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Exploring the need for fashion drawing skills training amongst unqualified fashion entrepreneurs in the Emfuleni local municipality

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Abstract

Fashion entrepreneurs contribute greatly to the local and South African economy. It is, therefore, vital to equip fashion entrepreneurs with necessary knowledge and skills, to ensure the success of their entrepreneurships. Fashion entrepreneurship demands occupation-specific skills. Without these skills, client satisfaction levels can decrease, influencing the success of the entrepreneurship. This article aims to describe the need existing amongst peri-urban fashion entrepreneurs without formal fashion-related training, with regard to the possession and utilisation of fashion drawing skills. A quantitative approach by means of interviewer-administered questionnaires was employed to explore this need. Non-probability sampling was used to identify 114 respondents. The study concluded that a need exists among fashion entrepreneurs with no formal fashion-related training, to acquire fashion drawing skills through training. Through the provision of the necessary skills, these entrepreneurs will be equipped and empowered, as it increases their vocational skills, and might have a positive impact on the success of their entrepreneurships. The study recommends that future training initiatives, either by government or educational institutions, offer training to fashion entrepreneurs without formal fashion-related training with specific reference to fashion drawing skills.

Keywords: Entrepreneur, fashion drawing, fashion entrepreneur, fashion entrepreneur challenges, visual communication

Introduction

The fashion industry is ever-expanding globally (López-Navarro & Lozano-Gómez 2014, p. 2) and plays a major role in the socio-economic development of countries (Sarpong, Howard & Osei-Ntiri 2011, p. 98). Asian countries, for example China and Vietnam, among others, have been known to thrive in the international textile and fashion trade, due to their successful training programmes in apparel design (Maiyo, Abong'o & Tuigon'g 2014, p. 63). The fashion industry in South Africa (SA) is also important as it forms part of economic development programmes (Dlodlo 2014, p. 191), aids in income generation for individuals within major cities, peri-urban areas, and small towns, and contributes to about one-third of GDP (Brandstories 2023). Therefore, successful training programmes, regarding fashion-related skills, have a pertinent link to a successful fashion industry and a direct impact on the income generation of individuals and communities.

Nonetheless, not all individuals within the fashion industry have acquired formal fashion training. Some individuals may have obtained fashion-related skills (such as sewing, pattern making, and fashion drawing) through family members, secondary school, short courses, or in-service work experience. These skills, particularly fashion drawing and illustration (hereafter referred to as fashion drawing), are necessary visual communication skills with which designers relay their ideas and designs to clients, through the use of sketches, photographs, drawings, among others. Visual communication is a pictorial form of communication where visual symbols are used to convey information (Liu 2015, p. 41).

Literature review

Following is an overview of the needs of skills training among Fashion entrepreneurs.

Role of entrepreneurs in the global and national economy

Globally and nationally, entrepreneurs are pillars of economic growth and development (Stoica, Roman & Rusu 2020, p. 18), as well as unemployment alleviation (Hui 2019, p. 593). The main type of entrepreneurship in SA, operated by individuals residing in less privileged or impoverished communities, are categorised under micro entrepreneurships (MEs) (Fatoki 2014, p. 157). MEs alleviate unemployment and poverty (Leboea 2017, p. 14), due to the important role, which they play in rural and urban communities (Rao, Venkatachalm & Joshi 2013, p. 136).

Entrepreneurship, the most common form of employment within impoverished communities, are generally started within industries with low start-up costs (SEDA 2016, p. 32), such as the clothing and textiles (fashion) industry (EDGE 2014, p. 24). Fashion-related entrepreneurs are five times more likely to start their own fashion business than those in other professions, mostly due to the low start-up costs required for necessary equipment (Burke 2010, p. 12). In general, entrepreneurial endeavours are relatively short-lived (Liang, Wang & Lazear 2014, p. 21), and have failure rates as high as 75% in SA (Fatoki & Asah 2011, p. 170). This failure rate is also relevant to fashion entrepreneurs (Kurz 2010, p. 14) facing general and field-specific challenges (Choto, Tengeh & Iwu 2014, p. 93; du Plessis & Marnewick 2017, p. 2). General challenges experienced by South African entrepreneurs were identified as the lack of formal and informal education (State of Entrepreneurship in South Africa 2009, p. 7), which is related to entrepreneurial success (Choto et al. 2014, p. 95). Education is acknowledged as key to successful entrepreneurships (Arthur, Hisrich & Cabrera 2012, p. 501) and relates to the concept of knowledge and skills (Green 2009, p. 1; Rao et al. 2013, p. 139).

Fashion entrepreneurs need relatively large skill sets to manufacture fashion products and sustain businesses (Burke 2010, p. 13; Kurz 2010, pp. 22). With relation to this study, fashion entrepreneurs must possess skills and techniques to present ideas and designs to clients (Burke 2006, p. 12).

Importance of skills training in fashion entrepreneurships

Training and development is critical for businesses to increase effectiveness, productivity and profitability (Nwaeke & Onyebuchi 2017, pp. 153) leading to an increase in competitive advantage (Sheehan 2014, p. 13). The concept of *training and development* is seen as an educational process where individuals acquire new knowledge or reinforce existing knowledge, to aid in improving their effectiveness and general competence (Sandamali, Dinithi Padmasiri, Mahalekamga & Mendis 2018, p. 13), through the identification and implementation of specific training and development strategies (Kutzhanova, Lyons & Lichtenstein 2009, p. 194). Entrepreneurs should possess both general entrepreneurial and sector-specific skills, contributing to more successful businesses (Rao et al. 2013, p. 145).

Fashion entrepreneurship is a specialised field (Rao & Joshi 2010, p. 100) and requires business-related and fashion-related skills. For fashion entrepreneurs to obtain and continuously develop their skills, they are advised to attend training opportunities offered at Universities of Technology, SETA training centres, colleges, or art schools to obtain qualifications within this field (Shah & Mehta 2009, p. 6). Such training can equip fashion entrepreneurs with the required theoretical and practical skills needed to succeed in their Fashion businesses (Shah & Mehta 2009, p. 6) and enhance their natural talent (Van Wyk 2007, p. 94), which is the key to the development of individuals (Sarpong, Howard & Amankwah 2012, p. 473).

Theoretical knowledge in fashion includes, amongst others, creative design, drawing, illustration, technical drawing, fashion theory as well as textiles (STADIO 2020, p. 4). Fashion-related practical skills can be derived from the theoretical knowledge, including practical visual communication skills needed to complete the process of concept (designing) to consumer (constructing finished product) (Tselepis & Mastamet-Mason 2013, p. 260).

Fashion entails visual products, the communication of products' designs by way of visual communication (Ryder 2005, p. 6). For this paper, visual communication is seen as the process of formulating a fashion sketch by a designer, and the interpretation of the sketch by a client.

Problem statement

Research by Van Wyk (2007, p. 78) in the Emfuleni Local Municipality (ELM) concluded that the most prominent skill that fashion entrepreneurs needed, but did not possess, was that of fashion drawing. These drawing skills are necessary for entrepreneurs to possess, as they form the basis of the visual communication process used to communicate designs to clients. The lack of drawing skills could be problematic, as it relates to client satisfaction, which, in turn, promotes the success of entrepreneurial endeavours (Burns & Bryant 2002, p. 42).

This paper explored and described the needs for fashion drawing skills training amongst fashion entrepreneurs with no formal fashion-related training, situated within the ELM. The specific objectives for this research were to explore and describe the:

- Use of fashion sketches to visually communicate the idea/design of the garment to the client
- Challenges experienced by the fashion entrepreneurs when communicating an idea or design to a client
- need for training of fashion sketches as means of visual communication.

Methods

Research design

An exploratory, descriptive, cross-sectional quantitative research design was followed to explore the need for fashion drawing skills training among fashion entrepreneurs.

Research setting

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to collect data from 105 Black African fashion entrepreneurs within ELM, with operational businesses for more than two years, and with no formal fashion qualifications. Recruitment took place in five fashion material retailers, in ELM, with permission from the owners. ELM is located in the southern part of the Gauteng province, SA. ELM's population make up 81% of the Sedibeng District

Municipality (SDM) population (Sedibeng 2020, p. 10), hence the focus on Black African fashion entrepreneurs.

Data collection

Data were collected by means of interviewer-administered questionnaires through four trained fieldworkers from the local community. Considering possible language barriers of respondents allowed fieldworkers to clarify questions and instructions on the questionnaire without providing any answers to questions (Babbie & Mouton 2003, p. 250; Martins 2005, p. 147). Guidelines for training of fieldworkers by Babbie (2013, p. 282-285) were considered during the training. Ethical clearance for this study was obtained (ECN10-2016).

Development of questionnaire

The constructs of the questionnaire were developed by consulting various sources (Table 1). The aim of the questionnaire was to gain an insight into respondents' current use as well as the intensity of the use of fashion sketches, the intensity of challenges experienced with specific aspects of fashion drawing, as well as establishing the respondents' perceived importance of training in fashion drawing as visual explanation method and its ability to increase client satisfaction.

Table 1 illustrates the various components, Likert scales used and literature sources of the questionnaire.

Table 1: Questionnaire development

Section	Included questions relating to...	Scale used	Literature source
A	demographic information	N/A	Van Wyk (2007)
C	the use of fashion sketches as a method of visual communication.	Often = 3; Sometimes = 2; Never = 1	Kim and Cho (2000); Wibowo, Sakamoto, Mitani and Igarashi (2012); Calderin (2013)
D	various aspects of fashion drawing that respondents might have difficulty with when communicating their designs to clients.	Very much =3; A little = 2; Not at all = 1	Kim and Cho (2000)
E	fashion drawing training needs of the respondents.	Very important = 3; Important = 2; Not important = 1	Kincade and Gibson (2010); Kurz (2010); Calderin (2013)

Data analysis

Data were analysed applying SPSS, and descriptive and inferential statistics were performed, including ANOVA, T-tests, correlations, and cross-tabulation. For this paper, Spearman's correlation coefficients with a medium effect ($r = 0.30$ to 0.49) or a large effect ($r = 0.50$ to 1.0) (Pallant 2010, p. 134) were reported. In this study, p -values ≤ 0.05 indicated practically significant correlations and differences (Pallant 2010, p. 135).

To determine construct validity, exploratory factor analysis was applied, and factor loadings ≥ 0.4 were considered, due to the specific sample size (Field 2009, pp. 644, 645). Keiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) indicated sampling adequacy with values ≥ 0.50 (Sarstedt & Mooi 2014, pp. 242, 243). Ensuring the reliability of this study, the internal consistency was measured by incorporating Cronbach's Alpha

coefficient (Pallant 2010, p. 6). Only questions and factors displaying a value of ≥ 0.6 were considered acceptable (Sarstedt & Mooi 2014, p. 256).

Results and discussion

Demographics

Most fashion entrepreneurs were married (52.9%); females (84.5%); operating a business for more than five years (73.8%); were between the ages of 18 to 65 years; and only 44.2% had an education level equivalent to Grade 12.

Current use of visual communication methods

The current method used by most respondents (82.7%) to present designs to clients, favoured using *commercially available fashion images*¹ (mean = 2.62; \pm SD 0.60; α = 0.82). This includes cell phones or tablets (mean = 2.74; \pm SD = 0.61) linked to the use of photographs (mean = 2.66; \pm SD = 0.68) and internet applications, such as Pinterest and Instagram (mean = 2.53; \pm SD = 0.81). These results agree with Liu and Liu (2017, pp. 409, 410), who stated that the use of traditional media methods (hand sketching and painting) are waning, due to the rapid development of electronic communication technology and the expansion of digital culture.

The use of fashion sketches ranked the lowest (mean = 1.99; \pm SD = 0.81), indicating that most fashion entrepreneurs do not sketch a design themselves, because they might not have the ability or skill to do so. Commercially available fashion images were a more convenient method (Liu & Liu 2017, p. 410) to communicate intended designs to clients. These results are concerning, as drawing designs is not only seen as the core of a designer's work (Bhatia & Juneja 2016, p. 87), but also as a very important skill that home-based fashion entrepreneurs should possess, to communicate designs to clients visually (Sinha 2002, p. 8). Table 2 depicts the individual items of *commercially available fashion images* used by respondents to visually communicate designs to a client.

Table 2: Summary of exploratory factor analysis of the seven-item use of visual communication methods questionnaire (N=105)

Item	Factor loading
	Commercially available fashion images
Photographs	0.86
Internet, e.g., Pinterest, Instagram	0.85
Photos from magazines	0.81
Cell phone/tablet	0.75
Commercial patterns, e.g., Vogue, Butterick, McCall's	0.47
Total variance explained by extracted sub-factors (%)	49.01
Range of communalities	0.26-0.91
KMO	0.74

¹ Images or photographs sourced from magazines or internet application (such as Pinterest and Instagram) which are displayed on an electronic device such as cell phones or tablet. These sketches exclude hand drawn sketches.

Cronbach alpha coefficient	0.82
Mean ±Standard deviation (SD)	2.62 ±0.60

*Factor loadings indicated in shaded grey areas have been grouped together

**Often = 3; Sometimes = 2; Never = 1

Client understanding of design

Respondents were provided with visual examples of two formats of drawings, namely technical drawing and fashion drawing, to ensure that they understood the differences between these two formats. Fashion drawings were preferred by 57.9% of the respondents, while 42.1% believed using technical drawings would aid more in this regard. These results indicate that respondents believe that some form of fashion drawing is important, to ensure a client has clarity about the intended design. This result is confirmed by Coburn and Schenk (2017, p. 4).

Difficulties with fashion drawing skills

Results in Table 3 indicated that between 36.2% and 41.3% of respondents find it very difficult to illustrate mentioned aspects. The most difficult being displaying the way different types of textiles, influence the shape or outline of garments (mean = 2.10; \pm SD = 0.85). Following was illustrating texture of fabric (mean = 2.05; \pm SD = 0.87). Both these items involve the texture of the specific fabric used for garments, which is challenging to convey without having had training in the rendering of texture, as a designer needs to be able to capture textiles, embellishments and construction elements as they relate to specific designs (Calderin 2013, p. 156).

Ranking third was the aspect of illustrating the shape or outline of garments (mean = 2.02; \pm SD = 0.87) before considering the fabric to be used. All other items regarding the challenges experienced with different aspects of fashion drawing (including illustrating the correlation between a garment's front and back, details, openings, colour, hemline, style lines and 3D aspects) were regarded as a little to not difficult at all (mean <2).

Kurz (2010, p. 30) suggests that it is not only a challenge to manufacture interesting garments of a good quality, but also to communicate the aesthetics of intended designs. The result from this section agrees with literature, and contributes to the relevance of this study, as well as the substantial contribution, which it could have in illuminating the need that fashion entrepreneurs with no formal fashion-related training might have for training in fashion drawing skills. Table 3 illustrates the specific difficulties experienced by fashion entrepreneurs when drawing designs for clients.

Table 3: Difficulties with aspects of drawing

D.2.	When drawing a design, how much do you struggle with showing:	N	n	Very much (3)	A little (2)	Not at all (1)	Mean	\pm SD	Ranking order
D.2.1.	The outline or shape of the garment	105	n	40	27	38	2.02	0.87	3
			(%)	38.1	25.7	36.2			
D.2.2.	The seams (style lines)	105	n	38	24	43	1.95	0.88	5
			(%)	36.2	22.9	41.0			

D.2.3.	How the hem of the garment will hang	104	n	40	20	44	1.96	0.90	4
			(%)	38.5	19.2	42.3			
D.2.4.	How different fabrics make a garment hang/look differently	104	n	43	28	33	2.10	0.85	1
			(%)	41.3	26.9	31.7			
D.2.5.	The opening of a garment (e.g., zip or buttons)	104	n	38	17	49	1.89	0.91	7
			(%)	36.5	16.3	47.1			
D.2.6.	The colour of the garment	103	n	40	19	44	1.96	0.91	4
			(%)	38.8	18.4	42.7			
D.2.7.	The way a fabric looks and feels (e.g., smooth, shiny, rough, etc.)	104	n	42	35	37	2.05	0.87	2
			(%)	40.4	24.0	35.6			
D.2.8.	The details on the garment (e.g., pockets, pleats, beading, etc.)	105	n	38	14	53	1.86	0.92	8
			(%)	36.2	13.3	50.5			
D.2.9.	How the collar and sleeves stand away from the body and does not lay flat	105	n	38	13	54	1.85	0.93	9
			(%)	36.2	12.4	51.4			
D.2.10.	That the back and front of the garment is the same	105	n	38	19	48	1.90	0.90	6
			(%)	36.2	18.1	45.7			
D.2.11.	That all the parts of the garment looks even and straight	105	n	39	22	44	1.95	0.89	5
			(%)	37.1	21.0	41.9			

Importance of training in specific fashion-related skills

Most respondents (74.5% – 90.4%) regarded it very important for a fashion entrepreneur to be trained in specific fashion-related skills ($\alpha = 0.73$) (Table 4). With relevance to this paper, 89.4% of the respondents agreed that the finished garment should correspond with the original sketched design (mean = 2.88; \pm SD = 0.35), illustrating the importance of the inter-relationship between the design and the manufacturing of a product (Syrjäläinen & Seitamaa-Hakkarainen 2014, p. 31). Since the design of a garment can be seen as an agreement between client and designer, it is assumed that the client expects the outcome to be in accordance with the agreement. If this is not the case, the client might prove displeased with the product, which leads to client dissatisfaction.

Having the ability to sketch designs (mean = 2.83; \pm SD = 0.45) was regarded as an important role in fashion businesses, as it is a way of relaying accurate information to the client about the ideas or designs (Wiana 2014, p. 1). The importance of even basic training in fashion drawing can aid individuals in acquiring easy drawing techniques, which they can then apply in their fashion entrepreneurship (Xu 2016, p. 2).

A positive correlation was noted between supporting the importance of having the ability to accurately sketch a design (which subsequently, corresponds with the final item) and the respondents' beliefs in the importance of obtaining fashion-related skills through training ($r = 0.28$). This result provided evidence that irrespective of whether the respondents possess the ability to create fashion drawings, they consider the attainment of fashion drawing skills through training important. Table 4 depicts the respondents' views on the importance of training in fashion-related skills.

Table 4: The importance of training in specific fashion-related skills

E.1.	How important do you think it is:			N	n	Very important (3)	Important (2)	Not important (1)	Mean	±SD	Ranking order
E.1.1.	To have training in:	E.1.1.2.	Technical drawing (Showcard A)?	102	n	76	22	4	2.71	0.54	6
					(%)	74.5	21.6	3.9			
		E.1.1.3.	Fashion drawing (Showcard B)?	100	n	81	13	6	2.75	0.56	5
					(%)	81.0	13.0	6.0			
		E.1.1.4.	Sewing?	104	n	94	10	-	2.90	0.30	1
	(%)			90.4	9.6	-					
E.1.1.5.	Pattern making?	105	n	91	3		2.86	0.38	3		
			(%)	86.7	12.4	1.0					
E.1.2.	To have the ability to sketch a design/idea?			105	n	90	12	3	2.83	0.45	4
						(%)	85.7	11.4			
E.1.3.	That the finished product (garment) is exactly the same as the sketch?			104	n	93	10	1	2.88	0.35	2
						(%)	89.4	9.6			

Use of fashion drawing as visual explanation aid between designer and client

Of the respondents, 96.2% confirmed that it is very important to possess the ability to draw sketches of intended designs, as it might aid in the process to communicate visually the designs to clients. This shows that despite respondents seldom making use of fashion drawing, they acknowledge that this method of visual communication plays an important role in depicting designs to clients.

Fashion drawing and client satisfaction

Most of the respondents (93.3%) believe that the ability to sketch a design enhances the level of client satisfaction. As consumers' needs are constantly updated (Bandinelli, d'Avolio & Rinaldi 2014, p. 1), drawing sketches of intended designs aid in reducing conceptual confusion between designer and client, regarding the specific design (Calderin 2013, p. 148). This agrees with literature, which indicates that a link exists between meeting the expectations of clients and client satisfaction (Koufteros, Rawski & Rupak 2010, p. 59), which is also important for the sustainability and profitability of fashion businesses (Nemati, Khan & Iftikhar 2010, p. 299).

Interest in receiving fashion drawing skills training

The majority of respondents (96.2%) are interested in receiving training to acquire fashion drawing skills. Literature states that small businesses are notably unwilling to undertake formal training, but individuals within these specific businesses might be more inclined to undertake informal training (Burns 2009, p. 39). The result from this specific question correlates with the statement from Burns, in the sense that respondents indicated the desire to undergo some form of training in fashion drawing skills.

Conclusion

As visual communication forms the basis for designers to communicate designs to clients, incorporating the use of fashion drawing skills plays an important role within fashion entrepreneurships.

The aim of this paper was to explore the fashion drawing skills training needs existing amongst fashion entrepreneurs without formal fashion-related training (within ELM). It was found that most respondents currently make use of commercially available fashion images, as visual communication method, and seldom make use of hand-drawn sketches. Most respondents find it challenging to illustrate aspects of a garment's design – specifically when depicting different fabric textures and the influence that textures have on the shape of garments. Most of the respondents indicated that they believed it to be of high importance that fashion entrepreneurs possess fashion drawing skills. Additionally, the ability to manually sketch designs will aid in the simplification of the communication process between themselves and their clients, as well as the enhancement of client satisfaction levels within their businesses. Overall, a positive inclination is noted amongst respondents, towards acquiring fashion drawing skills, indicating that respondents acknowledge the importance and potential benefit that fashion drawing skills may have within their fashion entrepreneurships.

The insights gained from this paper contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding the need for occupation-specific skills within entrepreneurships and can serve as a basis for future researchers to develop training programmes to enhance the fashion drawing skills of fashion entrepreneurs.²

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² This research paper is based on the main author's master's dissertation.

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