Brand Perception of Fashion Design as Academic Programme in Ghanaian Tertiary Institutions

Michael Obeng Nyarko[1], Timothy Crentsil[1] and Samuel Owusu-Mensah[2]

[1]*Dept. of Fashion Design and Textile Studies, Faculty of Creative Arts and Technology*
[2]*Departmentt of Marketing, Business School, Kumasi Technical University (KsTU), Kumasi, Ghana 02447144306, moyfila@yahoo.co.uk / 0509123301, tyemo2001@yahoo.com/ 0248548423, omens123@yahoo.com*

Abstract

For decades, public perception about Fashion Design Programme in Ghana is that of 'wayside' seamstress or tailor with no higher education. These tailors and dressmakers are trained in the informal sector through the apprenticeship system using outdated machinery, methods and processes. This practice has adversely influenced public opinions about the fashion design programme at all levels of fashion training. This study investigates prevailing perceptions about fashion design from the perspective of Academia and the general public. Staff and students of the Fashion Departments of three tertiary institutions in Kumasi and patrons of fashion products in Kumasi Metropolis formed the population for the study. Structured questionnaires were used to solicit opinions of respondents and descriptive statistics was adopted to analyse the data. The study revealed that most Ghanaians had misconceptions about the Fashion Design programme because of their lack of active engagement with the programme. It further indicated that proper branding of the Fashion Design programme will make it very attractive at the tertiary level of the Educational ladder in Ghana.

Key words: Ghana, Academic programme, branding, fashion design, tertiary

Introduction

Manlow (2008) traces dressmaking and millinery to the twentieth century when the skills were practiced in workshops. These dressmakers followed traditional patterns and did not introduce any radical innovations of style and manner into their designs. They did not employ designers and did not typically make substantial changes in style to the clothing they produced. This form of mass production was best suited to the making of identical products with variations only in size. The production of dresses, uniforms and costumes in this manner eventually gave way to factories. To cater for the needs of the new elite who wanted signs of distinction, and to produce clothes that made it possible for wearers to distinguish themselves and dominate others, the fashion designer was born. In creating these specialized clothes, designers drew themes from current cultural or historical sources.

Many scholars of fashion including Laver (2002) place the origin of Fashion to the fourteenth century. Steele (1988) argues that fashion, as a system of variations in acceptable styles, can be traced to Italian cities in the early Renaissance. Burke (2011) describes Fashion as a reflection of our society. As an art form it is believed to have the capacity to transform

an image, help express a person's identity or even make a social statement. In essence any current style that is trendy and patronized by a large number of people can be considered as Fashion. The fashion designer for that matter, is the creative and technical professional who designs clothing within a specific theme for specific purpose. The process involves the interpretation of the design brief, development of the conceptual ideas and translating the ideas into marketable designs. A successful fashion designer thus requires a portfolio of skills from creative to technical to management and business skills.

The phenomenon has emphasized the need for effective high skills training to meet the changes in trend. It comes as no surprise therefore that fashion has become an important course that is run by quite a number of tertiary academic institutions in Ghana. The programmes range from Diploma in Fashion, Higher National Diploma in fashion, Bachelor of Technology in Fashion, Master of Technology in Fashion and Master of Philosophy spread across the Polytechnics, Technical Universities and Traditional University. It is important to note that the intakes are high in most of these institutions. In Kumasi Technical University for instance, the Congregation hand book for the 2017, puts the total student population of the Higher National Diploma (HND) in Fashion at four hundred and thirty-four (434).

'The term 'brand' is derived from the old Norse word brand, "meaning burn, and it was by this method that early man marked his livestock (Blackett, 1991). The traditional American AMA definition (American Marketing Association, 1960) of brand is, "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or combination of them, which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors." It can also be defined, as an identifiable version of product which can be perceived by a consumer as being distinctive from other versions of the product (Watkins, 1986). In this sense, designer label (e.g. Ralph Lauren) or private label (e.g. Esprit) is also a brand'

In the fashion industry, an inappropriate brand image strategy could make a brand fail in that increasingly competitive business environment. O'Connor et. al., (2017) opines that a designer label or even a little brand name, may be different on the level of the product exclusivity, perceived quality and reliability. They all refer to image marketing, and would like to use brand as a tool to seize larger market share in their market niche. Within the fashion industry it is the observation of Ahn *et al*., (2010); Wigley and Provelengiou, (2011) that, diverse partnership strategies have been deployed to drive innovation and newness in a highly competitive market. Ahn *et al*. (2010, p. 6) asserts that "Fashion collaborations leverage entire fashion business concepts that transform their branding strategy into not only 'sleeping with enemies', but also to 'talking to strangers' regardless of product types".

The success of a fashion brand depends upon how precise it is, in understanding its target customers and their needs, so as to create wants. Clothing is called a "silent language" because it carries symbols. When people talk about the clothes they buy and why they buy them, they show a variety of logics. An understanding of why customers select one brand over another and what factors generate such kind of want is crucially important to fashion marketers. When insiders talk about this issue, the concept of brand image would be mentioned and it is useful to explain the phenomenon (O'Connor *et al*., 2017).

Brand image is defined as perceptions that consumers associate with a particular brand (Keller, 1993). In an era of competing options, a brand must find a way to create a connection with the consumer that leads to loyalty. Keller assets that one way that successful brands build and maintain a positive relationship with consumers is through establishing a favorable brand image. The brand image of a fashion product is particularly important to consumers because they use its rich symbolic meaning to express self-identity (Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Escalas and Bettman, 2005). Hence, consumers are likely to purchase fashion brands that assist them in creating the image they desire (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). Fashion entails the adoption of a new style by consumers (Solomon, 2012), and fashion-related brands depend heavily on the distinctive yet continually evolving elements of style, such as printed patterns on fabric or shades of color in cosmetics, to drive consumer demand. Thus, fashion-related brands include not only apparel and footwear products but also products such as cosmetics and jewelry. For instance, standalone cosmetic brands, such as Bobbi Brown or Clinique, can be considered fashion-related brands because the distinctiveness and evolving nature of their style/ design elements (e.g. color, fragrance blends) are used to entice customers back each season (Eunjoo C., Ann M. F., 2015).

Murphy (1988) identified the ingredients of a brand as; the product itself, the packaging, the brand name, the promotion, the advertising and the overall presentation. The theory therefore is for the brand owner to assemble these attributes and blends them in a unique way that will help achieve the desired results. Murphy likens branding to skills in cooking which requires skill in the "selection of the elements in the mix, part in the blending and cooking and part in the presentation" (p. 2). The brand should therefore be seen as a combination of physical, aesthetic, rational and emotional elements of a product. This should aim at producing not only appropriate product but also something that is different from the brands of competitors.

Despite the Sophisticated nature of contemporary Fashion Design and the complexity in the market trends, the general public has a narrow scope of the subject matter purely because of their lack of active engagement with the players in the industry. They perceive fashion as just sewing or dress making and regard it as a trade for drop out. There is therefore the need to address this misconception. The study seeks to examine the public perception about Fashion Design and adopt strategies to make the Fashion Design programme very attractive at the highest level of the Educational ladder.

Data and Method

The study is qualitative and the case study method was used to conduct inquiry into branding fashion design as academic programme in Ghanaian Tertiary Institutions. Respondents for the study were in two categories namely; staff and students of three tertiary institutions in Kumasi where fashion is thought as academic programme and patrons of fashion products in Kumasi. The breakdown of respondents at the tertiary institutions are as follows: Kumasi Technical University (16); University of Education Winneba (15) and Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi (15). The Patrons of Fashion product were from selected Sub – metros in Kumasi Metropolis. The Kumasi Metropolitan Assembly has ten Sub Metropolitan District Councils namely; Bantama,

Subin, Manhyia, Oforikrom, Tafo-Pankrono, Nhyiaeso, Kwadaso, Suame, Asokwa and Asawase. Three (3) out of the ten (10) sub-metros were purposefully selected for the study. The breakdown of the respondents for the sub-metros selected were; Subin (18), Oforikrom (18) and Kwadaso (18). These sub-metros were selected because they are the communities which house the three tertiary institution for the study. Structured questionnaires were used to solicit opinions of respondents and descriptive Statistics using percentages were used to discuss the results qualitatively. The sample size is Hundred and the response rate was 95 %.

Results and Discussions

The views expressed by respondents were processed and presented using frequency tables. The discussions were supported by concepts and theories in the literature review. Table 1 presents frequency distribution on demographic characteristic of respondents. Table 2 presents Frequency distribution of respondent's view on core areas of specialization in Fashion Design. Table 3: presents frequency distribution of respondent's view on academic levels of Fashion practitioners. Table 4: presents Frequency distribution of respondent's view on skills in Fashion, Table 5: presents Frequency distribution of respondent's knowledge on brand items in fashion Table 6: presents Frequency distribution of respondent's knowledge on brand strategies in Fashion and finally, Table 7: expresses respondent's agreement level on the importance of branding Fashion as Academic programme in Tertiary institutions.

Table 1: Frequency distribution on demographics characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total
Gender			**95**
Male	32	33.7	
Female	63	**66.3**	
Age group			**95**
Below 20yrs	14	13.3	
21 – 30yrs	23	24.2	
31 – 40yrs	31	**32.6**	
41 – 50yrs	15	15.8	
51 – 60yrs	12	12.6	
Marital Status			**95**
Single	61	**64.2**	
Married	34	35.8	
Educational Background			**95**
Basic School	10	10.5	
Senior High School	24	25.3	
Tertiary Institution	61	**63.5**	

Table 1 presents the sample characteristics of frequency distribution on demographics of respondents. Among the respondents in Kumasi metropolis purposively sampled,

66.3% were females and the remaining 33.7 % were males. Majority of the respondents constituting 32.5 % fall within the 31 – 40 years age bracket. As much as 64.2 % of the respondents were single and 63.5 % constituting the majority of the respondents either have tertiary education or in a tertiary institution.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of respondent's view on core areas of specialization in Fashion Design.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total
Lectures			**95**
Design	11	11.6	
Textiles	20	21.1	
Sewing	52	**54.7**	
Millinery and Accessories	12	12.6	
Students			**95**
Design	10	10.5	
Textiles	21	22.1	
Sewing	51	**53.7**	
Millinery and Accessories	13	13.7	
Patrons/Public			**95**
Design	7	7.4	
Textiles	11	11.6	
Sewing	64	**67.4**	
Millinery and Accessories	13	13.7	

Table 2 revealed that majority of the lecturer respondents constituting 54.7 % consider sewing as the core area of specializing in fashion. Another majority of 53.7 % and 67.4 % of the students and patrons of fashion products respectively, also indicated that Sewing is a core specialty in fashion. Opinions were however divided on the other areas in terms of their values.

Table 3: Frequency distribution of respondent's view on academic levels of Fashion practitioners

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total
Lecturers			**95**
Mainly Diploma graduates	21	22.1	
Mainly HND graduates	40	**42.1**	
Mainly B'Tech graduates	31	32.6	
Mainly M'Tech graduates	3	3.2	

Students			95
Mainly Diploma graduates	30	31.6	
Mainly HND graduates	41	**43.2**	
Mostly B'Tech graduates	20	21.1	
Mostly M'Tech graduates	4	4.2	
Patrons/Public			95
Mostly Diploma graduates	33	34.7	
Mostly HND graduates	50	**52.6**	
Mostly B'Tech graduates	10	10.5	
Mostly M'Tech graduates	2	2.1	

Table 3 presents respondent's opinion on academic level of fashion practitioners. It is evident in the table that the public believe that the academic level of most of the fashion practitioners is HND. The patrons of the fashion products who interact mostly with the practitioners recorded the highest score of as much as 52.6%. This is followed by the students with a score of 43.2 whiles lecturers recorded 42.2%. Opinions are however divided on the other academic levels.

Table 4: Frequency distribution of respondent's view on skills in Fashion

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total
Lecturers			95
Creative Skills	22	23.2	
Technical Skills	43	**45.3**	
Managerial Skills	10	10.5	
Business Skills	21	22.1	
Students			95
Creative Skills	20	21.1	
Technical Skills	51	**53.7**	
Managerial Skills	7	7.4	
Business Skills	18	18.9	
Patrons/Public			95
Creative Skills	15	15.8	
Technical Skills	55	**57.9**	
Managerial Skills	5	5.3	
Business Skills	20	21.1	

In Table 4 respondents expressed views on the type of skills possessed by fashion designers. Overwhelming majority of the respondents are aware that fashion design involves technical skills. Patrons of fashion products recorded the highest core of 57.9%, followed by Students (53.7%) and lecturers (45.3%) respectively. Creative skills featured next in percentage in

the three categories of respondents. Opinion was however divided on the managerial and business skills.

Table 5: Frequency distribution of respondent's knowledge on brand items in Fashion

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total
Lecturers			**95**
Logo	10	10.5	
Label	55	**57.9**	
package	30	31.6	
Students			**5**
Logo	11	11.6	
Label	65	**68.4**	
package	19	20	
Patrons/Public			**95**
Logo	7	7.4	
Label	70	**73.7**	
package	18	18.9	

Table 5 expressed respondents' knowledge on brand items in fashion design. It revealed that majority of respondents recognized label as brand item in fashion design. A whooping majority of 73.7% patrons of fashion products recognize label as brand item. 68.4% of students also indicated label as fashion item, while 57.9% of lecturers believe same. Quite a number of respondents also indicated package as a brand item. The least value in terms of percentage is 7.4% which was recorded by logo and the respondents that obtain that value are patrons of fashion products.

Table 6: Frequency distribution of respondent's knowledge on brand strategies in Fashion

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Total
Lecturers			**95**
Brand Name	20	21	
Packaging	15	15.8	
Quality of Product	30	**31.6**	
Promotion and Adverts	30	31.6	
Students			**95**
Brand Name	25	26.3	
Packaging	17	17.9	
Quality of Product	23	24.2	
Promotion and Adverts	30	**31.6**	

Patrons/Public			95
Brand Name	25	26.3	
Packaging	11	11.6	
Quality of Product	35	**36.9**	
Promotion and Adverts	24	25.3	

Table 6 revealed respondents' knowledge on brand strategies in fashion. Opinions on the brand strategies were diverse. The highest score of 36.9% was recorded for quality of product and was in the name of patrons of fashion products. The next highest score of 31.6% was for quality of product and was registered by lecturers. This was followed by 26.3 % for brand name which was scored by students.

Table 7: Respondent's agreement level on the importance of branding Fashion as academic programme in tertiary institutions, Level of Agreement (%)

Variable	Disagree	Neutral	Agree (%)
Lecturers	-	5 (5.3%)	90 (94.7)
Students	-	10 (10.5%)	85 (89.5)
Patrons/Public	5 (5.3)	18 (18.9%)	72 (75.8)

Table 7 shows the respondents agreement level on the importance of branding Fashion as academic programme in Tertiary institutions. It is evident from the table that with, the exception of 5.3% patrons of fashion products who disagreed and 34.7% who were neutral, majority of the respondents agreed that fashion design is a very important academic programme and should be branded in tertiary institutions in Ghana.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study sought to examine the public perception about Fashion Design and developed strategies to make the Fashion Design programme very attractive at the highest level of the Educational ladder. The study concluded that the public perceive Fashion design basically as sewing. This view was expressed by 67.4% of the respondents. The study also indicated that 52.6% of the public consider HND as the standard qualification for fashion graduates. Another 57.9% of the public constituting a majority, consider fashion design as involving technical skills. As much as 73.7% of the populace identified label as the major brand item in fashion design. On respondent's knowledge on brand strategies in Fashion, the responses were varied. Whiles the highest score of 36.9% indicated quality of product, 26.3% of the respondents selected brand. Overwhelming majority of 94.7% of the respondents agreed that fashion should be branded as an academic programme in Tertiary institutions in Ghana.

In line with Murphy (1988) ingredients of brand concept, it is recommended that academic institutions that run the fashion design programme should actively engage the general public on their brand and advertise them profusely in the media. Lecturers in the fashion departments in the various tertiary institution should emphasize presentation and train fashion design students to produce works with good finish.

References

Journal Articles

Ahn, S., Kim, H. and Forney, J.A. (2010), "Fashion collaboration or collision?", Journal   of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp.6-20

Bearden, W.O. & Etzel, M. J. (1982), Reference group influence on product and brand purchase decisions, Journal of Consumer Research, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 183-194

Eunjoo C., Ann M. F. (2015) "Conceptualization of a holistic brand image measure for fashion-related brands", Journal of Consumer Marketing, Vol. 32 Issue: 4, pp.255-265. Retrieved: August 30th 2018 from https://doi.org/10.1108/JCM-07-2014-1063

Murphy J. (1988). Branding. Marketing Intelligence & Planning. 6 (4) 4-8. Retrieved August 30th 2018 from https://doi.org/10.1108/ eb045775

O'Connor S., Smith I., Afzal W., (2017) Disruption be my guide: A study into future directions for academic programs for information management, Library Hi Tech, Vol. 35 (1) 71 – 80

Books

Blackett, T. (1991), Brand Valuation, (2nd ed.), Business Books Limited, London, Sydney, 2

Burke S. (2011). Fashion Design: Concept to Collection. Everest, China: Burk publishing.

Kumasi Technical University (2017), Vice Chancellor's Report for 12th Congregation Kumasi Technical University Congregation Hand Book for 2017/2018.

Laver, J. (2002). A Concise History of Costume. London: Thames and Hudson.

Manlow V. (2008). Designing Clothing: Culture and Organisation of the Fashion Industry. New Brunswick (USA): Transaction Publishers.

Steele, V. (1998), Paris Fashion: A Cultural History. New York: Oxford University Press.