

**A STUDY ON CONSUMER PERCEPTION TOWARDS SMALL ENTREPRENEURS IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY****Prof. (Dr.) Mona Mehta and Parth Davda**Nagindas Khandwala College (Autonomous), Mumbai  
parthndavda@gmail.com**INTRODUCTION**

Small entrepreneurs wield significant influence in the business world, particularly within the fashion industry, where they excel at innovating product lines and processes. Driven by passion, vision, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and a sharp focus, these entrepreneurs maintain a close pulse on industry trends, unlike their larger counterparts. Their inherent need to take risks propels them to carve out a niche in fashion.

The mantra "Small is the new Big" resonates strongly as small entrepreneurs collaborate effectively with larger organizations, transforming not just technology but also fostering environmental sustainability. The term "entrepreneur" has gained widespread usage globally, underscoring their pivotal role in the industry's evolution. Flexibility empowers small entrepreneurs to swiftly adapt to market dynamics, while their customer-centric approach and personal touch differentiate them.

Despite these advantages, small businesses face challenges such as limited access to capital, resources, and distribution networks. However, by embracing collaborative strategies, integrating technology, and forming strategic alliances, they navigate these hurdles successfully.

Notably, small entrepreneurs drive transformative change in fashion, championing sustainability and innovation. Their agility enables experimentation with eco-friendly materials, ethical production methods, and circular business models, setting benchmarks for industry practices.

In essence, small entrepreneurs in fashion exemplify resilience and innovation, demonstrating that size is no barrier to making a substantial impact on a global scale.

*Keywords: Consumer, Perception, Fashion Industry, Small Entrepreneurs*

**2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

1. Elf et al.'s (2022) research provides valuable insights into how small sustainable fashion enterprises in the UK can advance the circular economy through dynamic capabilities and extended customer engagement. The study identifies the key dynamic capabilities of small sustainable fashion enterprises, including innovation, flexibility, and customer knowledge, and highlights the importance of extended customer engagement in promoting sustainable consumption patterns. These findings have practical implications for policymakers and practitioners in the fashion industry who are seeking to support the transition towards a more sustainable and circular economy.
2. Gekombe et al.'s (2019) study is a valuable contribution to the growing body of literature on social media use among small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the fashion industry. The authors provide a detailed analysis of the role of social media in promoting growth and success among SMEs, highlighting the potential benefits of using social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The research also identifies a range of challenges that SMEs face when using social media, including limited resources, lack of expertise, and difficulty in measuring the impact of social media on business performance. By presenting practical strategies for overcoming these challenges, the study offers useful insights for SMEs seeking to leverage social media to drive growth and success. Policymakers can also draw on these findings to develop targeted interventions to support SMEs in the fashion industry.

3. Gonda et al. (2020) offer a comprehensive analysis of the competitive factors that shape the fashion retail sector, particularly for SMEs. The authors highlight the significance of pricing strategies, product quality, brand image, and customer service in determining the competitiveness of SMEs in the fashion industry. Furthermore, the study provides a detailed explanation of the relationship between these factors and the performance of SMEs, which can guide firms in adopting effective business strategies. By emphasizing the importance of these competitive factors, the study offers insights that can inform the development of policies to support SMEs in the fashion retail sector. Overall, the article presents valuable insights for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers seeking to understand the dynamics of the fashion retail industry and the role of SMEs in it.
4. Taçoğlu et al. (2019) provide a valuable analysis of the factors affecting the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the textile industry. The study uses a structural equation model (SEM) to examine the relationship between various factors and SME competitiveness, based on data from 158 Turkish textile SMEs. The authors find that firm size, innovation, brand value, and access to finance are critical factors that significantly impact the competitiveness of SMEs in the industry. The study's findings underscore the need for policymakers, managers, and researchers to prioritize these factors in the development of strategies aimed at enhancing SME competitiveness. Overall, the article makes an important contribution to our understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing SMEs in the textile industry and provides insights that can inform future research and policy development in this area.
5. The study by Sarkar and Karim (2019) in the *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* looks into how fashion designers also work as entrepreneurs. It explores how people see fashion designers and highlights their creative and business-thinking sides. The study also looks at the difficulties these designers face, like not having enough money or facing competition in the market. It gives practical advice for both new and experienced fashion entrepreneurs. The study uses good methods, like surveys or interviews, to gather information. It suggests useful ideas for people involved in fashion, showing how to support and encourage entrepreneurship in the industry. In simple terms, Sarkar and Karim's work helps us understand better how creativity and starting a business go together in fashion design.
6. Duggal and Jain's (2019) study in *Cosmos: An International Journal of Management* meticulously explores the challenges faced by entrepreneurs in the fashion industry, providing valuable insights into the complex entrepreneurial landscape. Using a likely mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches, the research delves into practical hurdles such as market competition, evolving consumer preferences, and financial constraints. Its implications extend beyond academia, offering actionable knowledge for entrepreneurs and industry stakeholders, and guiding policymakers and professionals in creating a supportive environment for fashion entrepreneurship. In essence, this work enriches our understanding of the challenges in fashion entrepreneurship. Simultaneously, in the entrepreneurial domain, overcoming obstacles like formulating a clear vision, securing capital, building effective teams, and navigating competition is crucial. Entrepreneurs must embody a visionary perspective and persuasive skills, while overcoming negative mindsets and lack of support requires continuous self-empowerment and community building. Recognizing that overcoming hurdles is essential for growth and prosperity underscores the significance of navigating challenges in both fashion and entrepreneurship.
7. Van Den Berg and Almanza's (2016) literature review delves into the intricate challenges encountered by fashion entrepreneurs during their entry into the industry. The study provides a comprehensive exploration of these challenges, spanning aspects such as market dynamics, consumer preferences, production intricacies, and distribution complexities. The research underscores the dynamic nature of the fashion landscape, emphasizing the necessity for entrepreneurs to continually adapt to evolving trends for sustained relevance and competitiveness. Financial hurdles, including capital constraints and strategic financial management, emerge as pivotal factors influencing entrepreneurial success. Additionally, the literature review highlights the crucial role of creativity and innovation in addressing challenges, as fashion entrepreneurs are not only

required to grasp market trends but also contribute distinctive and inventive ideas to stand out in the competitive fashion sphere. In essence, the literature review presents a thorough understanding of the obstacles faced by fashion entrepreneurs at the onset of their ventures, offering valuable insights for strategic planning and navigating the complexities of the industry.

8. In 2024, Dana, L. P., Boardman, R., Salamzadeh, A., Pereira, V., and Brandstrup, M. present a research endeavor titled "Fashion and Environmental Sustainability: Entrepreneurship, Innovation, and Technology." This study delves into the intricate connections among entrepreneurship, innovation, and technology within the realm of fashion, specifically focusing on their role in advancing environmental sustainability. By examining these crucial components, the research seeks to illuminate the evolving landscape where entrepreneurial endeavors, technological progress, and innovative approaches converge to foster sustainable practices in the fashion industry. This scholarly work is anticipated to provide valuable insights into the ongoing initiatives aimed at harmonizing fashion practices with environmental considerations.
9. In 2019, Shastri, S., Shastri, S., and Pareek, A. present a research paper titled "Motivations and Challenges of Women Entrepreneurs: Experiences of Small Businesses in Jaipur City of Rajasthan" in the *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*. This study investigates the driving forces and hurdles encountered by women entrepreneurs in small businesses within Jaipur city, Rajasthan. Focused on unraveling the motivations that propel women to engage in entrepreneurship, the research seeks to uncover the complex interplay between these motivators and the challenges faced. By providing insights into the unique dynamics of women's entrepreneurial experiences in Jaipur, the study contributes to a broader understanding of gender-related factors influencing the entrepreneurial landscape, offering valuable perspectives for both academia and practitioners.
10. In the year 2022, Tripathi, R., Yadav, U. S., Tripathi, M. A., Rawat, R., and Kushwaha, present a research paper titled "Performance of Women Artisans as Entrepreneurs in ODOP in Uttar Pradesh to Boost Economy: Strategies and a Pathway Towards a Global Handicraft Index for Small Businesses." This study, featured in the *Academy of Marketing Studies Journal*, investigates the entrepreneurial endeavors of women artisans participating in the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative in Uttar Pradesh. The research scrutinizes the strategies adopted by these women entrepreneurs to enhance their economic impact and envisions a potential Global Handicraft Index for Small Businesses. By focusing on the intersection of women artisans, entrepreneurship, and economic development within the ODOP framework, the study provides insightful perspectives into the strategies and prospective indices that could elevate the role of small businesses in the global handicraft sector.
11. In 2020, S. Tarai contributes to the realm of entrepreneurship with a paper titled "Entrepreneurial Development in the Handloom Sector Through Strategic Formulation: An Empirical Study in Odisha, India." Published in the *Journal of Textile Engineering and Fashion Technology*, this empirical study delves into enhancing entrepreneurial development within the handloom sector by implementing effective strategic formulation. Focused on the state of Odisha in India, the research explores the practical aspects of implementing strategies to nurture entrepreneurship in the handloom industry. Through the presentation of empirical findings, the study provides valuable insights into the dynamics of entrepreneurial development, specifically within the unique context of the handloom sector in Odisha, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of strategies that foster entrepreneurship in the textile and fashion industry.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To identify the characteristics and motivations of small entrepreneurs in the fashion industry, including their background, education, experience, and personal values.
2. To understand the role of small entrepreneurs in the Fashion Industry

3. To study the perception of consumers towards small entrepreneurs
4. To suggest strategies to small entrepreneurs

## HYPOTHESIS

### Hypothesis 1:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Small fashion entrepreneurs' uniqueness and creativity have a significant impact on shaping fashion trends and consumer preferences

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Small fashion entrepreneurs' uniqueness and creativity have does not have a significant impact on shaping fashion trends and consumer preferences

### Hypothesis 2:

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Consumers in the fashion industry actively seek out products from small entrepreneurs for the growth of the economy

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Consumers in the fashion industry do not actively seek out products from small entrepreneurs for the growth of the economy

## 2. METHOD

The research gathered data using a questionnaire administered to 204 respondents. Secondary data from various journals and magazines.

## 4 FINDINGS:

Data through questionnaire was collected from two hundred (204) respondents.

The findings of the research are as follows:

Parameters	Key Findings
Gender Distribution	66.7% of respondents are female, highlighting a significant female presence in small entrepreneurship within the fashion sector.
Age Distribution	Among respondents, 72.5% are aged 18-24, indicating a youthful demographic. Notably, 14.2% are below 18 years old, with smaller percentages in older age brackets (25-34: 8.3%, 35-44: 2%, 65+: 0.5%).
Occupation	80.4% of respondents are students, with 8.8% in various service roles and 3.4% identifying as homemakers, demonstrating diverse occupational backgrounds.
Shopping Patterns	A varied frequency of shopping habits is observed: occasional (30.9%), monthly (28.4%), weekly (16.7%), and rare (9.3%).
Preferred Retail Channels	Departmental stores (30.9%), online retailers (25.5%), street markets or vendors (23%), and clothing boutiques (20.1%) are favored retail channels.
Perceptions of Entrepreneurs	Respondents view small entrepreneurs as distinctive design providers (31.9%), local business embodiments (28.4%), innovators (10.8%), and limited in product range (14.7%).
Discovery Channels	Social media is the primary discovery channel (68.6%), followed by word of mouth (14.2%), local markets (11.3%), online marketplaces (4.4%), and fashion magazines (1.5%).
Customer Satisfaction	Positive experiences with small fashion entrepreneurs are reported by most respondents (54.1%), with only 10.3% indicating negative experiences.

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Importance for Local Economy	65 respondents find supporting small fashion entrepreneurs extremely important for local economic growth.
Emphasis on Sustainability	82% of respondents prioritize eco-friendly practices among small entrepreneurs.
Consumer Preference	55% actively seek products from small fashion entrepreneurs, and 68% occasionally choose them over large brands.
Importance of Quality	62 respondents believe small fashion entrepreneurs deliver better customer service, reflecting positive perceptions.
Concerns about Quality	61.3% express concerns about quality or trust when engaging with small fashion entrepreneurs, indicating a perception challenge.
Willingness to Pay Premium	48.5% of respondents are uncertain about paying a premium for fashion items from small entrepreneurs, suggesting hesitancy among consumers.
Impact on Fashion Trends	71.6% believe small fashion entrepreneurs play a significant role in shaping fashion trends.
Word-of-Mouth Promotion	85.3% would recommend products from small entrepreneurs to others, indicating potential for positive word-of-mouth.
Social Media Influence	Social media (84.8%) plays a crucial role in discovering products from small entrepreneurs.
Affordability Perception	41.3% find products affordable, while 32.4% consider them competitively priced; however, 16.7% perceive them as expensive.
Perception of Impact	83.8% believe small fashion entrepreneurs have a positive impact on the fashion industry.
Ranking Factors	Product uniqueness and creativity (79 respondents prioritize), supporting local business (47 respondents), competitive pricing (70 respondents), quality and trustworthiness (80 respondents), and personalized service (50 respondents) are key factors influencing consumer decisions.

### Testing of Hypothesis

The results after testing of the hypothesis are as follows:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Small fashion entrepreneurs' uniqueness and creativity have a significant impact on shaping fashion trends and consumer preferences

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Small fashion entrepreneurs' uniqueness and creativity have does not have a significant impact on shaping fashion trends and consumer preferences

The value of Chi-square ( $r^2$ ) is 2.84 and the value of p at 99% confidence for 4 degrees of freedom is 0.58 which suggests that the value of r is greater than the p value. This implies that the null hypothesis is rejected with 99% confidence. This further indicates that small fashion entrepreneurs' uniqueness and creativity have a significant impact on shaping fashion trends and consumer preferences.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Consumers in the fashion industry actively seek out products from small entrepreneurs for the growth of the economy

**H<sub>0</sub>:** Consumers in the fashion industry do not actively seek out products from small entrepreneurs for the growth of the economy

The value of Chi-square ( $r^2$ ) is 6.22 and the value of p at 99% confidence for 16 degrees of freedom is 0.98 which suggests that the value of r is greater than the p value. This implies that the null hypothesis is rejected with 99%

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confidence. This further indicates that consumers in the fashion industry actively seek out products from small entrepreneurs for the growth of the economy

### **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

The investigation into "A study on consumer perception towards the Role of Small Entrepreneurs in the Fashion Industry" provides compelling insights into consumer behavior and perceptions. The study reveals that students comprise a significant majority of respondents, highlighting a prime demographic for targeted marketing by entrepreneurs. Shopping habits among respondents vary widely, with opportunities identified for tailored marketing strategies and loyalty programs based on frequency preferences. Key retail channels such as department stores, online platforms, street markets, and boutiques are identified as focal points for small entrepreneurs. Social media emerges as the primary avenue for discovering new small businesses, emphasizing its crucial role in business visibility and customer engagement. Consumers express strong preferences for eco-friendly practices and unique designs offered by small fashion entrepreneurs, affirming their influence on fashion trends and local economies. Despite concerns about quality and trust, there is a clear preference for the personalized service and innovative offerings associated with small businesses in the fashion sector.

### **SUGGESTIONS**

Small fashion entrepreneurs can enhance brand appeal by focusing on continuous innovation and emphasizing creativity in their offerings. Engaging actively with the local community through events and collaborations fosters loyalty, aligning with consumer support for local businesses. By emphasizing craftsmanship and quality over pricing, entrepreneurs can differentiate themselves in the market. Establishing stringent quality control measures and offering personalized customer service further builds trust and loyalty. Integrating sustainable practices and adapting to consumer feedback and trends ensures relevance and competitiveness in the fashion industry.

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