



**CONSTRUCTING A FASHION MANAGERIAL SKILLS COMPETENCY  
FRAMEWORK IN SMALL-MEDIUM ENTERPRISE FASHION BUSINESS IN  
MALAYSIA**

**By**

**ZULINA BT KAMARULZAMAN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**November 2023**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**Chairman : Associate Profesor Nazlina binti Shaari, PhD**  
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Entrepreneurs in the fashion industry face significant challenges in acquiring and practicing business skills and competencies. The purpose of this study is to identify the skill requirements that fashion design entrepreneurs (FDE) need to succeed in a competitive business environment. Having a diverse set of skills is essential for FDE to ensure the efficient functioning, stability, and long-term success of the company. This study adopted a qualitative methodology in which fashion experts assessed a series of questions. The data collection process involved virtual focus group discussions, interviews, and question-and-answer sessions with fashion design entrepreneurs, established fashion industry professionals, and government employees who support and train FDEs. Study data were analysed using NVivo12 software to extract codes and themes that led to the final results, and descriptive analysis was performed using SPSS statistical software. This study identifies five essentials for successful business management: mastering personal leadership, competent design management, competent financial management, efficient human resource management, and strong networking skills. The importance of the elements is emphasised. The Fashion Design Entrepreneurs' Managerial Sustainability Framework (FDEMARS) research framework was developed based on key findings. The research framework was validated by a group of 30 fashion-related industry experts, including fashion design entrepreneurs, academic experts specialising in fashion and textiles, as well as industry representatives. The validation process yielded positive results. Experts agreed that FDEMARS is a comprehensive and effective tool for FDEs of different business ability levels. In conclusion, this paper highlights the importance of incorporating business skills management into the FDE function to improve effectiveness and address the various issues faced by the country's economic fashion industry.

**Keywords:** fashion business, fashion design entrepreneurs, fashion managerial skills, small-medium Enterprise, Malaysia

**SDG:** GOAL 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**MEMBINA KERANGKA KOMPETENSI KEMAHIRAN PENGURUSAN  
FESYEN DALAM PERNIAGAAN FESYEN PERUSAHAAN KECIL-  
SEDERHANA DI MALAYSIA**

Oleh

**ZULINA BT KAMARULZAMAN**

**November 2023**

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Usahawan dalam industri fesyen menghadapi kesukaran yang besar dalam memperoleh dan melaksanakan kemahiran dan kecekapan pengurusan perniagaan. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk menentukan keperluan kemahiran yang diperlukan untuk usahawan reka bentuk fesyen (FDE) untuk berjaya dalam persekitaran perniagaan yang sangat kompetitif. Bagi FDE, memiliki pelbagai kebolehan adalah penting untuk menjamin keberkesanan berfungsi, ketabahan dan kejayaan berterusan syarikat mereka. Kajian itu menggunakan metodologi kualitatif di mana pakar fesyen menilai beberapa siri pertanyaan. Proses pengumpulan data termasuk perbincangan kumpulan berfokus secara maya, sesi temu bual dengan responden yang dipilih daripada tiga kategori: usahawan reka bentuk fesyen, pakar industri fesyen, dan wakil agensi kerajaan yang menyediakan sokongan dan latihan untuk FDE. Data kajian dianalisis menggunakan perisian NVivo12 untuk mengekstrak kod dan tema untuk mendapatkan hasil dapatan yang kukuh, manakala analisis deskriptif dijalankan menggunakan perisian statistik SPSS. Kajian itu menekankan kepentingan lima elemen penting iaitu pentadbiran perniagaan yang berjaya: penguasaan dalam pengurusan peribadi, pengurusan reka bentuk yang cekap, pengurusan kewangan yang efisien, pengurusan sumber manusia yang baik dan rangkaian perhubungan strategik yang kukuh. Rangka kerja kajian untuk Kelestarian Pengurusan Usahawan Rekaan Fesyen (FDEMARS) dicipta menggunakan penemuan penting. Rangka kerja penyelidikan telah disahkan oleh sekumpulan tiga puluh profesional dari industri berkaitan fesyen, yang terdiri daripada usahawan reka bentuk fesyen, pakar akademik dengan pengkhususan dalam fesyen dan tekstil, dan wakil industri. Prosedur pengesahan menghasilkan penemuan positif, dengan pakar bersetuju bahawa FDEMARS ialah alat yang teliti dan berkesan untuk FDE pada tahap kepakaran perniagaan yang berbeza. Ringkasnya, disertasi ini menyerlahkan kepentingan memasukkan pengurusan kemahiran perniagaan ke dalam set kemahiran FDE untuk meningkatkan keberkesanan dan menangani pelbagai isu yang sedang dihadapi oleh industri fesyen ekonomi negara.

**Kata kunci:** perniagaan fesyen, usahawan reka bentuk fesyen, kemahiran pengurusan fesyen, perusahaan kecil-sederhana, Malaysia

**SDG:** Matlamat Pembangunan Mampan: Matlamat 8: Pekerjaan Yang Baik dan Pertumbuhan Ekonomi



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|         |                                                                        |
|---------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CAGR    | Compound Annual Growth Rate                                            |
| CEO     | Chief Executive Officer                                                |
| FDE     | Fashion Design Entrepreneur                                            |
| FDEMARS | Fashion Design Entrepreneurs' Managerial Sustainability                |
| FDM     | Fashion Design Management                                              |
| FE      | Fashion Entrepreneur                                                   |
| FGD     | Focus Group Discussion                                                 |
| GIEI    | Global Islamic Economy Indicator                                       |
| KLFW    | Kuala Lumpur Fashion Week                                              |
| KLYDA   | Kuala Lumpur Young Designers Association                               |
| M-CORE  | Microenterprise Competitiveness Rating for Enhancement                 |
| MARA    | Majlis Amanah Rakyat                                                   |
| MEB     | Malaysia Education Blueprint                                           |
| MIF     | MARA in Fashion                                                        |
| PRISMA  | The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses |
| RTW     | Ready-To-Wear                                                          |
| SDG     | Sustainable Development Goals                                          |
| SLR     | Systematic Literature Review                                           |
| SME     | Small Medium Enterprise                                                |
| SOP     | Standard Operating Procedure                                           |
| SPSS    | Statistical Package for the Social Sciences                            |
| SSM     | Companies Commission of Malaysia                                       |
| TVET    | Technical and Vocational Education and Training                        |
| UN SDG  | United Nations Sustainable Development Goals                           |
| VFGD    | Visual Focus Group Discussion                                          |

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a thorough examination of fashion design entrepreneurs (FDE) for individuals who aspire to excel in the realm of fashion design entrepreneurship, bolstering their competence to ensure the effectiveness and perseverance of their enterprises. The present exploratory study highlights the research context of fashion design entrepreneurs operating within the Malaysian fashion sector and their established linkages with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Specifically, this introductory chapter endeavours to provide an overview of the background and rationale for this empirical examination. The chapter comprises several crucial sections, including the problem statement, research queries, research aims, research scope, research constraints, research value, and conclusion.

### 1.2 Research Background

In recent times, the fashion industry in Malaysia has undergone several noteworthy alterations. The expeditious expansion of the fashion industry has spurred the proliferation of numerous fashion product brands. Moreover, amidst the worldwide economic recession, the predicament of unemployment compels individuals to pursue alternative avenues for sustenance (Raja Kasim, Shahzad, & Wan Ibrahim, 2020).

The significance of entrepreneurship in the economic development of Malaysia has garnered attention, prompting the Malaysian government to prioritise the aim of positioning entrepreneurship as a noteworthy industry (Ridzwan, Muhammad, & Rahman, 2016). According to Din et al. (2017), business enterprise is an instrument to boost the economy's execution, driven by advancement and efficiency. The primary objective is to enhance the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the trade. The extent to which entrepreneurial goals are heeded in different economies is contingent upon several factors such as the availability of key resources, the prevailing business landscape, and the degree of responsiveness of the political system (Tyagi, Bhateja, & Tyagi, 2016).

Malaysia initiated the trajectory towards sustainable development well in advance of the advent of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDG) 2030 mission. Based on the report obtained from the official website of the United Nations on Sustainable Development (<https://sdgs.un.org>), it has been noted that Malaysia's New Economic Model (NEM) has outlined a comprehensive five-year development plan with a primary focus on achieving high-income status, promoting inclusivity, and ensuring sustainability. Various factors have been identified as having a relationship with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and serve as vital facilitators. The present study centers around the eighth goal outlined under the UNSDG, which aims at promoting

skills that facilitate sustainable and all-encompassing economic growth, full and productive employment, and dignified work opportunities for all individuals. Verboven & Vanherck (2016) posited that the integration of SDGs into corporate strategies can serve as a proactive measure to mitigate unforeseen operating risks, including market fluctuations, evolving regulatory regimes, and other business precariousness. The study aims to sustain active participation in the fashion industry and advocate innovative practices in fashion design. In the interim, the government intends to pursue strategies that will facilitate the realisation of sustainable objectives for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Numerous prominent fashion brands promote the concepts of sustainability and expansion within contemporary society. Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy (LVMH), a French multinational luxury conglomerate established in 1987, stands as one of the prime players in the fashion industry. The achievement of the aforementioned party may be attributed to a noteworthy enhancement in perpetually reimagined digital correspondence with present, potential, and impending clientele on a global scale (Rosa, 2012). The strategic placement of global brands, which carry significant cultural connotations, can be readily observed in instances where favourable attitudes are inferred within compatible societal norms without the risk of misinterpretation (Batra, Zhang, & Feinberg, 2013). The principle of sustainability can serve as a benchmark for other fashion companies to execute their business practises in a manner that prioritises managerial expertise.

The fashion sector in Malaysia is witnessing a steady proliferation, providing a platform for local fashion designers to showcase their latest collections. Kuala Lumpur Fashion Week (KLFW) has emerged as a recurrent event aimed at promoting and advancing the talents of domestic designers. In an interview for KLFW 2019, Andrew Tan, the founder of KLFW, asserted that the fashion industry is currently undergoing a time of realisation. This phenomenon has created heightened challenges for businesses from both regional and global perspectives. Individuals such as Rizalman Ibrahim, Radzuan Radziwill, and Tom Abang Saufi have consistently remained familiar to fashion enthusiasts within the Malaysian fashion domain. The study evinces that fashion designers can effectively establish and operate their own business enterprises with remarkable success. The aforementioned organisation has established its presence in the industry for close to twenty years and continues to experience progressive growth. As a result, their identity has transformed into a reputable brand.

The journey towards attaining a well-established position was fraught with numerous challenges and intricate turns. However, it is noteworthy that these fashion designers have emerged as emblematic figures, guides, and pioneers, serving as inspiration and role models for their fellow counterparts in the field of fashion design. In accordance with Rizalman's statement cited in Marie Claire (2016), individuals identified as fashion icons hold a consequential responsibility to conduct themselves appropriately, as it elicits a myriad of opportunities and serves as a catalyst for inspiration among others in the industry. Subsequently, these prolific figures possess the ability to provide sound counsel to fellow entrepreneurs regarding critical aspects such as financial management, marketing, legal matters, and insurance policies, among other pertinent concerns. According to, certain mentors are inclined towards disseminating their knowledge and

proficiency in the various components of entrepreneurial acumen through means of training and development. Consequently, there is a demand for individuals who aspire to become fashion designers with an interest in entrepreneurship, coaching and mentoring, or accelerated learning.

In a discourse on art held in 2019, Malaysian fashion experts Faizal Hamid and Calvin Thoo opined that certain emerging designers in the country were eschewing the application of indigenous design culture as they found greater appeal in the global fashion industry's commercial prospects. This assertion is grounded in the fact that Malaysia's fashion landscape comprises a vast array of local brands. Regrettably, an issue concerning the aforementioned merchandise pertains to a deficiency in the domain of imaginative and distinctive fashion designs. One could posit that the prevalence of discarding fashion trends outweighs the prioritisation of producing designs of superior quality.

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) operating within the fashion industry hold a critical position in the Malaysian economy. The fashion industry has seen an exceptional rate of expansion within the country, with the principal drivers of this growth being SMEs. Currently, SMEs operating within the fashion sector of Malaysia are encountering various challenges. The intense competition within the fashion industry represents a significant obstacle (Che Pauzi et al., 2017). The current market is predominantly dominated by a vast number of well-established local and international brands, thus presenting a formidable barrier to entry for newly established SMEs. The tenuous connection between inadequate access to financing and a weak brand identity in the Malaysian fashion industry has been found to impede the creative processes of smaller enterprises, thereby posing significant challenges to these businesses (Rosihan & Aris, 2022). A significant number of small and medium-sized enterprises encounter difficulties in securing financial resources to support various business functions, such as the procurement of materials and equipment and the recruitment of personnel. Notwithstanding the prevailing challenges, there are viable prospects for SMEs operating in the fashion sector of Malaysia. The government has extended its aid to the industry through various initiatives such as financial support, technical guidance, and the provision of market opportunities. Furthermore, an escalating concern for sustainable and socially responsible fashion enables small and medium-sized enterprises to establish a distinctive position among rivals. SMEs operating in the fashion industry of Malaysia encounter a range of challenges. However, these businesses have the potential to experience growth and achieve success through the implementation of appropriate strategies and the provision of adequate support (Mohd et al., 2018).

As a result, it is imperative for the entrepreneurial fashion designer to adopt a proactive approach towards facilitating the growth of the fashion enterprise. The findings of this research indicate that an individual who possesses the traits of a design entrepreneur demonstrates the potential for achieving notable success within the domain of fashion design. Fernandes & Pereira (2019) study posits that fashion design entrepreneurs are better positioned to proactively connect entrepreneurship and fashion design in their endeavours if they possess full competence in managing the business and attain a comprehensive understanding of the pertinent knowledge and networking opportunities.

As stated by Fernandes (2019), in order to establish oneself as a fashion design entrepreneur, it is imperative to embark upon a collegiate or university academic pursuit that instils a firm grounding in entrepreneurial education, culminating in the cultivation of essential knowledge and skills. Malaysia boasts a plethora of both public and private universities and colleges where aspiring students can undertake thorough research in the field of fashion. Aligned with the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB) for 2013 – 2025, Wave 2 (2016-2020) aims to enhance the appeal and relevance of vocational education by rationalising its specialised elective offerings across three core domains, namely (1) engineering and applied science, (2) design and technology, and (3) business and services, as per the recommendation of the Ministry. Therefore, it is imperative to place a heightened emphasis on entrepreneurship courses within the realm of higher education for fashion studies. The purpose of this emphasis is to adequately prepare aspiring fashion design entrepreneurs for the intricate and dynamic nature of the fashion industry (Fernandes & Pereira, 2019).

From the study conducted by Civelek et al. (2017), evidence suggests that microentrepreneurs who have obtained a university degree exhibit greater levels of innovation and self-sufficiency compared to those with a lower level of formal education. The proficient dissemination of knowledge by Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) instructors is vital to upholding the standard of the disseminated materials. Educators may experience increased self-assurance in conveying their expertise in knowledge sharing (Hashim et al., 2016). Entrepreneurship education is commonly acquired through academic institutions such as colleges and universities, with the primary aim of augmenting knowledge and skills in business operations for the purpose of job creation and the provision of employment opportunities to others (Testa & Frasccheri, 2015). Fashion designers are inclined towards entrepreneurial pursuits as a means of fostering economic growth within their respective nations by becoming job creators.

Lang, Liu, & Kobia (2018) posited that the self-efficacy of individuals in fashion entrepreneurship is subject to the influence of five distinct factors. The present study identifies several critical factors that are crucial for success in the fashion industry. Specifically, the first factor entails the entrepreneur's perseverance and effort in the face of various challenges and obstacles that are inherent within the fashion business. The second factor involves the strategic promotion and planning of the brand for the fashion market via various marketing techniques. The third factor pertains to the effective management and acquisition of financial resources to sustain the business operationally. The fourth factor underscores the importance of effective risk management and the ability to handle unexpected setbacks in a professional and decisive manner. Finally, the fifth factor emphasises the imperative role of innovation and creativity in the fashion entrepreneur's mission to achieve a successful and highly impactful business outcome.

The Business Model Canvas (BMC) and the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis are two examples of business models utilised by entrepreneurs. The purpose of developing models is to offer guidance to entrepreneurs in the successful management and operation of their businesses. Several academicians posit that these business models are applicable not only to particular industries but can also be valid for any enterprise. As delineated by Osterwalder & Pigneur (2010), the BMC comprises

nine constituent elements, namely customer segments, value propositions, channels, customer relationships, revenue streams, key resources, key partners, key activities, and cost structure. The BMC is an effective tool for guiding the operational activities of SMEs. One salient aspect that warrants highlighting is the value proposition. The BMC highlights the central importance of generating value for each customer as a key value proposition. The contribution of value is crucial in determining the multiple factors that trigger the need for innovation, improved functionality, tailored solutions, successful task completion, aesthetically pleasing designs, attractive branding and status, favourable pricing, increased accessibility, cost minimization, and risk mitigation (Strategyzer, 2022) as essential requisites for customer attraction and acquisition. As noted by Kurnianingrum et al. (2022), it is recommended that the enterprise foster intimate connections with its client base and produce merchandise that aligns with its core principles to foster brand acknowledgement.

According to Dima (2021), it is imperative for entrepreneurs to adopt a forward-thinking mindset and formulate strategic plans for business expansion, thereby enabling the attainment of micro-to-macro objectives. The present discourse expounds on the criticality of harbouring innovative and imaginative approaches to ensure the longevity of a company. The cultivation of creative thought processes is paramount to the development and maintenance of an entrepreneurial mindset (Suradi, M. Yasin, & Rasul, 2017). SME Corporation Malaysia has advocated for the involvement of micro-enterprises and small businesses in the service sector, whose annual sales turnover amounts to less than RM300,000.00 and possess a workforce of fewer than five individuals, in business financing.

The Budget 2020 for Malaysia emphasised the idea that a business-oriented government can encourage consistent and thriving economic growth by embracing the developing digital market. This serves as evidence that the government acknowledges the entrepreneurial competitiveness of SMEs by providing financial support for digital business applications within the allocated budget. Furthermore, it has been acknowledged by the government that one of the key factors leading to sustainability challenges for businesses is the limited branding expertise and exposure of SMEs (Mohd Tajuddin, Fatimah, & Shakir, 2015). The utilisation of brand identity as a strategic tool for sustainable SMEs within the Malaysian fashion industry has been acknowledged (Fatimah et al., 2015). Nonetheless, the present study focuses on assessing management competencies as a means to ensure business sustainability rather than placing a primary emphasis on branding. Henceforth, pertinent governmental organisations may execute schemes aimed at enhancing the proficiency of business skills.

According to Abdul Mohsin et al. (2017), it can be determined that entrepreneurship is a rapidly evolving field that promotes the cultivation of innovative solutions. The cultivation of entrepreneurial talent and expertise is vital for success in this field (Hazlina Ahmad et al., 2010). In a demanding business environment, the provision of fundamental knowledge and relevant competencies is imperative to promote effective operational outcomes. Ng & Kee (2017) emphasised that in order for SMEs to attain long-term success, they must cultivate a set of fundamental competencies, which include transformational leadership, entrepreneurial competence, technical proficiency, and innovativeness.

Entrepreneurial intervention is instrumental in fostering business continuity and promoting goal attainment. This phenomenon is clearly manifested through the demonstrable acquisition of competencies in business development, as corroborated by precedent studies. Consequently, it is imperative for fashion design entrepreneurs to acknowledge the significance of acquiring diverse competencies to ensure the longevity of their business and address the obstacles prevalent in the contemporary rigorous business environment.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

The present study aims to scrutinise the essential competencies of fashion design entrepreneurs (FDE) by introducing a set of managerial competencies that can potentially enhance their business performance. The concept of sustainability within the fashion industry has garnered notable recognition from both business practitioners and scholarly investigations. However, limited inquiry has been dedicated to examining fashion design entrepreneurs in Malaysia with regard to this area of focus.

The fashion industry in Malaysia has demonstrated an array of fashion design diversification that resonates with the preferences of the indigenous market. Malaysia is recognised as a nation with a predominantly Muslim population; therefore, it is unsurprising that modest fashion has emerged as a prominent fashion trend among its citizens. The Malaysian fashion industry has experienced a pinnacle of success, which can be attributed to the efforts of fashion entrepreneurs (FE), who have played a significant role in enriching the industry with a wide range of fashion trends. Fashion entrepreneurs, including Liyana Rahman, Lola, and Niko & Clare, in addition to celebrities, seek the expertise of fashion entrepreneurs such as Naelofar, Siti Nurhaliza Creación, and Fazura. It is noteworthy that the label Fazbulous is predominant in the domestic fashion sector.

Fashion entrepreneurs and fashion designers possess varying characteristics in the industry. Although those involved in the fashion industry share some common ground, there are noticeable differences between the two positions in terms of their priorities and obligations. The ascendancy of fashion entrepreneurs within the fashion industry has the deleterious effect of marginalising local fashion designers who also act as entrepreneurs within the market. A fashion entrepreneur is an individual who initiates and operates a business related to the fashion industry. The fashion industry is increasingly witnessing the participation of individuals known as fashion entrepreneurs, who, despite lacking a formal education in fashion, are exerting considerable influence and assuming leadership roles in the field. A fashion entrepreneur may adopt a comprehensive approach, encompassing the establishment of a fashion boutique, the creation of a fashion-themed blog, or the formulation and release of a fashion-based application. The organisation possesses a collective unit comprised of sales personnel, marketing professionals, and experts in business analysis. They possess expertise in the domains of marketing, branding, and business strategy. The process may require individuals to strike a delicate balance between their imaginative vision and the financial feasibility of their endeavours.

In contrast, an individual operating as a fashion design entrepreneur (FDE) is inclined towards developing and manufacturing fashionable products, including garments, adornments, or supplementary articles. Upon completing their studies or accumulating several years of professional experience, individuals often initiate the founding and operation of a business with a specialisation in the design and production of fashion-oriented merchandise. It is probable that they possess a greater degree of expertise with regard to the conceptualisation and development of fashion items. In the realm of the fashion design industry, it is commonplace for entrepreneurs to engage the services of highly skilled individuals such as designers, pattern makers, and seamstresses to accomplish the creative and technical aspects of their enterprise. An entrepreneur in the field of fashion design may potentially possess enhanced regulatory power with regards to the creative direction of their products. Notwithstanding, they faced challenges in sustaining the enterprise. The competitive dynamics between FDE and FE are a salient feature of the present situation, and their emergence can be attributed to exigencies encountered in the context. The evolution of fashion culture presents a considerable impediment to the competitiveness of FDE vis-à-vis FE. Therefore, it is imperative to acquire new knowledge in order for FDE to remain aligned with FE and meet the demands of customers amidst the ever-evolving economic landscape. Fashion entrepreneurs and fashion design entrepreneurs, ultimately, fulfil significant functions within the sphere of the fashion industry. Ascertainment of accomplishment within either field is reliant on the integration of innovativeness, astute business acumen, and tactical strategising.

Therefore, the primary emphasis of this study pertains to the competencies that FDE must possess in order to effectively stimulate the sustainability of organisations through competency management. The aforementioned assertion is attributable to the outcomes of antecedent investigations. These studies posit that the existence of a noteworthy correlation between chief executive officers and social media users does not invariably infer the continuation of a company's sustainable operation. Previous research has identified certain aspects that require emphasis to assist entrepreneurs in sustaining and expanding their businesses into sizable corporations.

a) Inadequate business acumen among fashion design entrepreneurs.

According to revelations made by Amir Kadir (2020), a Malaysian fashion designer, during an interview, it is possible for business owners with no academic preparation in fashion to excel in the fashion industry in comparison to their counterparts who possess such a background. A significant number of fashion designers encounter challenges in administering their enterprises since entrepreneurship demands exceptional prowess, and only a few designers possess the requisite aptitude for business participation. While Verboven & Vanherck (2016) posited a notable disparity exists in the allocation of emphasis towards external motivators as opposed to the tangible impact they have on the business. This proposition underscores the imperative for a designer to undertake a critical evaluation of the overall vitality of a company's business operations and, accordingly, adopt a relevant management strategy.

b) Lack of business skills and knowledge in the fashion industry

The manifestation of fashion entrepreneurs in the Malaysian fashion industry has exhibited the presence of thriving competitive ventures. Accordingly, as posited by Che Pauzi et al. (2017), there was significant apprehension regarding the successful sustenance of businesses operated by fashion design entrepreneurs amidst the impact of the global economic downturn. In certain scenarios, wherein design has constraints on exerting influence and a non-design professional assumes the role of manager or client, designers often encounter reduced authority in their capacity as decision-makers (Norman & Jerrard, 2015). The implication that product design leads to problems is an erroneous notion. In fact, product design is deemed instrumental in cultivating sound business acumen (Sherwin, 2012). Zeng & Xu (2010) assert that the coordination of design and management between managers and designers hinges on practical applications, proficient design management, and an effective communication channel. In order to effectively compete amongst other fashion entrepreneurs, it is imperative for every fashion designer to expand their knowledge and expertise in pertinent areas such as business marketing and effectively disseminate and promote their capabilities through various social media platforms. Kurnianingrum et al. (2022) stated that in order to facilitate and optimise target market activities, it is advisable for the company to develop a diverse range of products. Moreover, it is imperative for stakeholders to prioritise the promotion of the community, foster positive relationships with invested parties, conduct extensive surveys and environmental analyses to identify current prospects, and remain open and responsive to constructive feedback.

According to research by Mohd Johan, Md Syed, & Mohd Adnan (2019), SMEs must offer clear and precise descriptions of their products to help customers retrieve relevant information effectively when online shopping in Malaysia. It is imperative for online retailers to furnish reliable shipping services in order to prevent the delivery of defective products to their clientele. Moreover, it is imperative that SMEs possess the necessary expertise to maintain the confidentiality and integrity of their client's data. In order to accomplish this objective, it is imperative for them to establish a secure cybersecurity policy aimed at safeguarding the IT infrastructure from malicious individuals.

c) Incompetence in managerial skills within fashion business management

Fashion designers in Europe have the potential to sustain themselves through engagement in the fashion industry, unlike their counterparts in other industries. The extent to which information acquisition and transfer shape business strategy remains contingent upon various factors. Aakko & Niinimäki (2018) contend that certain entrepreneurs in the fashion design industry prioritise the creation of artistic endeavours over their business development. According to Testa & Frascheri, (2015), individuals in the fashion design industry who aspire to create their own businesses hold promise as prospective generators of employment opportunities in the future. As reported by Kamaruddin et al. (2017), diverse types of backing and aid provided to fashion design entrepreneurs during the initial phase of their business can enhance their competitiveness in the market. The comprehension of information acquisition and the efficient resolution of associated issues are of paramount significance (Norman & Jerrard, 2015).

Nonetheless, it is imperative that research endeavours seek to benefit fashion design entrepreneurs by enhancing their proficiency in fashion business management, thereby ensuring their sustainability in the fashion industry. In the Malaysian context, it may be posited that SMEs that solely view their operations as intended for domestic consumption are potentially associated with a substandard status. There is empirical evidence to suggest that SMEs have made significant contributions to the economic development of the nation (Ali et al., 2018). Based on the research by Lavinsaa et al. (2020), Malaysian SMEs have no valid rationale for disregarding the crucial importance of participating in the Fourth Industry Revolution 4.0 (I4.0) for the purpose of elevating their competitiveness, as pertinent knowledge has been disseminated to them. Hence, it is imperative to eliminate this substandard mindset, as Malaysian SMEs possess the potential to surpass current limitations. The present study aims to examine one of the key predicaments confronted by fashion design entrepreneurs, namely, the attainment of a well-balanced equilibrium between overseeing the development of designs and managing the business processes. Fernandes & Pereira (2019) posit that fashion design entrepreneurs encounter formidable hurdles in the adjustment phase of their ventures as they grapple with the absence of market competency and networking skills endemic to the fashion industry. For a fashion design entrepreneur, managing both the creative and commercial aspects of business can be a challenging task if exclusive attention is given to design creation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about significant changes in the Malaysian fashion industry. The proliferation of new labels and brands offers a diverse array of clothing options for fashion customers. The sector is witnessing considerable growth, leading to intensified competition between fashion design entrepreneurs (FDE) and fashion entrepreneurs (FE) in Malaysia. With Malaysia's diverse and heterogeneous population, it is justifiable to anticipate that designers from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds would incorporate their unique and oriental features into their creative designs (Rosihan & Aris, 2022). Despite the existence of competition, it does not hinder the advancement of local fashion sectors. However, specific areas require enhancement to bolster the confidence of fashion designers and ensure the sustainability of their businesses and entrepreneurial ventures. This is in accordance with the objectives of the research, which explores the competencies of fashion design entrepreneurs in effectively managing their enterprises.

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to avoid using it as a justification to overlook sustainability. The fashion sector must unite, with the collaboration and endorsement of customers and fashion enthusiasts being of utmost significance. Within the Malaysian fashion industry, it is crucial for business owners and their associates to prioritise not only the acquisition of new skills but also the utilisation of digital applications to sustain their business operations. This entails inspiring current employees to embrace the new standard in carrying out activities and conducting commercial transactions (Zainuddin, Ridzwan, & Ridzwan, 2022).

The impact of economic proficiency on market-driven proficiency and innovation, organisational proficiency on managerial proficiency and social well-being, and environmental proficiency on the implementation of the five Rs (re-imagine, redesign, reuse, recycle, and reduce) have been substantiated by prior studies on business

sustainability. These findings highlight the significance of economic, organisational, and environmental factors in enhancing the business sustainability proficiency and performance of global fashion companies (Wong & Ngai, 2021). The significance of fashion business management for fashion design entrepreneurs in Malaysia cannot be overstated, given the dearth of proof showcasing the utilisation of fashion business management in their strategies. Consequently, this study is dedicated to examining the managerial proficiencies of fashion design entrepreneurs.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

The present study has identified a set of problem statements pertaining to the domain of fashion design entrepreneurship. In light of these issues, the research questions that have been formulated are expected to serve as a key tool in addressing these concerns. Based on the extant literature, it is suggested that the entrepreneurship curriculum ought to be the foremost subject of inquiry with respect to staying abreast of emergent business trends, particularly in contexts where fashion designers assume the role of entrepreneurs (L. Zeng, 2020; Fernandes & Pereira, 2019; Tselepis, 2015; Maiyo et al. 2014). While entrepreneurship syllabus in tertiary education for fashion is relevant, it is not the main focus of this investigation. The fashion industry's lack of sustainability is further compounded by an additional contributing factor. The current inquiry will centre around the particular predicament identified as the primary focus of the investigation, as delineated below:

- 1) What is the current practise among fashion design entrepreneurs in terms of managerial abilities and competencies necessary for a successful business?
- 2) Why do fashion design entrepreneurs lack management knowledge and skills?
- 3) How do fashion design entrepreneurs develop their managerial competencies in the fashion industry?
- 4) How do fashion designer entrepreneurs ensure long-term viability in the micro-scale fashion industry?

#### **1.5 Research Objectives**

The objective of this study is to augment the field of fashion design management through the provision of a framework that defines the essential knowledge and skills necessary for the acquisition of managerial competencies by fashion design entrepreneurs. The research conducted previously failed to address the topic of management, which requires further investigation. Considering the aforementioned, the research pursuits to reinforce this empirical study are outlined as follows:

- 1) To investigate the current competence of fashion design entrepreneurs to manage the business strategically.
- 2) To analyse the managerial competences required by SME fashion design entrepreneurs in the fashion sector.

- 3) To build a framework for enhancing management competencies for SME fashion design entrepreneurs in order to sustain their businesses in the fashion industry.

## **1.6 Scope Of Research**

The present research endeavours to scrutinise the Malaysian fashion design entrepreneurs, who are officially affiliated with the SME Corporation Malaysia, and emphasise the significance of aptitude in managing entrepreneurial operations. The present study shall employ the terminology as stipulated by SME Corporation Malaysia to ascertain suitable enterprises for subsequent elucidation. The provision of a solution for fashion design entrepreneurs who are confronted with challenges pertaining to business management would prove beneficial. The extant body of literature has identified the determinants that give rise to unsustainable business practises within the ambit of entrepreneurship. This particular investigation aims to examine an alternative predicament faced by fashion design entrepreneurs, namely that of managing incompetence.

## **1.7 Limitation of Research**

The present study will utilise the Malaysian fashion industry, with a particular focus on small and medium-sized enterprises operating in the micro fashion sector, as a case study. This study will centre on the entrepreneurial ventures of fashion designers, with a specific focus on those involved in fashion merchandising and service sectors operating within the geographical regions of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor. The present study is noted to be subject to a limitation in that the sample size is restricted to a mere 15 companies. One of the study's limitations pertains to its focus on individuals who are company owners possessing only a minimum level of diploma qualifications in fashion and textile-related areas, exclusively for their participation in the research. The present study's results are expected to aid fashion design entrepreneurs in effectively managing and maintaining their enterprises.

## **1.8 Significance of the Research**

The Malaysian fashion industry has demonstrated a steady and ongoing expansion, as evidenced by the emergence of numerous fresh labels within the market. Numerous enterprises operating in the fashion and textile industry are currently encountering financial predicaments. Upon entering the industry of fashion design, certain entrepreneurial endeavours begin with a robust and stable groundwork. Numerous hindrances may require elimination for the purpose of maintaining ongoing operations of the enterprise. The current global economic decline has caused entrepreneurs to reevaluate and devise new strategies for their commercial undertakings, aggravating the existing predicament. In earlier studies, a significant number of researchers directed their efforts towards exploring the domain of entrepreneurship education as it pertains to the field of fashion design. The researchers recognised a deficiency in managerial competencies faced by fashion design entrepreneurs, thereby recommending the

reinforcement of the incubator programme and entrepreneurship course (Fernandes et al. 2020; Fernandes et al. 2019; Fernandes et al. 2016).

The present study is geared towards examining fashion design entrepreneurs and exploring potential measures aimed at augmenting their management practises. The allocation of resources between design development and management is a strategic decision that fashion design entrepreneurs must make and one that is understandable given the demands and objectives of their enterprises. Nonetheless, it is imperative for enterprises to excel in both domains if they intend to sustain their commercial operations. Therefore, the research holds great importance in aiding entrepreneurs involved in fashion design to comprehend crucial managerial skills and surmount inadequacies so as to sustain the fashion enterprise. This study may yield advantageous implications for entrepreneurs within the realm of fashion design and furnish policymakers with valuable insights for the enhancement of their SME initiatives.

## **1.9 Outline of the Research**

The research outline offers a directional guide for the research endeavour, ensuring that the investigation is thoroughly structured and directed towards effectively addressing the research query. The present dissertation is structured into six distinct chapters, encompassing an introduction, a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, a detailed exposition of the research methodology employed, an extensive analysis of the findings obtained through the data collection process, a rigorous discussion of the major themes and implications arising from the research, and a conclusive summary of the research outcomes and contributions. Each individual chapter serves to further enhance and bolster the overarching thesis by establishing meaningful connections and interrelations with the remaining chapters.

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the body of research pertaining to managerial skill competencies among fashion design entrepreneurs operating in the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector. This chapter furnishes supplementary details pertaining to the inquiries raised by the study and its aims, which encompass particulars regarding the predicaments, challenges, and other relevant matters brought forth by the research. This article encompasses the research's parameters, constraints, importance, and synopsis of the chapters.

Chapter 2 delves into a comprehensive analysis of the existing literature review pertaining to the participation of fashion designers in entrepreneurial activities. The current chapter encompasses a diverse range of subject matters, every one of which utilises a specific keyword or phrase that holds relevance to the ongoing inquiry. The keywords employed in the literature review are pertinent to the domain of fashion business as they pertain to various aspects including fashion history, fashion design entrepreneurship, the Malaysian fashion industry, SMEs in the fashion sector, management theories, as well as the theoretical underpinnings of the study being conducted. A research study may encompass various arguments and claims, which can be substantiated by a literature review that may provide extensive evidence and support. The citation of previous research studies can be utilized by researchers to fortify their

arguments and illustrate the applicability and significance of their investigations. Within the context of the research process, the literature review provides the researcher with an all-encompassing comprehension of the current state of knowledge on the research topic, highlighting any lacunae that may still exist in previously conducted research, and ultimately directing the research design and methodology. In summary, literature reviews provide a structured approach to comprehending the current state of research within a particular academic domain.

An elaborate explanation of the research methodology utilised in the present study will be presented in Chapter 3. The methods that were deemed suitable for the research inquiry, along with their categorization as quantitative or qualitative, shall be deliberated. The present chapter expounds upon the key aspects of research design, which encompass the issues surrounding sampling populations as well as the unit of analysis. Each of the aforementioned topics is explained comprehensively. Furthermore, this paper will comprehensively elucidate the research methodology and protocols employed in the systematic collection of substantial data for this inquiry.

Chapter 4 is bifurcated into two distinct segments, namely data analysis and elucidation of findings. The objective of data collection pertains to the systematic procedure of acquiring and documenting data and statistics for the purposes of further research or analysis. The acquisition of information encompasses a range of sources, such as surveys, interviews, observational studies, experimental investigations, and the utilisation of secondary data sources, such as documents, reports, and databases. The underlying objective of data analysis is to obtain conclusive insights pertaining to the research question. This section shall delineate the outcomes that have been ascertained following the compilation and evaluation of the data. These findings are a product of data analysis conducted subsequent to the phase of data collection. Typically, novel viewpoints are presented in relation to the research query under investigation. The research findings hold great importance as they present novel information, innovative perspectives, and fresh evidence that can facilitate informed decision-making, authenticate theoretical constructs, spur innovation, and enhance performance.

The present exegesis shall proceed to elaborate on the outcomes of the antecedent chapter, which shall be explicated in the subsequent Chapter 5. This section shall elucidate the framework that has been formulated to address the specified research inquiry and accomplish the research goals. Professionals specialising in the area of fashion will be consulted in order to guarantee that the framework provided conforms to suitable standards and aligns with the investigation's objectives.

The conclusive Chapter 6 of this research endeavour shall expound upon the study's substantial contributions, the impediments encountered throughout its course, and the role of significance for practical application, as well as recommendations for upcoming investigations. The provision of recommendations for prospective inquiry pertaining to the subject of study is a crucial component of the research undertaking. Their contributions have the potential to facilitate the development of novel knowledge and illuminating insights, thus serving as a guiding framework for future research in the domain of fashion design entrepreneurship.

### **1.10 Summary**

This chapter systematically covers the fundamental constituents of the present study. The purpose of this chapter is to explain the identified problem statements based on the results of previous research. Numerous fundamental elements of the investigation, such as the inquiries and aims of the research, the breadth and restrictions of the study, and the importance of the research, have been formulated in light of the obstacles encountered by entrepreneurs in the domain of fashion design. The subsequent chapter shall delve into an extensive examination of the literary works and the foundational principles that have been adopted for the purpose of this investigation.



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