

OPPORTUNITIES THAT DRIVE SUCCESS OF FASHION ENTREPRENEURS IN IBADAN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The fashion industry has a long history of significant contributions to regional, national, and global economic and tourist growth. Experience and studies suggest that the fashion industry is a viable source for the Nigerian government's economic diversification and employment generation goal. Despite the rich history of fashion design entrepreneurship, the study of fashion entrepreneurship has yet to garner enough academic attention in Nigeria. This research, therefore, examined the opportunities that drive the success of fashion entrepreneurs in the fashion industry in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Ibadan, Oyo State. A phenomenological qualitative design was used. Ten proprietors of fashion companies were purposively sampled. Their responses were thematically analysed. Recommendations were made for governments at various levels, investors, intending and practising fashion entrepreneurs.

Keywords: Fashion entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship, opportunities that drive success, fashion industry, Ibadan North Local Government

Introduction

Nigeria is overly reliant on crude oil income, and the dwindling prices have affected the nation's economic fortunes. Unemployment is so high that the government and other stakeholders promote economic diversification for job generation (Obialo, 2019). The fashion industry (FI) contributes significantly to global economic activity. It is one of the critical pillars of wealth generation and economic growth in the global economy (Adedapo & Adedeji, 2021). It is also an integral part of the creative economy, which supports income generation, employment and export while fostering social inclusion, cultural diversity, and personal development (Ekpe, 2011). The Nigerian fashion industry, as one of the

means of diversification, has expanded in terms of exposure, participation, structure, presence, income, and training. Agu and Onuoha (2016) found that the textiles, apparel, and footwear industry contributes immensely to Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Many Nigerians work in the fashion industry as writers, illustrators, designers, models, photographers, makeup artists, hair stylists, cosmetologists, and journalists (Adisa, Abdulraheem & Mordi, 2014; Sarkar & Karim, 2019). Fashion designing is one of the skills recommended by the entrepreneurship curriculum of the Nigerian University system.

The fashion business has a long history of advancing urban development objectives and is a crucial driver of regional, national,

and international economic and tourism growth (Fasinu, 2019). Ibadan is one of the most populated cities in the country, and cities serve as the development engines of the economy. Fashion entrepreneurship and literature in Nigeria are relatively new. There is an increasing number of fashion businesses in Nigeria because it is a universal and highly globalised sector (Adedapo & Adedeji, 2021; Anyaehie & Areji, 2015). What drives the apparent success in this industry needs to be studied more. Consequently, this study investigated the factors driving success in the fashion industry in Ibadan North Local Government of Ibadan metropolis, Oyo State.

Research Question

What are the opportunities driving the success of fashion entrepreneurs in the fashion industry of Ibadan North Local Government of Oyo State?

Literature Review

Fashion Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs are the people involved in these economic efforts, including various activities supporting the economic growth of communities and countries (Obialo, 2019). A creative person who primarily works in the fashion, design, or luxury industries is therefore referred to as a fashion entrepreneur (Granger & Sterling, 2003). They often focus on creativity that yields results and has a fashion business, project, or concept. By establishing their sectors and showcasing the finest of their local scenes, fashion entrepreneurs help advance the design and clothing industries (Jackson & Shaw, 2016). A fashion entrepreneur seeks out new alliances and ventures within the fashion and design

industries to raise their visibility and get attention for their work. Due to its ability to advance national economic development and strengthen sustainable commercial activity, entrepreneurship is a crucial component in developing nations (Parker, 2009). They are responsible for effectively navigating change within their organisations. This change is achieved through generating and selecting ideas, transforming these ideas into innovative solutions, and facilitating organisational growth by adapting to the constantly evolving demands of the dynamic business environment (Obialo & Akinjo, 2021). Entrepreneurship is challenging and demanding, requiring knowledge, skill, and intuition. Starting a company has many different intentions, plans, and goals since every entrepreneur is different. Launching a business aims to produce value, which might manifest as a beneficial financial, social, or emotional outcome (Kurz, 2010).

Small businesses make up a significant share of all businesses in Nigeria and are crucial to the country's economic development (Fasinu, 2019). Small businesses with minimal initial investment expenses may help fight poverty, create jobs, and create domestic technology (Adisa, Abdulraheem, & Mordi, 2014). Small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) account for more than 90% of all businesses globally, more than 50% of all employment, and more than half of the global GDP (Kessey, 2014). SMEs make up 97% of Nigeria's economy, and 82.02% of the workforce is employed by 70% of these small businesses (Adebisi & Gbegi, 2013; Buowari, 2015). The advent of start-ups and small businesses with sustainable

In their 2016 study, Owen, Ogunleye, and Orekoya explore the issues the fashion industry is dealing with and suggest possible remedies that might promote its revival. According to the author, Nigeria's textile industry has traditionally contributed significantly to the economy's manufacturing sector and used to be the nation's second-largest employer of people after the government. The textile industry has, however, ceased to be a substantial source of foreign currency revenues and the creation of employment in Nigeria because of problems with the power supply, contradictory government policies, the extensive smuggling of imported textiles, and insecurity, among others. The research revealed that the government's dedication and sincerity of purpose are among the issues the business is confronting, along with a need for more political will. Nigeria's textile sector would be revived for long-term growth if its issues could be resolved promptly and comprehensively.

Odey, Saliu, Achukwu, and Olashina (2018) explored the issues that the Nigerian textile sector has encountered since independence. The research revealed that the issues facing the fashion business include, among others, globalisation of textile marketing, textile smuggling, unfavourable economic policies, and worldwide products produced in Nigeria. The findings also indicated that there is room for improvement in the Nigerian textile industry, including the use of better cotton-growing techniques, exploration of international markets, re-enactment of import restrictions on foreign textile products, investment in long-term ventures supported by scientific innovation, and

government trust funds and grants to encourage Nigerians to diversify their holdings and consider investments in the textile and related industries. Nigeria's textile industry can increase revenue (through exports), foster talent, and help the national economy.

Methods

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten purposively chosen fashion entrepreneurs in Ibadan North Local Government of Oyo State among the fashion entrepreneurs in the local government area.

Design and Instruments

The phenomenological method was used for qualitative analysis because the researchers concluded that it was vital to recognise people's shared experiences of a phenomenon (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Knowing these shared experiences helps advance practices and policies or facilitates a deep understanding of the phenomenon's characteristics (Obialo, 2022). The study chose the method to draw out the experiences of fashion entrepreneurs about their successes, challenges and creative problem-solving strategies within the Ibadan fashion business environments. Phenomenological qualitative research design concerns the exhibition of the living experiences of the participants in the study (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). The instrument was in two parts. The research instrument was in two parts. Part I concerns four (4) questions on age of business, sole ownership/partnership, staff strength and educational background of respondents. Part II consists of four (4) open-ended questions about the entrepreneurial

business plans over the last ten years has helped the sustainability issue gain momentum in the fashion sector. Despite their well-publicised successes, these businesses often need to improve their ability to develop or even result in their demise (Hofmann, Jacob, & Pizzingrilli, 2022). Thus, due to the continual influx of rivals within the industry, fashion design entrepreneurs must be more creative than those in other industries to maintain customer loyalty and brand recognition (Fasinu, 2019).

2.3 Empirical Review

Fasinu's (2019) study found that unreliable power supply forced fashion designers to seek alternative power sources to maintain manufacturing, raising production costs and releasing harmful gases that pollute the environment. Numerous small enterprises were forced out of business because of these issues. Aakko and Niinimäki (2018) explored the difficulties that fashion designers have and the possible benefits of doing so. The sample of 16 independent fashion designers from Finland, Estonia, and Latvia demonstrated that successful fashion designers must possess various administrative abilities. Further, success comes with the capacity to balance work and personal obligations with the effective fusion of fashion innovation with entrepreneurial creativity in micro-sized fashion businesses.

Lindelwa (2017) looked at the difficulties in the Swazi fashion industry. He found many creative but unsuccessful fashion designers and business owners in Swaziland. While many Swaziland designers may find popularity and success

inside their own country, the research revealed that those who can go abroad, especially to fashion capitals like Paris or New York, are the most competitive and can get more support. Attending fashion school may help fashion design businesses become more skilled, but only a few institutions or schools in Swaziland do so. Correspondingly, business clusters for entrepreneurs, a designer and business partner cooperation and the idea of implementing quality standards for certification as a need in the global market were recommended.

Hofmann, Jacob, and Pizzingrilli (2022) used a qualitative research approach to examine the key issues that micro and small-scale sustainable fashion businesses face. Business owners and executives from 18 firms across 13 countries participated in 18 expert interviews to provide the study's data. Connecting with customers is considered rather challenging, particularly given that sustainable firms must defend higher costs and highlight the advantages of their goods. Similarly, the researchers found that using mass and low-cost manufacturing methods with sustainable sourcing practices is economically challenging for an industry. In light of these observations, several management suggestions are produced and placed within the context of the Business Model Canvas. This innovative strategy helps sustainable organisations run their operations more effectively and experience growth by making recommendations based on the resource-based perspective. For instance, cooperative methods involving various stakeholders may ease restrictions in the two highlighted issue areas.

experiences of the participants on the opportunities that drive success in the fashion industry in Ibadan North Local Government of Oyo State, namely, 1. What are the opportunities in the fashion business? 2. What might be all the ways to say the fashion design business is profitable? 3. Can you mention the positive expectations in the fashion business? 4. In what ways will you advise an intending fashion entrepreneur?

Sample and Data Collection

Purposive sampling was used to select ten proprietors of fashion design companies. Appointments were scheduled in advance with each of the ten owners of fashion design businesses to prevent disrupting their busy schedules. Purposive sampling is finding and selecting individuals or groups with specialised knowledge or experience in an area of interest (Cresswell & Poth, 2018). Using this sampling strategy ensured that the participants were knowledgeable about the phenomena and could provide thorough accounts of their own experiences. Further, the fashion designers chosen for the research were those who had been in the business for at least five years. Data was collected using an interview guide. The interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards. Notes were also made. The notes assisted the researchers in matching the transcribed responses.

Data Analysis

Data from the interview were analysed using constant comparison analysis or the method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). They posit that constant comparison analysis or method of constant comparison involves three major stages.

The first is the open coding stage. At this stage, data are fragmented into small units. The researcher allocates a code or descriptor to each unit. The second stage is the axial coding stage, where the codes are grouped into categories. The final stage involves selective coding. The investigator grows one or more themes describing particular groups' contents. Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) argue that this analysis method assesses the import of the themes. Moreover, researchers can use multiple groups to determine the recurrent themes among respondents. Qualitative thematic content analysis was used. Consequently, the themes became the unit of data analysis.

Ethical Issues

Data confidentiality was strictly maintained in the study. As a consequence, the names of the fashion outfits were not disclosed. The respondents' consent was also sought, while all the information collected during the interviews was treated with the utmost privacy. The names of the fashion designers should have been mentioned in the analysis. Instead, all the names were anonymised.

Results And Discussion

Research Question:

What are the opportunities driving the success of fashion entrepreneurs in the fashion industry of Ibadan North Local Government of Oyo State?

The opportunities for success in the fashion industry in Ibadan North Local Government Area of Oyo State were identified in the prospects that abound in the industry for the fashion entrepreneurs and other stakeholders. These opportunities keep driving potential entrepreneurs to the industry and sustaining the industry's

growth, thereby attracting an endless array of potential players in the value chain created. These factors have been named opportunities by all the respondents. These opportunities were themed as follows:

Job Opportunities: Despite the worsening unemployment in the country, the fashion industry has continued to accommodate and create job opportunities for both old entrepreneurs and new entrants. This fact is corroborated by Odey et al. (2018), who contended that the Nigerian fashion business could provide employment, generate income (through exports), develop human talent, and support the national economy. They advised that if the sector is given the needed attention, it can reverse the unfavourable direction and reputation the local industry has endured for many years. One of the respondents shed light on this potential when she revealed that

The business is highly profitable because one may think one is broke, but one customer can bring a business worth thousands of naira. There is always appreciable gain after the cost of materials has been removed. Fashion designing is profitable because the salary earners' salary can be earned daily.

The above comment implies that Nigeria, especially the Ibadan metropolis, can tap into the potential of the global fashion market, whose value is \$1.2 trillion (Ruth, 2021). The reason is that more and more people nowadays are eager to spend big bucks on the latest fashions so they may boost their confidence in how they look. This renewed focus has recently pushed the

fashion industry into unfamiliar territory (Nwabachili & Ezeokeke, 2020). The business is viable to the extent that one of the respondents confidently recommends it to others who may be willing to try it. The participant stated that *The business brings profit. I can recommend fashion design to other people. However, anyone who wishes to succeed there must possess the required skills.*

The above suggests that the Nigerian fashion industry has unrealised potential in the fashion sector to help the Nigerian economy expand and flourish (Ruth, 2021). Consequently, the country's income can increase if the right policies are implemented.

Unlimited Growth and Expansion:

The respondents agree that the fashion industry possesses the potential for unlimited growth. One respondent stated that:

It helps one to aim high as one can expand his/her business locally, nationally, and globally. For instance, one can aspire to have his/her brand. It has continuity. It only sometimes leads to losses.

The aforementioned is consistent with the conclusion of Oshinowo et al. (2019), who claimed that the Nigerian fashion industry is a constantly changing multi-structural one with participants ranging from microbusinesses (mainly in the informal sector) to small enterprises (gravitating more towards the formal sector). The authors also noted that it substantially contributes to the country's creative economy and employs many people from all socioeconomic groups along its value

chain thanks to various essential to sophisticated manufacturing clusters.

Sustainability

The study also revealed that sustainability in the fashion industry drives success through flexibility in its operations. By this, the entrepreneurs claim that other businesses fold or face challenges when the locations change. This is only sometimes the case for fashion entrepreneurs. Fashion businesses can survive even if the owner has reasons to relocate to other parts of the city, out of the city, or out of the country. One fashion entrepreneur puts it thus:

One can easily survive as a fashion designer. It gives room for mobility. By that, I mean a fashion designer can conveniently change the environment within or outside the country. For example, if a fashion designer marries and needs to move from one town or country to another, he/she can quickly adapt to the new place and cope successfully. If she/he is highly skilled in the business, she/he can continue the business without any problem.

Knowledge acquisition: The nature of the fashion industry as a creative industry provides an environment that spurs people to pursue knowledge. It is a dynamic industry which evolves from time to time. In order to be up to date, fashion designers need to research and acquire knowledge so that they will be included. Commenting on the propensity for knowledge acquisition that abounds in the fashion industry, one of the interviewees said, "This business affords the owner a broader knowledge

because there are always trending styles, which always leads to research in order to keep the fashion designer in tune with the styles in vogue. In other words, it always widens one's horizons". Another entrepreneur succinctly says, "Self-development is another. One must develop himself or herself every day to keep tap with the industry dynamics".

Connection for Economic Viability: The fashion industry connects owners with critical societal personalities. This is because the clientele is very diverse, and the rich and famous are usually ready to pay for whatever fashion trends they feel will make them trendy and attractive. In the words of a respondent,

There are many opportunities to meet people and connect with well-to-do or highly-placed personalities. It affords networking for progress.

The above reality suggests that the fashion business has great potential for social capital. Social capital is the network of social contacts, connections, and affiliations in which a person may access or engage (Bourdieu, 2000). Apart from the available opportunity for connection, good wear also serves as an advertisement, which increases the clientele base and profitability and attracts more entrepreneurs because of the wealth creation available in the industry. A participant observes that:

Most importantly, one can easily connect to big companies and politicians.

The respondents all agreed that though these opportunities identified drive success for them as fashion entrepreneurs, they also encounter challenges that at times inhibit

the realisation of the potential in the fashion industry, not only in their local government, which is the location of this study but also in Oyo State and Nigeria as a whole.

Recommendations

1. This study has revealed the enormous potential of the fashion industry. The Federal Government should develop the fashion industry as it is doing in other sectors to provide employment opportunities for the teeming youth population. While the higher education system intentionally fosters skills such as fashion designing among the students, other levels of education seem uninvolved in building such skills. Skills development for economic growth, wealth, and job creation will be enhanced if the national education curriculum includes skills like fashion designing at all levels of the national education curriculum.
2. Promoting made-in-Nigeria clothing is imperative and will also grow the Nigerian fashion industry and economy. This promotion will benefit the nation's economy, showcase our cultural heritage globally, and attract foreign investments.
3. Since Nigerians have become fashion-conscious, fashion designers should consistently make high-quality products and sell them reasonably. These will entice fashion consumers to purchase locally-made items. The economy will

expand, GDP will rise, employment will increase, and national income will rise due to increased consumer spending.

4. Investors and intending entrepreneurs should explore the prospects revealed through this study for personal and national economic growth and development. The opportunities exposed in this sector of the economy should facilitate massive investments by government and non-government actors in the fashion industry of Ibadan North, Oyo State and Nigeria.
5. Government at all levels should invest in infrastructural development that will specifically target attracting stakeholders to the fashion industry in her quest to diversify the Nigerian economy.

Conclusion

The study's findings prove that the fashion business has many opportunities. The sector may change the wrong orientation and reputation the local industry has experienced for a long time if it receives the necessary attention. Suppose the nation can muster the required zeal. In that case, the market will open up, balancing Nigeria's trade with its neighbouring nations, taking in a sizeable portion of our unemployed youth who are always willing to work, and Nigeria would then become one of the top exporters of apparel not only in Africa but globally.

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