**Diverse expressions: Uncovering the landscape of black-owned fashion brands**

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***Introduction***

The fashion industry has long been an influential force in shaping cultural trends and reflecting societal values. However, black voices and perspectives within this industry have often been overlooked and marginalized. In recent years, a growing acknowledgment of the imperative for inclusivity and diversity has sparked a remarkable surge in the emergence and visibility of black-owned fashion brands. African American entrepreneurs bring with them a wealth of rich and diverse heritage. While there has been some research exploring the history of black fashion and the characteristics of African American consumers, the study of black-owned fashion brands demands further attention. Hence, the objective of this research is to employ big data analysis methods to illuminate the keywords associated with black-owned fashion brands, thereby offering an in-depth analysis that unveils their distinctive characteristics, overarching themes, and core values, which together define this dynamic sector of the industry. Through the meticulous examination of these keywords, we stand to acquire valuable insights into the essence of black-owned fashion brands, their unique contributions, and their broader significance within the expansive landscape of fashion.

***Literature Review***

African Americans exhibit distinctive dress characteristics as a means of expressing their ethnic identity. These characteristics include the use of bold colors and jewelry, unconventional pattern combinations, and traditional garments from various African cultures (Johnson, Reddy-Best, & Sanders, 2022). Throughout the past century, individuals of African descent have made significant contributions to the fashion industry. However, it is evident that further attention and research are needed to fully understand and appreciate the impact of black fashion entrepreneurs (Wadlington, 2004). Recognizing the importance of their backgrounds can help black fashion entrepreneurs to shed light on the factors that contribute to their success in both their personal journeys and business endeavors. By delving into these aspects, we can gain a deeper understanding of the rich cultural heritage and influence that black individuals bring to the world of fashion.

***Methods***

To examine the characteristics of black-owned fashion brands, a selection of 50 fashion brands was made (“Black-owned Clothing,” 2020). In order to assess their features, extensive text data was collected from each brand's official website, newsletters, press releases, and reports for analysis. A keyword analysis was then employed to identify the characteristics within these fashion brands. The text data underwent essential text processing techniques, including tokenization, removal of stop words, and lemmatization, to eliminate irrelevant words, symbols, or characters. The resulting text documents were merged to form a corpus, which served as the body of text for subsequent statistical analysis (Feinerer, Hornik, & Meyer, 2008). For the development and analysis of algorithms, the Python programming language (Version 3) was utilized. Furthermore, to automatically analyze and categorize the content of the extensive corpus of texts into meaningful topics or themes, topic modeling was employed. This study utilized TF-IDF (Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency) to identify relevant keywords representing black-owned fashion brands and employed topic modeling to categorize them accordingly.

***Results & Discussion***

TF-IDF, a natural language processing technique, proves valuable in extracting essential keywords from a collection of documents. The analysis revealed that black-owned fashion brands exhibit shared attributes such as ‘women’ (305.8), ‘design’ (238.8), ‘creativity’ (233.1), ‘fabrics,’ ‘black,’ ‘community,’ ‘world, ‘sustainability,’ ‘black-owned,’ ‘quality,’ ‘African,’ ‘New-York,’ ‘environment,’ ‘inspiration,’ and ‘small.’

Notably, 'women' emerged as the keyword with the highest TF-IDF score, interconnected with other significant keywords. Black-owned brands predominantly target women customers or found by women entrepreneurs, aiming to empower and support their rights and influence. Black women entrepreneurs actively raise their voices in support of diversity and culture while encouraging women to stand out within their communities as leaders. These fashion brands are committed to safeguarding women's rights, exemplified through events and collections commemorating International Women's Day. Secondly, black-owned brands prioritize ‘design,’ emphasizing their luxury and excellence in craftsmanship. They set themselves apart by creating unique designs born from their creative minds. Moreover, they place a specific focus on designing for a diverse range of body types, ensuring inclusivity. ‘Fabric’ also receives significant attention, with brands opting for luxurious materials as well as utilizing dead-stock and recycled fabrics to reduce waste. Fabrics are carefully selected to support movement and provide comfort. Bold and innovative patterns pay homage to ancestral practices and cultural significance. Furthermore, brands assert their identity by highlighting keywords such as 'black,' 'black-owned,' and 'African.' These brands and entrepreneurs showcase their values and cultural heritage, emphasizing the importance of their black foundation and reflecting black history and culture. They actively celebrate and support movements related to black empowerment. Fourthly, these brands aspire to make meaningful contributions to both the ‘community’ and the ‘world.’ They prioritize the community-made garments and ethical labor practices. While their reach extends globally, these brands also engage in addressing global issues such as human trafficking and sexual exploitation. Fifth, ‘sustainability’ serves as a core value. Initiatives include upcycling, the use of organic textiles, and an eco-conscious approach to style. Sustainability acts as a guiding philosophy in their efforts to combat problems like climate change. Finally, black-owned brands actively support ‘small’ businesses, manufacturers, and entrepreneurs, recognizing the importance of fostering and uplifting smaller enterprises. Several keywords demonstrated relatively higher TF-IDF scores compared to their frequency: ‘size,’ ‘inspiration,’ ‘economic,’ ‘ethical.’ The keyword ‘size’ is often associated with body shape and is interconnected with other essential keywords and values such as inclusivity and diversity, which reflect the core values that these brands aim to promote. ‘Inspiration’ frequently intertwines with artists, culture, imagination, and style, and ‘ethical’ is closely linked to sustainability, eco-consciousness, the environment, and the black community. Interestingly, the keyword ‘economic’ is notable for its connections to girls, freedoms, justice, and opportunities. This indicates that black-owned fashion brands actively support girls' economic freedom, advocate for economic justice, and strive to create economic opportunities for communities.

Through topic modeling, black-owned fashion brands were categorized into four main themes: value, artistry, products, and place. To begin with, the value topic encompassed keywords such as ‘women’, ‘black,’ ‘community,’ and ‘world,’ reflecting the brands' commitment to these overarching values. The artistry topic included keywords ‘design,’ ‘quality,’ ‘fabrics,’ ‘style,’ and ‘artisans,’ highlighting the brands' emphasis on creativity, craftsmanship, and the use of high-quality materials. The products topic revealed the diverse range of offerings from black-owned brands, including ‘shoes,’ ‘lingerie,’ ‘dress,’ ‘swimwear,’ and ‘sportswear.’ Lastly, the place topic revealed the geographic roots and operational centers of these brands, with a focus on ‘Africa,’ particularly ‘Nigeria,’ and their presence primarily in cities such as ‘New York,’ ‘Los Angeles,’ ‘America,’ and ‘UK.’

Overall, this research highlights the significant contributions and unique perspectives of black-owned fashion brands. By uncovering the keywords, values, and core characteristics that define them, we gain a deeper understanding of their impact on the fashion industry and their role in promoting inclusivity, empowerment, and sustainability. As the industry continues to evolve, these brands serve as beacons of inspiration, demonstrating the power of diversity and the importance of giving voice to marginalized communities.

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