Challenges of Developing Fashion Design as an Industry: A Case Study from Bangladesh

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Abstract

Bangladesh being the 2nd largest readymade garments producer yet remains as a producer for the international brand. Fashion design industry has started expanding in the country, and concurrently the potential of skilled fashion designer and entrepreneur increased in accordance with necessity fashion design education, but it seems fashion design education has not been successful enough to attract the skilled workforce into becoming an entrepreneur. This study aimed to develop a model that explores the necessity and importance of teaching entrepreneurship to the fashion designers at higher education level in the context of Bangladesh and to review and analyze different dimensions of academic education on entrepreneurship and fashion design and the relationship with growth in Bangladesh.

Through a questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews, a total of 120 respondents from 16 universities, colleges, and institutions were covered. The study finds different aspects and challenges of growth of entrepreneurship in fashion industry of Bangladesh and service quality influencing on after the higher education of fashion design. The consequences of this are serious for the higher educated scholar from fashion designing, who finds it difficult to get employed, and this is hampering healthy growth for Bangladesh’s fashion textile industry, as it faces worse problems in recruiting right skills, contemporary fashion sense and according to skill fast, the sector skills council for fashion and textiles. The narrow comparative study across the fashion sector and lacking research in the context of Bangladesh motivates to explore this area. As a result, overall findings disclose new insights for academics and decision makers.

Keyword: Fashion Design in Bangladesh; Entrepreneurship Education; Fashion Design and Education; Cultural Industries; Creative Design

1. Introduction

In Bangladesh, we have 170 million people that mean there is a niche market to create fashion brands which refer the fashion entrepreneurship. Over time, entrepreneur’s role in the economy and their contribution to the economic change in Bangladesh as well their creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, and managerial aspects changed (Abdullah, 2009). Fashion designs for their part strive for innovation, differentiation, and appeal. This is due to the fashion business essentially a forward-thinking sector and one of the core characteristics of fashion brands in innovation which has been an essential aspect of fashion business for centuries (Chowdhury, 2017).

With a large population Bangladesh, it should have fashion retailing industry is a voice on its own. It is an art, which is catered by every single person residing in this global village. The industry is flourishing and creating more competition within South Asia, looking forward to global Bangladeshi fashion movement as years to come. It is difficult to produce human resource report within 3 months
making Time as one of the key limitations for the report. Fashion renaissance started during mid-90’s in Bangladesh; journalists cater very little on this sector, henceforth Lack of articles and journals is another key factor of limitations for the report. According to the necessity fashion design education got demand and introduced. There are many institutions providing fashion education. However, it seems that they are becoming just creative designer, not an entrepreneur. Whereas the main aim of creative and skilled based education is to create entrepreneur and there is a great opportunity to explore the entrepreneurship in fashion industry of Bangladesh. Bangladesh has some very raw material such as Jamdani, Muslin, khadi, Silk, cotton as well as very wonderful hand embroidery, and design motifs. Among these Jamdani could be a very rich potential fabric to create an innovative design for fashion industry.

With a potential for fashion design entrepreneurship growth, Bangladesh has immense opportunities to develop entrepreneurship centering the fashion ware. Choosing a career in fashion designing education could be a long-term project in one’s life as it is one of the best paying industry today. Though this is a tough place to survive with extreme competition, the scale of its scope and opportunities never drop down. Whereas, conventional fashion design curriculum is being followed to ensure higher educated academics or professionals, the applied art devoted to the designing of lifestyle accessories and unlocking the potentials to entrepreneurship has been yet to be addressed. It’s also demanding career, their creativity with higher education, managerial and entrepreneurship skill to sustain in this industry. The study will, therefore, focus on the scopes for integration of life skills that could benefit fashion designer to become an entrepreneur.

2. Objectives of the Study

It is essential to stimulate an entrepreneurial mindset in fashion design within the context of higher education in Bangladesh; the research question would be want to develop research entitled “entrepreneurship and fashion design: A strategic model for higher education in Bangladesh” and the following objectives are being addressed under the study:

• To explain the challenges the fashion design graduates are facing and what opportunities do exist in their field?
• To review and analyze different dimensions of academic education on entrepreneurship and fashion design and the relationship with growth in Bangladesh.
• To examine why entrepreneurship education is not booming in Bangladesh and why Big Brands are not expanded in Bangladesh?

3. Literature Review

Successful entrepreneurship plays a significant role in driving economic development. It is, therefore, important to identify human qualities that make for successful entrepreneurs, and the social and economic conditions needed to promote the emergence of successful entrepreneurship (Tipu and Arain, 2011). Today, Bangladesh has developed a creative fashion industry of its own, with a range of styles and innovations. Even though fashion designer entrepreneurship is recognized as an important creative industry sector in many entrepreneurship models, this sector has not attracted systematic academic research in Bangladesh. Therefore, the purpose of the study presented in this paper is to apply a systematic and methodical approach to identify entrepreneurship and fashion design: A strategic model for higher education in Bangladesh.

Fashion today is a global industry, and most major countries have a fashion industry. China and Bangladesh are the biggest manufacturers of clothing, and other notable clothing manufacturing countries are Germany, Indonesia, Malaysia, India, Philippines, South Korea, Spain, and Brazil. The “big four” centers of the fashion industry are Paris, Milan, New York City, and London. Seven countries have established an international reputation in fashion: France, Italy, United Kingdom, United States, Japan, Germany, and Belgium (Das, 2000-2001).
According to Shane and Venkataraman, entrepreneurship comprises both “enterprising individuals” and “entrepreneurial opportunities,” and researchers should study the nature of the individuals who identify opportunities when others do not, the opportunities themselves and the nexus between individuals and opportunities (Dickerson, 2003). In this regard, (Dinnie, 2009) argue that individuals are motivated to engage in entrepreneurial endeavors driven mainly by necessity or opportunity, that is, individuals pursue entrepreneurship primarily due to survival needs, or because, they identify business opportunities that satisfy their need for achievement. For example, higher economic inequality tends to increase entrepreneurship rates at the individual level. However, most of it is often based on necessity rather than an opportunity (Xavier-Oliveira et al., 2015).

Fashion has also been defined in terms of a sociocultural phenomenon (Islam, 2001). The socialcultural divisions fashion reflected during the 18th–early 19th centuries, defining the mid-19th–mid-20th century as the era of “100 years of fashion” (Kumari, 2010), and establishing the present as a period of post-fashion. Vinken’s discussion of fashion differed from others in that she focused on the “correlation of three major conceptual articulations: The division of being and mere appearance, the division of the sexes, and inseparably linked to the latter division of the classes” (Lowe, 2006).

Different countries and regions have defined fashion designer entrepreneurship according to their pertinent market contexts. This study identifies fashion designer entrepreneurship based on the criteria that “firms or individuals involved in clothing and having a primary focus on design, as distinct from manufacture of clothing” and to include (1) established fashion labels, (2) lifestyle clothing, (3) niche market brands, and (4) emerging new designers (Massoni, 2004).

Entrepreneurship is strongly linked to small- and medium-sized enterprises (Abdullah, 2009). However, Bangladesh does not have a nationally accepted definition for the SMEs. SMEs have been defined based on three main criteria; (a) total assets value, (b) the number of full-time employees, and (c) turnover or production (GoB, 2002). In Bangladesh, when measuring size by employment, the following definitions are used: Micro <5 employees, small 5–29 employees, medium 30–149 employees, and large 150 employees, and above. Considering the nature of the fashion designer entrepreneurship, using total assets value and the turnover as criteria to define the business size is problematic (Massoni, 2004). Therefore, this paper uses the aforementioned definition, based on the number of employees to differentiate small, medium, and large enterprise sectors.

However, the literature suggests that most fashion designer entrepreneurs do not recruit permanent employees until their labels develop as public profiles (Malem, 2008). Due to the cyclical nature of the industry, typically when assistance is needed, out-sourcing operations (e.g., pattern making or machining) are the preferred option with most designers having dedicated contractors who work for them during particular phases in the production cycle (Mills, 2011). Nevertheless, the work-process between fashion designer entrepreneurs and their outsourced contractors is quite similar to the work-process between an employer and an employee rather than the one between a business and its suppliers. Therefore, the present study considers outsourced contractors as outsourced-employees rather than suppliers (Islam and Aktaruzzaman, 2001).

Many countries such as China and India have recently emphasized to improve their own fashion industry. Japan has already began branding its own fashionable items in many parts of the world, like Uniqlo, which has received many positive criticisms around the world. Bangladesh fashion retailing industry needs to be more flexible because it is a highly creative and artistic industry and holds multi-talented rooms for improvements, they need to be guided for improving the sector. Literacy issue at fashion industry considering Fashion is a unique voice; hence, it requires guidance to flourish the insight knowledge. It needs an exploration of human minds, which needs to be focused in our country.

4. Methodology

A descriptive research was conducted to fulfill the main purpose of this research. A questionnaire was prepared consisting of a number of questions regarding the purpose of the study. Questionnaire included economic problem (problem in getting money to start-up a business and inadequate capital),
family related problem (seek permission to start-up a business and facing problem of having children), social problem (facing gender discrimination, illiteracy, and lack of knowledge among women), and other problems (availability of training program and lack of managerial experience) faced by women entrepreneurs and the reasons behind their success. For deriving the result Likert scale (five points) was used in the questionnaire where the abbreviations used are SA for strongly agree, A for Agree, I for indifferent, D for disagree, and SD for strongly disagree starting from 5 to 1.

The study was conducted in central and southern part of Bangladesh including three wards from Dhaka city and Khulna City and its surrounding areas randomly as sites of data collection. Hence, the population of the study was all the fashion entrepreneurs in both city and its surrounding areas. The survey was conducted among 100 fashion entrepreneurs as sample unit from Metropolitan area and its surrounding areas. However, the convenient sampling method was used to select the individual entrepreneur. The choice of the sample size is based on the works of Mills (2011); Reynolds (2000); Roy (2012). Face to face interview was conducted to collect the relevant data from the respondents.

5. Empirical Analysis and Findings

5.1. Challenges in the fashion industry as well as for the design graduates and opportunities in this field

The fashion design branch as a part of the creative sector consists of a high number of individuals, who set-up a micro business or who are self-employed. 80% of creative entrepreneurs are in this category with no ambitions for further growth. Further pointed out that many want to stay small, because they want to maintain their independence and the focus on creativity. Therefore, the creative sector has rather a small-scale nature. The total number of self-employed people in Bangladesh is <10%, whereas in the field of design is 50% self-employed. However, rather than taking the growth of this new field as a functional response to a strategic need for workers in creative industry, I show how fashion design education has been made “creative” through a discursive opposition between art and industry and through the encounters and mediations of agents as they actively exercise choice.

However, a sizable number of fashion design companies, confronted with various challenges and obstacles, struggle on their way to start a business. Only 5% of around 1000 fashion design graduates are successful in creating an own business. Only a few fashion entrepreneurs are capable of making it through the 1st years, and many do not succeed in reaching a stage of retention. In this context, retention can be specified as gaining a sustainable position in the fashion business. A sustained and lasting position of a company may be achieved by a structured venture launch, which implies a goal-orientated and prosperous company foundation.

Considering the nature of the fashion designer entrepreneurship, using total assets value and the turnover as criteria to define the business size is problematic. Therefore, this paper uses the aforementioned definition, based on the number of employees to differentiate small, medium, and large enterprise sectors. However, the study suggests that most fashion designer entrepreneurs do not recruit permanent employees until their labels develop as public profiles. Due to the cyclical nature of the industry, typically when assistance is needed, out-sourcing operations (e.g., pattern making or machining) is the preferred option with most designers having dedicated contractors who work for them during particular phases in the production cycle. Nevertheless, the work-process between fashion designer entrepreneurs and their outsourced contractors is quite similar to the work-process between an employer and an employee rather than the one between a business and its suppliers. Therefore, the present study finds most fashion design educated graduates as outsourced contractors or outsourced-employees rather than suppliers or entrepreneurs.

5.2. Academic education on entrepreneurship and fashion design in Bangladesh and its relationship with growth

In Bangladesh, both general education and technical education contribute to the entrepreneurship development. In general education, students get introduced to entrepreneurship in the secondary level
and remain thereon to develop the preliminary background for start-up initiatives in the business field. The academic curriculum introduces the student with the prominent business entrepreneurs of Bangladesh. Recently, The University Grants Commission of Bangladesh has approved the bachelor degree in this specified area and the Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology has commenced a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Fashion Design and Technology (FDT) Program focusing on the opportunity to gather knowledge and skills which will help them flex their minds into becoming a successful entrepreneur. FDT program is mainly focused to guide students as a mentor so that they can move through the process of starting up a venture to become an entrepreneur. Then, this program is suitable for those who dream to launch a venture and become a successful entrepreneur.

A bulk of the country-known entrepreneurs and leading academicians will offer this class through the mixing of both theory and practical exposure. Moreover, worldwide exposure has been projected with the assistance of foreign universities. Bachelor of FDT Program aims at producing graduates equipped with entrepreneurial skills, cognition, values and attitudes for their jobs. After successful completion of this course of the survey, alumni will be capable to transform themselves not only as self-employed but also as the creator of employment through becoming an entrepreneur. On the other hand, technical education highlights three levels of programs - Certificate, Diploma and Degrees to demonstrate the growth of fashion design in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2017).

While identifying the dimensions entrepreneurship in the fashion design industry with fashion education, it is evident that Fashion is inspiration, creativity, and intuition. However, it is also organization, strategy, and management. These two apparently contrasting sets of elements have to come together to ensure the success of a business idea. Like in any other industry, entrepreneurship in the fashion industry combines the creation and management of a venture with the specific aspects of the industry, in this case, fashion in Bangladesh. Innovation is the main factor in the scope of entrepreneurship fashion design and is first and foremost important for the fashion industry with its complex economic, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions. Fashion design entrepreneurs innovate inside these dimensions with creativity and constant change (Tipu, 2011). Stated to the point: “The constant in fashion is change.” The study finds both statements are true for fashion entrepreneurs who must be continuously innovative in their sphere of activity; fashion can be copied but not innovation. A fashion design entrepreneur is the key person that manages the entrepreneurial process and sets up a business to integrate their design ideas into the marketplace.

5.3. Existing challenges of the fashion design graduates and opportunities in fashion entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship in the fashion design is a substantial issue since the fashion business landscape consists of many small actors that compete on the fashion market. On their way to a distinct position in the textile and fashion world, many fashion design entrepreneurs, who start up an own label, are confronted with personal challenges and a multitude of external obstacles.

Bangladesh is an upcoming in the industry in the fashion world. Although Bangladesh has a strong position at garments and textile sector, but due to its lack of knowledge and hiring procedures, job security, compensation, and benefits, it remains a silent player in the fashion industry, but the necessary government is expected to boost this fashion retail industry in Bangladesh. Entrepreneurship is strongly linked to small- and medium-sized enterprises (Abdullah, 2009). However, Bangladesh does not have a nationally accepted definition for the SMEs. SMEs have been defined based on three main criteria; (a) total assets value, (b) the number of full-time employees, and (c) turnover or production (GoB, 2002). In Bangladesh, when measuring size by employment, the following definitions are used: Micro <5 employees, small 5–29 employees, medium 30–149 employees, and large 150 employees, and above (GoB, 2002).

5.4. The problem with design education

Government policy on creative education is a key driver in why undergraduate education is not working, writes. Negative impact on creative education, particularly at the secondary level, is already being seen, with creative subjects either being cut or regarded as inferior. This then impacts on students entering
higher education. With less exposure to creative subjects before higher education, new students have less design knowledge, while still being expected to choose one specific discipline and career path.

The introduction of higher fees has turned universities into financial institutions, with many knock-on effects. The biggest challenge within fashion design studios is how to maintain a unique creative process and grow at the same time. Yet universities are insisting on the growth of student numbers to meet financial targets, which restricts creative teaching methods. When students face taking on such debt they, understandably, want reassurance that they will get a job at the end. The easiest way to give this reassurance is to clearly label the “tin” that they are buying. University systems are another driver in why undergraduate education is not working. It is difficult to teach an ever-evolving practice within a rigid university system that is more likely designed for health or law.

5.5. Economic challenges

Funds: Fund is very important to start any business either small or big. For entrepreneur, fund is a more crucial role player. It is found that most of the fashion entrepreneurs (60%) initially invest from their own savings followed by from informal loan such as from their husbands (19%) or other family members. It was found that women’s own saving for investment was small in amount. In most of the cases, the initial investment was below Tk. 1.00 lac. Only a negligible portion invested more than Tk. 1.00 lac initially from their personal savings. However, very few of them invested initially through formal loans such as from banks or NGOs. Hence, it is found that the formal sector is not contributing much in expanding entrepreneurship in the city and its surrounding areas. Entrepreneurs and challenges faced are as below:

Getting money to start-up a business: The study shows that maximum number (50%) of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement through a remarkable portion of the respondents (28%) disagreed with the statement. The mean value (3.28) indicates that the respondents were facing problem in getting money to start up a business. The standard deviation (1.22) indicates that the observations are not widely scattered about the mean.

Inadequate Capital: It can be seen that most of the respondents (60%) agree with the inadequate capital. The mean value (3.47) indicates that the respondents are suffering from their capital of the business.

5.6. Social challenges

Seek permission to start-up a business: In Bangladeshi society, many women and entrepreneur have to seek permission from their counterparts at every step of their life. This study provides a scenario that is not an exception from the tradition as it can be seen that most of the respondents had to seek permission from either their husband or parents. The data show that around 66% of the respondents had to seek permission to start-up their business. The study also finds that only 16% of the respondents had not to seek permission to start-up their business.

Having children: Women’s family obligations also bar them from becoming successful entrepreneurs in both developed and developing nations. Having primary responsibility for children, home and older dependent family members, few women can devote all their time and energies to their business. It can be seen that the presence of children is a problem for the entrepreneurs. 56% of the respondent took the presence of children as a problem to continue their business whereas around 31% of the respondents are not.

Social discrimination: Another challenge that women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh face is discrimination. Even when women entrepreneurs do approach banks for financing, they tend to face discrimination. Bank officials tend to ignore them in meetings and prefer speaking to their husbands or male business partners. The fact that banks engage in gender bias prevents many women from even approaching them. Some women get so discouraged that they do not bother to seek bank financing and turn instead to informal savings groups.

6. Conclusions

Entrepreneurship plays a key role in economic development and industrial growth of a country. Bangladesh is in such position, and the growth entrepreneurship has grown significantly for some
couple of years. The fashion entrepreneurs, especially women face many problems as financial or credit facility, training facility, marketing problems, social security problem, and attitude toward women of their family and society also create problems to develop themselves as an entrepreneur. Our government has adopted some policies regarding entrepreneurship development but due to administrative complication all these policies may fail at the time of implication, and the chances are high in case of fashion and textile industries. It’s a matter of hope that currently in Bangladesh, now big audience groups are becoming educated and interested about establishing their own business and fashion according to the study. Hence, rules and policy formation should support fashion entrepreneurs so that they can develop themselves and can perform. It will lead to the development of country’s sustainable economic growth as well as make contribution toward the entrepreneurs’ family.

However, entrepreneurship and fashion design research in relation to fashion have to be increased and applied to the fashion industry. Second, the situation in fashion academic education institutions needs to be improved; entrepreneurship has to be seen as an integrated part. Moreover, third, fashion design entrepreneurs have to be better prepared and supported in the pre-startup phase, in the startup phase, and in the growing phase. It would be fruitful to strengthen the whole textile, apparel, and fashion design industry by making it possible for fashion entrepreneurs to gain ground and to achieve a sustained position in the fashion sector.

References


