

Virtual Exhibitions for Final Capstone Fashion Design Project

: A Case of Chinhoyi University of Technology Final Year Students

Walter Chipambwa[†] · Chipo Munyaka · Edlight Mutungwe

Lecturer, Department of Clothing and Textile Technology, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe

Student, Department of Clothing and Textile Technology, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe

Senior Lecturer, Department of Clothing and Textile Technology, Chinhoyi University of Technology, Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe

Abstract Virtual fashion is becoming the latest trend being adopted by most fashion designers and apparel manufactures. The purpose of this study was to explore methods that can be adopted by fashion design students to have digital or virtual fashion exhibitions instead of having physical exhibitions that would imply physical attendance in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this study in-depth interviews and questionnaires were used for gathering data from the purposively sampled participants. Lecturing staff in the faculty offering the fashion design degree programme were interviewed and students were given an online questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions. The study revealed that virtual fashion exhibitions can be successfully integrated into the fashion design degree programme as students exhibit a high level of digital literacy and competency. The study highlights the need for more support in terms of ICT infrastructure at institution level so that students can develop their digital literacy skills. The findings reveal that virtual or digital exhibitions are feasible, though there are cost implications as there are prerequisites in software and hardware requirements. The study recommends institutions offering fashion design degree programme to embrace and invest in the new fashion technologies.

Keywords Fashion, Exhibition, Design, Students, Digital, Virtual

Citation Chipambwa, W., Munyaka, C. & Mutungwe, E. (2022) Virtual exhibitions for final capstone fashion design project: A case of Chinhoyi University of Technology final year students. *International Journal of Costume and Fashion*, 22(1), 25-35.

Introduction

Fashion is an unescapable part in human lives as it sets out our identity and reflects the present day culture. Fashion has been made accessible to everyone through various channels of media like magazines, television, social media networks and exhibitions. In the design world, mounting an exhibition proves one's ability to be referred to as a designer as it is evidence of the process followed to come up with a collection fitting a certain theme. Exhibitions inspire the fashion designer and provide the much needed experience in the fashion design sector, provide valuable feedback from the clients and fashion experts that help business growth

(Evgeniadou, 2017; Petrov, 2019; Schiller-Merkens, 2017). Cline (2012) views an exhibition as a planned and organised event showcasing products and services which are on offer and held for cultural, business and educational purposes, conducted in places such as college exhibition halls, museum, art gallery, park and library.

According to Loscialpo (2016), the way exhibitions are held differs according to the organisers of the event and can take a number of days or weeks to allow people to view the products on display with some exhibitions being nomadic in

Received January 22, 2022; Revised March 24, 2022; Accepted April 13, 2022

[†] Corresponding Author: wewalter01@gmail.com

nature. With the growth of e-commerce the fashion industry has seen some of the fashion shows adopting a fully digital concept. The rise in number of brands that have a very strong online presence shows a pragmatic shift to digital platforms (Teo, 2020). Anifa Mvuemba the founder of fashion label Hanifa had planned to hold her first New York Fashion Week in 2020 but her initial ideas were thwarted by the outbreak of the corona virus. She managed to go around the problem by holding a successful 3D virtual fashion show streamed over Instagram Live (Segran, 2020). The designer leveraged on technology and social media for the success of the virtual event. The format of these online or virtual shows held in 2020 differed with some combining the physical and virtual to come up with a hybrid setup and others were in the format of video story telling (Loscialpo, 2016).

Schiller-Merkens (2017) posits that there are three categories of exhibitions namely educational exhibitions, trade exhibitions and consumer exhibitions; with educational exhibitions involving students showcasing their academic projects and what they learnt over the years at the university in partial fulfillment of the requirements of their degree programmes. McCusker and Babington (2015) reported that in the higher education sector, most universities were lagging behind in terms of having a vision, capacity and commitment to adopt the digital approaches ideal for their sector. Educational activities and curricula are changing in tandem with the dynamism of this world due to globalisation and trade liberalisation; therefore institutions of higher learning should adapt to the changes taking place on a continuous basis. On the other hand the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted on educational activities as online learning and teaching takes center stage. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected how students learn and how the teaching process is structured with some referring it to as the “*new normal*”. One institution that embraced digital exhibition as a result of COVID-19 outbreak is Izmir University of Economics in Turkey which held their first ever digital exhibition for final year students in their faculty of Fine Arts and Design in July 2020. Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT) in Zimbabwe has a similar faculty also offering similar design programs to students and these include Fashion Design, Industrial Design, Fine Art and Visual Communication and

Multimedia Design. Traditionally CUT students’ exhibitions were and still are held physically but due to the outbreak of the corona virus a lot has changed. The outbreak of the corona virus changed the way students learn in universities and exhibitions were greatly affected as gatherings were prohibited.

According to Loscialpo (2016), previous studies have concentrated on specific fashion exhibitions in the Europe and failed to take into consideration the global fashion market since we are living in the era of globalization and trade liberalization. Barth, Davis and Mita (2018) focused on digital exhibitions concepts and practices in general without distinguishing the real world market from academic fashion design digital exhibition which is in partial fulfillment of the degree program in fashion design. Mofjell (2017) investigated the factors to be taken into consideration in trade shows therefore his study only centered on the factors affecting trade shows and not on academic fashion design exhibitions. Another study by Halil, Mohammad, Rosli, and John Halil (2018) was more focused on the museum exhibition organization and how it impacted the audiences who attended the event or exhibition hall; this study did not give much attention to modern trend which involves adapting digital exhibitions. The information on migration from physical fashion exhibitions to digital fashion exhibitions in capstone design projects specifically in fashion is scarce.

Mhlanga (2020) says it is time art galleries, colleges and universities embrace virtual methods of holding exhibitions in line with technological advancements. Virtual exhibitions sustained livelihoods of many artists during the pandemic but among those that took part in virtual events some still prefer to have those live, in-person events as they feel they get a better chance to explain their work to potential buyers (Mhlanga, 2020). According to McCusker and Babington (2015) institutions of higher learning which are not gearing towards digitalisation will remain backward because most of the things have been digitalised. The physical exhibitions because of their demand for a large space to display fashion designs, static hours of business or exhibition, demand for manpower to erect the stage among other activities, costs and limited number of visitors are no longer ideal in the era of digitalisation (Khoon & Ramaiah,

2008). Chinhoyi University of Technology is yet to embrace virtual exhibitions in an effort to move with the times and to allow students to hold their fashion exhibitions in this COVID-19 era. Most universities are formulating digital plans to adapt to the new technology and are introducing new methods and systems on a continuous basis resulting in them channeling funds to support digital academic activities and events (McCusker & Babington, 2015). Khoo and Ramaiah (2008) asserted that online exhibitions have a positive impact and easily connect the fashion design collections with the targeted clientele base as well as bringing the exhibitions closer to the people or intended audience at less cost. During this difficult time of COVID-19 pandemic the use of digital fashion exhibitions is required more than ever before hence, this research is important to take Chinhoyi University on board the digital fashion exhibition world. The research is guided by the research question: What strategies can be adopted by fashion design students to have digital or virtual fashion exhibitions in an effort to move away from the physical exhibitions that required physical attendance in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic?

Literature Review

Loscialpo (2016) views current fashion exhibitions as involving the use of various mediums such as modern technology and devices which produce eye catching representations of the physical exhibits. It was further posited that fashion exhibitions should follow the “mediatization” trend which comprises the use of 3D images among others to replace physical objects and people and in the process increase and maintain participation of the audiences and effective communication with them.

Physical Exhibitions

Fashion exhibitions at universities have been dynamic in all areas such as styles, concepts and topic or themes (Green et al., 2019). Historically exhibitions were held in person and people are more accustomed to the format where they actually have the physical live experience so that if it is a product they can actually touch and feel it. Digital or online

exhibitions have become the recent developments and this can be largely attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic which forced a lot of changes in the world of business. These online or digital events have become popular as curators try to find a ways to remain visible in their various sectors. However, Tsotsos (2014) asserts that there are some people who find the traditional physical exhibitions involving catwalks as entertaining than the digital exhibitions. There is a school of thought which believes that fashion designs put on by a person during the fashion exhibitions has numerous meanings and tell a variety of stories unlike the digital exhibition approach (Petrov, 2019). There is increasing solicitation of digital exhibitions in the form of films and digital books to substitute the traditional physical exhibitions and photographic exhibitions in galleries (Tsotsos, 2014). However, in disagreement Petrov (2019) pointed that there are some people who regard digital fashion exhibitions as artificial exhibitions which do not have the importance and value accorded to physical exhibitions involving real people.

Student Fashion Exhibitions

Fashion exhibitions have great importance and significance in the fashion industry but due to the COVID-19 pandemic it is not feasible to hold physical exhibitions at the moment (Mohanty, Dhoundiyal & Chodhury, 2020). Fashion exhibitions which involve physical interactions just like other events are regarded as the major causes of virus transmissions among the exhibition participants. In addition to the above Salusso, Lee, Lee & Lin (2016) posit that digitalisation of the fashion industry particularly exhibitions by students raise issues to do with copyright protection; how it is going to be ensured or guaranteed. Digital exhibitions serve as a source of inspiration to other fashion design students and may in the process imitate the works displayed (Salusso et al., 2016). According to Yaw (2013), universities and colleges produce graduates with digital experience and skills in response to the technological advancement taking place globally and these fashion design graduates have great potential to spearhead socio-economic development in the country. Academic experience is boosted or ensured by the digital fashion exhibitions such that they live a positive impact on individuals and a feeling of self-accomplishment

on the participating students (Halil et al., 2018). Barth et al. (2018) posits that there must be existence of standards and best international practices on introduction of the digital exhibitions as well as sustaining the digital exhibitions on a continuous basis. There is need to continuously assess the relevance of particular academic fashion design exhibitions and make recommendations for improvement after taking note of its strengths and weaknesses.

Yu (2020) states that most fashion design students have embraced online learning and this has also forced fashion schools' museums to curate a number of online exhibitions that provide a platform for inspiration to the fashion designer and fashion consumers. In the year 2019 the Parsons School of Design had its final year Master of Arts in fashion studies doing video virtual exhibitions and these were made available to all audience and also served as an exploratory process as it provided a platform for teaching through online collections. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the fashion exhibition "Playing Dress Up: Growing Up and Going out in 1960s Nebraska" was installed by graduate students at University of Nebraska and made accessible through an online virtual tour so that viewers could enjoy the display as the campus was closed due to the outbreak. The exhibition targeted showcasing clothing for the youngsters from early to the mid -1960s as this was the most active period where several designers tried to design for with the active child in mind. Raya (2021) states that the Otis College of Art and Design held its first ever virtual annual exhibition in the year 2021 necessitated by the pandemic and preparing the students for life in the design world after finishing their studies. She also goes on to say previously the college used to have a weekend where students doing their final undergraduate and graduate programmes in the college where they would showcase their projects in form of gallery exhibitions with installations covering various subject areas. But due to the COVID-19 outbreak the college administration had to find other ways in the "new normal" of making sure that students do their exhibitions and the virtual platform was created. The various institutions of higher learning mentioned before had to find ways of fulfilling a key component expected of their students doing studies in fashion design. Virtual format was adopted by many

institutions though it also posed challenges to the organisers as this was their first ever time going that route (Raya, 2021). Barth et al. (2018) state that a university benefits from the digital fashion exhibitions a lot as the showcasing of the fashion designs has great potential to market the institution as well in addition to fashion design exhibited by the fashion design students. In agreement Mofjell (2017) posits that exhibitions are another form of marketing with great influence to the target clients as they send a message, increase uptake of the fashion designs and raises the status of the university locally, regionally and globally.

Digital and Virtual Fashion Exhibitions in Industry

A digital exhibition involves the digital showcasing of a variety of fashion designs whereas if its only one item on display it is regarded a digital exhibit (Barth et al., 2018). A carefully planned and executed digital fashion exhibition is one that is driven by a theme, objective and aimed at achieving the set goals and targets. Digital fashion exhibitions provide a visual platform for presentation and accessing the fashion collections which are in virtual format and accessibility is anytime of the day and is limited by the geographic location; and more importantly allows exhibitors to upload photos on the website, social media pages and other digital approaches being used (Petrov, 2019). Digitalisation of the fashion industry has increased in all aspects such as communication and on line reputation a development which requires universities to produce graduates with digital competencies (Kalbask & Cantoni, 2019). Digital exhibition is made possible through the use of databases of fashion collections which are then displayed on the internet website pages (Tsotsos, 2014). Browchuk (2020) posits that confinement of people in homes due to Covid-19 pandemic is not an excuse for prohibiting the socio-cultural life and traditions of people or communities from continuing as usual as there are other innovative virtual approaches which may be adopted with great results and success. Browchuk (2020) further pointed as an example that, Dior introduced virtual displaying of products or fashions which brought the physical store to the people's homes electronically. In addition to that most fashion houses have

adopted the new digital exhibitions on a weekly basis with the Palace of Versailles partnering with Google Cultural Institute to ensure successful hosting of online fashion exhibitions. Xie and Youn (2020) report that due to the Covid-19 outbreak luxury fashion brands like Amani, Gucci, Dior, and Burberry had to adopt digital exhibitions where they presented their fashion collections without a catwalk. According to Harma (2011), digital fashion exhibitions pull many people to become interested in the displayed fashion designs. This is also made possible as many social media platforms are used in advertising the event online thus reaching a wider audience irrespective of the geographical location. Many people perceive that digital fashion exhibitions are an influential approach to educational activities as long as they are well planned, organised and successfully conducted (Huan & Kolsto, 2014). Thus planning becomes a key component of any successful exhibition as a lot is involved in the process. The use of digital fashion exhibition is largely driven by the belief that students from different socio-economic statuses and age groups are afforded an opportunity to showcase their fashion works and encourage their active involvement in the academic activities (Harma, 2011). He also pointed that the digital fashion exhibition plays an active role portraying a good image of the fashion designs in the eyes of the guests and creates an interesting environment as well in the process.

Methods

The study was purely qualitative in nature with a case study design seeking responses from lecturers and students at Chinhoyi University of Technology's School of Art and Design. The target population for the study was students doing their final year (4th year) for a Bachelor of Science Honors degree in Clothing Fashion Design as these were classified as the "knowledgeable informants" for this study. A case study was used as this is the only university offering a fashion design degree with an Exhibition course in the final semester. There were two groups of students in the final year; with one group being in the first semester of their final year and the other group in its second semester giving a total

population of 30 students. A total of 20 questionnaire responses were received from the students translating to a 66% response rate. The students' questionnaire contained both close ended and open-ended questions. The first semester in the final year offers Specialisation course that prepares for the Exhibition in the second semester of the 4th year. There was no sampling of students' respondents as the group is small; hence, the research used the whole population under study. The students were given the Google form survey link through their emails and student portal and a brief description of the study was also given and the confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study were stated. Four lecturers were purposively sampled from a total of eight, basing the selection on their experience in managing the Exhibition course. So only those lecturers who had coordinated the exhibitions before participated in the in-depth face to face interviews. Interviews were held following the COVID-19 WHO guidelines. Face to face interviews were guided by an interview guide and interviewers maximized on both verbal and body language during the question and answer sessions with further probing.

Result

Gender and Age Distribution/Demographic

Gender distribution of students who responded was 96% female and 4% male. The gender distribution is related to how the African parent view fashion design. Generally in many African households, the system expects the female figure of the house to be responsible for basic needlework and this has an effect on how the kids choose their career paths as it is defined or affected by these family views. Among the student participants the age range of 20-24 years had the highest percentage of 64%, followed by 25-29 years with 24% and lastly the above 30 years was 12%. Most students enrol for university learning as soon as they finish their high school advanced levels as they are keen to build their careers quickly so that they can start their own lives. A few others in the age range above 25 are most likely coming from the world of work to advance their academic qualifications as lifelong learners. According to Gudyanga,

Gora and Moyo (2019), there is gender stereotyping in Zimbabwe especially on the choice of study areas and this starts from the lower levels. Male students have negative perceptions towards subjects such as fashion and fabrics. This view is also shared by Mapolisa and Tshabalala (2013) when they state that Zimbabwean females are educated for development of their home life skills unlike their male counterparts who are prepared for employment. The decision for one to take a degree programme in clothing and or fashion design is affected by these early choices made in high school as reflected by the gender distribution in this study. Above the ages of 30 most students who enrol for university education to start their first degree are those who are mature and usually these are employed or have attained a diploma in the area and would want to enrich themselves. These are lifelong learners who work towards self-improvement in their career paths.

Literacy

All the respondents did highlight that they have some skills on how to operate a computer though they differ at the level of skills acquired. Sixty-eight percent (68%) of the respondents reported that they have basic skills on how to operate a computer, twenty-seven percent (27%) have intermediate knowledge and five percent (5%) have advanced skills. The respondents with basic computer literacy skills highlight challenges of resources as the major problem that has affected their capacity to develop in terms of skills. One of the respondents said, *“My skills could have been better in using a computer if I had my own laptop when I enrolled for my first year but I have had to borrow from friends whenever I have to do my assignments or researches”*. Another respondent also said, *“I just have basic skills in using a computer since I don't have a computer at home hence rely on the university Computer Lab on campus but we get very little time due to many other groups that would want to use the same lab”*. The students with advanced skills revealed that they could comfortably design various fashion items using the computer based on the skills acquired in Computer Aided Design course done offered in their second year. One student interviewee said this to say, *“The ICT course I did in my first year helped me a lot to be able to use*

a computer since I had never used one. My second year course Computer Aided Design boosted my confidence in computer usage and I am now able to illustrate designs using photo shop. However, I have a long way to go to be able to stage a virtual exhibition; here I definitely need lots of help. I just don't have the confidence to do that. We have never had a chance to learn about digital displays”. The students have a strong social media presence with one managing to set up her blog for fashion fanatics. Another student stated that she has a YouTube channel she recently started and due to her low level experience on how she could use the channel she was still developing her digital media skills that she thought would make her products saleable. One respondent stated that she uses her Instagram Live page to get comments from her followers on her fashion designs and she uses these comments frequently especially when working on schoolwork as it provides a good critique of her work quickly. McCuskey and Babington (2015) assert that most students nowadays have digital literacy but the problem lies with the universities which are slow in adapting to the digital needs of their students. In this study the respondents do cite that they have the theoretical knowledge to do digital exhibitions but their main problem is on the practical side to get exposure on skills and resources to use, like accessing the software required. In developing economies issues of piracy when it comes to software is a challenge as most students cannot afford buying the software on their own. It is then left to the institution of higher learning to invest in such software so that the students can access it and use it for their teaching and learning.

The students are taught how to do physical exhibitions and have witnessed many such exhibitions done by their former senior colleagues. The emergence of Covid-19 has now presented a challenge as gatherings are viewed as risks in spreading the virus. Learning has changed to online and a few have the resources to access these online lessons with reduced time. Interviewees agreed that they face challenges as they cannot access resources to acquire skills to enable them to present virtual exhibitions. *“The new strategy of going virtual for our exhibitions is the way to go but we are handicapped by our lack of resources. The institution is also handicapped to adequately assist us”*, they narrated.

Virtual Content Development

The capacity of students to do these online fashion exhibitions entails that these students have to develop the content and this requires prior knowledge on how they can stage these online events. The students cited that they had basic to intermediate computer literacy skills as stated before to develop content to be used for the virtual fashion exhibitions but these needed some sharpening. These skills are linked to what they would have managed to learn from their first year in college up to their final year. On the issue of software to use for content development all the students highlighted that they could either use Adobe suite or CorelDraw graphics suite. The students went on to mention that they opted to do a group advert with still images of the fashion designs of each one of them to sell the event to the public as they felt time was not on their side to try and develop content as individuals. The students stated that for them to make the event engaging when final capstone project is held online, there is a lot of work to be done so as to make sure the event will be a success. One student who managed to develop her virtual content for the final capstone presentation managed to do so and she states *“my collection was on intimate nightwear and this was the best way to showcase my fashion designs as it was difficult to easily find a model who could showcase my work”*. In this case the push factor for the student to go for an online display was the nature of the exhibition theme. Due to different cultural backgrounds and how society might react to the event the student opted for a photoshoot with models elsewhere and managed to synchronize the exhibits in form of a video show with background audio suitable for each piece of work.

Institutional Support and Status

From the study the results highlighted that as a university, the institution has the requisite staff and capacity to assess digital exhibitions. It was also revealed in this study that the university has a strong ICT support structure that will ensure a successful implementation or running of digital exhibitions thus purchasing or use of fully licensed software should not be a challenge. From the interviews with lectures it was noted that all the teaching staff in the department offering

clothing fashion design have the knowledge on how to assess students' fashion exhibition and if they adopt the digital format it would be a case of aligning the marking guide to the expected examination standards. Traditionally the lecturers or examiners were expected to visit students in their various towns or cities where they would mount their exhibitions for assessment as final capstone fashion design projects. As stated by one of the lecturers, *“Going digital will greatly reduce the cost on the institution as there was a lot of travelling for assessment and one would be under pressure to visit a certain number of students in a single day and sometimes time allocated to assess each student would end up being very short”*. Fashion exhibitions also do provide learning experience to both the lecturers and the students and also act as motivation or inspiration to the other students who might be in their lower levels in university. Digital exhibitions bring many benefits to the students and the institution as they also market the university to the outside world. It was revealed in this study that these exhibitions do provide a marketing point for the promotion of the brand Chinhoyi University of Technology as its digital presence will be made more visible through these events. According to Kalbaska and Cantoni (2019), digitalisation of the fashion industry has increased in all aspects like communication and online presence such that this development forces or requires universities to produce graduates with digital competencies. In this study the findings reveal that through digital exhibitions the institution will get more recognition the world over and this in turn attracts more international students who can end up being enrolled for various programmes offered by the institution. It was also highlighted that such international presence helps to market the department offering fashion design for more collaborations with international fashion designers and can lead to growth of the department. According to McCusker and Babington (2015), there is need for active university top management involvement in the processes or activities pertaining to adapting to digitalisation as their support and prioritization of the project which ensure its success. Eighty percent of the respondents highlighted that the institution needs more push towards digitalisation and a continuous upgrades of various ICT tools will be required. The institution should be geared towards digital exhibitions

due to the drive coming from global developments in the world of technology and education.

Adoption of Digital Exhibitions

The study reveals that given the necessary support and tools at institution level digital exhibitions can be held successfully, a view also shared by Khoon and Ramaiah (2008) and Vrencoska (2015). The major point of concern as highlighted by one lecturer was on the issue of authenticity as he said *“The issue of digital exhibition is noble but how will the institution ensure that the work is that of the student alone? How do we make sure he/she did not cheat? There are a lot of issues to be considered before we can embark on the digital exhibition especially for an exam. We could go for the digital exhibitions if it’s just a general exhibition of their works and not examinable to minimise cheating by some students”*. From the students, they welcomed the idea but with certain conditions of support from the institution like access to the software and hardware to use for digital exhibition development and launch. Khoon and Ramaiah (2008) stated that physical exhibitions are a traditional means of interacting between the fashion design designers and the potential customers; and this method is no longer effective in this era of digitalised world and its systems as there is increasing adoption of digital fashion design exhibitions Vrencoska (2015). Through digital exhibitions the upcoming fashion designers can reach out to the world and manage to sell their fashion ideas much easily and this can become a turning point for their careers. Globalisation and trade liberalisation in the world of fashion provide a fertile ground for the digital fashion exhibition’s success and students can easily participate. One respondent said *“We have to embrace Industry 4.0 concepts and one of the areas is digital innovation”*. It is therefore key for the institutions of higher learning to find ways of integrating the industry 4.0 and education 5.0 concepts as the two work hand in hand. Van der Velden (2016) posits that fashion exhibitions provide valuable feedback from the clients and fashion experts. The findings of this study highlighted that fashion design students’ work are evaluated faster on digital whilst they also create job opportunities for students on the international market. One respondent stated that *“Whilst my digital event is*

running viewers can post comments in real time and these comments form the basis of my design critique thus making me alter or improve my design quickly in response to what the market expects”. The view is also similar to what Schiller-Merkens (2017) says, pointing out that fashion critics or experts are engaged easily on online events so that they air their views and recommendations on the designs being displayed. In terms of costs of running or setting up the digital exhibition in this study it was revealed that the costs are lower for digital exhibitions in comparison to the physical exhibitions. Once the digital content has been developed the only requirements for a successful digital exhibition will be a good internet connectivity and technical backup in case of challenges during the running of the event. From the view of the students who participated in the study they generally felt it was a welcome setup as it reduces pressure on the student unlike in the physical exhibition as the event can be easily simulated a number of times before the day of official launch. Through digital exhibitions the students’ work can reach out to the target clientele base as well as bringing the event closer to people at less cost and also viewers can always follow the event afterwards easily irrespective of their geographical location. In addition, the study also revealed that digital exhibitions are not affected by the global pandemics like the recent COVID-19 outbreak that affected the teaching and learning process globally. Another responded also highlighted a similar view saying, *“Yes, we can do digital exhibitions but they lack the live feel of the event and the student or curator also misses on close interactions that usually happen during and after the event with viewers”*. The view hinged on physical exhibitions stems out of the need for that close and physical one to one in person interactions that are not made possible through online interactions. But as technology is continuously advancing such needs might be taken into account through other improvements for example how the virtual reality is being advanced.

Discussion

The research was guided by the question that tries to explore

the issue of virtual exhibitions for final capstone fashion design projects by students at a university. The findings reveal that universities in modern times depend on technology for efficient teaching as it has become integral to the curriculum. It was also revealed that investing in these modern technologies should be given more priority in the expenditure budgets for institutions of higher learning offering degree or diploma qualifications in areas aligned to art and engineering fields as innovations from these sectors is technology dependent. The results also showed that skills to develop content for virtual exhibitions might be there among students but there is need to harness student curatorial and technological skills. This could be achieved through short courses or workshops where the students could be taught on how to develop content digitally so that they can hold successful virtual fashion shows for their capstone fashion design projects. It was also revealed that the lecturers also will need to more training to improve their capability and objectivity in assessing virtual content as this is now different from what they have been doing in previous years. As an opportunity for growth the results also point out that there are more benefits to be accrued through these virtual exhibitions both to the student and the institution as they do provide a marketing point of the fashion brands or theme of the student and the institutional brand. Virtual or digital exhibitions help in imparting skills to the students that can be useful in the new industry 4.0 developments. The benefits of the digital exhibitions far outweigh challenges that have been mentioned as students get to network with other fashion enthusiasts globally and this can provide a springboard for their careers in the fashion industry. Though the study revealed a number of benefits for the adoption of digital exhibitions of these capstone fashion design projects, Tsotsos (2014) argues that there are some people who still find the traditional physical exhibitions involving catwalks as more entertaining than the digital or virtual exhibitions. The findings highlighted that the institution will keep improving to a better level in terms of curriculum development through these virtual events as they learn from each experience of the events from a wider audience unlike the physical exhibitions that are controlled or limited by geographical location. These recommendations can create links with other institutions

offering fashion design in the world and open doors for more collaborations from other experts in the fashion industry as these can easily have an input via the online platforms through which the exhibitions will be held. One student who managed to do a format of a virtual exhibition only did so due to nature of her theme and this can present a challenge to the examiners or lecturers who assess these projects as the assessment criteria will now have to be different for some students within a class. This becomes unfair to another students who might have had to put in a lot of hours of work to achieve their final presentation and this then calls for an adoption of uniform format for all the students. This then calls for development of the curriculum to ensure that all the students have the requisite skills to develop digital content for virtual presentation and also making sure the student have enough resources for them to develop and manage these events online a view also shared by McCusker and Babington (2015) as they will be graduating and going into the world of practice with all the relevant skills. This will ensure a smooth transition or blending in of the physical and digital exhibitions as the students and staff are well acquainted with how the events can be made a success.

Conclusion

By exploring the adoption of virtual fashion design exhibitions, the study established that this can be highly beneficial to the students and the institution as they can reach to a wider audience as compared to the physical fashion exhibitions. However there is need for skills development on the part of students and staff to ensure that they can manage these events online. Commercially the fashion business industry is moving fast towards the adoption of new technologies like block chain technology, artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR). Developing students and preparing them for these advances in technology will produce graduates who can easily fit into the technologically driven economies. The study also suggests that a strong and supportive ICT structure is a pre-requisite for the institution to successfully hold virtual exhibitions. Fashion exhibition project presentation is

on its own a form of scholarly work and as such it can be used in future references in the world of creatives and having it easily accessible through institutional repositories creates and adds to the body of existing knowledge. COVID-19 outbreak ushered in a new way of doing things and as a push factor it promoted the use of technology in all sectors of the economy despite the initial challenges and resistance to adoption of technology. It was concluded that institutions of higher learning need to adopt use of virtual fashion design exhibitions by their students.

Limitations and Further Studies

The study was only done at one institution of higher learning and inclusion of other institutions offering the same degree could enrich the study and make it more representative of all the institutions offering the fashion design degree. The researchers recommend that another study could be done where students are given a task to come up with content for virtual exhibition show and then evaluate the methods they would have applied to see the best way these can be held at student level.

References

- Barth, G. L., Davis, L. D., & Mita, A. (2018). Digital exhibitions: Concept and practices. *MARAC Technical Leaflet Series*, (12).
- Browchuk, E. (2020, June 29). Digital fashion weeks and virtual shows: A rundown of fashion's new rhythm. *Vogue*. Retrieved from <https://www.vogue.com/article/digital-fashion-weeks-2020>
- Cline, A. C. (2012). *The evolving role of the exhibition and its impact on art and culture* (Unpublished Bachelors thesis). Trinity College, United States. Retrieved from <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/267/>
- Teo, M. (2020, May 14). From Balenciaga to Alexander McQueen, these are the virtual fashion exhibitions happening right now. *Lifestyle Asia*. Retrieved from: <https://www.lifestyleasia.com/kl/style/fashion/virtual-fashion-exhibitions-2020/>
- Evgeniadou, E. (2017, October). Showroom10: Greek designers showroom. In *IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering*, 254(17), 172011. IOP Publishing. doi: 10.1088/1757-899X/254/17/172011
- Green, D. N., Du Puis, J. L., Xepoleas, L. M., Hesselbein, C., Greder, K., Pietsch, V., & Estrada, J. G. (2021). Fashion exhibitions as scholarship: Evaluation criteria for peer review. *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 39(1), 71-86. doi: 10.1177/0887302X19888018
- Gudyanga, A., Gora, J., & Moyo, L. (2019). Factors affecting the participation of rural male students in two vocational subjects in Zimbabwe. *Cogent Education*, 6(1). doi: 10.1080/2331186X.2019.1633126
- Halil, N. A., Mohammad, H. M., Rosli, N. E. Z. H., & John, A. A. (2018). The Exhibition Structure and Its Impact Towards Visitors' Understanding at a Museum. *Ideology*, 3(3), 41-53.
- Harma, V. (2011). Interaction and performativity in digital art exhibitions. *Nordisk Museologi*, (1), 98-105. doi: 10.5617/nm.3148
- Hauan, N. P. & Kolsto, S. D. (2014). Exhibitions as learning environments: a review of empirical research on students' science learning at Natural History Museums, Science Museums and Science Centres. *NoRDina* 10(1), 90-104.
- Loscialpo, F. (2016). From the physical to the digital and back: Fashion exhibitions in the digital age. *International Journal of Fashion Studies*, 3(2), 225-248. doi:10.1386/inf.3.2.225_1
- Kalbaska, N., & Cantoni, L. (2019). Digital Fashion Competences: Market Practices and Needs. In: *Rinaldi, R., Bandinelli, R. (eds) Business Models and ICT Technologies for the Fashion Supply Chain. IT4Fashion 2017. Lecture Notes in Electrical Engineering, vol 525*. Springer, Cham. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-98038-6_10
- Khoo, L. C., & Ramaiah, C. K. (2008). An overview of online exhibitions. *Journal of Library & Information Technology*, 28(4). doi:10.14429/djlit.28.4.193
- Mapolisa, T., & Tshabalala, T. (2013). Attitudes of teachers towards teaching of practical subjects. *International*

- Journal of Asian Social Science*, 3(11), 2267–2278.
- McCusker, C., & Babington, D. (2015). *The 2018 Digital University: Staying relevant in the digital age*. London, United Kingdom: Pricewaterhouse Coopers LLP
- Mhlanga L. (2020). Rise of virtual exhibitions in post-Covid-19 era. *The Standard*. Retrieved from <https://thestandard.newsday.co.zw/2020/05/24/rise-virtual-exhibitions-post-covid-19-era/>
- Mofjell, V. (2017). *Factors for universities to consider for trade shows: Exhibit marketing for universities* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Halmstad University, Sweden. Retrieved from <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1064698&dswid=369>
- Mohanty, P., Dhoundiyal, H., & Choudhury, R. (2020). Events tourism in the eye of the COVID-19 storm: Impacts and implications. *Event Tourism in Asian Countries: Challenges and Prospects (1st ed.)*: Apple Academic Press (2020). doi:10.2139/ssrn.3682648
- Petrov, J. (2019). *Fashion, history, museums: Inventing the display of dress*. London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Raya, A. (2021). Virtual high: How Otis College's 2021 annual exhibition came alive online. *Otis College*. Retrieved from <https://grid.otis.edu/otis-college-2021-annual-exhibition-students-prepared-for-work-post-pandemic-art-design-industries-spring-2021>
- Salusso, C. J., Lee, J., Lee, Y., & Lin, J. K. (2016). The perceptions of apparel design and merchandising students on creativity and apparel design copyright. *International Journal of Costume & Fashion*, 16(1), 1-16. doi:10.7233/ijcf.2016.16.1.001
- Schiller-Merkens, S. (2017). Will green remain in the new black? Dynamics in the self-categorisation of ethical fashion designers. *Historical Social Research*, 42(1), 211-237. doi:10.12759/hsr.42.2017.1.211-237
- Segran, E. (2020, August 6). Hanifa's virtual 3D fashion show is haunting, beautiful, and brilliantly executed. *Fast Company*. Retrieved from <https://www.fastcompany.com/90513959/hanifas-virtual-3d-fashion-show-is-haunting-beautiful-and-brilliantly-executed>
- Tsotsos, E. N. (2014). *Presenting the fashion object: Analyzing the exhibition fashioning the object: Bless, Boudicca, Sandra Backlund* (Unpublished master's thesis). The University of Western Ontario, Canada. Retrieved from <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/etd/2093>
- Vrencoska, G. (2015). Museum Fashion Exhibitions: The fashion designer as an artist and new paradigms of communication with the audience. *New space in art and science*, 515-528
- Xie, J., & Youn, C. (2020). How the luxury fashion brand adjust to deal with the COVID-19. *International Journal of Costume and Fashion*, 20(2), 50-60. doi:10.7233/ijcf.2020.20.2.050
- Yu, A. (2020, May 8). 3 fashion school museums you can visit virtually. *FashionUnited*. Retrieved from <https://fashionunited.com/education/news/3-fashion-school-museums-you-can-visit-virtually/2020050833470>
- Yaw, E. M. (2013). *Developing Digital Technologies for Fashion Illustration* (Unpublished Master's thesis). Kwame Nkrumah University of Science & Technology, Ghana. Retrieved from <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.836.3773&rep=rep1&type=pdf>