INNOVATION AND BUSINESS GROWTH IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY: A CASE STUDY OF NSUKKA, ENUGU STATE

By

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ABSTRACT

In a rapidly evolving global fashion landscape, local businesses should find strategies to overcome the significant challenges in adopting innovative practices essential for competitiveness and sustainable growth. This study explored the importance of innovation in driving business growth in Nsukka's fashion industry, Enugu State, Nigeria. The study adopted a case study approach with a survey questionnaire as an instrument. The population for the study was 269 respondents, randomly drawn following the suggested sample from G*Power. The questionnaire used for the data collected was validated, and tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha. An overall reliability coefficient of 0.947 was obtained. Data analysis was based on percentages, mean, and ANOVA statistics. Findings showed that different types of fashion businesses operate in Nsukka, and recognize the value of social media, digital marketing, and e-commerce as innovations, while other innovative tools are underutilized or unknown. Barriers to innovation adoption include lack of funds and government support. Major strategies to enhance innovation adoption and drive fashion business growth were access to funds with low interest rates, partnerships, and access to different technologies and experts. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of how innovation can drive regional economic development in emerging fashion markets.

Keywords: Business growth, Fashion Industry, Innovation, Nsukka

INTRODUCTION

Fashion is beyond the looks of an individual. Fashion is the art and practice of designing, creating, and wearing clothing, accessories, and footwear that reflect personal style, cultural influences, and current trends. According to Sumathi (2007), fashion is a prevailing style or custom adopted by a significant portion of society at any given time. It reflects not only clothing but also various aspects of life, such as behavior, accessories, and home decor, influenced by cultural, social, and economic factors. Fashion serves as a mode of self-expression, representing the individual's personality and societal identity while continually evolving with changing trends. Maintaining and sustaining styles and trends in fashion requires an industrial approach; thus a fashion industry refers to the sector that encompasses the design, production, marketing, and retail of clothing, footwear, accessories, and related products. Čiarnienė and Vienažindienė (2014) explained that fashion and its industry is a key component of the broader social and cultural phenomenon called the "fashion system," where the fashion system includes both the business and artistic aspects of fashion, as well as the processes of production and consumption. Aside from the fashion industry paying attention to the culture of the populace, there are challenges of supply chain complexities and sustainability issues, as well as digital transformations and innovations that are vital to succeeding in the industry.

Innovation involves the creation or significant enhancement of products, services, processes, or business models, offering new value to organizations, industries, or consumers. Ionela-Andreea (2019) emphasizes that innovation is closely tied to design and creativity, as it involves developing, implementing, and communicating fresh ideas to achieve goals like reaching new customers, entering bigger markets, or gaining a competitive advantage. In the fashion industry, innovation spans various areas, such as technological advancements, sustainable materials, digital marketing, and improved customer experiences (Colombi & Casciani, 2021). It can be incremental, gradual improvements, or disruptive, reshaping industry standards (Ionela-Andreea, 2019). The fashion sector's innovations are often fueled by digital transformation, including the rise of e-commerce, social media, and technologies like AI, virtual fitting rooms, and 3D printing. These innovations have transformed consumer shopping habits, brand marketing strategies, and the fashion supply chain. Fashion is no longer confined to physical stores or seasonal releases, as consumers access brands and trends online. However, a critical question remains: how many of these innovations are accessible to small and medium enterprises (SMEs), particularly within the fashion industry?

Despite the global competition aims of industries, innovation adoption in the fashion industry has predominantly been embraced by large-scale enterprises. Zahra et al. (2021) noted that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the fashion sector tend to lag in adopting innovative practices. The literature emphasizes the benefits of innovation for SMEs, such as improved business performance through faster response times, increased transparency, real-time market analytics for product development, enhanced productivity, cost savings, streamlined monitoring, quicker product development cycles, and greater access to international markets (Mittal et al., 2018; Zahra et al., 2021). Okanazu (2018) found that the most common innovations among SMEs in Enugu State included digitizing products and making them accessible via mobile platforms.

However, SMEs in fashion businesses like tailors, fabrics/accessories sellers, and boutiques face challenges unique to the industry. According to Zahra et al., (2021), these challenges include short product life cycles, unpredictable market demands, high trend uncertainty, and a volatile supply chain.

Despite these hurdles, research consistently highlights the positive impact of innovation on expanding the fashion industry's reach, enabling consumer engagement in novel ways, and fostering business growth, even on a global scale. Furthermore, Spescha and Woerter (2018) emphasize that innovation acts as a catalyst for business growth.

Business growth refers to a company's expansion and increased profitability, marked by higher revenue, market share, and operational scale. In the fashion industry, growth is achieved through market expansion, product diversification, innovation, and improved operational efficiency. This growth can be organic, involving geographical expansion, increased product offerings, or inorganic, through mergers and acquisitions (Hubbard & Hubbard, 2013). Additionally, fashion industry growth involves enhancing brand equity, fostering customer loyalty, and adopting scalable, sustainable business models for long-term success (Yang & Jang, 2020). Key growth metrics include financial performance, expanding the customer base, and strengthening market position relative to competitors (Morgan et al., 2009). In Nigeria, evidence suggests that the fashion industry has significant growth potential.

Fashion (2024) reports that Nigeria's fashion market is booming, with projected revenues expected to reach US$1.194 billion by 2024, showing consistent annual growth of around 17% over the past decade. This impressive growth has been largely driven by small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that play a crucial role in creating jobs and fueling economic growth (Zahra et al., 2021). Empowering SMEs with the necessary technologies can significantly enhance their development and competitiveness in the marketplace. Innovation is key to unlocking new possibilities and improving business processes, with business growth often reflecting the success of these innovations in expanding and scaling a brand. Given this potential, a critical question arises: What innovations are SMEs in fashion businesses within Nsukka adopted or willing to adopt, and what outcomes can be expected from innovating in the face of current challenges?

Nsukka, Enugu State, is a culturally rich and economically vibrant region, home to numerous small-scale fashion entrepreneurs. While the local fashion industry draws heavily on traditional aesthetics and craftsmanship, it faces challenges in adopting innovative practices that could scale operations and enhance business growth. Many fashion businesses in Nsukka operate with limited resources, often relying on outdated production techniques and traditional marketing methods. These limitations impede their ability to compete effectively in a globalized market that increasingly demands innovation. As a result, fashion businesses in Nsukka struggle to reach their full potential, missing out on opportunities for growth, profitability, and wider market reach.

This study is particularly vital given the rising importance of innovation in the global fashion industry. Technological advancements such as 3D printing, artificial intelligence, and digital platforms have revolutionized how fashion products are designed, produced, and marketed. Furthermore, there is a growing demand for sustainability, with consumers favoring brands that incorporate ethical sourcing, environmentally friendly materials, and circular economy practices. For Nsukka's fashion sector to thrive in this context, there is a pressing need to explore how innovation can be leveraged to overcome the barriers local businesses face and drive sustainable growth. By focusing on Nsukka, this research aims to uncover the unique challenges and opportunities for innovation in the town's fashion industry, providing insights that can benefit other emerging fashion markets facing similar conditions.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Like many other emerging markets, the fashion industry in Nsukka, Enugu State faces significant challenges in achieving sustainable business growth. Many fashion businesses, from small-scale designers to retail outlets, struggle to remain competitive in an increasingly globalized market. A lack of innovation, limited access to cutting-edge technology, inadequate business management skills, and an over-reliance on traditional methods of production and sales have impeded growth and reduced profitability for these businesses.

In Nsukka, most fashion enterprises operate with limited resources and often lack the knowledge or tools to adopt innovative practices, such as digital marketing, advanced production techniques, or sustainable sourcing. As a result, they are unable to effectively compete with larger brands that have embraced innovation to improve operational efficiency, reduce costs, and meet evolving consumer demands. Furthermore, the fashion sector in this region has not fully explored the potential of technological advancements like e-commerce, artificial intelligence, or sustainable design practices to create value and drive business growth.

This study is driven by the need to address these gaps and explore how innovation can catalyze business growth in the fashion industry in Nsukka. By examining the barriers to innovation adoption and understanding the specific challenges faced by fashion businesses in this area, this research aims to identify strategic solutions that could foster innovation, enhance competitiveness, and ultimately stimulate business growth in the local fashion sector.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study explores the link between innovation and business growth in the fashion industry among SMEs in Nsukka, Enugu State. Specifically, the study determines the:

1. the current state of innovation adoption among fashion businesses in Nsukka.
2. Barriers to innovation among fashion businesses in Nsukka.
3. Strategies for enhancing innovation and business growth among fashion businesses in Nsukka.
4. Impact of innovation on business growth among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were answered in this study:

1. What is the current state of innovation adoption among fashion businesses in Nsukka?
2. What are the barriers to innovation among fashion businesses in Nsukka?
3. What are the strategies for enhancing innovation and business growth among fashion businesses in Nsukka?
4. How does innovation impact business growth among Nsukka fashion businesses?

HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the current state of innovation adoption among fashion businesses in Nsukka.
2. There is no significant difference in the barriers to innovation among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

3. There is no significant difference in the strategies for enhancing innovation and business growth among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

4. The impact of innovation on business growth does not differ significantly among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted a case study research design based on survey responses of fashion business owners and workers within Nsukka Local Government Area, Enugu State. A case study design allows for a comprehensive and detailed examination of issues of interest (Priya, 2021). It enables the researcher to explore the unique characteristics, challenges, and opportunities specific to fashion businesses within Nsukka. This approach is ideal for investigating phenomena, such as innovation adoption, in real-world settings. Given the focus on Nsukka, the case study design provides the flexibility to analyze the local dynamics, industry-specific factors, and individual business strategies, which might not be fully captured through broader research methods.

Likewise, using a survey questionnaire allows for the collection of quantifiable data from a larger sample of fashion businesses. This method ensures that responses are standardized, making it easier to compare across different groups or subcategories, such as tailoring, fabric/accessories sellers, and boutiques. The survey enables the collection of specific information about the state of innovation, technological adoption, and business practices, providing a clear picture of how widely innovation is embraced among fashion businesses in Nsukka. Moreover, the survey can capture data on both perceptions and actual business practices, offering insights into the barriers, and expected impact of innovation.

AREA OF THE STUDY

Nsukka, a suburban city in Southeastern Enugu State, Nigeria, was chosen for this study due to its growing population, urbanization, and expanding commercial activities. These factors have fueled a thriving fashion business sector, with numerous tailoring shops, fabric sellers, and boutiques emerging in response to rising demand. As the sub-urban grows, the fashion industry flourishes alongside it, becoming a vital part of the local economy. Nsukka serves as a reflection of the broader urbanization trends across Nigeria, where fashion entrepreneurs are capitalizing on the city's development to cater to its increasingly fashion-conscious population.

POPULATION AND SAMPLING METHOD

There are three quarters in the Nsukka metropolis namely Onuiyi, Odenigbo, and Ogige, with a population of about 450,000 (Nsukka Local Government Area, Nigeria, n.d.). The population for this study was determined using G*Power, a widely recognized statistical tool designed to calculate the appropriate sample size needed for various types of statistical analyses. G*Power was specifically utilized to compute the "A priori sample size required for conducting an ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) test with a fixed effect omnibus approach and one-way test design" (Faul et al., 2007).

This type of ANOVA is used to assess whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of multiple groups. After running the calculations through G*Power, the tool generated a sample size of 252, which is deemed appropriate to ensure sufficient statistical power and reliability for the study's analysis. This method ensures that the sample size is neither too small (which could lead to inaccurate results) nor unnecessarily large, maintaining efficiency while maximizing the study's ability to detect significant differences.

However, to ensure that an adequate population sample was realized, 10% of 252 was added to account for errors in completing the instrument, not retrieving copies, etc. Thus, a total population of 277 was sampled for the study. A total of 269 valid questionnaires were duly completed, comprising 121 Tailors, 53 fabrics/accessories dealers, 85 boutique owners/staff, and 10 others including laundry service providers, shoemakers, etc. The details of the population are shown in Table 1, Figures 1 and 2.

INSTRUMENT FOR DATA COLLECTION

The instrument for the data collection was a structured questionnaire developed from the literature review. The instrument is titled Innovation for Business Growth Questionnaire (i4BuG). It began with an opening statement assuring respondents of the voluntary nature of their responses, as well as the anonymity and confidentiality promises. It has two sections, A and B. Section A ascertains demographic information of the respondents such as the type of fashion business, how long the business has been, and the number of employees. Section B has 40 items spread over 4 four parts, denoted I – IV, according to the specific purposes. Part I has 11 items to ascertain the state of current innovation adoption among fashion businesses in Nsukka. Respondents were asked to select from the list, the innovation they have used in business using two response options of *Yes (2)* or *No (1)*. Part II has 10 items that ascertain barriers to innovation in fashion businesses, Part III has 8 items that ascertain the strategies for enhancing innovation and growth in fashion businesses, while Part IV consists of 11 items that elicit the impact of innovation on the growth of fashion businesses. Parts II-IV elicited responses using a 5-point Likert scale of *SA (Strongly Agree) = 5; A (Agree) = 4; N (Neutral) = 3; D (Disagree) = 2; SD (Strong Disagree) = 1*. Thus, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statements.

The instrument was face-validated by three experts from two Departments at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The experts' views and corrections were integrated into the final copy of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability test showed an overall reliability coefficient of 0.947, which is judged acceptable for the study. Data collection was through direct administration and retrieval using 12 research assistants. The research assistants were briefed on the motive of the data collection, the voluntary nature, anonymity and confidential statements, before being sent across the three parts of the suburban city. Data collection lasted for one week.

METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data were analyzed using simple percentages for demographic information, as well as mean, standard deviation, and one-way ANOVA to compare the responses of different groups. Simple percentages were used to illustrate the demographic characteristics of the respondents and the state of innovation adoption thus far.

The mean and standard deviation were applied to assess the level of agreement expressed by respondents on the questionnaire items. Using a 5-point rating scale, a mean score of 3.50 was considered the threshold, with scores of 3.50 or higher indicating "Agreed," while scores below 3.50 signified "Disagreed." For research question 1, the percentage of "Yes" below 50% is termed Poor, above 50% Adequate, while exactly 50% is termed average. Additionally, ANOVA was employed to compare the responses from three different groups, and the significant differences between these groups were tested at a 0.05 significance level.

RESULTS

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Table 1 shows the types of fashion businesses prevalent in Nsukka. Tailoring had the highest frequency among the fashion businesses while boutique owners/staff came second. Others who were found relevant in the fashion businesses include shoemakers, laundry shops, hairdressers, and barbers.

Table 1

Sampled Fashion Business Types

S/N	Fashion Business Type	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Tailoring	121	45.0
2.	Fabric/Accessories Sales	53	19.7
3.	Boutique	85	31.6
4.	Others	10	3.7
	Total	**269**	**100.0**

Figures 1 and 2 reveal the age of the fashion businesses and their respective number of employees or workers. Most of the businesses were still incubating as only 7% (18) had operated for more than 6 years. On the other hand, no fashion business has more than 10 employees, indicating that the fashion business in Nsukka could mainly be classified as small and medium scale enterprises.

Figure 1
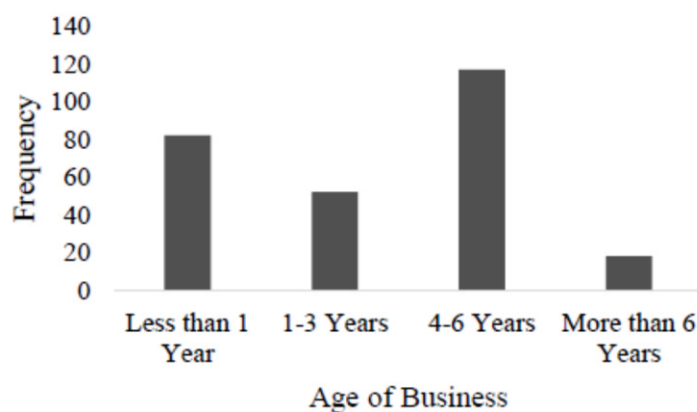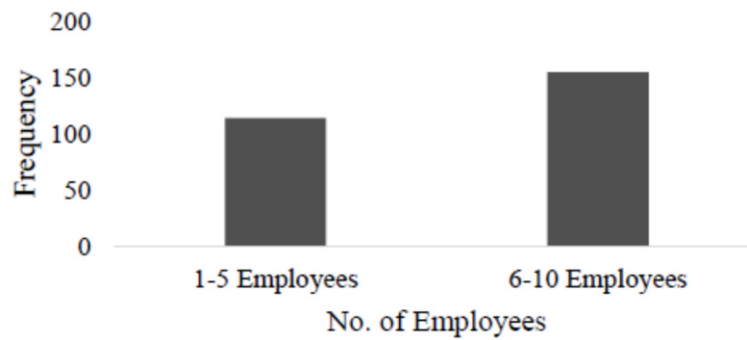**Age of Fashion Businesses Sampled**

Figure 2

Number of Employees in the Fashion Businesses Sampled

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

RQ1– What is the current state of innovation adoption among fashion businesses in Nsukka?

Table 2

Percentage of Innovation Adoption Status in Fashion Businesses

S/N	Innovations in Fashion Businesses	Yes	%	No	%	Status
1.	Live stream of designs and processes	23	8.6	246	91.4	Poor
2	Augmented reality	0	0	269	100	Poor
3	Virtual Fashion	6	2.2	263	97.8	Poor
4	Artificial Intelligence	0	0	269	100	Poor
5.	Online Sales /Marketplace (e -commerce)	25	9.3	244	90.7	Poor
86	Virtual influencers	23	8.6	246	91.4	Poor
7	Real-time tracking/inventory management	7	2.6	262	97.4	Poor
8	Use of sustainable materials	10	3.7	259	96.3	Poor
9	3D printing	18	6.7	251	93.3	Poor
10.	Social media marketing (Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter)	36	13.4	233	86.6	Poor
11.	Digital Marketing	29	10.8	240	89.2	Poor

Results in Table 2 reveal that Innovation adoption among fashion businesses in Nsukka is notably low. Most modern technologies, such as augmented reality, virtual fashion, and artificial intelligence, are barely used, with 0% to 2.2% of businesses adopting these innovations. Even more commonly adopted innovations, such as e-commerce platforms (9.3%) and digital marketing (10.8%), still show relatively low penetration. The highest adoption rate is for social media marketing (13.4%), suggesting that while businesses recognize the value of social media, other innovative tools are being underutilized or are not even known at all.

H_{o1} – There is no significant difference in the current state of innovation adoption among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

Table 3
Descriptive and ANOVA Results of Current State of Innovation Adoption among Fashion Businesses

S/N	Business Type	Descriptive			ANOVA				
		No.	Mean	SD		df	F	Sig.	Remark
1	Tailoring	121	1.72	.18	Between Groups	3	4.438	.005	S
2	Fabrics/Accessories	53	1.76	.19	Within Groups	265			
3	Boutique	85	1.80	.15	Total	268			
4	Others	10	1.84	.20					
5	Total	269	1.76	.18					

Key: No. = Frequency/Number of Respondents; SD = Standard Deviation; df = degree of freedom; F = critical value, Sig.= Probability level of significance; NS = Not Significant; S = Significant

Data in Table 3 shows the ANOVA results with a significant difference in innovation adoption across different business types ($p = 0.005$). This means that some business categories, like Tailoring, Fabrics/Accessories, and Boutiques, adopt innovations at different levels. However, the results also indicate that Boutiques (*Mean* = 1.80) have slightly higher innovation adoption compared to Tailoring (*Mean* = 1.72), Fabrics/Accessories (*Mean* = 1.76), and Other businesses (*Mean* = 1.84). This suggests that boutiques may be slightly more innovative than other types of fashion businesses in Nsukka. Based on the result in Table 3, hypothesis one was not accepted.

RQ$_2$ – What are the barriers to innovation among fashion businesses in Nsukka?

Table 4
Barriers to Innovation in Fashion Businesses

S/N	Barriers to Innovation in Fashion Businesses	Mean	SD	Remarks
12.	Lack of funding	3.58	1.13	Agreed
13.	Limited knowledge	3.38	1.28	Disagreed
14.	Fear of failure	3.22	1.33	Disagreed
15.	Fear of technology	3.77	.96	Agreed
16.	Lack of skilled personnel	3.57	1.06	Agreed
17.	Poor government support	3.62	1.11	Agreed
18.	Lack of training opportunities using innovative fashion tools	3.59	1.25	Agreed
19.	Limited access to the technology	3.82	.97	Agreed
20.	Lack of networking opportunities	3.83	1.0	Agreed
21.	Poor access to quality information	3.77	1.0	Agreed
	Cluster_Barriers	**3.61**	**.77**	**Agreed**

Table 4 shows the barriers to innovation in fashion businesses among which the top barriers include: lack of funding (*Mean* = 3.58), fear of technology (3.77), lack of skilled personnel (3.57), poor government support (3.62), and limited access to technology (3.82). These barriers highlight the challenges that fashion businesses in Nsukka face in adopting innovations. The cluster mean (3.61) further shows that most respondents agree that these factors significantly hinder innovation.

H$_{O2}$ – There is no significant difference in the barriers to innovation among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

Table 5

Descriptive and ANOVA Results of the Barriers to Innovation in Fashion Businesses

S/N	Business Type	Descriptive				ANOVA			
		No.	Mean	SD		df	F	Sig.	Remark
1	Tailoring	121	3.52	.83	Between Groups	3	1.57 7	.195	NS
2	Fabrics/Accessories	53	3.75	.46	Within Groups	26 5			
3	Boutique	85	3.69	.80	Total	26 8			
4	Others	10	3.42	.94					
5	Total	269	3.61	.77					

Key: No. = Frequency/Number of Respondents; SD = Standard Deviation; df = degree of freedom; F = critical value, Sig.= Probability level of significance; NS = Not Significant; S = Significant

The descriptive results in Table 5 show that the business type notwithstanding, Tailoring (*Mean* = 3.52), Fabrics/Accessories sales (3.75), and Boutiques (3.69), the perceived barriers are comparable. This suggests that barriers like funding, technology access, and skilled personnel shortages are universally problematic. Also in Table 5, the ANOVA results revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in mean barriers across different business types ($p = 0.195$), indicating that all fashion businesses, regardless of type, face similar obstacles. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Rq$_3$ - What are the strategies for enhancing innovation and business growth among fashion businesses in Nsukka?

Table 6

Strategies for Enhancing Innovation and Growth in Fashion Businesses

S/N	Strategies for Enhancing Innovation and Growth in Fashion Businesses	Mean	SD	Remarks
22.	Access to funding, with zero or single -digit interests	3.98	1.06	Agreed
23.	Training programmes on available innovative fashion according to the level of recipients	3.51	1.16	Agreed
24.	Access to technology such as inventory management software, Digital design tools, Customer relationship management software, etc.	3.73	1.10	Agreed
25.	Partnerships with universities, fashion institutes, or industry experts	3.75	1.08	Agreed
26.	Provide a guide for skills in e -commerce platforms, social media marketing tools, etc.	3.35	1.10	Disagreed
27.	Providing short courses and workshops on fashion design and business management	3.45	1.33	Disagreed
28.	Effective and efficient networking opportunities	3.95	1.15	Agreed
29.	An organized provision to shared resources and innovative expertise.	3.81	1.21	Agreed
	Cluster_Strategies	**3.74**	**.71**	**Agreed**

Table 6 shows that six of the eight strategies were agreed to be helpful in adopting innovation across the fashion businesses in Nsukka. In order of priority, the six strategies are access to funding with zero or single-digit interest rates (*Mean* = 3.98), effective networking opportunities (3.95), shared resources and innovative expertise (3.81), partnerships with universities, fashion institutes, or industry experts (3.75), and access to different technology (3.73). These strategies suggest that businesses recognize the importance of external resources and support, such as funding and technology, as critical to boosting innovation.

Data in Table 6 also show that some strategies were less supported: providing guides for e-commerce platforms and social media marketing tools (*Mean* = 3.35) and short courses and workshops on fashion design and business management (3.45). These may indicate that businesses either already have access to some of these tools or do not see these as a high priority for innovation.

H$_{03}$ – There is no significant difference in the strategies for enhancing innovation and business growth among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

Table 7

Descriptive and ANOVA Results on Strategies for Enhancing Innovation Adoption in Fashion Businesses

S/N	Business Type	Descriptive				ANOVA			
		No.	Mean	SD		df	F	Sig.	Remark
1	Tailoring	121	3.80	.68	Between Groups	3	2.927	.034	S
2	Fabrics/Accessories	53	3.85	.70	Within Groups	265			
3	Boutique	85	3.63	.72	Total	268			
4	Others	10	3.23	.66					
5	Total	269	3.74	.71					

Key: No. = Frequency/Number of Respondents; SD = Standard Deviation; df = degree of freedom; F = critical value, Sig.= Probability level of significance; NS = Not Significant; S = Significant

Data in Table 7 reveal that Tailoring (*Mean* = 3.80) and Fabrics/Accessories sales (3.85) businesses have higher scores for strategy adoption, while Boutiques (3.63) and Other businesses (3.23) have lower scores. This indicates that tailoring and fabrics/accessories businesses may be more proactive in implementing growth strategies compared to other business types. The ANOVA results show a significant difference ($p = 0.034$) in strategy adoption among different business types. This suggests that some business types may be more inclined to adopt certain strategies. Based on the variant acceptance of the strategies across the fashion business types, the null hypothesis was not accepted.

Rq$_4$ – How does innovation impact business growth among Nsukka fashion businesses?

Table 8

Impact of Innovation on the Growth of Fashion Businesses

S/N	Impact of Innovation on the Growth of Fashion Businesses	Mean	SD	Remarks
30.	Improves customer satisfaction	3.81	.95	Agreed
31.	Helps in attracting new customers	3.61	1.16	Agreed
32.	Contributes to increased revenue in business	3.87	.83	Agreed
33.	Helps businesses to expand into new markets	3.64	1.23	Agreed
34.	Improves speed and efficiency in product development	3.72	1.03	Agreed
35.	Reduces the operational cost of fashion businesses	3.38	1.32	Disagreed
36.	Helps business to maintain a competitive edge	3.45	1.29	Disagreed
37.	Easy adaptation to changing fashion trends and consumer preferences	3.62	1.39	Agreed
38.	Improves business-to-customer interaction	3.29	1.37	Disagreed
39.	Helps in building strong customer relationships and loyalty	2.94	1.42	Disagreed
40.	Improves the overall shopping experience for your customers	3.50	1.19	Agreed
	Cluster_Impact	3.84	.87	**Agreed**

Table 8 shows that seven of the items were agreed to be impacts of adopting innovation across the fashion businesses in Nsukka. The respondents agreed that adopting innovation would impact fashion business growth by improving customer satisfaction (*Mean* = 3.81), attracting new customers (3.61), contributing to increased revenue (3.87), as well as improving speed and efficiency in product development (3.72) among others. These findings suggest that there is a clear idea of what is expected from innovation among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

Data in Table 8 also show that some impacts were less supported. For instance, respondents disagreed that innovation reduces the operational cost of fashion businesses (*Mean* = 3.38), indicating that they have an initial cost of acquisition and perhaps maintenance in their thoughts. Results also show a disagreement with the innovation's help in building strong customer relationships and loyalty (*Mean* = 2.94), as the least accepted. These may indicate that the importance of innovation adoption is solely to pursue a personally conceived goal, hence the goal may not be generalized.

H$_{04}$ – The impact of innovation on business growth does not differ significantly among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

Table 9

Descriptive and ANOVA Results on Impacts of Innovation Adoption in Fashion Businesses

S/N	Business Type	Descriptive				ANOVA			
		No.	Mean	SD		df	F	Sig.	Remark
1	Tailoring	121	3.40	.93	Between Groups	3	1.27 6	.283	NS
2	Fabrics/Accessories	53	3.67	.76	Within Groups	26 5			
3	Boutique	85	3.46	.84	Total	26 8			
4	Others	10	3.62	.98					
5	Total	269	3.48	.87					

Key: No. = Frequency/Number of Respondents; SD = Standard Deviation; df = degree of freedom; F = critical value, Sig.= Probability level of significance; NS = Not Significant; S = Significant

The descriptive results in Table 9 show that the impact of innovation varies across the business types: Tailoring (*Mean* = 3.40), Fabrics/Accessories sales (3.67), and Boutiques (3.46), Others (3.62), while the overall was below 3.50, further validating the ungeneralizable acceptance of what innovation would do for the fashion businesses. Also in Table 9, the ANOVA results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference in the mean impact of innovation across different fashion business types (p = 0.283), indicating that all fashion businesses do not attach the same level of importance to their pursuit of innovation. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following findings emerged from the study:

1. There are different types of fashion businesses in Nsukka, such as tailoring, fabric/accessories sales, boutiques, shoemaking, saloon/barbing, and laundry services.
2. Fashion businesses recognize the value of social media, digital marketing, and e-commerce as innovations, but many other innovative tools are underutilized or not even known.
3. Some barriers hinder fashion businesses in Nsukka from adopting innovations, including lack of funds, and lack of government support among others.
4. Fashion businesses agreed with strategies to enhance innovation adoption such as access to funds with low interest rates, partnerships, and access to different technologies and experts, even if they will be shared among several businesses.
5. The respondents agreed that adopting innovation would impact fashion business growth by improving customer satisfaction, revenue, and production time, showing a clear idea of what is expected from innovation among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

6. There is a significant difference in the current state of innovation adoption among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

7. There is no significant difference in the barriers to innovation among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

8. Fashion businesses in Nsukka have significantly different strategies for enhancing innovation and business growth.

9. The impact of innovation on business growth does not differ significantly among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

DISCUSSION

Different Types of Fashion Businesses

The findings from this study showed that there are different types of fashion businesses in Nsukka, such as tailoring, fabric/accessories sales, boutiques, shoemaking, saloon/barbing, and laundry services. The variety is not surprising given the general landscape of fashion businesses. A broader search across sources, such as websites and studies, confirms the prevalence of these businesses in Nsukka and the surrounding area. Spacey (2017) offers further validation by identifying 22 different types of fashion businesses that are popular globally, including bespoke and made-to-measure tailoring, footwear manufacturing, jewelry design, and costume-making. This comparison with Spacey's categorization demonstrates that the fashion businesses in Nsukka are part of a broader spectrum of industry types that are not only thriving globally but are also locally adapted.

This finding is critical because it underscores the versatility of the fashion industry. Fashion is not limited to clothing design and production alone but includes a wide range of connected services and products that add value to the sector. The local adaptation of global fashion business types indicates both opportunity and diversity within the sector and proves that those in Nsukka are tapping into different areas of the fashion industry, contributing to economic growth and creating jobs. The variety of businesses also points to the different skill sets within the local fashion community, from artisanship in tailoring and shoemaking to the entrepreneurial skills required to manage boutiques and salons. This diversity further demonstrates the potential for growth in various niches within the fashion business. These businesses not only meet local demand but also offer avenues for innovation and economic contribution, reinforcing the industry's importance in both local and global contexts.

Innovation adoption status across fashion businesses

Fashion businesses within Nsukka adopt varying levels of innovation, with a focus on digital tools like social media, digital marketing, and e-commerce. These innovations are recognized and utilized by many local businesses, particularly boutiques. However, more advanced technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and artificial intelligence (AI) remain underutilized or even unknown in many cases. This uneven adoption is a significant point, indicating a gap between potential innovation and its implementation within the local industry.

These findings align with the findings of Todeschini et al. (2017), who noted that while the fashion industry is generally innovation-driven, many businesses, especially smaller ones, are not fully aware of emerging trends like sustainability or cutting-edge technology applications. Similarly, Duml & Perlacia (2016) found that technological advances, including mobile technology and social media, have reshaped how fashion businesses interact with suppliers and customers. This shift has facilitated the growth of e-commerce, allowing fashion businesses to expand their reach and improve accessibility. The mention of Slyce (2015) further reinforces the idea that the internet has catalyzed new forms of commerce, notably e-commerce. This has opened new opportunities for fashion businesses in Nsukka to reach a broader market through online platforms, even though the full potential of digital innovation is not yet fully tapped. Lastly, while some fashion businesses in Nsukka are adapting well to basic digital tools, there is significant room for growth in the adoption of advanced innovations like AR and AI. The differences in innovation adoption between sectors, such as boutiques and tailoring, illustrate the varying degrees of digital transformation within the local fashion industry, a trend that may be alleviated if barriers are properly examined.

Barriers to innovation adoption in fashion businesses

The finding on the barriers that hinder innovation adoption among fashion businesses in Nsukka, highlights challenges such as lack of funds and government support. These barriers are common across different business types, suggesting that any strategy to improve innovation adoption should target all sectors within the fashion industry equally. The issues faced by fashion businesses in Nsukka mirror those in many developing economies and among small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as identified by Sari & Asad (2018) and Zahra et al. (2021).

According to Zahra et al. (2021), many SMEs struggle to adopt innovation due to various constraints, particularly in developing economies. Sari & Asad (2018) identified key barriers, including human resource barriers - a shortage of skilled staff and a lack of necessary expertise limiting the ability to integrate innovations, operational resource barriers - the scarcity of raw materials and the difficulty in sourcing high-quality inputs further complicate innovation efforts; financial barrier - the high cost of innovation, lack of funding, and poor financial management are significant obstacles; imitation over innovation – where some businesses focus on copying competitors rather than investing in original innovation, limiting their potential for growth and differentiation.

These barriers are universal to many SMEs, particularly in developing contexts, where financial and resource limitations are more pronounced. In Nsukka, the lack of both financial resources and institutional support further compounds the challenge, making it difficult for fashion businesses to embrace innovative practices, regardless of their type. Overcoming these barriers requires comprehensive support mechanisms, among other strategies for enhancing innovation adoption.

Strategies to enhance innovation adoption in fashion businesses

The fashion businesses in Nsukka recognize several key strategies to enhance innovation adoption. These include access to low-interest funds, partnerships, and shared access to advanced technologies and expert resources. Despite agreeing on these strategies, the choice of how to implement them varies significantly across different fashion businesses in the region. Literature has studies corroborating the existence of different strategies.

Some fashion businesses may prioritize access to funding, while others might focus more on partnerships or technological integration. Regardless of these preferences, the core strategies - improving funding opportunities, facilitating access to technology, and providing training for skilled personnel - are widely seen as essential to fostering innovation and business growth. Sari & Asad (2018) and Zahra et al. (2021) have suggested similar strategies for overcoming barriers to innovation, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing economies. Wijaya et al. (2023) further emphasized the importance of collaboration between the local fashion industry and technology developers, such as software and website application creators. These partnerships can help fashion businesses implement user-friendly technologies, improve customer engagement, and make better use of marketing research. By doing so, businesses can enhance customer satisfaction, streamline operations, and increase their competitive advantage. Collaboration with tech experts and proper use of digital tools, as suggested by Wijaya et al. (2023), can significantly elevate the local industry's ability to innovate and grow.

Impact of innovation adoption on fashion businesses

The findings of the study indicate that adopting innovation within fashion businesses in Nsukka positively influences business growth by enhancing customer satisfaction, increasing revenue, and reducing production time. This suggests that local businesses should have a clear understanding of what they expect from innovation: improved efficiency and customer experience. Moreover, the study shows that the impact of innovation on business growth is relatively uniform across different types of fashion businesses in Nsukka, highlighting a broad consensus on the benefits of innovation adoption.

The literature consistently supports the view that innovation is critical for business growth in the fashion industry. Ogbari et al. (n.d.) emphasize that innovation can drive market expansion, allowing businesses to reach new customer segments, whether by broadening existing markets or penetrating new geographic, demographic, or psychological territories. However, despite the evident creativity in Nigeria's local fashion industry, small-scale businesses often struggle to fully capitalize on global market opportunities. This challenge stems from their limited ability to promote their skills and navigate the barriers related to scaling production and distribution. Other studies, such as Wang (2019), confirm that innovation helps businesses retain market share and maintain their customer base, while noting that innovation improves production speed, contributing to overall operational efficiency. These impacts are crucial for the growth and sustainability of fashion businesses in Nsukka, as they align with the global understanding of innovation's role in the fashion industry.

CONCLUSION

The adoption of innovation is crucial for the growth of fashion businesses in Nsukka, improving customer satisfaction, revenue, and production efficiency. Despite the recognition of basic digital tools like social media and e-commerce, advanced technologies such as augmented reality and artificial intelligence remain underutilized. Barriers such as lack of funds, government support, and skilled labor hinder innovation adoption, which is a common challenge faced by SMEs in developing economies. Collaborative strategies, including partnerships, shared technologies, and increased funding, are essential for overcoming these obstacles and fostering innovation. Ultimately, innovation holds the potential to expand market reach, improve production processes, and ensure the long-term sustainability of fashion businesses in Nsukka; more support is needed to maximize these benefits.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations would suffice:

1. Government agencies, financial institutions, and private investors should provide low-interest loans and grants to support innovation adoption in fashion businesses, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Nsukka.

2. Local business associations and government bodies should offer training programs to familiarize fashion entrepreneurs with advanced technologies like augmented reality (AR), artificial intelligence (AI), and e-commerce platforms to enhance their operations.

3. Fashion businesses in Nsukka should form partnerships with technology experts, software developers, and other industry stakeholders to share resources and implement innovative tools more effectively.

4. Fashion businesses should leverage digital marketing and trade platforms to amplify their reach, enhance visibility, and tap into global markets, thereby addressing challenges in publicity and market access.

SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER STUDIES

The following are suggested for further studies:

1. Impact of integrating advanced technologies on efficiency and customer engagement among fashion businesses in Nsukka.

2. Comparative analysis of innovation adoption barriers among fashion businesses across various regions in Nigeria.

3. Exploring the effectiveness of partnerships between fashion businesses and technology developers in business growth.

A longitudinal study on the impact of innovation adoption on business growth, market expansion, and customer satisfaction among fashion businesses in Nsukka

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INNOVATION FOR BUSINESS GROWTH QUESTIONNAIRE (i4BuG)

Dear Respondent,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey. Your responses are extremely valuable to the success of this study. Please be assured that your participation is completely voluntary, as well as anonymous, and all information provided will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. No identifying details will be linked to your responses, and the data collected will be used solely for research purposes. We appreciate your honest and thoughtful feedback, and we guarantee that your privacy will be fully protected throughout the entire process.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Section A: Demographic Variables

1. Type of Fashion Business

   Tailoring ☐   Fabric/Accessories Sales ☐   Boutique ☐

   Others _____

2. How long have you been in the fashion business?

   Less than 1 Year ☐   1 – 3 Years ☐   4 – 6 Years ☐

   More than 6 years ☐

3. How many employees do you have?

   1 – 5 ☐   6 – 10 ☐   11 – 20 ☐   More than 20 ☐

Section B:
Part I: **What is the current state of innovation adoption among fashion businesses in Nsukka?**
Please select the list of innovations you have used in your business.

S/N	Innovations in Fashion Businesses	Yes	No
1.	Digital Marketing		
2.	Online Sales/Marketplace (e-commerce)		
3.	Social media marketing (Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter)		
4.	Use of sustainable materials		
5.	Live stream		
6.	3D printing		
7.	Virtual influencers		
8.	Virtual Fashion		
9.	Augmented reality		
10.	Artificial Intelligence		
11.	Real-time tracking/inventory management		

Part II: **What are the barriers to innovation among fashion businesses in Nsukka?**
Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Key: SA (Strongly Agree) = 5; A (Agree) = 4; N (Neutral) = 3; D (Disagree) = 2; SD (Strong Disagree) = 1

S/N	Barriers to Innovation in Fashion Businesses	SA	A	N	D	SD
12.	Lack of funding					
13.	Limited knowledge					
14.	Fear of failure					
15.	Fear of technology					
16.	Lack of skilled personnel					
17.	Poor government support					
18.	Lack of training opportunities using innovative fashion tools					
19.	Limited access to the technology					
20.	Lack of networking opportunities					
21.	Poor access to quality information					

Part III: **What are the strategies for enhancing innovation and business growth among fashion businesses in Nsukka?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Key: SA (Strongly Agree) = 5; A (Agree) = 4; N (Neutral) = 3; D (Disagree) = 2; SD (Strong Disagree) = 1

S/N	Strategies for Enhancing Innovation and Growth in Fashion Businesses	SA	A	N	D	SD
22.	Access to funding, with zero or single digit interests					
23.	Training programmes on available innovative fashion according to the level of recipients					
24.	Access to technology such as inventory management software, Digital design tools, Customer relationship management software, etc.					
25.	Partnerships with universities, fashion institutes, or industry experts					
26.	Provide a guide for skills in ecommerce platforms, social media marketing tools, etc.					
27.	Providing short courses and workshops on fashion design and business management					
28.	Effective and efficient networking opportunities					
29.	An organized provision to shared resources and innovative expertise.					

Part IV: **What is the impact of innovation on business growth among Nsukka fashion businesses?**

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements.

Key: SA (Strongly Agree) = 5; A (Agree) = 4; N (Neutral) = 3; D (Disagree) = 2; SD (Strong Disagree) = 1

S/N	Impact of Innovation on the Growth of Fashion Businesses	SA	A	N	D	SD
30.	Improves customer satisfaction					
31.	Helps in attracting new customers					
32.	Contributes to increased revenue in business					
33.	Helps businesses to expand into new markets					
34.	Improves speed and efficiency in product development					
35.	Reduces the operational cost of fashion businesses					
36.	Helps business to maintain a competitive edge					
37.	Easy adaptation to changing fashion trends and consumer preferences					
38.	Improves business-to-customer interaction					
39.	Helps in building strong customer relationships and loyalty					
40.	Improves the overall shopping experience for your customers					