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### Researching Campaign Materials for Ellie Mia Boutique

Mariann Yip

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## **Researching Campaign Materials for Ellie Mia Boutique**

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

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and Renée Crown University Honors  
May 2014

Honors Capstone Project in Public Communications

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Date: April 23, 2014

### **Abstract**

Before you spend thousands of dollars on a public relations campaign, it is important to test the campaign materials to a sample population to see what their thoughts and opinions are. Using their feedback, you are then able to tailor the information in a more effective way, thus, creating and launching a successful campaign that accomplishes all of your goals and objectives.

Ellie Mia is a fashion boutique located on Marshall Street in Syracuse, N.Y. This capstone project explores the PR branding methods of the store to increase awareness of its existence, to augment store traffic and business and to build a consistent store image through platforms including photos, an event, a video and a look book.

Two photo shoots were conducted with student models. One of the photo shoots took place on campus and was a fall, college theme, while the other was more glamorous and had an edgy, high fashion theme. A video shoot was also made at the boutique, which gave the viewers a glimpse of the store's vibe and atmosphere and the clothing and accessories that it had to offer. An event invitation was also created to invite students to relax and shop.

The promotional package was shown to three focus groups, consisting of six people each. The discussion questions were directly related to the research questions, which gave a better understanding on the participants' thoughts on the boutique before reviewing the sample materials. The participants were also able to discuss recommendations and suggestions on how to improve the campaign materials before they were actually launched.

Half of the participants knew about the existence of Ellie Mia, whereas half of the participants had never heard of it. They all agreed that boutiques generally carry more expensive items than retail and department stores, which was a concern for most students because money and clothing prices are crucial factors in their shopping decisions.

Conclusively, if Ellie Mia is targeting students that are willing to spend more money on clothing and fit a size 0-6, then the campaign materials represent the brand well. However, if Ellie Mia is trying to branch out to a newer audience, then the campaign materials need to be altered in terms of using more diverse, student models and perhaps finding more affordable pieces for the store or offering student discounts.

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## Executive Summary

According to the Public Relations Society of America (2014), “Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics.” To help organizations maintain positive relationships with their publics, public relations firms and agencies use different methods to build an organization’s reputation and awareness, with campaigns being the most common (Matera & Artigue, 2000, p. 66).

There are many purposes to a public relations campaign, including promoting a certain product, spreading awareness of a particular issue or taking a stand on an important topic. Specifically for a business, a campaign can be used to help increase its publicity and awareness. This capstone project, *Researching Campaign Materials for Ellie Mia Boutique*, explores how to effectively market and promote the boutique at Syracuse University. Focus groups with college students as participants were conducted and their feedback and suggestions on the sample campaign materials were used as analysis and research for the client.

Ellie Mia is a fashion boutique located on Marshall St., which is a popular area at Syracuse University, where students eat and hang out with friends. I wanted to get a better understanding on students’ knowledge and opinions about the boutique, so I created a campaign kit for the client that best represented her store’s image. During my meetings with the owner, Sophie Dimanidis, I became more aware of

what her brand stands for and was informed about the background of her usual customers.

Using this information and my observations of her shop, I strategically planned a research study by creating potential campaign materials to test on a sample of female students. Sophie and I decided to hold two photo shoots that would represent her store's items for the fall/winter season. The fall theme photo shoot took place on SU campus and the photos were put into a small digital and physical look book. The winter high fashion theme photo shoot took place downtown and the photos were both printed and used digitally.

A video shoot was also produced as a promotional video for the boutique. For those who have never been in the boutique, it was a great opportunity to see the store's variety and atmosphere because the video captured a customer's shopping experience. Furthermore, I designed an invitation for the "Cozy Up at Ellie Mia" event by using one of the photos from the fall look book. At the event, customers were offered free hot chocolate, encouraged to shop the winter items, socialize with each other, and were allowed to participate in an accessory raffle.

It is important to remember that none of the creative elements were actually released to the public because these were considered to be the sample materials of what Sophie would include in her branding campaign had she launched them. The physical materials were a visual for the focus group participants to analyze. As a

result, I received public feedback about a campaign before it was launched.

Pre-testing materials is beneficial for any public relations campaign regardless of the company. As a clothing boutique that focuses on selling its products to a niche target, I examined how the general public, including but not limited to its niche target, receives the campaign materials. Moreover, instead of asking feedback about what the audience would like to see in the campaign, I included physical and digital visuals, so they were able to see the campaign direction, critique it, and offer creative advice.

Sophie is aware that her boutique has a target audience. The items in her store are pricey, but are good quality and unique to most department stores. Based on the backgrounds of her usual customers, she does not carry a large range of sizes because she knows what her customers normally look for and what sizes they normally fit into. With this knowledge, she wanted to explore what students of Syracuse University felt about her boutique, especially those outside of her target audience.

Thus, the campaign materials were directed to students outside of her normal targeted publics. The project explores whether or not students felt compelled to visit the boutique and whether the campaign materials were consistent with Ellie Mia's brand image. As a result, the focus groups were used as research for Sophie. All of their opinions and feedback were valuable information that she may choose

to or not use to market her store.

The three research questions that I focused on for this project were:

- Q1: What drives students to shop in a store/ boutique? What roles do price, style and brand image play in students' shopping decisions?
- Q2: How can Ellie Mia increase awareness of the shop on SU campus?  
How does branding come into play?
- Q3: What materials are crucial for a public relations firm to promote the business?

Based on the responses and data from the focus groups, I have concluded that style is the main factor that drives students to shop at a boutique because boutiques carry items that department stores and retail stores do not. When asked about purchasing factors, all of them agreed that price was their number one concern because as college students, they need to learn how to budget their money wisely, especially on clothing and accessories.

In addition, students believed that Ellie Mia can increase campus awareness by putting the look books around campus buildings and as advertisements in student publications. Collaborating with fashion design students or other organizations on campus would bridge the relationship between the boutique and the university. Participants felt that the campaign materials were appropriate in promoting the business. Moreover, they were fond of the student models in the photos and found



the look book and video appealing and beneficial in marketing the boutique to the student population.

To increase store traffic, students suggested greater discounted sales to parallel the boutique's pricier inventory. Regardless of Sophie's decision, the participants believed that the campaign materials could still be used to effectively market the boutique without sales and discounts. Additionally, participants questioned whether the campaign would target Sophie's usual customers or a newer audience. To them, the boutique's pricing seemed inconsistent with students' budgets. They also found the models used and sizes carried by the boutique to be inconsistent with their personal clothing sizes and personal images of beauty and fashion.

### **Advice to Future Honors Students**

I have never really found myself to be a procrastinator, but I know that's not the case for many college students. For an honors capstone project, starting early is key. It took me a while to figure out what I wanted to do, but once I found my interest, I started to work. I advise you to create a timeline and deadlines for your project and stick with them as much as you can. Make sure your own deadline is at least a few days or even a week earlier than the deadlines set by the Honors Program. Having that extra time will allow you to put more effort and attention to revisions, which will ultimately make the process go smoother.

Most importantly, focus your capstone on your passion and major. I've come to realize that the more committed you are to your project, the easier your work becomes. Lastly, try to have fun because yes, it's a lot of work, but in the end, it's all worth it and you'll feel relieved and accomplished!

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Ellie Mia's Background**

Ellie Mia is a fashion boutique located on 754 South Crouse Avenue, Syracuse, NY. The store has provided high quality accessories and clothing for fashion lovers and students at Syracuse University since its opening in 2010. The owner, Sophie Dimanidis carries a variety of brands and is up to date with the latest trends by reading fashion news and receiving catalog look books.

As a businesswoman, Sophie knows her targeted audience. Her store is a reflection of her customers: those that like to spend more money on high quality, unique items and those that fit into sizes 0-6. She often knows her customers by their names and likes to get to know them on a more personal level. However, as a business, she is always looking for ways to promote her store on SU campus because it is located at a popular spot where students hang out.

When asked if she would be interested in being a part of this capstone project, she was enthusiastic about the creative elements of the campaign because she believed they would help build her store's image and increase public awareness. As a result, the campaign materials were determined, which would consist of a look book, photo shoot prints, a short video and an event invitation.

All fashion brands and designers use fashion campaigns to promote their seasonal collections. They are often placed in billboards and magazines as advertisements, as videos online and as commercials, or as look books or style books in both digital and physical formats. As a result, this capstone project mirrored those elements because a look book and video were most appropriate

and relevant to promoting Ellie Mia as a fashion boutique.

### **Meeting Notes**

Weekly meetings were held with Sophie at her store, in which we mapped out the timeline of the project, which would take place over a span of three months in the fall semester of 2013. We discussed the campaign materials in detail, ranging from the outfits and accessories, to the color schemes of the photography, to the student models and their hair and make up. Sophie also wanted the materials in the promotional package to focus around the fall/winter season since those were the clothing she carried at her store at that time.

After I edited the photos and video, Sophie examined and assessed the creative elements and gave me feedback, so I could make changes accordingly. Many drafts and versions of the campaign materials were reviewed before we finalized the package. We agreed that each campaign material would be unique to its purpose, yet have the same brand image, so when looked at it as a whole, it would be cohesive and consistent with one another.

### **Timeline**

Below is the timeline from fall semester that I used for my capstone research project.

09/09: First meeting of the semester with Sophie

- Discussed campaign materials
- Brainstormed event details and ideas
- Started to plan out photo shoot themes and locations

09/12-09/17:

- Researched photo shoot locations

- Contacted models, photographers and make up artist for photo shoot
- Finalized photo shoot location and date for September 20<sup>th</sup>

09/20: Photo shoot, Everson Museum of Art

- Hair and makeup done at the store
- Models styled by employees at the boutique
- Travelled downtown and shot models in three different outfits

09/21-10/03:

- Uploaded, edited photos

10/04: Second meeting with Sophie

- Showed photos to Sophie
- Edited photos with Sophie's revisions
- Wrote clothing descriptions for look book
- Planned second photo shoot details

10/05:

- Contacted models, photographers and make up artist for second photo shoot at SU campus
- Finalized photo shoot date for October 12<sup>th</sup>

10/12: College theme photo shoot on Syracuse University campus

- Hair and makeup done at the store
- Models styled by employees at the boutique
- Shot three models in one outfit each

10/12-10/14:

- Uploaded, edited photos
- Put together look book with previous photos from first shoot

10/16: Third meeting with Sophie

- Showed photos to Sophie
- Edited look book with Sophie's revisions
- Planned video shoot details
- Finalized "Cozy Up at Ellie Mia" event date for November 11<sup>th</sup>

10/18: Sent look book for printing

10/21:

- Contacted models, photographers and make up artist for video shoot at Ellie Mia Boutique
- Finalized video shoot date for 10/26

10/26: Video Shoot at Ellie Mia Boutique

- Hair and makeup done at the store
- Model styled by employees at the boutique
- Shot model in multiple outfits

10/27-11/02:

- Uploaded video clips
- Edited video

11/01: Received printed look book

11/05: Fourth meeting with Sophie

- Showed Sophie the video and took notes for revision
- Showed Sophie the printed look book
- Discussed event details and invitation

11/06:

- Emailed Sophie with event flier design and received approval
- Sophie put the invitation on her social media networks and spread it through word of mouth to her customers

11/06-11/14:

- Edited and finalized video

11/15: “Cozy up at Ellie Mia” event

- Help set up boutique and took photos of event

11/18: Fifth and last meeting with Sophie

- Discussed event turn out and success
- Wrapped up campaign materials for focus group analysis

01/13-01/17:

- Focus group recruitment
- Confirmed date and time with focus group participants

01/24:

- Conducted three focus groups

01/25-01/26:

- Focus group transcription

01/28-01/31:

- Focus group analysis
- Emailed Sophie focus group data and analysis with suggestions and recommendations for future research

\*It should be noted that throughout the timeline, I stayed in constant communication with Sophie through emails during the whole creative process.

### **Campaign Materials Execution**

I collaborated with my friend, Allison Winckler, who is a make up artist for the two photo shoots and video shoot. I also had three assistant photographers for the first photo shoot since it was taken place outside of campus. My friend, Amelia Leung, also assisted me on the second photo shoot. However, for the video shoot and the look book, I personally designed and created them with guidance and feedback from Sophie.

The first element that was executed was the high fashion photo shoot. The location was downtown Syracuse, in front of the Everson Museum of Art, because the artsy setting matched the elegant vibe that Sophie wanted. The models, Sarah Rozansky and Alexis Mattei, were styled by the employees of Ellie Mia and had their makeup and hair done by Allison Winckler. The models had a total of three looks because Sophie wanted to keep the photo shoot simple and focus more on the accessories and the dresses, rather than incorporating many different looks.

The video shoot was produced a few weeks after with another student model named Mary Kate McCoonan. She was styled in four different outfits and the camera followed her around as she browsed the store's items and accessories. The video had a more down to earth, fun vibe, compared to the serious, elegant vibe of the first photo shoot.

Moreover, the second photo shoot took place on SU campus, which also featured student models including Sarah Rozansky, Mary Kate McCoonan and

Mary Wagner. The look book featured only one outfit per model because Sophie wanted to test a variety of shots with one outfit rather than many outfits. These photos were meant to resemble the average college student so their outfits were causal, everyday wear including fall accessories such as scarves and hats.

Sophie also had a small event at her store the week prior to finals week during fall semester 2013, in which we named “Cozy Up at Ellie Mia.” She had complimentary hot cocoa and a winter accessory raffle. We used one of the photos from the look book and made it into an invitation, which was promoted through word of mouth, at her store and on her social media networks. We would then test whether or not people in the focus groups would have attended the event had they heard about it last semester.

Combining these different elements, Sophie had a promotional package for her boutique. Although she had the look book in her store and used the photos and invitation on her social media networks, they were not used to promote her store aggressively. Merely, they were used as a sneak peek of what may come for the future. The reactions of her employees and customers to the materials were also helpful since they know her brand better than anyone else.

The photos, video, invitation and look book would be the sample test materials for the research component of this capstone. The participants’ feedback of the boutique itself are more important than the creative aspects of the campaign because it is more difficult to change public opinions than it is to change campaign materials. However, both affect one another, so if we know what the public wants and needs, then we can tailor the campaign materials to match them.



## Chapter 2: Behind the Scenes

People do not often have the opportunity to see the behind the scenes of a photo shoot or the process and preparation for it. Below are photos of what went on before and during the photo shoot.

### HAIR & MAKEUP:



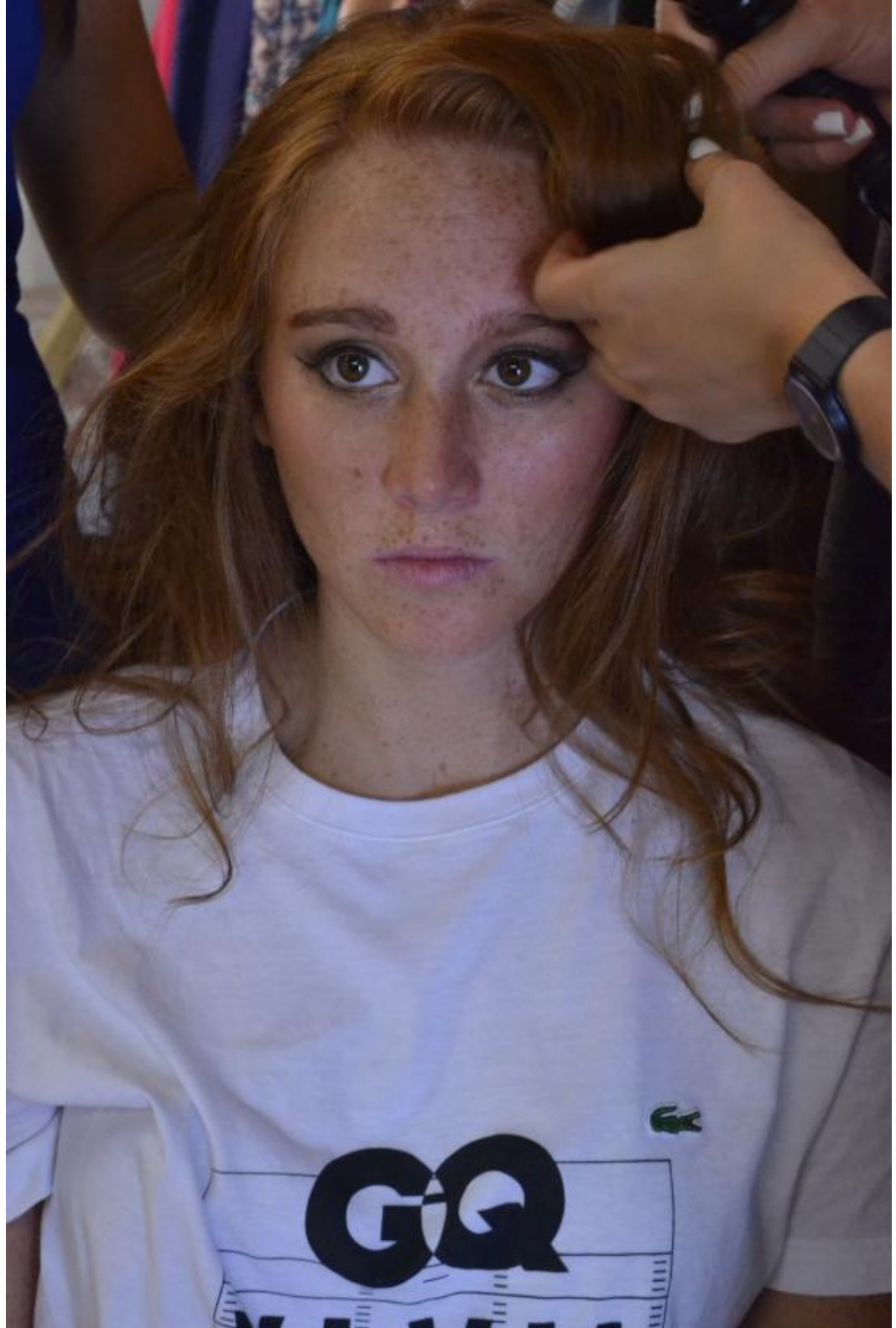


Allison Winckler doing Sarah Rozansky's makeup



Alexis Mattei gets her make up and hair done

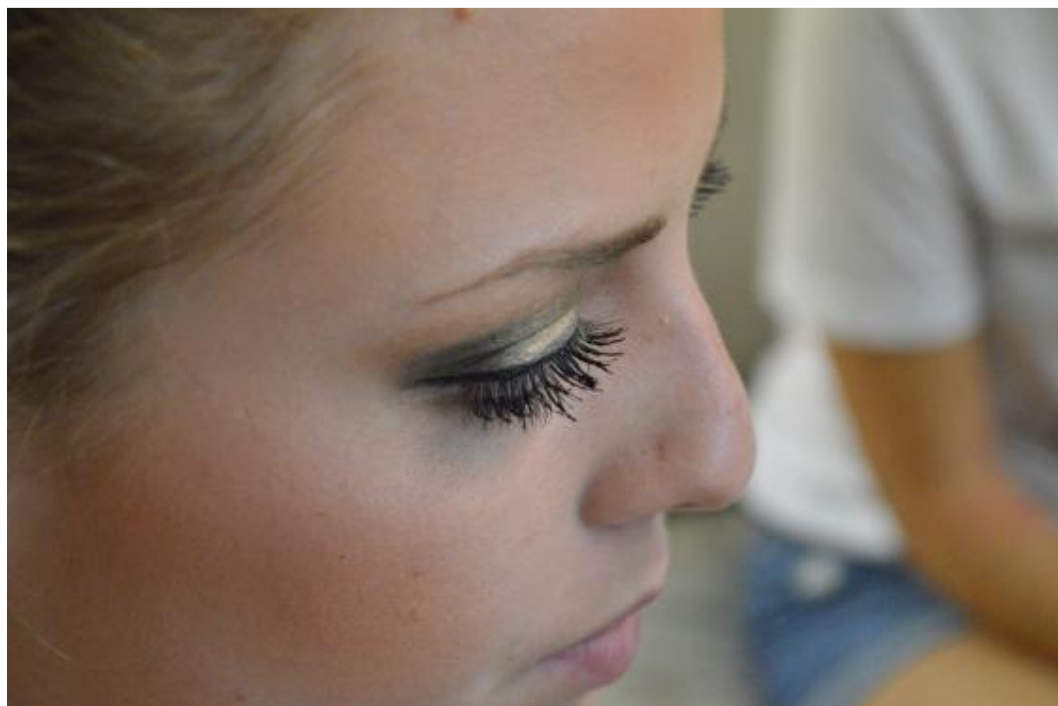
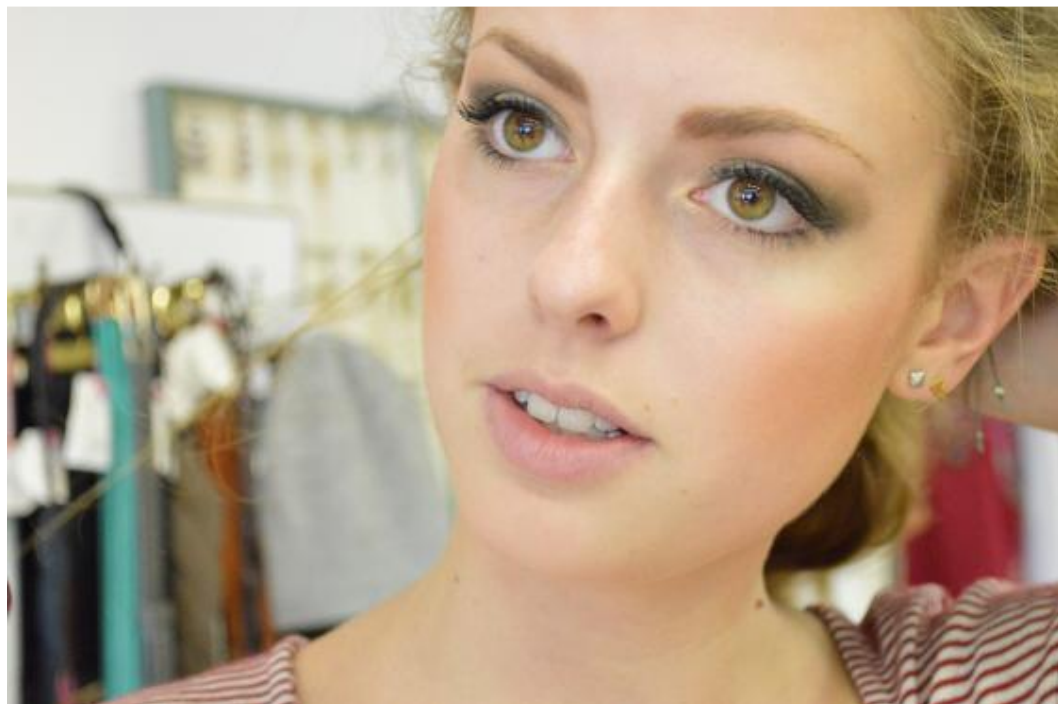




Alexis Mattei gets her hair styled



Sarah Rozansky gets her hair curled by Laura Filanges



Close up of Sarah Rozansky's make up



**PHOTO SHOOT PREPARATION:**



Laura Filanges helps style Alexis Mattei for photo shoot



**PHOTO SHOOT SET UP:**

Amelia Leung photographs Sarah Rozansky

## Chapter 3: Focus Group Process

### **Importance of Research**

The second half of my project focused primarily on research because research is the beginning of the process in analyzing the effectiveness of public relations campaigns. The capstone project not only relies on public relations, but also on consumer relations because the focus is to explore ways in which Sophie can foster mutually beneficial relationships based on understanding her consumer's needs and wants (Smith, 2014, p. 69).

Matera and Artigue (2000) argue that the “audience doesn’t come to the message; the message must reach the audience” (p. 136). In other words, planning is key to any campaign execution. Without planning, it is difficult to convey messages that are understandable for the target audiences. Sophie and I planned the campaign materials as part of our attempt to send the message that her boutique is a trusted and dependable source for fashion inspiration and customers can shop for high quality and designer brands and accessories at her shop.

Furthermore, I applied Cutlip, Center and Broom’s four-step process in structuring this capstone project. Starting with the first step, I have defined the problem based on my meetings with Sophie, which is a lack of student awareness of the boutique (Broom, 2012, p. 281). In addition, I have determined that the purpose of the research is to explore the affective and behavioral objectives of the campaign. The third step is to create a campaign or program that meets or surpasses the objectives, which is what I have attempted to do based on the

creative elements of the testing materials. The last step is to evaluate and provide feedback on the campaign, which is where my research and analysis come into play (Broom, 2012, p. 361).

According to Stacks (2011), “Research is important in management decisions and accurate data lead to valid assessments and analyses of public opinions and program effectiveness” (p. 24). For this specific project, research and data can help predict consumers’ attitudes, opinions and knowledge of the boutique, while also giving insight to their shopping habits and behaviors. The client can use the data to implement changes to the campaign materials that addresses or reflects the trends or common themes in the focus group feedback.

### **Focus Group Methodology**

I used focus groups as my main method of qualitative research because it is an inexpensive way to collect valuable data. The information will also provide me with insight on how to manage and solve communication problems between the client and the targeted audience. With that information, I can educate my client on how to use public relations and marketing strategies to better market her boutique to her publics. My approach to the focus group was consumer-oriented and based on market research tradition since the boutique is a business and profit driven (Krueger, 2009, p. 5).

A focus group usually comprises of 6-12 people and provides credible qualitative research that allows for an in-depth, focused discussion on how groups of people feel about the subjects at hand (Krueger, 2009). I decided to use the

minimum amount of people for each focus group because if the purpose of the study is to understand an issue or behavior, then it is recommended to use fewer people (Krueger, 2009, p. 64). I also thought focus groups would be the best research method because participant feedback would give insight to any issues or problems and help guide the campaign's direction and development. It would also help me understand consumers' concerns and the discussion could elicit news campaign ideas and recommendations for future research.

Moreover, as a moderator, I was also able to observe the interaction between the participants as they discussed the questions and could guide the direction of the focus group. The respondents had various, unbiased opinions about the discussion topics I chose, which allowed for honest responses. In addition, focus groups give participants the opportunity to debate on issues and bounce ideas off of each other. As a result, it was beneficial for me to observe how participants voiced their opinions and how they responded to each other.

### **Participants and Sampling**

I used purposive sampling and volunteer sampling for my recruitment process. I selected female students that I knew who fit the description of my research project and my knowledge of Sophie's targeted audiences, which is an example of purposive sampling (Stacks, 2011, p. 197). The three categories that I took into consideration for the sampling were college majors, college standing, and fashion interest. Since the focus of the campaign is on public relations and fashion with branches to marketing and advertising, I wanted to first ask people

with majors in communications since they were familiar with the field and can contribute their thoughts based on the knowledge and insights from their courses. I then used volunteer sampling, in which I asked female students who were interested in fashion to see if they would agree to participate in the focus group (Stacks, 2011, p. 198).

For the purpose of this project, I gathered 18 females mainly from the public relations and advertising majors with room for other majors as well. The backgrounds of the participants ranged from sophomore to graduates with majors in public relations, advertising, biology, fashion design, graphic design, psychology, magazine, new media management, architecture, history and education.

Although I depended on participants' answers based on whether or not they had an interest in fashion, their opinions were still valued since all of the women have opinions to offer based on their shopping experiences. Many of the participants that I approached personally have fashionable style and seemed to fit the targeted audience of a boutique. Overall, I tried my best to gather qualified candidates based on the focus of my research, which is fashion and clothing.

### **Focus Group Procedures**

All of the participants were informed about the purpose of the focus group and capstone project before volunteering to participate in the focus groups. Before the focus groups were conducted, students also signed a consent form, which gave me permission to record their responses and use it solely for the purpose of this

capstone project, which can be found in Appendix A. The responses were recorded in audio and are transcribed in Appendix C.

Three focus groups consisting of six participants each took place in a secluded room in S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. Snacks were provided and participants were asked a series of questions, which can be found in Appendix B. Ultimately, their responses would help answer the following research questions:

- Q1: What drives students to shop in a store/ boutique? What roles do price, style and brand image play in students' shopping decisions?
- Q2: How can Ellie Mia increase awareness of the shop on SU campus?  
How does branding come into play?
- Q3: What materials are crucial for a public relations firm to promote the business?

The research questions deals primarily with questions of value, which answers “how good” or “how well” something is and questions of policy, which answers what should be done (Krueger, 2011, p. 33). My research mainly focuses on how well the boutique is branding itself in the SU community and what could the client do to solve the problems and issues that were mentioned in the discussions.

Figure 1 below summarizes the key concepts that need to be considered for the branding campaign of Ellie Mia, which relates directly to the research questions.



Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

First, we need to find out what students' purchasing factors are, whether they prefer to shop at boutiques or at retail stores. Once we determine what drives them to shop at a certain store, we can then introduce Ellie Mia into the picture and see if their purchasing factors align with that of the boutique's. If there is an inconsistency, then Sophie needs to find a way to make sure both complement each other.

The second factor in the theoretical framework would be the level of awareness of the boutique's existence on Marshall St. because without students' awareness, Ellie Mia would have no store traffic or business. Awareness directly relates to the third aspect of the framework, which is publicity/promotion. Once those two factors have been explored, we can work on the public relations and marketing aspects, which are the campaign testing materials.

As a result, the focus groups give me a better idea on student's purchasing factors and awareness of the boutique. Taking into account of the research and responses, I will then have a better idea of the direction of the campaign materials and how to use them to promote and publicize Ellie Mia.

## Chapter 4: Focus Group Analysis

After conducting three focus groups, it is clear that many students do not generally shop at boutiques because the clothing are out of their price range. In regards to Ellie Mia, students feel that the boutique can improve on its relationship with the university to raise awareness of its existence. Some students were not aware of the location even though it is on the strip of Marshall St.

The participants responded better to the campaign materials after they expressed their concerns with the boutique. They were able to give suggestions and feedback to improve the sample materials to better target students and to improve Ellie Mia's store image.

**Purchasing Factors:** *What drives students to shop in a store/ boutique? What roles do price, style and brand image play in students' shopping decisions?*

Style and brand image were the most common driving factors for students to shop in a store. The participants believed that most of the stores that they shop at matches their sense of style and clothing preference. Only a few participants shop at boutiques, whereas many do not. They have all agreed that if a boutique does not carry the styles that consumers want, then it is obvious that customers would not shop there.

Additionally, stores need to have a good reputation and brand image to attract customers. Brand image does not just mean how a store is portrayed in the media or social networks, but also how the store portrays itself through its display



windows, the clothing items, the store's atmosphere and the friendliness of the staff and employees. Especially if it is a customer's first time shopping at a store, first impression is everything; students believed that their first experience influences their permanent outlook on the store.

Moreover, everybody in the focus groups agreed that money is the main factor when it comes to their purchasing decisions. Since they are all college students, they are on a budget and need to spend their money wisely, especially on clothing and accessories. Since there are so many store options, students would be more inclined to shop at department and retail stores than boutiques simply due to the price difference.

Students acknowledge that boutiques carry more unique items, which is an advantage over department and retail stores. However, they associate boutiques with expensive items, which is a problem since money is the most important factor in their purchasing factors. As a result, the participants have concluded that the lower prices of department and retail stores outweigh the exclusivity of a boutique's clothing.

**Awareness:** *How can Ellie Mia increase awareness of the shop on SU campus?  
How does branding come into play?*

One main problem that Ellie Mia faces is its lack of awareness on campus. Surprisingly, half of the participants had never heard of the boutique or knew its location. For those who were aware of the boutique's location and existence have not once visited or entered the boutique, which relates directly to the awareness

factor of the theoretical framework. Thus, I was able to explore the promotional and publicity methods that students suggested that would best promote the shop.

Students agreed that a look book and photos would be great publicity for the boutique. Many of them suggested utilizing student publications as a means of advertising or simply putting the look books on campus locations to increase student awareness. Since a boutique carries clothing, students felt that visuals of those items would be appealing and generate curiosity for those who have never heard of Ellie Mia. Students also read student publications since many of them are in academic buildings and find advertisements to be the most effective promotional method.

Social media is also a useful tool to branch out to Syracuse students. Participants were fond of the promotional video because it helped to eliminate the intimidating fears that some expressed about visiting the boutique. The video was fun and portrayed the store's vibe to be down to earth and carefree. Students like that the video was inviting and welcoming because the model seemed to be interacting with the viewer.

A good PR tactic would be to put the video on social media networks such as Facebook and Instagram because it would give students a glimpse of the store's atmosphere and brand, rather than having students rely on their assumptions and perceptions of what they think Ellie Mia's image is. Ellie Mia has never had a promotional video either, so this would be a good way to introduce the brand and store to students.

Additionally, students felt that Ellie Mia has a great location on campus,

but is not taking advantage of its location and its potential relationship with the university. Especially with the student publications and the communication and fashion programs at Syracuse, Ellie Mia can collaborate with students and organizations to be a recognized and trusted boutique. Instead of disassociating with the university, the store can benefit in building a relationship with SU.

One participant expressed: “Doesn’t Newhouse always have like a fashion show at the end of the year or something? It would be cool if she collaborated with one of them because I know one of my teachers last year, she was trying to get her students to model, so I know students model in that and that’s kind of consistent with this, and even in the end if they said ‘some clothes provided by Ellie Mia’ or something like that.”

In other words, students see an opportunity that the boutique can benefit from. Collaboration with the school would be a great way to start a relationship with the students. If Sophie teams up with organizations that are fashion based, she will be able to connect with people of the same interests and can then work on maintaining those relationships to build a positive reputation for her boutique.

**Publicity/Promotion:** *What materials are crucial for a public relations firm to promote the business?*

The sample campaign materials were received well by the students. They liked the idea of using student models as the face of the brand in the photos and video because they were seen as college students with whom they can relate to. All the participants thought that the look book and photos were professional,

which helped enhance the business aspect and image of the boutique.

Participants thought the contrast between the two photo shoots highlighted the variety of items that Ellie Mia had to offer. Since the photos were inspired by seasonal trends, they suggested having look books for each season or semester, as this would make the boutique a trusted source of fashion inspiration. The look books can also serve as communication between the boutique and the college students and fashion lovers.

Similar to the responses to the awareness factor, students felt that social media would be a great way to promote the business. All of the campaign materials can be showcased on their networks, especially on Instagram, a platform where users and businesses can post aesthetically pleasing photos. Instagram's most popular accounts are food, travel and fashion, so it would be beneficial for the boutique to utilize the medium and market their products directly to SU students.

In regards to the "Cozy Up at Ellie Mia" event, students liked that there was complimentary hot cocoa and many of them agreed that they would have attended the event. It was a great incentive to get people who have never heard of the boutique to visit and people who are intimidated to shop at the boutique as well. It was also a small sized event that gave students a chance to socialize with their friends, get to know the owner and employees, enjoy hot cocoa, enter the winter accessory raffle and browse through the boutique. As a result, Ellie Mia should host more events that are similar to the "Cozy Up at Ellie Mia" event during the school semester to connect with students.

Taking into account of students' concerns with price, they believed having discounts would also be a good promotional method to get people to shop at the store. One student claimed, "I know that we were talking a lot about the price and it determines whether you walk into a store or not, but also, the things that she has there are nice brands, so she can't make them too cheap where she's not going to make a profit, so it's kind of hard unless it's just a cheap boutique with stuff that aren't made well, but then you're not going to want that."

In other words, students are aware of the business aspect of the boutique, but would like to see if Ellie Mia can do occasional discounted events to solve the issue of the store's expensive prices since money was their number one factor in purchasing decisions. Combining the look book, photos and video with the discounted events, students felt that Ellie Mia could better market itself on SU campus because both suggestions would help solve the problems of lack of awareness and the boutique's general expensive prices. The students felt that sample materials were all necessary in creating a consistent brand image and promotional package for Ellie Mia.

## Chapter 4: Discussion/ Conclusion

After analyzing the data and responses from the focus groups, it is safe to conclude that Ellie Mia needs to first find out who its targeted audience is for the campaign. Since the materials were a sample and were used as a test, participants felt that there was an inconsistency between the boutique's brand image and the testing materials.

The assumption and perception that many students have of Ellie Mia is that the store carries expensive items, which only come in limited sizes. Students found both factors unappealing, especially if Sophie decides to target "average" college students. Participants loved the idea of using student models in the photos and look book, but prefer to see a diverse group of students because most of the models in the campaign materials fit the prototype of a model: tall and skinny. If the models in the look book represented different body figures and sizes, then students would feel that they accurately represent "average" students since not every female on campus looks similar to the models in the testing materials.

Participants also suggested that if Ellie Mia is trying to branch out to a newer audience, then Sophie may want to consider carrying more sizes because her current sizes run from 0-6.

One of the participant expressed, "... I've been taking classes in these [subjects that focus around diversity and marketing] and I don't know if it's just obvious to me, but all of the models are really pretty, they're really skinny, they're really tall, all the clothing like really fit them, so you have to think, like if

I'm not tall, skinny, blonde, and pretty, am I going to look good in that tight dress that's going to show my gut? I don't know."

In other words, the response is a concern similar to the lack of diversity of student models in the advertisements. The boutique's limited sizes are also narrowing Sophie's targeted audience into a category of females that fit into a size 0-6 and not all college students are in that size range.

Moreover, students thought that Ellie Mia already has a targeted audience due to the pricing and sizes of her clothing. If Sophie decides to stick with that targeted audience, then participants agreed that the campaign materials remain consistent with her publics and do a good job in marketing to them. However, if she wants to target average college students, she should diversify her models, especially in the promotional package.

Another major concern that was expressed in the focus groups was the perception that Ellie Mia has an intimidating vibe and many students are scared to go into the boutique. They have all noted that the store usually has a few customers with two employees working. They do not feel that it is welcoming enough for them to shop because as one participant expressed, "It's like they're watching you, like I can't even look at the price tag because they're going to look at me looking at the price tag."

Participants also used the words "uncomfortable" and "unfriendly" to describe their shopping experiences. To solve this issue, one student suggested that during warm weather, the boutique could open their doors to the public for a more welcoming vibe. An employee can also stand outside and pass out the look

books to promote the boutique while also engaging in friendly conversations with students. It is important to keep in mind that the participants do not feel that the store itself is intimidating, but find the store's image intimidating. Thus, Sophie must find a way to change that perception because it would ultimately help her store's image, traffic and reputation.

Overall, even if Sophie wants to keep her targeted audience of customers who spend more money on clothing and fit into size 0-6, the campaign materials can still raise awareness of the boutique because they represent her brand well. However, if she wants to target the average college students, then participants suggest having more discounted events and using more diverse models.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

When it comes to focus group research, the participants play a crucial role in the data and analysis since their backgrounds influence their responses. The different methods of recruitment and sampling can generate different conclusions. If this research was done again, I would focus my recruiting efforts in different classes and have people sign up, rather than personally choosing candidates that I knew. This method can avoid any bias because there will be no connection between the participants and the moderator.

Having a bigger sampling can also be beneficial because it could potentially give a larger range of opinions and participants can dive into different topics and areas of focus in their discussions. I decided to go with six people in each focus group because I felt that that number was a decent amount to start an



open discussion. I feared that a larger group could be intimidating, which can cause some people to speak more than others. However, I would use different sized focus groups in the future to see if I would collect the same information based on the audio and observation of participants' interaction.

There are a few notable disadvantages of a focus group, which are summarized in Figure 2 below (Fern, 2001, p. 97):

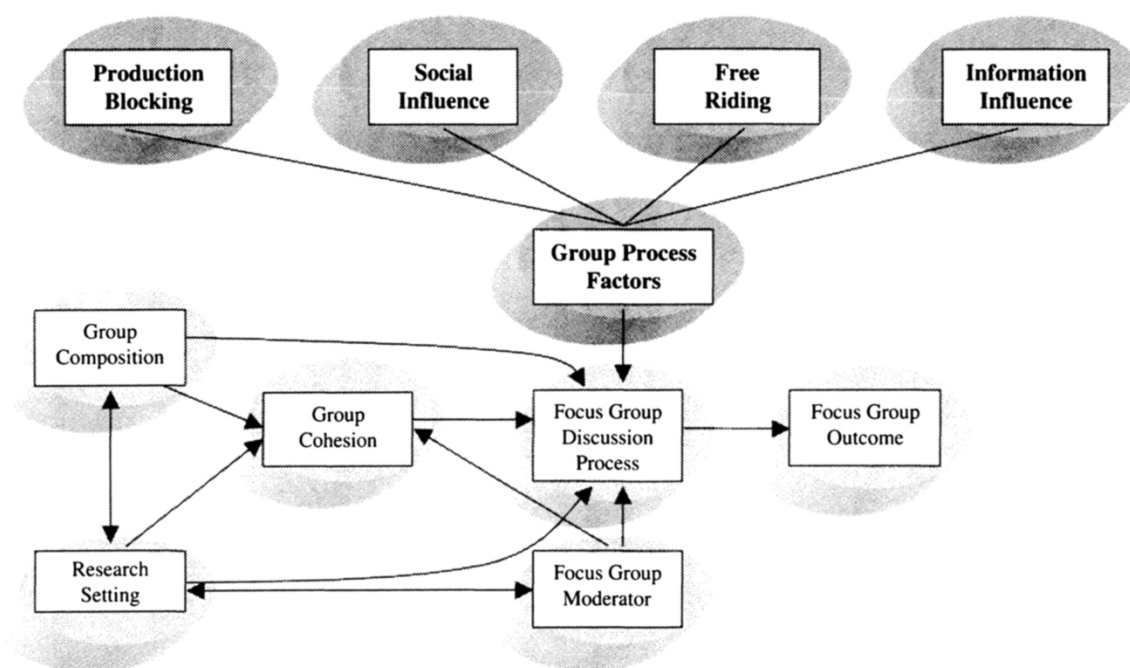


Figure 2: Factors that Affect Focus Group Procedure

For this particular project, I believe the group environment could have played a contributing factor in formulating participant responses. The focus group procedure creates an artificial environment, which may not accurately reflect the

opinions of the participants (Pbworks, 2007). The students were informed that their responses would be recorded, which may influence the authenticity of their thoughts. In addition, if many people agree with one position, the minority group may be pressured to also agree, which gives the dominant voices a greater value in the research. Fern's (2011) diagram supports how group composition leads to group cohesion, which in return affects the focus group outcome (p. 97).

To solve that issue, it is possible to have surveys in addition to focus groups. Surveys are a simple way to generate responses from a greater sample. Since they are anonymous, students may be more inclined to be truthful with their thoughts, which would help eliminate the biased output. In both cases, it is difficult to have a research method that does not have both advantages and disadvantages.

Fern (2011) also noticed that the setting of the focus group could help create a comfortable space for participants to share their thoughts in an open discussion as opposed to an artificial environment (p. 98). Fern's first stage of focus group process is "globality," which has to do with "the degree and nature of diversity among group members" (2011, p. 98). Before a focus group discussion begins, participants may notice that they are different from each other. Once the discussion starts, the participants slowly interact as a group and learn what they have in common. After they feel more comfortable with each other and the topics of study, they develop a collective consciousness. The last step of Fern's focus group discussion process is the "informational exchange stage during which information and explanations are freely exchange" (Fern, 2011, p. 99).

The final step is crucial in focus group analysis because as a researcher, I am interested in the participants' exchange of information and self-disclosure. It is primarily the moderator's job to make sure that the group feels relaxed during the discussion, which explains why the location, time and setup of the room is so important in conducting focus groups. As a result, I recommend using Figure 3 of Fern's six-stage process in future focus group procedures to ensure that the participants reach the information exchange phase and can comfortably share their thoughts without experiencing or succumbing to peer pressure or group influence.

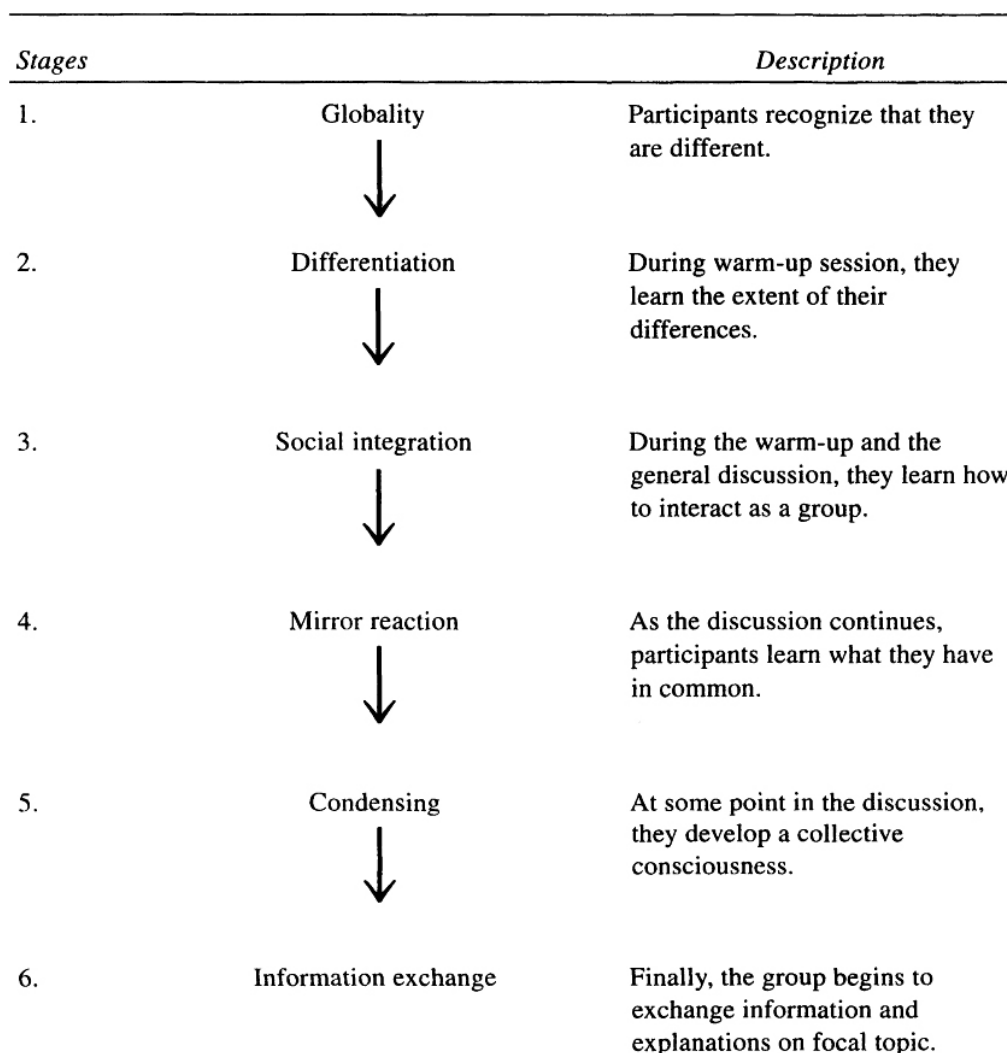


Figure 3: Focus Group Discussion Process

Another recommendation for future research that can further explore the PR branding methods of this capstone project would be taking the suggestions and feedback from the focus groups and implementing them to the new campaign materials. For example, a more diverse group of student models can be used in the look books. Sophie can also try to collaborate with student organizations and place advertisements in campus publications. She can also have events that were similar to her “Cozy Up at Ellie Mia” event, along with offering student discounts. After these suggestions take place, I would hold another session of focus groups with the same participants to see if their opinions have changed based on the PR and marketing efforts of Ellie Mia.

If the responses have been positive, then it is safe to conclude that the students’ input helped increase awareness of the boutique and changed overall perceptions of the store’s image and reputation. If their opinions have remained the same, then it is obvious that the campaign materials and the PR efforts were not effective. In either situation, it would be interesting to see how the focus group feedback have affected the branding image of Ellie Mia after taking their suggestions into account and actually putting them into action.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Focus Group Protocol**

Moderator: Mariann Yip

Format: 6-8 participants will meet in a casual classroom setting, with chairs around a table, so everyone can see each other and engage in an in-depth conversation. Snacks will be provided, so people can relax and talk openly and comfortably.

Focus Group Questions:

#### **Ellie Mia Boutique: backgrounds, opinions**

1. What do you normally look for in a boutique? What factors or attributes draw you in the most (cost, style, location)?
2. What do you know about Ellie Mia boutique? Do you shop there? What are your opinions?

#### **Look book (fashion, advertising, PR standpoint)**

3. I want you to look at this look book that I made last semester. If you saw this, would you be compelled to check out the boutique?
4. Do you feel connected with these models since they are college students and

the images are taken from campus locations? What if you knew one of the models?

5. From an advertising perspective, do you think this was done well or what could be changed?

6. From a public relations perspective, how do you think the store can use this look book to promote business or gain publicity?

**Photos and event aspect, video (advertising, PR standpoint)**

7. If you saw this event and didn't know about the store, would you attend? Why or why not?

8. Just looking at these photos, do you think there is a consistency between the brand and the look book?

9. What do you think of the video?

10. With the increasing use of social media, do you think if it was posted on Facebook or Instagram or even sent out as an email blast, it would boost business or store traffic?

**Promoting/ Marketing Boutique**

11. Taking all these materials, what do you think is missing? Or do you think the store has a good promotional package?

12. Last minute thoughts or opinions on what would make you shop there or visit or even spread the news to your friends.

## **Appendix B**

### **Consent Form**

#### **INFORMED CONSENT**

S. I. NEWHOUSE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

*An Analysis of PR Campaign Materials for Ellie Mia Boutique*

My name is Mariann Yip and I am a senior, majoring in public relations at S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. I am working on my honors capstone project and will be conducting a focus group study on students' opinions on the sample campaign materials for Ellie Mia Boutique.

You will be asked a series of open-ended questions in a round table discussion, which will take approximately 60 minutes. All discussions will be audio recorded in digital format and then destroyed after transcriptions of the audio are completed. Although precautions will be taken to protect confidentiality and anonymity, I cannot guarantee confidentiality or anonymity in a group situation such as this. Your names and responses will be used in the transcription only, but will remain anonymous in other references in the analysis.



The benefit of this research is that you will be helping me gain a better understanding of how Ellie Mia can better connect with college students and promote itself on campus. The research is used primarily for my capstone project and for the client, if she chooses to use the data and analysis.

Your participation is completely voluntary and you have the right to refuse to take part without penalty. If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research you may contact Mariann Yip ([mmyip@syr.edu](mailto:mmyip@syr.edu), 845-269-8585). You may also contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at (315) 443-3013 if you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, or if you have any questions, concerns or complaints that you wish to address someone other than me if I cannot be reached.

**“All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate in this research study. I have received a copy of this consent form.”**

\_\_\_ I agree to be audio/video recorded.

\_\_\_ I do not agree to be audio/video recorded.

## Appendix C

### Focus Group Transcription

#### Transcription of Focus Group 1:

*Ellie Mia Boutique: backgrounds, opinions*

1. What do you normally look for in a boutique? What factors or attributes draw you in the most (cost, style, location)?

- Megan: The quality of the clothing and the price. The overall appearance of the store too. But definitely uniqueness!
- Leanne: I would say like what they have on the display on the windows, like that's the first thing I look at.
- Breanne: Also the quality of the clothes too.
- Adrianna: It's probably price and how unique the clothing is.
- Leanne: And what it looks like inside, like if it looks dingy, like even if they call themselves a boutique, I'm not going to go in.
- Jess: And like how clean it is, like I hate when stores are trashed.
- Breanne: And also the atmosphere too, I mean if you're going to take the time and shop in a boutique, instead of going to a big department store, I think it's kind of nice to have that experience, like the staff is friendly, and there's good music and stuff.

- Sophie: I feel like I generally expect it to be more expensive, but I am super price-conscious, so I'll get something if I really love it, but otherwise, I won't.

2. What do you know about Ellie Mia boutique? Do you shop there? What are your opinions?

- Leanne: I've been there once, I think, I mean I just looked around it, but I looked at their clothes and some of their clothes, like it wasn't for me.
- Jess: I've never been in there, I think I've barely heard of it.
- Adrianna: Yeah, I've never heard of it or shopped there. I didn't even know it was on campus.
- Leanne: And also, when I was there, I felt like it was really expensive for some of their stuff.
- Megan: I don't know much about them because I've never shopped there. The clothing looks like you could get it at Forever21, but more expensive.
- Sophie: I feel like I generally assume that all those stores on Marshall St. are really over priced, so I would just more likely go somewhere else or look online or something.
- Breanne: Also, their window displays, like I don't think I ever walked by and said "ooo I really like that. I should go in and check it out." So I guess it's just not my style or something, but I've never just been compelled to walk in.

*Look book (fashion, advertising, PR standpoint)*

3. I want you to look at this look book that I made last semester. If you saw this, would you be compelled to check out the boutique?

- Leanne: I like that it's just pictures, and right, there are the prices, it looks good and overall, I like how it looks.
- Sophie: I like that and what you said earlier, when she said earlier that she likes that it's places around campus. My only initial reaction is that it seems like they are students, and if it's campus-oriented, then they could look a bit friendlier. I know that they're doing the 'not caring model' thing, but since it's supposed to be inviting or like 'these people are like you', then it can be –
- Jess: They look mad.
- ALL: Yeah, they do.
- Jess: Like I like the look book, it looks really professional, I wouldn't think it's student work, but I did notice that they're really nice dressed, so I'll probably be like "Oh I like that jacket."
- Breanne: These are all good quality photos.
- Adriana: I think it's very professional and similar to what I would see in look books of other high-end boutiques.
- Leanne: But I feel like they're all sort of wearing the same thing, like if Ellie Mia wanted to advertise different stuff, have them wear different things, like different colors.
- Jess: Yeah, or different styles to represent their whole store.

4. Do you feel connected with these models since they are college students and the images are taken from campus locations? What if you knew one of the models?

- Jess: I think most people who shop there anyways are students.
- Adrianna: I like that you are using campus locations and students. I would want to see more looks and more photos because I really thought it was well done.
- Breanne: It helps spread the word too, like if one of the girls was at the photo shoot, she can say “oh hey, I did this for this boutique,” like it might put a positive image of the boutique to the people’s mind.
- Sophie: And also, if they went to model there, and they were like “I got to wear this really cool necklace” or something, then they might even want to shop there.
- Megan: I like that the settings around campus provide a sense of familiarity and one of the models is a girl in my fashion program. This also provides a sense of familiarity, but also strange at the same time because I’d feel like I’m trying to imitate her style.

5. From an advertising perspective, do you think this was done well or what could be changed?

- Sophie: Especially if it’s going to be people that you know, maybe they can represent their own style, and if they look just happier.
- Adrianna: I think it’s a good idea because if not a lot of people know

about it for instance, it gives an idea of what the store carries. The look book is fall but if there's one for each season, it's helpful to promote the store.

- Megan: I think this is the perfect advertising tactic. It really hones in on what the boutique carries and who her consumers are.

6. From a public relations perspective, how do you think the store can use this look book to promote business or gain publicity?

- Breanne: I think it's good because it's local and it's not like some aloof perspective that they're putting out there, I mean it's really approachable for students and they're seeing faces that are similar to their own. Yeah, I think it's good, a little bit more variety would be cool as you said, I think that would be neat because then they can show all the clothes that they offer, and yeah from a PR perspective, I think it's a good idea to do this kind of thing, because I don't ever hear from this boutique, like I haven't seen any outreach from them, so I think it would be a good start.
- Sophie: I feel like it would also be really cool since they are obviously representing students, like if they definitely got a diverse group of people, like not all people that know each other obviously or something, cause if you're reaching out to people, then it may just be to people that you know, but just represent a whole different.
- Moderator: When you say a whole different, do you mean models or what?

- Sophie: Yeah...like not all model type.
- Adrianna: I think it's a good idea to put the look book into student publications, almost like advertisements because people read them or even magazines.
- Leanne: Another thing is that if this boutique wanted to spread its word, get more well known, I don't know if they can insert their brochures in like pamphlets throughout schools.
- Breanne: Like the D.O or something.
- Leanne: Yeah and I don't know if discounts are their thing, but maybe a 10% discount here and there would really spread the word.
- Jess: It'll get people in there for sure.
- Leanne: Yeah, or at least get them curious.

*Photos and event aspect, video (advertising, PR standpoint)*

7. If you saw this event and didn't know about the store, would you attend? Why or why not?

- Adrianna: I guess it would depend on what time it was and if I could make it. I would think about going, but I would more likely tell other people and see if they wanted to go.
- Leanne: I would probably go in, but I don't know.
- Jess: I think that's really cute.
- Breanne: I think it's a good incentive to come in and it's like special and I don't know, I like that.

- Jess: Yeah, it's not like going to a department store, because you're not going get chocolate and talk to somebody specific.
- Moderator: But do you think the store needs prior branding to that or do you think the invite is enough?
- Breanne: I think it's also a good kickoff for that, to have better outreach, and have more people come in, that you wouldn't have otherwise, like greeting you inside when people come in.
- Adriana: Yeah, I definitely agree. It can be a good way to start promoting itself to the students on campus.

8. Just looking at these photos, do you think there is a consistency between the brand and the look book?

- Adrianna: I think there's a consistency because boutiques normally have different styled clothing.
- Leanne: Yeah, I think she should have that, it's good. I think she should have both, but it depends on what she wants her image to be, like is there a specific style she wants to get across, like does she want to be more sophisticated, or...
- Moderator: I mean the whole point of a boutique is to carry different looks, so she has these looks in the look book that are more causal, everyday wear but then she has more stuff that you might want to wear for a formal or a nice event.
- Sophie: I think it's a good mix because there are those everyday looks, but



at the same time, people at Syracuse do have events that might want to get more dressed up for and when I initially saw it, I was like “Oh I really like that dress, that’s cute,” but I think keeping it consistent with the student models might be cool.

- Jess: Yea, I think it’s cool that she has the student thing because um, you don’t really get that with other boutiques, but this is a college setting anyways, so she should take advantage of that more.
- Sophie: Plus, it’s really easy to get integrated into the Syracuse community just like “Oh I would like to model for that, that would be fun,” so people would just know that their friends have done it or something, like it’ll be an easy way to spread the word.
- Moderator: So you think it’s better to stick with the same models? Like a face of the brand?
- Sophie: Maybe not the same model, but student models.

#### 9. What do you think of the video?

- Megan: I like the personality captured in this video. But you don’t see too in depth the overall aesthetic of the company.
- Breanne: I think it was a little unclear as to why she was shopping and I get that you can just go in and browse and stuff, but I don’t know, it would’ve been nice if there was some kind of storyline, like why is she walking in that store, but I think it gave a good view of the boutique, and the products it has to offer. There’s a good variety and stuff and like, you

can obviously tell it's very neat in there, it's a good environment, and I think that could've been shown a little more, like to get a glimpse inside.

- Jess: I like that she was laughing at the camera and stuff, it made you feel like you were shopping with her, so I think more of that would've been good.
- Adrianna: Yeah, I agree with what everyone has been saying.
- Sophie: Yea, it seemed to show the vibe that you were speaking about earlier and it was pretty consistent with the look book that you showed us.

10. With the increasing use of social media, do you think if it was posted on Facebook or Instagram or even sent out as an email blast, it would boost business or store traffic?

- Leanne: I think so! Cause it made me, like when I saw her put on the dress, I was like "Oh that's really cute, I would try that on." So, I think so.
- Jess: Especially if it's somebody you know in the video, then like, you'll probably watch it, like if it's your friend or something. Cause that's how social media works, everybody's friends on it.
- Adriana: Definitely. Social media is so big nowadays. It will help her rather than hurt her if she posted them on Facebook or Instagram.

#### *Marketing/ promoting boutique*

11. Taking all these materials, what do you think is missing? Or do you think the store has a good promotional package?

- Adrianna: I think that's sufficient if you put it in the right place and market it to the right audience.
- Megan: Definitely promote it on social media.
- Leanne: I guess, like obviously get the word out with everyone, like maybe have in the beginning of the semester, like maybe have like a kick off, like in the fall or a spring sale, I don't know, something like before summer or spring break or something.
- Sophie: Doesn't Newhouse always have like a fashion show at the end of the year or something? It would be cool if she collaborated with one of them because I know one of my teachers last year, she was trying to get her students to model, so I know students model in that and that's kind of consistent with this, and even in the end if they said 'some clothes provided by Ellie Mia' or something like that.
- Jess: I don't know if you're allowed to distribute those in the school, but if I saw the look book laying around, I'd probably pick it up, so if there's more working with the school, like have some collaboration with Newhouse classes.

12. Last minute thoughts or opinions on what would make you shop there or visit or even spread the news to your friends.

- Adrianna: If a boutique has things that are one of a kind, I would shop there. It's hard to say because I haven't gone to the store and I don't know what they carry.

- Breanne: I just think it's like if they have good outreach. We are in such a unique community, like we have so many different people on campus and they have such a good spot, that like, capitalizing on that, like just offering incentives to come in and be there, like they have to make themselves a staple on campus and they can, they totally can, they can become like a trusted boutique for a lot of girls to go to, but I just think it's a matter of outreach, and making that connection in the first place.
- Sophie: The only reason why I haven't been in there is because I assume it's expensive and I wouldn't be able to afford things, so I mean, I don't know, it might be expensive, but if it's actually affordable, then that'll be a good thing, like to really emphasize that.
- Moderator: I've been to the store and it is pretty pricey, so do you think that's an automatic turn off?
- Leanne: It's more like, if I like something, I'll pay for it. It's not more like I love it, but it's too expensive, like if I love something, I'll pay for it. And I feel like I didn't fall in love with a lot of her stuff to pay her price, but then again, that's what a boutique is. It's pricey to start with so maybe if she figured out like what clothes would get the students more interested, like people have formals and a lot of people don't have cars to go to the mall or other stores, so maybe, if she have types of clothes that students on campus would be more likely to wear.
- Adriana: Yeah, I think that's a good point. It really depends on who is shopping there. I mean, we all have different styles and different shopping

preferences. I do agree that price is a big concern because we are in college. Some of us can afford that, but some people can't. I think she needs to look at her targeted publics and go from there.

- Moderator: Is there anything else you guys want to add?
- Jess: I just think that may be the problem. Who is her audience? It can be me and it can be you. She needs to find that connection.
- Megan: Yeah, I think that's the whole point of this focus group. I think you can tell her what we've been saying and then figure out a plan to fix the issues and concerns.
- Moderator: Okay, thank you so much for your time. If nobody else has anything new to add, then I think we are all set. I really appreciate all of your thoughts and insight.

## Transcription of Focus Group 2:

*Ellie Mia Boutique: backgrounds, opinions*

1. What do you normally look for in a boutique? What factors or attributes draw you in the most (cost, style, location)?

- Darina: A lot of times, boutiques are more expensive than department stores, which like kind of discourages me to go in, because I'm really poor, so a lot of times they don't have discounts. Sometimes they have sales I've noticed, so I'd be more inclined to go in during the sale, I think.
- Yan: I don't really go to boutiques. I usually just go to the malls because they're bigger and there are more choices.
- Rachel: Boutiques also carry a lot of brands that department stores don't have, which is nice, but it's definitely more expensive, so if I'm really looking for something that I can't find anywhere else, I'd probably go to a boutique.
- Darina: Yeah, like unique stuff.
- Samantha: I kind of agree with what Darina was saying. I know Ellie Mia in particular, their prices are kind of expensive, and usually when I go there, I look at their jewelry because it's fun jewelry and it's not as expensive as the shirts and stuff, um, but I don't know why, but I feel like boutiques don't have sale racks. Like in Lord & Taylor, there's always sales, you always find things cheaper, like Free People is always on sale, but in boutiques, it's always going to be the original price.

- Darina: And it's like super intimidating sometimes. I went to Ellie Mia once and they were really standoffish and unfriendly and I think that, like they know that only certain people are going to make purchases and they won't waste their time on anyone else who doesn't look this way.
- Marie: I feel like there are best finds in boutiques, like more in department stores, like in boutiques, you find things you can't find anywhere else, but if I know right away that the prices are so high, I don't even try to look, like that's the immediate turn off.
- Samantha: Like I know *Some Girls* on Marshall St, they went out of business, but they used to have cheaper things. It was a lot different than Ellie Mia, but they went out of business, so I guess you have to see the differences in the pricing.
- Ally: I mean, it's the same like what every one's saying, like I would shop in there if it's things I know I can't find anywhere else and I normally shop there, like there's this store called LF, I think, um, and I think, two times out of the year they have like this huge sale, where it's like 80% off.
- Samantha: That's when I go.
- Ally: Exactly, that's when I go too, that's when I like to shop at boutiques when I know they're having sales.

2. What do you know about Ellie Mia boutique? Do you shop there, what are your opinions?

- Samantha: We'll the windows are always bright, like really pretty with

really cool things, but as Darina was saying, I sometimes get intimidated to walk in because there's always maybe like two workers there and there's not that many people there, so they're looking for you to buy something, but if you look at the price tag, it's like between the 60-80 range, which is not that high, like if you want to get a shirt, but you can find like \$30 shirts in other stores. But their display windows definitely catch your eyes.

- Marie: I don't even know which one is Ellie Mia. Just based off what we said about boutiques in general, like my assumption is so high that I can't afford it that I don't even wander in, like I'll notice the windows.
- Darina: It's like eye candy, like what do you call it, it's like window shopping.
- Marie: Yeah, like I don't even pay attention to what's the name of the store, like I don't even consider it.
- Samantha: But if you take into consideration, the school we go to, there's definitely a target audience, who will easily go in, especially freshman girls who don't have cars to go anywhere else, they'll go in and buy. I have a freshman friend who says that her roommate spends monthly a thousand dollars at that store and J. Michael's because they can and it's there. So that's definitely something also to consider.
- Rachel: I've been there twice and every time it's so uncomfortable.
- Darina: It's like they're watching you, like I can't even look at the price tag because they're going to look at me looking at the price tag.



- Samantha: No, I definitely agree, but it's cute things, but I don't know how to change that, the price.

*Look book (fashion, advertising, PR standpoint)*

3. I want you to look at this look book that I made last semester. If you saw this, would you be compelled to check out the boutique?

- Darina: I really like it. It's trendy and cute and like totally gets the whole school vibe across. I'd be compelled to go in, but then once I went in, it be up to the price of the product, I think.
- Yan: The look book would make me aware of the boutique and the photos look good. So I would go check it out, especially since it's on campus.
- Samantha: I definitely think it's a good way to get people in who haven't already been in, like "Oh they sell scarves," like things that everyone can relate to, so I think it does a good job of that.
- Darina: Cause I know in the display, they have dresses, but this is more casual stuff that we would wear everyday, so I like that.
- Marie: It's very edgy, and looking at it, it's the kind of look that I would want, but then again, it would have to depend on price if I would buy it, but I definitely like the look book.
- Ally: I definitely think this is a great look book. It doesn't look like a student did it and it really makes the boutique have a professional, business, marketing aspect to it. I think that helps change people's attitudes on the store, like they have a boutique, they must be like a real

store with high quality items.

4. Do you feel connected with these models since they are college students and the images are taken from campus locations? What if you knew one of the models?

- Yan: Yes, I do feel more connected because they seem like normal people since they are students. They go here and they're like me.
- Ally: Yeah, I think to a certain extent. I can see these girls on campus and if they are modeling and wearing the clothes, then I know I can too.
- Marie: I know two of them and they're both awesome girls and they're both really confident, but I think I would make the same assessment if I didn't know them. They just look like they're really put together and powerful, confident women.
- Moderator: So do you feel more connected since the photos are taken from campus locations?
- Marie: Yeah, I think knowing them, it's kind of like them recommending them to me personally, so I always take that into consideration, so if it was that boutique next to another boutique, and I saw two look books, but I knew the girl in one, I'd go to that one.

5. From an advertising perspective, do you think this was done well or what could be changed?

- Samantha: I just wanted to go off topic for a bit. I know that we were

talking a lot about the price and it determines whether you walk into a store or not, but also, the things that she has there are nice brands, so she can't make them too cheap where she's not going to make a profit, so it's kind of hard unless it's just a cheap boutique with stuff that aren't made well, but then you're not going to want that.

- Ally: And that's why whenever I shop in those boutiques, like I always look for the sales or like they'll post it on Instagram, or Twitter or something and then, even like LF, just cause I always go in there whenever they have sales, but they'll start the sale off and keep decreasing the price as it goes on, so they're still making a profit, but like over the span of the week they're doing the sale, but the least expensive things will be on the last day and that's when they're really trying to push stuff out.
- Rachel: Just going back on the advertising, I really like that's is an editorial spread and it's not so brand heavy with descriptions on the side. And it's just clothes, not generic, but styles that you would want to obtain, like walk around campus, that's how I would want to dress and it's girls that I see around campus, like I don't know any of them, but I would admire what they're wearing and it would draw me in, so I like that it's simple and not in your face. It's approachable and the store isn't that approachable, so I like it.
- Yan: I think it's good and the clothing is nice. The design was done well and yeah I think it makes it more personal and relatable like what Rachel was saying.

6. From a public relations perspective, how do you think the store can use this look book to promote business or gain publicity?

- Ally: I mean I don't know if they can send this out or put it around campus, but if I saw it, I would look at it and be interested.
- Samantha: It definitely grabs your eyes, the colors and scarves and I agree with what Rachel said, if you saw this look book, it may not be as intimidating to walk in the store.
- Marie: And just doing it in general, I don't see any promotion for any of the boutiques, so if one just started doing it, it would stand out from the rest cause like I said, I don't know names of them because they're all just the boutiques, like nothing stands out.

*Photos and event aspect, video (advertising, PR standpoint)*

7. If you saw this event and didn't know about the store, would you attend? Why or why not?

- Darina: I would be more inclined if someone that I knew was going or if you told me personally to come to it, I would go.
- Samantha: Yeah, I think it's a good way to get new customers in the store by promoting it, like come in, look around, have hot chocolate. And I would probably go with friends also, not alone.
- Rachel: Yeah, it's more polished and it's more comfortable, the copy too, it's just more inviting, so I'd probably be more inclined to go.
- Yan: I would go with my friends because it doesn't hurt to just see how it

is. I can always change my mind if I do not like it there.

8. Just looking at these photos, do you think there is a consistency between the brand and the look book?

- Yan: I think it's good to have more campus locations. I don't think students are really looking forward to high-end clothing because they can just go to high-end stores like Bloomingdales. I really like the student aspect and think it is better to focus on that.
- Samantha: But it's also cool to know that they have these different dresses because people wear them for formals.
- Darina: I think if it's possible, obviously like this whole thing is seasonal, but like I wouldn't mind looking through all of these pictures at once. I don't know, like a look book that combines everything because the dress and the causal wear can all be fall/ winter.
- Samantha: And people who may not like that look can wear dresses instead.
- Rachel: Yeah, and the setting itself isn't so much different from the look book.
- Darina: Yeah, yeah it matches, which is when you can get more creative, and even have like some type of copy that allows you to transition.
- Ally: And fall and winter always go together in the fashion world, so it would make sense that they are put together in one look book.

9. What do you think of the video?

- Samantha: I think it does a good job in showing all the stuff and the accessories that really caught my eye, like the necklaces and the earrings and all that, but another thing we need to note and I've been taking classes in these, and I don't know if it's just obvious to me, but all of the models are really pretty, they're really skinny, they're really tall, all the clothing like really fit them, so you have to think, like if I'm not tall, skinny, blonde, and pretty, am I going to look good in that tight dress that's going to show my gut? I don't know.
- Rachel: Also, the fact that she's the only person in the store, it kind of has that personal shopper feel to it, which is, I guess it kind of bothered me, but everything else, I really like. And I like the way it was filmed, like choppy.
- Marie: That's how I kind of feel about that boutique though, like I feel like it was a one to one shopper and that's what makes it intimidating, like you can't do your own shopping. You're being.. like it's you and one other worker, so that kind of affirmed that for me, but I really like the first half a little more, like the faces she was making, like the different poses, the quick cuts, I really like those more than the slow cuts.
- Samantha: It did a really good job in showing everything that they have there.
- Ally: It was fun to watch. I enjoyed it. It is a different perspective than what I would think of the boutique if I walked in. It helps to challenge

those perspectives and it gives the boutique a more friendly and welcoming vibe.

10. With the increasing use of social media, do you think if it was posted on Facebook or Instagram or even sent out as an email blast, it would boost business or store traffic?

- Rachel: Like those slow cuts, I don't know if you follow Nastygol on Instagram, but they do a lot of that stuff.
- Darina: Yeah it's cool.
- Rachel: Yeah, so that portion just made me think of Instagram and the other parts can be posted somewhere else, so it can draw people in.
- Ally: Of course, it would. I think people love fashion accounts and fashion pictures. The video is fun, people would want to watch that. The photos are nice and people would want to see that kind of style.

#### *Marketing/ Promoting boutique*

11. Taking all these materials, what do you think is missing? Or do you think the store has a good promotional package?

- Yan: I think it's a really good promotional package and advertising. I didn't know about this store, but now I might check it out later!
- Darina: I think for her target, like you just said, who are skinny sorority girls who are rich, it's really good, but if she wants to branch out, then there needs to be like different types of people.

- Rachel: Like more diversity.
- Samantha: Totally, like the girls look great in it, but if she has that audience that doesn't care about breaking out, then it's great. But as Darina said, if she wants to branch out and then she needs to say, "I want girls who haven't been there before, how do I get them to come to my store?"
- Rachel: Can they branch out? Do they even carry other sizes? Because I don't think even think that's an option, like they can't even draw in other girls.
- Ally: I don't even know if she can. I've been to the store and all of the items are so small. I mean I fit into them, but I know not everybody does. I don't know how she would feel about increasing the sizes because if nobody shops those sizes, she has no motive or incentive to include those sizes.

12. Last minute thoughts or opinions on what would make you shop there or visit or even spread the news to your friends.

- Marie: I think people hate getting hounded by those guys, especially by that one T-shirt guy, but I think if they have two weeks where the weather is actually nice, if they can have their doors open and have someone outside and make conversation.
- Darina: Totally, totally!
- Marie: Like I never even know if it's open or not, like it's just a shut out,



isolated, empty place, so I'd be terrified to walk in. But like music playing, someone to talk to.

- Darina: Which I think would be great for their vibe also.
- Moderator: So it is safe to say if she's targeting people who are skinner and can afford her clothing, this is great. But if she wants to branch out to a newer audience, it's not as effective?
- Samantha: But for people that can afford that \$80 shirt but are not in that mold, then size is also a factor.
- Marie: Yeah, like that welcoming stuff can benefit her even if she doesn't want to change her audience.
- Rachel: Right because it'll change her reputation, like the cozy event
- Samantha: Like J Michael's does a good job, I don't know why.
- Rachel: They also have more variety, so that it itself draws more people in.
- Darina: And Ellie Mia has glass windows, super chic, but J Michael's has wood everywhere.
- Samantha: Yeah, if that store were in Soho, it would be great.
- Ally: Yeah, I always shop at Soho and I think I could see the store there. But here in Syracuse, I'm not too sure. I guess some of the girls would shop there because they have the money to do so and they fit into those clothing.
- Moderator: So I guess two issues that I am hearing are pricing, so she needs to figure that out and sizing.
- Marie: Yes, but then again, that's only if she wants me to come into that

store, so it depends on who she's trying to target.

- Moderator: That's a really interesting point. Is there anything else you guys want to add?
- Yan: I think what you have here is great. The problem is to talk to her and see what she wants to do with it. All of these materials can be beneficial for her.
- Rachel: Yes, I agree. If she wants to leave her targeted audience, then it's still good publicity. If she wants to branch out to another audience, then she can do that too.
- Darina: I think they both summarized what I wanted to say. I think that gives you the general feedback of the campaign materials.
- Moderator: Okay, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate your thoughts and feedback.

### Transcription of focus group 3:

#### *Ellie Mia Boutique: backgrounds, opinions*

1. What do you normally look for in a boutique? What factors or attributes draw you in the most (cost, style, location)?

- Alicia: I think I usually go to boutiques because I don't want to find something that everyone has versus like going to a Target where everyone could have the same thing.
- Francheska: Same here. I go to boutiques because I hope to find things I can't find in department/mall store like "vintage things." Style definitely draws me to certain boutiques. However, I think boutiques because they have unique pieces definitely have more expensive items.
- Taylyn: I usually go if it has nice style and good pricing because boutiques tend to be more unique than your chain stores like Forever 21 or H&M, so you'll find more unique products and things you won't find typically in the U.S. or in your area.
- Carrie: A lot of times I notice is that it ends up being too expensive for me, so I like the clothes, but I can't afford it.
- Doris: I more care about the style, um, also pricing is important, but I concentrate more on style.
- Mo: I agree. Boutiques have more different stuff than the common stores. Sometimes they are expensive, but if the style is so outstanding, so like eye grabbing, then I would buy it.

2. What do you know about Ellie Mia boutique? Do you shop there? What are your opinions?

- Francheska: I know that they have great clothes. I can tell from their window displays, but I have never been inside because I assumed it was too expensive.
- Taylyn: I've been in there, but I haven't exactly looked at the pricing. I know they have really nice clothes, but I've never made a full shopping trip there, but I would like to in the future.
- Doris: I've been there like my freshman year with my friends cause one of my friends worked there and I checked the price and some of them are designer brands so it's kind of expensive, but I think they have really fancy stuff that I like.
- Alicia: I've gone in there, but I've never bought anything because of the prices. I think it's fair prices because it's really nice stuff, but it's just out of my budget.
- Carrie: Yeah, I love their clothes, but it's out of my budget.
- Alicia: I think it's worth the price, but it's just... right now I'm shopping at Target.
- Mo: One time, I wanted to buy a specific item, so I went in to see if they carry that particular style, but I found several items I wanted to buy, but the price tag, it's too much.

*Look book (fashion, advertising, PR standpoint)*

3. I want you to look at this look book that I made last semester. If you saw this, would you be compelled to check out the boutique?

- Alicia: I think it's really cool that it's small, I mean it's not small, but you can go through it in a few minutes and you don't have to, you're not overwhelmed by it, I think it's good.
- Francheska: I like the look book. It would definitely compel me to go inside and check the store out.
- Mo: I would like to see more typography, more words, statements, just let me know what the brand is all about.
- Carrie: I would like to see more clothes, like if I didn't know what Ellie Mia was, like overall what their brand is, like you could get a gist of it by looking at the overall view of it, but I would like to see what else they have.
- Doris: Yeah, I agree with her because I feel like the photos, like there's too much repetition of the same type of outfit.
- Carrie: If she kept these images, but put different clothes on them, it would be awesome.
- Taylyn: But I do see why she kept similar items. I think that may be the trend or the inventory that she has at that time. I think it make it cohesive. I don't think there's a problem in adding different styles, but I also don't think there's anything wrong with the look book right now.

4. Do you feel connected with these models since they are college students and the images are taken from campus locations? What if you knew one of the models?

- Alicia: Yeah, I would say so, definitely.
- Carrie: Yeah, that's my friend; it's cool cause once you know them. It makes it more personal.
- Alicia: Yeah, I like seeing them outside of Chucks because that's where you wear those clothes.
- Francheska: I think it's cool that these pictures were taken on campus, but I don't necessarily feel more connected to the boutique. But I think using college students in their look book is a great way for the boutique to reach out and associate themselves with that certain public.
- Taylyn: Yeah, I mean these girls do look like college students. They are really pretty and also look like models, but I also don't think they're so distant in terms of relating it back to me. I think it's such a good idea because it's a good opportunity for students to model and it's a good opportunity for the boutique to reach out to students.

5. From an advertising perspective, do you think this was done well or what could be changed?

- Francheska: I think it's really well done. I like the graphics, and I think the font and words are all eligible and well placed.
- Carrie: If it wasn't found in a store, I wouldn't know where the store was,

like I wouldn't flip to the back.

- Alicia: Yeah, that's a good point.
- Carrie: But if it was in the store, it would make complete sense where it was.
- Alicia: I think it would've been cool if there were words on it too, like this page on what they're wearing.
- Moderator: But that page has the description of the clothing and because this look book focuses on one look for each model, we didn't want to repeat the same description on each page.
- Alicia: Oh okay, that makes sense. I didn't notice that at first.
- Taylyn: I think the colors could be enhanced because the photography isn't very inviting, color wise, they seem cold and dark, but I understand that that's winter, but it doesn't really pop out to the person that's looking at it.

6. From a public relations perspective, how do you think the store can use this look book to promote business or gain publicity?

- Francheska: Like I said before, using college models and even using the campus is a great way to attract that public considering it is near campus. I think maybe doing a discount promotion for students on certain days might be a good idea to promote business.
- Carrie: I would put it outside of the store, so it can draw people's attention to come in and they can flip through it and say "Oh I like these clothes,

where can I find them?” and go to the store.

- Taylyn: If there was a collection launch event, it would be nice to pass them out.
- Alicia: Yeah that would be cool.
- Taylyn: You can show the different items in the store.
- Mo: Yeah, you can leave these booklets in front of the register to promote the next season’s clothes.
- Carrie: Yeah, some stores have that and I always look through them.
- Doris: I think it can also be promoted online, you can have digital versions
- Mo: QR codes maybe!

*Photos and event aspect, video (advertising, PR standpoint)*

7. If you saw this event and didn’t know about the store, would you attend? Why or why not?

- Alicia: I would go because it says complimentary hot cocoa and I would go in for sure because I automatically think that store sells really cute clothes, but I can’t afford it, but there’s hot chocolate and a raffle and things like that, that would really draw me in.
- Taylyn: I agree with the whole hot chocolate thing, it would definitely draw people in, free anything. I just think the design of the invite is really attractive, so it would bring a lot of people in.
- Moderator: And even if you don’t shop in the store, do you think you would still attend the event?



- Alicia: Yeah.
- Mo: I might feel a little insecure, I do agree with what everyone is saying, but I might feel a bit reluctant because I don't know who is going. I don't know who the owner is and what's the location will be like, would it be too crowded or a group of people that's too intimidating, so I might want to know more about this event. Like if there's an event page on Facebook, I might check it out and see who's going and what's the location like and then decide if I want to go. But definitely, the whole hot chocolate and relaxing idea is very good.
- Alicia: Maybe even a photo of the front of the store would draw people in because I don't know if a lot of people would see Ellie Mia boutique and know where it is on Marshall St.
- Francheska: I like the event flyer...It's not something I would normally, personally attend, but I know that's certainly a popular way to attract new customers.

8. Just looking at these photos, do you think there is a consistency between the brand and the look book?

- Francheska: I definitely think there's a consistency among both the event and the look book. I don't even know the store that well, but I can tell that the style and feel of both the look book and the event. They both convey the same messages/connect back to the boutique in the same way.
- Alicia: I think you can combine them in the same book. I think you can

see everything it has to offer, for sure. I think they're all good photos.

- Taylyn: Yeah, to show the versatile of the store, like if you separated them, you might think they only carry one side or the other, but you might not. Some people might not connect it.
- Alicia: I don't think I would have connected it unless they're in the same book.
- Mo: I think this style of the clothes, but I think it could've been shot in a more glamorous location, like I don't know, the theatre in downtown, but I do love the photos.
- Carrie: I kind of like the background because you focus more on the clothes, but I completely understand what you're saying.

9. What do you think of the video?

- Alicia: I thought it was awesome. I thought it was really awesome, she was having fun the whole time.
- Taylyn: Like it makes you think of the average girl who shops and she makes the experience look fun.
- Alicia: The only thing is that I would look at the dresses and think "Oh my gosh, they're so pretty, but where would I ever wear them?"
- Carrie: I liked how you did the blur and the focusing and unfocusing.
- Francheska: I enjoyed the video, again it was consistent with all the other material provided. I think putting it on Facebook/Instagram - popular networks for college students- would be the best way to go to get the

boutique new customers and to also promote the event.

- Doris: Yeah, it was really cool. I think stores don't really do that. They rely on photos but taking the time to take a video gives a different perspective. It gives the store life and personality.

10. Do you think if it was posted on Facebook or Instagram or even sent out as an email blast, it would boost business or store traffic?

- All: Yes, definitely.
- Alicia: I don't know if I would watch the video if it was posted on Facebook, but if it was posted on Instagram or Twitter in photos, I would watch it rather than watch the whole video on Facebook.
- Moderator: Do you think the video was too long then?
- Alicia: No, I thought it was perfect. I just don't know if I would have time to click it and watch it all the way through, but I thought it was good.
- Carrie: And you can tell that you can get jewelry from there too, so you can tell you can shop for a whole outfit.
- Mo: I really like that it featured so many different clothes in one video
- Carrie: It's almost like when you walk out and you model it out for your friends to see if they like it or not, that's what I got out when she walked out.

### *Marketing/promoting boutique*

11. Taking all these materials, what do you think is missing? Or do you think the

store has a good promotional package?

- Alicia: I think it's very consistent. I think the video is my favorite still, if you could get people to really pay attention to it and click on it, people would want to shop there.
- Taylyn: Yeah, everything seems consistent, content wise, style wise, creative wise, everything, it looks like it's uniform, no matter where you place it, whether it's a physical copy or a digital copy.
- Alicia: Do they have an Instagram account?
- Moderator: Yes they do.
- Doris: Yeah I think it's great they have an Instagram account because every fashion store should utilize the platform. It is good to connect with the public and it is good to post photos of the clothing.

12. Last minute thoughts or opinions on what would make you shop there or visit or even spread the news to your friends.

- Carrie: I think the video would make me go in more because that was more fun and welcoming and that may be the only thing that doesn't match with these, but then again, it shouldn't match because that's high fashion and it's not goofy but I think if I watch the video, I would go in more than if I saw the look book, but that matches my personality too because I don't really know how to dress myself.
- Francheska: I like all the material provided. I think it shows the diverse selection at the store. The messages are all congruous. I am more visual,

so the video definitely moved me more and made me more interested in visiting the store.

- Mo: Sometimes, I get those newsletters, those promotional emails, and they will feature different styles that are really good looking to allure you to go to the store and some discount promotion deals will also attract me, so I would say if you can try to get people to sign up for the newsletter or email, um then promote it that way by featuring a few looks, that would make them know more about this store.
- Doris: This store has been here for a while, but a lot of my friends, they just found out this store when they walk through Marshall St, because they redecorated it, it's so bright right now and it looks really new. Like last year, they didn't realize there was a boutique. I think that's so weird. It's just the decoration and the windows and stuff.
- Carrie: Yeah and Marshall St. is all food, so people automatically think it's only food stores.
- Alicia: Maybe if there was a 10% on a certain day for college students kind of thing, like with your college ID that would definitely draw me in, like try again.
- Carrie: I would just walk past it because I walked in once and it's too expensive for me and the overall feel to it is very expensive, so I don't even look twice.
- Francheska: It's really finding a balance I guess. Is she willing to give more discounts and get people to go to her store? Or would she rather

leave the high prices and try to profit from that since that's what boutiques normally do?

- Doris: Students love discounts though. We are in college, so if she is willing to do something special sometimes for students, I think that would be great.
- Mo: Yeah, there are just so many options that she can try. She just needs to see what she wants and try to reach other audiences.
- Carrie: I agree. There are so many marketing and public relations tactics that she can explore. I think this is a great first step.
- Taylyn: I know you said these are just testing materials, but did she use them?
- Moderator: They were posted on her social media networks, but they weren't publicize greatly.
- Taylyn: She should totally use them. I know you're using them for research, but I think she can definitely benefit from it. They are a good promotional package. I think everything you've shown us matches up and she can release all of them because she doesn't have that much publicity on campus.
- Mo: Yeah, this will definitely put her name out there and get people talking. Even if people don't buy her clothes because they are expensive, they will at least still know the name.
- Moderator: Okay, thank you so much for your time and feedback. If none of you have anything else to add, then that wraps up this focus group.