Merchandising of Locally Made Fabrics: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Merchandising of textile products locally made in Nigeria is crucial for promoting economic growth, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. This study aims to investigate the challenges and prospect facing the merchandising of locally made textile products in our country Nigeria. This study focuses on identifying effective marketable and competitive measures. The study discussed merchandising processes, merchandiser's responsibilities, challenges affecting locally made fabrics and fashion, prospects of locally made fabrics. The study concludes that cultural authenticity and strategic collaboration will provide huge opportunities for local merchandisers of textile products. The paper recommends that textile artist should improve in merchandising strategies. Government should also find a way to support merchandiser of locally made fabrics and accessories. Finally the paper contributes to the body of knowledge as a source of reference for merchandising of Nigeria made textile products.

Keywords: Merchandising, Challenges, Prospect, Locally, Fabrics

Introduction

Merchandising and marketing are words that mean the same thing and could also be called business. Business is an art and also like a science. It's a matter of practical experience, foresight and judgment, all these give rise to luck. For anyone to be successful in business, you must master the basis of business success by learning the skills that will make you a successful merchandiser. Textile or fabric merchandising is the act of buying and selling of textile products, such as garments, fabrics of all kinds, accessories and more.

Merchandising of textile goods is different from making the textile pieces, a person who makes fabrics or fashion outfits is a textile artist and a creative designer. While a merchandiser is a person or group of persons that are into buying and selling of textile products., Merchandising of textile pieces could also be seen as the totality of what happens in the outside where **textile** art pieces are sold for gainful purpose**.** In discussing textile merchandising, fibers are not left out, fibers are cultivated, harvested and distributed by farmers who process yarns locally for production of woven fabrics to consumers in different weaving centres where woven fabrics and other related products are made. These processes moves smoothly because of the presence of the merchandiser. The raw material (fibre) move from the initial producer to another point according to the clients direction. According to Eicher (1976), the traditional textile arts exist side by side with expanding industrialized textile mills. Indigenous, hand-processed fibres and dyes are use by the traditional weavers and dyers.

According to Adam (1992), textile and garment production plays a major role in the economy of a country. Textile and clothing contributes to employment and especially in the regions where alternative jobs may be hard to get, merchandising and pricing of textile goods plays alongside. The prices offered by clients or customers should be justified based on processes, production materials and procedures during production. The merchandising of locally made fabric is a dynamic aspect of the fashion industry, embodying a fusion of traditions, innovation, and sustainability. Local fabric do not only carry cultural significance but also represent a commitment to ethical production and support for local

economy. However despite their potential, the merchandising of local fabrics presents various challenges alongside promising prospects.

The Merchandising

Merchandising is a major strength of garment business all over the world. Textile and fabrics will not be a successful business without merchandising. Textile merchandising is the process of planning and executing the process of price, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services associated with textiles to create an exchange that satisfies both customers and sales. The art institute of Chicago in its brochure describes textile merchandising as revolving around the business side of textiles and how the textile products gets to the end users. Kriger (1993) noticed that material marketing is the cycle of arranging and executing the idea of value, advancement and dissemination of thoughts, labour and products related to materials to make the trade that fulfills and sale (Emidun, et al, 2021). Just put it in the most common way of trading materials products. The term is additionally used to mean helping the retailers with exposure at the places of the show to assist them with augmenting their deals. This includes teaching them the best utilization of rack space, the arrangement of showing materials and exhortation on their purpose. It additionally includes the endeavour to convince customers at the retail location

Apparel Merchandising

Apparel merchandising is a process of development, executing apparel order from receiving to delivery through proper follow-up based on the needs of the target market. Apparel merchandising is seen as a process of understanding the market trends in order to make selection, develop products, taking and managing inventory in a bid to create appealing display of apparels and accessories for the purpose of sales and profits. In all merchandising is incomplete without accepting the product, brand and price. Merchandising process involves three parties, The Company, Buyer (consumer) and the merchandiser.

i. **The company**: Are the producers of product or the middle group between the producers and the merchandiser in some cases, the goods comes direct from the producers to the merchandiser.

ii. **The Buyer (consumer)**: The consumers are the group of people who order goods through the merchandiser. These units also have sales persons. The sales person must acquire good experience in salesmanship; his/her experience puts you in direct contact with the customers.

iii. **The Merchandiser**: Is the middle man between the company and the buyer. He/she takes order from the consumer (buyer) to the producer. The merchandiser takes care of all the requirements of the buyer.

Merchandiser's Responsibilities

The person who is totally involved in merchandising is called a merchandiser. The merchandiser coordinates with the design team to effectively present the product or product line. He or she develops colours and specifications also perform market research to determine the most effective ways to sell and promote the product. This person needs strong communication, negotiation skills, visual and analytical abilities. He or she also needs to be a creative and innovative thinker. He plans the activities to execute and dispatch the merchandise on time.

Challenges Affecting Local Made Fabrics and Fashions

The problems of merchandising of locally made fabrics in Nigeria are numerous; there are some challenges that are specific to the merchandising of locally made fabrics which are:

1. **Market Penetration and Awareness**: One of the foremost challenges lies in penetrating mainstream markets and raising awareness about local fabrics. Traditional fabrics often struggle to compete with mass-produced, globally marketed textiles. Limited exposure and visibility hinder consumer recognition and acceptance of locally made fabrics. Marketing practices and strategies are seen as a creative industry which includes advertising, distribution and sales. Marketing also involve the anticipation of customers future needs and want. Advertisement is a marketing communication that employs an openly sponsored, non-personal message to promote or sell products, services or ideas. Locally made textiles and accessories in Nigeria lack advertisement which is the major aspect of awareness and proper distributions strategies.

2. **Quality control and standardization:** Maintaining consistent standard is crucial for establishing trust and credibility among consumers. However, ensuring uniformity in locally made fabrics can be challenging due to variations in production techniques, materials, and craftsmanship.

3. **Access to technology and infrastructure:** Many local fabric producers operate in regions with limited access to modern technologies and infrastructures. Outdated equipment and inefficient production processes hinder stability and competitiveness in the global market.

4. **Supply chain management:** The complexity of local supply chains, involving multiple intermediaries and decentralized production units, poses logistical challenge. Poor supply chain management can lead to delays, inefficiencies, and increased production costs.

5. **Price competitiveness:** Local fabrics often face price competition from cheaper, mass-produced alternatives, particularly in price-sensitive markets. The price of raw materials is one of the biggest challenges facing local manufacturer of textile and fabrics.

6. **Branding:** This works like a compass, as compass is a directional tool so as brand name. Your brand name is an easy assess to a successful marketing in textile and fashion. Brand name could be an archetype, which means it can be a symbol, pattern, character and more that are recognizeable. Calderin (2017) posits that archetypes do help to establish common ground and a share language; they don't have to be reduced to stereotypes. They become more complex and interesting when you imbue them with personality traits and assign them physical characteristics. Personality comes through the tone of marketing and how sales staffs are trained to interact with customers. The physicality of a brand can be felt at every touchpoint-the product, packaging and space.

Prospects of Locally Made Fabrics

The way forward for merchandising of locally made fabrics are not far-fetched. The underlined points should be put into consideration and locally made fabrics, fashion and accessories will bum in textile industry within and outside our country.

1. **Raising demand for suitable and ethical fashion:** Growing consumer awareness and concern about sustainability and ethical, sourcing present significant opportunities for local fabric merchandising. Locally made fabrics, with their emphasis on artisan, craftsmanship and eco-friendly production practices, align well with this trend.

2. **Cultural heritage and authenticity:** Local fabrics possess inherent cultural values and authenticity, appealing to consumers seeking unique and culturally rich products. Locally made fabrics are customized and highly creative. For example the Akwete fabric which is a traditional woven fabric of Akwete people in Ukwa East Local Government Area of Abia State. Akwa ocha is also a woven fabric which identifies the wearer as an Aniocha indigene of Delta State. Aso-Oke is a woven fabric that is used to identify the western Nigerians (the Yoruba group). The Northern weavers are the Nupe, Okene, and Hausa. The Hausa and Yoruba weave are similar but the Hausa weave stylea are more intricate with great emphasis laid on geometric patterns Chukueggu (1998)These cultural fabrics keeps you at the right standing for cultural heritage. Apart from the woven fabrics mentioned above, dyeing is another cultural heritage for Nigerian fashion and clothing, Dyeing tradition is popular in Kano, Bida, Ilorin, Abiokuta and Okene. These tribes and ethnic groups have their different techniques, styles and methods of dyeing fabrics which automatically gives an end result for cultural identification. There are so many other cultural outfits that identify people of different geopolitical zone in Nigeria. Joe-Mgbakiri (2020), posits that, the wealth of an individual is measured according to your quality of traditional textiles.

3. **Collaborations and Partnerships:** Collaboration between local fabric producers, designers, and retailers can amplify visibility and market reach. Strategic partnerships with fashion brands and retailers enable local fabric merchants to tap into established distribution networks and reach a boarder

customer base. Calderin (2017) sees collaborations as you being determine the area you want to bring the fight to. Are you interested in setting yourself apart based on how bold, focused, or niece you can be? Will you be so disruptive, it would be impossible to compete with you? Can you reposition yourself as a collaborator instead of an adversary, changing the conversation from "us and them" to "we". As a collaborator, with this mindset the fabric and fashion merchandising will blossom.

4. **Government Support and Initiative:** Government initiatives in promoting indigenous industries and sustainable development can provide vital support to local fabric merchandising. Incentives such as funding, infrastructure, development, and policy reforms can bolster the competitiveness of local fabric enterprises.

5. **E-commerce and digital Marketing:** Leveraging e-commerce platforms and digital marketing channels facilitates broader market access and consumer engagement. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Youtube and many others enable local fabric merchants to showcase their products to a global audience, bypassing traditional barriers to market entry.

Conclusion

The merchandising of locally made fabrics presents great challenges and prospects reflecting the complexities of the global fashion landscape. While the hurdles such as market penetration, quality control, and price competitiveness persist, promising opportunities abound in the form of rising demand for sustainable fashion, cultural authenticity, and strategic collaborations will provide huge opportunities for local merchandisers of textile, fashion apparels and accessories. By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on emerging prospects, stakeholders can unlock the full potentials of local fabrics, creating a vibrant and sustainable ecosystem that celebrates tradition, innovation, and ethical production practices.

Recommendation

1. The study recommends that textile artist should improve in merchandising strategies.
2. The government should find a way to support the merchandising of locally made fabrics and accessories.

Contribution to Knowledge

1. The study serves as a source of reference for boosting merchandising of locally made textiles, fabrics and its accessories.
2. This study has laid down principles and standards for marketing of arts products and other locally made products in Nigeria.

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