# Utilization of Social Media Among Fashion Merchandisers in Promoting Fashion Products for Sustainable Living in Benue State

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Abstract- The study assessed the utilization of social media fashion merchandisers in promoting fashion products for sustainable living in Makurdi Metropolis. Three (3) research objectives were formulated for this study. The population for the was made up of 145,000 fashion merchandisers. Taro Yamane was used to calculate the sample size 398 respondents, while Bouley's formula was employed to distribute the sample size across the wards. Mean score was used to achieve the objectives. Findings showed that the most frequently sold digital fashion items was sown wears (  $\square$  =3.75) More so, findings also revealed that the most commonly used digital platforms was Facebook ( =3.95). findings further showed the major challenge encountered during the usage of social media was undersize/oversize products. Finally, the study concludes sown gowns as the highest sold fashion items on digital platform, Facebook and WhatsApp also as the most used social media platform to promote and merchandise fashion products. Challenges faced by fashion merchandisers are inadequate finance, internet fraud, subscription of technological knowledge, difficulty, lack undersize/oversize products among others. It was recommended that awareness should be raised among fashion merchandisers about the availability of most fashion items online for increased patronage, Fashion business owners should advertise more on digital platform such as Facebook and WhatsApp. The cost of subscription by network provider such as MTN, GLO etc should be lowered so as to enable consumers to spend more time online in search for desirable fashion items, likewise, merchandisers should make use of the concept of standard fit information in selecting the items to display on digital platform so as to ameliorate the challenges of undersize/oversize products.

Indexed Terms- Social Media Merchandising, Social Media Platform, Fashion Merchandiser, Fashion Products, Sustainable living.

#### I. INTRODUCTION

The development of internet-mediated communication technologies particularly social media has changed the way consumers, brands and communities connect and interact (Hsu, 2019).

The ubiquitous acceptance of social media is essentially propelled by its unprecedented use by consumers. Indeed, social media is being used by billions of people around the world (Statista,2020a). Internet, social media, mobile applications, and other digital communications technologies have become part of everyday life for billions of people around the world.

According to recent statistics for January 2020, 4.54 billion people are active internet users, encompassing 59 % of the global population (Statista, 2020a). Social media usage has become an integral element to the lives of many people across the world. In 2019, 2.95 billion people were active social media users worldwide. This is forecast to increase to almost 3.43 billion by 2023 (Statistica, 2020b). In the year 2000 through to 2010, digital marketing underwent an evolution towards greater sophistication, largely due to the proliferation of devices capable of accessing digital media, leading to a sudden growth in the field. As of 2012 and 2013, statistics indicated that digital marketing was still experiencing growth. Concurrently, the emergence of social media platforms, such as LinkedIn, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter in the year 2000, played a crucial role in the increasing reliance of consumers on digital electronics in their daily lives. (Brinkley, 2012). Social media began as a tool for people to communicate and engage socially. Although the enthusiasm in social media initially began with the younger age group, the interest has expanded to others as well. In the last two or three years, the role of social media has given rise to social commerce phenomenon. It has been pervasively associated as electronic marketing (e- marketing). Besides, it has been regarded as a powerful tool to enhance fashion marketing, the volume of goods sold through social media reached \$5 billion (Anderson, Price, Brusa, 2011). People spend an increasing amount of time online searching for information on products and services, communicating with other consumers about their experiences and engaging with companies. Social media enables companies to connect with their customers, improve awareness of their products, influence consumer's attitudes, receive feedback, help to improve current products and services and increase sales (Algharabat et al., 2018; Kapoor et al., 2018; Kaur et al., 2018, Lal et al., 2020). The penetration of social media in consumers life can be understood by the number of active users on social media platforms, for example, Facebook is reported to be one of the most popular platforms with approximately 2.6 billion monthly active users, followed by Instagram, YouTube, WeChat, which have all crossed 1 billion monthly active user mark (Statista, 2020b). The total number of global social media users are estimated to be 3.96 billion as of July 2020, which is approximately 56.5 % of world's population (Statista, 2020d). Social media has primarily changed the way consumer receive information and communicate with each other. It has become an essential point of information search for consumers because of the availability of a wide variety of options, convenience and plethora of brand/product related information available at a click away from the mouse (Amed et al., 2017) but it's evident that fashion consumers from all age groups are using social media and are also inspired by it. Wilberg (2018) reported that interaction with other users has the ability to trigger new consumer needs and even alter consumer purchase intention, which was further corroborated by a recent survey conducted by Mintel (2019), reporting that a third of British fashion consumers are influenced to purchase a product or participate in an activity based on influencers recommendation on social media. fashion brands across different segments of the fashion

industry such as fast-fashion retailers (e.g. Zara, H&M) sports fashion brands (e.g. Nike), onlineonly retailers (e.g. konga, Jumia) and even fashion SME's are increasingly using social media in their marketing and communication activities (Rienda et al., 2020; Bonilla et al., 2019; Amed et al., 2018). According to Purwar (2019) Fashion industry is a large and valuable industry of the world. Approx. 75% of internet users reach fashion retail websites and apps through their digital devices (Mobile, PC etc.). In general, consumers use various digital tools for information and marketing purpose such as -Facebook, Instagram, twitter, blogs, links, YouTube etc. In the next few years, fashion consumers may expect further explosive growth rate of social media contributed through users' use and view. Social media has changed the world of marketing, it is all about the ways in which we create, connect and share content online, and can be used as an integral part of an online marketing campaign (Najeem 2016)

Sustainability according to United Nation is the development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. It aims to minimize the negative impacts on the environment and society. For a fashion need to be sustainable it must strive to achieve and balance specific economic, environmental, cultural and social objectives, Hák, Janoušková, and Moldan (2016) argued that the achievement of sustainability objectives is extremely important for achieving a qualitatively better standard of living. Sustainability approach inevitably involves the transition from a linear industrial system to a circular system that can be enabled by the introduction of a new business model, a product manufacturing cycle with a view to both economic and environmental sustainability (Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2013). Sustainability entails business optimization of resource consumption, reduction of financial waste in terms of saving capital and resources.

Businesses driven to focus sustainability makes financial sense and is perhaps the only strategy that will support the future of the fashion industry. Sustainability efforts and current trends, analyzes consumer perception and buying behavior which leads to increase in patronage that enhances profitability Statements of the problem

Many industries including fashion industry have shift from their traditional means of creating awareness about their product to digital world in order to digitalize their market and communicate the purpose and value of their products to customers. This is because the use of traditional means of promoting brand such as (radio advertising, newspapers, television, magazines etc) is not sufficient to carry out this operation due to the rapid change in technology innovation. This diversification required the use of social media platform to achieve the set goals. In today's competitive environment, it is not easy enough to create awareness and encourage sales, but how to persuade consumers to patronize and feel comfortable with the service should be of great concern. Challenges of increased global competition have halt merchandising performances. There are infinite number of different fashion products, operational individuals' methods and requirements contributed to this global competition, lack of comprehensive effective social media marketing strategy also poses a threat to merchandising performance. (Montgomery 2018). The shift in the global economy resulted in a transition to digital merchandising over the years, with brands establishing a robust online presence that surpassed in-store sales. Social media is becoming the alternatives for people to shop for their needs. Also, Local fashion merchandisers contend with a lack of retail outlet/structure, hostile environment, and competition with established foreign brands (Aderibigbe, 2014). Which also enables many of them to adopt social media merchandising for effective performance, nevertheless, there are some factors that could hinder the patronage of fashion items online such as interrupted power supply, subscription difficulty due to network fluctuation, inadequate finance among others.

## Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to;

- 1. Identify fashion items sold most through digital merchandising in Benue State
- Identify the most commonly used platform in merchandising of fashion items by fashion merchandisers in Benue State
- 3. Determine challenges encountered by fashion business owners in merchandising of fashion products in Benue State.

## II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design: the study employed survey research design which was considered suitable for the study because it will enable information to be gathered from fairly large number of fashion business merchandisers in Makurdi metropolis with the intention of assessing the use of social media to promote fashion items and challenges of use.

Area of study: The study was carried out in Makurdi, the capital Benue State. Makurdi is the headquarters of Makurdi Local Government Area. Benue is a State in the mid-belt region of Nigeria; one among the North Central geo-political zone with a 2022 projected population of about 6,141,300. Although Benue is termed Agrarian State, majority of the population are farmers, traders, public and civil servants, teachers in primary and secondary school, lecturers in tertiary institutions, bankers and entrepreneurs especially fashion merchandisers

Population of the study: The target population for the study comprised all the fashion merchandisers in Makurdi local council wards that have shops by the road side, shopping complex and market which are registered with an association. Totaling 145,000. These merchandisers are dealers of all fashion products e.g bags, cosmetics, beddings, footwears, clothes and accessories among others. Makurdi council wards comprises of Agan, Ankpa, Bar, Fiidi, Mbalagh, Clerk/Market, Central/South Mission, Modern Market, NorthBank 1 and 2, Wailamayo.

Sampling: 398 sample size was used for the study. Taro Yamane formula was used to calculate the Sample Size. Bourley's Allocation formula was employed to distribute the sampling size across the various wards.

Instrument for data collection: The instrument for data collection was a four (4) point rating scale structured questionnaire titled as Utilization of Social Media among Fashion Merchandisers (USMFM) which was developed by the researcher based on the three objectives of the study. The instrument was face validated by three experts, two (2) from Fashion and Clothing Department, College of Agric, Science and Technology, Lafia and one (1) from Tests and

Measurements Department, Joseph Sarwuan University, Makurdi. Twenty copies of the instrument were administered in the state that were not part of the population to determine the internal consistency of the instrument using Cronbach Alpha. Reliability coefficients of 0.9768, 0.8653 and 0.9730 were obtained in the three research questions respectively. Method of data collection and analysis: The instrument was administered by the researcher with the help of an assistant. 398 questionnaires were administered, collection was at the spot and the recovery rate was 100%.

Data from the study were analyzed using mean score. In the study, a mean of 2.50 was used as the cut off, such that a mean rating of 2.50 on an item by the respondent equal to or above was taking as agreed while mean below 2.50 was regarded as disagreed.

### III. RESULTS

Table 1: Mean Responses on fashion products sold most through digital medium among

Fashion Merchandisers in Promoting Fashion Products in Makurdi Metropolis

| S/ | FASHIONPRODUC          | MEA  | DECISIO |
|----|------------------------|------|---------|
| N  | TS                     | N    | N       |
| 1  | Jewelry                | 3.40 | Agree   |
| 2  | Makeups/powder and     | 3.53 | Agree   |
|    | foundation             |      |         |
| 3  | Cosmetics              | 3.55 | Agree   |
| 4  | Bags                   | 3.48 | Agree   |
| 5  | Shoes                  | 3.35 | Agree   |
| 6  | Watch, bangles/rings   | 3.41 | Agree   |
| 7  | Underwears/lingerie    | 3.57 | Agree   |
| 8  | Tummy trainers         | 3.53 | Agree   |
| 9  | Shirts                 | 3.40 | Agree   |
| 10 | Sown gowns             | 3.75 | Agree   |
| 11 | Trousers               | 3.53 | Agree   |
| 12 | Skirts                 | 3.53 | Agree   |
| 13 | Beads                  | 3.43 | Agree   |
| 14 | Beddings               | 3.49 | Agree   |
| 15 | Materials              | 3.43 | Agree   |
| 16 | Ready-made wears       | 3.55 | Agree   |
| 17 | Sport wears/sport kits | 3.51 | Agree   |
| 18 | Baby wears             | 3.44 | Agree   |

| 19 | Wedding          | 3.42 | Agree |
|----|------------------|------|-------|
|    | wear/accessories |      |       |
| 20 | Weave-on/wigs    | 3.27 | Agree |
| 21 | Socks            | 3.40 | Agree |
| 22 | Perfume/cologne  | 3.55 | Agree |

Key: SA- strongly agree, A- agree, SD- strongly disagree, D- disagree. Source: field survey, 2023

The data presented in table 1 above revealed 22 fashion items such as baby wears, perfume, watches/rings, cosmetics bags, shoes among others as agreeable which indicates that fashion

Merchandisers do use social media platform to merchandise this fashion products. Sown gowns (3.75) rated higher than the other items, while weave-on/wigs rated the least (3.27) among the listed items.

Table 2: Mean Responses on the Most Commonly used Platform in Merchandising of Fashion Products by Merchandisers in Benue State

| DIGITAL   | MEAN                                                                                                      | DECISION                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PLATFORMS |                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Facebook  | 3.95                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Blogs     | 3.46                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Instagram | 3.64                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Flickr    | 3.15                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Linked-in | 3.15                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Wikis     | 3.13                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Google    | 3.26                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| YouTube   | 3.74                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Twitter   | 3.30                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Tiktok    | 3.74                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| WhatsApp  | 3.90                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Telegram  | 3.38                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Pinterest | 3.58                                                                                                      | Agree                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|           | PLATFORMS Facebook Blogs Instagram Flickr Linked-in Wikis Google YouTube Twitter Tiktok WhatsApp Telegram | PLATFORMS           Facebook         3.95           Blogs         3.46           Instagram         3.64           Flickr         3.15           Linked-in         3.15           Wikis         3.13           Google         3.26           YouTube         3.74           Twitter         3.30           Tiktok         3.74           WhatsApp         3.90           Telegram         3.38 |

Key: SA=Strongly agree, A=Agree, SD=Strongly disagree, D=disagree Source: field survey, 2023

The data presented in Table 2 above revealed that all the commonly used platforms of the respondents in the table ranged from 3.13-3.95 which were all greater than the cutoff point value of 2.50 on a four-point rating scale. This implies that the 13 identified items in the table represent the views of the fashion merchandisers about the most commonly used digital platform to merchandize fashion products in Benue

State. The two (2) most commonly used digital platforms are Facebook (3.95) and WhatsApp (3.90).

Table 3: Mean Responses on Challenges Encountered by Fashion Merchandisers in Benue State.

| S/N | CHALLENGES                                         | MEAN | DECISION |
|-----|----------------------------------------------------|------|----------|
|     |                                                    |      |          |
| 1   | Inadequate finance                                 | 3.23 | Agree    |
| 2   | Inadequate digital media knowledge                 | 3.14 | Agree    |
| 3   | Lack of suitable digital marketing techniques      | 3.08 | Agree    |
| 4   | Technical glitches                                 | 2.98 | Agree    |
| 5   | Incorrect shipping address                         | 3.01 | Agree    |
| 6   | Unprofessionalism of digital technology            | 2.87 | Agree    |
| 7   | Unclear product information                        | 2.90 | Agree    |
| 8   | Lack of structures/retail outlet                   | 3.00 | Agree    |
| 9   | Not receiving timely feedback                      | 2.92 | Agree    |
| 10  | Subscription difficulty due to network fluctuation | 3.43 | Agree    |
| 11  | Interrupted power supply                           | 3.26 | Agree    |
| 12  | Digital Payment error/failure                      | 2.95 | Agree    |
| 13  | Internet fraud                                     | 3.13 | Agree    |
| 14  | Inferior products                                  | 3.16 | Agree    |
| 15  | Undersize/oversize products                        | 3.51 | Agree    |
| 16  | Poor texture of products                           | 3.00 | Agree    |
| 17  | Non-durability of products                         | 2.97 | Agree    |
| 18  | Poor representation of products                    | 3.05 | Agree    |
| 19  | Inadequate legislation on fashion products         | 3.06 | Agree    |
| 20  | Poor perception of displayed items                 | 3.01 | Agree    |

Key: SA- strongly agree, A- agree, SD- strongly disagree, D- disagree Source: field survey, 2023

The result of the challenges confronting digital fashion merchandising is presented in Table 3. Twenty (20) items were highlighted. All the identified items rated greater than the cutoff point of 2.50 on a 4-point rating scale. Undersize/oversize products were rated most with the highest mean score of (3.51). This implies that their customers would have lodged complaints that the products they purchased were not adequately sizable. Since, the dealers were not opportune to have a physical view of their customers, they were unable to recommend adequate sizes for the customers who patronize them online.

### IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings in table 1 revealed the use of social media platform to patronize these fashion products. A fashion product is considered fashionable during the time that large segments of society accept it. Owing to its utilitarian and aesthetic functionality, clothing items is widely deemed a fundamental necessity for individuals and families worldwide, this agrees with the view of Nchekwube and Chigbu, 2009 as cited earlier. Social media enables consumers to access a variety of a given item as well as the prices without the trouble of moving from one location to another. Shoes, in particular, are better displayed and in assorted manner at online shops. The platform also affords the consumers the opportunity of accessing shoes at short notice for emergencies. Perfume, cologne and deodorants are some of the items that are mostly patronized online, according to Selvi Pragadeeswari (2014) varieties, convenience and accessibility are some of the primary reasons for consumers to opt for online sales. It is also important to stress that sown wears are also part of items that are most frequently sold probably because it saves the stress of selecting a material, approaching the tailor and selecting a style, and waiting for days before collecting the material. Hollander, (2019) states that sown clothing is pre-manufactured to standard sizes and sold in finished condition which made it easy for selection, should an emergency arise, social media platform also becomes preferable for easy selection of desired readymade wears.

Findings in table 2 showed the most commonly used digital social media platform to merchandise fashion products. The identified items are facebook, blogs, Instagram, flickr, linked-in, wikis, google, youtube, twitter, tiktok, whatsapp, telegram and pinterest. People spend an increasing amount of time online searching for information on products and services communicating with other consumers about their experiences and engaging with companies. Many organizations have responded to this change by making digital and social media an essential and integral component of their business marketing plans (Stephen, 2016). Social media platform enables merchandisers to connect with their customers, improve awareness of their brands, influence consumer's attitudes, receive feedback, help to improve current products and services and increase sales (Kapoor et al., 2018; Kaur et al., 2018, Lal et al., 2020). Facebook and WhatsApp were rated the most commonly used among other digital platform identified. They are the earliest and commonest applications among Nigerians. Facebook became popular for all sorts of conversation, interaction and information exchange. Due its flexibility and ease of use, consumers found it useful for online shopping. In addition, access to a large audience, as a user can view posts that are made by friends of his friends, is more enhanced in relation to other digital applications. Consequently, products that marketed by numerous dealers can be easily accessed. Furthermore, Facebook itself intermittently projects recorded advertorials, even as the latest fashion items are displayed in varieties. On this application, fashion business owners enjoy relative ease in showcasing fashion products for example mannequin and cloth hangers without necessarily owning a website, this finding agrees with the view of Danielle (2013) that the most popular social media site in terms of users is Facebook with more than 750million monthly visitors. The possible reason for this massive patronage could be due to the fact that Facebook allows users to create a profile with pictures and information about themselves and create an easy way for people to keep in touch and for users to have a presence on the internet without creating a website. Facebook pages have more than 50 million registered businesses and over 88 % of businesses use Twitter for their marketing purposes (Lister, 2017). Findings in table 3 showed the mean responses on the challenges of use of social media platform in merchandising fashion product. The result indicate that data subscription is needed to search for fashion items online. Where the tariff on data subscription is high customers will be unable to stay online long enough to select, order and pay for items. This is in view of Rombe et al (2021). In addition, inadequate finance also can limit their participation in social media fashion. undersize/oversize products were the challenge with the highest mean score (3.51). This supposes that their customers would have lodged complaints that the products they purchased were not adequately sizable. Since, the dealers were not opportune to have a physical view of their customers, they were unable to recommend adequate sizes for the customers who patronize them online.

### **CONCLUSION**

Technology is growing fast and changing the performance of business activities in a tremendous way. In order for business organization to survive with this change, they have to carefully study and adapt with the technology environment as the factor is uncontrollable and complex. Use of social media is part of the technology effect that changes the business view about how fashion business can communicate and reinforce the benefits of their services to the target market. The most frequently sold fashion items on digital platform rated highest was sown wears. Suitable platforms such as Facebook and WhattsApp were the major platform to promote fashion products. Oversize/undersize products are the major challenges encountered.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Increased awareness should be raised among fashion merchandisers about the availability of most fashion items online for increased patronage.
- Fashion business owners should advertise more on digital platform such as Facebook and WhatsApp as this is widely used and popular social media site, also, consistency on using digital platform will help impact purchase decisions.
- 3. The cost of subscription by network provider such as MTN, GLO etc should be lowered so as to enable consumers to spend more time online in search for desirable fashion items, likewise, fashion merchandisers should make use of the

concept of standard fit information in selecting the items to display on digital platform so as to ameliorate the challenges of undersize/oversize products.

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