



Proceedings of the 37th iSTEAMS Cross-Border Conference – Accra Ghana 2023
Series 37, Volume No 2

Faculty of Computational Sciences & Informatics - Academic City University College, Accra, Ghana
SMART Scientific Projects & Research Consortium (SMART SPaRC)
Sekinah-Hope Foundation for Female STEM Education
ICT University Foundations USA
IEEE Computer Society, Nigeria Section
Intelligent Antitheft Management Networks
Creative Research Publishers – Society for Multidisciplinary & Advanced Research Techniques (SMART) Africa

**37th International Science Technology Education Arts Management
& Social Sciences (iSTEAMS) Cross-Border Conference - Accra Ghana 2023**

**Exploring Sustainable Business Strategies and Job Creation
Opportunities in the Sub-Saharan African Fashion Supply Chain
Using Photovoice; a case study of the Nigerian Fashion Industry.**

Obonyilo Jane

Sustainable Energy and Allied Disciplines
Glasgow Caledonian University, London

Email: Jane.Obonyilo@gcu.ac.uk

Phone: +2349123849250

ABSTRACT

The fashion industry in Sub-Saharan Africa is gaining significant recognition globally. Attention is drawn to the global audience not only by the vibrant and colourful prints of fabrics, but by the enormous potentials identified in the fashion supply chain- from cotton growing to final consumption. Considering the ease of entry into the sector and the various opportunities the fashion industry presents, the concept of sustainability is increasingly being adopted as a mitigating strategy to curb the pollution and waste generation attributed to the fashion industry. This study therefore, attempts to tell the compelling story of how the Nigerian fashion industry imbibes the concept of sustainability into the fabrics of fashion enterprises. The qualitative study adopts Photovoice methodology through focussed group discussion engaging 6 Fashion-related Small and Medium Scale enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria. The data obtained will be analysed thematically.

Keywords: Fashion, Sustainability, Fashion sustainability, Nigerian fashion, Sub-Saharan Africa, Photovoice.

Proceedings Citation Format

Obonyilo Jane (2023): Exploring Sustainable Business Strategies and Job Creation Opportunities in the Sub-Saharan African Fashion Supply Chain Using Photovoice; a case study of the Nigerian Fashion Industry.. Proceedings of the 37th iSTEAMS Multidisciplinary Cross-Border Conference. 30th October – 1st November, 2023. Academic City University College, Accra, Ghana. Pp 37-42. .dx.doi.org/10.22624/AIMS/ACCRCROSSBORDER2023V2P3

1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Globally, the fashion industry contributes approximately 2% of the world's valued at 3 trillion dollars - with women's clothing and apparel sector contributing the most to the total value of the fashion industry. As an indication of the contribution the fashion industry contributes to economic growth, some countries that have been impacted by the economic boosting potentials of the fashion industry include China and Bangladesh. China has the largest garment-producing industry globally with a volume of over 3 billion meters of fabric produced monthly and produces an estimated 31 billion pieces of apparel (Statista,2015; Statista, 2021).

China's fashion industry employs over 10 million people and has a GDP of 8 trillion dollars. Many global brands especially in developed countries do not manufacture locally, therefore in a bid to source cheap labour, outsource the manufacturing of their products to China which is a low-wage economy. The major source of their revenue comes from exports. Bangladesh, on the other hand, is the second largest garment producing industry next to China. With 80% of the Nation's export generated from the garment industry, the sector contributes 16% to the nation's GDP (Statista, 2021). Also with 4,000 garment production factories, the sector has an employment capacity of 4million.

Sustainable Business Strategy



This icon is for display purposes only and is completely editable. You can replace this with any other icon from the www.slideteam.net icons section.

Fig 1: Sustainable Business Strategies

Source: <https://www.slideteam.net/sustainable-business-strategy-powerpoint-slide.html>



Proceedings of the 37th ISTEAMS Cross-Border Conference – Accra Ghana 2023
Series 37, Volume No 2

In the context of Sub-Saharan Africa which consists of 46 out of the 55 countries in Africa, the African fashion industry is particularly known for its 'vibrant hues and colorful fabrics such as wax and printed dyed cotton, and the high quality of craftsmanship in African cultures' (Fashionomics 2020). The clothing and textile industry contributes 1% of the global worth of the fashion industry, with the Sub-Saharan African (SSA) fashion market valued at 31 billion dollars (Young, 2015; Euromonitor, 2015).

While South Africa, Lesotho and Swaziland are known for the exportation of locally made fashion products, Morocco, Egypt and Tunisia are known for mass garment production and cheap labor often patronized by European fast-fashion brands, with the workforce mainly female. West Africa is known for cotton and textile production; Southern and Eastern Africa is known for the production of precious stones. As in the case of other countries globally, the fashion industry in SSA possesses the potential to mitigate the problems of unemployment facing the continent by creating job opportunities embedded in the textile industry value chain; from growing cotton to consumption (Akinsola, 2019).

Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have the same advantage as other countries to utilize the enormous opportunities the fashion industry contributes to global industrialization. There is an increase in the knowledge of sustainability and the application of sustainable practices embedded in fashion garment production. This research will adopt a qualitative methodology to examine how the fashion industry in Sub-Saharan Africa adopts sustainable business strategies in the creation of job opportunities in various stages of the production cycle.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Inspired by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically, Numbers 1, 8 and 12, specifically, no poverty; decent work and economic growth, and responsible consumption and production, respectively, this research will identify some challenges faced by fashion entrepreneurs in adopting more sustainable practices, examine the opportunities the fashion industry presents in job creation and adoption of sustainable business practices in the Sub-Saharan fashion industry production cycle (SDGs, 2023). Despite the challenges faced in the fashion industry, more eco-friendly decisions can attain fashion sustainability. For example, sustainable power supply options such as energy generated from renewables or solar panels can replace the use of fuel generators, or over reliance on epileptic power supply (Nwankwo, Olaniyi and Morgan, 2023).

Furthermore, other challenges faced by the SSA fashion industry include low wages for workers, child labour, and the importation of second-hand clothes from developed countries which eventually result in landfill waste. These can be mitigated with adoption of more ethical and sustainable practices. There are various stages of garment production and with each stage comes various peculiar challenges as well as numerous entrepreneurial opportunities to mitigate the existing challenges. Figure 1 highlights the various stages of garment production and life cycle which is applicable to fashion businesses globally. Considering the ease of entry into various stages of garment production provides some information about job opportunities and avenues for sustainable practices in the supply chain.



Figure 2: Stages of garment production and life cycle;
Source:redressdesignaward.com

1.2. Aim and Objectives

Aim: The aim of the research is to examine how the fashion industry in Nigeria adopts sustainable business strategies in creating job opportunities throughout various stages of the production cycle.

Objectives

- To examine the scope and impact of the Sub-Saharan African fashion industry
- To examine the Fashion industry production cycle
- To examine the job creation opportunities and sustainability-conscious business strategies in production processes in Sub-Saharan Africa's fashion industry
- Using Photovoice to capture how fashion SMEs tell a compelling story of fashion sustainability

2. METHODOLOGY

This research will use Photovoice in examining how the fashion industry in Sub-Saharan Africa adopts sustainable business strategies in the creation of job opportunities in various stages of the production cycle. Photovoice is a qualitative research methodology often used among a community or small groups of people that make use of photography and pictures to capture people's views and perspectives (Wang, 1999; Silverman, 2016). The participants are provided with disposable cameras or encouraged to take pictures using their own mobile phones or cameras. The idea is to capture the observer's perspective in line with the research objectives and provide a written caption where possible. Pictures taken by participants are afterward reflected upon and discussed using the qualitative method of data collection - a focussed group, comprising of the researcher and the participants to explain the images from the perspective of each participant, highlighting individual narratives and identifying common themes or differences amongst the photographs and captions.



Proceedings of the 37th iSTEAMS Cross-Border Conference – Accra Ghana 2023
Series 37, Volume No 2

In the context of this research, 6 participants who are owners of Fashion-related Small and Medium Scale enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria will participate in the focused group. The data obtained from the focused group will afterward be thematically analysed.

3. CONTRIBUTIONS TO KNOWLEDGE

This research will contribute to credible academic literature in public domain that borders on the subject of sustainability in African fashion. Furthermore, government and other organisations in various SSA countries, may find this research informational in developing policies related to fashion innovation and encouraging sustainable and ethical practices. Also, fashion SMEs will be knowledgeable about the opportunities available in the circular economy and will be inspired to adopt sustainable practices. Finally, this research will provide a motivation to sustainable fashion SMEs to tell a compelling story of how their fashion enterprises imbibe the concept of sustainability.

REFERENCES

1. AKINSOLA, W., 2019. *Free to read | The state of Nigeria's Fashion Industry*. [online] Stearsng.com. Available at: <<https://www.stearsng.com/article/the-state-of-nigerias-fashion-industry>> [Accessed 30 August 2023].
2. Fashionomics, 2020. [Online] investing in the Creative Industries: Fashionomics. Available at: <https://www.afdb.org/fileadmin/uploads/afdb/Documents/Generic-> [Accessed 14 October 2023].
3. Nwankwo, N., Olaniyi T.K., and Morgan, A., 2023. A Just Sustainable Energy Transition for Oil Rich Sub-Saharan Africa Countries. Available at: <https://infonomics-society.org/wp-content/uploads/A-Just-Transition-Framework-for-Oil-Rich-Sub-Saharan-Africa-Countries.pdf> [Accessed 12 September 2023].
4. Obonyilo, J.O., and Marciniak, R., 2023. Imperatives of Inclusive Policies on Growth and Challenges of the Fashion Industry in Sub-Saharan Africa. In *Pioneering New Perspectives in the Fashion Industry: Disruption, Diversity and Sustainable Innovation* (pp. 155-170). Emerald Publishing Limited.
5. SDGS 2023,. Sustainable Development goals. Accessible at: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (Retrieved 10 September 2023)
6. STATISTA., 2015. *China: apparel production 1970-2015 | Statista*. [online] Statista. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/307602/china-apparel-production/>> [Accessed 13 September 2023].
7. STATISTA., 2021. *Fashion - Africa | Statista Market Forecast*. [online] Statista. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/outlook/dmo/ecommerce/fashion/africa>> [Accessed 13 September 2023].
8. STATISTA., 2021. *China: textile production by month 2021 | Statista*. [online] Statista. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/226193/clothing-production-in-china-by-month/>> [Accessed 13 September 2023].
9. SILVERMAN, D., 2016. Qualitative Research. Sage. 4th edition.



Proceedings of the 37th iSTEAMS Cross-Border Conference – Accra Ghana 2023
Series 37, Volume No 2

10. WANG, C. C., 1999. Photovoice: A participatory action research strategy applied to women's health. *Journal of women's health*, 8(2), pp. 185-192
11. YOUNG, R., 2015. *Tapping the \$31 Billion Africa Opportunity*. [online] *The Business of Fashion*. Available at: <<https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/global-markets/tapping-31-billion-africa-opportunity>> [Accessed 30 April 2023].