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Creativity and Resourcefulness: A Study of JK Art Enterprise and the Valorization of Coconut Shell

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Abstract

This research explores the potential of coconut shells in art production, focusing on the creative practices of JK Art, an enterprise based in Nsukka, Nigeria. JK Art successfully repurposes coconut shells—an abundant yet underutilized resource—by transforming them into functional and decorative items, addressing ecological, economic, and cultural concerns. This study examines the socio-economic potential of indigenous innovations, such as coconut shell art, as a means of empowerment and waste reduction. A qualitative research approach was employed, utilizing a case study design to analyze JK Art's production processes, tools, and techniques. Data collection methods included studio documentation, focus group discussions, and thematic analysis of the enterprise's creative processes, conceptual interests, and market strategies. The study investigates the material properties of coconut shells for art-making, evaluates the economic viability of their use, assesses their environmental sustainability, and discusses challenges related to the preservation of traditional art forms. Findings reveal that artistic explorations with coconut shells offer diverse creative possibilities, promote the business of art, and contribute to waste reduction, resource conservation, and cultural preservation. Despite challenges such as funding limitations, market acceptance, and scalability, the enterprise demonstrates the potential of small-scale, sustainable art initiatives. This research underscores the value of creativity in repurposing underutilized resources, highlighting the need to explore and appreciate similar local materials for entrepreneurship and micro-enterprise development.

Keywords

Coconut shell, Creativity, JK Art Enterprise, Art Business

Introduction

Globally, coconut shells have been explored by artists and hobbyists for art creation. In doing so, they give new life, artistic voices, and usefulness to the shells. Coconut shells possess distinct textures and patterns that make them suitable for elaborate carvings and decorations. Various methods, such as burning, etching, and dyeing, can be used to enhance these textures, resulting in intriguing works of art. Additionally, coconut shells are water-resistant, tough, lightweight, engravable, and resilient. Therefore, creative works made from coconut shells do not easily rot and are guaranteed to last long while retaining their color and value.

In Nigeria, the abundance of coconut trees and their frequent yield make discarded coconut shells a common sight. During the eight-month industrial action by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) in 2021, two creatives, having remained idle at home for a while, brainstormed on the potential of some coconut shells lying waste in their immediate environment. These two individuals, Ikechukwu Success and John Omeke, were students of the

Nsukka Art Department at the time. They embarked on a series of artistic explorations and experiments using the available shells and soon began creating intricate ornaments from them. Their first successful production included necklaces, earrings, and wrist bangles. Creating and marketing this initial batch of products led them to discover that the creative process involved minimal production costs but yielded impressive returns. The durability of the material, its natural aesthetic quality, the handmade approach, and its lustrous—sometimes colorful—finish positioned the ornaments as appealing alternatives to commercially available ones.

As word spread about JK Art's unique creations, demand for their handmade jewelry grew. This newfound popularity encouraged the team to experiment with different designs and forms, further expanding their product line and solidifying their place in the market. Since then, the two artists have consistently produced and marketed creative works made from coconut shells on a significant scale, leading to the establishment of the JK Art brand.



Coconut Explorations and Celebrations around the World

They have further expanded the enterprise's production beyond simple ornaments to household items such as plates and cups, among other utility wares. Currently, JK Art has evolved into a thriving art business specializing in complex sculptures, jewelry, and home décor items made from coconut shells. While their primary consumers are from their immediate Nsukka community, JK Art has established a significant supply chain extending to Enugu and other states in Nigeria, demonstrating the growing demand for their art. Additionally, JK Art products and artworks often incorporate designs and elements that highlight native motifs and illustrative patterns addressing traditional subjects and concepts. By doing so, they showcase the cultural adaptability, innovation, and acceptance that coconut shells inherently embody.

Employing a qualitative research approach with a case study design, data for this study was collected from an insider perspective. Since the two artists who primarily run JK Art Enterprise are also contributors to this paper, the study involves researching *in* and *on* action through studio discussions and documentation. Gray and Malins (2016) explain that this research method supports an in-depth inquiry into one's creative practice, lending credibility and trustworthiness to the research (see also Sullivan, 2010; Makeela, 2007). Studio discussions and documentation provide first-hand insights into the contextualization and creative processes behind JK Art's artworks. The study also relies on a literature review to assess the existing knowledge base on the subject. Data analysis involved aesthetic and thematic methods, presented using narrative and discursive approaches. Together, these approaches provide rich, contextual information to address the study's objectives. By interrogating the artistic potential of coconut shells, the study examines the intersection of creativity, business, and sustainability using JK Art Enterprise as a case study.

The findings from this study are expected to contribute to the empowerment of local artists, art enthusiasts, hobbyists, entrepreneurs, and communities by raising awareness about the significance of coconut shells—and, by extension, other locally available resources—as potential income-generating materials. This, in turn, fosters economic and social development in local areas and beyond. It is noteworthy that while coconut shells have been explored both casually and intensively in various parts of the world, scholarly literature on the topic remains limited, particularly concerning the economic viability of this form of art.

The art of carving intricate designs and creating artifacts out of coconut shells has a long history. Writing about the city of Goa in India, Rathi (2018) notes that the tradition of crafting artifacts from coconut shells can be traced back to the 13th–14th century. From this cultural epicenter in India, the practice quickly spread to other regions, such as Sri Lanka and the Pacific Islands (AdminCraft, 2023). As the craft traversed cultures, each tradition imparted its unique style and techniques, resulting in a diverse array of visually striking designs and patterns.

Beyond the artistic merits of coconut shell carving, the practice holds deep spiritual and symbolic significance in many cultures. In Hinduism, for instance, carved coconut shells are often incorporated into religious rituals and ceremonies (AdminCraft, 2023). Similarly, in Sri Lanka, the tradition of coconut shell carving has been passed down through generations as a cherished cultural practice. These pieces, often one-of-a-kind and meticulously crafted, are sometimes preserved as family heirlooms (AdminCraft, 2023). Collectors and enthusiasts seek out these rare and valuable artifacts not only for their intricate designs and patterns but also for their profound historical and cultural significance, underscoring the enduring legacy of the art form.

Coconut festivals are widely celebrated in the Philippines, with the Dinagyang Festival in Iloilo City serving as a premier example (Dunne et al., 2016). These annual events not only highlight the cultural importance of the coconut palm in the region but also showcase the diverse applications and creative potentials of coconut-derived materials, including the shells. During the festivals, local artisans and enthusiasts demonstrate their skills by transforming coconut shells into a wide range of functional and decorative items (Dunne et al., 2016). From bowls and utensils to intricate sculptures and jewelry, these public displays celebrate the cultural heritage and traditional knowledge associated with coconut shell art (Jayaweera et al., 2019). Importantly, they also inspire younger generations to engage with and explore the creative possibilities of this material.

Furthermore, Dunne et al. (2016) observe that coconut festival celebrations have contributed to growing awareness and appreciation of coconut shells as a sustainable and eco-friendly resource. Amidst rising global concerns about environmental responsibility and the need for circular economies, these festivals provide an essential platform to showcase the sustainability of coconut shell products and artistic works. They also play a key role in

preserving and transmitting the skills necessary for the art industry (Dunne et al., 2016). During these events, master artisans lead demonstrations and workshops, passing their expertise to younger generations and ensuring the continuity of these time-honored practices (Suryawanshi & Agrawal,

2018). By raising the profile of these traditional art forms, the festivals have encouraged more individuals to engage with and learn the craft of coconut shell transformation, thereby safeguarding cultural heritage and promoting sustainable livelihoods.



Figure 1: Picture from Coconut Festival in Philippines 2024 (Image credit: Coconut Festival/Hello travel)

Consequently, the coconut festival celebrations have also catalyzed the exploration of new and innovative applications of coconut shells in aesthetics and design (Dunne et al. 2016). As diverse audiences, including local and international visitors, converge at the festivals, artisans and designers find a platform to experiment with and showcase their latest coconut shell creations. This has inspired a wave of creative explorations that push the boundaries of what is possible with this versatile material, contributing to the growing appreciation of coconut shells and establishing the Philippines as a hub of coconut-based creativity and sustainable design.

Creative Explorations of the Materiality of the Shell

The coconut shells themselves exhibit a diverse assortment of natural hues, ranging from deep, rich brown tones to lighter, more subtle shades, often showcasing intricate patterns and textures that result from the growth and maturation process of the shells (Dunne et al., 2016). These distinctive visual qualities have made coconut shells a favored choice among artists seeking to incorporate raw, natural elements into their works.

The utilization of coconut shells as a medium for creativity is deeply rooted in the traditions and cultural practices of many societies worldwide. Across numerous tropical and subtropical regions, coconut shells have been employed for centuries to create functional,

utilitarian objects such as bowls, cups, and various types of containers (Jayaweera et al., 2019). While these practical applications were the original impetus for working with coconut shells, they have evolved into more decorative and artistically inclined forms that reflect the unique cultural heritage and aesthetic preferences of local communities.

A prime example is the coconut-rich landscape of Alleppey, Kerala, which provides a strong foundation for the exploration of coconut shells in art production. Traditionally, coconut farmers would scoop out the copra (dried coconut meat) by making a precise hole at the top of the shell. The remaining shell would then be transformed into a variety of functional and decorative items. The process involves several steps, starting with the selection of well-shaped, mature coconut shells, followed by cleaning, cutting, smoothing, and carving them into the desired shapes and designs. Skilled artisans employ specialized tools, such as bow blades and files, to create intricate patterns and engravings on the coconut shells (Baral & William, n.d.). The resulting products showcase the versatility of coconut shells, with a wide range of items being produced, including bowls, vases, teapots, ice cream cups, pen stands, and lampshades.

Additionally, coconut shells have been extensively used in Southeast Asia for producing traditional musical instruments, including the Indonesian Rebana and the Filipino kulintang (Dunne et al., 2016). In contrast, in the Indian subcontinent, coconut shells have been skillfully



incorporated into the creation of Rangoli patterns, a distinctive form of decorative floor art closely associated with Hindu cultural celebrations (Suryawanshi & Agrawal, 2018).

On the African continent, coconut shells have also been employed in making ceremonial masks, jewelry, and various other culturally significant objects (Dunne et al., 2016). Furthermore, it is important to note that coconut shells, which are essentially a waste product, would otherwise contribute to environmental pollution if left unattended (Haldus, 2024). This abundance presents a significant opportunity for their exploration and utilization in creating a wide range of artistic products.

One of the key benefits of using coconut shells in art production is their inherently renewable and sustainable nature. As a naturally occurring material, coconut shells can be repurposed into diverse items, ranging from decorative bowls and vases to intricate jewelry and home accessories. This aligns with the growing consumer demand for eco-friendly and ethically sourced products, as evidenced by the rising popularity of coconut shell charcoal briquettes (Putri, 2024; Ahmad, 2022).

The distinctive texture and natural appeal of coconut shells make them suitable for various applications, highlighting the creative possibilities of this easily accessible material. Beyond traditional household items, coconut shells are also used in manufacturing different products. For instance, coconut shell powder is widely used in making mosquito coils, incense sticks, and as a filler in plywood and resin glue production (Baral & William, n.d.). The consistent quality and resistance to water and fungi of coconut shell powder make it an important industrial resource. Repurposing this natural, biodegradable material helps reduce waste and encourages eco-friendly creativity.

Moreover, research has shown the potential of coconut shells as a substitute material for wood carving. Traditional woods like odum, sese, kyenkyen, ebony, and mahogany are becoming scarce due to overuse, necessitating alternative materials (Djokoto & Asabea, 2013). The coconut tree presents a viable option, offering a renewable and sustainable source for the wood carving industry. Interestingly, the techniques and tools used for coconut wood are similar to those used for traditional wood, facilitating an easy transition (Djokoto & Asabea, 2013). This suggests that artists can integrate coconut shells into their wood carving practices, providing new creative avenues.

Coconut shells have also been explored as a means of providing affordable flooring solutions in Kenya (Nazir, Maina & Osanjo,

2024). The authors state that advancements in technology have demonstrated that coconut shell waste can be used in manufacturing flooring, roofing, and wall tiles. Nazir, Maina & Osanjo (2024) sought to address the problems of poor coconut shell waste disposal and the housing crisis in Kenya. Their approach aims to repurpose waste, reintroduce the use of local materials, and promote local artisans (Nazir, Maina & Osanjo, 2024).

Specific Artists Exploring Coconut Shell

While coconut shell art is widely practiced, some individuals have developed significant techniques and unique explorations of the craft. For instance, the intricate carving of coconut shells into beautiful artifacts is exemplified by the work of Vijaydatta Lotlikar, who has been exploring this material for more than three decades (Harmalkar 2022). His artistic expression not only showcases the creative potential of a humble, natural material but also highlights the growing importance of sustainable and eco-friendly practices in art production. From delicately crafted earrings and unique furniture to traditional lamps and everyday utility products, the versatility of Lotlikar's shell art is evident. He also uses his craft as a tool for environmental activism, emphasizing that coconut shells serve as a natural alternative to non-environmentally friendly materials like plastic (Harmalkar 2022).

Additionally, promoting coconut shell carving can create economic opportunities and help preserve traditional craftsmanship. Lotlikar's initiatives to run workshops and train aspiring artisans have helped spread knowledge of this art form, inspiring a new generation of craftsmen (Harmalkar 2022). This approach not only ensures the survival of a distinctive cultural practice but also provides a source of income for those engaged in making and selling coconut shell products.

Similarly, Nghia Dai Nguyen, a 45-year-old artist residing in Hue, Vietnam, has ingeniously repurposed this versatile natural resource into handmade jewelry, marking a novel foray into the world of fashion (Lopez 2024). Nguyen's creative process involves meticulous cleaning and sorting of coconut shells, followed by carefully carving them into desired shapes. A lacquer base, derived from gardenia or synthetic compounds, is then applied with precision. Once the initial layer sets, a secondary lacquer layer, composed of a blend of paint, glue, and mineral powder, is added to achieve a glossy, durable finish (Lopez 2024). Nguyen utilizes recycled coconut shells due to their availability and deep-rooted traditional significance. He emphasizes that coconut shell art encapsulates a distinctive "handmade" tradition prevalent among Southeast

Asian communities, highlighting its eco-friendly and human-safe attributes (Lopez 2024). Often regarded as mere waste, coconut shells are

transformed by artists like Nguyen, unlocking their creative and commercial potential.



Figure 2: Lopez, and his worker, cleaning the coconut shells and sorting them by shape (Image credit: Manila Bulletin).

Also worthy of mention is Jenny Jasmin Lacay from Bicol, Philippines, who has developed a unique technique of coloring on coconut shells. Having learned painting from her father, a self-taught artist, she later evolved her craft by venturing into painting human and animal graphics on coconut shells (Boredpanda 2017). Lacay noted that the coconut plays a significant

role in Filipino culture, being used in cooking, gardening, beauty, and fitness and now as a medium for artistic expression (Boredpanda 2017). She has showcased her "coco art" at various art festivals across the Philippines, emphasizing the growing importance of coconut shells in creative exploration (Boredpanda 2017).



Figure 3: Painting on coconut shell. (Image credit: #art by Jenny Jasmin Lacay; sourced from Boredpanda, 2017).

In Nigeria, Nathaniel Hodonu, a painter, sculptor, and teacher based in Lagos, creates a wide array of artworks from coconut shells. Born and raised in Badagry, Lagos, he has been exploring coconut shells as an artistic medium since 2006 (Olatunbosun, 2019). Following his success in this craft, Nathaniel has begun teaching

interested individuals how to use coconut shells creatively. His oeuvre includes cups, key holders, bangles, pendants, pen holders, soap dishes, and curtain holders, among other items. The artist stated that the primary objectives of his training are to educate the public on the utility of coconut shells, thereby reducing unemployment and environmental pollution (Olatunbosun, 2019).



Production Processes

From the foregoing, it is evident that creative explorations with coconut shells have a long history and are practiced in many cultures worldwide. However, their creative and entrepreneurial opportunities, particularly within the Nigerian art scene, require greater scholarly attention. This study, therefore, aims to contribute to conversations on the exploration of coconut shells in the creative industry, highlighting their potential for hobbyists, art businesses, waste management, environmental sustainability, and cultural appreciation, among other benefits.

Coconut Shell Explorations of JK Art

The following paragraphs provide a detailed documentation of the production processes, which involves material sourcing, preparation, processing and finishing. The facilities, tools, and equipment used in creating the artworks are also discussed. After, the product range of the JK Art enterprise is presented.

Material Sourcing and Preparation: The first step in JK Art’s production process is sourcing of the primary material– coconut shells. To get the shells in large numbers, the enterprise depends on coconut sellers at Nsukka markets. Some of the sellers sell coconuts in whole, that is together with their shells, while some others sell the central cavity (white flesh) alone, having cracked the shells carefully. The already cracked coconut shells are often gathered from women who sell the bits of the central cavity of the coconut, along with roasted corn or *abacha*, by the roadsides or at the local markets. They are typically sourced from those sellers for free and used by the enterprise to create jewelries like pendants and beads. On the contrary, when the enterprise needs the shells in full, typically for making rounded items like cups, plates and some other explorative art works, the shells are bought in whole from Oba or Ogige markets, the two major local markets in the area. In sourcing the whole shells, the sizes and forms of what is to be created from them are carefully considered.



Figure 4: A heap of coconut shell in JK Art studio ready for use.



After the shells have been sourced (as shown in Figure 4 above), they undergo a thorough cleaning process to remove any remaining coconut flesh. This is followed by gently air-drying the shells to prevent cracking, ensuring they become moisture-free and ready for use.

Material Processing: Shaping the coconut shells involves a wide range of delicate processes using both manual and electric tools, such as mallets, chisels, carving knives, grinding machines, art saws, saw blades, sanding tools, airbrushes, and paintbrushes (see Figures 5a–b).



Figures 5a-b: Some manual and electric machines for cutting and shaping the shells

precision carving. This begins with carefully selecting the shell, considering whether it will be used as a plate, ornament, or other decorative item. The shell is then cut into the desired form using manual hand saws and small hand saws, while a saw blade is used for carving intricate designs. Once carved, the coconut shells are sanded using both rough and smooth sandpaper. Rough sandpaper is applied after cutting to remove the rough surface and any remaining husk particles. Then, smooth sandpaper is used to refine and smooth the surface, preparing it for finishing. This step ensures that the surface is free of rough edges. Close attention is given to details, especially for delicate designs, before undergoing a fine finish. After sandpapering the front and back of the design, a drilling machine is used to make holes for passing rings and ropes for hanging pendants. Next, the stamping process follows. All JK Artworks are stamped on the back or in a hidden part of the piece before the fine finishing stage.

Finishing: For the enterprise, finishing typically involves two stages. The first stage involves

mixing and applying two chemicals, known as a hardener and a clear coat, to achieve a glossy effect. The second stage involves using paints and varnish. JK Art uses acrylic paint to add color to the artworks. Water-based pigments such as acrylic, watercolor, and gouache are preferred to prevent chemical reactions that could stain the color during the finishing process, ensuring the sustainability ethos of the enterprise is maintained. Eco-friendly paints are also a top choice for the enterprise.

The painting process involves applying multiple layers of paint to ensure durability and vibrancy, followed by air-drying the items. Traditional motifs are sometimes painted onto the shells to add cultural significance, while other pieces feature abstract modern designs. After painting with water-based paint, the artworks are coated with varnish to preserve the colors and enhance durability. The varnishing process is crucial as it protects the artworks from wear and tear, especially for items intended for practical use, such as plates or kitchenware. Additionally, the varnish provides the finished products with a polished, glossy appearance (see Figures 6 and 7).



Figure 6: A cup by JK Art waiting to be painted.



Figure 7: A cup by JK Art, painted and completely finished.

Product Range

JK Art products range from utilitarian to aesthetic items. The first range of products is *Efere oji*, a set of works that combines functionality with patterns that are deeply rooted in the Igbo cultural heritage. These designs turn a simple coconut shell into a

meaningful storytelling medium. *Efere* is the Igbo word for plate, and *Oji* is the word for kolanut. So, *Efere Oji* is a plate designed for serving kolanut or any form kola to visitors. *Efere oji* typically consists of a bowl with handles and a cover (Figure 8). It is designed to be kept in an *obi* which is the living room of a family head in Igbo land.



Figure8: Plates and cups, by JK Art, Medium: Coconut Shell

Similar to the *Efere Oji* category are JK Art’s plates and cups. From intricately designed cups that elevate the simple act of drinking to

decorative bowls that serve as striking centerpieces, each item is created with care, good finishing and attention to details (see Figure 9).



Figure 9: *Efere Oji* and cups, by JK Art, Medium: Coconut Shell

JK Art also offers a range of jewelries like necklaces, earrings, pendants and bangles. Each of these appear in various designs with diverse shapes, colors, and materials. Worthy of note, specifically, are customized necklaces designed according to each client's desire. The customized necklaces are in high demands and have become a key part of the product line, allowing the business to connect more deeply with each

customer. Such necklaces often embody the artistic vision of JK Art and the personal stories of the clients. Some clients request names to be engraved. Others may want special dates, initials or traditional symbols that resonate with their heritage. Painstakingly creating these personalized pieces often showcase the diverse possibilities of the shells and JK Art's in transforming them into cherished jewelries or keepsakes.



Figure 10: Pendant with engraved name, by JK Art, Medium: Coconut Shell



Figure 11: Customized Bangle, by JK Art, Medium: Coconut Shell

The latest in the JK Art product range is their handbags. Creating the handbags has particularly been an exciting journey for the enterprise as it established new frontiers for the

firm footing them further in the fashion industry. These handmade bags often combine the natural forms of coconut shells with intricately carved designs.



Figure 12: Customized Bags, by JK Art, Medium: Coconut Shell

More so, the restless spirit of the JK Art team has further led them to venture into random sculptural pieces which could be functional or purely aesthetic (for instance, see Figure 13). One of the most adventurous functional household items they have created so far are unique lighting

fixtures which, when installed and illuminated, the natural patterns of the coconut shells create mesmerizing light and shadow casts that creatively dramatize a space.



Figure 13: Customized Household products, by JK Art, Medium: Coconut Shell



Opportunities of the Enterprise

This section presents an analysis of the entrepreneurial aspects of JK Art's coconut shell art production in terms of its business model, supply chain, pricing, marketing strategies and economic viability of the enterprise.

Business Model of JK Art Enterprise

At the heart of JK Art's business model is the principle of lean entrepreneurship. Lean entrepreneurship, often referred to as the Lean Startup approach, is a method of building and managing businesses that emphasizes experimentation, iterative learning, and customer



feedback (Ries, 2011). It aims to shorten product development cycles and rapidly determine whether a proposed business model is viable (Blank, 2013). This methodology encourages entrepreneurs to test their assumptions, adapt, and refine their products or services based on customer feedback (Maurya, 2016). By doing so, startups can reduce market risks and avoid the need for large amounts of initial funding.

JK Art began with minimal resources, using locally sourced coconut shells and basic hand tools. From the outset, the enterprise adopted the Lean Startup approach, which involves developing a core set of products—the minimum viable product—and testing them in the market before making larger investments. This strategy has allowed the founders to refine their products based on customer feedback while minimizing the risk of overextending their financial resources.

Key elements of the JK Art business model include product diversification and tiered pricing, sustainability as a market differentiator, local sourcing, and community engagement.

Supply Chain of JK Art Enterprise

JK Art primarily sells its products through local markets, art exhibitions, and pop-up events, as well as direct sales to customers within the Nsukka community. The business has also expanded its distribution through social networking sites, particularly WhatsApp and Instagram, creating avenues for national and international sales. To facilitate this, JK Art partners with logistics companies to manage the shipping of products to customers within and outside Nigeria. Additionally, the enterprise continues to explore partnership opportunities with boutiques or stores interested in eco-friendly practices, as well as cultural institutions willing to display and sell its products in curated spaces.

Economic Viability of the Enterprise

JK Art's use of coconut shells in art production presents significant economic opportunities, particularly for the local community and the broader market. The specific economic benefits that the enterprise offers to business owners and the community include:

Local Acquisition of Raw Materials:

One of the core advantages of coconut shell art lies in its reliance on an easily accessible and low-cost raw material. In areas like Nsukka, where coconuts are abundant, JK Art is able to source coconut shells at minimal expense. This reduces overhead costs and maximizes profit margins, enabling the enterprise to operate efficiently even with limited capital.

Job Creation and Artisan

Empowerment: A major economic benefit of JK Art's operations is the creation of job opportunities for local artisans. By transforming what is often considered waste material into valuable art pieces, JK Art generates demand for semi-skilled labor. Local artisans, who might otherwise struggle to find sustainable employment, are integrated into the enterprise to assist with processing and assembling coconut shell products. This not only provides them with a stable source of income but also helps preserve artisanal skills that might otherwise be lost in a rapidly modernizing economy. Moreover, by investing in training and skill development, JK Art empowers these artisans to take ownership of similar artistic ventures, fostering a sense of pride and economic independence.

Market Expansion and Export

Potential: Coconut shell art has broad appeal that extends beyond local markets. With a growing global demand for eco-friendly and sustainable products, JK Art is well-positioned to expand into both national and international markets. The uniqueness of its products, combined with its eco-conscious production process, makes them attractive to consumers who seek items that align with their values. This creates opportunities for e-commerce platforms, boutique stores, and international art festivals, where such sustainable and culturally rich products are highly sought after. Additionally, as JK Art refines its business model, the enterprise could explore partnerships with export agencies or collaborate with other creative industries to scale up production. By doing so, JK Art not only increases its revenue potential but also raises awareness of Nigerian craftsmanship and sustainability efforts on a global stage. This, in turn, reduces import dependency and promotes local consumption.

Entrepreneurial and Economic Challenges of JK Art Enterprise

Like many businesses, JK Art Enterprise has encountered various entrepreneurial challenges since its inception. These challenges have tested the resilience of its founders and shaped the company's vision. While a passion for coconut shell art has remained a driving force, the realities of running a sustainable business have exposed the team to numerous obstacles, as outlined below:

1. Lack of Funding and Financial Constraints

One of the earliest and most persistent challenges faced by JK Art is the lack of adequate funding. As a small, self-funded startup, the enterprise initially struggled to secure the capital needed for growth. With minimal resources, the founders had to rely on



their personal savings and any small revenue generated from early sales to cover basic expenses. This financial limitation affected nearly every aspect of operations, from sourcing materials and employing specialized labor to purchasing high-quality tools and scaling production.

2. Inflation and Rising Costs in Nigeria

Beyond general funding challenges, JK Art has also had to contend with inflation, which has significantly increased the cost of materials and overall business operations. The economic aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with global supply chain disruptions, led to a sharp rise in the prices of essential materials. The cost of coconut shells, paints, sandpaper, and even the strings used for necklaces escalated rapidly, further squeezing JK Art's already tight profit margins.

Additionally, transportation costs surged, making it more expensive to source materials and distribute products to different markets. As fuel prices rose, the cost of traveling to collect coconut shells or supply products to local markets and stores became a considerable burden. JK Art had to either absorb these increased costs or pass them on to customers, a decision that often risked alienating price-sensitive buyers.

3. Negative Public Perception and Market Acceptance

Another significant challenge faced by JK Art was public skepticism and negative perceptions of its products. When the enterprise first introduced coconut shell art, many potential customers dismissed the products as "primitive" or "fetish," creating a barrier to market acceptance. This sentiment was particularly strong in local markets, where non-traditional materials such as plastic and metal were more highly valued, while coconut shells were often associated with outdated or indigenous art forms.

For instance, during an early sales attempt at Dei-Dei Market in Abuja, the founders encountered mockery from customers who viewed their products as unworthy of serious consideration. One customer even remarked that the items seemed incomplete without kola nuts for a "sacrificial offering to some deities." Such comments were disheartening and reflected a broader misunderstanding of the value of sustainable, eco-friendly art crafted from unconventional materials like coconut shells.

This negative perception made it difficult for JK Art to establish credibility and build a strong customer base. Many potential buyers were unfamiliar with the level of

craftsmanship required to create these products and, as a result, undervalued the artistry and effort behind each piece. Customers often expected extremely low prices simply because the materials were considered "waste."

Overcoming these misconceptions required a significant investment in customer education. JK Art worked hard to communicate the sustainability benefits, craftsmanship, and cultural significance embedded in each product. This process took time and effort, as changing consumer mindsets about the value of coconut shell art was not an overnight success.

4. Pricing Difficulties and Consumer Perceptions

JK Art has faced challenges in pricing its products appropriately. On one hand, the business needs to cover the costs of production, including rising material, labor, and transportation expenses. On the other hand, the widespread perception that coconut shells are a "cheap" material has made it difficult to justify higher prices for handmade items.

Many customers, unaware of the time, effort, and skill involved in crafting each piece, expect coconut shell products to be priced significantly lower than those made from other materials. This devaluation forces JK Art to strike a delicate balance—pricing items too low would erode profits, while pricing them too high could deter potential customers.

As inflation and material costs continue to rise, JK Art has struggled to maintain a pricing model that ensures profitability while keeping products affordable for its target audience. Experimenting with tiered pricing and offering a range of products at different price points has helped mitigate this challenge, but it remains an ongoing concern.

5. Scaling Production While Maintaining Quality

As demand for JK Art's products has grown, scaling production without compromising quality has become increasingly challenging. Coconut shell art is labor-intensive, requiring meticulous attention to detail at every stage of production. Maintaining this high level of craftsmanship becomes more difficult as the business expands.

Producing larger quantities of products while ensuring that each piece meets JK Art's quality standards requires more skilled artisans, specialized tools, and efficient production processes. Without a reliable team, the founders often find themselves stretched too thin, juggling multiple aspects of the business. This not only affects the consistency and quality of the products but also hinders the enterprise's



ability to meet growing market demand in a timely manner.

Impact of the Art

Coconut shell art presents several key environmental benefits, particularly through its role in waste reduction, resource utilization and conservation, and the promotion of sustainable practices. As a natural byproduct of the coconut industry, coconut shells are often discarded or burned, contributing to pollution and environmental degradation. JK Art's initiative to repurpose these shells into functional and artistic products provides an innovative solution to these environmental challenges.

By repurposing coconut shells, JK Art not only prevents them from becoming environmental pollutants but also transforms them into valuable art and utility items. This circular use of materials exemplifies sustainable production, where waste is minimized, and resources are used to their fullest potential. As noted during informal conversations with local coconut vendors, JK Art's demand for these shells has created a new market for a previously underutilized material. Vendors who would otherwise discard the shells now have a reason to collect and sell them, contributing to the overall reduction of agricultural waste in the community. This practice not only benefits the environment but also strengthens the local economy, creating a symbiotic relationship between art production and sustainability.

Another key environmental benefit of using coconut shells is the conservation of traditional art materials, such as wood, which is becoming increasingly scarce due to deforestation. Coconut shells, with their hardness and durability, serve as a viable alternative to wood in many art forms, particularly carving. By shifting to coconut shells, JK Art reduces the pressure on forest resources, helping to preserve biodiversity and natural habitats. Furthermore, using coconut shells as a material for art reduces the demand for synthetic materials like plastic or resin, which are harmful to the environment both in terms of production and disposal. Being biodegradable, coconut shells offer a much more sustainable option, contributing to the overall goal of reducing humanity's environmental footprint.

Similarly, sourcing materials locally minimizes energy and fuel consumption typically required to transport materials over long distances. Additionally, the manual nature of much of JK Art's production process helps reduce its carbon footprint. Unlike mass production methods that rely heavily on electricity and machinery, JK Art employs hand tools and artisanal techniques, which have a significantly

lower energy demand. This not only ensures that the environmental impact of production is kept to a minimum but also preserves traditional methods of craftsmanship, which are typically more environmentally friendly.

Beyond its direct environmental benefits, JK Art's products also contribute to promoting broader sustainable consumer habits. By offering eco-friendly products made from renewable materials, JK Art encourages consumers and the general public to think critically about the environmental impact of their purchases. As customers become more aware of the benefits of sustainable products, they are more likely to seek out similar eco-conscious options in other areas of their lives, contributing to a broader cultural shift towards environmental responsibility.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the Circular Economy (CE) Theory, which promotes sustainable resource utilization by minimizing waste, extending product life cycles, and fostering continuous reuse of materials (Geissdoerfer et al., 2020). Unlike the conventional linear economic model, which follows a "take-make-dispose" pattern, the circular economy approach seeks to create a regenerative system where resources are efficiently repurposed rather than discarded (Kirchherr, Reike, & Hekkert, 2017). This framework has gained prominence as industries and businesses worldwide seek innovative ways to balance economic growth with environmental sustainability (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2019). A fundamental principle of the Circular Economy Theory is waste valorization, which involves transforming discarded materials into valuable products (Korhonen, Honkasalo, & Seppälä, 2018). This concept challenges traditional perceptions of waste by redefining it as a potential resource rather than a liability. Another key tenet is eco-design, which integrates sustainability considerations into product development to minimize environmental impact at every stage of the production cycle (Bocken et al., 2016). Additionally, resource efficiency is a core aspect of the theory, emphasizing the need to optimize material use and reduce reliance on virgin resources through innovative recycling and repurposing strategies (Ghisellini, Cialani, & Ulgiati, 2016).

The relevance of this theory to the present study lies in JK Art's practice of transforming coconut shells into artistic and functional pieces. By repurposing agricultural waste into high-value creative products, JK Art exemplifies the principle of waste valorization,



demonstrating that discarded materials can serve as essential inputs for sustainable entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the emphasis on biodegradable and environmentally friendly art aligns with the eco-design principle, ensuring that artistic creations contribute minimally to environmental degradation. This approach supports broader sustainability goals while also fostering economic opportunities for local artisans, reinforcing the notion that environmental responsibility and economic viability can coexist. This study extends the application of Circular Economy Theory by demonstrating its viability within the creative industry, an area that has received limited attention in existing literature. While much of the research on circular economy models focuses on large-scale industries and technological innovations in waste management (Geissdoerfer et al., 2020), this study highlights how small-scale artistic enterprises can operationalize circular economy principles through indigenous craftsmanship and sustainable practices. By showcasing the intersection of creativity, sustainability, and entrepreneurship, this research contributes to an emerging discourse on how cultural and artistic industries can serve as catalysts for environmental conservation.

Moreover, this study strengthens the theoretical foundation of the circular economy by introducing a localized circular economy model, in which traditional knowledge and artistic skills are integrated into sustainable business practices. This perspective expands the scope of the theory beyond industrial and corporate applications, emphasizing the role of small enterprises in advancing circular economy principles. It also provides insights for policymakers and sustainability advocates on how to support eco-friendly artistic enterprises through targeted interventions, financial incentives, and capacity-building programs. By anchoring on the Circular Economy Theory, this study offers a fresh perspective on sustainable entrepreneurship within the creative sector. The findings reinforce the idea that circular economy principles are not exclusive to large corporations but can also be effectively implemented at micro and small enterprise levels. This contribution enhances the applicability of the theory to a broader range of industries, providing a more inclusive and diversified understanding of sustainable economic practices.

Conclusion

In conclusion, JK Art's practice of utilizing coconut shells repurposes a waste material that would otherwise contribute to environmental degradation. By transforming coconut shells into art, the enterprise not only

reduces waste but also promotes the use of renewable materials, supporting environmental sustainability, business viability, job creation, and artistic exploration. Additionally, the enterprise's methods of sourcing materials and creating art highlight the potential of small-scale, locally based production to advance sustainability. The integration of traditional designs into modern products further demonstrates how contemporary innovation can coexist with the preservation of historical art forms, reinforcing the relevance of indigenous knowledge systems. Moreover, JK Art's commitment to local sourcing and community engagement fosters economic empowerment, creating opportunities for job growth and cultural preservation within the Nsukka region and beyond.

The challenges faced, such as market acceptance, funding limitations, and maintaining quality at scale, underscore the complexities inherent in small-scale creative enterprises. Nevertheless, the successful fusion of modern design techniques with traditional artistry presents a promising path toward expanding market reach and gaining recognition for sustainable art. Ultimately, this research not only highlights the potential of coconut shells as a valuable medium for artistic expression but also calls for further exploration of similar enterprises that merge creativity with ecological mindfulness. By doing so, it contributes to a broader movement toward sustainability within the creative arts landscape. This study serves as a vital contribution to the growing discourse on sustainable art practices and the economic development of local communities.

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