

ICT social interfaces and business transactions in the Nigerian fashion small and medium-sized enterprises

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ABSTRACT

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has become an integral part of business operations and transactions, impacting business performance. The study identified ICT social interfaces used for business transactions in the fashion Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs), investigated business transactions that engage ICT, and identified the challenges associated with ICT use. Purposive sampling was used to select 385 fashion designers from the six States in Nigeria. Data was collected using a questionnaire and interview schedule. The result showed that ICT social interfaces used include social media and e-commerce platforms for communication. WhatsApp (74.8%) and Facebook (69.4%) were the most proficiently used. YouTube (27.3%) and Instagram (32.2%) were also fairly popular, but with lower proficiency levels. The majority are conversant with the internet and social media. Respondents expressed strong training needs in learning new skills, digital sample display, online banking, and product marketing. This study recommended training for fashion designers in the use of the internet to boost their business interactions. It offered insights that can inform industry practices, policies, and strategies while providing a comprehensive understanding of how ICT social interfaces shape business performance in the dynamic Nigerian fashion sector.

Keywords: ICT, Social Interfaces, Fashion Designers, Digital Literacy, Social Media Marketing, Fashion SMEs

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The fashion industry is one of the largest and most dynamic sectors in the global economy, which employs 430 million out of the 3.62 billion; this constitutes about 11.9% of the global workforce (Global Apparel Statistics, 2025). The activities of the industry include everything from the design, manufacturing, and marketing of clothing to retail and distribution. Understanding the business performance of the fashion industry involves analysing various aspects such as market trends, financial performance, consumer behaviour, operational efficiency, sustainability, and technological innovation. The fashion industry, both globally and in specific regions (such as Nigeria or other emerging markets), is shaped by ever-changing consumer preferences, economic factors, and technological advancements. All over the world, Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

and social media have revolutionised industries, and the fashion industry is not an exception. ICT is shaping the mode of transaction in the business world. This has shrunk the barriers of distance, space, and time in the operations of industries. ICT involves the use of digital technologies to manage, process, and communicate data, enhancing efficiency, productivity, and customer satisfaction in fashion operations and textile merchandising.

The increasing demand for textile and fashion products is believed to be driven by their essentiality through lifecycle stages, population growth, evolving fashion trends, and increased disposable income. Businesses across various sectors have undergone a transformative shift due to the widespread adoption of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), which have revolutionised business transactions by streamlining

processes, expanding market reach, and fostering greater efficiency (Laudon & Traver, 2016). From supply chain management to marketing and sales, digital tools have significantly enhanced business operations, leading to improved profitability (Turban et al., 2018). The fashion industry, in particular, has benefited from e-commerce platforms, social media marketing, and online payment systems, which facilitate seamless interactions between businesses and customers across different geographical locations. This digital transformation has redefined customer expectations and created new avenues for businesses to connect with target markets (Sahrawat, 2024).

Despite the vibrancy of the Nigerian fashion industry, the sector lags in fully integrating ICTs into its core operations (Ejinkeonye-Christian, 2025). While some designers and businesses utilise social media for marketing and branding, a comprehensive digital ecosystem supporting all facets of the industry remains underdeveloped. This gap presents a significant challenge, hindering the industry's growth potential and global competitiveness.

A robust digital ecosystem, encompassing e-commerce platforms, online marketplaces, digital design tools, and integrated supply chain management systems, is essential for the Nigerian fashion industry to capitalise on growing product demand and compete effectively on the international stage (World Bank, 2021). The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other advanced technologies can further optimise supply chains and foster innovation in fashion design (Adewale, 2024).

As technology continues to evolve, it has become an omnipresent force driving unprecedented changes within the fashion landscape. The rapid advancements in digital tools, innovative materials, AI, and cutting-edge manufacturing techniques have merged seamlessly with the creative genius of fashion designers, redefining possibilities and pushing the boundaries of conventional design paradigms.

Over the last century, technological innovation has played a significant role in the evolutionary changes in the fashion and textile industries, shifting from artisanal craftsmanship to industrial design education. The Nigerian fashion industry is currently experiencing dynamic growth, driven by a burgeoning population, increasing fashion consciousness, and a desire for unique, locally designed apparel (Diyaolu et al., 2023). This surge in demand, coupled with the rise of a fashion-forward

middle class, presents significant opportunities for the industry but also necessitates adaptation and innovation to meet evolving consumer needs and remain competitive (Anyaegebunam & Fatuyi, 2019). However, despite the potential of digital platforms, their adoption in Africa, including Nigeria, remains limited due to challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, unreliable internet access, power supply issues, limited digital literacy, high costs of ICT implementation, security concerns, and cultural resistance to technological change (Unegbu et al., 2024).

The textile industry also faces pressures from increasing imports, underscoring the need for improved competitiveness through technological advancements (Kolawole, 2024). Addressing these challenges requires the development of digital infrastructure and literacy initiatives (Ayesu et al., 2024). These have a strong impact on growth, competitiveness, and value chain integration in Nigeria. Demands for textile products are increasing every day. Global business transactions in fashion are adopting the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). ICT has become an integral part of business operations and transactions, impacting business performance.

In order to bring the Nigerian textile and fashion industry to compete globally through improved quality products and enhanced merchandising, there is a need to develop a digital community which interconnects textile industries, fashion designers and customers. A digital ecosystem can trigger a rapid shift to a sustainable pattern of production and create more value as well as drive sustainable growth in Nigeria. It will also contribute to the actualisation of the digital economy policy of the nation.

The study investigates the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in facilitating business transactions within the Nigerian fashion industry, with particular emphasis on the use of ICT-enabled social interfaces and the challenges associated with their adoption and utilisation.

2.0 LITERATURE

The theory of marketing communication, which describes the necessity of effective communication between the producers and the buyers, was adopted.

The impact of ICT in modern business operations is evident. Businesses in the Nigerian fashion industry now leverage social media platforms and e-commerce websites to reach a broader audience,

enhancing customer interaction and engagement (Fajobi, 2023).

The Marketing Communication Theory (MCT) serves as the foundation for this study, highlighting the importance of effective communication between producers and consumers. MCT encompasses various strategies through which organisations communicate with their target audience to promote their products, services, or brands. These strategies include advertising, public relations, sales promotion, direct marketing, and personal selling to create a cohesive message that influences consumer behaviour and builds brand equity (Naumovska and Blazeska, 2016).

Belch and Belch (2018) identified key components of marketing communication that align with ICT adoption in business:

- i. Sender: The business or organisation (fashion designers) using ICT tools to reach customers.
- ii. Message: The content being communicated (fashion product details and services), promotions, or brand stories.
- iii. Channel: The medium through which the message is delivered (e.g., social media platforms and mobile apps).
- iv. Receiver: The target audience or customers (fashion consumers) who receive and interpret the message.
- v. Feedback: Response received from the customers, such as purchases, reviews, or engagement metrics.

This study leverages MCT to analyse how ICT social interfaces enhance business performance in the Nigerian fashion industry.

Key Constructs in the study include:

- i. ICT Social Interfaces (Independent variable): These include digital communication platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, DigiTextile.ng, and e-commerce platforms which serve as a channel for communication, marketing, and transaction in the fashion industry.
- ii. Business Transactions (Mediating variable): ICT tools facilitate transactions such as customer engagement, marketing campaigns, fashion education and promotion, sales, and payment processing.
- iii. Challenges of ICT usage (Moderating variable): This implies the factors that can affect how ICT is used in business, including limited digital literacy skills, internet

accessibility, and perceived governance control of the platform.

- iv. Business performance (Dependent variable): This refers to the result obtained on business transactions, including brand awareness, sales growth, and customer satisfaction.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The study was conducted in selected states across Nigeria. These states represent major fashion and textile activity hubs from four geopolitical zones: Lagos and Ogun States (South-West), Kwara State (North-Central), Enugu State (South-East), and Kano and Kaduna States (North-West). These locations were purposively selected due to the concentration of fashion designers and related textile activities.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling technique was employed to select the respondents. In the first stage, states with active fashion and textile business clusters were selected purposively. In the second stage, two local government areas (LGAs) were selected from each state. In the third stage, two wards were selected from each LGA. Finally, fashion designers operating within the selected wards were identified and surveyed. Overall, a total of 385 valid questionnaires were retrieved and used for analysis. Fashion designers were the primary unit of analysis in line with the study's objectives. The sample size was determined based on field accessibility and proportional representation of the fashion designers across the selected states and wards. This ensures adequate coverage of active fashion business hubs within the study area.

Data Collection

Structured questionnaires, focus group discussions, and interview schedules were used to collect primary data on ICT usage, business transactions, and challenges faced by the fashion designers. The instruments were well-reviewed for clarity and relevance by experts before administration. Participation in the study was voluntary. The consent of respondents was sought, and the purpose of the research was declared before data collection. Responses were treated with confidentiality and used only for academic purposes. Additionally, secondary data were sourced from relevant publications, reports, and online sources.

Primary and secondary data were collected. Primary data were obtained through structured questionnaires,

interview schedules, and focus group discussions, while secondary data were sourced from relevant publications, reports, and online resources.

Data Analysis

Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, to present demographic characteristics, business transactions, and social media usage patterns among fashion designers. A pilot test was conducted before the study, which helped in reconstructing the questionnaire

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Subcategory	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	193	50.1
	Female	192	49.9
Marital Status	Single	141	36.6
	Married	232	60.3
	Divorced	8	2.1
Religion	Christianity	181	47.0
	Islam	202	52.5
	Traditional Religion	2	0.5
Education Level	Primary	14	3.6
	Secondary	115	29.9
	Post-secondary	117	30.4
	Non-formal	137	35.6

Table 1 shows the gender distribution of respondents, with males accounting for 50.1% and females 49.9% of the sampled fashion designers. This indicates an almost equal representation of both genders among fashion designers across the selected states. The majority of respondents were married (60.3%), while 36.6% were single and 2.1% were divorced. Educational attainment varied among respondents. Those with non-formal education formed the largest group (35.6%), followed by post-secondary education holders (30.4%) and secondary education holders (29.9%). Respondents with only primary education constituted 3.6% of the sample. This indicates that most fashion designers possess at least a secondary education or have acquired skills through non-formal training.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of respondents' socio-economic characteristics. The mean age of the respondents was 37.35 years, with ages ranging from 16 to 73. This indicates participation across a wide age spectrum among

respondents. The average household size was 6.61 persons, while the average industry experience was 13.92 years. The mean monthly income was \$282,916.02, although income distribution varied widely, ranging from ₦3,000 to ₦20,000,000. This indicates significant income disparities within the industry.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents' Social-Economic Characteristics

Variable	N	Min.	Max.	Mean
Age (years)	386	16.00	73.00	37.35
Household size	386	1.00	20.00	6.61
Years of experience	386	1.00	55.00	13.92
Average monthly income (₦)	337	3,000	20,000,000	282,916

Table 3: Business Transactions with Textile Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Textile Producers	19	4.9
Wholesale Textile Merchants	151	39.2
Retail Textile Merchants	250	64.9
Fashion Designers	103	26.8
Nigerian Consumers	185	48.1
International Consumers	63	16.4
Banks	74	19.2

The results in Table 3 above show that fashion designers engage in business transactions with multiple stakeholders. Transactions were most frequently conducted with retail textile merchants (64.9%), followed by Nigerian consumers (48.1%) and wholesale textile merchants (39.2%). Transactions with banks were reported by 19.2% of the respondents, while engagement with international consumers accounted for 16.4%. Business transactions with textile producers were the least reported at 4.9%. These results indicate that most business interactions occur at the retail and consumer levels rather than at the production stage.

Table 4: Usage of Social Media Platforms

Social Media Platform	Users (N=385)	Percentage (%)
WhatsApp	288	74.8
Facebook	267	69.4
Instagram	124	32.2
YouTube	105	27.3
Telegram	40	10.4
Pinterest	25	6.5
TikTok	12	3.1

The findings in Table 4 above indicate varying levels of social media platform usage among fashion designers. WhatsApp recorded the highest usage, with 74.8% of respondents indicating its use. This was followed by Facebook, used by 69.4% of respondents. Other platforms recorded lower usage levels. Instagram was used by 32.2% of respondents,

while YouTube was used by 27.3%. Telegram had 10.4% usage, Pinterest had 6.5%, and TikTok recorded the lowest usage at 3.1%. These results show that fashion designers predominantly rely on WhatsApp and Facebook compared to other social media platforms.

Table 5: Purpose of Social Media Usage

Purpose	Facebook (%)	WhatsApp (%)	Instagram (%)	Telegram (%)	YouTube (%)	Pinterest (%)	TikTok (%)
Communication	67.8	76.9	23.9	8.3	2.1	1.6	1.8
Advertisement	51.4	60.8	24.9	2.1	4.9	2.6	2.6
Learning New Skills	37.9	27	14.8	4.9	26.2	2.9	2.6
Displaying Samples	44.4	55.3	18.2	1.6	3.6	2.3	1.3
Marketing Products	40.3	45.2	15.1	2.1	2.9	2.1	1.3
Purchasing Supplies	25.7	29.6	7.8	1	0.8	1	1.3
Selecting/Sourcing Styles	-	-	-	-	-	0.5	-

The results in Table 5 above show that social media platforms are used for multiple business-related purposes. Communication emerged as the most frequently reported purpose across platforms, particularly on WhatsApp (76.9%) and Facebook (67.8%). Instagram, Telegram, Pinterest, YouTube, and TikTok recorded considerably lower usage for communication. For advertisement, WhatsApp (60.8%) and Facebook (51.4%) were again the most utilised platforms. Instagram recorded 24.9% usage for advertising.

In terms of learning new skills, Facebook (37.9%) and YouTube (26.2%) were most frequently reported, followed by WhatsApp (27.0%) and Instagram (14.8%). The display of samples was mainly conducted through WhatsApp (55.3%) and Facebook (44.4%). For marketing of products, WhatsApp (45.2%) and Facebook (40.3%) were the most frequently used platforms. Instagram accounted for 15.1%, while the remaining platforms recorded relatively low usage. The purchase of supplies through social media platforms was less frequent.

Table 6: Areas Where Fashion Designers Require Further Training

Area	N	%
Connection to the internet	97	25.10
Use of social media	77	19.90
Communication	50	13.00
Advertisement	111	28.76
Learning new skills	195	50.52
Connecting with customers	136	35.23
Modelling (Display of samples)	160	41.45
Online banking	150	38.86
Marketing products	138	35.75
Purchasing	120	31.09
Selecting fabrics	148	38.34

Table 6 presents areas where respondents have shown interest and need for further training in relation to the usage of ICT for business purposes. It indicates that learning new skills recorded the highest training demand (50.52%), followed by modelling/display of samples (41.45%), online banking (38.86%), and selecting fabrics (38.34%).

Training needs were also prominent in marketing products (35.75%) and connecting with customers (35.23%). There was lower demand for training on communication (13.00%), and use of social media (19.90%), suggesting that respondents are relatively more confident in basic communication and social media use compared to advanced digital business functions.

ICT-Enabled Social Interfaces and Marketing Communication

The findings indicate that WhatsApp and Facebook are the most widely adopted ICT-enabled social interfaces among Nigerian fashion designers, followed by Instagram and YouTube, while Telegram, Pinterest, and TikTok remain minimally utilised. This pattern reflects a preference for communication channels that enable direct, interactive, low-cost, and feedback-driven exchanges between senders (fashion designers) and receivers (consumers) (Belch & Belch, 2018).

WhatsApp's dominance can be attributed to its capacity for personalised messaging, real-time interaction, order negotiation, and post-purchase feedback, all of which strengthen relationship marketing and customer retention. Facebook's widespread adoption similarly reflects its multifunctionality, combining advertising, customer

engagement, brand storytelling, and feedback mechanisms within a single platform. These findings align with studies on SMEs in developing economies, which consistently show that businesses favour digital platforms that are easy to use, affordable, and capable of immediate customer interaction (Trainor et al., 2014; Appel et al., 2020). Evidence from Nigerian and African contexts further reinforces this trend. Awotunde et al. (2024) observe that Nigerian SMEs rely heavily on mobile-based social media platforms due to their cost efficiency and accessibility, while Abdulraheem et al. (2025) demonstrate that digital marketing engagement significantly influences fashion consumption behaviour among African youth. Collectively, these findings affirm MCT's proposition that channel effectiveness depends not only on message content but also on accessibility, immediacy, and feedback potential (Naumovska & Blazeska, 2016).

The primary purpose of social media usage is communication and advertisement, particularly via WhatsApp and Facebook. Platforms like YouTube and Instagram are leveraged mainly for learning new skills and displaying samples, supporting SMMT constructs of user-generated content and engagement (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Li, Larimo, & Leonidou, 2021). Limited use of platforms like TikTok indicates an opportunity for growth in innovative marketing channels.

Business Transactions Enabled through ICT Platforms

The study shows that ICT platforms facilitate diverse business transactions, including customer communication, advertising, product marketing, sample display, learning new skills, and limited procurement activities. These transactions correspond directly with the message dissemination and feedback components of the marketing communication process, where designers transmit product information and receive responses through inquiries, engagement metrics, and purchase decisions. The predominance of transactions involving retail textile merchants and Nigerian consumers indicates that ICT usage in the Nigerian fashion industry is primarily oriented toward downstream market engagement rather than upstream production integration. This finding is consistent with digital fashion and SME literature, which suggests that ICT adoption among small fashion businesses is more commonly driven by market access, total quality management and customer relationship than by manufacturing coordination (Li et al., 2021; Diyaolu, 2022). Importantly, the use of platforms such as Facebook

and YouTube for learning and skill acquisition highlights the expanding role of ICTs beyond transactional functions. ICT-enabled social interfaces increasingly operate as informal knowledge-sharing and capacity-building spaces, reinforcing the dual promotional and educational role of digital marketing communication (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Similar patterns have been documented in Nigerian SME studies linking digital adoption to improved business knowledge and performance (Fajobi, 2023; Odufuwa et al., 2024). There is increasing evidence of digitalisation in the textile industry (Orisadare et al., 2025; Ogunyemi et al., 2024).

Challenges Moderating ICT Adoption and Utilisation

Despite evident ICT adoption, the concentration of usage on a limited number of platforms suggests the presence of moderating challenges that constrain broader and more strategic utilisation. Key challenges include limited digital literacy, inconsistent internet access, financial constraints, and perceived platform governance issues. Within the MCT framework, these challenges disrupt essential communication processes such as message encoding, channel optimisation, and feedback interpretation, thereby reducing communication effectiveness. Consistent with prior research, infrastructural deficits and skills gaps remain major barriers to ICT utilisation among creative industry entrepreneurs in developing economies (Heeks, 2017; Vial, 2019). Nigerian and Sub-Saharan African SME studies similarly show that limited digital competence and resource constraints significantly affect the depth and effectiveness of technology adoption (Okwudiri et al., 2025; Yuwono et al., 2024).

The limited uptake of visually oriented platforms such as Pinterest and TikTok, despite their relevance for fashion branding and trend diffusion, suggests that adoption barriers are not purely technological but also strategic and competence-based. This reinforces the argument that ICT adoption should be conceptualised not merely as access to tools, but as a marketing communication capability, consistent with the core assumptions of Marketing Communication Theory.

ICT, Marketing Communication, and Business Performance

The findings demonstrate that ICT-enabled social interfaces play a crucial role in business transactions, including enhanced communication efficiency, increased market visibility, improved customer

engagement, and strengthened customer relationships. Within the study's conceptual model, ICT social interfaces function as communication channels that mediate business transactions, which in turn influence performance indicators such as brand awareness, sales growth, and customer satisfaction.

This mediated relationship aligns with contemporary marketing communication literature, which emphasises that digital platforms enhance business performance by enabling two-way communication, personalisation, rapid feedback, and relationship marketing (Maecker et al., 2016; Li et al., 2021). However, uneven platform utilisation suggests that performance gains are not uniformly distributed, favouring businesses with stronger digital skills and better connectivity. This underscores the importance of targeted interventions to ensure inclusive and sustainable industry growth. Diyaolu et al. (2019) opined that ICT is also being adopted by students in their selection of styles and fashion.

Training Needs for Effective Use of ICT Social Interfaces

The study shows a dominant need for training on learning new skills, modelling, online banking, and digital marketing, indicating that while basic ICT tools are widely adopted, deeper competencies required for strategic skill updates, marketing communication, and transaction efficiency remain limited. Within the Marketing Communication Theory framework, these skill gaps weaken message encoding, channel optimisation, and feedback effectiveness, leading to constrained business performance outcomes. Most firms in textile manufacturing are in need of technical support for advanced technology in production (Diyaolu et al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that ICT-enabled social media platforms play a central role in facilitating business transactions within the Nigerian fashion industry. The dominance of WhatsApp and Facebook reflects an industry preference for platforms that support direct, interactive, and relationship-oriented marketing communication. While ICT usage currently emphasises domestic market engagement, the findings reveal substantial potential for international market expansion through more strategic platform diversification. Overall, ICT-enabled social interfaces emerge as critical tools for business sustainability, market visibility, and customer relationship management in the Nigerian fashion industry. Strategic ICT adoption, supported by enhanced digital competencies and enabling

infrastructure, is essential for strengthening competitiveness and long-term industry growth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Fashion designers should strategically adopt underutilised platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest, and TikTok to enhance visual storytelling, engage younger demographics, and access international markets.
2. Capacity-building initiatives should focus on content creation, digital marketing strategy, analytics, and customer engagement, enabling designers to maximise the communicative and transactional potential of ICT platforms. This recommendation is supported by the study's findings, which show a high training demand in learning new skills, modelling/display of samples, online banking, and product marketing.
3. Designers should leverage ICT platforms to move beyond local transactions by developing global digital identities, integrating cross-border e-commerce tools, and participating in international fashion networks.
4. WhatsApp and Facebook should be optimised for customer service, personalised marketing, and feedback management, while YouTube and Instagram should be integrated for brand storytelling, tutorials, and product showcasing.

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