The Issue of Sub-Standard Ready-to-Wear Garments in Fashion Marketing: A Challenge Facing the Fashion Industry in Nigerian Economy

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Abstract
This paper examines the issue of sub-standard ready-to-wear garments in fashion marketing: a challenge facing the fashion industry in Nigerian economy. Fashion is a global activity with a lot of stiff or hyper-competition. The manufacturers therefore have to strive to maintain standards of quality products to meet the market target. Unfortunately, the Nigerian fashion industry is unable to compete in terms of quality with the foreign ready-to-wear garments produced, especially in the developed nations of the world. This has lead to serious challenges in the fashion industry and consequently affecting the national economy negatively. This paper highlights these challenges and recommends ways of eradicating them.
Key words: Sub-standard, Ready-to-wear, Garments, Fashion marketing, Fashion industry

Introduction

The term, ready-to-wear, describes garments made in standardized sizes and usually produced in factories (Dickerson, 2003). Substandard ready-to-wear therefore, refers to factory produced garments that are of low quality. According to (Kotler, Bowen and Makens, 2006), a quality is the totality of feature and characteristics of a product that bear on its ability to meet customer needs. It can be briefly defined as, "freedom from defects". They further explain that quality has a direct impact on product or service performance. This is closely linked to customer value and satisfaction. Quality begins with customer's needs and ends with customer satisfaction.

Jones (2006), reports that fashion manufacturing falls within the market sector of the economy. According to

Easy (2009), fashion marketing exists only for one reason, the CONSUMER. He argues that the primary objective in gaining greater understanding of the nature of fashion products and the process, is to satisfy some of the basic needs within a society. Commercially, when consumer's needs are not satisfactorily met, it results in increase customer loyalty and trust in what is being offered by the organization, and consequently in sales performance and productivity.

The word fashion, may be defined as a prevailing style. According to Dickerson (2003), fashion is always based on a specific style, and that style however, does not become a fashion until it gains consumer acceptance. It implies that it is the consumers that provide the momentum to make things happen in the fashion industry. A fashion industry is a complex enterprise that is concerned with the design, production and marketing of men's, women's, children's apparels and other related items. Fashion generally is a global activity. The fashion industry has always been very competitive because of the large number of companies competing for the same business.

In Nigeria today, there is a craving for foreign ready-to-wear garments, instead of the domestically produced ones, especially by the upper and middle group of the society. This is due to the inability of the domestic fashion manufacturers to satisfy the Nigerian fashion consumers in terms of quality. Most of the domestic ready-to-wear garments are substandard, resulting in low patronage in fashion marketing,

and thus, posing a challenge to the fashion industry in Nigeria economy. This paper believes that the success and failure of the fashion industry, depends on the consumers' purchases of its products. It emphasizes that consumer spending will occur at a healthy pace, only when the ready-to-wear fashion products are of standard.

The paper therefore discusses the following sub-headings:
- What is Fashion?
- What is Marketing?
- Fashion Marketing
- The Responsibility of Fashion Marketers
- Historical Development of Ready-to-wear garments
- Causes of Sub-standard Ready-to-Wear Garments in Nigeria
- Conclusion
- Recommendations

What is Fashion?
The word, fashion implies different things to different people. According to Easy (2009), fashion means, to construct, mould, or make. It involves creating change and is defined as a succession of short-term trends or fad. This he argues to be due to the fact that industry must continually create new products and so change is intrinsic to fashion. Explaining further, he reports that fashion is the exercise of creative design skills, involving design component. Rogers and Gamans (1983), regard fashion as any form, custom or style. To Weber (2000), fashion is anything that is currently "in" vogue. In addition, he states that fashion usually means

clothes, but that there are fashions in hair styles, in home decoration and in the foods that are eaten. Rouse (1989), perceives fashion, not only referring to clothes and styles of appearance, but that there are "fashions" in other aspects of intellectual and social life, such as architecture, dancing, cooking, sociology and philosophy. She emphasizes that the expectation of change which characterize approaches to clothing styles pervade many aspects of man's social and intellectual life. Rath (1994), considers fashion as "a look or style of clothing" worn at a particular time by a particular group of people. In Sprole's (1981) view, "fashion is a temporary cyclical phenomena adopted by consumers for a particular time and situation".

All the above definitions of fashion stress two key features: change and acceptance. According to Jones (2006), it is the fact of change which produces so many problems for clothing manufacturer, while Easy (1995), emphasizes that the role of change in fashion marketing is crucial.

In Nigeria, the fashion manufacturers are always in a hurry to make money. They lack the patience necessary to create new design, styles or make innovative ideals that would bring about changes. Rather than creating their own designs, they go into imitation of foreign garments or ready-made fashion from other developed nation, which automatically make the Nigerian made garments inferior, lack originality and consequently, affect consumers acceptance negatively.

What is Marketing?
Marketing is a social and managerial process by which people and groups obtain what they need and want, through creating and exchanging products and value with others (Kotler, Bowen and Makens, 2006).

According to Kotler and Keller (2006), marketing deals with identifying and meeting human and social needs. Reported further was the American Marketing Association definition which is as followings: Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationship in ways that benefit the organization and its stake holders. They emphasis that one of shortest definitions of marketing is "meeting needs profitably". In Easy's (2009) view, Marketing is a business philosophy or way of thinking about the firm from the perspective of the customer or the potential customer. Marketing is a management process concerned with anticipating, identifying and satisfying customer needs in order to meet the long-term goals of the organization Etzel, Walker and Stanton (2001), opine that marketing can occur any time a person or organization strives to exchange something of value with another person or organization. Thus, the essence of marketing is a transaction or exchange. In this broad sense, marketing consists of activities designed to generate and facilitate exchanges intended to satisfy human or organizational needs or wants.

For consumers' satisfaction and effective marketing of Nigerian ready-

to-wear garments, there is need for the manufacturers to look into the consumers desires or tastes from time to time and produce accordingly.

Fashion Marketing

Fashion involves continual change, which has to do with the exercise of creative design skills, resulting in variety of products. One thing is for an industry to respond to the need for change, another thing is to be able to identify products that the customer needs and will buy. This is where marketing is essential to the fashion industry. Marketing provides the skills needed to ensure that the creative component is used to the best advantage, and profitably, bringing about business growth and success. According to Easy (2009), fashion marketing is the applicable of a range of techniques and a business philosophy that centres upon the customer and potential customer of clothing and related products and services in order to meet the long-term goals of the organization.

The Responsibility of Fashion Marketers

Fashion marketers perform a lot of responsibilities in ensuring that the marketing process gets to the final consumers. Their responsibilities according to Easey (2009), are outlined as follows:

- Fashion promotion
- Fashion distribution
- Fashion product positioning and pricing
- Fashion product management

- Fashion marketing research

Easey (2009), further explains the various responsibilities of the fashion marketers as follows:

Fashion Promotion: One of the functions of the fashion marketer is to promote or enhance the interest and desire of potential customers by using the right skills and strategies to stimulate their desires.

Fashion Distribution: The marketer must ensure that the products are well distributed to the various market places, using the right distribution outlets.

Product Positioning and Pricing: A fashion marketing decision must be made about the product position and pricing, taking into consideration, the strategic goals of the company as well as the price sensitivity of its customers.

Product Management: The fashion marketer must have knowledge and awareness of the company's cost of production, to enable him perform his marketing role.

Researching: A fashion marketer is involved in the investigation of the market shares of competitors and trends in those shares. This is done with the purpose of assessing the potential consumers.

Historical Development of Ready-To-Wear Fashion Products

According to Dickerson (2003), ready-to-wear fashion industry started with clothing for men in United States. It began in early 1800s, almost half a century before women's ready-to-wear had its beginning. It all started with the efforts of some enterprising individuals

who saw the need and proceeded to fill it. In some port cities such as, New Bedford, New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, a few venture some tailoring shops conceived the idea of producing and selling cheap ready-to-wear trousers, jackets, and shirts for sailors who needed to replenish their wardrobes inexpensively and immediately during their brief stops in port. These clothes wear poorly made in low-quality fabrics. The cutting was done in the dealer's shops, and the garments were then sent to local women for hand sewing. This early ready-made-clothing were referred to as "slops", a term from which the word sloppy developed.

Kidwell and Christian (1974), report that these ready-to-wear garments could be readily recognized about as far as the wearer could be seen. Consequently, there was a sort of shame in the purchase and wearer of such clothing, and it was considered almost disreputable to wear it. It was seen as a reflection or a supposed indication of poverty. Nevertheless, the market for ready-to-wear clothing soon expanded to serve bachelors who had no one at home to sew for them and plantation owners who needed cheap clothing for their slaves. Because there were no firms then existed that produced clothing for others to sell, these early shops functioned as retailers and manufacturers. Some of the proprietors were custom tailors who produced ready-to-wear clothing garments for cheaper grades of cloths in addition to carrying on their primary business of made-to-measure clothing.

As industrialization developed in the nineteenth century, cities grew, and a new mass market began to emerge among middle-class or white-collar city dwellers. To attract these customers, some of the more resourceful shop owners offered higher-priced and better-made garments. The quality of ready-to-wear cloths improved, and their acceptance increased.

Dickerson (2003), reports that the manufacturer of ready-to-wear is based on standardized sizes in sufficient variety so that almost any figure can be accommodated by one of them. This account relates that in the early years of the industry, each manufacturer worked out its own set of sizes and made garments to its own specifications, hoping to fit as many people possible. The fit of these early garments was far from perfect. When the U.S. government ordered for soldiers' uniform during the Civil War, because hand sewing would not keep pace with the Army's need, factories had to be built and equipped with the then-new sewing machines. In order to facilitate the production of its uniforms, the Army surveyed the heights and chest measurements of more than a million recruits, and thus provided the first mass of statistical data on the form and build of American men. After the war, the results of the Army study were made available to producers of men's civilian clothing. This put the sizing of men's ready-to-wear on a scientific basis and, by making improved fit possible, hastened the change from homemade and custom-made to factory-made garments.

Causes of the Production of Sub-standard Ready-to-Wear Garments in Nigeria

The causes of sub-standard ready-to-wear garments in Nigeria include the following:

1. *Low Quality Fabric:* Most Nigerian manufacturers use low quality fabrics which affect the durability of the ready-to-wear garments. Unlike other developed nations, such as London, where producer searches for fabrics that will evoke such response that will ultimately be acceptable to the consuming public (Waddell, 2004).

2. *Poor use of Colour:* The colour combinations most times are so poor compare to those of the foreign garments. Fashion decision in the primary market begins with colour. Gray and Williams (2006), opine that colour is a sensation, a mood, and one of its attributes is that, it helps to sell clothing. There lies failure or success of fashion marketing.

3. *Poor Garment Assembly:* This is either due to lack of focus during process or sewing production, or lack of skilled man-power, resulting in imperfect fit.

4. *Poor Design:* The skill of any good design lies in maximizing the value that can be added to a set of basic raw material. It is therefore dependent on the quality of the original design, its suitability for the market and the way it is made to meet customer's perceptions. Design in the fashion industry is crucial to its success (Easey 2006).

5. *Poor Packaging System:* Jones (2006), states that although the main function of packaging is that of protection, packaging has become intrinsic to the overall offering of the garment and its status. Packaging helps to reinforce the image with the customer when properly done, but this is not the case with most of our domestic garments.

6. *Poor Finishing:* Finishing according to Waddell (2004), is very necessary and can done by hand although is now mechanised with technical innovations in the developed nations. However, in Nigeria, most garment workers do not trim loose threads before the garments are sent to the market, making customers or consumers to view them as inferior.

7. *Lack of Pressing:* In some manufacturing companies, pressing takes place during assembling and is called, 'under pressing' although the usual practice is to press the finished garment and pasted by the quality controller and package ready for distribution (Waddell, 2004). In Nigeria, most of the garments are not even pressed to gain a pleasing appearance to customers, who will view finished items.

8. *Wrong Labelling of Sizes:* There is wrong labelling of sizes which result in garments not having good fit.

All these problems result in mad rush for foreign garments, making Nigeria to lose foreign earnings, and consequently, affecting our economy, negatively.

Conclusion
The paper concludes that the domestic Fashion Industry can contribute immensely to Nigerian economy, if the recommendations made below are implemented in other to upgrade the standard of the ready-to-wear garments in fashion marketing.

Recommendations
Based on the problems associated with the ready-to-wear garments produced in Nigeria, the following recommendations are hereby made:

1. The fashion industry should put quality control mechanism in place, both in-line and final inspection, to ensure that finished garments meet quality standards.
2. New computer technologies should be incorporated into virtually most aspects of the industry to improve efficiency and produce value for the consumer.
3. Regular training programmes should be organized for the fashion designers as most of them are not skilful due to limited literacy. Government should encourage the fashion industry by sending some of the designers overseas for training or bring very efficient resource persons to train them, in order to upgrade their literacy level in the area of creative design skills.
4. There should be re-orientation of the entire public on the need to patronize domestic ready-to-wear garments.
5. Manufacturers who handle all production processes, ranging from designing to sewing and assembling of garments parts, who are not ready for further training in other to enhance their creating skills for effectiveness should stop, as this result in sub-standard production.
6. Government and corporate bodies should encourage and sponsor periodical trade shows for manufacturers to show-case their lines, in order to promote the fashion industry and create competition within the manufacturers. As this is done, manufacturers will strive to maintain standard, and thus attract buyers from every part of the world including those Nigerian consumers who have disregard for them.
7. The manufacturers should learn to appreciate consumer's perception of the products and respond accordingly as the success or failure of the industry depends on their purchases.
8. The fashion firms should be encouraged to set up cooperative societies to enable them attract government attention and recognition in terms of policy reforms on importation of foreign fashion products.

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