

FASHION SCHOLARSHIP EST FUND 1937

MERCHANDISING 2027 CASE STUDY

2027 Theme

Learn more about the topic of the 2027 Case Study, **Unlocking Hidden Potential: Identifying High Value Consumer Groups**, and the importance of this topic in the fashion industry.

General Guidelines

There are specific requirements in how your case study is completed. This section will explain general expectations.

Merchandising Focus

Each discipline takes a unique approach to the annual theme to most directly align with the needs of the discipline. In this section, **learn about the expectations for Merchandising.**

Required Content

Specific content is required within your case study submission. Use the required content as a checklist to ensure you have included all necessary components within your case study.

Judging Criteria

Judging is a blind process following specific criteria. Checkout the criteria to understand what considerations are most important in case study development.

Getting Started

Once you have an understanding of the expectations and layout of the 2027 FSF Case Study, use the resources provided in this section to get started with your own case study concept.

Introducing the 2027 Case Study Theme

Unlocking Hidden Potential: Identifying High Value Consumer Groups

The fashion experience is rapidly changing. According to the [State of Fashion 2025](#), “a new era of brand and product discovery is on the horizon.” Industry-wide, both major fashion brands and emerging micro-brands are evolving to be ever-present, meeting consumers wherever they are, at each moment of the day. This change is helping consumers to find brands that fit their unique lifestyles. Yet, the plethora of choice and availability in fashion commingles with a critical challenge; “fashion shoppers are overwhelmed with choice, which negatively impacts their engagement and conversion rates with brands.” While consumers are demanding more utility from each brand experience, they are also exhausted. As a result, many consumers feel they are overlooked and underserved, with their needs not being focused on by brands. As brands seek to build deeper connections to consumers, understanding the needs and wants of unique consumer groups is critical to establishing brand staying power ([Napoli & Rees, 2025](#)).

In the 2027 Fashion Scholarship Fund Case Study, you will explore how a fashion brand or retailer of your choice can unlock hidden potential and build a connection with the unmet, overlooked, and underserved needs of a specific, unique consumer group that has the potential to be highly valuable to the brand. You will identify and define the specific consumer group, proposing an opportunity for the chosen brand or retailer to meet the demands of their lifestyles. Your consumer group may be aligned by factors such as generation, region, lifestyle, or hobbies. Further, they are likely to be affected by shifting societal and cultural priorities, generational or intergenerational trends, emergent communities, and/or shifting manners of living. The consumer group you select can be a small microcosm or a large entity.



You must demonstrate how the identified consumer has been hidden, overlooked, or underserved and why the consumer group presents high value to the brand going forward. The identified consumer cohort must logically align with the priorities of your selected fashion brand or retailer. The consumer group must also benefit from the brand serving them in an intentional manner. Given the diversity of consumers within the United States, your case study must focus on a consumer group within the USA. However, your selected brand may be based in the USA or another country.

You will need to bring this theme to life in the case study you present.

Topic Selection

You will develop a case study exploring the current challenges and future opportunities for an existing fashion brand or retailer as they relate to high value consumers. The following guidelines will support your selection of a suitable fashion brand/retailer and how your ideas are presented in a creative and professional format.

Brand & Retailer Selection

1. **Fashion or related industry.** The fashion brand/retailer that you choose must be a fashion apparel, accessories, footwear, home, beauty, or health & wellness brand.
2. **USA-based consumer.** Given the diversity of consumers within the United States, your case study must focus on a consumer group within the USA. However, your selected brand may be based in the USA or another country.
3. **Generally well-known.** The brand/retailer(s) that you select should be generally well-known. Given the diversity of consumers within the United States, your case study must focus on a consumer group within the USA. However, your selected brand may be based in the USA or another country.
4. **Publicly traded.** It is suggested (but not required) that you choose a company that is publicly traded so that information regarding the company is easily accessible.
5. **For Business Strategy Applicants:**
Alix Partners Consumer Sentiment Index. While it is not required, it is suggested that you select one of the brands/retailers highlighted in the Alix Partners Consumer Sentiment Index for Fashion, Beauty, or Home (available in the 'Resources' section). These reports provide insights to what is driving brand performance and consumer desire, allowing you to maximize your insights and knowledge as a foundation for your case study.

Case Study Slide Deck

Case studies must be submitted as slide decks in landscape orientation, with slides sized for on-screen show 4:3 or 16:9 display (approximately 10" x 7.5"). Files can be created in any software of the applicant's choosing, such as PowerPoint, Keynote, Adobe InDesign, or Adobe Illustrator. However, all cases must be submitted in a flat PDF format without video or sound.

Format Your Way

Your case study must be presented as a slide deck, however, there are no specific requirements regarding visual design or text format. You are encouraged to utilize visuals throughout your presentation. It is advisable to not overload each slide with information, and to keep your presentation concise and to the point: each slide should take no more than 1-2 minutes to absorb by the reader.

References

All references should be included within a references/ bibliography page at the end of your slide deck or annotated in footnotes visible within the slide. Do not use hyperlinks in a footnote as the content cannot be accessed once the case study is uploaded.

Stick to the Page Length

The slide deck should be 18-22-pages in length including title, body, appendices, and references. A breakdown guide is provided alongside each section to help you determine the cadence of information. However, it is your responsibility to ensure you do not exceed the maximum allowed slides. Do not exceed the page limit. Ensure your content connects from section to section to tell the story you are trying to convey. This is the first time judges will be exposed to your case study, and they should be able to fully interpret your intended plans.

Exclude Your Name and School

Your name should NOT be included in your case study. Do not include your name or college/university affiliation on the title page or anywhere in the case study as the review process is anonymous. However, your name will be included on other required documents including your resume and unofficial transcript; those documents are not a part of the case study judging process.

Proofread

Be sure to proofread your case study. Points will be deducted for not following format directions, as well as for grammar and spelling errors.

AI Disclosure

You may use AI programs (e.g. ChatGPT) for brainstorming and help in generating ideas. However, note that the material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. You may not submit any work generated by an AI program as your own. If you include material generated by an AI program, it should be properly cited like any other reference material.

MERCHANDISING ELEVATE THE CONSUMER EXPERIENCE



Aro Archive

Objective: Develop a new product assortment, inclusive of distribution and launch plan, to serve address needs of a new or existing customer segment that is currently overlooked or underserved by your chosen brand or retailer.

Your Role: Head of Merchandising

You are the Head of Merchandising for an existing brand or retailer of your choice. You are responsible for curating the product assortment to meet consumer needs, driving the balance of the right product in the right place at the right time. It is your responsibility to establish the assortment mix including determining channels of distribution and launch timing. Your overarching goal is to deliver customers with the product they want when they want it while maximizing sales.



The AP Space



@heavn

Expanded Objective Explanation

Your objective is to curate an assortment for an existing fashion brand or retailer to address the unmet needs of an underserved consumer, with the focus on connecting to unique lifestyle demands. In addition to the assortment, you will consider distribution and launch of the product. The consumer segment you identify may be a new consumer for the brand or build on an existing consumer group. The assortment should meet the consumers unique needs, such as their hobbies and lifestyle, in a clear manner. The product will build a connection between the brand and the identified market segment. It should address specific challenges or opportunities for both the brand and the target market. Consider how the assortment aligns with the brand identity and priorities.

As an example of a brand connecting with a specific consumer group, L'Oreal recognized an opportunity to more fully serve Generation Z consumers. The brand recognized Generation Z' desire to embrace the unique emotive power in sensory experiences. L'Oreal launched YSL Scent-Sation, connecting consumers' individual fragrance selection to neuroscience and how emotions are personally triggered ([Williams, 2024](#)). The brand captured unique, positive emotions which translated to personalized YSL scents which are derived from the brand's existing fragrances. The concept launched in a specific mall alongside a shopping festival ([L'Oreal, n.d.](#)).

MERCHANDISING

REQUIRED SECTIONS

Section 1: General Introduction (1-2 slides)

- Title slide
- Executive summary

Section 2: Establish Your Brand (2-3 slides)

- Introduce your chosen brand/retailer
- Highlight current categories, special collections, and assortment strategies
- SWOT analyses of your chosen fashion brand/retailer

Section 3: Case Study Research (2-4 slides)

- Research in suggested areas: Industry landscape, society, consumer and lifestyle, macroeconomics

Section 4: Purpose & Goals (1-2 slides)

- Purpose of assortment
- Align with key company goals
- Outline objectives achieved through assortment

Section 5: High Value Consumer (2-3 slides)

- Describe the target consumer considering assortment goals
- (Optional) Create 2-3 consumer personas

Section 6: Product Launch Plan (1-3 slides)

- Outline your merchandise launch plan including timing and locations
- Develop a distribution plan

Section 7: Brand Merchandising (2-4 slides)

- Develop an assortment plan for 5-10 styles, addressing SKUs per style. Include cost, retail, and initial markup at item and total level
- Include a mood board or visual representation of your proposed assortment

- Create a 6-month merchandising plan including the KPIs of sales, gross margin, inventory turn and detailing projected monthly receipts and markdowns

Section 8: Visual Merchandising (1-2 slides)

- Create visual merchandising guidelines that demonstrate how the assortment will come to life in stores, online, and/or across other channels

Section 9: Future Growth (1-2 slides)

- Outline plans to scale or exit depending on its success

Section 10: Conclusion & References (2-4 slides)

- Conclusion
- Bibliography (also known as, references or works cited)

(Optional) Section 11: Use of AI (1 slide)

- Address advanced technology, such as AI, will be used within your proposed strategy. For example, you may address if it will support the customer experience, visual merchandising, or other aspects of your proposed plan.
- Alternatively or additionally, you may address how advanced technology, such as AI, was used in the creation of your case study.
- In addition to the 'Use of AI' section, please be sure to clearly reference any use of AI in your case study in text or within the reference list.

(Optional) Section 12: Appendix (0-5 slides)

- Present additional, supplemental ideas that support your project and add significant value

MERCHANDISING INDUSTRY EXAMPLES

Consider examples of assortments created by existing fashion brands and retailers to target consumer segments.



@limitedtoo

Limited Too

The tween brand Limited Too has re-emerged after a 15-year hiatus, recognizing a void in product offering for girls ages 10-13. Initially, the brand launched within Kohl's department stores but announced plans for standalone stores in 2025.

Oak Bluffs Collection

In collaboration with Morehouse and Spelman Colleges, Polo Ralph Lauren launched the Oak Bluffs Collection building on the communities heritage as a haven for Black communities ([Feitelberg, 2025](#)). The limited edition assortment was launched alongside a documentary about Oak Bluffs, telling the story of the real people who inspired this heritage line ([Thompson, 2025](#)).



Forbes



Heretic Parfum

Heretic Parfum

Heretic Parfum launched products in alignment with the growing demand of millennial consumers to tie purchases to emotions. The brand created assortments grouped by mood, such as "grounded and centered" to directly connect consumers mood and olfactory senses ([Heretic, n.d.](#)).

GymShark

GymShark is leaning into the middle class boom as shoppers on both ends of the spectrum for disposable income trade up and down in search of quality and value, creating assortments built on affordable quality apparel that is wearable for daily life ([Wightman-Stone, 2025](#)).



GymShark

Learn more about how product merchandising can meet the needs of overlooked and hidden consumers.

Chen, C. (2025, August 18). Luxury Has Lost the Plot — and These Brands Are Picking Up the Slack. *Business of Fashion*. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/retail/luxury-has-lost-the-plot-and-these-brands-are-picking-up-the-slack/>

Chen, C. (2025, September 10). Reformation Launches First Full Jewellery Line. *Business of Fashion*. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/retail/reformation-launches-first-full-jewellery-line/>

Deloitte Insights. (2024, February 21). Customer expectations of sustainable products. *Deloitte*. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/retail-distribution/consumer-behavior-trends-state-of-the-consumer-tracker/sustainable-products-customer-expectations.html>

Deloitte Insights. (2023, April 27). Understanding splurge spending: Inflation and the “lipstick-index” phenomenon. *Deloitte*. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/retail-distribution/consumer-behavior-trends-state-of-the-consumer-tracker/splurge-spending-inflation-lipstick-index.htm>

McKinsey & Company. (2025, September 8). *Holiday shopping 2025: US consumers hunt for early deals*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/holiday-shopping-trends-mckinsey.com>

Stern Carbone, S. & Takanashi, L. (2025, September 26). Exclusive: The Inside Story of Carhartt WIP’s Fashion Ascent. *Business of Fashion*. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/professional/exclusive-how-carhartt-made-workwear-fashionable-or-inside-carhartt-wips-quiet-streetwear-takeover/>

Sykes, M. (2025, August 13). Mejuri Wants to Bring Jewellery Back to Sports. *Business of Fashion*. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/sports/us-open-mejuri-tennis-racquet-magazine-collaboration/>

Access the linked *Business of Fashion* articles for free with the free [BOF student membership!](#)



Scholarship winners are showcased at the annual FSF Live Gala



Learn more about the Live Gala and other Fashion Scholarship Fund events on the website, www.fashionscholarshipfund.org



Industry leadership are also honored at the annual FSF Live Gala

JUDGING CRITERIA

Your case will be reviewed by industry professionals including the FSF Board of Governors, FSF Mentors, and FSF Alumni. The percentages below represent the portion of the score that will come from each respective category.

Creativity & Feasibility

Merchandising, Marketing, Business Strategy (40%)

Design & Product Development (20%)

- Is the applicant's idea unique, inspiring, and innovative?
- Is the applicant's idea well-thought-out and conceivably executable?
- Is the applicant's idea clearly connected to the selected brand/ retailer?

Research & Development

Merchandising, Marketing, Business Strategy (40%)

Design & Product Development (20%)

- Has the applicant researched the selected brand/retailer, demonstrated depth of knowledge of the company's activities and competitive positioning as relevant to the presented concept?
- Has the applicant conducted thorough research regarding the retail landscape and the attitudes, behaviors, and lifestyle traits of the intended consumer?
- Has the applicant addressed how consumers will benefit from their proposed concept?
- Has the applicant clearly demonstrated the quantifiable business benefit of the creative concept?

Collection Presentation

Design & Product Development ONLY (40%)

- Has the applicant presented their concept development in a manner that is clear and supports the final collection design?
- Has the applicant presented a final collection that conveys a strong presentation of design and is fitting to the intended concept?
- Has the applicant presented technical design details (through tech flats) that are easy to understand and show how to execute the concept?

Clarity

All Disciplines (15%)

- Does the applicant clearly and consistently tell their story, aligning direction from executive summary, through core content, and into the conclusion?
- Does the applicant's case follow logical development and a clear structure; is it easy to follow and summarize?
- Did the applicant clearly complete each portion of their prompt?
-

Format

All Disciplines (5%)

- Did the applicant use correct grammar and spelling?
- Did the applicant include a title page with one sentence to summarize the case?
- Was the applicant's name and school kept anonymous?

Wondering Where to Begin? Get Started By Researching This Year's Theme

Use the below resources to begin building your understanding of the consumer and brand opportunities relating to this year's case study topic.



@greyhoundoriginal

Use the below resources to support your identification of important consumer groups.

Coresight Research. (2025, September 21). Analyst Corner: Understand Who Shops Where in US Retail, with John Mercer. <https://coresight.com/research/analyst-corner-understand-who-shops-where-in-us-retail-with-john-mercer/>

Coresight Research. (2025, September 25). Shoptalk Fall 2025 Wrap-Up: Driving Retail Forward—AI, Agility, Loyalty and Leadership in Volatile Times. <https://coresight.com/research/shoptalk-fall-2025-wrap-up-driving-retail-forward-ai-agility-loyalty-and-leadership-in-volatile-times/>

- Deloitte Insights. (2025, July). Deloitte Global Sustainable Behaviors Survey. *Deloitte*. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/environmental-social-governance/deloitte-global-sustainable-behaviors-survey.html>
- Deloitte Insights. (2023, June 28). Financial well-being and consumer resilience. *Deloitte*. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/retail-distribution/consumer-behavior-trends-state-of-the-consumer-tracker/consumer-resilience-financial-wellbeing.html>
- Deloitte Insights. (2023, July 31). Global anxiety levels in polycrisis. *Deloitte*. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/retail-distribution/consumer-behavior-trends-state-of-the-consumer-tracker/global-anxiety-levels-polycrisis.html>
- Deloitte Insights. (2025, June 24). Understanding the value-seeking consumer. *Deloitte*. <https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/retail-distribution/consumer-behavior-trends-state-of-the-consumer-tracker/understanding-value-seeking-consumer.html>
- Google Trends. (n.d.). Explore what the world is searching for right now. *Google*. <https://trends.google.com/trends/?geo=US>
- McKinsey & Company. (2025, October 16). How today's consumers are spending their time and money. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/how-todays-consumers-are-spending-their-time-and-money>
- McKinsey & Company. (2025, June 9). State of the consumer trends report 2025: When disruption becomes permanent. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/state-of-consumer>
- McKinsey & Company. (2024, November 11). The state of fashion 2025: Challenges at every turn. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/state-of-fashion>
- National Association of Convenience Stores. (2025, September 30). Millennials and Gen Z contribute 32% to consumer spending. https://www.convenience.org/Media/Daily/2025/September/30/3-Millennials-and-Gen-Z-Contribute-32_Research
- Porch Group Media. (2025, October 13). Consumer shopping trends and statistics by the generation: Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, and Boomers. <https://porchgroupmedia.com/blog/generational-consumer-shopping-trends/>
- VML. (2025, September 18). The Future Shopper 2025: Key trends shaping e-commerce. <https://www.vml.com/insight/future-shopper>

Have you familiarized yourself with the
How to Apply Guide?

Be sure to read it carefully! It outlines additional requirements and the available resources to support your Fashion Scholarship Fund scholarship application.

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The 2027 FSF Case Study was created by the Fashion Scholarship Fund, Board of Govenors, Scholarship Committee and Authored by Danielle Sponder Testa
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