

## TRANSFORMING CLOTHING INNOVATION INTO ENTREPRENEURIAL VENTURES IN GHANA: THE CASE OF FASHION AND CLOTHING DESIGNERS IN SEKONDI-TAKORADI METROPOLIS

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### ABSTRACT

The Ghanaian clothing industry is undergoing a transformation phase characterised by a blend of cultural heritage, innovation, and entrepreneurial spirit. Despite a rise in global demand for African-inspired fashion, many Ghanaian innovators face substantial challenges in turning their creative ideas into viable business ventures. This study examines the primary factors influencing success and the obstacles to entrepreneurship in the clothing sector, focusing on financial constraints, business management skills, market access, and government policies. The research uses qualitative methods and deliberately selects 18 sole traders from the clothing manufacturing industry in the Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis for interviews. These clothing entrepreneurs shared their experiences and growth strategies. The findings show that while digital marketing and e-commerce offer opportunities for expansion, limited financial support and a lack of business management skills restrict growth potential. The study recommends implementing an improved financial support programme, enhancing business education, and strengthening policy measures to develop a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem in Ghana's fashion industry. These insights aim to inform strategies that promote sustainable clothing entrepreneurship and foster economic development.

**Keywords:** Transforming, Clothing Innovation, Designers, Entrepreneurial

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ghana's clothing and fashion industry is undergoing a significant transformation driven by cultural heritage, technological advancements, and entrepreneurial initiatives. As the global fashion market expands, Ghanaian designers and clothing innovators utilise indigenous textiles such as Kente, batik, and smock (fugu) to create distinctive fashion statements that appeal to local and international consumers (Quartey & Abor, 2020). This creative industry reflects Ghana's rich cultural identity and catalyses economic development by generating employment and boosting export revenues through innovation (Mensah & Antwi, 2021).

Innovation in clothing design encompasses new fabric technologies, sustainable fashion practices, and digital marketing strategies for the fashion industry (Morris & D'Arcy, 2020). With the rise of e-commerce and social media platforms, Ghanaian fashion entrepreneurs have greater opportunities to reach international markets (Acheampong & Osei, 2019). In other words, the success of fashion startups depends on their ability to combine creativity with sound business strategies, including market research, branding, production efficiency, and supply chain management. Many Ghanaian designers struggle with these aspects due to a lack of formal business education and limited support structures for scaling their operations (Opoku-Mensah & Boateng, 2022).

Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that government policies and industry regulations play a crucial role in shaping the entrepreneurial landscape for clothing innovators (Kinyanjui, 2015). Policies that actively promote local textile production, deliver substantial financial incentives, and robustly support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are crucial for significantly enhancing the sustainability of Ghana's fashion industry (GIPC, 2023). However, the local industry faces formidable challenges, including the overwhelming influx of second-hand clothing imports and the pervasive threat of counterfeit textile products, which pose serious risks to its growth and stability (Amankwah & Asiedu, 2021).

However, despite the industry's potential, transitioning from clothing innovation to sustainable entrepreneurial ventures remains challenging due to financial constraints, limited access to global markets, and inadequate business management skills. This paper clearly aims to explore the significant transformation of clothing innovation into viable entrepreneurial ventures in Ghana. It will thoroughly investigate the key factors influencing the successful transition of clothing innovation into entrepreneurial ventures in Ghana, analyse Ghanaian fashion entrepreneurs' challenges in scaling their businesses, and assess the impact of digital marketing and global market access on the growth of Ghanaian clothing enterprises. Drawing on comprehensive insights from case studies of successful Ghanaian fashion entrepreneurs and relevant industry reports.

## 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Ghana's vibrant fashion industry faces significant challenges in shifting from clothing innovation to sustainable entrepreneurial ventures. Although the country has a rich heritage in textile production and clothing design, with indigenous fabrics like Kente, batik, and smock (fugu) gaining local and international recognition (Quartey & Abor, 2020), many designers struggle to turn their creative innovations into successful businesses. A primary challenge is financial constraints; many designers lack access to the necessary startup capital and funding opportunities to scale their operations. Limited support from banks and investment firms hampers their ability to expand and compete effectively (Mensah & Antwi, 2021). This financial bottleneck often prevents designers from working on large-scale projects, hindering the full commercialisation of their innovations.

Another critical issue is the lack of business management skills among fashion entrepreneurs. While many excel in garment-making and textile artistry, there is often a gap in formal education in business management, market research, branding, and supply chain logistics. This deficiency can lead to inefficiencies in production and marketing strategies, resulting in stagnation or failure for many startups (Opoku-Mensah & Boateng, 2022). Access to global

markets is also limited, as many designers lack the skills and resources to market and sell their products online effectively. Inadequate digital literacy and weak online branding, combined with logistical challenges related to international shipping, further complicate their outreach efforts (Acheampong & Osei, 2019).

Government policies and industry regulations considerably influence the entrepreneurial landscape (Abor & Quartey, 2020). Although initiatives aim to boost local textile production and provide financial incentives for small and medium-sized enterprises, the rise of second-hand clothing imports and counterfeit goods diminishes the competitiveness of Ghanaian fashion businesses. Limited protections against unfair market competition further discourage entrepreneurship within the industry (Amankwah & Asiedu, 2021; GIPC, 2023).

To overcome these challenges, strategic measures should be investigated to turn clothing innovation into sustainable entrepreneurial ventures in Ghana. Recognising the key factors for success, identifying obstacles, and proposing policy measures are vital steps towards building a supportive environment for fashion entrepreneurs. By addressing financial limitations, enhancing business education, leveraging digital marketing, and increasing government support, Ghana can foster a vibrant fashion industry that drives economic growth and generates employment opportunities using Kente and Fugu fabrics.

### Plate 1: Sample Innovative Ghanaian Kente Designs



Source: Field Data 2024

These innovative contemporary designs are unique and could serve as strategic measures to turn clothing innovation into sustainable ventures. Key steps involve identifying success factors and obstacles, and proposing supportive policies. With proper management of financial constraints, education, digital marketing, and adequate government support, Ghana can develop a high-impact fashion sector to boost economic growth and employment, primarily through the Kente and Fugu fabrics. Hence, this study investigates how informal fashion businesses can transition clothing innovation into international fashion businesses.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

This study explores the transformation of clothing innovation into sustainable entrepreneurial ventures in Ghana. The specific objectives of this research are:

1. To investigate the key factors that influence the successful transition of clothing innovation into entrepreneurial ventures in Ghana.
2. To analyse Ghanaian fashion entrepreneurs' challenges in scaling their businesses.
3. To assess the impact of digital marketing and global market access on the growth of Ghanaian clothing enterprises.

### **1.3 Theoretical Framework: Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation**

Schumpeter's Theory of Innovation (1934) provides a relevant framework for understanding how innovations in clothing can give rise to entrepreneurial ventures. Schumpeter argued that entrepreneurs are agents of change who introduce new combinations of resources, or "innovations," that disrupt markets and create new opportunities. He identified five primary forms of innovation. The first is the development of new products, such as introducing a new clothing line that incorporates sustainable fabrics. The second involves new methods of production, such as adopting digital printing for textiles or using zero-waste cutting techniques. The third is the opening of new markets, as seen in the expansion of Ghanaian streetwear onto global fashion platforms. The fourth relates to new sources of supply, such as the use of upcycled fabric scraps for home furnishings or fashion design.

Finally, Schumpeter pointed to new organizational forms, including restructuring business operations through online retail platforms or the creation of designer cooperatives. Together, these categories demonstrate how clothing innovations can be transformed into entrepreneurial ventures that drive industrial and market change. In the Ghanaian fashion industry, Schumpeter's theory aligns with designers' efforts to create unique clothing styles using indigenous textiles such as Kente, batik, and smock, thereby differentiating themselves in both local and international markets. There is a need to explore strategic approaches for converting clothing innovations into viable entrepreneurial ventures in Ghana. Understanding the key drivers of success, identifying barriers, and proposing policy interventions can foster a more supportive ecosystem for fashion entrepreneurs. By addressing financial constraints, enhancing business education, leveraging digital marketing, and improving government support structures, Ghana can cultivate a thriving fashion industry that contributes to economic growth and job creation.

## **2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1 The Role of Innovation in the Fashion Industry**

Innovation plays an undeniably crucial role in advancing the dynamics of the fashion industry. It is a driving force that fosters creativity, enables product differentiation, and boosts market competitiveness. According to Quartey and Abor (2020), clothing innovation encompasses a range of transformative concepts, including the development of new fabric technologies, the adoption of sustainable fashion practices, and the implementation of effective digital marketing strategies.

Ghana has a vibrant fashion scene, where designers prominently use indigenous textiles, such as Kente, batik, and smock (fugu), to craft unique and culturally rich fashion pieces (Agordah, 2025). These creations not only resonate with local sensibilities but also have the potential to appeal to global markets, showcasing Ghanaian artistry's rich heritage. The global demand for authenticity and cultural appreciation in fashion reinforces the significance of these locally sourced materials.

**Plate 2: Samples of Innovative Fugu designs**



**Source:** Field Data 2024

However, transforming these innovations into sustainable and successful businesses is a multifaceted challenge. It demands more than mere creativity; effectively navigating the competitive landscape of fashion requires well-considered entrepreneurship strategies, substantial financial investment, and a sharp understanding of business acumen. As Mensah and Antwi (2021) highlight, designers must focus on their artistic vision and on developing practical business models to sustain their innovations in the long term, ensuring they can thrive in a rapidly changing industry.

**2.2 Challenges in Transitioning from Innovation to Entrepreneurship**

The Ghanaian fashion industry boasts considerable potential, thanks to its rich cultural heritage and the creativity of its fashion and clothing designers (Agordah, 2025). However, several significant challenges impede the successful transformation of clothing innovations into viable entrepreneurial ventures. One of the primary obstacles is financial constraints; many aspiring designers struggle to secure startup capital and pursue investment opportunities, which are crucial for launching and sustaining their businesses (Brioxiova et al, 2020; Alam & Hoque, 2018). This lack of funding not only stifles creativity but also limits these entrepreneurs' operational capabilities (Felden et al, 2019).

Moreover, a notable deficiency in business management skills hinders many fashion entrepreneurs from overseeing crucial aspects of their operations, including production

efficiency, branding strategies, and supply chain logistics. A well-rounded understanding of these areas is vital to the sustainability and growth of any business, yet many designers enter the industry with limited knowledge of them.

Research by Acheampong and Osei (2019) highlights the impact of inadequate business education on the prospects of these entrepreneurs, noting that this knowledge gap significantly contributes to the alarmingly high failure rate of startups in Ghana's fashion sector. The convergence of these challenges establishes a critical environment for innovation, where immense potential goes unrealised. We must confront and eliminate the barriers that hinder progress through robust education, increased access to funding, and strong support networks that empower emerging designers on their entrepreneurial journeys (Onuoha, 2022; Yankson & Owusu, 2016).

### **2.3 Digital Marketing and Global Market Access**

The rise of e-commerce and social media has significantly transformed the fashion landscape for entrepreneurs, providing unprecedented opportunities to connect with a wider global audience (Fischer & Geyer, 2020). Recent studies have demonstrated that digital platforms, including popular social media sites such as Instagram and Facebook, as well as dedicated e-commerce solutions like Shopify, serve as cost-effective marketing channels for promoting fashion brands to potential customers (Amankwah & Asiedu, 2021; Okonkwo, 2018).

Despite these advantages, many talented designers in Ghana face several hurdles that hinder their online success. A notable challenge is designers' lack of digital literacy, which impedes their ability to navigate and fully utilise these online tools. Additionally, weak online branding and a limited understanding of creating a compelling digital presence can make it difficult for these designers to stand out in a competitive market (Ministry of Communications and Digitalisation, Republic of Ghana, 2024; Agyarkoh, 2020).

Logistical issues, particularly those related to international shipping, pose significant challenges for designers as they strive to deliver their products efficiently and affordably to customers worldwide. Acheampong and Osei (2019) emphasise that successful integration into the digital marketplace relies on access to these platforms, adequate training in e-commerce strategies, and a solid understanding of online customer engagement. Therefore, providing comprehensive training and support is crucial for empowering these designers to establish a successful online presence and fully capitalise on the benefits of the digital economy.

## **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This study utilizes a case study research design within a qualitative framework to examine how clothing innovation evolves into entrepreneurial ventures in the Sekondi Takoradi Metropolis, Western Region of Ghana. A case study approach is appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth exploration of complex phenomena in their real-life context (Shrestha & Bhattarai, 2022). The descriptive aspect of the research enables a detailed understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing Ghanaian fashion entrepreneurs.

### 3.2 Population and Sampling Technique

The population comprises entrepreneurs active in Ghana's Western Region, within Sekondi-Takoradi metropolis, in the clothing and fashion design sector. A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants with direct experience in fashion innovation and entrepreneurship. Purposive sampling allows for the targeted selection of information-rich cases relevant to the research objectives (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). In this study, 18 fashion/clothing entrepreneurs operating in Sekondi-Takoradi were selected. These participants produce both traditional and contemporary ensembles incorporating Ghanaian textiles (e.g., Kente, fugu, adinkra). Because of the purposive and context-specific nature of the sampling, the findings are intrinsically bound to this setting and are not generalizable to all Ghanaian fashion designers.

### 3.3 Data Collection Methods

Primary data were collected using semi-structured interviews with the selected entrepreneurs, allowing for open-ended responses while ensuring alignment with the study's core research aims (Opoku & Baiden, 2023). The interview guide was structured around key themes: transforming innovation into a business, business challenges, and digital marketing strategies. Secondary data were drawn from academic publications, industry reports, and government documents to triangulate findings and enhance the study's contextual validity.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Analysis of the qualitative interview data involved thematic analysis, an approach suited for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2021). All interviews were transcribed, coded, and systematically organised into salient themes, including financial constraints, digital transformation, and innovation pathways. These thematic results were then compared against the extant literature to identify corroborations, contradictions, and novel insights.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was secured prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees and data were securely stored to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

### 3.6 Limitations of the Study

Because this research employs a qualitative design with a purposively selected sample of 18 entrepreneurs in the Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolis, the findings are context-specific. They cannot be statistically generalised to all fashion entrepreneurs in Ghana. The study focuses on understanding experiences, perceptions, and innovation processes rather than measuring numerical outcomes. Access to some business and financial records was restricted, limiting deeper cross-verification of certain claims. Nonetheless, the qualitative insights, supported by relevant secondary data, provide a rich, contextualised understanding of how clothing

innovation develops into entrepreneurial ventures within Ghana's fashion industry (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Opoku & Baiden, 2023; Shrestha & Bhattarai, 2022).

#### 4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings thematically, based on the research objectives. The themes capture how clothing innovation is transformed into entrepreneurial ventures in Ghana, the challenges fashion entrepreneurs face in scaling their businesses, and the role of digital marketing and global access in promoting growth. Direct quotations from participants are included to highlight their lived experiences and perspectives.

##### 4.1 Factors Influencing the Transition from Clothing Innovation to Entrepreneurship

The findings indicate that cultural heritage is one of the strongest influences in transforming fashion creativity into entrepreneurship in Ghana. Many participants emphasized that their designs are rooted in Ghanaian culture, with indigenous fabrics and symbols shaping their creative direction. One respondent stated: "Our culture inspires us; I cannot design without using kente or adinkra because that is who we are." Another explained: "When people abroad see kente in a modern style, they are excited; it makes my products different from others." Such perspectives demonstrate how heritage acts both as inspiration and as a marketing advantage, aligning with Quartey and Abor (2020), who argue that cultural heritage plays a central role in branding within Ghanaian fashion entrepreneurship.

Respondents highlighted creativity as a key driver of innovation. Many described how they reimagine traditional textiles in contemporary ways to appeal to diverse audiences. One participant explained: "I take fugu and turn it into casual jackets because I want young people to wear it." Another added: "I use batik but change the patterns so they look more international." These accounts show how creativity enables designers to adapt and remain relevant in changing markets.

Effective marketing strategies, particularly storytelling, were also identified as crucial for the transition from creativity to entrepreneurship. Respondents emphasized that explaining the meaning behind their designs helped them connect with customers. As one participant put it: "When I tell customers that the adinkra on the dress means strength or wisdom, they feel proud to wear it." Another remarked: "It's not just about clothes; it's about culture, and people buy into that." These narratives support Agordah's (2025) claim that cultural storytelling in fashion branding enhances both product value and consumer loyalty.

Community engagement further strengthened this transition. Several respondents mentioned that involving artisans, local weavers, or family members in production increased authenticity. One explained: "I work with women in my community to make accessories; when customers hear this, they trust the product more." These findings illustrate how Ghanaian fashion entrepreneurs leverage cultural identity, creativity, and branding strategies to turn innovative ideas into viable entrepreneurial ventures successfully.

##### 4.2 Challenges in Scaling Fashion Businesses

Despite these strengths, participants expressed significant challenges in scaling their businesses. Financial constraints were the most pressing concern. Many respondents indicated that banks and investors do not take fashion enterprises seriously. One explained: "I have gone to the bank three times, and they always say fashion is risky; without loans, we cannot grow." Another lamented: "We rely on family savings, but that is not enough to buy better machines." These findings echo Yankson and Owusu's (2016) observation that poor access to finance is a major obstacle for small businesses in Ghana.

Limited market access was also highlighted as a barrier. While participants acknowledged growing demand for locally made products, they found it difficult to expand beyond their immediate environment. One respondent remarked: "People love our clothes, but reaching them outside Accra or outside Ghana is difficult without networks." Another commented: "We don't have proper shops or showrooms; customers only see us on Instagram, and that is not enough." These responses reveal structural weaknesses in distribution and retail channels.

Infrastructural deficits compounded these challenges. Poor road networks, unreliable transportation, and supply chain inefficiencies were common concerns. One participant shared: "Sometimes my fabrics arrive late because of bad roads; by the time I finish production, the client is already angry." Another added: "Electricity problems also affect production because we use machines." Skill gaps also emerged, with participants admitting difficulties in business management. As one noted: "I am good at designing, but when it comes to accounts or managing workers, I struggle."

Regulatory hurdles created further frustrations. Respondents pointed to bureaucracy in registering businesses, obtaining permits, or navigating taxation. One entrepreneur expressed: "The process of getting a license is so stressful that sometimes I just want to stop." Another said: "Government policies change too often, and it confuses us." These voices emphasize the systemic obstacles to growth, underscoring the need for policy reforms and targeted support.

### 4.3 Impact of Digital Marketing and Global Market Access

Digital marketing was widely acknowledged as a game-changer for Ghanaian fashion entrepreneurs. Social media platforms provided access to broader audiences, including international markets. One respondent observed: "Most of my customers are from Instagram; without it, my business would be invisible." Another affirmed: "I have shipped to Europe because someone saw my work on Facebook." These findings support Acheampong and Osei's (2019) conclusion that digital platforms are central to expanding market reach in Ghana.

However, the adoption of digital strategies was uneven. Several respondents admitted struggling with digital literacy and presentation. A participant explained: "Good photos sell, but cameras are expensive; sometimes customers ignore our products because the pictures are not clear." Another shared: "I want to sell online, but I don't understand how to arrange delivery to other countries." These responses highlight how skill gaps and weak e-commerce infrastructure restrict the potential of digital marketing.

Counterfeit products also emerged as a serious concern. Many participants reported that their designs were copied and sold cheaply, damaging their reputation. One entrepreneur explained: "We create something original, and the next week, fake versions appear in the market." Another

added: “Customers think we are the same as the cheap sellers, and it affects our sales.” These concerns align with GIPC’s (2023) call for stronger policies to protect intellectual property in Ghana’s creative industries.

Overall, while digital platforms offer growth opportunities, gaps in digital literacy, logistics, and regulatory protection limit their effectiveness. Enhancing digital training and strengthening intellectual property frameworks would therefore be crucial steps in helping Ghanaian fashion entrepreneurs leverage global opportunities.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

The findings of this study highlight the significant potential of Ghana’s fashion industry and emphasise its role as an essential contributor to the country’s economic landscape. This is supported by global literature, which recognises the fashion industry as a key driver of economic growth, especially in emerging economies (Morris & D'Arcy, 2020). Digital marketing and access to international markets are vital components of this potential, allowing entrepreneurs to expand their reach and engage with a broader customer base. Studies by Okonkwo (2018) demonstrate that digital strategies are vital for increasing brand visibility and consumer engagement, particularly in today’s interconnected marketplace.

Despite these opportunities, the industry faces significant challenges that hinder entrepreneurial growth. Financial constraints remain a key issue, limiting the ability of emerging designers and brands to innovate and compete effectively on the global stage. The literature consistently demonstrates that access to capital is a barrier to entrepreneurship across various sectors, including the fashion industry (Mensah & Antwi, 2021). A study by Alam and Hoque (2018) confirms that the Bangladeshi garment sector exemplifies how limited access to finance constrains creativity and growth among small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Besides financial barriers, there is an urgent need to enhance business education specifically designed for the fashion industry. This education should cover not only the technical skills necessary for garment creation and design but also key business skills, such as financial management, marketing strategies, and operational planning. Felden et al. (2019) highlight the importance of integrating business education into creative fields, and they support curricula that equip fashion entrepreneurs with both technical and managerial skills. Additionally, digital marketing tools are becoming increasingly important in today’s fashion environment, as they can help brands improve visibility, engage consumers, and respond more effectively to changing market trends (Fischer & Geyer, 2020).

The study also emphasises the importance of strengthening government support structures to foster a positive environment for fashion entrepreneurship. Past research by Brixiova et al. (2020) indicates that governments play a crucial role in supporting SMEs through policies, funding opportunities, and industry-specific infrastructure. Initiatives in countries such as Kenya and Nigeria have demonstrated that strategic government support can help local fashion industries succeed both regionally and internationally (Kinyanjui, 2015; Onuoha, 2022). By tackling these complex challenges, stakeholders can work towards building a thriving ecosystem that benefits individual entrepreneurs and contributes to the nation's broader economic growth.

These insights provide a solid foundation for policy recommendations and industry interventions that promote sustainable growth in Ghana's fashion entrepreneurship. Combining global best practices with a thorough understanding of local contexts can not only improve the entrepreneurial environment but also position Ghana as a significant player in the international fashion industry. Ultimately, creating a supportive environment that addresses financial, educational, and infrastructural challenges is essential for the continued growth and success of Ghana's fashion sector, aligning with broader academic discussions on industrial development.

## **5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE FASHION ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

GIPC and relevant agencies should notify young entrepreneurs about accessible funding and training programmes.

Regulatory bodies must enforce rules against counterfeit products and the importation of second-hand clothing, as these issues remain significant concerns.

The Government of Ghana should expand access to business loans and grants for fashion entrepreneurs.

Government and civil society should enhance business training and mentorship in the fashion industry through workshops and e-marketing initiatives.

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