

The Impact of Social Media on Small-Scale Businesses in Ghana: A Case of Fashion Brand Marketing and Promotion in Sunyani Municipality

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Abstract: Social media in the 21st century business environment has become a digital arena where people can share ideas about their businesses in general. However, it enhances communication and interaction among various individuals around the universe. The major concern that influenced the study has to do with the fact that, irrespective of the numerous benefits of social media in the fashion industry, there has been no evidence indicating the impact of social media on fashion businesses in the Sunyani municipality. The study seeks to evaluate the impact of social media on the small-scale fashion industries in the Sunyani Municipality. Specifically, it attempts to examine the impact of social media platforms on fashion brand marketing and promotion and assess the effective use of social media tools by the small-scale fashion industries. The study employed a qualitative research design where interviews were used as instrument for data collection. In view of this, the municipality was grouped into four zones, and five industries were selected from each zone to represent the sample size using a purposive sampling technique. The study reveals that social media has a positive impact on small-scale fashion industries when employed as marketing and promotional tools. The study underscores that small-scale fashion industry players understand effective ways of handling social media platforms. However, it is recommended that fashion designers adopt social media for communication and marketing purposes.

Keywords: Social Media, Marketing, Fashion, Industry, Networking, Brand

1. Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which power the economies of the majority of developing and growing countries globally, are the most widely used business model in Africa [1]. They are viewed as engines for economic development since they create more jobs for people in emerging nations.

The use of social media is one of the many factors that have been linked to the growth of SMEs [2]. The impact of social media in the 21st century on small-scale industries globally cannot be underestimated. Social networks are online tools that allow users to create contacts and contents and share them with others [3]. They are, however, founded on online technology and have an ideological foundation. Social media platforms are considered to be very great tools that are more effective than conventional or traditional

marketing phenomena and tactics employed for influencing users' opinions and behaviours [4, 5]. Currently, there are over 4 billion internet users, with over 3 million of them utilizing social media for business success.

It is an undeniable fact that social media has the potential to increase companies' productivity, especially in the fashion industry. This growth has been necessitated by embracing social networking sites as a marketing tool for reaching a larger online audience [6].

The fashion industry is growing in an episodic manner while making many economic impacts on the lives of people and nations. Technology has actually improved the practice of fashion over the past decade. The fashion industry is either characterized as large, small, or medium depending on the labour force, facility, line of production, and per capita income. Most of the fashion houses in Sunyani are small in nature and, as a result, have limited lines of production and

specialized in customized clothing. The marketing strategies employed by the renowned designers in the traditional cities like Accra and Kumasi appear more advanced as compared to those in the Sunyani Municipality.

It will be prudent for the fashion designers in the study area to also adopt and utilize the social media platforms more frequently just to benefit from the attractive packages they offer regarding internet marketing.

Social media is an assemblage of websites and online platforms where people can transfer information and make assumptions [7, 8]. These platforms are employed by the fashion industry to study and discover trends and foretell consumer behaviours. The global acceptance of social media has made it possible for it to become a well-known phenomenon.

It is alleged that, social media, if effectively used, has many opportunities to offer small-scale businesses [9, 10]. Irrespective of the significance of social media as an online marketing and promotional tool, small-scale fashion businesses in Sunyani seemed not to be bothered, and there is no evidence indicating the impact of social media on fashion businesses in the municipality. However, this paper seeks to evaluate the impact of social media on small-scale fashion industries in Sunyani. The main objectives are to examine the impact of social media platforms on fashion marketing and promotion and assess the effective use of social media tools by the small-scale fashion industries. Below is the research questions developed to guide the study towards achieving its objectives.

How has social media impacted on the marketing and promotion of small-scale fashion businesses?

What would be an effective use of social media tools in the small-scale fashion industry?

2. Literature Review

The literature review shall take into consideration the concept of social media platforms, their impacts, effective use, and benefits with regard to fashion brand marketing and promotion.

Social media appears to be the hottest trend in the fashion industry [11]. The popularity and application of social-networking platforms by fashion businesses are expanding quickly. Many businesses have seen double the number of followers on social media. The current information from one of the prominent providers of digital market research indicates that, comparatively, fashion business in the retail sector has increased dramatically due to the presence of social networking websites.

It is believed that young adults are main users of social media. Through these networking platforms, individuals interact with their favorite fashion designers and vice versa [9, 12-13]. Again, young adults between the ages of 18 and 24 are classified as the most frequent users who interact with online fashion businesses, especially in the retail sector. Fashion designers and retailers regularly update their social media profiles with tweets, blogs, and Twitter feeds in an

effort to develop their brands' personalities on global and real-time online platforms [14]. In view of this, designers and retailers employ social media to post brand images, videos, off-screen footage, and fashion shows, which probably gives the brand a human voice.

Social media is used by fashion houses, companies, and shops to foster genuine in-person interaction with customers. Social media platforms give customers the feeling that they are part of the industry brand's entire family. It has the benefit of offering businesses the chance to take part in conversations about their own businesses. When a company introduces an industry's page on a social networking site like Facebook, it has a significant brand advantage because it is collaborating with its target consumers. Again, it offers designers and retailers the privilege to reveal their current products (designs) in a way that represents their vision [13, 14].

The fashion industry is strongly established as a commercial practice. Nearly all aspects of the fashion industry, from designing to marketing and the purchasing process, rely heavily on people rather than machines for their dependability and reliability. However, with the help of social media, fashion businesses can now depend more on digital than on human resources, which is an unquestionably faster way to raise brand awareness among consumers and predict fashion trends [15].

Social media is an accepted contemporary technology for linking fashion brands and customers. This connection enhances communication while encouraging consumers' desire to purchase. What is more, social media can be a great tool for exhibiting a brand's image in the minds of consumers. Tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp have been very influential in creating brand awareness, marketing, and promotion in the fashion industry since 2009 [16, 18].

The emergence of fashion bloggers has had a substantial impact on the fashion business. Anything fashionable in this era has changed with the advent of social media. The industry has come to realize the influence of bloggers, so much so that they are allowed to participate in fashion shows and exhibitions. In view of this, they are accorded the necessary recognition at international fashion shows because of their established networks of followers [17, 19]. A study carried out by Bourne found that social media platforms give new and young stylists, bloggers, and designers international opportunities for their businesses [20].

A publication from "Forbes.com" dubbed "Social Media is Fashion's Newest Muse" detailed how social networking platforms offer aspiring designers, stylists, and bloggers a possibility for professional development and recognition. Retailers are using social media platforms as a starting point for searching for potential fashion designers. In order to help individual fashion producers sell their products and improve connections with clients and consumers, the most reliable tool to use is social media [9, 20-21].

Social media marketing also entails comprehending online consumer behavior. Nowadays, social media advertising,

which has grown to be a significant marketing campaign channel, has taken the place of print, television, and radio advertising. Presently, opinions are more valued on social networking websites where people converse [22].

Considering the effective use of social media, it is believed to be an integral component of an online marketing style that promotes newly created content for the purpose of increasing brand exposure. It is a great way to interact with a company's target market, which helps increase brand loyalty and trust. A very key issue about the handling of social media platforms is to try posting on a regular basis because the audience and followers of a particular brand are likely to be dormant or inactive if they realize that the brand owner is not active [3, 23].

Again, it is very important to know and understand your active audience in order to build strong relationships on social media. The social media platforms are many, but as a brand or content inventor, you need to ascertain which platform will work better to achieve the desired goals of the business. Having a personality that maintains a singular voice is very crucial. Being active and knowing exactly what to post or share with followers or a target group has always been fantastic [22-24].

Another professional way of using social media is to make every effort to reply to all queries or worries made by your followers or customers, since social media is quite public. Negative remarks should be addressed in particular (as long as they are not meant to be offensive). Keep in mind that social media is also a public relations (PR) tool, so how you respond to upset or unsatisfied clients will be observed globally. As long as you know how to utilize it properly, social media can be a very useful tool for developing relationships with your audience (customers or followers) [25].

3. Methodology

The qualitative research design was used to gather data on small-scale fashion industries in Sunyani Municipality. A non-random sampling technique known as purposive sampling was adopted. In this approach, the sample size was selected based on the judgment of the researchers and the purpose of the study. The sample size comprised twenty (20) renowned small-scale fashion industries within the study location. The designers within the various outfits formed the key respondents because it is assumed that the business brand is created, marketed and promoted on behalf of the entire workforce by the designers. The instrument for gathering data was an interview. Interview data was examined and interpreted using a descriptive analysis. The framework for the analysis of the data collection was provided by a secondary source of data.

4. Results and Discussion

As indicated earlier, interviews were used as the data collection instrument to analyze the information specifically

on the study objectives: examine the impact of social media on fashion brand, marketing, and promotion; and assess the effective use of social media tools or platforms by small-scale fashion industries in the Sunyani Municipality. The researchers interviewed twenty (20) fashion designers after grouping their respective industries into four zones.

Table 1. Interview Schedule.

Area of Study (Zone)	Interview Date
Sunyani North	12 th April, 2023
Sunyani West	14 th April, 2023
Sunyani East	19 th April, 2023
Sunyani South	21 st April, 2023

Below are the responses obtained from the interviews based on the questions that were posed to the interviewees.

Impact of Social Media on Marketing and Promotion of Fashion Brands.

Question One: What are your favorite social media platforms, and why?

Social media platforms have become very influential in the modern business environment. The platforms are many, but not all of them are popular on the business front. Categorization of social media tools has always been the key to differentiation.

Looking at the interviewees' responses on their favourite social media platforms for marketing and promotion of fashion brands, sixteen (16) designers out of the entire twenty people interviewed asserted that Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram are the most frequent platforms employed for marketing their brands (fashion). On the other hand, four (4) interviewees admitted employing We Chat, Snap Chart, TikTok, and Instagram in addition to the tools enumerated earlier. The majority of interviewees' preferences on particular platforms also revealed that Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube are the common tools employed by the small-scale fashion industry in the municipality because of their user-friendly properties.

The positions of the interviewees indicate that the majority of designers in the small-scale fashion industries in the Sunyani Municipality are not conversant with many social media platforms earmarked for digital marketing. Other social media tools, such as Pinterest, Vimeo, and LinkedIn, are all equally important for brand promotion. The most popular tools are those that are excellent at showcasing fashion brands to the global market, such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Snap Chart, Instagram, TikTok, and Pinterest. These platforms can either project videos or pictures to the target customers and followers.

Question Two: How has social media contributed to the marketing and promotion of your fashion brand?

Social media has diverse importance regarding brand marketing and promotion. The platforms enable the fashion industry to connect with their target followers or customers using the current social networking technology.

Considering how social media has contributed to the marketing and promotion of fashion brands, nearly half of the interviewees (nine) believed that the use of social media tools

such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp has helped them reach many customers. They further related that, through social media tools, they have been able to contact customers far and near their business locations. Again, they asserted that the use of social media platforms has contributed to the increase in their monthly income and, at the same time, doubled their regular customers and followers. This assertion is in consonance with a study carried out by the authors [17, 18] that revealed that social media has the tendency to create more avenues for businesses, especially the fashion industry. Another group of interviewees (seven) stated that the application of social media tools like Instagram and TikTok has been very influential in the way they conduct their businesses. The posting of brand photographs and the creation of short video content have been enticing their customers.

In the same vein, only four interviewees shared contrary views concerning the benefits of social media platforms for marketing and promotion of their brands. They, however, believe that social media has little or no influence on the way they market their brand. They further reiterated that, because they have had no engagement with bloggers, much has not been felt with the application of social media tools in the promotion of their fashion brand. It can be seen from the responses that the use of social media platforms as an online connection with customers has a very positive impact on fashion marketing. Notwithstanding, the speed at which new brands reach customers has been amazing since, with the click of a button, a message is already sent to the target audience.

Effective use of social media platforms in the small-scale fashion industry.

Question Three: What are the most effective ways of handling social media platforms in the fashion industry?

This question is intended to solicit the views of fashion designers on how best they handle their social media platforms. In this regard, more than half (11 of the interviewees) said that they are always active online, trying to update their customers and followers on their latest brand. Again, they mentioned that they have put in place some prompt response mechanisms to ensure that customers' concerns are addressed whenever possible.

On the other hand, six (6) interviewees asserted that because they do not have time to be active online, they have engaged some high-profile personalities within the municipality who act as influencers for their industry's brands. The use of middlemen as bloggers or influencers for marketing brands has always been the right way to go. Only three (3) interviewees who responded to this question argued that posing brand photographs online encourages pirating of ideas and products, and as a result, they have little or no interest in sharing their products on digital marketing platforms.

It can be deduced from the expression that this group of people is deeply rooted in traditional business practices, whereby physical engagement between brand owners and customers has always been the strategy.

Irrespective of some members' inability to effectively handle social media platforms, as revealed, the majority of the interviewees are abreast of the technicalities of using social media in the fashion industry. It can be categorically stated that social media has been a gateway for reaching out to target customers and should be effectively treated as such. It should also be understood that collaborating with others, gathering reviews and opinions about your products or services, brand monitoring, constant sharing with your audience, and keeping up with social media trends are some of the right ways to use social media platforms.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusions

This study made an effort to evaluate the impact of social media on small-scale fashion industries in the Sunyani Municipality. Considering the data analysis and the findings of the study, it can be concluded that the use of social media platforms as digital marketing and promotional tools in the fashion industry has many benefits. Despite serving as a free tool for public relations, social media connects prospective customers to marketers. The fashion industry is undergoing transformation and in the same way, social media has been considered a great advertising tool. Many fashion industries have benefited so much from social media as a brand marketing and promotional tool. It is incredible how passionately consumers and designers have embraced social media. Social media is now the hottest fashion brand marketing tool, and we have to trust its influence and power. Again, the study revealed that Facebook and Instagram YouTube, Twitter, and TikTok are the most frequently used social media employed by the small-scale fashion industries in the Sunyani Municipality.

5.2. Recommendations

Following the study's execution, examination of the consulted literature and interpretation of the data gathered on the subject "the impact of social media on the small-scale fashion industry in the Sunyani Municipality" yield intriguing findings. A few recommendations for action will include maintaining a consistent online presence to build a brand's trustworthiness, reaching out to professionals in the fashion industry for potential partnerships, and staying up-to-date with emerging internet trends while developing creative marketing strategies. Additionally, small-scale fashion industries in the Sunyani Municipality are encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of social media platforms as marketing and promotional tools to improve their businesses.

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