

# Aba, Abia State, Nigeria's Innovative and Interactive Fashion Houses: The Case of Inadequate Facilities for the Growth of the Fashion Industry in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

What is made in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria is not good for the Nigerians unless shipped out to Italy, repackaged and reintroduced back to the country in the name of Imported Product. This is the nonchalance and the problem with Nigerians. The fashion industries in the country are almost gone if not extinct because of bad governments, corruption and many inadequacies as a result of political affiliations and interests. The existing fashion houses are on individual basis and struggling to survive and for a more inclusive fashion industry in Aba, the researchers adopted content base analysis, qualitative research method where they carefully analyzed and interpreted works of other authors and used them in buttressing their points as applied to the issue at hand, Aba, Fashion House. Experts in the industry and especially, in Aba, believed that the fashion industry (houses) if properly handled, will hold paramount importance in today's dynamic world of style and entrepreneurship in the area and will provide a platform for local designers to showcase and give a high end edge to their products and the Nigerian fashion in general. The management of the Aba, fashion industry must find ways to market their products to be accepted both locally and internationally. The idea of shipping their products to Italy and bringing them back to Nigeria to sell must be discouraged. And most importantly, the utilisation of adaptable spaces will allow for flexibility, enabling seamless transitions from workspace to event hosting areas, ensuring the accommodation of fashion shows, exhibitions, and educational workshops and that is how to connect with the rest of the fashion industry world.

**Keywords:** fashion, industry, architecture, technology, innovation, house

## INTRODUCTION

“Made in Aba,” has always been common and associated with any good material, be it clothing, shoes and hand bags seen in Nigeria. Aba, has always been seen as the hub of any good material people wear or use, for the mass production of clothing, shoes, hand-bags, and all that had to do with dressing (fashion) no matter the type. Dressing according to Neufeldt and Guralnik (1994), the act of one that dresses, that which is used to dress something.

In some regions, it is called fashion and fashion is more than just clothing. It could be looked at as an expression of creativity when it comes to dressing, culture, and identity. It has the power to transform and inspire, and it is a constantly changing industry shaped by trends, technology, and the world around us. Fashion is described as the changing styles of dress and appearance that are adopted by a group of people at any given time and place (Lillethun & Welters, 2011).

According to Walker (2017), fashion is a dynamic form of self-expression that transcends mere clothing, evolving into a powerful language that speaks to the complexities of culture, identity, and

societal shifts. She further indicated that, fashion is not just about wearing the latest trends; it is about interpreting them in a way that reflects who you are and what you stand for. People have need to express their emotions, individual identity and culture, and over time, fashion has proven to be a creative art whereby one is able to freely display these qualities that make them unique. That the clothes one wears says a lot about a person is a cliché in this age of increased self-consciousness (Davis, 1992).

Countries, regions and cities are known for their fundamental style of clothing and material. In Ghana, it is their Kinte. In Yoruba, Nigeria, it is Adure tie and dye, and in Igbo land, red cap and ankle band for the chiefs, in America, the blue jean, in London England, the suit and tie, etc. Equally, in those areas in the developed world, their materials are made in their industries while in Aba, they are mostly made in individual stores called Fashion houses. In most of the advanced world, they are made in what is called, the Garment Industries.

The fashion industry has a rich and diverse history, evolving through centuries to become a global economic powerhouse. Its roots can be traced back to ancient civilizations, where clothing served both functional and symbolic purposes. Early textile production techniques were labour-intensive, with hand-weaving and hand-sewing dominating the industry. The Industrial Revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries marked a significant turning point in the industry. Mechanised looms and sewing machines revolutionised garment production, leading to the rise of mass manufacturing. This era saw the transition from hand production methods to machines, chemical manufacturing and iron production processes, and an increase in steam and water power. Machine tools were developed, and we saw the rise of the mechanised factory system. It revolutionised the way fabrics were produced, setting the stage for the modern textile and apparel industries (Stocks Sewing Machines Ltd., 2021),

In the 20th century, fashion became increasingly democratised, with ready-to-wear clothing making high-end fashion accessible to a broader audience. Iconic designers like Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, and Yves Saint Laurent played pivotal roles in shaping the industry. The mid-20th century also saw the birth of fashion photography and the establishment of renowned fashion magazines (Chic Luxury Brand UAE, 2017).

The latter half of the century witnessed the globalisation of fashion, as international designers gained prominence and fashion weeks in cities like Paris, Milan, New York, and London became global events. Fast fashion emerged, characterised by quick production cycles and affordable, trend-driven clothing (Chic Luxury Brand UAE, 2017). The fashion styles are constantly changing with the advancements in communication and technology around the world. The dynamics of the world economy has changed and greatly impacting the socio-economic conditions of every society. Today, the world economy is in a period of rapid and dramatic change, and the question of just how we will connect to this new world is the single most important issue of our life. We are living in a time of contradiction. A time of role reversals, a time in which old expectations are violated so frequently that new expectations cannot form. Many of these contradictions center around connections to the world. The world is now connected and affecting the old operational mechanisms of most establishments. It is a new world and with changes (Moss, 1995).

Technological advancements, especially, the rise of the internet, further transformed the industry. E-commerce platforms allowed consumers to shop online, while social media became a powerful tool for fashion influencers and brands to connect with a global audience. Fashion house on the other hand, according to Smith (2019), is an intricate nexus of creativity and commerce, where designers converge to craft and curate collections that transcend mere garments, encapsulating a distinctive brand narrative.

A fashion house stands as a symbol of creative synergy and commercial innovation, where designers converge to craft collections that extend beyond mere garments, encapsulating a unique brand

narrative. As renowned fashion historian Jane Williams observes, Fashion houses are not merely places of creation; they are storytellers, weaving tales through fabrics and stitches that resonate with the pulse of cultural and aesthetic evolution (Williams, 2018).

In all, fashion houses are all what make up the fashion industry. The fashion industry is a vast, complex and highly profitable sector focused on the creation, production, and sale of clothing. It encompasses various aspects such as design, production, marketing, retail, promotion, and advertising of fashionable apparel. The term Fashion Industry, encompasses a wide range of industries and services, providing employment opportunities to millions of people worldwide. The industry is divided into different sectors, including haute couture, ready-to-wear, fast fashion, and luxury goods. Haute couture refers to high-end custom-made clothing that is made to order for individual clients. Ready-to-wear, also known as prêt-à-porter, is mass-produced clothing that is sold in standard sizes. Fast fashion is a relatively new concept that involves the production of low-cost and trendy clothing in large quantities. Luxury goods refer to high-end products that are produced in limited quantities and are often associated with high prices and exclusivity, and mostly for a special tailored class of people (ostentatious living individuals).

In the past, clothing was predominantly made at home until the late 19th century. However, with the advent of technology, particularly sewing machines, and the growth of global capitalism and factory production systems in the 20th century, the fashion industry gained significant prominence. While the fashion industry initially emerged in the United States and Europe, it has experienced remarkable growth and now commands a prominent position on the global stage. To keep up with modernization and increase efficiency, many fashion companies have adopted outsourcing practices, entrusting certain aspects of their operations to other regions across the globe (Winter & Lasch, 2016). For example, in Aba, Abia State, shoes are produced, shipped to Italy and brought back to resell in the name of imported products. This is simply because, Nigerians embrace foreign made products and locally produced ones, they take to be inferior. On the Cable Network News (CNN), Dr. Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, the Director, World Trade Organization, has on many occasions, discussed this while talking about the potentials in Africa. The fashion industry can be divided into four main categories: raw material production, fashion design, retail, and advertising. What sets the fashion industry apart from other manufacturing sectors is its inherent nature of constant change. Fashion is primarily defined by the creative vision of its designers. Unlike mere clothing production, fashion incorporates elements of taste, style preferences, and cultural evolution, with morality playing a significant role in shaping fashion trends (Schiller-merkens, 2017). The dynamic nature of style is a central aspect of the fashion industry, requiring adaptations not only in production processes, but also in design, advertising, and promotion strategies (Lu, 2016).

The fashion and textile industries are vibrant and rapidly growing sectors in Africa, with an estimated value of 31 billion USD, and Nigeria is a major contributor to this growth. The Nigerian fashion industry is not only significant in terms of its economic contribution, but it also plays a crucial cultural role in the country. Despite facing significant challenges, Nigerian fashion brands are creating a new wave of innovation and sustainability in the industry, using low-impact production methods and traditional handcraft techniques, combined with striking aesthetics and African wax prints. The industry is at the forefront of adopting sustainable practices, recognizing the importance of minimising its environmental impact. By embracing sustainable craftsmanship and innovative design, the Nigerian fashion industry is breathing new life into the country's once-thriving textile industry and contributing to the growth and development of the African fashion industry as a whole (Business Sweden, 2022).

The Nigerian fashion scene has always been characterised by its unique, expressive, and defining nature. Emerging as a leader not only in Africa, but globally as well, the Nigerian fashion industry has continuously undergone transformations, blending traditional elements with contemporary influences while preserving its distinctive charm and essence (Awodipe, 2021). Describing Nigerians

as inherently fashionable would be an understatement, as our lifestyle and elegance reflect a magnitude beyond words. However, similar to a child outgrowing its diapers, the fashion sense of Nigerians has evolved and matured throughout the years.

The fashion industry in Nigeria plays a vital cultural role and contributes significantly to the country's economy. Casual clothing is frequently the choice, though for different events people may opt for formal and traditional attires. These garments encompass a wide range of colours, fabrics and often include decorative elements like beads. Various regions in Nigeria have distinctive clothing styles influenced by their tribal traditions (Okeke, 2023). Nigeria is known for its production of stylish textiles and ready-made clothing, and some Nigerian designers have gained global acclaim. Nigerian craftsmanship is a unique selling point and presents a lot of potential for value added products and job creation to the growing communities.

In Nigeria, there exist different fashion designers with their privately owned studios, workshops, boutiques etc. in different locations yet, very little attention is given to fashion houses. Establishing a fashion house in Aba, Nigeria, and leveraging spatial design to enhance the fashion industry involves a multidimensional approach that integrates both the cultural and economic aspects of the region. Aba, known for its vibrant entrepreneurial spirit and textile industry, has a rich history in garment manufacturing and design. Focusing on spatial design within this context offers an opportunity to revitalise and further promote the fashion industry.

Spatial design plays a critical role in creating an immerse and captivating environment for the fashion house. It encompasses the layout, interior design, and overall aesthetic appeal of the physical space. The local cultural elements of the area are important factors to be considered in the design of the industry. According to Nwabueze (2019), *Cultural Entrepreneurship in the Nigerian Fashion Industry*, emphasises the importance of infusing indigenous cultural elements into fashion and design. This approach not only adds uniqueness to the space, but also fosters a sense of connection with the community, potentially attracting both local and international clientèle.

Moreover, the spatial design would consider the practical aspects of the fashion house, adequate spaces for the design studios, showrooms, fitting rooms, and even spaces for fashion events and workshops. This aligns with the findings by Chen (2020), that indicates that spatial design strategies for fashion retail stores should emphasise the significance of adaptable spaces that cater to various needs within the fashion industry.

Creating a space that encourages interaction, such as incorporating lounges or cafe areas, can also enhance the overall customer experience. According to Smith and Scott (2018), in *The Role of Experiential Design in Fashion Retail*, spaces that facilitate social interaction tend to create a more engaging and memorable experience for customers. Although not structured, and by default, most fashion houses in Nigeria have places for socialization, eatery, drinking, etc.

## **STATEMENT OF PROBLEM**

The fashion industry in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria, has immense potential for growth and development yet, without structured and standardised fashion houses for all. The challenges of fostering meaningful consumer engagement within the fashion spaces through spatial design remains a critical concern for architects and the building industry. Fashion houses are grappling with understanding how spatial design elements can captivate and sustain consumer interest in an increasingly competitive market like Aba. Hence, there is need to investigate the dynamics of the consumer engagement within the spatially designed environments for the fashion industry, exploring factors such as layouts, aesthetics, circulation and the interactive elements to improve on the consumer behaviour.

## **AIM**

The aim of this project is to investigate and propose an inclusive functional fashion house, where appropriate spatial design strategies will be utilized to promote the facilities in the Aba, fashion industry.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The authors adopted content base analysis, qualitative research method where they carefully analyzed and interpreted works of other authors and used them in buttressing their points as applied to the issue at hand, Aba, Fashion House.

## **FINDINGS**

The fashion industry all over the world constantly grows and changing the dynamic and styles of dressings of the people. However, the architecture of the industries while encompassing and with different functional facilities in the advanced world, are mostly still primitive in the development world and especially in Aba, Abia State, Nigeria, known for beautiful and mass produced fashion attires and dressing products. As gathered by sampling the opinions of the experts in the industry and especially, in Aba, the fashion industry (houses) if properly handled will hold paramount importance in today's dynamic world of style and entrepreneurship in the area.

It will serve as an attraction point for everyone interested in fashion, contribute to Nigeria's economy through employment, production and trade, and it will provide valuable insight into the creative process, innovations, challenges and opportunities within the fashion sector, an opportunity for other cities interested in establishing their fashion industry. It will equally, give a deeper understanding of the cultural significance, traditional craftsmanship and unique design elements that contribute to the promotion and preservation of the cultural identities of the people through fashion and styling designs. Most importantly, it will provide a platform for local designers to showcase and give a high end edge to their products and the Nigerian fashion in general.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Aba, Abia State, Nigeria, can only hold Aba down. Abia State has been very unfortunate with the government and governance. None of the governments of Abia State, has been able to fully investigate the fashion industry's potentials of Aba, to take advantage of it and for the industry to grow to its potentials, the governments must align with the Aba, business communities and tap into the potentials of the fashion industry.

The management of the Aba, fashion industry must find ways to market their products to be accepted internationally. The idea of shipping their products to Italy and bringing them back to Nigeria to sell must be discouraged. Developing and building a well balanced industrial structure that will accommodate all the facilities needed for a fully functional fashion industry in Aba, is highly recommended and with well articulated government policies that will see to the industry's sustainability.

## **CONCLUSION**

The establishment of a fashion house in Aba, will present an exciting opportunity to merge the prowess of the local fashion industry with a spatially innovative design, giving room for more challenges, attractions and international investments. By focusing on spatial coordinated spaces and designs, this industrial design will create a dynamic, multifunctional spaces that will serve as a thriving nucleus for the fashion communities. The layout of the fashion industry will be meticulously

designed to encompass distinct zones that will embrace convivial engagement of activities. The activities will include dedicated areas for design studios, workshops equipped with state-of-the-art equipment for garment construction, and spaces for showcasing finished creations. The utilisation of adaptable spaces will allow for flexibility, enabling seamless transitions from workspace to event hosting areas, ensuring the accommodation of fashion shows, exhibitions, and educational workshops.

Emphasis will be placed on incorporating sustainable design elements such as energy-efficient lighting, recycled materials, and innovative eco-friendly technologies to align with global trends and reduce the ecological footprint of the fashion house.

The strategic location within Aba, will foster a sense of community and collaboration among local talents. The spatially optimised design intends to encourage networking, idea exchange, and skill sharing among designers, artisans, and entrepreneurs. This collaboration aims to bolster the collective creativity and innovation within the fashion industry.

Additionally, the fashion house's unique and appealing design, coupled with its focus on sustainability and technological integration, is envisioned to attract both local and international attention. This attention has the potential to position Aba, as a burgeoning fashion hub, drawing in not only local residents and industry experts, but also global visitors, thereby contributing significantly to the city's cultural and economic landscape.

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