entry fee.

Conclusions and Significance

Regional fashion weeks provide a platform for smaller-scale designers and students to jumpstart their brand and showcase their collections publicly. Fashion weeks provide designers experience and insight to the industry, as well as design and marketing advice. The authors will highlight the advantages and disadvantages of student participation and share evaluative narratives of students who have participated in regional fashion shows while students at their institution.

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