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Digital Strategies for Sustainable Fashion: Insights from Emerging Ghanaian Fashion Designers

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Abstract

Purpose: This study explores the use of social media marketing by emerging fashion designers in Ghana, with a focus on how they leverage these platforms to promote sustainability in their designs. The research aims to understand the effectiveness of social media tools in building brand identity, fostering customer relationships, and expanding global reach for designers in Ghana's growing fashion industry.

Methodology/Design: The study employed a qualitative, phenomenology approach by conducting in-depth interviews with 52 emerging fashion designers based in Accra and Kumasi. The sample selection technique used in the study is non-probability purposive sampling. This approach was chosen to intentionally select participants who could provide relevant and diverse insights into the use of social media marketing to promote sustainable brands in the Ghanaian fashion industry.

Findings: The findings reveal that social media platforms, like Facebook, Instagram and TikTok, play a crucial role in connecting emerging designers with sustainability-conscious consumers. Designers use techniques like live-streaming, discovery reels, and hashtags to promote sustainability and build authentic brand identities. The study also highlights the power of influencers, hashtags and the global reach of social media in attracting international customers.

Practical and Social Implications: This research shows how emerging designers in Ghana can use social media to engage with a global audience and promote sustainable fashion practices. It also demonstrates the importance of cultural sensitivity when using social media tools like hashtags and emojis. The findings provide valuable insights for fashion designers looking to integrate social media marketing into their business strategies, contributing to the growth of sustainable fashion in Ghana and beyond.

Originality: This study is one of the first to examine the role of social media marketing in Ghana's emerging sustainable fashion sector. Focusing on the intersection of social media, sustainability, and fashion entrepreneurship offers new perspectives on how digital platforms are transforming the fashion industry in Africa. The study also highlights the potential for emerging designers to utilize cost-effective digital tools to compete on a global stage.

Keywords
Brand Identity, hashtags, marketing tools, phenomenology, social media, sustainable fashion practices.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Fashion, by its very nature, is an intricate and multidisciplinary field. Black (2009) describes it as a domain that seamlessly spans two- and three-dimensional design, textile development, cutting-edge technologies, and traditional craftsmanship. It also intersects with artisan skills, business strategies, production processes, marketing, global economics, visual culture, history, and even social anthropology.

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Across the globe, scholars have long debated the boundaries of the fashion industry and the terminology used to describe it. Cross (1992) sheds light on the diverse ways fashion is understood across cultures, using terms such as clothing, apparel, dress, and costume. In recent years, research within the fashion sector has expanded to encompass emerging areas such as product design, engineering, sales and marketing, and even automotive development.

However, one of the most notable shifts has been the increasing focus on sustainable fashion practices and the role of digital platforms and e-commerce in their promotion (Rathore, 2019; Guercini et al., 2018). Blázquez (2014) emphasises the importance of physical store environments for branding and customer engagement within the fashion industry. However, the rise of e-commerce has transformed the landscape, particularly for sustainable fashion. Scholars like Pezderka and Sinkovics (2011) highlight the internet's pivotal role in facilitating global business growth. Moreover, social media has emerged as a powerful tool in fashion marketing, enabling the promotion of ethical and sustainable practices (Melumad et al., 2019; Peng et al., 2018). Guercini et al. (2018) further argue that evolving technologies, shifting consumer behaviours, and adaptive marketing strategies drive this change, with social media playing a critical role in fostering sustainability-oriented e-commerce.

The global expansion of e-commerce offers significant opportunities for the fashion industry to integrate ethical practices on a larger scale (Reynolds, 2002). Social media, a tool widely adopted across the world (Ho & Ito, 2019), enables consumers to engage in conversations about sustainability, share ideas, and advocate for responsible fashion (Safko & Brake, 2009). As Rathod et al. (2022) and Vrontis et al. (2021) note, these platforms have disrupted traditional industry-consumer power dynamics. Influencers, in particular, have become critical voices in shaping consumer behaviour and promoting sustainable fashion. Recent studies delve into the relationship between social media and marketing. Ge and Gretzel (2018) explored the use of emojis as tools for consumer engagement, while Erz et al. (2018) examined why users hashtag on Instagram. Lin et al. (2018) investigated the role of influencers in industrial goods promotion, insights that are also relevant to sustainable fashion. However, Vrontis et al. (2021) stress the need for more qualitative research in low-income countries, where data on social media's role in sustainable fashion marketing is scarce (Dzhafarova & Trofimenko, 2019; Silva et al., 2019). Research to date has predominantly focused on high-income countries, often relying on quantitative methods.

Ghana's fashion industry exemplifies this gap in research. The sector is a vibrant blend of traditional craftsmanship and modern design, reflecting the country's rich cultural heritage. However, as Adwoa (2022) points out, sustainability faces significant challenges in this context. Limited access to resources and training prevents many Ghanaian designers from adopting sustainable practices, while the high costs of sustainable materials, often imported make sustainability financially burdensome. This trade-off between affordability and sustainable production presents a persistent dilemma for small-scale designers. Consumer awareness also poses a challenge. While global interest in sustainable fashion is rising, many Ghanaian consumers remain unfamiliar with the concept, making it difficult for local designers to market their products effectively or justify higher prices (Amankwah, Appiah, Frimpong, & Kent, 2023). At the same time, social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube are becoming vital tools for fashion marketing in Ghana (Yaro, 2022). However, as Yaro (2022) notes, the use of these platforms for promoting sustainability remains underexplored, particularly by emerging designers who may lack the resources or expertise to leverage them fully.

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This study focuses on emerging Ghanaian fashion designers as key players in shaping the industry's future. In this context, "emerging fashion designers" refers to individuals who are fresh out of fashion school or apprenticeship programs. These designers represent a new generation of creative talent entering the Ghana fashion industry. They are at a critical juncture in their careers, equipped with foundational skills and innovative ideas but still navigating the practical realities of building sustainable practices and establishing a market presence. With their connections to local stakeholders, including established designers, brands, and influencers, these designers are well-positioned to explore the potential of social media for promoting sustainability. Their perspectives on social media and sustainability are particularly valuable, as they are likely to adopt innovative approaches to address the challenges of resource constraints, affordability, and consumer awareness. The research seeks to address the following questions:

1. Are emerging fashion designers in Ghana willing to use social media marketing to promote their sustainable fashion?
2. What social media techniques are most effective in promoting sustainable practices within the fashion industry in Ghana?
3. How can social media platforms enhance the financial sustainability of fashion designers in Ghana?
4. How does social media influence consumer behaviour towards sustainable fashion products in Ghana?

By addressing these questions, this study aims to provide insights into how Ghana's fashion industry can leverage social media to overcome its sustainability challenges and pave the way for a more ethical and economically viable future.

2 | METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study, guided by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), aimed to assess the influence of sustainable social media marketing on the Ghanaian fashion industry. With a particular focus on Phenomenology, Groenewald (2004) discusses this qualitative approach as understanding the lived experiences of individuals and capturing their personal perspectives on particular phenomena. In the context of this research, it allows for an in-depth exploration of how emerging fashion designers experience and perceive social media marketing, particularly regarding sustainability. By using phenomenology, the study seeks to uncover the meaning behind designers' interactions with social media platforms and how they incorporate sustainability into their practices. This approach emphasizes subjective experiences, making it ideal for understanding the challenges and opportunities designers face in the digital landscape.

The research then utilised semi-structured interviews, as recommended by Adams (2015) and Blandford (2013), to gather in-depth and flexible responses from participants. This interview format allows for a mix of predetermined questions and the freedom for participants to express their thoughts in detail, fostering a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives. The non-probability purposive sampling method, as discussed by Showkat and Parveen (2017), was employed to intentionally select participants who could offer relevant and diverse insights into the use of social media marketing and sustainability in the Ghanaian fashion industry. The use of this sampling method was crucial in

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selecting participants who could offer relevant insights into the intersection of social media marketing and sustainability in the Ghanaian fashion industry.

The study aimed to focus on emerging designers who were fresh from school and open to incorporating social media into their design practices. This approach ensured that the selected participants had a direct and practical understanding of both the challenges and opportunities related to sustainability in fashion, particularly within the context of social media use. By intentionally selecting participants with this profile, the study ensured that the insights gathered were directly relevant to the use of social media in promoting sustainable fashion within the Ghanaian context. These designers, having been educated with contemporary tools and trends, are more likely to adopt new technologies and marketing strategies that align with global shifts towards sustainability. Their openness to integrating social media into their business practices allowed for an in-depth exploration of how they use these platforms to communicate their sustainability goals and engage with eco-conscious consumers, making their perspectives vital for understanding the role of social media in the industry.

2.1| Participants

The study focuses on recently graduated fashion designers in Ghana. These participants were selected based on their experience with social media marketing and their potential to offer varied perspectives due to their diverse cultural backgrounds and regional influences. The aim was to gather a heterogeneous sample that could provide comprehensive insights into the integration of sustainable social media marketing within the fashion industry through fashion education.

2.2| Data Collection

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, each lasting approximately 25 minutes. This format allowed for flexibility in questioning, enabling the researchers to explore specific topics in depth while still covering a broad range of issues relevant to the study. The interviews aimed to uncover personal experiences, perceptions, and strategies related to sustainable social media marketing.

2.3| Demographic characteristics of participants

In total, 52 participants were interviewed in this study. The ages of the participants ranged between 20 and 38, with the majority (30/52) found within the 20-25 age bracket. Figure 1(a) shows the age distribution of all 52 participants. Of the total participants, females constituted the majority (38/52) against their male (14/52) counterparts (see Figure 1(b)).

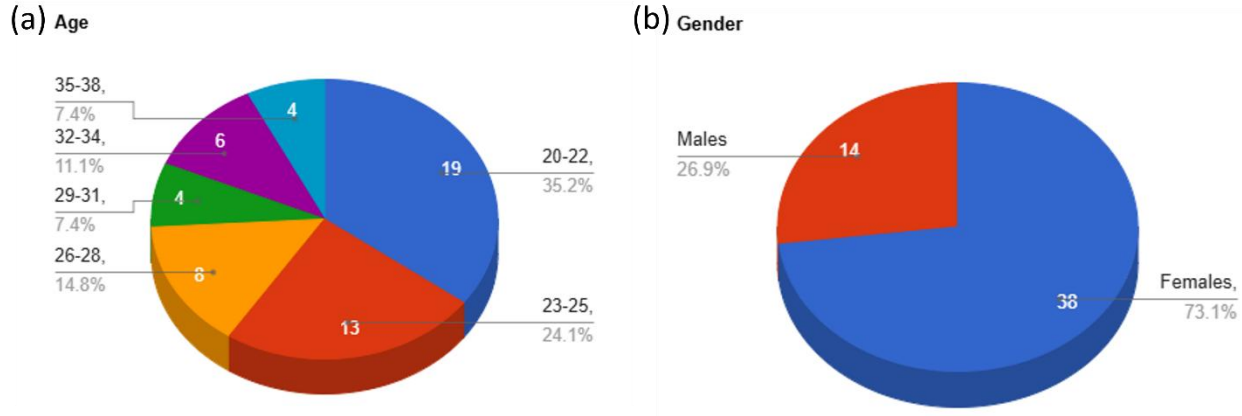


Figure 1. (a) Age distribution of participants, (b) Gender distribution of participants

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The higher number of female participants in this study on the use of social media in fashion can be attributed to the historical association of fashion with women, where females have often been more involved and targeted by the fashion industry (Siregar et al., 2023). Anand (2020) argues that females tend to engage more with fashion trends, which may translate into higher usage of social media for fashion-related content. Additionally, cultural and social expectations have traditionally emphasized women's appearance, making fashion more central to their daily lives and self-expression (Edelsbrunner, 2023).

However, it's important to note that this distribution is specific to this study. The male population in the fashion industry and social media usage for fashion in Ghana could increase in the future as evolving cultural norms encourage more men to engage in fashion and its digital platforms (Kim, Cho, & Park, 2022). Cultural shifts towards inclusivity and the breaking down of traditional gender roles are leading to greater male participation in fashion and its digital spaces (Rahman, Hu, & Fung, 2023). The findings are presented using pseudonyms to personalize the verbatim report and cancel the identities of participants in spite of the verbatim quotation.

The study was primarily conducted in Accra and Kumasi, where many of the country's fashion schools and enterprises are situated. 30/52 participants were situated in Accra and 22/52 from Kumasi as shown in Figure 2. Both locations serve as a hub for various educational institutions due to several factors.

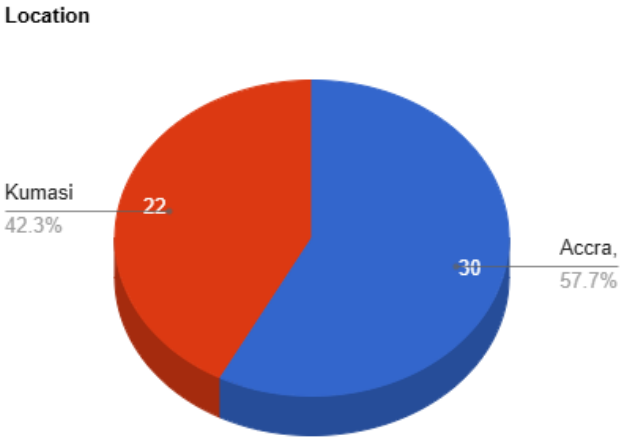


Figure 2. Participant location distribution

As the capital city, Accra offers access to a wide range of resources and opportunities, including governmental and industry support, funding, and infrastructure. These are vital for establishing and operating many educational institutions. Accra's status as a cultural and economic centre attracts students and professionals from across the country and beyond, with many students coming from different parts of Africa. This creates a diverse and vibrant learning environment, enhancing the exchange of ideas and fostering creativity.

Moreover, the presence of industries related to fashion and design in Accra provides students with valuable networking and internship opportunities. Students can collaborate with industry professionals, participate in internships, and gain hands-on experience, which is crucial for their development. The concentration of fashion schools in Accra underscores the city's importance as a centre for education and innovation in the field of fashion. The city's dynamic environment, combined with its economic and

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cultural resources, makes it an ideal location for studying the integration of sustainable social media marketing in fashion education.

Kumasi, a city celebrated for its rich cultural heritage, is not only a centre of learning but also a key player in fashion education. The city's cultural diversity and traditions deeply shape the teaching and creative practices in its fashion schools, giving students a unique blend of traditional and modern fashion influences. Located in the heart of the Ashanti Region, Kumasi benefits from its strategic position in one of Ghana's most culturally and economically vibrant areas.

Kumasi's reputation as an educational hub for fashion studies in higher institutions attracts students from across the country, creating a melting pot of ideas and perspectives in the fashion industry. This blend of cultures and the city's strong educational infrastructure provide an ideal environment for studying the evolving landscape of fashion, particularly in areas like sustainable social media marketing. By learning in Kumasi, students not only gain technical skills but also a deep understanding of the cultural nuances that shape fashion in Ghana.

Accra's cosmopolitan environment and Kumasi's cultural depth provides a comprehensive backdrop for the research, ensuring that the findings are reflective of the diverse influences and practices within the Ghanaian fashion industry. This dual-city approach allows the researchers to explore how sustainable social media marketing is integrated into fashion education across different contexts, identifying unique challenges and opportunities.

2.4| Data Analysis Approach

Braun and Clarke (2006) outlined a method for analysing data, which involves gathering text and words and organizing them into categories of information. This process, known as thematic analysis, captures the diversity of ideas in the collected data. Beyond simply categorizing information, this approach allows for delving deeper into the underlying meanings and nuances present within the text. Codes are initially generated based on the topic guide, and these codes are independently assigned to review the transcripts. This approach facilitates a systematic exploration of the data, identifying key themes and patterns within the text, ultimately leading to a comprehensive understanding of the information being gathered. Thematic analysis in this study followed the six-phase approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) (See Figure 3 for simplified flow chart): (A). Familiarization with Data: All interview transcripts were read and re-read to identify initial ideas and patterns. This step helped to ensure an in-depth understanding of the data. (B). Initial Code Generation: A coding framework was developed based on the research objectives and key areas identified during the familiarization process. Codes were assigned systematically to segments of data across the entire dataset. (C). Theme Search: Related codes were grouped together into potential themes. Themes were constructed to capture key patterns that addressed the research questions, focusing on participants' experiences and perceptions. (D). Theme Review: Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data. This step included discussions between the researchers to ensure consistency and reduce bias in theme development. (E). Theme Definition and Naming: Each theme was clearly defined and named to reflect its essence, ensuring clarity and alignment with the research objectives. (F). Report Writing: The finalized themes were used to structure the findings, supported by direct quotes from participants to validate interpretations.

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Figure 3. The six thematic Analysis Steps based on Braun and Clark (2006)

The study implemented measures to ensure reliability and consistency, including colleague validation, inter-coder reliability, and an audit trail. Themes were cross-checked with qualitative research colleagues, and discrepancies were resolved by both researchers. This ensured transparency and replication of the coding process.

2.5| Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, ethical considerations were rigorously upheld. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained before the interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured, and participants were given the right to withdraw from the study at any point. By employing this robust methodology, the researchers aimed to gain thorough insights into the integration of sustainable social media marketing in the Ghanaian fashion industry, identifying areas for improvement and potential future developments.

3 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study are organised into sub-themes that elaborate on the key issues emerging from the main themes. To further simplify and enhance the clarity of the data, Figure 4 visually represents the relationship between the main themes and their corresponding sub-themes. This figure serves as a clear guide for readers, making it easier to grasp the connections and distinctions between the various elements discussed in the study.

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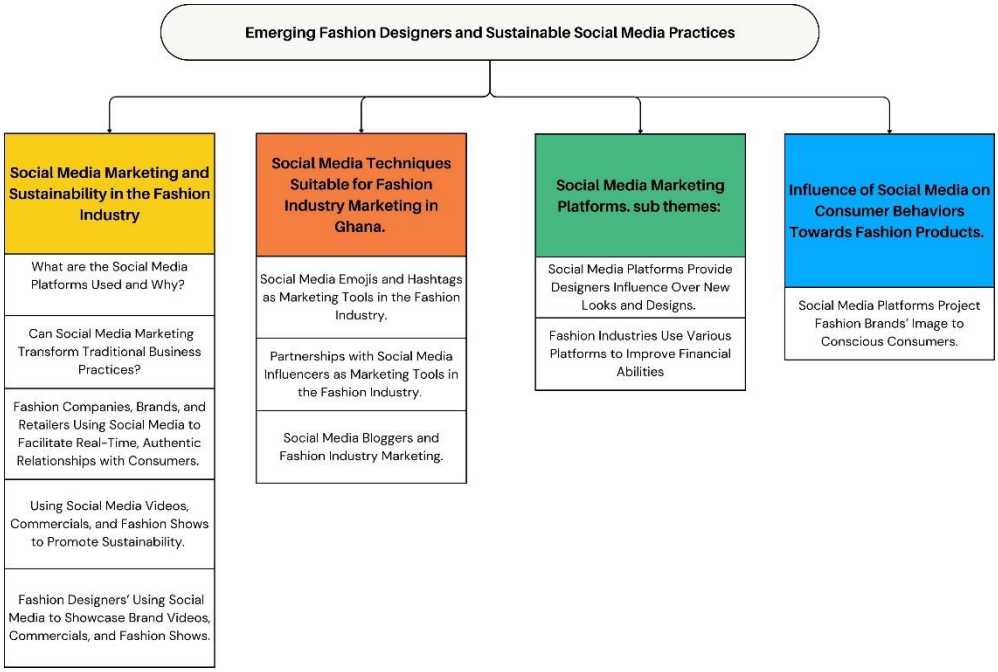


Figure 4. Themes and sub-themes emerging from the study

3.1 | Theme 1: Social Media Marketing and Sustainability in the Fashion Industry

This theme examines the perspectives of emerging fashion designers in Ghana regarding their willingness to use social media marketing to promote fashion and sustainability. Four sub-themes emerged: the social media platforms they use and their reasons for using them; the potential of social media marketing to transform traditional business practices; the role of social media in fostering authentic relationships between brands and consumers; and the use of social media videos, commercials, and fashion shows to promote sustainable practices.

3.1.1| Social Media Platforms Used and Why

Participants highlighted Instagram and Facebook as their primary platforms for promoting clothing and other fashion items. Instagram was especially valued for its visually driven content, which aligns with the aesthetics-focused nature of the fashion industry. Features like stories, reels, and shoppable posts were praised for enhancing user engagement and enabling real-time interaction. King, a participant, remarked, "I find Instagram provides more information and styles on fashion trends and sustainability compared to Facebook." Facebook was noted for its broader user base and tools like groups, pages, and the marketplace, which allow for detailed interactions and community building. Cynthia shared, "Both Facebook and Instagram give global exposure to new fashion designs and ideas on sustainable fashion practices." Participants agreed that these platforms are vital for showcasing collections, following designers, and staying updated on fashion sustainability trends.

3.1.2| Transforming Traditional Business Practices

A majority of participants (45 out of 53) believed social media marketing could revolutionize traditional business practices by expanding global market access and promoting sustainability. Social media was seen as a dynamic and cost-effective alternative to traditional methods. Agnes noted, "Most people are on social media; even those who cannot read can watch videos and see pictures. Designers can use these platforms to promote sustainable practices compared to fixed-location shops." Social media's ability to quickly adapt to trends and educate consumers about sustainability was highlighted as

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a key advantage. However, a few participants, like Adam, argued for the coexistence of traditional methods: "My mother ran a successful tailoring business without social media, so while it's beneficial, traditional methods can still succeed."

3.1.3| Building Real-Time, Authentic Relationships

Participants unanimously agreed that social media enables brands to build authentic relationships through transparency and interaction. Anita observed, "I've seen live streams where designers show sustainable fashion and teach customers how to shop for eco-friendly materials without meeting them in person." By sharing behind-the-scenes content, such as sourcing eco-friendly materials, brands can align with consumers' values and foster trust. However, some participants expressed concerns about the limitations of digital interactions. One participant noted, "It's harder to build lasting relationships online; in-store experiences still play a crucial role."

3.1.4| Promoting Sustainability Through Videos, Commercials, and Fashion Shows

Participants emphasised the effectiveness of social media videos and live-streamed fashion shows in promoting sustainable practices. These tools allow designers to showcase sustainable materials, ethical production techniques, and waste reduction methods. Georgina stated, "With social media videos, designers save the stress of explaining designs; they just show the process." Participants recognized the cost-effectiveness and global reach of these methods, which have become essential for educating consumers and promoting eco-friendly fashion.

3.2 | Theme 2: Social Media Techniques for Fashion Marketing in Ghana

This theme explored suitable social media techniques for marketing in the Ghanaian fashion industry. Three sub-themes emerged: emojis and hashtags, influencer partnerships, and bloggers' roles.

3.2.1| Emojis and Hashtags as Marketing Tools

Participants emphasized the role of emojis and hashtags as powerful tools for enhancing social media engagement and summarizing key messages effectively. Rebecca observed, "Emojis and hashtags make posts more attractive, especially for sustainable collections," pointing to their ability to capture attention and convey themes in a visually appealing and concise manner. These tools were seen as particularly useful for promoting eco-friendly fashion by making content more relatable and shareable. However, Mavis urged caution, warning against the overuse of emojis and hashtags, which can clutter posts and dilute their impact. She suggested that designers collaborate with social media experts to ensure clear and professional communication while maintaining an engaging tone.

Some participants acknowledged the need for further training on how to optimize the use of these tools. They expressed interest in workshops or tutorials to better understand hashtag strategies and the appropriate use of emojis to enhance messaging for sustainable fashion campaigns. This blend of creativity and strategic expertise was seen as essential for effective digital marketing in the evolving fashion landscape.

3.2.2| Influencer Partnerships

Participants unanimously acknowledged the value of influencer partnerships in promoting sustainable fashion. Dorcas emphasised the impact of strategic collaborations, stating, "The right influencers can promote brands, especially those advocating sustainability." These partnerships were seen as instrumental in expanding the reach of sustainable fashion messages to diverse audiences. Rosemary

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proposed prioritizing relatable figures over supermodels to foster authenticity and deeper connections with consumers. She argued that influencers who reflect the values and everyday experiences of their followers are better positioned to inspire trust and drive engagement with sustainable brands.

Georgina highlighted influencers' unique ability to showcase sustainable designs effectively through curated content that blends storytelling with visual appeal. By demonstrating how sustainable pieces can be seamlessly integrated into daily wardrobes, influencers help demystify sustainability, making it more accessible and aspirational for their audiences. The participants agreed that leveraging influencers who resonate with target demographics can enhance brand credibility, amplify visibility, and encourage widespread adoption of sustainable practices in the fashion industry.

3.2.3| Bloggers' Roles in Fashion Marketing

Social media bloggers were mentioned as pivotal players in promoting sustainability and organizing events that amplify the visibility of eco-conscious brands. Cynthia highlighted their influence, stating, "Bloggers provide detailed information about sustainable brands through videos and photographs, making it easier for consumers to connect with the values behind the products." Participants recognized bloggers' storytelling capabilities as a powerful tool for bridging the gap between designers and consumers. Through engaging narratives, bloggers not only highlight the craftsmanship and sustainability of products but also create emotional connections that enhance the appeal of sustainable practices. By showcasing the journey of sustainable designs, from concept to completion, bloggers effectively inspire audiences to embrace more ethical consumption habits.

Moreover, their ability to leverage visually compelling content and personal experiences ensures that sustainability is not just a concept but a relatable and desirable lifestyle choice for their followers. This positions bloggers as key collaborators for designers seeking to promote their brand ethos and drive the adoption of sustainable practices in the fashion industry.

3.3 | Theme 3: Social Media Platforms and Financial Sustainability

3.3.1| Influence Over New Designs

Participants emphasised how social media platforms influence new designs and promote sustainability. Dorcas cited Pinterest as a source of inspiration, while Abi noted the global audience's demand for sustainable options. Christabel highlighted the platforms' role in encouraging innovation and adapting to trends.

3.3.2| Financial Opportunities

Participants emphasised platforms like YouTube and Instagram as powerful tools for monetisation, engagement, and driving financial sustainability in the fashion industry. These platforms were highlighted for their ability to reach vast audiences while allowing designers to showcase their creativity and commitment to sustainable practices. Ama stated, "YouTube allows designers to monetise content, enhancing financial sustainability," pointing out that the platform's monetisation features, such as ad revenue, sponsorships, and memberships, provide an additional income stream for designers. Instagram, with its visually appealing format and interactive features, was identified as a valuable platform for building a brand's identity, attracting clients, and driving sales. Participants noted that Instagram's shoppable posts, reels, and stories enable designers to create a seamless customer journey from inspiration to purchase.

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Regular posting of high-quality, engaging content was seen as a critical strategy for maintaining relevance and building a loyal audience. By showcasing behind-the-scenes processes, sustainable production methods, and new collections, designers can position themselves as transparent and trustworthy brands. Participants also stressed the importance of gathering consumer feedback through these platforms. This feedback helps designers refine their offerings, align them with consumer preferences, and incorporate sustainable practices that resonate with their target audience. Edmund pointed out, "Social media platforms are not just marketing tools; they are an extension of the designer's brand, enabling real-time interactions and fostering relationships that can drive long-term financial success." By leveraging these tools effectively, designers can improve financial outcomes while promoting a more sustainable fashion industry.

3.4 | Theme 4: Influence on Consumer Behaviour

3.4.1| Projecting Brands to Conscious Consumers

Participants highlighted the power of social media in connecting fashion brands with environmentally conscious consumers, emphasising its role as a bridge between sustainable practices and target audiences. Akua suggested prioritising platforms that attract sustainability-focused communities, such as Pinterest and TikTok, where eco-conscious users often search for and share ideas about ethical fashion. "It's about meeting consumers where they are already engaging in discussions about sustainability," she noted. Fatima proposed an additional strategy of joining niche fashion groups and communities on platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn. These groups offer valuable networking opportunities, increased visibility, and a space to share brand stories, sustainable initiatives, and products with an audience already invested in ethical and sustainable practices.

Edmund emphasised the utility of apps and tools that integrate with social media platforms to gather valuable consumer insights. "Apps like polls, feedback forms, and analytics tools can help brands understand their audience better," he explained. By using these tools, designers can refine their offerings, ensure alignment with sustainable values, and enhance their practices based on consumer expectations. Collectively, these strategies position social media as not only a marketing channel but also a platform for meaningful engagement and continuous improvement in sustainability efforts.

4 | ANALYSIS

The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), developed by Icek Ajzen in 1991, provides a valuable framework for understanding how social media influences consumer behaviour towards sustainable fashion. This theory suggests that human actions are guided by three kinds of considerations: attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In the context of sustainable fashion in this study, social media can influence consumer attitudes toward sustainable consumption by showcasing eco-friendly practices, highlighting societal norms related to sustainability, and demonstrating how easy or achievable sustainable choices are (e.g., via influencers or brands showing how to integrate sustainable fashion into daily life). This theory can be used to understand why consumers might choose to support sustainable fashion brands based on social media influence.

In the case of sustainable fashion in Ghana, social media has the power to influence attitudes towards sustainable consumption. By showcasing eco-friendly practices through videos, commercials, and live-streaming events, social media platforms help communicate the value and necessity of sustainability in fashion. Participants in the study noted that tools such as live-streaming fashion shows and video content

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are more effective than traditional marketing methods in conveying sustainable practices. This aligns with the findings of Vladimirova et al. (2023), who highlighted how social media has become a key driver in encouraging consumers to engage with sustainable fashion. Through visual and textual content, social media provides a platform for designers to display their sustainability goals and eco-conscious designs, thereby shaping consumer attitudes and fostering positive perceptions about sustainable fashion.

Subjective norms, the social pressure to engage in certain behaviours, are also significantly influenced by social media. Social media platforms serve as spaces where influencers, peers, and brands collectively endorse sustainable fashion practices. The presence of influencers who actively promote eco-friendly fashion choices sets a societal expectation that sustainability should be prioritized. Zhao et al. (2022) further emphasized how sustainable fashion brands use social media to communicate their sustainability goals. This creates an environment where consumers feel a social obligation to support brands that align with ethical and sustainable values. As Kochhar (2020) and Fetais et al. (2022) suggest, by consistently showcasing their sustainable designs on social media, emerging designers can establish a unique brand identity that appeals to eco-conscious consumers, thereby reinforcing the normative influence of sustainability.

The perceived behavioural control component of TPB refers to individuals' perceptions of how easy or difficult it is to perform a behaviour. Social media helps make sustainable fashion more accessible by demonstrating how easy and achievable sustainable choices can be. For instance, brands and influencers often highlight sustainable fashion in a way that demonstrates how consumers can seamlessly integrate sustainable practices into their everyday lives. This could include styling tips, sustainable shopping guides, and brand showcases that simplify the process of making sustainable fashion decisions. This aspect is reflected in the study, where designers noted that social media tools such as live streaming and direct messaging allow them to engage with their audience in real-time, gather feedback, and address consumer concerns directly, thus enhancing consumers' sense of control over their fashion choices.

Furthermore, social media platforms allow emerging designers in Ghana to break geographical barriers and expand their reach globally, as highlighted by Anand (2020). Platforms like Instagram and TikTok enable designers to reach international customers who are interested in sustainable fashion, showcasing their work beyond local boundaries. As social media can facilitate global networking and partnerships, designers in Ghana can connect with eco-conscious consumers and industry professionals worldwide. The Theory of Planned Behavior informs this part of the analysis by highlighting how the availability of these global opportunities increases consumers' perceived control over their purchasing behaviours. The easy access to information about sustainable fashion, along with the ability to engage directly with designers and brands, empowers consumers to make informed choices.

Additionally, the study identified effective social media techniques, such as sustainability-focused emojis and hashtags, as crucial tools in shaping consumer behaviour. Hashtags like #EcoFashion, #SustainableStyle, and #EthicalFashion serve as powerful tools for communication, aligning brands with sustainability while reaching a broader audience. As Vladimirova et al. (2023) and Kochhar (2020) suggest, visual and concise messaging on social media platforms enhances the ability of brands to communicate their sustainable practices. Emojis further personalize this messaging, making sustainability feel more relatable and engaging. However, as Silva et al. (2023) note, designers need to be culturally aware when using hashtags. Since hashtags can carry different meanings across cultures, designers need to ensure they use them in ways that are authentic and aligned with their values. This

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attention to cultural nuance can increase the effectiveness of social media marketing and foster a stronger emotional connection with consumers, aligning with the subjective norms aspect of TPB.

The study also emphasizes how social media platforms serve as essential tools for designers to launch sustainable fashion concepts and engage with their audiences. This finding is consistent with Zhao et al. (2022), who argue that social media provides brands with strategic advantages, especially when promoting sustainable practices. By using targeted advertisements, discovery reels, and live streaming, designers can effectively attract high-profile clients and build brand loyalty. These tools allow designers to engage their followers in real-time conversations about sustainability, further enhancing the perceived behavioural control of consumers. By staying updated on the latest sustainable fashion trends through social media, designers can adapt their offerings to meet consumer demands and maintain their competitiveness in the market.

To enhance the practical implications of the findings, designers must integrate measurable success metrics such as increased sales, customer engagement, and environmental impact. While the study highlights the benefits of social media marketing in promoting sustainable fashion, defining and quantifying these outcomes can provide a clearer understanding of social media's effectiveness. Potential increased sales can be measured through social media-driven campaigns, including promotions or direct sales features on platforms like Instagram and TikTok. By tracking conversion rates and sales figures following sustainability-focused posts, designers can quantify the impact of social media marketing on revenue generation.

Customer engagement is another critical metric, which can be quantified by analysing metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and overall interaction rates with sustainability-related content. A higher level of engagement generally correlates with greater brand loyalty and stronger community ties, as indicated by Fetais et al. (2022). This can be tracked through analytics tools provided by social media platforms, offering insights into the effectiveness of content in fostering meaningful connections with consumers. Next, measurable environmental impact can be assessed by tracking the adoption rate of sustainable fashion practices among consumers. For example, tracking the use of sustainability-focused hashtags like #EcoFashion and surveying audiences on their awareness and adoption of sustainable products could quantify shifts in attitudes towards sustainability.

4.1 | Challenges and limitations of using social media for sustainable fashion marketing

While social media has become a powerful tool for promoting sustainable fashion in Ghana, some respondents mentioned it's important to acknowledge the challenges and limitations of this. Several factors constrain the effectiveness and reach of social media marketing for sustainable fashion in Ghana. Opoku and Baiden (2023) emphasise that many Ghanaians, especially those in rural regions, lack reliable internet access, limiting their exposure to sustainable fashion content on social media platforms. Biela-Weyenberg (2023) also emphasizes the urban-rural digital divide means that sustainable fashion messaging may not reach a significant portion of the population, potentially excluding them from the conversation and market. The research also acknowledges the cost of internet access poses another significant barrier. High data costs in Ghana can restrict consumer engagement with sustainable fashion content on social media as discussed by Amoah and Abdul Bashiru (2020). They claim expensive internet

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services may limit the time users spend browsing and interacting with sustainable fashion brands online, reducing the effectiveness of marketing efforts.

Ironically, the digital marketing efforts aimed at promoting sustainable fashion have their own environmental footprint. Shen (2021) highlights how energy consumption from data centres and network infrastructure supporting social media platforms contributes to carbon emissions. Zou (2024) discusses the production and disposal of electronic devices used to access social media create electronic waste, which can be particularly problematic in developing countries like Ghana. To address challenges in social media marketing for sustainable fashion, brands can integrate offline and online strategies to reach wider audiences, create data-light content for accessibility, and establish community partnerships to bridge the digital divide. Promoting sustainable digital practices and implementing education initiatives can enhance inclusivity and mitigate environmental impacts.

5 | IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

The impact of social media on sustainable fashion practices in Ghana's fashion industry is significant, but its long-term implications require careful consideration. While social media marketing has proven effective in promoting sustainable fashion, it is crucial to examine how these shifts will affect the industry's structure and the sustainability of emerging practices. The growing emphasis on sustainability through social media marketing could lead to lasting changes in consumer behaviour, with increasing demand for eco-conscious products. This cultural shift has the potential to make sustainability a fundamental value in Ghanaian fashion. However, it is essential to critically examine whether this shift will result in a truly sustainable fashion ecosystem that goes beyond marketing rhetoric (Jumba, 2024; Vladimirova et.al, 2023).

The rapid growth of sustainable fashion may spur competition among designers, but unless rooted in tangible changes to production methods, supply chains, and material sourcing, these efforts could risk becoming superficial or deceptive publicity. As more emerging designers embrace sustainability, the pressure to maintain authenticity could conflict with the practical realities of producing sustainable fashion on a larger scale. Social media's influence on the structure of Ghana's fashion industry is profound. By bypassing traditional intermediaries, social media marketing allows emerging designers to directly connect with consumers, altering the value chain significantly. As Amankwah et.al (2023) highlight, this digital shift empowers small-scale designers to reach a global market and reduces dependency on large fashion conglomerates. However, this democratization could also lead to increased market saturation, making it harder for individual brands to distinguish themselves.

The emphasis on digital presence might further shift the power balance toward tech-savvy designers who are adept at utilizing social media platforms. This could marginalize those who lack digital literacy or access to necessary tools, such as designers based in rural areas or older generations who may struggle to adopt new technologies (Barakat et.al, 2023). Moreover, the evolving role of social media influencers in the Ghanaian fashion industry could create a new form of gatekeeping, where success is increasingly tied to influencer endorsements and digital visibility (Madhura, 2024). As the industry becomes more dependent on influencer culture, smaller brands without significant influencer support might struggle to gain recognition. To mitigate potential risks associated with these structural changes, integrating social media strategies into fashion education will be critical. Designers need to be equipped

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not only with technical skills in digital marketing but also with an understanding of the ethical, economic, and environmental implications of their digital presence (McKeown & Shearer, 2019).

Policymakers have a role in supporting the growth of the digital fashion sector. Government initiatives could focus on providing subsidies or support for rural designers to gain access to digital tools and training, ensuring that the benefits of social media marketing are not limited to urban or well-funded designers. Furthermore, regulations around online advertising and influencer endorsements could help ensure that messaging around sustainability remains authentic and transparent, safeguarding consumers from potential mislead.

As social media continues to evolve as an important platform for brand-building and marketing, the study's results prove the necessity for designers to adapt their brand strategies to align with both consumer expectations and global trends in fashion sustainability. This research buttresses the idea that social media serves as a bridge between fashion brands and consumers, fostering real-time, authentic interactions. For emerging designers in Ghana, leveraging platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and/or Facebook provides a key opportunity to communicate their commitment to sustainability and ethical fashion practices. This direct communication not only enhances consumer trust but also helps to position designers as thought leaders in the sustainable fashion space. The emphasis on live-streaming events, real-time interactions, and showcasing behind-the-scenes content speaks to the growing demand for transparency in the fashion industry, particularly as consumers become more conscious of the environmental and social impacts of their purchasing decisions.

In addition to addressing local challenges, improving apprenticeship practices has the potential to position Ghanaian fashion designers more competitively in the global market. By aligning with international standards of sustainability and innovation, designers can leverage their unique cultural heritage and craftsmanship to create distinctive products that appeal to global consumers. This alignment could open pathways for Ghanaian designers to expand their reach through participation in international fashion shows, trade fairs, and collaborative platforms, such as partnerships with established global brands and networks that prioritize ethical and sustainable practices. Moreover, enhancing the quality of training and mentorship in apprenticeships and training could enable designers to adapt more effectively to evolving global trends, such as digital fashion, circular economy models, and the increasing demand for transparency in supply chains. These trends are shaping consumer preferences worldwide and offer significant opportunities for Ghanaian designers to differentiate themselves in the global marketplace.

To realize these opportunities, it is crucial to integrate global perspectives into fashion studies and apprenticeships. This could include incorporating international fashion trends into training curricula, fostering cross-border exchanges through digital platforms, and creating opportunities for students to gain exposure to global best practices. Future studies could further examine how such initiatives might influence the creative output of Ghanaian designers and their ability to compete internationally. Additionally, research could explore the establishment of regional hubs in Ghana that connect local designers with international markets. These hubs could act as incubators for innovation, providing resources, mentorship, and access to global markets while preserving the cultural authenticity that defines Ghanaian fashion. By contributing to the global push toward ethical and sustainable fashion, Ghanaian designers can play a pivotal role in promoting diversity and inclusivity within the global fashion industry.

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6 | LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study offers valuable insights into the use of social media marketing by emerging fashion designers in Ghana, several limitations should be considered. The study focused on a relatively small sample size of 52 designers, which may not fully represent the increasing diversity of the broader fashion industry in Ghana. Moreover, the sample was unintentionally skewed toward women, with limited male participation, which could introduce a gender bias in the findings. Since fashion trends and marketing strategies can vary across gender perspectives, this imbalance may have influenced the generalizability of the results.

Additionally, the study primarily relied on interviews as the main data collection method. While interviews provide rich, qualitative insights, they are subject to biases such as participant self-reporting and interviewer interpretation. Some designers may have overemphasised the effectiveness of social media marketing or the importance of sustainability due to social desirability bias. The study was again limited to designers based in Accra and Kumasi, two major urban centres in Ghana. This geographic limitation means the findings may not fully capture the experiences of designers in more rural or less-developed areas, who may face different challenges and opportunities in utilizing social media marketing. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable contributions to understanding social media's role in Ghana's fashion industry, especially for emerging designers focused on sustainability.

7 | CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the participants' favourable attitudes and confidence in social media marketing's ability to cultivate genuine consumer interactions, this study proposes integrating social media marketing, with a focus on sustainability, into the curriculum of Ghanaian Fashion Design Institutes. Stakeholders and policymakers could utilise these insights to enhance customer behaviour towards fashion businesses by promoting sustainable practices.

Additional research is needed to explore how to effectively incorporate these themes, ensuring that the integration of social media marketing into educational programs and industry operations is both advantageous and enduring. This exploration should include examining the costs associated with social media initiatives, the financial benefits of a stronger online presence, and the precautions necessary to safeguard brand reputation in the digital realm. A thorough understanding of these factors will facilitate the development of a comprehensive strategy for leveraging social media marketing to promote the growth and success of Ghanaian fashion designers, particularly in sustainability.

Integrating social media marketing into the curriculum would equip fashion students with the essential skills to proficiently utilize these platforms, enhancing their capacity to engage with specific audiences and effectively promote their sustainable fashion brands after completion. This educational advancement has the potential to foster a more vibrant and competitive fashion industry in Ghana, where designers are well-prepared to navigate the digital landscape while championing sustainability.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing applies to this article upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Francisca Emelda Seiwaa Bosro is a passionate and innovative fashion designer who completed her studies at the School of Fashion and Design at BlueCrest University College. With a keen eye for sustainable fashion, Francisca focuses on creating eco-friendly and culturally inspired designs that blend contemporary aesthetics with traditional influences. Her education has equipped her with a strong foundation in both the technical and creative aspects of fashion design. As an emerging designer, she is dedicated to using her craft to promote sustainability in the fashion industry while elevating the unique styles of Ghanaian and African fashion.

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