

The Impact of Digital Media Advertising on Consumer Behavioral Intention towards Fashion and Luxury Brands: Case of the Gambia

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of digital media advertising on consumer intention towards fashions and luxury brands using a case of consumers in The Gambia. The study is built on the new methods and concepts used in digital marketing environment with growing potential to influencing consumer behavioral intention towards fashion and luxury brands.

Digital marketing factors such as privacy, familiarity, trust in advertiser and content, entertaining digital ad, digital interactivity, and relevance of digital ads were factors used to measure consumer intention in digital media ads of fashion brands. Total respondent involved in the quantitative survey comprised of seventy four. The results of the multiple linear regression analysis are inconsistent with some studies; however, it is also in line with results from several past studies. The study reveals that digital media ads that are entertaining, attracts consumer trust in the advertiser and content of digital media ads were considered to have the most significant impact on consumer intention towards fashion brands. Results also conclude that social media, websites, e-mails, and search engine continue to dominate the retailing of fashion brands.

The study recommends that digital media ads should be effectively aligned with traditional mass media, built with some entertaining content, but based on ultimate value proposition, strategically aimed to promote consumer interest and trust.

Keywords: Digital marketing; Digital media; Consumer behaviour; Advertising

Introduction

According to some scholars, global internet connectivity continues to grow at an unprecedented rate that has never been experienced over the past decades. Accordingly, this trend is expected to rise faster in terms of use and growth of internet and its related technologies across all sectors of product and services categories [1,2]. This massive internet penetration allows for the adoption of internet as a strategic medium for personal and business use. For businesses it serves as a strategic tool in planning and execution of activities and processes that enhance the competitiveness of one firm against others. For those firms it is not only a communication tool but a source of information, and platform for customer engagement and retention [3,4].

The growth of new technologies such as smart phones, smart watches, and a host of others allow market expansion through vast audience and access beyond physical distance of brick and mortar stores. Its usage among all demographics becomes significant part of lifestyle and hence its influence is far overreaching across sectors and markets. Internet helps reach more markets effectively compared to traditional means. To remain competitive in today's turbulent market conditions, corporations require effective use of resources (including web 1.0 and 2.0) to build bridges and reduce physical distance between the business and channel members along the supply chain, as well as in real time. Businesses can further leverage internet and its related technologies to increase market presence both virtually as well as physically at every stage of consumer buying decision process. In addition to physical presence, digital footprints enhances brand awareness, create resonance and further influence customer purchase decision making [5,6]. When consumers have easy access to a brand whether through person-to-person direct contact or internet connectivity prior to, during, and after purchase transactions, this further increases the brand's authenticity [6].

Virtual platforms such as digital media provide mass availability and access to more recent information. Taylor [7] argues that internet has become a major source of information consumption and to a great extent, has almost replaced traditional media such as radio, newspaper, and television. Also, the use of internet has become popular among consumers for searching product or service information (or reviews) and purchasing [4]. For this reason, companies use internet for many reasons: to enhance real time communication with customers, to increase sales, improve brand awareness, and raise the share of voice in the marketplace. Digital medium such as smartphones, tablets, smart televisions, and computers are used to place digital marketing message in any form, time and place. These messages can be placed in several forms on the internet such as images, video, text, animation and games. Using several digital media platforms, companies can demonstrate their products and services and enhance interactivity with its target customers. Therefore, digital advertising can be said to be a form of promotion that uses the internet and the World Wide Web for the purpose of delivering marketing messages for customer attractions and purchasing [8].

Despite the popularity of digital advertising, proliferation of online presence among businesses, which remained highly unregulated,

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rendered the content of online advertising popularly doubted among consumers due to lack of trust, poor content, obtrusive to personal privacy amongst others.

Most of these businesses provide a generic online advertising rather than personalized experience and thus lacking maximum customer engagement and retention. While marketers attempt to use digital advertising to lure customers' emotions and feeling towards brands, the outcome become rather unsustainable and futile, most of the time, leading to lack of consumer trust in digital marketing. However, the limited empirical studies on customer reactions to digital advertising reduced the potentials to maximize the return on digital ads [7].

When marketers understand digital consumer needs and attitudes, they will be able to ascertain the digital media platforms to assure large audience, proper timing, and excellent content creation during planning and implementation stages of the digital ads. According to Taylor [7], the limited knowledge and unpredictability of customer behaviour towards online advertising amongst practitioners lead to creation of poor content, mostly unsubstantiated claims, continues to arouse consumer mistrust and high resistance rate to digital advertising. Often times, these ads become obtrusive, rather annoying and unrealistic. In order to provide further insights on this widely polarize debate, this study seeks to analyze the impact of digital media advertising on consumer behavioral intention towards fashion and luxury brands, case of retail fashions sector of The Gambia.

As several studies concentrate on digital advertising means such as social media, e-mail, pay-per-click ads etc. as single measure of brand performance and market growth [9,10], this study examines the nature and relationship between digital advertising and consumer purchase intention. While several studies touched on the conceptual review of digital marketing as a single measure of brand performance, this study is built on the already existing theories to empirically measure how digital marketing must be aligned with consumer behaviour and attitude as well as the brand in order to leverage the potentials associated with digital marketing. It is noted that consumer behavior differs widely across markets and demographics, thus this study looks at differences in terms of attitude, values and intention [4,11], and different situational and contextual conditions [12]. To provide insights into this problematic research area, this study seeks to achieve the following goals to guide the entire research process accordingly:

1. To discuss several means of digital media advertising in the context of digital marketing based on the review of relevant scientific literature.
2. To discuss the nature of consumer behavior in digital marketing environment and how it is influenced by digital media advertising factors.
3. To propose theoretical model on the relationship between digital media advertising and consumer intention based on review of relevant scientific literature.
4. To draw conclusion on the results of the findings, and propose actions to enhance the effectiveness of digital ads on consumer attitudes towards retail fashions brands in The Gambia.

Consumer behavior continues to be a dominant field in scientific journals and thus, digital marketing practices requires inclusive approach to consumer behavior study [4] and purchase intentions [3]. Recent studies showed that consumers have shift attractions from traditional ads (mass media ads) to digital media campaigns [12]. Digital media ads allows for mass audience as more people use

smart technologies thereby exposing them to ads virtually at the same seconds irrespective of place and time [12]. This study further noted that firms that are able to optimize digital marketing are a step ahead of those that are not.

With the emergence of e-commerce, consumers of brick and mortar stores become hard-to-sell, opting for products that are available through the web. There is increased dependence on consumer online reviews to make purchase decisions, explore the search engine for relevant content, and seek brand engagement and feedback. These situations opened prospects for more personalized services, and enhance digital marketing across both products and services categories. Therefore digital marketing should ensure that consumers are empowered, relied on them for guidance rather than trying to change their perception like traditional marketing do [12].

Meanwhile there is lot to be admired in digital marketing, especially in the fashions and luxury goods category. Fashion and luxury brands are ostentatious in nature and the emergence of digital marketing enhances that experience associated with prestige and value. However this may not be the case for all the markets. For example consumers in developed economies that have seen rising surge in digital technologies over decades ago may not infer the same level of prestige and superior value as the case may be for consumers of the world's least developed economies where digital marketing is largely considered a myth and a way for defrauding consumers.

Background

Digital marketing in The Gambia fashions and luxury retail industry

Digital marketing has experienced a significant growth in the context of world's fashion and luxury goods category. This rising competition brings about mass proliferation of digital marketing necessitated by increased online advertising, consumer online shopping and coordinated online surveys. These strives continue to set high standards for companies and traders of fashion and luxury goods in the rest of developed and emerging markets, and Gambia is no exception. Meanwhile, digital marketing practices in The Gambia fashion and luxury sector are still new, quite underdeveloped and highly unregulated. However, the most dominant practices of digital marketing in this country include digital campaigns via YouTube and social media especially Facebook. This therefore limits the opportunities of enhanced digital marketing that could boost growth of local markets and diversify local brands into global markets.

A country with a population of about two million people continues to see significant growth in fashions subsector like jewellery, bags and clothing amongst youth (millennial) and older consumers. Although fashion brands are pretty much expensive for average consumers in the country, but the overall domestic demand for imported fashions (like bags, jewellery and clothing) continues to spike higher than domestic fashion brands.

This rising cost of global fashion brands continue to be felt as a result of low-average income, and depreciation of Dalasi (Gambian currency) against major importing countries such as US dollar (\$), British Pound sterling (£), Chinese Yuan (¥) and Euro (euro) could be key. The composition of above-average income and high-end social elite fashion consumers constitute about less than 23% of the population. This trend results to relatively low demand for fashion apparels in the markets -resulting to consumer online search and purchasing direct

from the few e-commerce sites available to them at even much less cost relative to prices in the domestic market.

The unprecedented growth of the number of fashion businesses (like branded stores, specialized distributors or importers and local firms involve in processing batik and tie-dye among other apparels fashion designers) have increased over the years due to rising demand for fashion. This proliferation of market players affects the overall competition and domestic price of fashion due to similarity of products and small-size of the market. In the end, consumers become quite opinionated in terms of choice of fashion, price, quality and access. Therefore, unless fashion businesses leverage the benefits of digital marketing in Gambia's small, but viable market, global brands would likely continue to experience stellar growth while local brands will remain far behind. But effective digital marketing in the sector could help ensure increased market awareness and engagement with local and global consumers about Gambia's growing fashion industry.

Despite the growing popularity of digital marketing globally, the slow rate of internet penetration in the country greatly inhibit the rate of digital marketing. Internet becomes more of social and relational media for communication between people rather than medium for marketing. Despite this slow connectivity rate, only few businesses are making enhanced digital marketing. While Internet retailing in the country remains far behind compared to other countries in the sub region, the use of social media platforms particularly Facebook and YouTube is growing in popularity among businesses and consumers. On Facebook, fashion brands are displayed through videos and photos and the number reaction (i.e., total likes, comments, and views) is measured to determine the choice of consumers. YouTube allows for online video streaming of especially locally made brands. But due to erratic power supply and weak internet connectivity heavy video streaming is not possible.

Furthermore, lack of effective analytics of reactions, engagement and trends among the very few digital marketing users, limits the vast interactive potential and growth of digital media marketing. Also the problem such as user friendly platforms, lack of e-commerce platforms and secured online payment systems remain almost non-existent in the country. These factors pose severe challenges to online fashion retailing in The Gambia.

More than 60% of fashion and luxury apparels in the country are imported from United States of America, China, and other parts of Europe. Fashions such as designer bags, dresses, shoes and other apparels produced by popular brand owners (like Prada, Louis Vuitton, Calvin Klein, etc.) continue to dominate Gambian fashions sector. These brands command huge popularity in the sector due to the global prestige and quality associated with them. The successes of these brands could be associated with global-wide marketing campaigns by producers and independent dealers leading to a global chain reaction in terms of brand awareness and competitiveness. Meanwhile, locally-made fashions in the country continue to grow, and gain popularity in the local market and experiencing relatively low competition with imported brands. According to studies, heightening competition of fashions globally allows businesses to embrace the opportunities of digital marketing otherwise be bound to experience low market growth and brand equity [1,3].

Fashion products are high-end goods and thus digitized experience with this target segment could be highly promising. However, the absence of adequate digital marketing practices in the sector limits value proposition and market positioning. As a result, fashion businesses

become myopic of the niche that exists among the fashion and luxury consumers in the country. If digital marketing is widely practiced, fashion industry could provide opportunity to anticipate consumer needs, launch campaigns and deliver value to more fashion conscious consumers adequately and efficiently [13], and thus promote global awareness of beautiful Gambian-made fashion brands. This trend could impact on consumer overall view and opinion of how digital media advertising shape attitudes towards brands advertised digitally. To a great extent a certain amount of prestige could be associated to brands advertised via digital media compared to traditional mass media. However this assertion cannot be known for fact unless customer opinions are sought to offer insights into the effectiveness of digital advertising among the consumers with limited experiences of digital media advertising.

The limited empirical studies of digital marketing in fashions category have rendered this study very crucial. Moreover, there is no scientific literature on digital advertising practice in The Gambia that could be used to guide businesses in marketing fashion and luxury brands, hence the motivations of this research.

Literature Review

Conceptual review of digital marketing, platforms for digital media advertising, and consumer behavior in digital media environment

Digital marketing: Digital marketing continues to shape marketing approach to today's well informed and globally diverse consumers. New digital technologies create added value to consumers through positioning them as participants (called "prosumers") as producers and consumers [1] rather than end-users [14]. Online, content-based marketing strategy thus helps to bridge physical barriers of both consumers and firms through virtual contacts leading to new relationship paradigm [9,15]. According to Sinha et al. [4], digital marketing allows for individual attention to consumer needs through engagement, better campaign management, and marketing design and execution. Also, digital marketing enables products and services to be positioned, promoted, distributed and serviced [16]. For firms that need to establish long-term mutual relationship with 'critical sufferers' such as consumers and salespeople, web based strategy is needed to promote digital relationship and co-creation of content and meaning of marketing messages [1,9]. In the world of digital age, surviving the challenges of empowered customers requires less dependency on traditional mass marketing tactics [1,16].

If strong brands are important to companies operating in a world of bricks and mortars, they are even more important in the open market of virtual environment where they are transparent and more accessible [10]. According to Siegel and associates [15], digital marketing produces opportunity to build and strengthen company branding activities. Internet offers opportunities through digital platforms to allow for interaction and engagement than just broadcast messages [16].

Despite the numerous significant roles of digital marketing, several conditions remain to impede successful execution of digital marketing activities. Tiago and Verissimo [9] noted that limited investment in digital media, lack of qualification on the part of marketing practitioners, poor customer engagement and perception of low benefit potential continue to persist, and even erode into well-established corporations. These further limit the gains driven from digital marketing activities and unveil the brands to challenges of limited awareness and consumer

trust. As consumer trust and potential for infringement of personal privacy become challenges in digital marketing, the marketers are forced to braise-up with adequate content creation through engagement [13].

Thus, creating the condition that allows collaboration with customers in developing and testing new products enhance brand loyalty and increased equity. Rubinstein and Griffiths [10] noted that making fast, continuous customer engagement and feedback is a way of increasing involvement and building loyalty.

According to Simmons [13], companies can harness the potentials of digital media marketing to achieve operational and strategic goals of businesses in the following ways:

1. Establishing online brands provides strategic competitive advantages to 'first mover' businesses;
2. Helping businesses through systematic process of understanding needs, attracting, retaining and learning customers;
3. Enables businesses to go beyond awareness of site to developing relationship and trust through improved "click-to-order" ratio and repurchase;
4. Enhance building strong stronger relationship with customers, business partners through unique message and functionality, content and customization;
5. Enhance delivery of consistent and improved quality brand experience through a unique proposition concept and quality delivery of brand promise.

In the past, marketers rely on television, radio, email, and telemarketing and informational websites to mass-market and disseminate information to consumers. The presence of today's disenfranchised digital media provides not only a new channel of information distribution, but a mean to engage market players and reduce the barriers of physical distance between consumers and businesses [9]. These enable digital media advertising an appropriate step towards a more socially-involved brand concept development to brand awareness and delivery to continuous relationship building and engagement [15]. Media platforms such as company websites, social media networks, photo and video sharing sites, aggregators and syndicators, reading lists allow large brand awareness and bring more traffic or visitors to a site [15].

However the choice of media platform depends on its accessibility to the ultimate audience of ad message. Each media offers unique appearances of the brand, thus integrating the ad message; brand value and choice of media make all the big differences on these platforms. Several digital platforms such as social media, E-mail, Gamification marketing (using games to advertise the company and brands), and Search engine advertising among few others continue to dominate digital advertising scene.

Social media marketing: Social media continues to be a prominent promotion and communication platform to businesses. Businesses of all sizes and markets use social media for mass brand awareness and enhance customer engagement [13]. Most companies used social media to enhance personalized customer online experience, thus allowing for customization [1,13]. This further ensures adequate measurements of the effectiveness of everything: from consumer behaviors, to actions and outcome paths, to results [16]. According to Constantinides [1], 62% of U.S consumers used social media sites to read online reviews, and 95% of them consider these reviews reliable. This study further notes

that trustworthiness of social media reviews over the years doubled the traditional newspapers and television maintained a staggering figures of 22% and 21% respectively.

According to studies, Social media networks such as corporate website continues to dominate companies' communication channel and thus constitutes about 90% followed by Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter at 73%, 46% and 42% respectively [9]. A significant percent of people between 22-50 years old maintained at least one social media account, making them vulnerable to digital ads messages via these rich social media platforms. Companies can leverage on this growing numbers to increase brand awareness, reach, and word of mouth through effective social media marketing programs. Today, a significant percent of consumers depend on social media reviews to make purchase decisions which are vital to the overall brand equity [13]. Therefore, social media advertising provides unlimited brand awareness and global-wide customer engagement. Compared to mass media advertising, social media remind undoubtedly cost-effective, most effective source of quality content and customer engagement.

Despite these benefits, social media can destroy a brand in just a click. Several actions by special interest groups or individuals used social media to protest anti-brand campaigns in times when brands conflicts societal and individual concerns. These anti-branding sites use consumer complaints, product evaluation forums and social interactions among customers of corporation have to protest online dissatisfaction. Therefore vigorous monitoring of online brand's health will help promote online brand reputation. Also using social media analytics could help curb further damage to brands and ensure favorable customer-brand relationship. However, there exist several limitations among practitioners in terms of content creations, measurement and interpretation of social media insights, and timely responses to customer queries, and engagement. These factors continue to inhibit the potentials of social media marketing across all markets and product and services categories.

E-mail marketing: Due to increased global internet connectivity, e-mail constitutes one of the leading digital marketing means since 2014. E-mail marketing is still in use despite the growing consumer discontent with privacy and message spamming [17]. E-mail is an essential form of communication within a marketing channel where businesses can communicate brand value proposition to desired target audience, and additionally, customers also communicate their needs upstream to the businesses through E-mail [15,18]. While e-commerce practice rises in fashion and luxury sectors, direct marketing using e-mail continues to attract large customers through personalized products and services. Changes in different e-mail message content can directly influence reach and message reception of the desired target consumers [18]. On a daily basis companies use email for several reasons [17-19]: To increase revenue to the firm through awareness campaigns, and up-or cross-selling efforts; to increase traffic to websites, brick and mortar retail locations, or call centers; to improve brand awareness, performance, and customer conversion rate (actions); to deepens customer preference and profile information through surveys, promotions and sweepstakes; and to promote customer relationship and engagement.

To ensure effective email marketing, personalizing e-mail messaging is relevant to positive reception of the ad message. However understanding needs, timing and interesting messages based on customer priority can help increase positive attitude towards e-mail ads remind widely a challenge for practitioners.

Search engine marketing: Search engine marketing is one of the most recent and highly effective ways of digital advertising with high potentials to increase brand awareness and drive traffic to the company's website [20]. Consumers use internet search engine to seek information of particular brand or business. The search engine advertising is popular among users as it scans the web for relevant keywords and make available in search results that are in the form of online advertising available to advertisers [20]. Several studies posit that success of search ad depends on the relevance of the search keyword [15,21] or the use of "long tail" keywords [20], results of which remain highly disputed in scientific literature. Search marketing allows users to conduct a search of a brand or a business and the search engine scans for relevant and desired content on the basis of keywords [15]. This medium allows advertisers to use the internet search to placed message, URLs, banner ad or text linked to the advertiser's websites to provide further information about their brand or the business related to the search keyword [15,20,21].

Organic search results are free for advertisers but, results displayed on sponsored search engine is paid by the advertiser each time the internet user clicks on the results in the sponsored search result section [20]. On the other hand, while some advertisers are more particular with the number of clicks on the sponsored search by the users, others are interested in the total number of brand awareness as a result of the presence of the ad on the search [22]. However, ranking of the search results very important as the ad is likely to generate more clicks, more awareness, and lower cost of acquisition when the search is ranked higher [20,21].

Gamification marketing: The use of gaming or "gamification" is new and showing growing popularity in digital marketing scene and among marketing practitioners, especially in mature economies and West in particular. As one of the popular trends in services marketing, games constitute the hallmark where e-commerce and electronic market intertwined [23]. Therefore gamification is referred to as "the process of enhancing a service with affordance for gameful experience in order to support users overall value creation and brand engagement" [23]. While several studies explored the definition of gamification in service marketing described a game as "a rule-based formal system with a variable and quantifiable outcome, where different values, the player, exert effort in order to influence the outcome, the player feels attached to the outcome, and the consequences of the activity are optional and negotiable". Although definitions vary, they all emphasis on human computer interaction, providing opportunity for online brand presence and interaction.

Furthermore, game plays are source of entertainment and serves as marketing channel for communication and interaction between brands and the users. Marketers use games to enhance brand interactivity and engagement with consumers as common reference for human-computer interactions [24]. Thus, the aim of gaming in marketing is for consumers to buy, change perception through designs and screen displays to covertly or subversively persuade consumers to brand engagement [23]. Gamification introduces a new paradigm of persuasive marketing to use services to connect company or brands with consumers.

Consumer behaviour in digital environment: Consumer behaviour has gained significant attention in marketing practice, and would continue as the hallmark of product and service marketing across all sectors [11]. This trend is growing fast and has influenced purchase decisions through information provided by companies and consumers available online. The introduction of World Wide Web

promotes customer-brand relationship and a network of groups of consumers in digital environment [3,7]. Digital media is shaping consumer experience of brand value and access to more information about products and services. This is because digital technologies have become part of our daily lives providing opportunity for more brand exposure, and promotes customer relationship with the brand, the company and other group of consumers [7].

Consumer behaviour is either directly or indirectly linked to how people consume, waste or destroy products and services as a result of our lifestyle, attitude and value [1,11]. Therefore, businesses build long-term relationship with consumers in digital environment brand relationships have become strategic marketing policy to ensure impactful brand experience and customer loyalty [1,3].

However, these digital presences caused massive shift in consumer behaviour between utilitarian behaviour and hedonic consumer behaviour [11,25], or aesthetics behavior [25].

Study shows that there is increasingly growing acceptance rate of consumers of digital ads globally [4]. This study further posits that spending on global mass media advertisement will reduce rapidly while digital ads expenditure especially through mobiles, email, and social media will increase exponentially. However, it is not clear what aspects of digital ads that enhance consumer trust and stimulate desired positive actions. When consumers view brands in ads, they make opinion based on hedonic or utilitarian aspects of the ad message. However, this attitude towards digital ads differs from one customer to another and according to the sector [4]. Most consumers are influenced by motion, pictures, or overall design of the ad in order to invoke desired actions among several consumers.

Generally, advertisements stimulate consumers to develop interest in information about brands and companies thus the choice of digital media platform is crucial to enhance desired responses towards the brand in the ad [7]. Digital ads are generally ubiquitous and customers have growing concerns over privacy and spamming.

Therefore, marketers must be responsive to customer privacy, trust issues, and relevance of message [7]. It can be assume that when consumers opt-in for receiving ads before sending such messages, they are more likely to build higher acceptance of the ad and improves overall effectiveness of digital advertising. Based on this proposition, it can be assumed that digital ads that recognize customers privacy concerns have positive influence on consumers and stimulate desired response towards the ads and the brand, as such messages respects consumers' personal space/privacy, hence H1: digital ads that observed and value consumer concerns over privacy have significant positive influence on behavioral intention towards the ad.

Studies confirmed that advertiser is among the most important factor in consumer acceptance of advertising message. When consumers develop trust of the advertiser, they are more likely to transfer the same trust to the ads message and responds favorably towards the brand in the ad [26]. Digital media ads have sprawled increased attention over trusting issues surrounding virtual information in online business. Credible and ethical companies provide assurance that their message will be trusted and consequently influence desired customer behavior through relevant content [7]. Consumer trust is the reason for which customers build upon purchase decision making, and influence the quality of interaction and behavioral commitment of the customer with the brand. Furthermore, Studies show that consumer trust is highly related with attitude and behavioral intention towards ads and message recall [7,26]. Companies that established trust with customers

are more likely to record high reception and positive response towards digital ads messages.

Based on the above assertions the following hypothesis is proposed: H2: consumers are more likely to be receptive to digital ads from marketers they trust.

In this world of information overload, relevance of content and message is key ineffective digital advertising. To enhance desired consumer behavior towards digital ads, ads that are relevant and useful to consumers have favorable reception [7,27]. Privacy and trust issues that surround digital environment require relevant ad content to evoke desired responses. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed: H3: consumers are more likely to be receptive to digital ads that are relevant to them.

Customer engagement is the new order of relational marketing that requires customers' involvement in co-creation process through continuous interaction and feedback. Digital media provides perfect opportunity to enable customer involvement in brand development, management and delivery process. Where customers can review website and give feedback, marketers can assure effective quality delivery consistently in timely and most effective manner [25]. However, studies proved that virtual interaction with customers have negative impact on long term relationship. Also, studies show that when customer experience of the "human-touch" is enhanced a better relationship and trust is built over time, and that is limited in virtualized digital interaction [26,28] Therefore, it is not clear whether this assumption holds for fashion shoppers hence that the following hypothesis is proposed: H4: digital ads that incorporate and allow interaction with the brand are more likely to evoke positive desired customer response.

Advertising messages can be presented in many forms such as those that are informational, entertaining, etc. and consumers respond differently towards these different forms of ads. According to several studies, ads that are informational indulge consumers with required information for purchase and use of such products, particularly suitable during product introduction [7,27]. On the other hand, digital ads that are entertaining are more likely to evoke positive emotion and feelings towards the ads compared to informational ads. Based on these assertions this hypothesis is proposed: H5: digital ad messages that consumer considers entertaining are more likely to evoke desired response than ads that are not.

Digital media enhance brands to be strong and powerful. A digital media message promotes brand awareness, strengthen customer-brand relationship and generate new prospects [15]. According to Taylor [7] a message that is strong and has the ability to build a brand online is the single most important factor in digital marketing. When message is strong, it helps effective targeting and allows for greater customer engagement. Thus, it is assumed that H6 digital ad messages that integrate well with the brand are more likely to evoke desired customer behavioral intention towards the ad.

Several studies showed diverging views over the above assumptions. Despite these divergent opinions there is almost non existing studies that validate empirically how digital advertising influence fashion shoppers particularly in developing economies.

Research Design and Methods

A survey method of data collection has been used as an approach to seek direct opinion of retail fashions consumers in The Gambia. These

questions reflect the basic demographic information on consumers as well as questions that concerned customer opinion of digital media advertising. The goal is to see how consumer opinion of digital media advertising differs from one respondent to another and the degree to which the ads influence opinions about fashion and luxury brands. To develop insights into the effect of digital ads, this study uses several digital media available to fashion and luxury business such as social media, E-mail, Search engine optimization, gamification marketing, and company website.

Sampling and data collection techniques

Combinations of primary and secondary sources of information constitute the backdrop of this study. It is opined that multiple-source of data collection in research help to ensure the extrapolation of large data and generalization of results [29]. Review of relevant scientific literature on digital marketing constitutes the theoretical background of this study. In addition, primary data was collected to gather empirical data from fashion shoppers in The Gambia. The quantitative market research is positivist and deductive, thus they allow you to confirm or reject hypothesis and are methodically rigorous and considers the truth as objective and universal. The primary data collection mode was employed through design and distribution of online survey questionnaire.

The online survey questionnaire is a self-administered data collection tool used in this study. Respondents were invited to participate and fill in the survey questions which could last for about ten (10) minutes. Invitation to participate in the survey sent out to consumers in The Gambia through Facebook, Email, Twitter, and LinkedIn, and follow-up on response submission was done via these media as well. Sample population of hundred (100) respondents has been sent out and invitation accepted to participate in the survey from a cross section of fashion shoppers in The Gambia. These respondents were selected randomly based on convenience sampling techniques. With this sampling technique, a significant amount of accepted responses could guaranteed with less cost, time, and ensure high response rate, thus reducing the non-response error [30].

The questionnaire is divided into two main parts: first part includes consumer opinion of digital advertising and media used in digital advertising. A five (5) point Likert scale (ranging from strongly disagree, to strongly agree) was used as scale in the questionnaire.

According to Saunders et al. [30] this method helps to elicit respondents' behavioral motivation through a range of scale. Second part of the questionnaire relates to consumer demographic details such as gender, age category, income and source of exposure to digital media advertising message. This information helps ensure adequate profiling of fashion shoppers and further helps in developing targeting and positioning strategy.

Defining measurement scales

Measurement scales used in this study comprised of questions defined by hypothesis to collect required data. A total of six (6) scales have been used namely: Attitude towards the ad (entertaining), Attitude towards the advertiser (trust of the advertiser), familiarity (content), Attitude toward the brand in the ad (Relevance in ad), Digital responsiveness (interactivity); Privacy concern (collection of information); and consumer behavioral intention (towards the brand). All the constructs were measured according to 5-point Likert scales ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These scales have been widely used by several academic and practitioners in the

field of marketing and consumer behavior studies. To identify the true Cronbach's Alpha for each scale during the data analysis section of this project, IBM SPSS statistics (version 22) has been used in the calculation of constructs and other relevant statistics.

These scales have been adopted and customized to fit the purpose of the current study. After a review of several relevant scientific literatures, it has been observed that there exist limited to almost non-existent measurement scales on digital marketing dimensions resulted the need for the adoption of appropriate scales from several widely used literatures. Despite these shortcomings, relevant aspects of this study have been fully noted during scale customization and adoption. This is anticipated to avoid misplacement of meanings, and enhance elicitation of required responses from survey respondents. To assure the appropriateness of this study scales, all the scales have been subjected to statistical measurement of internal consistency of each scales. According to the number of responses and the mode of answering, all the scales surpasses the threshold of acceptable level of consistency with previous studies (i.e. 0.5) ranging from 0.6 to 0.9.

Note: Relevance of ad message has four (4) original statements used in previous studies and gives Cronbach's Alpha of 0.91. While in the current study the Cronbach's Alpha values for the same construct using the same number of statements result is 0.58. Accordingly, to assure internal consistency and reliability of the scales used in the data collection process, researcher has a discretion to eliminate one or more statements that may result to bigger or small values of reliability to a more acceptable level of consistency value (i.e. values ranging from 0.6 to 0.9), hence the new values consist of two statements for the scale-relevance of ad message. Similarly, privacy concerns which consists of three statements according to original scale and alpha value for which falls far below acceptable reliability range, leading to an elimination of one statement which results in improved values from 0.42 to 0.82 Cronbach's Alpha. With this new Cronbach's Alpha the scale is considered suitable for further use in the study.

Data Analysis and Results

Results of the study are presented using descriptive statistics, graphs, charts and matrices indicating the behavior of tested variables of the study. An account of the results of sample population is presented using descriptive statistics and a tabular representation of variable mean and frequencies. Furthermore, research findings have been presented based on the test of hypothetical statements. These statements have been analyzed according to multiple linear regressions. Analysis of results has been done using statistical tables and graphs generated from SPSS output. Test of hypothesis accepted or rejected has been confirmed according to the result of the statistical tests.

Sample profile of the study population

The purpose of the study is to analyze the influence of digital advertising on fashion and luxury consumers in the smallest West African nation of The Gambia. To measure opinions of fashion and luxury consumers in these country seventy-four (74) completed questionnaires were returned and constituted as the overall total of responses for this study. Of all the number of respondents, male constitutes (56%) while female respondents were (44%). The number of respondents between ages categories of 26-34 years old have recorded the highest values of (50%) compared to 17-25 years and years old and above recorded (26%) and (14%) respectively.

Descriptive statistics: The study uses Likert scales to measure different consumer opinion based on predetermined set of questions.

All these constructs are measured according to five (5) points Likert scale ranging from one (1) strongly disagree, two (2) disagree, three (3) undecided/neutral, four (4) agree, and five (5) strongly agree. Out of the total number of respondents, results showed that there exist differing opinions in their evaluation of constructs: entertaining, familiarity, trust, relevance, interactivity, privacy, and intention.

The statistical mean (m) for entertaining (m=3.73), familiarity (content) (m=3.63), trust (m=3.54), and intention (m=3.77) indicate that responses to these constructs are more inclined towards "agree" tendencies (ranging from 3.5 to 4.0). However, responses for privacy concerns (m=3.18), and relevance of digital ad message (m=2.94) have neutral tendency (ranging from 2.5-3.5).

Respondents demonstrate "undecided/neutral" in their responses to these two constructs. Based the statistical mean of constructs, entertaining digital ad (m=3.73) has a much bigger evaluation compared to others, and relevance of digital ad was evaluated the least according to the mean (m=2.94). May be they do not understand or have little opinion about the questions concerning their fashion designer with regards to privacy and relevance of digital ad messages.

Descriptive statistics: Digital media and gender difference: A cross tabulation statistics was carried out to gauge the relationship between gender and respondents exposure to digital media advertising. The results "Crosstabs" shows that media exposure for digital media advertising has significant difference between male and female respondents in terms of media for digital advertising exposure ($p=0.03$; $p<0.05$).

Meanwhile, results showed that social media has a much bigger exposure of digital advertising exposure to respondents in The Gambia. It can be opined that Facebook, Twitter and YouTube among host of other social media could be highly valuable to increase fashion brand awareness and customer engagement. Social media constitutes bigger percent exposure to respondents by (74.3%) followed by search engine (such as Google search) with (9.5%), then Smart television (6.8%), Electronic games (5.4%) and Email (4.1%) reported to have least dependency for digital media advertising among respondents in The Gambia.

Descriptive statistics: Gender difference according to digital media factors: Two independent samples t-test has been used to determine the existence of any statistical difference between male and their female counterparts in terms of the overall evaluation of digital media factors used in the model. Respondents showed differing opinions on some of these factors while others remain mainly indifferent. According to the results of two independent samples t-test, female have a mean (m=3.927) compared to male (m=3.651) and $p>0.05$, showing there is no significant difference in their behavioral intention towards fashions brands in digital media advertising, hence ($t=1.178$; $p=0.890$).

Result of the two independent samples t-test showed male respondents a mean of (m=3.262) and female (m=3.073) and $p<0.05$ in their evaluation of privacy concerns in digital media advertising. Based on the results, there is a significant statistical difference between male and female in their evaluation of privacy concerns in digital media marketing for fashions brands in The Gambia, hence ($t=0.848$; $p=0.008$). Therefore, male respondents are more conscious and wary quite often about privacy concerns in digital marketing compared to female respondents.

Results of independent samples t-test shows female respondents

a mean of ($m=3.619$) compared to male ($m=3.309$) and $p > 0.05$ in their evaluation of the level of interactivity involved in digital media marketing. According to this result, there is no significant statistical difference between male and female respondents in terms of digital media interactivity, hence ($t=-1.441$; $p=0.826$). Weather fashion brands involve some degree of interactivity with consumers and brand, this thus have no significant difference among respondents in this study.

Results of the two independent samples t-test shows that female have a bigger mean ($m=3.062$) compared to male respondents ($m=2.857$) and $P<0.05$ in the evaluation of the relevance of digital media advertising of fashions brands. This results indicate that there is a significant statistical difference between male and female in terms of their opinion of relevance of digital media ads, hence ($t=-1.193$; $p=0.05$). Therefore, females tend to be highly concerned over the relevance of digital media ads in their purchase decision making of fashion brands compared to male respondents.

According to the results of two independent samples t-test which shows female ($m=3.711$) and male ($m=3.423$) and $P > 0.05$ in terms of the level of trust in digital media advertiser of fashions brands. However, these results indicate that there is no significant statistical difference between male and female in their opinion of trust of digital media ads message, hence ($t=-1.376$; $p=0.10$). Respondents evaluated that trust in digital advertiser does not significantly influence their intention towards fashion brands.

Results of two independent samples t-test which shows female a mean of ($m=3.828$) and male ($m=3.494$) and $P > 0.05$ in their evaluation of familiarity (ad content) with designer/trader of fashion brands. This results does not show any significant statistical difference between male and female in their evaluation of fashion designer/retailer's in terms of familiarity, hence ($t=-1.438$; $p=0.387$). Therefore, familiarity with the designer has no influence among respondents in the evaluation of fashion brands.

Finally, results of two independent samples t-test which shows female a mean ($m=33.804$) and their male counterpart ($m=3.684$) and $P>0.05$ in their evaluation of entertaining digital media ads of fashion brands. According to this result there is no significant statistical difference between male and female in their opinion of how they are influenced by an entertaining digital ad, hence ($t=-0.523$; $p=0.113$). Respondents evaluated that digital ads that are entertaining seems to have no influence in their judgment towards the fashion brand in the ad.

Research analysis and findings

A test of normality was done and results confirmed that all variables used in the model meet the conditions of normality. However, a result of the P-P plot shows slight dispersions away from the distribution. Despite this, it is assumed that it will have an insignificant impact on the model outcome. Result of residual statistics of Cook's distance (maximum, 0.14) was used to identify any available outliers in the model. This indicates that the value is far below 1.0, showing there are no extreme cases on the model.

According to the results of the multiple linear regression, all the set of predictor variables (independent variables) such as familiarity, entertaining, trust, relevance, interactivity, and privacy account for a significant impact on the model outcome, hence variance ($R^2=0.642$) 64% of the model ($P<0.05$). Therefore, the model is a good predictor of outcome. To analyze the effect of individual predictors in the model, t-statistics were significant for entertaining (positively related, $t=3.512$;

$P=0.01$) means consumer evaluation of digital media advertising that is entertaining has a greater impact on their behavioral intention towards the fashion brand in the ad. Also, trust (positively related $t=2.579$; $P=0.012$; $P<0.05$) which means consumer evaluation of trust in the digital advertising content significantly influence their intention towards the fashion brand in the ad. However, the results does show any significant influence of familiarity ($t= -0.211$; $P=0.833$), relevance ($t=1.713$; $P=0.091$), interactivity ($t=0.033$; $P=0.974$), privacy ($t=0.879$; $P=0.382$) on consumer intention towards digital media ads of fashion brands. The results of the standardized coefficients Beta in the evaluation of the impact of each individual predictor variables (independent variable) on the outcome (intention), results show that only entertaining (0.373) and trust (0.338) accounted for a statistical significant contribution on the outcome and thus $P<0.05$. Therefore, a 1% increase in scores for entertaining and trust will lead to a greater impact on their evaluation of intention towards fashion brands. The two variables make the most significant contribution to the model outcome compared to other predictor variables. To validate the hypotheses according to β in the order of relative importance of individual predictor variables in explaining the outcome intention was entertaining ads ($\beta=0.383$; $P=0.01$) and followed by trust in content and advertiser ($\beta=0.377$, $P=0.012$); while other predictor variables showed no statistical significance on the outcome variable familiarity ($\beta = 0.023$), relevance ($\beta=0.254$), interactivity ($\beta=0.004$), privacy ($\beta=0.073$), and $P>0.05$. Based on these outcomes, H1 (entertaining ads) and H5 (trust in the content and advertiser) are supported, while H1, H3, H4, H6 are not supported by this study.

Regression model thus:

$$=0.089 \times \text{Intention} + 0.383 \times \text{Entertaining} + 0.377 \times \text{Trust}.$$

Discussion

Results from the analysis showed that respondents evaluated these factors differently from one another. However, trust in digital media ad and entertaining ads were evaluated better compared to others. Overall, the results of the study confirmed the multidimensionality of digital marketing factors on consumers across several market categories and regions.

Therefore, results of the statistical tests indicate that male respondents have a much bigger exposure to digital media advertising through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. This result is in line with other literatures. This means the growth of social media in developing economies especially in The Gambia is something to be harnessed by retailers of fashion and luxury brands. Therefore, fashion and luxury businesses can leverage these massive potentials to increase brand awareness and integrate with other traditional media to achieve increased brand performance.

Furthermore, age category between 17-35 years old is the biggest users of social media and this is consistent with the literature. This study concludes that, this trend will grow more than 32% in few years to come. Thus, businesses could also leverage social media to increase brand awareness and enhance customer-brand engagement and influence. According to Kaplan and Haenlein [31], if a business is not present on social media it means such business does not exist in cyberspace, thus limiting its exposure to large market and influence. According to Constantinides [1], 81% of those businesses that engage in social media registered about 56% of new business through market exposure and customer engagement.

While there is increased popularity of search engine marketing in

global internet marketing scene, search marketing remains far behind social media among respondents in fashions category. Only 14% of respondents say they depend on search engine for information on fashion trends and exposure. Therefore, it can be argued that such consumers must have heard about a fashion brand prior to their use of search engine for relevant content.

According to Durmaz and Efendioglu [12] search advertising may not be as effective compared to social media as the use of banner ads results to banner blindness among consumers. Additionally the success of search marketing depends on the relevance and popularity of keywords than to enable search result on the top of listed search. This ranking however remains a fundamental challenge for marketers. Male respondents have reported to have higher tendency towards search engine for product search and information about fashion and luxury brands, and the age category of 36-50 years have bigger interest in search results. This trend will likely continue for quite a long time among such groups because they consist of well educated, stable family and who make purchase decisions based on economic rationality [3]. Brands must be able to use search marketing in conjunction with social media in order to increase brand awareness and drive more traffic to the brand's website.

Smart TV and Electronic games remain far behind according to respondents 'evaluation of digital media exposure. But a coherent and well integrated digital marketing strategy that incorporate Smart TV and Electronic gaming with traditional media such as mass and print media would stimulate desired response. However, game marketing still remained highly new in the digital marketing scene particularly in developing economies like Gambia where electricity and internet are erratic and expensive compared to other economies, making electronic gaming highly unpopular.

Email marketing remains the least popular in promoting fashion and luxury brands to respondents. However there is increased used of email advertising among major corporations compared to small sized enterprises. Despite this trend female respondents tend to have higher dependency on email marketing compared to their male counterparts. Thus, if businesses want to maximize brand exposure, permission-based email marketing could help enhance this process [17].

In the analysis of digital media factors vis-a-vis gender difference, results remain highly disputed in the literature. Results of the two samples test showed that male respondents are more concerned over privacy issues and relevance of digital media advertising than female respondents. These factors remain highly important for respondents anytime they are exposed to digital media advertising. In order to reduce this contention amongst consumers digital marketers must ensure that there is adequate assurance that customer data will remain secured and confidential at all times. In cyberspace where there is no security, customers tend to developed distrust and confidence in the business. While consumers wary about privacy issues and relevance, marketers of fashion brands should develop relevant information and content of digital advertising to ensure assurance and help restore hope in the business to users.

Contrary to the previous studies, the results of this study showed that privacy issues, familiarity with advertiser and digital interactivity has no significant impact in consumer behavioral intention towards fashions brands in The Gambia [7,27]. However, the evaluation of respondents' opinion of digital marketing factors such as trust in digital media advertising content and digital ad that is entertaining constitutes the highest impact on their behavioral intention towards

fashion brands. Consumer trust in digital ad message becomes the next serious business for digital marketers especially in times of eminent privacy risks associated with online marketing. Significant per cent of respondents say they are more likely to respond positively towards a fashion brand when they trust the advertiser of digital ad and its content. This is consistent with relevant literature [7]. Accordingly, trust is number one factor forgetting customer interest in digital ad message. In addition, trust in ad message is also considered linked to credibility towards the brand and message recall [7]. If a fashion designer wants to instill trust, feedback and interactional relationship is the hallmark of consumer behavioral intention towards brands [26].

The findings also show that respondents believe that digital media ads that are entertaining increase their behavioral intention towards fashion and luxury brands. The digital ad content that composed of fun, and aesthetic gimmicks have a bigger impact on respondents towards fashion brands. Studies support that entertaining message in digital ads has been successful in new digital media context [7]. It is also confirmed that entertainment leads to a more positive attitude towards the ads and purchase intention in messages [32]. This also confirmed that entertaining ads results to inducing customer's sublime emotions to a brand in ads especially among consumers with hedonic consumption behavior, and mostly all fashion brand consumers fall in. Fashion brands are prestigious and a bit of humor and fun in its message content will ensure brand awareness and stimulate desired response. The fashion retailers should ensure that there is stable relationship with consumers, one that is beyond virtual relationship. This will enhance trust and familiarity with the retailer, and thus the dissatisfaction and ingenuity associated with digital marketing is reduced to the minimum.

Conclusions

In conclusion, digital marketing factors such as trust in advertiser and content, and entertaining digital media ads are evaluated highly significant in predicting respondents' behaviour towards fashion brands in Gambia. Therefore digital marketers should understand customers' needs and wants in order to create the right content for different group of consumers. To create the right content, marketers should regularly monitor all reviews and measure the effects of digital media advertising exposure in order to minimize or avoid dissatisfaction. Consumer research is relevant to enhance customer content creation in order to increase positive behavioral intention towards fashion brands.

To ensure long-term preference in the fashion retailer market, value proposition in digital ads must be truthful and reliable. While advertising claims that are aimed at inducing emotions and feeling must be encouraged and strengthened, digital marketers must always ensure that such claims, as discounts, are consisted with value proposed and delivered. By this, trust can be instilled and relationship enhanced.

The annual Gambia fashion week should be dedicated to promotion of digital marketing across fashion and luxury sector to enable knowledge and widespread use of effective digital marketing practices. Trainings on measurement and use of key success factors in digital marketing will ensure effective use and relevant content creation and site management.

Digital marketing must not be done in isolation from traditional direct marketing.

Thus, fashion and luxury brands in digital media marketing must be integrated with traditional offline, brick and mortar stores to enable access and physical presence of these brands to consumers. Despite the prestige associated with fashion brands, digital media advertising

must be aligned (at best) with mass media ads. Social media could be an important foundation for optimized digital marketing in The Gambia.

Limitations of the Study

Several limitations were observed in this study. The sample size of the study is significantly small and thus limits the statistical test to ascertain the results of the study with limited potentials of error and variability. A significant sample size would have increase the validity and minimize the sampling error associated with nonresponses and improve result validity [30].

The short period under which the study was conducted has a bearing on the content and result of the finding. The study reviews and adopts measurements scales used in several previous studies is undoubtedly with limitations. While some scales may not be directly linked to the relevant issues of digital media advertising, some scales are quite simplified or difficult to relate to with consumer opinion. Scales that are created and tested reliable for digital media marketing continue to be very limited in the empirical literature and thus impact the overall results of the study.

There has been limited empirical study on digital marketing and its measurements thus leading to very small available references or literatures.

Studying consumer behavioral intention could be rather difficult task as some consumers are not aware of their intention unless actual stimuli or situational factor triggers it. Therefore it is hoped that providing methods that involves consumers and exposed their behavioral intention could be vital to elicit specific intention in future studies; that would help understand the factors that have triggered intention in the first place, rather than use of abstracts to define behavioral intention.

Finally the limited access to internet connection of the sample population has severely affected the number of responses for this study as more people could not depend on the available connection to fill the online survey.

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