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LEVERAGING SOCIAL MEDIA FOR GROWTH: OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALL-SCALE TEXTILE AND FASHION ENTREPRENEURS IN EMERGING DIGITAL ECONOMIES

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Abstract
In the context of a less digitalised economy, small-scale textile and fashion professionals face unique challenges and opportunities in leveraging social media for growth. Drawing on the social media engagement theory, this study explores the strategic potential of social media marketing as a transformative tool for these professionals. The study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to analyse the data collected. Purposive sampling techniques were employed to gather data from 457 textile and fashion professionals from two business regions of the country. The study findings revealed that four of the proposed hypotheses were significant, while two were not. The findings indicate that effective social media strategies can significantly impact small fashion brands by providing cost-effective marketing solutions that reach a global audience. The study contributes to understanding the nuanced strategies employed by small businesses that leverage emerging innovations to create sustainable growth pathways in less-digitalised economies such as Ghana.

KEYWORDS: Social media, textiles, fashion, professionals, digital economy and small businesses.

JEL CLASSIFICATION: M31, L26, O33.

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INTRODUCTION

In this digital era, small-scale textile and fashion professionals in less digitalised economies are undergoing a significant transformation by leveraging social media to drive growth and enhance their market share. Ye et al. (2023) emphasised that, with global apparel market growth driven by rising e-commerce and social media penetration, small-scale textiles and fashion professionals present a unique opportunity to capitalise on the market. Digitalisation, particularly social media, has transformed how businesses operate, creating unprecedented opportunities for engagement, promotion, and operational efficiency (Rozak et al., 2021; Zaki, 2019). A crucial element of this transformation is social media, which emphasises the strategic utilisation of digital platforms to improve firm performance, drive innovation, and secure a competitive edge (Borah et al., 2022).

Keelson et al. (2024) affirmed that social media platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, etc., have paved the way for small-scale textile and fashion professionals to not only facilitate direct customer engagement, brand promotion, customer feedback, and market analysis but also to serve as tools for creating strategic growth opportunities. Also, Jin and Shin (2021) revealed that social media has changed how textiles and fashion retail evolve. Grasping how to leverage these digital platforms effectively is crucial for small businesses seeking to succeed in a competitive landscape.

While previous studies highlight the significance of social media in the broader context of other industries, there is a significant lack of targeted studies on how small-scale textile and fashion professionals in less digitalised economies can leverage social media to create growth opportunities. Few studies focus solely on larger brands, without addressing specific opportunities for smaller entities, such as small-scale textile and fashion professionals (Gautam & Sharma, 2017). Additionally, studies on the mediating role of social media remain underexplored in the context of the textiles and fashion industry in a less digitalised economy such as Ghana.

Despite the encouraging prospects of social media as a growth tool, several small-scale textile and fashion professionals in less digitalised economies face complications in utilising social media for strategic growth, such as limited access to resources and digital marketing expertise. Again, the dominance of large brands in the digital space through sophisticated marketing strategies creates challenges for small-scale fashion professionals to gain visibility and engage with their target audiences. Numerous social media studies focus on advanced economies or large firms, overlooking small-scale artisans in low-digitalisation settings such as Ghana's textile sector (Tumasjan, 2024; Myllylahti, 2018; Amoah, 2020). This challenge poses a significant concern that must be addressed to enable small-scale professionals to leverage social media for sustainable growth. The present study, therefore, seeks to:

1) analyse the present usage of social media among small-scale textiles and fashion professionals in an emerging economy
2) investigate the mediating role of social media on strategic growth opportunities of small-scale textile and fashion professionals from a less digitalised economy.

The findings of this study hold significant implications for theory and practice. The remainder of the study is structured as follows: Section two presents the research background and theoretical framework. Section three details the methodology used in the study, while Section four examines the empirical findings. Finally, Section five addresses the discussion and implications of the research.

1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The social media engagement theory (SMET) is a fundamental framework for understanding interactions between individuals and organisations in digital environments (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016). The theory focuses on user interactions with content, brands, and one another on social media platforms, emphasising behaviours like liking, sharing, commenting, and producing user-generated content. The SMET offers a comprehensive perspective on engagement dynamics in digital environments by synthesising concepts from social exchange theory, resource-based view, and collective action. Di Gangi and Wasko (2016). For instance, it acknowledged the relationship between user engagement and social media usage, emphasising the importance of understanding this influence. The theory also incorporates resource exchange, where individuals contribute resources (such as knowledge, time, and creativity) to achieve shared objectives, aligning with social media as a medium for collective action.

In the textile industry, social media has become a crucial tool for marketing professionals across various industries, including fashion and textiles (Bandara, 2021). Ijomah et al. (2024), for instance, submit that the use of social and digital marketing offers organisations significant opportunities to reduce costs, improve brand awareness, and increase sales. The metaverse also presents new opportunities for digital marketing professionals, including those in the fashion industry, to explore innovative strategies (Dwivedi et al., 2022). In the fashion industry, the influence of social media on sustainable fashion practices has become increasingly important (Vladimirova et al., 2024). This makes the use of social media in the textile industry a necessary tool for enhancing their marketability and sustainable growth. Raza et al. (2023) found that user engagement on social media platforms significantly influences customers' cues. Additionally, Cheung and Choi (2022) explored how fashion professionals use social media as a resource to self-verify their complex identities and found variations in followers' influence. Ahuja and Tabeck (2023) also explored the role of social media in enhancing brand engagement and perception within the textile, apparel, and fashion industry. The study highlighted how social media could serve as a powerful tool for textile companies to establish a strong brand identity and foster community engagement. This implies that social media engagement is a multifaceted construct, incorporating cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions. Thus, SMET emphasises value co-creation, in which users and organisations co-create value, aligning with the participatory nature of social media to drive business growth. Hence, this study draws on it to explore how user engagement influences the industry's strategic growth, given that social media is integral to the textile industry (Cheung & Choi, 2022). The theory will help underscore the importance of building relationships with consumers through interactive and engaging content. Again, the study can offer nuanced insights into how textile companies can enhance their brand identity, gain valuable customer insights, collaborate with influencers for greater reach, and promote sustainable practices—all of which are essential for thriving in today's competitive market landscape.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Content variety

Content variety encompasses the diversity of media formats, themes, and messaging styles used in social media communication (Sandel & Ju, 2019). In the digital marketing landscape, businesses leverage various content types, such as images, videos, infographics, live streams, customer testimonials, and behind-the-scenes footage, to engage, retain audiences, and enhance overall brand perception (Wang et al., 2024). Social media marketing success relies on engaging the target demographic with compelling content. According to Guha et al. (2021), using diverse content formats, small-scale textile professionals can showcase their products effectively, strengthening their brand presence.

Also, Ayoubi (2024) emphasises that consumers engage more frequently with visual content, such as images and videos, compared to text-based content. Wang et al. (2024) suggest that businesses employing a mix of different strategies are likely to increase their engagement through user-generated comments, shares and likes compared with those relying on traditional platforms. Thus, social media plays a key role in this strategy, particularly in the fashion industry, where video and user-generated content, including images, are significant drivers of user participation (Guha et al., 2021). Hence, we hypothesise that.

H1: Content variety will significantly influence social media usage among small-scale textile professionals.

2.2 Customer interactions

Customer interactions on social media encompass a wide range of activities, including responding to inquiries, addressing concerns, engaging with comments, and participating in discussions (Rane et al., 2023). These interactions serve as a bridge between businesses and their audience, helping to foster trust, strengthen relationships, and create a sense of community around a brand. Through consistent and meaningful engagement, businesses can enhance customer satisfaction, improve brand perception, and drive long-term loyalty (Pranata et al., 2023). According to the extant literature, there is a positive relationship between customer interaction and social media usage due to direct communication between customers and businesses (Wibowo et al., 2021). Rane et al. (2023), for instance, found that small enterprises that respond to customer inquiries expeditiously are likely to increase their retention rates more than those that respond more slowly. Similarly, studies show a strong bond between customers and businesses due to ongoing interaction (Ibrahim, 2022). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H2: Customer interactions will significantly influence the use of social media among small-scale textile professionals.

2.3 Frequency of posts

Posting frequency refers to how often a business shares content on social media platforms (Pal et al., 2022). Posting frequently increases a business's visibility, enhances customer engagement, and builds brand loyalty, especially in the small-scale fashion industry (Arjang et al., 2024). Arjang et al. (2024) examined Indonesian fashion SMEs and found that consistent daily posting correlated with increased follower growth and improved direct message inquiries. According to Gbandi and Iyamu (2022), increased posting frequency can lead to higher sales among SMEs in Nigeria.

Furthermore, studies have highlighted the importance of posting frequently to enhance user engagement on social media (Mason et al., 2021). Similarly, de Oliveira Santini et al. (2020) highlight the importance of frequent posting to engage and retain customers. However, this should be optimally varied among platforms—requiring small businesses to calibrate the strategies based on audience analytics rather than adopting one-size-fits-all approaches (Oliveira Santini et al., 2020). These arguments position posting frequency as a fundamental strategic lever for small-scale fashion professionals seeking sustainable growth. Hence, we hypothesise that:

H3: The frequency of posts will significantly influence the use of social media among small-scale textile professionals.

2.4 Influencer collaboration

Influencer collaboration is a partnership between businesses and social media influencers with significant followings and industry credibility (Enke & Borchers, 2021). Influencer marketing has quickly become a powerful strategy for brand awareness and engagement (Vrontis et al., 2021). Influencer marketing is a powerful tool for businesses to expand their reach and enhance brand perception, as influencers strongly shape their followers' views and behaviours. Influencers are relatable figures who share genuine experiences, boosting audience engagement on social media (Sankala, 2024). This is corroborated by Masuda et al. (2022) as engagement builds connection and community, driving increased social media usage as followers interact with influencers and consume their content.

Furthermore, according to Erwin et al. (2023), Influencers in SMEs are significant, particularly in enhancing customer engagement and promoting business activities. Enke and Borchers (2021) found that followers perceived influencers as more trustworthy than traditional celebrities, leading to higher message acceptance and brand recall. Thus, micro-influencers achieve higher engagement rates than macro-influencers, making them particularly suitable for small-scale fashion businesses with limited budgets. Essentially, local influencers outperform international counterparts in driving engagement within emerging markets due to cultural resonance (Masuda et al., 2022). Therefore, we hypothesise that:

H4: Influencer collaboration will significantly influence the use of social media among small-scale textile professionals.

2.5 User-generated content

User-generated content (UGC) refers to content created by consumers that highlights a brand's products or services (Santos, 2022). This can include customer reviews, testimonials, photos, videos, and social media posts (Santos, 2022). UGC fosters a sense of community, encourages user interaction, and is an authentic and cost-effective way to build brand credibility on social media (Ijomah et al., 2024). Existing studies have found a positive correlation between user-generated content and social media use. According to Paul et al. (2023), UGC enhances user engagement on social media.

Similarly, Mayrhofer et al. (2020) found that UGC had a significant effect on customer behaviour. Thus, it significantly affects the way consumers use social media. Santos (2022) adds that UGC campaigns with consumer-created photos and videos generate higher engagement and trust. Thus, customer-generated content significantly increases brand trust and purchase likelihood, as customers spend more time engaging with such content than with standard brand posts. In effect, UGC represents a powerful strategic resource for small-scale fashion professionals in less digitalised economies. Thus, we hypothesised that:

H5: User-generated content will significantly influence the use of social media among small-scale textile professionals.

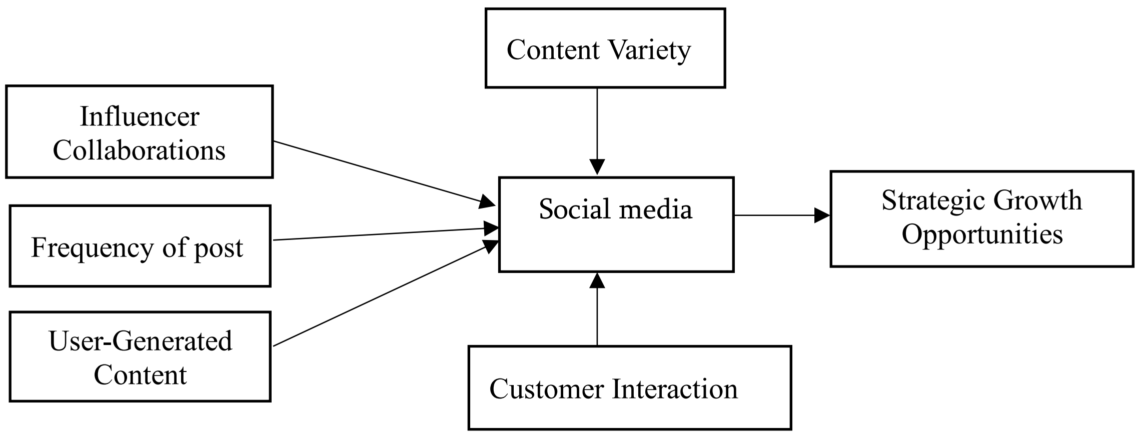
2.6 Social media usage and strategic growth opportunities

Social media usage is the strategic use of digital platforms by businesses for marketing, customer engagement, and business development (Olanrewaju et al., 2020). It provides access to improved market insights, increased brand visibility, and enhanced competitive positioning. Effectively leveraging social media strengthens a business's market position, making it a crucial tool for growth and sustainability. For small-scale textile businesses, social media is an affordable yet powerful marketing tool that allows them to reach new customers, showcase their products, and build brand awareness (Hysa et al., 2021). Studies show that businesses with a strong social media presence experience growth in revenue, customer acquisition, and brand expansion (Mayrhofer et al., 2020).

Engaging effectively with their audience increases their chances of growing and expanding their market share (Mayrhofer et al., 2020). Social media platforms also enable direct interactions with customers, helping build long-term relationships and increase customer loyalty. Prioritising engagement efforts can give businesses a competitive edge in the market by helping them develop a loyal customer base and establish themselves as trusted brands. According to Olanrewaju et al. (2020), social media usage presents several benefits—marketing advantages, networking, and access to information. The study revealed that improved customer relationships are directly attributed to user engagement on social media. Thus, early adopters among SMEs are likely to gain more advantage in building digital brand recognition. Hence, we hypothesise that:

H6: Social media usage will directly influence the strategic growth opportunities of small-scale textile businesses.

Figure 1 **Proposed conceptual framework**



(Source: Own research)

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research context and design

This study uses a quantitative research design to investigate the strategic growth opportunities for small-scale textile and fashion professionals by applying social media in a less digitalised economy. The study focused on service-based, small-scale textile and fashion professionals in the central and western parts of Ghana. According to Enu et al. (2015), the service sector has overtaken agriculture to become the largest segment of Ghana's economy. Currently, social media has become a dominant tool for professionals in the textiles and fashion industry, enabling them to connect with their customers by showcasing their products and fostering brand loyalty. This shift offers a significant approach for small-scale textile and fashion professionals operating in less digitalised economies, where traditional marketing channels may be limited or cost-prohibitive.

In Ghana, the service sector, including fashion and textiles, has experienced substantial growth, yet many professionals face challenges, including limited access to financial resources and technological constraints (Amoah et al., 2020). Social media offers a unique opportunity for these professionals to overcome barriers by providing cost-effective marketing solutions that enhance visibility and engagement. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok allow small-scale textile and fashion professionals to connect with their audiences without the need for expensive advertising campaigns or physical storefronts. Moreover, the democratisation of fashion through social media has enabled emerging designers to compete with established brands by leveraging influencer partnerships and user-generated content. This research will explore how small-scale professionals can strategically harness social media to drive growth and enhance their sustainability in a competitive market.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

The association's office in the central and Western regions of Ghana was contacted to seek official permission for their participation in the study. A total of 457 textiles and fashion professionals were purposively selected based on the criterion of having operated for more than 1 year and currently using social media in their field of operation. Ten trained research assistants were deployed to help in identifying the sample. The study used small-scale professionals in the textiles and fashion industries. The study adopted the purposive sampling technique to ensure that respondents have relevant experience with social media in their business operations. This sampling technique was deployed because it allows for the collection of valuable insights from participants with specific characteristics or experiences relevant to the study.

Data collection was conducted between October and December 2024 using the online survey platform Google Forms (Keelson et al., 2025). The questionnaire was divided into two parts: the first collected demographic data on the respondents, while the second collected data on their perceptions of harnessing social media in the industry, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). To prevent duplicate responses, Google Forms was restricted to a single response, with mandatory fields to ensure that no data was left incomplete. Respondents' consent was sought before data collection to ensure their anonymity and adhere to ethical protocols. To test the reliability and validity of the measures, three senior, experienced professionals in the textiles and fashion industry reviewed the instrument to assess the content, clarity, and wording of the statements supporting the theoretical constructs. Additionally, a pilot study involving 30 respondents confirmed the instrument's reliability, with no multicollinearity identified. The survey was administered in English, which is the official business language of Ghana. A total of 379 valid responses were gathered, resulting in a comprehensive dataset. Table 1 depicts the descriptive statistics of the study respondents.

The study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) to analyse the collected data, using SmartPLS 4 software. PLS-SEM was particularly suitable for this research due to its robustness in handling complex predictive models and its ability to work effectively with smaller sample sizes, which is often characteristic of studies focusing on specialised populations such as small-scale textile and fashion professionals in less digitalised economies (Hair et al., 2019). Unlike covariance-based SEM, which is primarily confirmatory and requires larger samples and multivariate normality, PLS-SEM is prediction-oriented and imposes minimal distributional assumptions, making it appropriate for exploratory research aimed at identifying key strategic growth pathways (Hair et al., 2017). The analysis followed a two-step approach: first, the measurement model was assessed to establish reliability (Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability), convergent validity (average variance extracted), and discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion). Second, the structural model was evaluated to test the hypothesized relationships through path coefficients, coefficients of determination (R^2).

Table 1 **Respondents details**

Demographic	**Category**	**Frequency (n)**	**Percentage (%)**
Total Sample	-	457	100
Age	18-25 years	68	14.9

Demographic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
	26-35 years	183	40.0
	36-45 years	137	30.0
	46+ years	69	15.1
Gender	Male	147	32.2
	Female	310	67.8
Education	Basic	138	30.2
	Secondary	229	50.1
	Tertiary	90	19.7
Region	Central	251	54.9
	Western	206	45.1

(Source: Own research)

3.3 Measurement of the constructs

The study constructs were adapted from established literature to ensure validity. Content variety (CV) from (Agichtein et al., 2008; Dolan et al., 2019; Schaefers et al., 2021), Customer Interaction (CI) from (Carlson et al., 2019; Hu et al., 2017; Oncioiu et al., 2021), Frequency of Post (FP) from (Golder et al., 2015; Stsiampkouskaya et al., 2021), Social media (SM) from (de Calheiros Velozo & Stauder, 2018; Tafesse & Wien, 2018), Influencer Collaboration (IC) from (Enke & Borchers, 2021), Strategic Growth Opportunities (SGO) from (Olanrewaju et al., 2020), and User-Generated Content (UGC) from (Santos, 2022). Each construct was assessed using a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), and the use of closed-ended questions facilitated easier analysis.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Assessment of the measurement model

The measurement model was assessed through three stages: evaluating factor loadings, determining convergent validity, and examining discriminant validity. Items with loadings below 0.7, as recommended by Hair et al. (2017), were excluded to ensure an optimal fit. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), both of which exceeded the 0.7 threshold, as shown in Table 2 below. Convergent validity was confirmed using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which exceeded the 0.5

threshold set by Hair et al. (2019). Table 3 presents the construct items, their respective loadings, and the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values, indicating that all item loadings exceeded 0.7, thereby confirming strong indicator reliability. Additionally, VIF values remained below 5, indicating that multicollinearity was not a concern (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 2 **Constructs validity and reliability**

Constructs	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Content Variety	0.844	0.847	0.895	0.681
Customer Interaction	0.878	0.882	0.916	0.733
Frequency of post	0.852	0.855	0.900	0.693
Influencer Collaborations	0.795	0.798	0.880	0.710
Social Media	0.867	0.868	0.909	0.714
Strategic Growth Opportunities	0.816	0.826	0.878	0.643
User-Generated Content	0.796	0.796	0.867	0.621

(*Source:* Own research)

Table 3 **Construct items, loading, and variance inflation factor (VIF)**

Construct	**Indicator**	**Loading**	**VIF**
Customer Interaction	**CI1**: I actively engage with textile and fashion brands on social media platforms.	0.835	2.158
	CI2: Interactions with fashion brands on social media influence my purchasing decisions.	0.880	2.493
	CI3: I am satisfied with the level of interaction I receive from textile and fashion brands on social media.	0.886	2.589
	CI4: The content shared by textile and fashion brands on social media adds value to my professional knowledge and insights.	0.821	1.860
Content Variety	**CV1**: The variety of content shared by textiles and fashion brands on social media platforms meets my expectations.	0.813	1.798
	CV2: I find different types of content (e.g., videos, images, stories) from textiles and fashion brands engaging and informative.	0.850	2.029
	CV3: The diversity of content from textiles and fashion brands on social media positively influences my perception of the brand.	0.842	2.021
	CV4: I prefer brands that provide a wide range of content on social media, including tutorials, behind-the-scenes looks, and user-generated content.	0.794	1.719
	FOP1: I post updates about my work in textiles and fashion on social media at least once a week.	0.850	2.197

Frequency of Posts	**FOP2**: I interact with my followers on social media (e.g., responding to comments or messages) multiple times a week."	0.856	2.095
	FOP3: I share content related to textiles and fashion on social media platforms several times a week."	0.838	1.971
	FOP4: I frequently post promotional content for my textiles and fashion products on social media.	0.782	1.637
Influencer Collaboration	**IC1**: Collaborating with influencers on social media effectively enhances my brand's visibility in the textiles and fashion industry.	0.819	1.632
	IC2: Influencer collaborations positively impact consumer trust in my textiles and fashion brand.	0.885	2.015
	IC3: I regularly collaborate with influencers to promote my textiles and fashion products on social media.	0.822	1.635
Social Media	**SM1**: I believe that using social media is an effective marketing strategy for promoting my textiles and fashion products.	0.842	2.054
	SM2: Social media significantly increases the visibility and awareness of my brand in the textiles and fashion industry.	0.869	2.311
	SM3: I feel that social media allows me to engage effectively with my audience and customers in the textiles and fashion sector.	0.850	2.057
	SM4: Social media helps me stay informed about the latest trends and developments in the textiles and fashion industry.	0.819	1.912
Strategic Growth Opportunities	**SGO1**: I believe that using social media provides significant growth opportunities for my textiles and fashion business.	0.838	1.759
	SGO2: Social media has effectively expanded my brand's reach to new markets and audiences.	0.812	1.772
	SGO3: Engaging on social media has led to valuable collaboration opportunities with other brands and influencers in the textiles and fashion industry	0.773	1.618
	SGO4: Social media enables my business to adapt quickly to trends and innovate based on real-time consumer feedback.	0.783	1.629
User-Generated Content	**UGC1**: User-generated content from customers enhances my understanding of the quality and appeal of fashion products.	0.821	2.235
	UGC2: I am more likely to purchase a fashion product after seeing user-generated content related to it on social media.	0.791	2.108
	UGC3: User-generated content increases my trust in a fashion brand compared to traditional advertising methods.	0.781	1.553
	UGC4: I actively seek out and engage with user-generated content related to textiles and fashion brands on social media.	0.757	1.509

(Source: Own research)

Table 4 illustrates discriminant validity through the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, where the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) (indicated by the diagonal values- bold figures) exceeds the inter-construct correlations (shown in off-diagonal values). This confirms that each construct is unique and measures distinct concepts, thereby supporting strong construct validity (Henseler et al., 2015; Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4 **Test of discriminant Validity-Fornell-Larcker criterion**

Construct	Content Validity	Customer Interaction	Frequency of Posts	Influencer Collaboration	Social Media	Strategic Growth Opport.	User-Generated Content
Content Validity							
Customer Interaction	**0.798**						
Frequency of Posts	0.498	**0.779**					
Influencer Collaborations	0.597	0.599	**0.791**				
Social Media	0.680	0.738	0.504	**0.777**			
Strategic Growth Opport.	0.489	0.505	0.647	0.516	**0.721**		
User-Generated Content	0.705	0.736	0.525	0.586	0.587	**0.635**	

(*Source:* Own research)

4.2 Assessment of the structural model

The structural model was analysed by calculating the coefficient of determination (R^2) and testing the associated hypotheses. Before this, the collinearity among the predictor constructs was evaluated, revealing variance inflation factor (VIF) values between 1.553 and 2.589, which indicated no significant collinearity concerns (Hair et al., 2017). The R^2 values, obtained using PLS-SEM blindfolding techniques, demonstrated strong predictive capability and explanatory power for the model (Hair et al., 2019). Table 5 presents the R^2 values, reinforcing the model's robustness.

Again, Table 5 presents the results of the structural equation model, which evaluates the relationships among content variety, influencer collaboration, social media, user-generated content, post frequency, customer interactions, and strategic growth opportunities. Four of the hypothesised paths are statistically significant (p-values < 0.05), while two are not. The table presents regression results comparing two models that predict outcomes for small-scale textiles and fashion professionals who use social media. R^2 values indicate the explained variance, with the first model showing far greater explanatory power.

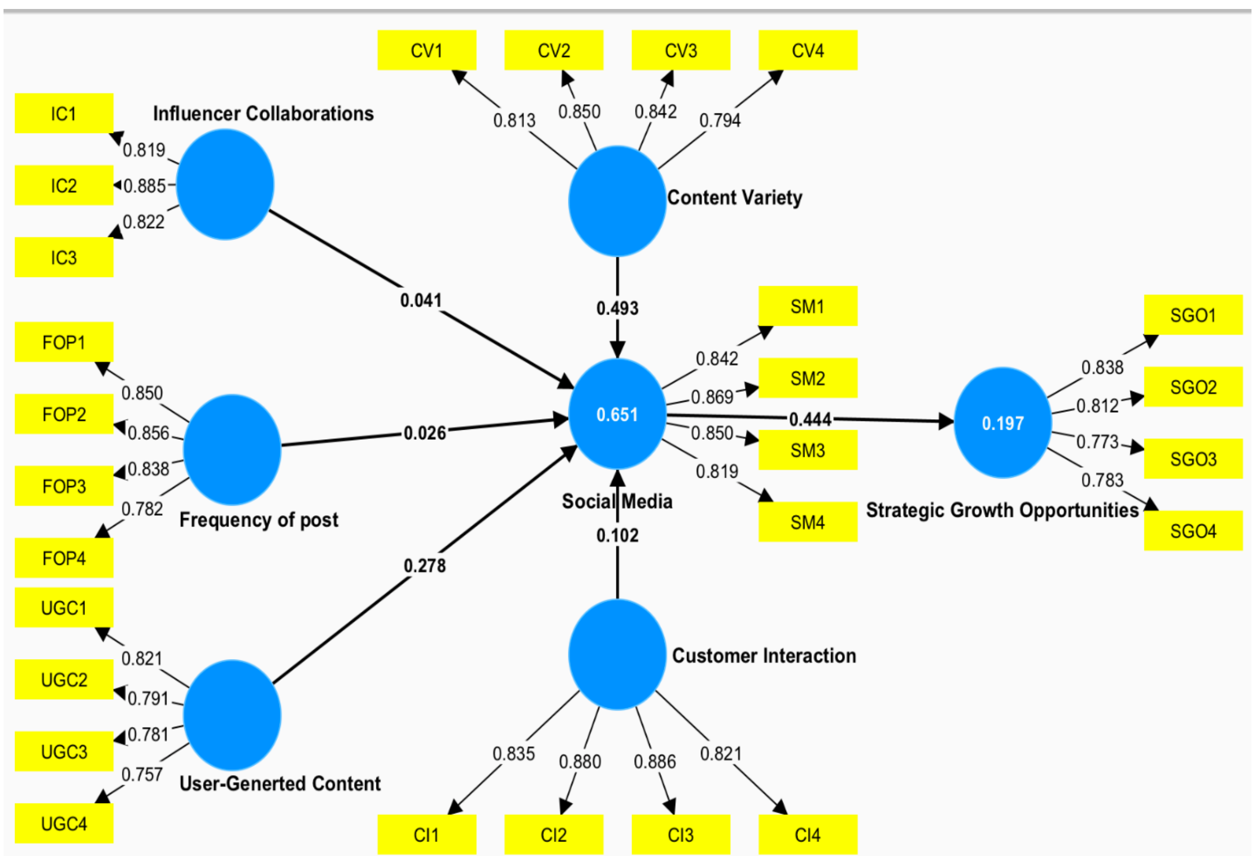
Table 5 **Hypothetical path coefficient -PLS-SEM**

Relationships	**Original Sample (O)**	**Standard bootstrap results**				**Decision**
		Sample Mean (M)	**Standard Deviation**	**t-statistics**	**P-value**	
Content Variety -> Social media	0.493	0.490	0.037	13.291	0.000	**Supported**

Customer Interactions -> Social media	0.102	0.104	0.034	3.006	0.003	**Supported**
Frequency of post -> Social media	0.026	0.028	0.027	0.970	0.332	**Not Supported**
Influencer collaboration -> Social media	0.041	0.041	0.033	1.275	0.203	**Not Supported**
Social media -> Strategic Growth Opportunities	0.444	0.444	0.041	10.742	0.000	**Supported**
User-generated content -> Social media	0.278	0.277	0.034	8.196	0.000	**Supported**
Dependent Variables	***Coefficient of determination (R^2)***			***Adjusted R^2***		
Social media	0.651			0.650		
Strategic Growth Opportunities	0.197			0.196		

(*Source:* Own research)

Figure 2 **Estimated model**



(*Source:* Own research)

The high coefficients of determination (R^2) indicate strong explanatory power: social media ($R^2 = 0.650$), Strategic Growth Opportunities ($R^2 = 0.196$). These results confirm the theoretical framework, demonstrating that social media mediates its influence on Strategic Growth Opportunities.

Figure 2 illustrates the structural relationships in the proposed model. The model demonstrates high explanatory power with R^2 values of 0.651 for social media and 0.197 for strategic growth opportunities. These results validate social media's vital role as a mediator in driving strategic growth opportunities for small-scale textile and fashion professionals.

5 DISCUSSIONS

Influencer collaborations and post frequency do not affect social media usage in Ghana's fashion and textile industry. This means that fashion and textile professionals do not prioritise influencer collaborations to increase social media usage and do not often post regularly to enhance usage on these platforms. According to the study's findings, content variety is a significant driver of social media engagement. These findings are corroborated by extant literature, which highlights that diverse content engages audiences and promotes interaction between customers and businesses (Wang et al., 2024). Similarly, according to Ayoubi (2024), high-quality visual content has a profound impact on driving customers' social media engagement. This implies that professionals in the fashion and textile industry use a variety of content to engage with customers. This is a good business strategy based on existing studies. By doing so, businesses can effectively promote their products and connect with their audience in meaningful ways, enhancing strategic growth opportunities (Guha et al., 2021).

Customer interaction also emerged as a significant driver of social media engagement for small-scale textile and fashion professionals. This aligns with prior studies, including Wibowo et al. (2021) and Wang and Kim (2017), which emphasise the importance of direct customer engagement in building strong relationships and improving strategic business outcomes. Social media platforms enable businesses to communicate directly with their audience, creating a two-way dialogue that fosters trust and brand loyalty (Pranata et al., 2023). One notable benefit of social media-based customer interaction is its ability to provide businesses with real-time feedback (Gunarathne et al., 2018). By monitoring comments, direct messages, and reviews, businesses can better understand customer preferences and expectations. This immediate insight into consumer behaviour allows businesses to tailor their products and services, ensuring alignment with market needs. This also provides opportunities for co-creation (Rathore et al., 2016). This collaborative approach fosters innovation, therefore providing strategic growth opportunities for professionals in the fashion and textile industry.

The study’s findings challenge the conventional notion that frequent social media posts correlate directly with social media. Previous studies, such as de Oliveira Santini et al. (2020), emphasise the importance of consistent posting for maintaining audience interest. This was also emphasised by Mason et al. (2021), who stated that post frequency is critical on social media. However, in this study, professionals were not posted frequently. Studies have shown that post frequency is useless without quality content. According to Fernandes and Castro (2020), frequent posting without strategic intent can lead to audience fatigue, resulting in boredom and reduced customer engagement. This implies that the frequency of posts is not sufficient to enhance social media engagement. Implying that quality trumps quantity. This is evident in the variety of content influencing social media usage. Despite the lower frequency of posts, they can still engage with customers through the quality of their posts rather than their quantity. This, however, does not diminish the benefits businesses derive from frequent posting. One significant challenge that prevents businesses from posting regularly is the lack of time and resources. Small-scale businesses often operate with limited manpower, with owners and staff juggling multiple responsibilities, including production, sales, and customer service. (Saputra et al., 2024). This leaves little room for consistent social media content creation and posting. (Thomas et al., 2024). Unlike larger organisations with dedicated marketing teams, small businesses may struggle to maintain a regular posting schedule, resulting in inconsistent engagement with their audience. Businesses can leverage social media analytics to monitor the performance of their posts. (He et al., 2016). Insights into metrics such as likes, shares, and comments can guide content strategy, helping businesses identify what works and what does not. By focusing on data-driven decision-making, businesses can maximise the impact of their posts while maintaining a manageable posting frequency.

The study showed that the relationship between influencer collaborations and social media engagement among small-scale textiles and fashion professionals in less digitalised economies is not correlated. This means businesses in the industry are not leveraging influencer collaborations to increase social media engagement. This finding contrasts with previous research, which highlights that businesses engage with influencers to enhance social media usage. According to Masuda et al. (2022), social media influencers engage followers through personal stories and product reviews, fostering connection and community, which drives increased social media usage. Also, Moodley and Ntobaki (2024) emphasise that influencers perceived as credible and trustworthy are more effective in shaping positive brand perceptions. This finding means that businesses that do not prioritise using influencers to drive strategic growth can leverage UGC and content variety to boost social media engagement. A key factor limiting the effectiveness of influencer collaborations in these contexts is the constrained budget of small-scale businesses. Collaborations with well-known influencers often entail high costs that may be beyond the financial reach of smaller enterprises (Kumar & Nanda, 2023). This aligns with Uzcátegui-Sánchez et al. (2024), who highlighted that customer-generated content often holds more authenticity and trustworthiness than influencer promotions in emerging markets.

User-generated content is a powerful tool for small-scale textile and fashion professionals, as evidenced by the study’s findings. This aligns with existing research by Paul et al. (2023) and Mayrhofer et al. (2020), who highlighted the significant impact of UGC on customer behaviour. One of the key advantages of UGC is its authenticity (Paul et al., 2023). Content created by customers is perceived as more trustworthy than branded content. It reflects genuine experiences. For small-scale businesses in less digitalised economies, this trust is invaluable, as customers are more likely to purchase products when they see positive reviews or photos from other satisfied customers. UGC also enhances the reach and visibility of small-scale businesses (Tembo et al., 2021). According to the study's findings, UGC improves social media usage for these businesses in less-digitalised economies. These can reduce the need for businesses to patronise influencers, as they reap benefits at a lower cost when they incentivise UGC through discounts, giveaways, or recognition. This organic promotion is particularly beneficial for businesses with limited marketing budgets and can encourage more customers to participate, creating a ripple effect of engagement.

The study reveals a significant and positive relationship between social media use and strategic growth opportunities for small-scale textile and fashion professionals in less-digitalised economies. This finding underscores the role of social media as a powerful mediator that drives business growth by enhancing visibility, fostering innovation, and creating avenues for market expansion. Businesses in the fashion and textile industry within less digitally advanced economies are utilising social media. (Senanu et al., 2023). This finding is supported by existing literature. For instance, Mason et al. (2021) emphasise that social media presents numerous strategic growth opportunities. The study also indicated that social media allows businesses to communicate directly with customers. This interaction helps businesses address consumer concerns and create favourable information, which can influence purchasing decisions. According to Devereux et al. (2020), to maintain consumer interest, businesses are encouraged to develop fresh and compelling content. This not only keeps the audience engaged but also helps monitor trending conversations, allowing businesses to adapt their strategies in real time and, therefore, providing strategic growth opportunities. Developing engaging content is crucial for businesses to maintain consumer interest and stay relevant in today's fast-paced digital landscape. By providing valuable, informative, and entertaining content, businesses can capture their audience's attention and foster a deeper connection with their brand. This shows that for businesses, especially those in less digitally advanced economies, maintaining consistent direct communication is crucial to developing engaging content. These will enhance strategic growth opportunities.

6 IMPLICATIONS

This study examines how social media facilitates strategic growth in small-scale textile and fashion industries, especially in less digitalised economies. This study explores how social media has become a powerful tool for small-scale textile and fashion businesses, particularly in economies with limited digital infrastructure. The study sheds light on the unique challenges and opportunities these businesses face, an area that has been largely overlooked in prior studies. The study's insights contribute to knowledge, particularly regarding the mediating role of social media in enhancing strategic growth opportunities. The findings encourage further exploration of similar mediating variables in other industries or under different socioeconomic conditions. The study found that the frequency of posts and influencer collaborations did not significantly influence social media engagement, suggesting a need for further investigation.

Small-scale textile and fashion professionals should emphasise customer interaction, diverse content, and user-generated material to boost engagement and drive growth rather than prioritising frequent posts or influencer partnerships. In today's digital landscape, small-scale textile and fashion businesses must adapt their strategies to meet the evolving needs of their target audience. Prioritising customer interaction and fostering a sense of community can be a powerful way to cultivate brand loyalty and drive engagement.
In practice, providing training in leveraging social media analytics and crafting engaging content can empower small businesses to maximise their social media impact. Small businesses often face challenges in navigating the dynamic landscape of social media. By investing in training on social media analytics and content creation, they can unlock the true potential of these platforms. Leveraging data-driven insights to inform their social media strategy, small businesses can identify the most effective channels and content formats to reach their target audience. Small businesses can utilise UGC as a low-cost strategy to build credibility and expand their reach without heavily investing in influencer marketing. UGC offers small businesses a cost-effective way to establish credibility and broaden their audience without the hefty investments required for influencer marketing. By tapping into customers' authentic voices, small firms can leverage social proof to showcase their products or services in a more relatable and trustworthy way. This strategy allows them to foster stronger connections with their target market while minimising the financial burden often associated with traditional marketing approaches.

Furthermore, governments should prioritise investments in digital infrastructure to enhance connectivity and accessibility for small-scale businesses in less digitalised economies. Reliable and high-speed internet access is crucial for these businesses to effectively leverage social media platforms and other digital tools for strategic growth and expansion. By investing in robust digital infrastructure, such as fibre-optic networks, mobile broadband, and cloud computing services, governments can empower small businesses to reach new customers, streamline operations, and access a wider range of digital resources and services. Policymakers can play a crucial role in accelerating digital transformation by introducing a range of support mechanisms and incentives for small businesses. One effective approach is to offer targeted subsidies or tax incentives to encourage small enterprises to invest in digital marketing tools, technologies, and infrastructure. This financial assistance can help alleviate the financial burden and make it more feasible for smaller companies to adopt and integrate digital solutions into their operations.

CONCLUSIONS

The current study primarily examined the influence of social media on its role as a strategic growth opportunity for textiles and fashion professionals in Ghana. Social media has emerged as a valuable tool for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). However, research on the role of social media in the textile and fashion industry among SMEs in developing countries remains limited. The study confirmed that four of the proposed hypotheses were significant, while two were insignificant. Data from 379 respondents were analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) software version 4.0. Furthermore, the research indicates that effective social media significantly influences the industry's strategic growth and opportunities. Additionally, the results suggest that the industry players can leverage social media to engage with stakeholders more effectively. The use of social media aids in customer variety, customer interaction, user-generated content, and enhancing strategic growth opportunities. This study provides a comprehensive understanding of how social media relates to the opportunity creation for textiles and fashion professionals. The implications of this research are both theoretical and practical. It offers valuable insights for industry players on utilising social media to create and realise strategic growth opportunities, and provides empirical evidence of its effects on business performance.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study's scope was limited to SMEs in Ghana's textiles and fashion industry, which may have introduced a degree of bias into the results. It is acknowledged that context-specific differences could exist, making it challenging to generalise the findings to a national or global scale. Additionally, the relatively small sample size necessitates caution when extrapolating the outcomes. Future research should adopt a cross-cultural approach to assess how social media applications enhance textile and fashion professionals across diverse regions and contexts. Moreover, while social media is a powerful marketing tool, its usage is not without drawbacks. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of how social media impacts the growth of strategic opportunities for SMEs, future research could also compare data across different sectors beyond the textiles and fashion industry, which was the sole focus of this study. This broader analysis would provide deeper insights into sector-specific dynamics and their influence on social media.

RESEARCH ETHICS, INFORMED CONSENT, AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the authors' institutions and applicable national regulations. Formal research ethics committee approval was not required, as the study involved an anonymous online questionnaire survey of adult textile and fashion professionals and did not collect sensitive personal data. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, their right to withdraw at any time, and the assurance of confidentiality and anonymity; by agreeing to participate and completing the questionnaire, they provided their informed consent. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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