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ADV 410

Individual Research Project

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**Client:**



**Background:**

Forever 21 is a fast fashion retail chain based out of Los Angeles, California. It was founded by Do Won Chang and Jin Sook Chang as a 900 square foot store in Highland Park, California in 1984, and grew to become the fifth largest specialty retailer in the United States. It has stores globally, and is continuing to open stores in every continent (minus Antarctica). The company has grown a lot in just 30 years, but remains a family-owned company. Their mission is to sell trendy clothing for affordable prices, which is why they mass produce fashion overseas and by having more quantity there is more room for revenue, which is how they've been profiting so much in the past years.

Forever 21 has had more than a few legal battles and PR nightmares. The most recent scandal is one of their t-shirts looks similar to another t-shirt being used to fundraise by Planned Parenthood, with the word "Women" written on it in many different languages. Copying is one issue, but the second issue to arise from it is that the Forever 21 version doesn't include the word in Swahili or Arabic. Forever 21 since then has taken the shirt off their website, and responded to commentators saying that they "were not aware that there was any copyright issue". Besides this, there have been many other similar issues of them seemingly copying other designs, as well as designers directly suing the company for it and having to reach settlements in court.

## Research Questions:

Issues that have not yet been addressed:

- There have been over 50 cases of Forever 21 copying other designs, yet it seems to keep happening. They must find a way to do more extensive research on what their clothing is based off to avoid further legal messes, such as the most recent one that happened in September with the women t-shirt. Even though these issues happen, people continue to shop there. How do they maintain this loyal of a consumer base?
- Employment relations and safety issues including
  - A chemical named Cadmium was found in their jewelry to be in excess, they had to reduce it to .03% and pay over a million dollars to settle the lawsuit
  - The Asian Pacific American Legal Center sued Forever 21 for paying 19 of their workers less than minimum wage

## Questions to be asking:

This survey/focus group should be directed towards people who do shop at Forever 21. It should find out if those consumers know about the issues that the company has faced, how it changes their perception of the company, and if it affects whether they will continue shopping there or not. If it doesn't influence them, why is that the case? These specifically tailored questions will get a read on why consumers shop the way that they do even after hearing about controversies about said company. Do their values not match up with what their actual actions would be? Why is that? The overarching research question is: **How do the mistakes of the company affect how people shop at their stores?**

## **Key Variables/Constructs:**

The main concepts here that we need to focus on to figure out the answer those questions is to get a gauge first on the morals of the consumer. The key variables to ask about include

- Fast Fashion
- Copyright Law
- Unethical treatment towards workers
- Separation of religion from the brand

By being aware of these key variables in the case of the brand Forever 21, we can get a closer look into the consumer mind and how they feel about these topics through different research methods.

The other key constructs that must be looked at include the organization/client (Forever 21) and their reputation currently, after all these events have already happened. The key publics as well need to be examined, which is where the survey/focus group will come into play.

## **Proposed Methodology**

I have decided to conduct a focus group because I feel that in this case qualitative data would provide the best, overarching ideas to come up with a key insight. This chosen method is appropriate because it is a conversation that I want people to have, as opposed to just filling out a quick survey that doesn't get the people in the group curious and talking about the topic and their actual thoughts and feelings.

I would try to find a sample of 5-10 young women, between the ages of 18-22, whose parents are of middle-higher income levels but encourage their daughters to not spend as much money, so they shop at Forever 21.

By paying each participant \$5, costs would be low. The time of this would have to be late afternoon, when girls are done with their classes. We would conduct the focus group within the next month, probably in a classroom or at someone's apartment. We would record it on an audio device and later transcribe as much of it as possible, or possibly just key points that the girls make about the questions and seeing where the discussion leads.

## **References:**

F. (n.d.). ABOUT US. Retrieved October 12, 2017, from <https://www.forever21.com/us/shop/Info/AboutUs>

Main, A. (2017, September 15). This Forever 21 shirt looks just like another shirt designed to benefit Planned Parenthood. Retrieved October 12, 2017, from [http://mashable.com/2017/09/15/forever-21-planned-parenthood-shirt/#1o\\_yqfGt18qV](http://mashable.com/2017/09/15/forever-21-planned-parenthood-shirt/#1o_yqfGt18qV)

NANCY CLEELAND | TIMES STAFF WRITER. (2001, September 07). Lawsuit Against Forever 21 Alleges Unfair Labor Practices. Retrieved October 12, 2017, from <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/sep/07/business/fi-43072>

## Appendix

Focus Group begins with quick survey sheets passed around:

1. Please write down your name, age, and what town and state you are from.
2. List the top 5 stores you shop for clothing at
3. Are you familiar with the legal battles Forever 21 has faced in the past year? Circle one. 1=not familiar at all, 2=heard about it once, 3=heard about it more than once, 4=heard about it a lot, 5=I'm very familiar and can name any one of them
4. Forever 21 has had over 50 companies sue them for copyright issues. Will this effect what you thought of them previously? Circle one (Extremely Unlikely | Somewhat Unlikely | As Likely as Not | Somewhat Likely | Extremely Likely)
5. If you knew that Forever 21 had labor issues, would it change how you shop there? Circle one (Extremely Unlikely | Somewhat Unlikely | As Likely as Not | Somewhat Likely | Extremely Likely)

Questions asked during focus group

1. If you had to decide between shopping cheap at somewhere that has bad labor practices, or paying a lot to shop somewhere where there weren't any, which would you choose and why?
2. How does your average shopping experience at Forever 21 look like? If not there, then describe a clothing shopping experience.
3. I'm going to say a few statements. Please explain what comes to your mind when I say them:
  - a. Fast Fashion
  - b. Unethical practices
  - c. Copying other designers
4. Forever 21 has been known to copy other designers and make profit from it, the most recent one being the "Women" shirt written in many different languages. Do you feel this was merely a coincidence or that it was intentional, and why?
5. Do you feel that the company should spend more money on researchers to ensure mistakes like this stop happening, and how so?
  - a. Where should they get this money?
6. Thank you for your time. As a last question, how important is it to you that fast fashion companies such as Forever 21, Zara, and H&M focus more on originality and better treatment of workers if it means prices of the clothing will go up, and why?