

# Demystifying business models (shifts) among Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs in a COVID-19 era

Rufai Haruna Kilu

*Department of Organizational and Human Resource Management,  
University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana and  
University of Professional Studies, Accra, Ghana*

Mohammed-Aminu Sanda

*Department of Organizational and Human Resource Management,  
University of Ghana Business School, Legon, Ghana, and*

Ana Alacovska

*Copenhagen Business School, Copenhagen, Denmark*

## Abstract

**Purpose** – There is growing scholarly discourse towards COVID-19 pandemic and creative entrepreneurship in the perspectives of Global South. Extant literature lacks sufficient empirical evidence on the subject matter. This paper therefore provides insights into business models and business model shifts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic among creative entrepreneurs in Ghana.

**Design/methodology/approach** – In working towards achieving the purpose of the study, a qualitative design was deployed. Four artistic communities in three regions were understudied. The study conducted working interviews, Focus Group Discussions and field observations on the creative entrepreneurs.

**Findings** – The results showed a unique business model that captured ministries, agencies and departments; traditional authorities, foreigners and the diaspora community as key creative partners. The creative entrepreneurs equally proposed value via quality deliveries, attractive pattern mix, pure handy crafts, mart finishing, imbining culture into productions and symbolic meanings. Their key activities include cutting and gluing, sewing and coloring, sketching and prototyping, annual Kente festivals, film shooting and editing. The creatives stream revenue through sales, advances, profit margins, contracts, gate proceeds, loans, friends and family support. The results also point at a regime of business model shifts among the creatives, deploying digitalization and diversification in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Research limitations/implications** – The research by design is limited to the qualitative tradition; despite knowing well about the quantitative approach that could have provided a wider scope and coverage for effective generalizability. Certainly, it would be of future research interest to design a comparative mix-method study to achieve a wider coverage feat. Indeed, the paper does achieve the goal of providing an original empirical account, hence making a valid contribution to knowledge in the area of study.

**Practical implications** – The knowledge on demystified business models relative to the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs has practical implications for practice: first, it generates a ground-up knowledge as to what creative entrepreneurial business models are, why they exist and exactly how to create one in a Global South perspective.

**Social implications** – These creative business models and the COVID-19 induced model shifts among the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs imply continuous creative livelihoods, sustainable business models and assurance for innovation in creative entrepreneurship space.



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**Originality/value** – The study is of high scientific value, creative entrepreneurial essence and public interest to better demystify creative entrepreneurial business models and theoretically framed them. It offers strong empirical evidence on COVID-19 induced business model shifts. These creative business models and the COVID-19 induced model shifts among the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs imply continuous creative livelihoods, sustainable business models and assurance for innovation in creative entrepreneurship space.

**Keywords** Creative entrepreneurship, Demystifying, Business models, Business model shifts, Value proposition, COVID-19 pandemic, Ghana

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

The current work is situated within the wider discourse on COVID-19 and the creative industry in the Global South perspectives. More specifically, the paper provides insights into business models and business model shifts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic among creative entrepreneurs in Ghana. The COVID-19 pandemic has turned out to be the most significant global disruptive event as witnessed in the 21st century. The crisis spanned from the enormous loss of human lives to mainstream remote working, cutting global physical activities down to a virtual world. Indeed, the outbreak of the pandemic has also changed the way businesses are executed. While the scientific and health community of practice work towards research to ensure prevention and recovery, the business and management community have to deal with the economic impact of the crisis. Though on one hand, the COVID-19 crisis has imposed enormous challenges on business organizations, on the other hand, it necessitated innovations, presenting organizations with opportunities to identify new business models that will allow them to survive through the crisis (Seetharaman, 2020).

Business model as a concept is a recent addition to developmental management research. A common argument in the literature states that business model refers to the logic of the company, including how it operates and how it creates value for stakeholders (Reim, 2018). Over the last few years, more and more agreement has arisen for a common definition, as used by Teece (2010) and Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), which basically states that business models describe the design or architecture of the value creation, value delivery and value capturing mechanisms that a company employs. Business models decide how value is created, delivered and captured, the tactical sets decide how much value in the end is created and captured. Literature, however, lacks clarity surrounding the contents of the business model components (value creation, delivery and capture), and they seem open for interpretation as to exactly what activities they entail. Creative entrepreneurship is the practice of setting up a business or setting oneself up as self-employed in one of the creative systems (Howkins, 2001). Essentially, creative entrepreneurs are investors who use their creative or intellectual talent and skills to earn a living (Kilu *et al.*, 2022).

The cultural and creative sectors account for 3.1% of the world's GDP and 6.2% of global employment, making them critical investments for economic development (UNESCO, 2022). It is no secret that COVID-19 and national lockdowns had a dramatic effect on employment for many. However, they hit the cultural and creative industries particularly hard, with a total of 10 million jobs lost in these sectors worldwide in 2020 (UNESCO, 2022). This had an impact not only on individuals, but also on the wider economy, wiping 750 billion off the value of the global cultural and creative industries. The crisis will not only leave many creative organizations struggling for survival, but it will also force some to look for alternative strategic paths (Seetharaman, 2020). People's global access to, and reliance on, cultural content has increased during the pandemic, however, at the same time, those who produce arts and culture find it increasingly difficult to work, and all over the world, museums, cinemas, theaters and concert halls – all strategic places of creation and sharing, have closed their doors (UNESCO, 2022). Indeed, what was already a precarious situation for many artists has become unsustainable and a threat to the creative space.

The paper generally seeks insight into the ongoing conversation relative to COVID-19 pandemic and creative business models in the Ghanaian context. In order to achieve this aim of the paper, the following questions were asked: what are the unique business models among the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs? What are the business model shifts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic among the creative entrepreneurs in Ghana? The paper is structured as follows: section one presents the introduction, dovetailing the concepts and constructs of the study. Section two reviewed extant literature on the subject matter, guided by the aim of the paper. The third section centered on the methodological remarks. Section four presents the results, specifically, creating understanding of creative entrepreneurial business models according to the nine building blocks of business models (Osterwalder *et al.*, 2005; Bock and George, 2018; Wirtz, 2011), and their business model shifts. The section five and six presents the conclusion and practical implications of the study.

### Literature review

This section contained a useful body of knowledge emanating from extant literature to create understanding and state-of-the-art on business models in creative entrepreneurship. Magretta (2002) argued that business models are reflections on how businesses operate and create value for their stakeholders. Teece (2010) and Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010) posited that business models are all about the design and architecture of the value creation, value delivery and value capturing means that entrepreneurs deploy. Wirtz (2011) reviewed the business model concept and proposed an integrated business model consisting of nine sub-models divided into three main components: strategy, customer and market, and then value creation. The strategy component comprises three models regarding the strategy (mission, strategic positions and development paths, value proposition), resources (core competencies and assets) and network (business model networks and partners). The customer and market components consist of customer model (customer relationships/target group, channel configuration, customer touchpoint), market offer model (competitors, market structure, value offering/products and services) and revenue model (revenue streams and revenue differentiation).

Osterwalder *et al.* (2005), are of the view that a typical business model consists of nine building blocks namely: Customer segments that an organization serves; Value propositions that seek to solve customers' problems and satisfy their needs; channels which an organization uses to deliver, communicate and sell value; customer relationships which an organization builds and maintains with each customer segment; revenue streams resulting from value propositions successfully offered to customers; key resources as the assets required to offer and deliver the aforementioned elements; key activities which are performed to offered and deliver the aforementioned elements; key partnerships being a network of suppliers and partners that support the business model execution by providing some resources and performing some activities. Creative partnership leads to supply routes, reduce inherent business risks, support in product design, marketing, financing, facilitate production processes and management. Thus, creative key partnerships enhance attainment of key resources and performance of key activities Scott (2015). Roos (2014) and Bechtel *et al.* (2013) argued that, without key partnerships, achieving art-based results in a creative entrepreneurial context is hardly possible.

Cost structure is usually mentioned when the implications and potential benefits of a business are described. It may pertain to cost savings related issues or reverse material flow (Subramanian and Gunasekaran, 2015) production costs (Sivertsson and Tell, 2015), costs of product development (Berning and Venter, 2015) or investments (Barquet *et al.*, 2013). Cost structure comprising all the costs incurred when operating a business model. Also, Bock and George (2018) are of the view that business models are designs used to exploit business opportunities and

propose value. According to [Bock and George \(2018\)](#), value could be profit, education, an economic growth, entertainment, social justice or any amount of possible business and entrepreneurial outcomes. In business models, organizations use all forms of capital (i.e. human, financial and technology) to create and capture value. In this work, value-creation through creative entrepreneurship is often referred to as an essential function of the creative entrepreneurial business model, because it forms the basis for satisfying customer needs ([Zhuang et al., 2017](#)). For [Agrawal et al. \(2019\)](#), value-creation as a function explains how resources and capabilities are disbursed in order to sustain the value desired within the value creation network. Value-creation processes can be divided into different categories - namely (1) activities related to increased efficiency and cost reduction ([Agrawal et al., 2019](#)), and (2) activities related to revenue and growth ([Cockburn et al., 2018](#)). Activities related to increased efficiency and cost reduction aim to improve and refine already existing operations, such as maintenance and daily production processes ([Agrawal et al., 2019](#)). Strategic key activities according to [Lewandowski \(2016\)](#) include operations, marketing, production, problem-solving and administration.

Value proposition is a function of product and product-related services, which provide users value for money ([Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2010](#)). Distribution channels include wholesalers, retailers, distributors and even the Internet ([Osterwalder et al., 2005](#)). Another distribution possibility for the creatives centered on virtual communication with customers through web advertisements, e-mails, websites, social media handles and video conferences ([Scott, 2015](#)). Also, maintaining good relationship with customers can lead to the attainment of creative entrepreneurial goals. Good relationships with customers may enhance social-marketing strategies and leverage relationships with community partners ([Lacy et al., 2015](#)). Revenue streams are basically ways that a company makes money. There are several ways, mainly associated with the product-service systems ([Joustra et al., 2013](#)). Key resources are the building blocks pertaining to the most important assets required to make a business model work ([Sivertsson and Tell, 2015](#)). According to [Joffe \(2021\)](#) culture and the arts help human beings negotiate their conditions in times of crisis, grief and mourning. Although the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was acknowledged with anxiety, creative entrepreneurs vehemently refused to give up, hence remain resilient to the socio-economic difficulties that characterized the health emergency. Instead of the creatives being pulled or pushed out of operations or performances by the challenges presented, they swiftly metamorphosized themselves to take advantage of new opportunities with new future visions.

Indeed, the pandemic has presented new opportunities for creative entrepreneurs to digitalize businesses or identify alternative business models of value, in looking to expand their horizons ([Seetharaman, 2020](#)). [Langevang et al. \(2022\)](#) identified three practices of hustling in creative work during the pandemic in Ghana: digitalization, diversification and social engagement.

Similarly, [Langevang et al. \(2022\)](#), further argued in affirmation that hustling and the associated worker resourcefulness, improvisation, savviness, hopefulness and caring are not merely individualized survival strategy, but rather as an agentic and ethical effort to turn the vicissitudes of life into situated advantages and opportunities, and even social change in the COVID era. According to [Chulek \(2020\)](#) the COVID-19 pandemic compelled creatives to either initiate or enhance their presence in the digital space. Digitalizing was an attempt to create and capture value and to explore new revenue streams for their creative wares and services. For the creatives in Ghana during the COVID-19, it was either you join the digital community or you go hungry ([Hinson et al., 2020](#)). A researcher attests to how globally both creators and audiences made rapid pivotal shifts to digital means of creation, distribution and consumption ([Jeannotte, 2021](#)). Across the world, the digital capabilities of firms and their ability to adapt were crucial components of resilience strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic ([Khlystova et al., 2022](#)). Similarly, during the pandemic crisis, the creatives acknowledged absence of state and institutional support, they then turned to new activities as additions to their work portfolio to manage risk, make the most of scarce resources and develop safety nets ([Muthoni Mwaura, 2017](#);

Thieme, 2013). A common practice among the creatives in Ghana was to diversify their business portfolios and income streams (Alacovska *et al.*, 2021). This involves both “related diversification” whereby the creatives hold multiple jobs or businesses within the creative industries or closely related industry as well as “unrelated diversification” through which creatives venture into completely different industries such as trade and farming. While relying on a portfolio of different incomes were pervasive prior to COVID-19, the pandemic seems to have pushed the creatives into relying more on unrelated diversification. Relative to the shifting business models of the creatives, some critics argue that the shift models are just knee-jerk reactions to the pandemic and once normalcy returns, they will revert to their earlier business models or find a new equilibrium (Seetharaman, 2020). Just as Sanda (2017) argued that African organizations facing the momentous challenges emanating from changes in the global spaces, might need future visions, which when made attractive, inspiring and compelling will shift mindsets of managers from not only focusing on managing crises, but also future predictors.

### Methods and materials

The fieldwork span over 7 months – May to December 2020. The participants operate within 3 regions in Ghana (Savannah, Northern and Ashanti regions). The study also centered on four towns in the regions (Daboya, Kumasi, Bonwire and Tamale). The three regions and four weaving towns understudied are noted for wealth of craft and artistic trade in Ghana. Their choice for the study was scientifically guided by the subjective information oriented context selection strategy, justified on grounds of maximizing the utilization of abundant art and creative information in the area (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Kilu, 2017). The study participants include smocks designers, yarn merchants, smocks weaving trainers, graphic and digital designers, painters, textile technology: Batik-tie and dye, leather works, art entrepreneurs, indigo pit dye operators, smocks weavers, fashion designers, musicians and performing artists. Working interviews were deployed to the participants at their respective weaving centers, galleries and studios. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 min.

Identification of study participants was mainly done through snowballing with the assistance of key gatekeepers. A semi-structured interview guide was used. Structured around key themes: understanding creative entrepreneurial business models as well as their business model shifts in the COVID-19 era. The study participants ranged in age from 17 to 60 years, and included 6 women and 14 men. Justification for interviewing the twenty (20) participants was on grounds of reaching theoretical saturation. The participants also ranged from no formal education to those well-educated with the highest educated person being a PhD student in Textiles Design Technology in a Ghanaian technology university. The participants also spent between 3 months and 38 years in artistic practice. In all, 23 data collection engagements were carried out, made up of 20 interviews and 3 focus group discussions. The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are captured in Table 1.

By way of data management and analysis, voice recordings of both the interviews and focus group discussions were done using a tape recorder. Recordings were further transcribed and organized into themes, reflecting the research questions. The data were then organized thematically, including both the recurrent themes and issues that were not recurrent but were of interest in relation to the aim of the paper. All quotes were verbatim and approved by the interviewees. Also, handwritten notes were taken in the course of both the interviews and the focus group discussions to augment comprehension of the process.

Analysis of data was guided by both literature and aim of the study. More specifically, the analysis was developed in a three-stage process rather than follow a precise sequence. The analysis began with an open coding (Yin, 2014), breaking the data into pieces by associating words and sentences with codes such as “creative entrepreneurship”, “creative business models” and “creative model shifts”. Further axial coding was conducted where

Name	Gender	Age	Education	Creative field of practice	Years in practice	Location
P 1	Male	33	Degree in Education	Smocks designer	23	Tamale
P 2	Male	53	No School	Yarn Merchant	30	Tamale
P 3	Female	35	Junior High School	Smocks weaving trainer	11	Tamale
P 4	Male	33	Technical University Education	Graphic and digital designing	13	Tamale
P 5	Male	60	Technical University Education	Painting	25	Tamale
P 6	Male	39	PhD Student, Textile Technology	Textile Technology -Batik-tie and dye	15	Kumasi
P 7	Female	30	Technical University Education	Leather works	3 Months	Tamale
P 8	Female	40	Bachelor of Arts in Integrated Rural Arts	Art entrepreneur	10	Kumasi
P 9	Male	51	Informal Education	Pit die operator	20	Daboya
P 10	Male	39	Basic School	Pit die operator	20	Daboya
P 11	Female	17	Senior High School	Smocks weaving	5	Daboya
P 12	Male	51	Junior High School	Yarn Merchant	38	Daboya
P 13	Female	23	Senior High School	Fashion	2	Tamale
P 14	Male	42	Senior High School	Musician	31	Tamale
P 15	Male	35	MPhil in Performing Arts and Culture	Performing Art	35	Kumasi
P 16	Male	35	MPhil in Public Health	Film producer	10	Tamale
P 17	Male	51	Diploma in Fine Arts	Pottery and Sculpture	33	Tamale
P 18	Female	47	Vocational Education	Kente Weaving	25	Kumasi
P 19	Male	60	Middle School Leaver	Kente Merchant	20	Bonwire
P 20	Male	33	Informal Education	Kente designer	15	Bonwire

**Table 1.**  
Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

codes that were conceptually similar were grouped into more abstract concepts. Finally, from these abstracts, concepts were aggregated, themes were then developed to describe the studied phenomenon. The aggregate dimensions that emerged from the analysis are: “public institutions, traditional authorities, foreigners and the diaspora community as key creative partners.” Creative value proposition via “quality deliveries, attractive pattern mix, pure handy crafts, mart finishing, imbibing culture into productions and symbolic meanings.” Key activities include “cutting and gluing, sewing and colouring, sketching and prototyping, annual Kente festivals, film shooting and editing.” Creatives stream revenue through “sales, advances, profit margins, contracts, gate proceeds, loans, friends and family supports.” The results also point at a regime of business model shifts in terms of “digitalization” and “diversification” in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A sense of ethical behavior was exercised in line with the demands of ethical legislations and requirements. Schutt (1996) noted that informed consent and voluntary research participation is an ethical requirement. This, when done properly, will ensure that individuals voluntarily will participate in the research with full knowledge of relevant risks and benefits. This then drew the researcher’s attention to negotiate access. We went further to explain the notion of informed consent to the respondents and further explained that they were free to participate or not, or may start and withdraw when sensing discomfort.

## Results

Results from the study created understanding of business models among the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs. The results further showed a regime of business model shifts among

the creatives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several indications from the analysis showed the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs have in place business models as strategy to guide, shape and propel their businesses. Also, reason for the creative business model shifts was due to a collective frustration, occasioned by the ravaging COVID-19 pandemic.

**Demystifying the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurial business models**

The nine elements of a typical business model have been assessed among the Ghanaian creative enterprises. These include key partners, key activities, value proposition, customer relationship, customer segment, key resources, channels of distribution, cost structure and revenue streams. These elements seek to address operational and growth issues among the creative enterprises as captured in [Table 2](#).

Key partners	Key activities	Value proposition	Customer relations	Customer segments
Ministries, agencies and departments; traditional authorities; foreigners and the diasporan community; other public and private institutions; exporters	Cutting and gluing; sewing and coloring; sketching and prototyping; annual Kente festivals; film shooting and editing; exhibitions and Design creations	Quality deliveries; attractive pattern mix; pure handy crafts; smart finishing; imbibing culture into productions and symbolic meanings	Ensuring good customer satisfactions; good reception; price reduction; credit sales; timely delivery; patience with customers and offering historical narratives relative to their creative wares	Men and women; old and youth; educated and non-educated; lecturers; students; retailers; home decorators; end users; individuals; institutions; foreigners and locals
	<i>Key resources</i> Machines and materials; finances; yarn; Dye/chemicals; human resource/ creative minds; traditional symbols resistive materials wax, musical instruments; costumes; Camera and Equipment		<i>Channels of distribution</i> Galleries and craft shops; castles; sales; institutions; social events; exporters; self-advertisements; client referrals; social media; postal system; festivals, stream portals, exhibitions; courier services; online marketing; agents; roadsides selling, cultural centers, churches and schools	
	<i>Cost structure</i>		<i>Revenue stream</i>	
	Material and machines; transportation; communication; furniture and fixtures; wax; rentals; power; software acquisition; equipment; wages and salaries		Sales; advances; profit margins; contracts; gate proceeds; loans; friends and family supports	

**Table 2.**  
Business model canvas for Ghanaian creative enterprises



### *Creative key partnerships*

In operations of business, key partnerships are established relationships with other businesses, institutions, groups and individuals to ensure success of the business model. In the course of the study, the most obvious key partnerships among the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs were related to supply-chain, cost and revenue, i.e. “government agencies and departments, traditional authorities, foreigners and the diaspora community, other public and private institutions and exporters.” Thus, buyer–supplier partnership, one that helps provide a reliable and systematic source of supplies for the creative entrepreneurs. [Scott \(2015\)](#) argued that creative partnership networks allow businesses to supply routes, reduce inherent business risks, support in product design, marketing, financing, facilitate production processes and management. Thus, creative key partnerships enhance attainment of key resources and performance of key activities. For instance, among the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs, key partnership involves artists partnering with cultural centers, gallery and local art-based shops to sell to tourists from Europe, America, China and Ghanaians in the diaspora.

Also, the creative entrepreneurs who are into textile technology partner with institutions like schools and Ghana health service to supply some of their official wears in a form of batik tie and die. Some of the creative entrepreneurs enter into strategic partnership with Ghana post office for delivery of their wears both locally and internationally. They equally partner with exporters of artifacts for foreign trade to earn foreign currencies. Creative entrepreneurs in smock and leather works equally partner with Chiefs and queen mothers in supply of regalia for festivals, traditional and customary functions. A Kente weaver then said, “you know there are many Chiefs and Queen mothers within the Ashanti kingdom, and they patronize our products a lot. So, they are those who are helping to sustain our businesses.” The study further observed strategic partnerships with private institutions, interested partners, the general public, social media audience, landlords, art managers, suppliers, retailers, students among others. Just as participant puts it:

In the performing art industry, the social media, print and electronic media are our key partners. Beyond the media, then our audience, those who listen to us, those who watch us, those who patronize our performances. Without them whatever we do will be useless. It’s like a three-sided pillar, the performer, the media and the audience or the society (A 35-year-old male performing artist).

These co-creative collaborative engagements, based on the cooperation in the artistic productive value chain, allow the free flow of cultural and creative materials and ideas ([Van Renswoude et al., 2013](#)). [Roos \(2014\)](#) and [Bechtel et al. \(2013\)](#) never mince words, intimating that, without key partnerships, achieving art-based results in a creative entrepreneurial context is hardly possible.

### *Creative entrepreneurial key activities*

Key activities are the imperatives that creative entrepreneurs need in order to create and propose value, reach out to markets, build and maintain sound customer relationships and generate revenues. Strategic key activities have become a cornerstone of most creative entrepreneurial business models. Typical business activities among entrepreneurs include operations, marketing, production, problem-solving and administration ([Lewandowski 2016](#)). These activities are oriented towards an increase in artistic performance, cultural product designs and socio-technology exchanges. In the course of the study, key creative entrepreneurial activities for the leather technology workers, were essential tasks to enable them to achieve their entrepreneurial purpose or meet value propositions include washing and cutting of the leather, cutting, gluing, mending, sewing, coloring, finishing, oiling, polishing, stretching and nailing.

For the digital design artist in Ghana, key activities include sketching, designing, penciling, prototyping, dreams and observations. The weavers, both smocks and Kente do



lining, indigo pit dying, rolling, weaving, designing, drying, fixing, barbering, skinning, wapping/stretching, burning of “zata,” “gara” preparation, mushing. Their other activities include annual Kente /smocks festivals – mostly in December, since 1999, selling and exhibitions. Pottery and Sculpture creatives in Ghana are into clay preparations, parting, firing and production. The film producers shoot, they edit, they do pre-production and costume making. The music producers do beat making/instrumentals, they do tracking, vocals, mixing and mastering. While textile design technologists create master pieces and carry out productions. Theater and performing arts do body exercises and rehearsals. A participant intimated:

I culture a lot of designs. Just like the musician who would be motivated by a situation to write something, that’s what I also do. Sometimes I chance into something, and it gives me an idea of how that thing cultures into my designs. So, I do some of these things and put them down. I always do some things that have some kind of history and meaning behind them, that when explained to someone, it will sell. I also create master pieces. I don’t necessarily do to sell but I do to aid my marketing (A 39-year-old male Textile Design Technologist).

#### *Creative value propositions*

Key component of a creative business model is the value proposition. A creative value proposition is a statement that clearly communicates benefits that creative entrepreneurs’ products or services deliver to customers. Value proposition offers a product and product-related services, which allow user to do what is needed, reduce inconveniences and provide additional benefits (Osterwalder and Pigneur, 2010). So, a well-crafted creative value proposition differentiates creative entrepreneurs and their specific products or services in the marketplace. In the course of the study, creative value proposition among the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs include quality products and services, attractive or proper pattern mix, quality indigo dying, hand sewing, paying attention to details, comfort of the client, uniqueness, good finishing touches, masterpiece to catch consumer eyes, one-of-a-kind styles, ability to use non-technology, imbibing culture in productions, symbolic meanings and purely handicraft technologies. In a response to value proposition, a participant said:

... you should buy me because I represent quality! In my own definition, even the aesthetic parts of the items are part of the quality. When it looks very appealing to the eye, to me it is part of the quality. So, I think I stand for quality, I can give you very appealing designs, I can give you that which is durable and stand the test of time. Maybe because of my background and what I stand to achieve in the future. I make sure I do that which will be very difficult for somebody to end up condemning easily. I always make sure I am on point because I am protecting my integrity and brand, that is very paramount to me.

A participant believes that performing arts is unique in each environment. The way dancing is done in Kumasi is different from the type of dances done in Accra and other parts of Ghana. That what makes them unique is their culture. He asked, “I don’t know if you have heard something called Kumerican music?” He explained “there is this wave of kumerican music! A form of hip-life and hip-pop music that basically throws light on Kumasi and its culture, which is proposing value for the music industry in Kumasi.”

On value proposition, another participant noted the following:

To be honest with you I don’t go out campaigning for jobs. People walked in here on referral from clients we work for. So, when you are looking for quality and on time delivery job, we have people around that can tell you please what you are looking for, speak to this guy over there, he will solve your problems for you. For me when you walk in here we make sure we satisfy you. We give you what you looking for not beyond what you are expecting but exactly what you are looking for. Then again we make sure we give you what we have to give you as professionals (A 33-year-old graphic and digital designer).

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In a focus group discussion, participants said:

... here in Bonwire, we propose value through the uniqueness of our Kente cloths. Uniqueness that comes with careful measurement and careful weaving to such an extent that if you make a piece of cloth from Bonwire, you will see the arrangement appears to have the same measurements. You will see it and all the whites are very close to almost head-to-head after sowing. So, Kente from Bonwire also has both historical and philosophical meanings attached to their names.

Some creatives in Ghana propose value through proverbial art-works. A participant in an interview had this to say “our work forms part of our culture and speaks in proverbs, for instance, art-works that someone is climbing a tree and another person is pushing him, proverbially means he who climbs well, deserves a push!” So, art is something that speaks to art-consumer. It proposes value and makes consumers happy to buy. Especially, “art-consumers from the Americas.” They have the mindset being decedents of Africa. So, when they come and you well explain the “cultural-stuff” with their proverbial meanings, they get excited and buy more!

### *Distributive channels*

Distributive channels among the creatives are a chain of businesses or intermediaries through which artistic goods or services passes until it reaches the final buyer or the end consumer. Distribution channels may include wholesalers, retailers, distributors and even the Internet (Osterwalder *et al.*, 2005). In the case of Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs, the distributive channels include galleries, Novika, craft shops, Cape Coast Castle, Accra James town, art stores, direct orders, sales, institutions, funerals, weddings, exportation, self-advertisements, client referrals, social media, postal system, local distributors, submissions to film festivals, stream portals (YouTube), exhibitions, cultural festival and social events, enskinement, flyers, courier services, online marketing, agents, roadsides selling, neighboring countries, Ghanaian markets, cultural centers, churches and schools. Online distribution was popular among the creatives, especially Facebook. Just as participant intimated, which is a reflection of others. “I am a fan of Facebook because the operation on Facebook is quite different from the other social media platforms. It allows quite a number of people to access you when you place a spec.”

Another channel of creative wares distribution is through the courier services.

... we have clients coming in to pick their stuffs. And then when the person is out of town we have these courier services, we take it to the station, label it and then dispatch it at the station. There are times depending on where the client is we do the work and then we have to carry it either by car or motorbike to your office or home.

The above means of distribution suggests that the creative entrepreneurs create value and deliver it virtually (selling digitally, i.e. music in YouTube and MP3 formats (Sivertsson and Tell, 2015)). Another distribution possibility for the creatives centered on virtual communication with customers through web advertisements, e-mails, websites, social media handles and video conferences (Scott, 2015).

### *Customer relationships*

Building and maintaining good relationships with customers is the company-wide process of nurturing positive relationships with customers - the cumulative sum of all customer interactions and experiences. Maintaining good relationships with customers can lead to the attainment of creative entrepreneurial goals. Good relationships with customers may enhance social-marketing strategies and leverage relationships with community partners (Lacy *et al.*, 2015). In the course of the study, the creatives claim having strong connection based on trust

with their customers, who feel more secure and connected with their brands, which is leading to growing customer retention. "Customer satisfactions, a happy customer relation, and good reception is our hall marks." The creatives equally resort to "price reduction for first timers," as a customer relations strategy to retain customers. Credit sales of creative wares also entice customers. Their other customer relations approaches include on timely delivery, patience with customers and offering historical narratives relative to their creative wares.

Knowledge on individual differences in terms of temperaments matter in building good customer relationship, posited by a participant in the course of the study.

There are people who can't even just meet the customers and smile at them. You need to be formal. You need to be a bit rough with them sometimes. You need to be too diplomatic. There are some others you need to be as ordinary as this thing. So, learning a few things about human behavior matters. I am a sanguine and as a sanguine as I am, I have a multi approach to people.

and,

In the performing arts, we always see our customers as our God, because without them we are also not there. So, whatever we do, we carve it in such a way that it goes to make the customer happy. So, my audience, when coming to watch, I see them as the best of human beings at that moment because without them I will not be there. It will be a shame that I act rude to them, and nobody comes to watch. So, there should be a good relationship between the performer and the audience. It is very important, your customer is your friend, your advisor, he/she is your god.

#### *Customer segment*

Men and women, both educated and non-educated, lecturers, students, retailers, home decorators, end users, individuals, youth, chiefs, locals and foreigners constitute core customers of the creative entrepreneurs in Ghana. One of the participants said "my customers cut across. A universal customer base of a sort, made up of the tertiary institutions, individuals, agribusiness owners, contractors and political players within the five northern regions." This explains how diversified the customer segment of the creative entrepreneurs is.

#### *Revenue streams*

Revenue streams are basically ways that a company makes money. There are several ways, mainly associated with the product-service systems (Joustra *et al.*, 2013). In the course of the study, revenue streams include proceeds from sales, Google Drives, advance orders make money available to the creatives. Also, charges for services constitute good revenue streams. Other revenue streams include profit from productions, contracts, gate proceeds from performances, hiring, internally generated funds, orders, loans, friends and family support. In this regard, a participant had this to say, "to be frank I have used a lot of my salary and some professional earnings into my art works." This explains how some of the creatives invest their salaries to sustain their creative enterprises. Another participant said "basically, we stream revenue from the sales and profit we make from productions and the little that you also tap from your official monthly salaries and all that to add up to doing the business. The issue of plowing back profit as revenue stream also prominently featured among the creatives. The traditional options of revenue streams concern selling products or services, advance payments and plowing back profits (Lacy *et al.*, 2015). However, the current study showed modern revenue streaming models, i.e. Google drives, YouTube and other online streaming platforms especially for music and film industries. Effective revenue streams mostly depend on the value proposition.

#### *Key resources*

Key resources are the building blocks pertaining the most important assets required to make a business model work (Sivertsson and Tell, 2015). Every business model requires key

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resources, and it is only through that companies generate, create, offer and deliver value propositions and revenues. In the course of the study, key resources were captured under physical, financial, intellectual or human resources. The physical resources include the tangible, material resources such as machines, yarn, dye/chemicals, threads, resistive materials, wax, musical instruments, costumes, canvas, paint, brushes, camera and equipment. The financial resources are money. The human/intellectual resources include artists, creative minds and traditional symbols. These resources are more important in the knowledge-intensive and creative sectors.

The major resource I use is the fabric, the raw fabric or mesmerized cotton. Quite apart from that I also use some chemicals like mordents and dyes that are used as colors. We also use some resistive materials like the wax, paraffin wax. That is what we use to cause resistance during production. We also use some affinity-based chemicals like sodium hydroxide and sodium hydrosulfide (A 39-year-old male Textile Design Technologist).

Also,

I can talk of the instruments that I use, the costume, publicity is one. You can't perform without your instrument if it is music, you need the instrument. You need your costume and all those things. You can also talk of the equipment, the camera, the mic, the mixers and all those equipment (A 42-year-old male Musician).

The key resources acquisition by the creative entrepreneurs implies their effective creation, offering and delivering of proposed value via distributive channels to build and maintain good customer relationships and to receive revenue flows.

#### *Cost structure*

Cost structure in the perspectives of the Ghanaian creative entrepreneur's business model involve various types of expenses they incur in the course of their creative production. This typically composed of both fixed and variable costs. Fixed costs are costs that remain unchanged regardless of the amount of output the creative entrepreneurs produce, while variable costs change with their production volumes. In the course of the study, we observed the creative entrepreneurs find every possible way to minimize costs, in other to maximize profits. Common cost structure regarding operations of the creative entrepreneurs includes material and machines purchases, cost of sewing, transportation cost, communication, furniture and fixtures, wax, rentals, power, software acquisition, equipment, wages and salaries. Cost structure is usually mentioned when the implications and potential benefits of a business are described. It may pertain to cost savings related issues or reverse material flow (Subramanian and Gunasekaran, 2015) production costs (Sivertsson and Tell, 2015), costs of product development (Berning and Venter, 2015) or investments (Barquet *et al.*, 2013).

#### **Creative model shifts/in the COVID 19 era**

The COVID-19 happened to be the most significant disruptive pandemic witnessed by the Ghanaian creative industry and what has already been a difficult situation for many artists has become unsustainable and threatening survival of the industry. The constraints caused by the pandemic were severe and the responses to it occasioned some changes regarding business models. The changes were situated in two most dominant forms captured in the data, thus diversification and digitalization, to be discussed in turns.

#### *Diversification*

Lived world experiences from past global crises, taught us that diversification is now central and strategic priority for a great deal of resolve and resilience in seeking to navigate

a socio-economically viable paths toward a change (De Jong *et al.*, 2015). Taufiq, a male smocks weaver for example, remarked that even before the COVID-19 pandemic “we were already in diversification.” In response to a question in a focus group discussion as to their fields of diversification in coping with the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the creative entrepreneurs responded, like Majeed said “some of us are now into livestock, others are into fishing, crop farming, petty trade, teaching and lecturing.” Some of the qualities that characterize diversification into other products and services, notably innovation and resilience, will be much in need as companies recover from the COVID-19 crisis (Seetharaman, 2020). Philip, a male-painter explained how diversified he is “I am a painter, I do calabash works, I use calabash to do lamps, sometimes I do bead work, earrings and necklaces as well as batik. I do different types of art too.” A smocks weaver had this to say, “since the out-break of the COVID-19 pandemic, we shift from weaving to fishing and farming, because demand for the smock was low, due to people no longer attending social gatherings.” In relative terms, we argue that diversification into new business possibilities is a survival, growth and development strategy of the creative entrepreneurs in Ghana. Just as Scott (2015) explained that the power of diversification in crisis is said to be an enabler of business performance and organizational health and again contribute to the wider effort to revive ailing economies. Just as the creative entrepreneurs did in Ghana, some of them diversified from weaving to fishing, and others shifted from designing to farming.

### *Digitalization*

During the pandemic, artistic consumers rapidly moved towards the digital space via online channels, and this then motivated the creative entrepreneurs and the creative industry in general to either initiate or enhance their presence digitally. As Hinson *et al.* (2020) argued that for the creatives in Ghana during the COVID-19 pandemic, you either join the digital community or you perish. Globally, the digital capabilities of firms and their ability to adapt were crucial components of resilience strategies for the COVID-19 pandemic (Khlystova *et al.*, 2022). Some sound engineers, music producers and weavers (both smock and Kente) in Ghana explained how due to the COVID-19 crisis, they had to deploy online marketing to reach out to creative consumers, because people have been in-doored, spending considerable amount of their time at home due to state restrictions and fear of contracting and spreading the virus. This increase in online marketing presented new opportunities for those who had already composed some songs, weaved some smocks and Kente, and other cultural wares, ready for on-ward distribution. Many of the creatives spoke, similar to what Tawugeh said “I have bloggers in Tamale here who help to promote my songs and everything I do. The blogging helps a lot, because I released free beats and through the blogging, I now have hundreds of downloads.” Beauty, a female cultural entrepreneur also said she uses the “face book, YouTube, Instagram and then twitter to market her cultural goods online.” Another participant intimated:

With the advent of Covid-19, I use social media where I posts my smocks. Some people get interactive with me through the comments box. Like I post smocks and people comment, oh I like this one. That is how I connected with one lady in Accra, and she agrees to do business (A 17-year-old female smocks weaver).

### **Conclusion**

The study identified business models of the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs – who their key partners are, what their key resources are, how they create and capture value for their wares, key activities they carry out, how their wares are being distributed, whom their customers are

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and how they relate with customers. The nature and structure of their cost and how they stream revenue were empirically captured in this paper, as a way of demystifying the myth surrounding business models of the creative entrepreneurs in Ghana. In that regards, foreigners and the diaspora community constitute key creative partners. Imbibing culture into productions and symbolic meanings attached to their creative wares is how they propose value. Their key activities hinge on annual creative festivals. Sales, advances and profits are their revenue streaming avenues.

Demystifying the creative business models centered on three elements: first relating to money, made up of the revenue streams and cost structure, essentially money in and money out. Next, relating to supply, so their key resources, suppliers and activities. Lastly, elements of the business model related to demand (i.e. customers). This section includes things such as value proposition, customer segments, channels and customer relationships. All of these must work together as a whole. This section provides answers to the first research issue: demystifying creative business models among Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs. The results further showed how the creative entrepreneurs responded to the pandemic by diversifying into alternative businesses and changing their business models from being predominantly retail led, to completely online, witnessing physical stores being closed and increased their spending on digital marketing, utilizing social media and their own websites. This part also provides answers to the second research issue: providing insights into creative business model shifts among Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs.

The current research by design is limited to the qualitative tradition; despite knowing well about the quantitative approach that could have provided a wider scope and coverage for effective generalizability. Certainly, it would be of future research interest to design a comparative mix-method study to achieve a wider coverage feat. Indeed, the paper does achieve the goal of providing an original empirical account, hence making a valid contribution to knowledge in the area of study.

### **Implications**

The research provides insights into creative business models and business model shifts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic among creative entrepreneurs in Ghana. The results demystified business models of the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs, as a way of providing insights. Unique business models were found that identified government agencies and departments; chiefs and traditional authorities, foreigners and the diaspora community as key creative partners. The creatives' value proposition hinged on quality, attraction, good pattern mix, pure handy crafts, smart finishing, imbibing culture into productions and symbolic meanings. Their key activities include cutting and gluing, sewing and coloring, sketching and prototyping, annual Kente festivals, film shooting and editing. The creatives stream revenue through sales, advances, profits making, contracts, gate proceeds, loans, government, friends and family supports. The knowledge on demystified business models relative to the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs has practical implications for practice: first, it generates a ground-up knowledge as to what creative entrepreneurial business models are, why they exist and exactly how to create one in a Global South perspective.

The results also point at a regime of business model shifts among the creative entrepreneurs, who are deploying digitalization and diversification in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This implies the Ghanaian creative entrepreneurs are delivering value, distributing their cultural wares and streaming revenue with a more digital flavor in a diversified manner. It further means that, the pandemic required organizations to look for alternatives and digital replacements of their products and services and to identify ways of delivering them with minimal physical contacts and increased safety.

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**Corresponding author**

Rufai Haruna Kilu can be contacted at: [haruna.rufai@upsamail.edu.gh](mailto:haruna.rufai@upsamail.edu.gh)