

## Fashion Modeling In Zimbabwe

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### Abstract

The purpose of the research was to investigate the factors affecting the training of professional fashion models with a view to improve the performance of professional fashion models on the runway in Zimbabwe. Fashion modelling and fashion shows have become powerful forces in marketing fashion brands in the contemporary world. The study was carried out in Harare, Zimbabwe, following a qualitative descriptive case study design. In-depth interviews and observations were used to solicit data from fashion models, designers and fashion modelling agencies. The findings indicated that the major factor affecting the training of fashion models was that the Zimbabwean society is not very supportive to fashion modeling and fashion show activities. It was obtained that fashion models lack knowledge and skills of what they are expected to do on the runway as the training covered very little curriculum content. The findings also revealed that fashion designers and modeling agencies had different expectations in terms of entry physical requirements of a fashion model. The conclusion put forward was that the young people in Zimbabwe neglect fashion modelling as a profession for it is viewed by the society as an indecent profession. It was recommended that there is need for all training institutions that offer fashion design and modelling courses to conscientise the Zimbabwean society on fashion modelling as a profession and its importance to the fashion industry. Modelling agencies and fashion designers should consider reviewing and broadening the curriculum and duration of the modeling training programme so that fashion models end up mastering the required skills necessary for befitting performance at fashion shows.

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**Keywords:** fashion modelling, modelling agency, runway, catwalk, fashion designer.

### INTRODUCTION

Fashion models and fashion shows are the most vital marketing tools in the clothing and fashion designing industry. Showing and advertising clothing on fashion models demonstrates how the cut and fabric interact with the wearer. This was acknowledged by couture houses that emerged in Paris in the nineteenth century with house maids parading in front of customers in private salons, (Bathes, 2009). This created public interest and urge to buy the design. Thus fashion models have become powerful forces in marketing fashion brands in the contemporary world, (Wissinger, 2009; Mears, 2011). In addition, fashion models are considered as cultural intermediaries through the way the frame consumer experiences and encounter with commodities in the selection, styling and dissemination of information and images populated by the models. Fashion models are vital especially to clothing manufacturers and fashion designers. Fashion models are used to capture the customers' attention to create awareness of the designs in fashion by displaying them on the ramp in fashion shows. In this sense, the fashion models stimulate the customers' interest for the designs by the way the garments will be molding or fitting on their figures. Customers desire to purchase a design by first admiring it on the fashion model on the ramp.

Professional fashion models are very important in the fashion industry. Their absence creates hiccups in the fashion industry. A professional fashion model is trained to showcase fashion designs or fashion brands with attitude according to the designer's inspiration as for the customer to understand and appreciate the concept and inspiration behind each design. A professional fashion model should be able to bring out the designer's mind and creativity behind the design through the way he or she delivers the designer's creations on the ramp through the catwalk. Professional model may as well appear on top of fashion magazine covers and national advertisements such as commercials or spreads (Wissinger, 2009). Haphazardly choosing models usually leads to clothing not molding well onto the chosen models' figures. The models might fail to give a befitting attitude and grace the designs as the designer requires and expects customers to see. When fashion designers fail to work closely with professional fashion models, they usually incur problems in showcasing their designs in fashion shows. When a clothing manufacturing company does not have a company professional model to model and try out the prototypes before mass production then the company is prone to producing clothes with flaws. Mistakes are identified and corrected as the model fits the prototype samples before mass production. This

reduces the company's risks of producing rejects and incurs loss.

Fashion modeling as a profession is said to have had its genesis in the nineteenth century, the first fashion model being a white Parisian shop girl called Marie Augustine Vernet-Worth, being a model for Charles Frederick Worth's designs, (Ankarcona, 2010). Charles Worth was the first fashion designer to work with a fashion model and to promote fashion modelling, introducing fashion shows. Marie Vernet Worth then started her career of fashion modelling by doing in house modelling in 1852. Marie and other models would wear and model clothes for Charles Worth's clients and customers who visited the shop. Several times a year Marie and other models would put on a themed fashion show for Charles Worth's latest creations. After the fashion shows, there was always a great turn up of customers to buy Charles Worth's designs. This enlightens that fashion designers and clothing manufacturing companies should work closely with professional fashion models and should often put on fashion shows for a successful clothing line. This situation of marketing designs through models is however not very common among fashion designers in Zimbabwe.

Fashion modelling having been pioneered by a white Parisian woman, there are black fashion models that have pioneered in modeling as a profession. Effron (2011) sites that Naomi Campbell is one of the first black fashion models to grace the covers of Paris French Vogue in August 1988. Donyale Luna is another black fashion model who appeared on the cover of Vogue (British) in the 1960s, (Quick, 1997). This shows that being a fashion model has nothing to do with one's race or complexion. However, from all the above mentioned successful fashion models not even one is from Zimbabwe showing constraints within the modelling profession. Africa is seen as a source of anthropological inspiration for international brands. However, in terms of modelling, African models have been regarded as less suitable as noted from the inception of Miss World sixty years ago; only one black African model has been good enough to win the Miss World title, (Miss World, 2009). This poses a lot of questions as to whether the black African model is not trained enough to compete and succeed internationally.

In western countries models are trained for not less than a year (Wojak, 2007). Most international models are very successful because they are trained for a long time. In Hong Kong for example professional fashion models are trained to acquire in-depth presentation skills, and learn how to enhance their aesthetic expression in personal image and grooming technique (Hong Kong design institute, 2011). Hair styling and make-up effects are concurrently emphasized to bring out a person's best personal look. In Africa,

particularly in Zimbabwe models are prone to perform below international standards showing that a lot is lacking in their training hence the need for this study. Fashion modelling seems to be considered lowly as part of curriculum activities in Zimbabwean educational institutions. There seems to be a few if there are any primary, secondary or higher and tertiary institutions of learning which offer fashion modeling as part of their curricular.

Having analyzed what professional fashion modeling is and the trend of professional fashion models in Zimbabwe, it points out that these models lack a lot in their training prompting the researcher to conduct a study into the factors affecting the training of fashion models in Zimbabwe. Efforts were made to answer the following objectives:

To identify factors affecting the training of fashion models in Zimbabwe.

To establish ways that can be used to improve the training of professional fashion models in Zimbabwe.

#### **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

The research was delimited to fashion models, fashion designers and modeling agencies in Harare, Zimbabwe hence the results may not be statistical generalized. This study was however, intended not to prove but to improve the situation of fashion modelling in Zimbabwe. The findings might be applicable to other institutions operating under similar situations.

#### **RELATED LITERATURE**

Fashion models are persons who are paid to wear and display clothing and fashion designs, (Ranck 1997). These are trained persons who are employed to display, advertise and promote commercial products notably fashion clothing or to serve as subjects of art works. The job ranking for modern fashion models may be print models, runway models and supermodels. According to Effron (2011), a runway model is a person who showcases clothes from fashion designers, fashion media and consumers. They are also called live model. Runway models work in different locations constantly traveling between those cities where fashion is well known. Ranck (1997) indicates that a supermodel is a highly paid fashion model that usually has a worldwide reputation with a background in haute-couture and commercial modelling.

According to O'Connell (2008), a fashion model is not expected to be curvy, muscular or voluptuous. The waist is supposed to be twenty-four inches around and the model should have a small large bust. Thus a flat chest is required. A fashion model is also expected to know how to pose for photo shoots, give good face, know about fashion usually from magazines, fashion books, watch modelling shows and have a thorough knowledge of how to put make up. Effron (2011) advices that fashion model requirements are dictated

not by the fashion trade but by the clients of model agencies that require a certain build, a certain height, with a certain look for an advertisement to sell their clothing. A model can be of any size and shape. This is why there are runway, bikini, and lingerie, catalogue, and body-parts models. Each of these modelling has its expectations, for example, a bikini model should be well endowed while a catwalk model should have a flat chest so that clothing falls properly. A supermodel is an ideal high fashion model that should be tall, skinny, masculinised, very good looking and perfect in every way (Blakeley, 2008). The face of a model should be symmetrical, neither long nor round but somewhere in between. Eyes should be normal to large with a perfect shape. The eyelids should not be hooded. Nose should be proportional and straight. Lips should be full and in good shape. The skin should be perfect without any fine lines. Eyebrows should be thick and perfectly shaped and hair should be in good condition. Fashion models should conform to rather rigid physical criteria.

Blackwell (2012) sites that female fashion models are expected to start their career early as from fifteen to twenty years as male models are expected to start their career a bit older between eighteen to twenty-five years. This is because a male model should not look so childish and a lady should not look old. This explains that fashion models are expected to be trend setters and to choose clothes which promote venture and reflect awareness of dignity. Models should therefore know pure manners and social grace so that society will appreciate modelling. Effron (2011) propounds that a fashion model has to possess the specific personal attributes that a designer or fashion director looks for. According to the British Association Of Model Agents, a fashion model is expected to be tall, have a nice physique, unique facial features, ability to walk the runway, a good sense of style and ability to look good at all times. A fashion model is also expected to know how to dress up properly, have excellent stamina, and be familiar with different poses for photo shoots. According to O'Connell (2008) patience is an important attribute that is required of a model. This is because models will sometimes be stuck in the same position for hours, in the cold and rain and need to sustain the same pose. They also need to adapt to whatever surroundings they are put in.

#### **Training Required For Fashion Models**

Effron (2011) indicates that there is no specific entry requirement of formal education for one to become a professional fashion runway model or commercial fashion model. As long as one has exceptional physical features, the minimum height required, confidence and positive attitude, then one has the chance to land a good modelling offer. However those who want to boost their fashion modelling career, it would be ideal to satisfy an associate or bachelor's degree program in fashion merchandising, fashion design, arts and drama.

Majority of modelling agencies and employers pay more attention to the physical features of the models as well as their modelling portfolio. Modelling agencies are supposed to guide the model to create a very good portfolio of one's best photos, (Pooe, 2012). This is because talent scouts and other modelling agencies would have reference of one's past experiences. Fashion models are required to be trained to convey emotion and attitude of whatever brand one will be modeling for. They are required to learn wardrobe planning so as to be able to properly represent the garments and wardrobes that one is supposed to advertise. A good fashion model is capable of wearing all types of clothing styles and will always look good in them.

According to Blackwell (2012) fashion modelling training programs should offer or include many exciting opportunities for models' personal, spiritual and physical development. Training should include content encompassing how to walk on the runway, hair and make -up, style and grooming, photography, etiquette, developing public speaking skills, how to dress appropriately for every occasion, image issues, acting and formal table manners. Modeling agencies should be located in an area where there is a lot of fashion activities going on. This would enable models to mix and interact with people involved in fashion. Walker (2009) suggests that quality training is fundamental in fashion modelling because the way a model is trained makes a model to be good, average or bad in fashion modelling. To make modelling training progressive, a lot of aspects need to be addressed so as to build a conducive environment for successful productive fashion modelling training. There is no research study that has so far been conducted in Zimbabwe to examine factors affecting the training of fashion models with a view of finding strategies for improving the training programmes of fashion modelling hence this study.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **The Design**

Given the qualitative stance adopted in this study and the nature of the research questions, the researcher selected the descriptive case study design as the most appropriate research design for this study. As defined by Yin (2003) a descriptive case study strives to describe, analyse and interpret a particular phenomenon. The researcher was in a position to reveal in detail the unique experiences and concerns of fashion models, fashion designers and modeling agencies and interpret the factors that affect the training of professional fashion models in Zimbabwe. The case study provided rich, contextual insights into the dynamics of issues related to fashion modeling.

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

In this research, the sample was distributed into three strata namely fashion models, fashion designers and

modeling agencies. Stratified purposive sampling was used to select the participants on the basis of the noted problem (Gray, 2004). The researcher chose nine fashion models, nine fashion designers and three modelling agencies as these were perceived to be rich in information with respect to the purpose of study.

#### **Instruments**

The researcher utilized a combination of data collecting instruments namely in-depth interviews, observations and focus group interviews. These were used in order to collect views, opinions and experiences from the targeted sample.

#### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

Data from the study was presented in narrative form and inductively analysed to discover important patterns, themes and inter-relationships.

#### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The discussion covers the findings of the two main research objectives. These findings were interpreted using data collected through in-depth interviews, observations and focus group interviews. On the demographic characteristics of participants it was obtained that among the fashion designers, who were selected six were males and three were females. Three of the fashion models who selected were males and six were females and two males and one female was selected from the modeling agencies. Gender imbalance of males and females were noted in the fashion and modelling industry. This shows that fashion modelling is more appreciated by females than males. This might give insights that most fashion designers prefer to venture into female fashion than male fashion. Fashion designing is a profession which is surprisingly dominated by males and males are the ones who are again managing all the modelling agencies. The difference in percentage of both sexes shows, however, an appreciation of fashion and modelling by these sexes. In terms of age wise it was noted that among fashion models no participant was above the age of thirty years. This showed that fashion modelling is a profession which is seasonal and one cannot be a model at thirty, rather models might change to other professions like starting a modeling agency as they grow older. To add more, these findings might tell that females have to start modelling at a younger age because females look more attractive when they are younger and age faster while males look more attractive as they grow older. Male fashion does not look attractive on a childish face. Blackwell (2012) informs us that fashion modeling is a profession which must be started at a young age of between eighteen to twenty five years for males and fifteen to twenty-two years for females.

#### **Factors Affecting the Training of Fashion Models**

This research objective sought to examine the factors affecting the training of professional fashion model. On

the views aired by fashion designers, modeling agencies and fashion models on what model are expected to do on the ramp it was obtained that fashion models have general knowledge of what is expected of them but all of them lack some knowledge and practice of the basic fundamentals of modelling which include, good posture, good poses for photos, having patience and endurance. This lack of knowledge and practice lead to them putting up less professional performances. According to O'Connell (2008), fashion models are expected to have huge amount of patience and endurance because sometimes they may be expected to be stuck in the same position for hours or to do the same routine over and over again without looking tired. All the fashion designers pointed out that models did not understand what they are expected to do on the ramp. The designers expressed that models performance in fashion shows was not pleasing to them. This showed that there is a lot that is lacking in their training. O'Connell (2008) indicates that a fashion model should know how to pose for photo shoots and to give a good face. All modeling agencies mentioned only grooming and catwalk as the expectations they focus on but left out attitude, good posture, patience and endurance which are fundamental attributes of a fashion model. This showed that modeling agencies lack a lot of knowledge that is required as modelling agencies to match the training needs they are required to offer.

Stemming from the same research objective was the issue of entry physical requirements. It was noted that all fashion designers and modeling agencies seemed to have different expectation in terms of entry physical requirements especially for age range and weight. This might mean that models trained by these modeling agencies would not be marketable to designers as expressed by one of the fashion designers in the excerpt below;

*It's very difficult to get the correct figure from these agencies as they do not consult us on the models we require.*

This implies that there is likely to be lack of confidence among models during fashion shows and even on the ramp. Effron (2011) ,however indicates that fashion model requirements are dictated not by fashion trade but by the clients of the model agency that require a certain built, height and a certain look for any advertisement to sell their clothing. This explains that fashion designers as clients of modelling agencies should dictate their physical requirements to model agencies or schools to train the required models for the fashion industry for a particular season.

Concerning the curriculum covered during training at the modelling training institutions, it was found out that the most common content covered by models was that of make-up. All participants agreed that the issue of make-up ranging from skin care and photo-make-up are

thoroughly covered. It was emphasised that the human body is a unique canvas that had to be decorated in many ways so as to bring out the unique aspect that can accompany the design when it is worn. Temporary decorations like makeup, and hairstyles, are all ways of following fashion or signaling a person's position in the society. However Magwaza (1999) observed that make-up is just a form of body art that tend to change among cultures, and it may be an ideal canvas for individual creativity and self-reinvention. Make-up can also be used as a way for people to challenge social values and cultural assumptions about beauty, identity, and the body itself. These ideas therefore implies that make-up as part of curriculum content for modelling should, therefore, be covered thoroughly as revealed by the data obtained as it is necessary for the models to adjust makeup to suit the different design collections among different cultures they may be hired to show case.

The findings showed that issues to do with acting, image, photography and styling were not being discussed and covered thoroughly in all modeling training institutions. All participants indicated that acting is not covered at all. This explains why most models performed poorly during fashion shows. Fashion modeling is an act and performance that needs artistic way of presentation. While Skov (2004) argued that acting in fashion modeling is just a general point about art, it is especially important in relation to fashion, which is a diffuse participatory phenomenon that thrives on multi-directed interaction. Instead of a crowd in which each individual is both an observer and observed, fashion modeling is an advertising act that separates performers from spectators by aid of the catwalk. Instead of a mixture of old and new clothing items which most people tend to wear, the fashion modeling separates the new collection that is presented on stage by the models, from the clothes worn by the audience, making those in the process appear 'already-old'. In this respect it can be argued that the fashion modelling done during fashion shows consists of two performances encased in each other, (Skov, 2004). The same author goes on to emphasise that the first performance is the clothes parade on stage, planned and scripted down to each pose and turn. The other is the performance put on by the audience, whose behavior is scripted, if not literally then sociologically. Members of the audience are simultaneously observers and part of the spectacle, and ultimately it is they who determine the success or failure of the designs being show- cased or advertised. The fashion modelling and show like the theatre, mediates between production and consumption therefore the performance of the fashion models should be excellent to encourage consumption of the fashion designer's collection.

It was, however, obtained from the participants that fashion designers do not often hold fashion shows regularly as narrated by one of the fashion designers.

*'As designers we hold a combined fashion show once or even twice a year,, aa there is not much fashion activity hey. So if we hold time and again we will lose'*

This excerpt shows that fashion models are gaining less experience in Zimbabwe for there are very few fashion events that are held. The fashion designers who should give the models the platform to gain experience hold fashion shows once in a year. This might explain why fashion models are not experienced in their field hence their training is not even taken seriously.

Stemming from the same objective was the issue of the mode of fashion modelling training. The findings revealed that all of the fashion models who were interviewed indicated that they were all trained on part-time basis. Most of the participants indicated that part-time was not the best mode to train models to be good professional fashion models. One of the participants reiterated that:

*'These modelling scouts just focus in part-time studies only; They are not even serious at all, even those that focus on miss Zimbabwe are just doing part-time; I wonder if there is any full-time modelling courses here'*

This might indicate that the part-time session might be very short for one to gain enough knowledge and experience hence models tend to perform poorly during fashion shows. This might as well reveal that fashion models in Zimbabwe took fashion modelling as a part-time job as such they ended up concentrating on other courses, diplomas or degree programs are thus not linked to fashion modeling. Zimbabwean modelling agencies also offer training for only six months on part time basis and this might not be enough to take a fashion model through the whole program content that is required of a fashion model. Wojak (2007) maintains that fashion modelling training courses should take at least eight months on full time. Zimbabwean fashion models did not have experience of real advanced fashion modelling like that done in fashion cities like Milan because they did not get enough platform to learn by experience.

It also emerged from the participants that the Zimbabwean society is not very supportive to fashion modelling and fashion show activities. Due to the lack of support, modelling agencies tended to face constraints in sourcing resources to organize fashion modelling competitions for their models or to invite and host international modelling agencies to share ideas with them. One of the modelling agencies aired that:

*'It's very difficult to have professional fashion models here; our people regard these models as indecent, they are after money from these big people. Our people need time and they need to*

*be educated on the role these model play in the fashion industry.*

This excerpt might indicate that if the society did not support the young people who have the passion for modelling, fashion modelling would not improve in Zimbabwe. Most of the fashion models even indicated that they lacked the necessary moral and financial support to even participate in international fashion modelling events. The Zimbabwean society relates fashion modelling as an indecent profession because models would at time advertise some clothing items half naked and this is considered as contradicting with the norms and values of how an individual should behave in society.

#### **Ways of Improving the Training of Professional Fashion Models in Zimbabwe**

From the findings it was suggested that all free-lance fashion designers and clothing manufacturers should come together and hold fashion shows seasonally. This would create a platform for local fashion models to gain experience on the runway hence promoting the fashion business. Fashion designers proposed that the government should reduce imports of fashion clothing items and embrace the local designs so as to boost the local fashion and clothing business. It was raised by all participants that modelling agencies should collaborate with other international modelling agencies for various exchange programmes so as to get a wider understanding of how to run fashion modelling training programmes. To note as well was the views that were noted by all modelling agencies that the Zimbabwean society should be educated on what fashion modelling and fashion shows are all about. This implies that there is need to create awareness activities in form of modelling shows in schools or through film and video on what fashion modeling is all about among communities in Zimbabwe. This would create opportunities and platforms for the society to understand and gain an appreciation of fashion shows and modelling events.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

The findings of the study unveiled several facts about fashion modelling in Zimbabwe. From the views it could be established that the major factors affecting the training of fashion models were that modeling agencies who are the trainers of models and fashion designers who are the employers of fashion models had different entry physical requirements and expectations. Thus fashion models faced constraints when it comes to performing at fashion shows. It also emerged that there is not much fashion activity in Zimbabwe in term of fashion and fashion shows held by designers hence modelling agencies sometimes failed to secure full time modelling students. It was established that the youth neglect fashion modelling for the Zimbabwean society is not very supportive of modelling as it is regarded as an indecent profession. It came out that the duration of

the fashion modelling training programme was rated very short that students acquired limited skills. It was also concluded that the major ways of improving the training of fashion models could be through increasing awareness among the Zimbabwean society on what fashion modelling is all about so as to support the young who have the passion for fashion modelling. Fashion modeling agencies have to encourage the local media to promote local fashion models to ensure that they are known to the fashion industry. Fashion designers should come together and corporate in holding fashion shows often to encourage the society to be aware of fashion modelling and fashion shows.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the findings it could be recommended that the Zimbabwean fashion training institutions and modelling agencies should review their course content so that fashion models would gain wide knowledge and skills necessary for a professional fashion modeling career. Modeling agencies should create platforms for fashion models to gain experience through collaborating with modelling agencies, fashion designers and fashion photographers from other countries. This would as well enable the modelling agencies to boost their knowledge and experience on how to run successful modelling training institutions. Zimbabwean fashion designers should hold fashion shows more often to encourage Zimbabweans to develop an appreciation of Zimbabwean designs showcased by Zimbabwean black fashion models. Fashion designers, modeling agencies and other fashion institutions should conduct awareness campaign educating the Zimbabwean nation on the role of fashion modeling and fashion shows. These awareness activities might create an urge among the people and the corporate community to support the young people who have a strong passion for fashion modelling.

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