Factors to Improve the Quality of Fashion Clothing Shops in Douala, Cameroon

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Abstract: *Fashion clothing shops in Douala are increasing since 2010 and are not performing well. Thus, this study aims to investigate the determinants that can improve the qualityof fashion clothing shops in Douala which is the largest city of Cameroon.And market, marketing, human capital and business operations were taken as constructs' to influence that improvement of the quality among an age group from 18 to 46 and above. Out of the 225 questionnaires distributed, only 91 were valid for the final analysis, where the researcher had 59 females and 32 males, with respectively 64.8% and 35.2% showing finally that they strongly agree in preference of fashion clothing shops than online shopping. Thus the quality should be improved. However, hypothesis will be tested empirically for further studies.*

Keywords: Clothing, fashion, quality, Shops, Cameroon

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of Cameroon and the Industry of fashion clothing

1.1.1 Overview of Cameroon
Cameroon is in the central part of Africa. It is bordered by the Central African Republic to the East, by Nigeria to the West, Chad to the Northeast, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and the Republic of the Congo to the South. Yaoundé is the capital of Cameroon, the second largest city in this country after Douala, the city chosen for the study. First January 1960, Cameroon gained its independence and became a bilingual country where French and English are the official languages. It is a country with a population of 24,376,863 people in 2017 and occupies 475,442km^2 with its ten regions (Review, 2017).

In 2016, the country's economic activity slowed at the point that the growth was expected by the end of 2017 to be dropped up to 3.7 percent if we compare with the 4.4 percent in 2016. Since the production of the oil was quite slow, especially in the West of the country (BANK, 2017). Let us notice that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2017was 4 percent. The GDP growth of Cameroon in recent years increased substantially, between 1998 and 2017 (Knoema, 2018).

To improve the quality of a business, entrepreneurs face a lot of challenges. We can name the funding, the poor infrastructure, the income distribution which is inequitable, corruption, imports-exports, and generally the climate which can be unfavorable for a business. Nevertheless, even though that to get a loan is not easy and the cost of financing is high, Cameroon have a lot of microfinance institutions which can bring their support (FIDELIS, 2016).

1.1.2 Industry of Fashion Clothing Background
The fashion clothing industry has made great progress with the fact that people can handle transactions through many platforms. Nowadays, the business industry in Cameroon faces different types of business with consumers, which can be done physically or electronically. Clothing shops in Cameroon are likely present in business to consumer and business to business markets (CHRISTOPHER F. & ROBERT N., 2014).

According to the research done by the National Institute of Statistics (INS)of Cameroon, only 14,723 production units operate in the industry of clothing-textile-cotton in Cameroon and 99,4% of all these units are handle by small enterprises. For the whole sector in 2013, they have achieved a turnover of FCFA 16.7 billion annually out global sales of 142 billion.

However, the global turnover is specially assigned to the activities of cotton with 87.3% of the global amount. *"The lack of financial support, the cost of raw materials which is high, the obsolescence of the equipment of the production and the fiscal pressure are among the biggest difficulties with which small units in the sector have to contend"*, the INS study indicates (BUSINESS IN CAMEROON, 2018).The fashion clothing boutique industry continues to grow even though the economy of Cameroon is dominated by the public sector and the fact that people are more and more in the process of discovering the online clothing (Akinboade, 2015). But since the online platform is still at its genesis stage, fashion clothing shops interest people because they can come physically to get and try exactly what they are looking for.Therefore, the quality should be improved.

1.2 Purpose of the research and Problem statement

1.2.1 Purpose of the research
The purpose of this study is to improve the quality of fashion clothing shops in Douala – Cameroon, by specifically looking at ways in which shops' managers can keenly orchestrate their various business functions as a development plan. Therefore, the factors taking in consideration are Market, Marketing, Human Capital and Business Operations. We will focus the research on these factors while understanding the individual influence of each on the improvement of fashion clothing shops in Douala Cameroon. Additionally, the research work can be use in

academics to expand the knowledge of other students as reference material, and useful for the society.

1.2.2 Problem statement

Since 2010, clothing shops kept on increasing in the city and each one is trying to build a solid brand image. However, they are not running well due to high competition and the entry of online shopping. Since everyone should be dressed up, people are more and more interested in fashion. Thus, the quality of the combination of modern and cultural material whether in clothes, shoes and accessories should be improved to make people appearance more attractive and different. The results of the research work will look into ways to keep afloat their overall performance.

1.3 Terms of References

1.3.1 Research objectives

- To analyse the influence of the Market on improving the quality of fashion clothing shops in Douala Cameroon
- To investigate the effect of Marketing on improving the quality of fashion clothing shops in Douala Cameroon
- To understand the role of the Human Capital on improving the quality of fashion clothing shops in Douala Cameroon
- To study how the Business Operation impacts on improving the quality of fashion clothing shops in Douala Cameroon

1.3.2 Research Questions

- What role does the Market play on improving the quality of fashion clothing shops in Douala Cameroon?
- How does Marketing impact on improving the quality of fashion clothing shops in Douala Cameroon?
- What is the effect of Human Capital on improving the quality of fashion clothing shops in Douala Cameroon?
- How does the Business Operations improve the quality of fashion clothing shops in Douala Cameroon?

2. Literature Review

In this section we will review the four factors mentioned above, to look into their influence on improving the quality of fashion clothing shops in Douala. Thus the research framework:
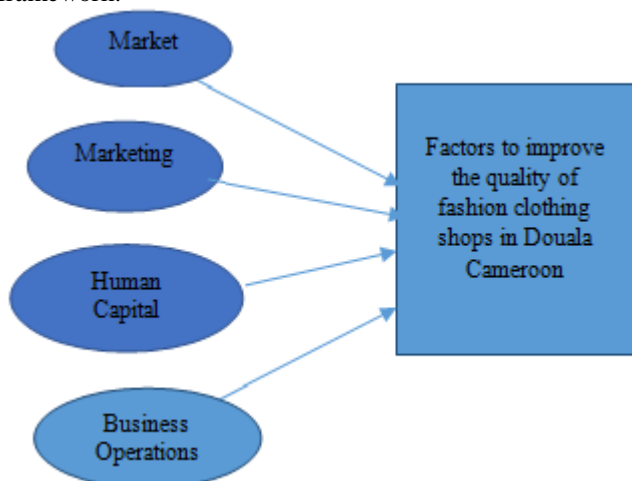

Figure 1: Research model

2.1 Market

Market is a nominal or actual place where purchasers and sellers interact directly or indirectly to trade whether services or goods. In other words, the action of selling and buying (Moffatt, 2017). Since the market is always changing, to handle this change, the market research should be focused more on competition, the market trend and growth of the fashion clothing industry in Cameroon. Therefore, let us apply the Michael Porter Five Forces (Porter, 1997) to understand what role the market play on improving the quality of fashion clothing shops.

2.1.1 Rivalry among Competitors

This is link to the strength, the number of the competitors and how the quality of some products does and services compare to others. The competition is intense in fashion clothing industry due to the remarkable number of brands (Alan Shop; Damilwl; International shopping Cameroun; Carino Boutique; etc) which offer almost similar products. Nevertheless, for their quality and features, some brands drive loyalty (GIMET, et al., 2015). The market has been populated with new brands, the global economy has been fluctuated, the rise of technology and digital (MAMMYPI, 2017). Despite the treat on clothes, shoes and accessories, shops are still in need for carrying out work due to the quality of all the items imported to run businesses and, even the ones bought locally.

2.1.2 Bargaining power of suppliers

The bargaining power of suppliers can be exerted on an industry participant by the fact of raising prices or reducing the purchased goods and services quality. The profitability of an industry can be squeezed by suppliers due to higher prices they can practice (Prasad, 2011). However, in fashion clothing industry, they should follow the rules set by brands. Brands use the clout of their finances to have influence on prices thus, because they possess the purchasing power, it can be easy for them to switch from one supplier to another in the industry (Zhang, 1997). So, the control of suppliers in fashion clothing industry is very little and then, their bargaining power is not too significant (Pratap, 2017).

2.1.3 Bargaining power of buyers

This is related to how big are the buyer orders, how is easy for them to drive prices down, how much would it cost them to switch brands, and how they can be strong enough to set rules and impose them to brands. The power of each group of buyers is related to a number of its market situation features and, compared with the overall business, to its purchases relatively important (Porter, 1997). This explains why in fashion clothing and apparel, the bargaining power of even individual consumers should be a significant force. Thus, in this 21st era, power is in the customers hands. Even if they don't influence directly the position of a brand, they can impact the brand indirectly. So, brands should clout in the best manner their consumption (Fiona, et al., 2016).

2.1.4 Threat of new entrants

As mentioned above, the fashion industry is densely populated with a lot of brands. However, existing shops and new ones must use a great differentiation level to succeed. Because, the seriousness of the threat is related to the

barriers to the entry, such as economies of scale, product differentiation, capital requirements, access to channels of distribution, cost disadvantages independent of size, etc(Porter, 1997).In the fashion clothing industry, brands continue to move by finding unique ways to succeed and grow popular. In Douala, the threat of new entrants is a weak force in this industry. The proof of this fact is the popularity of fast fashion which always increases(Pratap, 2017).

2.1.5 Threat of substitutes

The threat of substitutes refers to how is easy and cheap for customers to switch from one brand to another. It is from inside the industry that it comes from, by the fact that no brand can be assured that it will keep its celebrity without be focus on the consumers, regarding the intense competition (Aksoy, et al., 2012). Nevertheless, brands have many substitutes even if clothes don't have in general. There aresubstitutes that, at lower prices, can make high end styles. However, the Porters framework doesn't always address the demand size, it doesn't explicitly account for the government role, focusing not only on current market, but on the entire industry. It can be taken as brainstorms because it is more qualitative (Dobbs, 2014). New factors need to be considered like the government influence, which should include the competitive environment changes, takes account of time.

2.2 Marketing

According to Philip Kotler, marketing is *"the capacity of creating, exploring and delivering value to satisfy a target market needs at a profit. It is the process of putting in execution the production, pricing, promotion and distribution of services and goods, to generate exchanges that satisfy the goals of individual customers and organizations"*(Kotler, 2011). John Burnett added that the purpose of all business is not only to identify its customers, but to keep them too (Burnett, 2008). But brands are continuously looking forward to reinforcing the marketing mix or 4Ps (Product, Price, Place and Promotion) in order to provide a high level of satisfaction.

2.2.1 Product

A product is anything that in order to satisfy a want or need can be offered to a market. This can be a service or a physical good. The customer will assess the offering through the product quality and features, the services mix, and the appropriate price (Kotler, 2011). Considering fashion clothing shops, the products are clothes, bags, shoes and accessories such as belts, watches, underwear and fragrances. To make themselves looking good and presentable, customers are always seeking for something new, good quality, and accessories that they can perfectly match with their apparels. Therefore, the purchasing decision is not always easy to make. Nevertheless, with good quality products and good advices, it should be less hard to make.

2.2.2 Price

When come to purchase a product or a service, the price is very significant for the customers. However, they always seek for products with high quality, comparing the price with competitors to ensure that the product deserve the price paid.Generally, regarding the fashion clothing shops, the price needs to give back the image that the brand wants to establish. The fact remains that items with lower prices will expect sales with a higher volume, while luxury items may generate the same revenue with few sales via higher pricing (SHERMAN, 2010).Thus, the price should be based on the material costs, the labor required to produce the item and its perceived value.

2.2.3 Place

The place is not only the physical building like a shop but, even any ways through which the product is made accessible to the customer like the online selling (Kotler & Amstrong, 2010). Therefore, it is very important that brands get enough products and do a balance between its target customers and the costs of distribution channels. This push to select neatly how the marketing mix is drive together to match the product to the target market needs. Thus, shops should have great warehouses to stock a lot of items in order to always equipped the distribution channels such as stores in Douala, independent fashion clothing stores and department stores to create 'shop in shops' around the country.

2.2.4 Promotion

Promotion is the means for brands to inform and persuade customers to purchase their service or good. This is usually done through advertising, social media outreach, special offers, branding, sales management, etc. all this provide customers product information like its usage, characteristics and the availability (Sable, 2018). The promotion purpose being to get and retain customers, fashion clothing shops can planned the use of effectiveadvertisement, direct mail (catalogues for instance), events, exhibitions, sales promotions (like discounts), public relations (by taking part to charitable events for example), could dress up a country celebrity as product placement branding.

The 4Ps still hold value however, may not be valid in all businesses due to the fact that they accentuate on a product and the communication of that product, because the product may not be always being marketed (Allotey, 2017). Moreover, the B2B marketers are undercut by the 4Ps in three sorts: the product technology and goodness are stressed even if considered as entry cost; it insists on the necessity to produce a solid case for their solutions high value. And this prevent them from taking benefit of their advantage as a reliable diagnosis, problem solving and advice source. Therefore, to be useful to B2B marketers, the 4Ps need to be rethink by upgrading Product to Solution, Place to Access, Price to Value, Promotion to Education and in short word 4Ps to SAVE(Ettenson, et al., 2013).

2.3 Human Capital

Human resource is one of the successful function of any industry, in particular in clothing industry. Manpower is like the lung of the industry. Therefore, for carrying out the objectives of the industry, every effort should be made on a priority to keep this function up. The fashion clothing industry especially in terms of shops is a great employment generator in the way that, it contributes to the country's economy through the creation of working opportunities (Subbiah, et al., 2012).

2.3.1 Importance of Human Resource

The department of human resources (HR) is very critical in a business, no matter how big or small is the business. The HR main goal in most of the firms is to achieve the mission and the vision of the business. In fashion clothing industry, HR is important not only to managers but even to employees. First of all, to managers, HR is helpful in the process of recruiting and hiring workers. The communications of the legal requirements are done by the HR in the way that, on any current regulations of the employee, the department update the company. A solid performance management should be great to see how address issues and feed brilliant employees. Secondly, to employees, the HR responsibility is to enhance the sales department capacity, in motivating the staff and generating conditions that make tasks easy to be done (Meere, 2017).

2.3.2 Recruitment and Selection

Recruitment is a process where individuals are attracted in a limited number and with required qualifications to occupy vacancies. Thus, in order to be admitted, recruitment process involves that the candidate must have the qualifications related to the job specification (Rahman, et al., 2015). Besides, recruitment sources can be internal or external like colleges, agencies, referrals, advertising, electronics, universities, etc. After the recruiting process, should come the selection process which is the process of choosing the best applicant from a group of candidates, suited for the position. This can be done via interviews, physical ability tests, work force samples for more presentation from the candidates, reference checks, to name a few.

2.3.3 Training and Development

Training and development both usually go together and are very important for the employees of a company. For business like clothing shops, training and development are very critical in the way that, employees will learn and understand how to work in teams. It is through training and development that workers are provided with new ways to improve their skills in order to contribute efficiently to product and service quality (Armstrong, 2006). However, Regarding fashion clothing shops, there should be different types of training such as induction, job and internship training, promotional and sales training, design and modelling training to name a few.

2.3.4 Rewards and Compensation

Gary Dessler in his book Human Resource Management defines compensation through the words that "*employee compensation* refers to all forms of his / her pay and arising from his / her employment"(Dessler, 2013). So, after recruiting, selecting and training the employees, the company should think on how it will reward and compensate its workers in order to steady them. Therefore, to do it in an industry such as fashion clothing, managers can provide incentives, promotions, regular wages, rewards and sometimes increase wages. Also, motivating the staff and generating conditions that make tasks easy to be done, so the employees can feel more comfortable and safe.

2.4 Business Operations

The Business operation refers to all the tasks involved in a business daily duty in order to generate profits. It is a set of activities which in relation, produce to the customer something of value. Therefore, it is very vital for a company in that way to specify roles and defines better decisions of the organization. This helps to put up the visibility and the productivity of the company, leads to stakeholders and the customer satisfaction. Thus, it has specific goal, inputs, outputs, and a number of activities (Schneider, 2017).

2.4.1 Value Chain

A value chain is a set of activities of a firm which are performed to deliver a product or a service for the targeted market. These activities are linked to the competitive position of the organization. It assesses the value added of each single activity to the company product or service. This thought came to the idea that businesses like fashion clothing shops are more than a compilation of people, equipment and money. Therefore, it is only when all these things are fixed together that it can become possible to generate something that a customer is willing to pay a price (Porter, 1985).

2.4.1.1 Primary activities

Primary activities can be grouped into 5 key areas (inbound logistics, operations, outbound logistics, marketing and sales, and service) and are those concerned with the creation of the products or services, and even to market the product or service. Each of these primary activities is involved to uphold activities helping their efficiency of effectiveness.

2.4.1.2 Support activities

Businesses should have what Porter call *support activities* with its four main areas: procurement, technology (with R&D), human resource management including all the HR practices (recruitment, selection, training and development, performance management, employee pay and benefits, etc.) and infrastructure (not only buildings, but even systems for finance, planning, management of information, quality, etc.).

2.4.1.3 Linkages between Primary and Support activities

The ability to link properly all the value chain activities will generate for the business the profit margin. These linkages are too crucial for the business success. For instance, it could be only when the Marketing & Sales function lists forecasts of sales for the next period to all others functions in time that, Procurement will be capable to call for the important material for the right date (Recklies, 2001).So, the linkages are for the perfect collaboration and information flow between the activities of the value chain, even if in most industries, some companies are elements of a supply chain and can face some risks (Kanchan & Reza S., 2015).

3. Research Methodology

The research adopted the questionnaire survey method to collect data. The questionnaire was designed based on the factors mentioned above such as market, marketing, human capital and business operations. The survey had three sections organized into questions. The 1st section was based on the consent of the respondent where he / she is willing

and agrees to take part in the study. The 2nd section contained the respondent profile. The 3rd and last section was related to the subject matter where the respondents were just required to stick one answerwith all the items appropriate to measure them. The last section was structured in Likert'scale five-point (LIKERT, 1932).

Data were collected electronically through google form and via emails from some shops managers, to individual from universities students, secondary's school students and employees. All of them from the Littoral region of Cameroon, which has as capital Douala. This has been done to get relevant information to achieve the research objective. 225 questionnaires has been distributed to the target audience with an age group of 18 to 46 and above years old. After following up and cleaning up the 109 questionnaires received, only 91 were found valid to be used for final data analysis. The analysis has been done since Sekaran suggested that the sample size appropriate should be at least 100 participants (Sekaran, 2003), and be between 30 and 500 respondents according to the rule of thumb suggested by Roscoe (Roscoe, 1975).

4. Discussion and Results

A total of 225 questionnaires were distributed, and only 91 out of 109 returned were usable for the analysis. The researcher got 59 females and 32 males, with respectively 64.8% and 35.2%. So, females are more interested in fashion than males.Thus, the results illustrated that 33 % of the participants were aged from 26 to 30 years old, 16.5% from 18 to 20, 15.4 % were aged from 21 to 25, 14.3 % aged between 31 and 35 years old, 8.8 % aged between 36 and 40 years old, 4.3% for those aged between 41 to 45 and 7.7 % were above 46 years old.

More than a half of the respondents were from universities schools with 58.2%, 23.1% from employees, 11% from secondary's schools and 7.7% from some shops' managers. This segmentation let the researcher to see how the quality of fashion clothing shops in Douala can be improved by having data not only from shops managers and employees, but from the students too due to the fact that they are big customers.

Considering the number of visits per week that the respondents can make by going to clothing shops, 54.9 % can make it once a week, when 24.2 % are for twice a week. Meanwhile, 11 % are going thrice a week and 9.9 % can go more than thrice a week.Furthermore, 56 % of the respondents confirmed that they can spend below 100,000 Franc CFA to purchase an item in a fashion clothing shop, 24.2 % were between 100,000 Franc CFA and 200,000 Franc CFA. Meanwhile, 11 % can spend between 200,000 Franc CFA and 300,000 Franc CFA and 8.8 % more than 300,000 Franc CFA.

The statement concerning the preference of physical fashion clothing and accessories shops to online shops is showing that, out of the 91 respondents, 34 strongly agreed, 33 agreed, 9 were neutrals, 8 disagreed and 7 strongly disagreed. Surely because online shopping is still at its genesis stage, and with physical shops, customers can try

items before paying. Testing hypothesis will be empirically done for further studies.

5. Conclusion

This study had as main objective to investigate the determinants that improve the quality of fashion clothing shops in Douala- Cameroon. Market, marketing, human capital and business operations were chosen as variables to influence that improvement of the quality. 91 respondents were considered for the final analysis with the age group from 18 to 45 and above. The questionnaire was distributed from the shop managers to employees and students as customers in Douala. The results indicated that the quality should be improved.

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