

CHALLENGES FACED BY ACCESSORY ENTREPRENEURS IN ACCESSORIES PRODUCTION IN SWAZILAND

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Abstract

Accessories are items worn with garments to create and enhance a complete outfit. When accessories are worn, or co-ordinated with apparel they have to complement the wearer's look. However, accessories need to show creativity and style on their own, before they are collaborated with clothing. The purpose of the study was to assess the challenges faced by the accessory entrepreneurs in their production of various accessories for purposes of selling at Ezulwini Handcraft Market, in Swaziland. The specific objectives of the study were to: determine challenges faced by accessory producers; identify ways accessory producers could use to improve the marketing of their accessories products; and, to determine strategies to improve the accessories' production for business sustainability. The study was a descriptive research design; the sample size was 66 accessory producers who were selected systematically. A face-to-face semi-structured interview was conducted to collect data and its validity was checked by four experts in the Consumer Sciences Department. The instrument was reliable as its coefficient was 0.74 and the data were analysed using SPSS version 20. The results revealed that the challenges faced by accessory producers had a strong impact on the creation of accessories, as they resulted in the production of similar and less creative accessories. The results further revealed that finding an expert in the accessory business to teach the accessory producers the different techniques of accessories production would enhance the accessories production. In conclusion the accessories producers at Ezulwini Handcraft Market were challenged by the lack of relevant knowledge; and, funds to start and expand the businesses, as well as lack of supply shops around Ezulwini area. Furthermore, they did not advertise their products. Recommendations were that finding an expert in accessory production to teach the producers different techniques of accessory production would instil creativity in their approach of accessories design and production; and also, having a supply shop around Ezulwini area as well as creating a website for purposes of advertising their products would be beneficial for their businesses.

Keywords: accessories production, business sustainability, vendors and producers, creativity in design, entrepreneurs, challenges.

1. Introduction

Accessories have developed through the ages as functional items as well as important symbols of social standing or rank in society, they can complement a garment, create a statement, or be purely utilitarian [1; p. 6]. Accessories comprise of items of dress normally worn as an accompaniment to a basic body-covering garment such as dresses or suits [2] and thereby, create a complete outfit. Accessories can be used to create optical illusions to modify a person's appearance just like certain garments; they can draw a viewer's attention to one area of the body and shy away the other part of the body [3]. Accessories express individualism of the person, making both an impression and a statement about the wearer. When accessories are worn or co-ordinated with apparel they have to complement the wearer's look. Accessories prevent the

wearer's clothes from being plain and uninteresting because they add a creative and interesting look to the outfit [3].

However, this calls for accessories to show creativity and style on their own before they are collaborated with clothing. Therefore, the booming accessories business requires a large number of new accessory designers [1].

Accessories have to be creative, stylish and stand out so as to make the wearer's complete outfit look attractive, capturing and fashionable [4]. The Ezulwini Handcraft Market accessory vendors and producers stock and sell similar accessories from vendor to vendor, and thus no competition. Failure to advertise, market their accessories and attract customers and capture sales may lead to possible decline in the local informal accessories business. To guarantee the sustainability and development of the accessories business in the informal sector, one needs to acquire skills and creativity in the production of accessories. This will enable the producer to develop new ideas, create fashionable products that will meet, match the consumer's demand and capture the consumer's attention. With the rightful skills and creativity one can even go an extra mile in the creation of more desirable accessories and generate more income.

The purpose of the study was to identify the challenges faced by accessory producers at Ezulwini Handcraft Market. The specific objectives of the study were to: Determine challenges faced by the accessories producers in the production of accessories; Identify ways accessory producers can use to improve the marketing of their accessories; and, determine strategies to improve the accessory production. The study was conducted through interviews at the Ezulwini Handcraft Market, and this was costly. Given that some of the producers did not understand English language, there is a likelihood that misinterpretation of questions might have led to bias answers thus affecting study results.

2. Material & Methods

The descriptive research design study used systematic sampling technique, and 66 participants from one hundred and thirty two (132) Ezulwini Handcraft Market accessory producers were selected to participate in the study. A face-to-face semi-structured interview schedule consisting of four sections, mainly closed-ended questions and some open-ended questions was developed from objectives of the study for data collection. Section A was for demographic characteristics; Section B consisted of closed-ended questions on challenges faced by the accessory producers; Section C had closed-ended questions on ways of marketing and advertising of accessories; and, lastly Section D contained both closed and open-ended questions where respondents indicated strategies of improving accessory production.

The interview schedule was reviewed and attested to its content and construct validity by four Consumer Sciences' experts, within the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Swaziland (UNISWA). For consistency, clarity, suitability and appropriateness of the instrument pilot-testing was done with results shown in Table 1. The Cronbach's alpha was calculated on the domains of the interview schedule [5].

Table 1: Reliability coefficient

Domain	Number of items	Coefficient
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B. Challenges faced by accessory producers	13	0.72
C. Ways of marketing and advertising	6	0.75
D. Strategies of improving accessory production	9	0.71
Overall reliability coefficient	28	0.78

Data were collected and responses from 66 respondents and for each question were recorded by the interviewer. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 20) was used for data analysis to yield descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages that were presented in both tabular and narrative form according to the objectives of the study. The highest percentages were considered to have agreed with the statements.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Characteristics

Study results on demographic characteristics indicated that the majority of respondents (92.4%) were females with 39.4% of the respondents between the ages of 41-50, next age group of 31-40 were 36.4%; and, 65.2% of the accessory producers resided around Ezulwini, A majority (77.3%) of the respondents started the accessories' business because of unemployment; with 56.1% having been in the accessories business for 7-10 years.

3.2 Challenges Faced by Accessory Producers

Study results indicated that all 66 respondents created their own accessories and they all received some form training, 56.1% were trained by a relative or a friend, 40.9% of the respondents were taught by other women in the market place. Findings of the study indicated that 97% of the respondents self-funded their accessory business, while 3% were loaned by relatives. Daily sales were low and ranged between E100-E250 for 40% respondents as a result of the few customers who trickled in on a daily basis.

Respondents credited various sources of inspiration for their accessories' production such as cultural events, consumer needs; imagination and some were inspired by what others created; with magazines used by 45.5% of respondents; with 97% indicating they didn't sketch their designs before production. Lack of an easily accessible shop for accessories supplies led to material shortage and disadvantaged accessories' production; this was stated as a common problem by 45.5% respondents and 39.4% respondents got their raw materials from Durban which is far and costly. Thus this shortage and limited variety of materials led to use of beads and nylon thread by all (100%) respondents and thus drastically affecting creativity and variation in accessories produced. With 47% of the accessory producers who indicated that few consumers knew about their products, it's no wonder that patronage to the Ezulwini Handcraft Market was minimal thus probably having a majority of consumers preferring retail stores. Furthermore, lack of professional training and funds to start accessory businesses was an additional challenge.

3.3 Marketing and Advertising of Accessories

Study results showed that 72.7 % of the respondents believed that few consumers knew about their accessories and hence the reason for 5-10 customers on a daily basis. Findings of the study indicated that 57.6% of the respondents chose to sell their accessories at Ezulwini Handcraft Market because of the location of the market. Results of the study indicated that accessory producers at the stated Market did not advertise their products; however 92.4% stated that they thought advertising through various media would increase the numbers of customers they received daily, with 53% respondents favouring the creation of a website while 24.2% opted for television commercials. Study findings showed that respondents were not exporting their products, with 59.1% indicating that it was costly for them to engage in exportation while 30.3% didn't see any need to export.

3.4 Strategies to Improve Accessories Production

Study results indicated that 48.5% respondents stated that production could be enhanced by the availability of production materials. The findings indicated that 71.2% of the accessory producers disagreed that forming a partnership with someone would help increase the variety of accessories in their markets, but rather that finding someone to teach them different production techniques would improve their knowledge (95.5%). The study further revealed that 86.4% of the respondents thought it would be beneficial for their businesses to have a few supply shops around Ezulwini stocking a variety of accessories' raw materials to enable them create different and stylish accessories. While 95.5 % of the respondents thought that the use of different raw materials would broaden their creativity, results also indicated that 57.6% thought it would enhance their creativity while 72.7% indicated that it would improve their skills in the accessory production (Table 2).

Table 2: Strategies to enhance accessories production

Statement	Yes (f)	%	No (f)	%
Would forming a partnership help increase the variety of accessories in your market	19	28.8	47	71.2
Do you think using different materials could broaden your creativity	63	95.5	3	4.5
Could having a few supply shops around Ezulwini enable to create different and stylish accessories	57	86.4	9	13.6
Finding someone to teach you more about accessory production could improve your knowledge	63	95.5	3	4.5
Finding someone to teach you more about accessory production could improve your creativity	38	57.6	28	42.4
Finding someone to teach you more about accessory production could improve your skill	48	72.7	18	27.3

4. Conclusion

The location of Ezulwini Handcraft Market away from the consumer market was seen as a major contribution to few customers. Lack of relevant knowledge, funds to start and expand the business, and the unavailability of a supply shop for raw materials around Ezulwini area were challenges that highly contributed to the creation of similar and less creative accessories from vendor to vendor. Study results further showed that finding an expert, in the accessories business at Ezulwini Handicraft Market, to teach them the different techniques of accessories production would improve their knowledge, skill and creativity which would enable producers to create different and stylish accessories. Among the strategies suggested, finding an expert in the accessories business who would teach them different techniques of accessories production was considered very important.

This finding is in agreement with [6] who stated that financial challenges and lack of relevant knowledge, key skills and competencies for the production of variant fashion products disadvantaged the producers. Furthermore, the authors [6] indicated, it is recommended that, fashion designers take vocational training and practice as key elements to perfect performance and productivity. This therefore, calls for Ezulwini Handicraft Market accessory producers who are serious with their businesses, to find it necessary to acquire training that will assist them improve their skills. This can be done by organising themselves into groups and inviting experts from tertiary institutions and experienced fashion designers to assist them upgrade their skills and competencies in product development and product quality for a notable success in their accessories business ventures.

Findings revealed that accessory producers thought advertisement of their products through various media, as well as the creation of a website would be an avenue for showcasing their products to their advantage. This finding is in agreement with [7] who stated that marketing is the sequence of activities undertaken by an individual or an enterprise to persuade customers to buy his, her products for satisfying their needs and wants.

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Acknowledgement

The authors are grateful for the Ezulwini Handcraft Market accessory producers and vendors for their cooperation in participating in the interviews, and the instrument validators who made conducting this study possible.