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COMPARISON OF CLOTHING RETAIL: RESILIENCE AND IDENTITY IN THE UKRAINIAN MARKET

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This research is the result of a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project conducted between students from Ukraine and Texas. The study focuses on the apparel retail sector, comparing business environments to understand how geopolitical and cultural factors shape entrepreneurship. While clothing retail is a global industry, our findings highlight a profound divergence between the stable, scale-driven market of Texas and the resilience-based, identity-driven market of Ukraine. This paper outlines the legal, economic, and cultural frameworks that define the current state of Ukrainian clothing retail in 2026.

In Ukraine, the entry barrier for small-scale clothing retail is relatively low due to the simplified taxation system. Most entrepreneurs register as sole proprietors (FOP), utilizing the 'Diia' digital ecosystem to manage documentation and tax filings with high efficiency. However, the domestic ease of registration is sharply contrasted by the complexities of international trade. Customs regulations remain a significant bottleneck for the industry. Unlike the predictable logistics found in Texas, Ukrainian retailers face unpredictable delays and bureaucratic hurdles at the border. These disruptions make inventory planning exceptionally difficult, forcing businesses to adopt flexible supply chain strategies that are not typically required in more stable Western markets.

Despite the overarching challenges of the current environment, the Ukrainian clothing brand sector has demonstrated remarkable growth, with a recorded 40% increase in the first half of 2024 alone. Digital marketplaces play a central role in this expansion, with Rozetka serving as the premier platform for online sales. However, a critical finding of our research is the discrepancy between official statistics and reality. The actual market volume is significantly larger than reported, as a substantial portion of transactions occurs through unofficial channels or small-scale social media commerce. This "informal" market resilience is a core characteristic of the Ukrainian retail landscape, allowing the industry to survive and even thrive during economic volatility.

One of the most striking differences between the Texas and Ukraine markets is the role of national identity in purchasing decisions. In Ukraine, clothing has transitioned from a basic necessity to a powerful medium of self-expression and national pride. Products featuring traditional embroidery (vyshyvanka), the trident symbol, or Made in Ukraine labels command high demand. Consumers are not merely buying apparel; they are investing in their national identity.

Furthermore, consumer behavior in Ukraine is deeply tactile and social. Unlike the highly digitized and automated shopping experience often seen in Texas, Ukrainian buyers prefer to physically inspect fabric quality before purchasing. Trust is not built through mass advertising but through word-of-mouth and recommendations from social circles. Additionally, the cultural acceptance of second-hand shopping is uniquely high in Ukraine. It is viewed as a normal, pragmatic, and sustainable way to shop, representing a significant segment of the total market share that contrasts with the fast-fashion culture prevalent in many U.S. regions.

Communication norms in Ukrainian retail reflect a culture that prioritizes personal trust over transactional efficiency. While Texas business communication often emphasizes speed and standardized professional etiquette, Ukrainian interactions take place primarily on platforms like Telegram and Viber. Business relationships begin with polite, professional inquiries, but they must evolve into genuine partnerships to be successful. In this market, the strength of the relationship often

dictates the success of the sale, as trust serves as the primary currency in an environment where legal and logistical certainties are often absent.

The challenges facing Ukrainian retailers are unprecedented and geographically unique. Retailers must manage their businesses amidst power outages, air raid alerts, and severe supply chain disruptions. These factors create a high-pressure environment that requires constant adaptation. The unpredictability of customs and the physical risks to infrastructure create a risk profile that is entirely different from the market conditions experienced by our peers in Texas. Survival in the Ukrainian market requires not just business acumen, but extreme operational resilience.

Despite the risks, the Ukrainian market offers unique opportunities for rapid development. The patriotic fashion niche continues to expand, but a more significant emerging sector is adaptive clothing. As a response to the needs of wounded veterans, there is a growing and socially vital market for specialized apparel. This niche represents the intersection of social responsibility and business innovation, highlighting how Ukrainian entrepreneurs are adapting their portfolios to serve the immediate needs of their society.

To synthesize our findings, we have developed a comparative visual framework that contrasts the operational realities of the apparel industry in Ukraine and Texas. The top section of the collage illustrates the Ukrainian landscape, where the synergy between national pride and digital agility—manifested through 'Diia' and patriotic branding—acts as a counterforce to the disruptions of war. Conversely, the bottom section details the Texan market, emphasizing a mature retail environment driven by southern hospitality, high-volume convenience, and standardized contract trust. This visual representation serves to highlight the 'resilience vs. efficiency' dichotomy, providing a clear window into how cultural heritage and systemic stability fundamentally dictate the strategic priorities of clothing retailers in each respective region (Fig1.).



Fig.1 Image generated by ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Canva

The clothing retail market in Ukraine in 2026 is a complex ecosystem defined by a struggle between instability and growth. Our comparison with Texas reveals that while the American market excels in scale and logistical predictability, the Ukrainian market excels in cultural depth and adaptive resilience. The success of a business in Ukraine is ultimately determined by how well it integrates national identity, builds interpersonal trust, and navigates the logistical realities of a nation in transformation.

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COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GRAPHIC DESIGN INDUSTRY: A VISUAL STUDY OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEMS IN UKRAINE AND TEXAS

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This research, developed within a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) framework, utilizes a structured visual-analytical collage to investigate the divergent professional landscapes of the graphic design industry in Ukraine and Texas, USA. By focusing on advertising, corporate branding, and web development, the study explores how geopolitical instability, regulatory frameworks, and cultural norms dictate the success of creative ventures. The collage serves as the primary methodological tool, mapping "necessity entrepreneurship" in a conflict zone against investment-driven entrepreneurship in a stable corporate market.

The research employs a dual-panel visual matrix to synthesize qualitative data. The left axis (Ukraine) utilizes symbols of national identity and digital tools to represent a high-flexibility, high-risk environment. The right axis (Texas) employs icons of institutional stability and corporate scale to represent a high-velocity, structured market. This visual approach allows for the simultaneous analysis of formal regulations, informal cultural practices, and technological convergence.